

In the Wilderness I Wander

Ex. 17:1-7

Introduction:

1. I read with interest the account of Israel's experiences in the wilderness.
2. What? Are they questioning whether God is among them or not?
 - a. He has just delivered them from Egypt.
 - b. They have witnessed the ten plagues.
 - c. They have crossed the Red Sea on dry ground.
 - d. Then they grumbled for water at Marah, grumbled for something to eat (God gave them manna), grumbled for meat to eat (God gave them quail), grumbled for water again at Rephidim, and finally asked, "Is the Lord among us or not?"
3. I can understand Moses' frustration with them.
4. But upon further reflection I may be more like them than I want to admit. I may even be found grumbling in my wilderness experience.

Discussion:

- I. In 1 Cor. 10 Paul warned the Christians at Corinth NOT to be like Israel in the wilderness (1-5).
 - A. Evidently he saw some similarity between Israel and the church at Corinth.
 1. In the immediate context in 1 Cor. the Corinthians had been having some difficulty over eating meats sacrificed to idols.
 - a. Some seemed to think it was ok, while others did not.
 - b. Paul's point is you need to be willing to discipline yourself to not eat meat if it encourages your brother to do something that violates his conscience.
 - c. In other words "restrict your freedom if it causes your brother to sin."
 2. He goes on to reflect on how we need to discipline ourselves so that we might win people to Christ. We need to remember what is important, focus on the accomplishment of the purpose of God and act in a way that accomplishes that purpose.
 3. Israel in the wilderness wandering seemed to have gotten focused on the things of this life—like eating and drinking and missed the main thing—faithfulness to the Lord.
 - B. Paul pointed out that they were all baptized into Moses (2).
 1. This occurred when they crossed the Red Sea.
 2. It marked their deliverance from Egypt. It marked a new beginning. We might even say they had become God's new creation.
 3. They were headed to the Promised Land, but not immediately.
 - C. They wandered in the Wilderness for 40 years.
 1. Deut. 8:1-10 reflects on this.
 2. Several things to note here.
 - a. The objective was to humble them and discipline them so that they might come to understand that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
 - b. The wilderness wandering was a test. Not in the sense that we generally think of a test. This was no school exam to determine one's knowledge. This was a test of faith.

Did they believe God or not? Would they trust Him or not? He would bring them into the promised land, but they would have to trust Him to do it.

- c. Every time they questioned God's graciousness in the wilderness they questioned God's faithfulness to give them the land.
 - d. They needed to learn that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God! They needed to trust God even though they were hungry and thirsty and near death.
- D. The Corinthians needed to know this too. Some things are more important than eating meat. But you know, I begin to grumble when things become inconvenient to me.
- 1. I may grumble when I have to submit my right to eat meat to another's conscience (1 Cor. 8:13).
 - 2. I may grumble when I am wronged (1 Cor. 6:7) or defrauded (1 Cor. 6:7).
- E. I am seeing a pattern here.
- 1. Like Israel, the Corinthians had been baptized (1 Cor. 12:12-13).
 - 2. Like Israel, the Corinthians were headed to the promised land. They were waiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7).
 - 3. But they were in the wilderness learning humility, learning to trust God, learning that men do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
 - 4. Like Israel I have been baptized. Like Israel I am headed for the promised land. But like Israel I am now in the wilderness, learning humility, disciplined by the Lord, learning to trust and to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

II. The paradigm is bigger than this.

- A. Remember Jesus' temptation in the wilderness not for 40 years but 40 days.
- 1. He had been baptized. He had allied Himself with the purposes of the Father. It was the beginning of His ministry.
 - 2. Looking toward His exaltation as King.
 - 3. But then He was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1ff).
 - 4. The first temptation. "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Jesus' response, hear it carefully, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." That is the exact message that God was trying to communicate to Israel in the wilderness. Jesus even quotes Deut. 8:3.
 - 5. Again, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down and give His angels charge concerning you. Jesus' response, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." (A quotation from Deut. 6:16.) Like Israel had done at Massah (Ex. 17:7) when they said, "Is the Lord among us or not?" The Corinthians were not to test the Lord (1 Cor. 10:9) like Israel had.
 - 6. Jesus' final temptation: all the kingdoms of the world to worship Satan. Jesus' response: "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Quotation from Deut. 6:13 where Israel was warned to not forget the Lord when they came into the promised land. Instead they were to listen to Him and be careful to do just what He commanded, for their good always (Deut. 6:3, 24).
- B. It was not only the Corinthians in the first century that found themselves in "the wilderness." Heb. 10:32ff describes those who after being enlightened, endured a great

conflict of sufferings. The writer said, "You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (v. 36). All those examples of faith in Heb. 11 were people who endured their own wilderness. Jesus too is identified as one who ran the race with endurance and suffered death on the cross (12:1-3). Chapter 12 even talks about their being disciplined as sons (like Israel in the wilderness).

C. From Gen. 3 and forward we humans all have been in "the wilderness."

1. Eden represents the beginning, a new creation.
2. Marred by sin we are cast out into this world, a wilderness in which we wander and learn humility and trust in the Lord.
3. We are looking for a new heavens and new earth.
4. We may groan (Rom 8:22) and even grumble in our suffering, but we are learning that man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Conclusion:

1. Let us learn our lessons well.
2. Let us be faithful until death.
3. Let us not grow weary, nor allow our faith to waver, nor forget the Lord.
4. We are almost out of the wilderness and we will soon arrive in the promised land!