

The Promise ←————→ **The Promised Land**

Mark your place! Even in your *wilderness* you are somewhere between the spoken or the prophetic Word given to you and the Promised Land. So, even in the wilderness, you are in a good place!

Don't let the devil convince you otherwise! **We can't possess the promise without the journey!**

Have you become too GPS dependent? When I travel somewhere now, I type in the address and simply follow the directions that will lead me to my destination. When the trip is completed, I can do the same as I head home. There's no need to remember street names anymore. Our GPS systems have delivered us from the stress of travel. Wouldn't it be nice to have a GPS system for our spiritual lives? You must agree it would be nice to key in "Get out of the wilderness" and be given step by step directions on how to get out of the wilderness and arrive at our destinations. Unfortunately, wilderness experiences don't work that way? Maybe it was because of death, a disappointment, a mental overload, divorce, disappointment, or failure. One situation after another and now you find yourself in the wilderness.

How long will it last? Will you come out? Are there lessons to be learned? Why is God normally silent?

Key words or phrases for the wilderness: The Promise, wandering, transformation, journey, character, strength, walking by faith, pruning and refining, teachable moments, developing a relationship, preparation, God's timing and reflections on the big picture.

As we look at some of the Biblical characters in the Bible, let's keep these words and phrases in mind. We have to simultaneously ask these questions: What is God doing with us and what is God doing to us? We can learn from their experiences (good and bad). Is there a pruning going on? Is this a time of character building?

This is how we will approach each lesson. I encourage you to read the background Scriptures before we come to class. Consider the key words and phrases. Go back and read the text (s) with "fresh eyes."

Forced Times in the Wilderness

Take a moment and look at the life of Jesus. Read Luke 5:15 and 16. Sometimes when we fail to give God the time He wants, He causes us to withdraw to the wilderness so He can speak to us.

The Question:

How do you keep your faith in the wilderness? How did the persons whose lives we will study do it? How many did God lose along with way?

If God's track record is good, this means there is good news for those of us who are currently in the wilderness. You may be in a dying marriage or a dying relationship. It may be a wayward child or an unfaithful spouse. You may be out of work or on the verge of homelessness. Regardless of the place, you

are in the wilderness. Demons are warring against us. Desperation and despair are calling our names. Doubt and discouragement want you to give up! The wilderness is for real! We've been there for a while now and it doesn't seem to be a way out.

Wilderness Experiences are essential!

Record the first verse of the temptation narrative here (Matt 4:1) _____

Do you think this was the same Spirit who had been mentioned in Matthew 3:16? That's puzzling. Why would God's spirit descend on Jesus when He was being baptized and then, lead Him into the wilderness to be tempted, and use Satan as an instrument to tempt Jesus in the wilderness?

Do you find it strange that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted* by the devil?

Let's refer to Israel's wilderness experience. Though this is a future lesson let's look at it quickly.

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-6

What were God's three reasons, mentioned in the text, for allowing them to journey through the wilderness?

_____, _____.

Deuteronomy 8:3b and Matthew 4:4 are similar. Take note of the common words found in both records, namely "to tempt/test," "desert," and "forty." One anonymous contributor said, "It is a place of exile!"

The wilderness is not where you are being punished. We are being tested and our faith is being strengthened.

Our Best Stories Come out of the Wilderness!

Consider this point. God commissioned Jesus and rightfully called Him, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." God said this about Jesus before the temptation narrative. Wow! He knew the outcome. He also knows our outcome. One final note: Though the wilderness is often a place of darkness and despair, most importantly, we must keep in mind it is also a place where God is! Hallelujah! God accompanied Jesus in the wilderness. God went along with the Israelites on their journey. He is with us too.