**THE REQUEST & THE REASON**

Sunday School Lesson 1

*Wandering in the Wilderness*

Exodus 3:18

1/5/2024

**Series Introduction:** Today, we are going to start a new series entitled “Wandering in the Wilderness.” The purpose of this lesson series is to look at Israel’s journey through the wilderness. From studying the Bible, it’s very clear that the wilderness journey was a vital moment in the history of Israel. It was in the wilderness that the children of Israel became the nation of Israel. It was in the wilderness that the written Law of God was given to man. It was in the wilderness that the Levitical priesthood and temple worship (tabernacle built) was established. It was in the wilderness that the Lord showed Himself to His people. He showed His presence, His power, and His provision. It was in the wilderness that Israel first entered into conflict against other nations. It was in the wilderness that the Lord tested the children of Israel, and they chose to provoke Him. This led to an extended stay in the wilderness. As you can see, the wilderness was packed full of important events that we can learn from. When it comes to application in this lesson series, we will consider the wilderness as a place of difficulty and testing and as a general picture of the life of the believer. The wilderness led to the Promised Land and rest. The wilderness of life ends in the Promised Land! For our first lesson, we are going to look at the request that was made to go into the wilderness, and we will also look at the reason that the Bible provides for the Lord taking Israel along this route. Regarding the request, the Lord gave Moses a specific request to make to Pharaoh regarding Israel’s departure. This request was for Israel to go into the wilderness to sacrifice and hold a feast unto the Lord. As far as the reason for going through the wilderness as opposed to the sea route, the Bible shows us that the Lord knew that Israel was not prepared for combat just yet.

1. **THE WILDERNESS: A PLACE TO SACRIFICE AND FEAST UNTO THE LORD**
2. **Notice that the wilderness provided a separated place of sacrifice and dedication unto the Lord.** *Exodus 3:18 And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Matthew 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Luke 5:16 And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. (Luke 4:1-5; Exodus 8:25-28)* While the Lord’s plans for Israel were obviously much bigger than just going into the wilderness for three days, there is something to be said for the fact that the Lord told Moses to request for them to go there to sacrifice to God. The connotation in the request is that Egypt was not a good place for the sacrifice to occur. They needed a separated place. They needed a sacred place. During their forty years there, many sacrifices were made unto the Lord. Looking at the New Testament, we see the wilderness still reflecting a place of sacrifice and dedication unto the Lord. John the Baptist went into the wilderness. Jesus went into the wilderness. He did it as a willing act of sacrifice. He regularly went to the wilderness to be alone with the Father. The wilderness moments that come in our lives provide us with a great place of sacrifice! Also, the wilderness of life itself is a time of sacrifice. Afterwards, we have eternal rest.
3. **Notice that the wilderness feast was a necessary response to the Lord and His call and blessing.** *Exodus 5:1 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. 2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. 3 And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.* When Moses went before the pharaoh, he told him that Israel needed to go and hold a feast unto the Lord in the wilderness. This was a familiar concept to the pharaoh. The Egyptians held commemorative feasts to their gods and even to the pharaoh himself. It was typically done to pay tribute to some perceived answer from their false god or as a general celebration of that false god’s help in their victories. Moses was very familiar with their practices. He knew that the pharaoh would understand the need to respond to the voice of God with a feast. The problem was that the pharaoh did not recognize or accept the true God of the universe. He viewed the request as a ploy to get out of work. Moses warned him that the feast was required to avoid the judgment of God. As an application, we should see the wilderness as a great place to respond back to God and offer our praise to Him for moving and speaking in our lives. This was the spirit that Paul demonstrated in the New Testament when he praised God in the trials.
4. **Notice that the wilderness sacrifice required them to be wholly prepared to offer whatever the Lord required of them.** *Exodus 10:24 And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. 25 And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. 26 Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and we know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither.* Instead of accepting Moses’ request, the pharaoh continued to barter with him over what was necessary for Israel’s departure. He tried to keep the children from going with them. When that didn’t work, he tried to keep the cattle and sheep from going with them. Obviously, he was doing this because he did not want to lose the labor that the Israelites provided. Moses responded to the pharaoh by letting him know that they needed to take their possessions with them. The reason for this was that Moses did not know what would be required of the Lord for the sacrifice. Thus, he needed to be totally prepared to offer up whatever was required. The Lord wants us to bring everything into the wilderness with us. He wants us to be willing to sacrifice to Him whatever is needed on our journey.
5. **THE WILDERNESS – A PLACE TO PREPARE US FOR THE BIGGER BATTLES AHEAD**
6. **Notice that the wilderness was not the quickest route to take to get to the Promised Land, but it was the best route for them to take.** *Exodus 13:17a And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.* *Genesis 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* The way along the sea through the land of the Philistines would have been a significantly shorter trip. It was roughly 250 miles in length. The route they took was at least double of that length. This illustrates for us that the quickest route to something is not always the best route for us. As people, we can be very impatient with God’s leading and His timing. We must remember that He knows what is best. Abraham’s route was not quick. Joseph’s route to Egypt was not quick!
7. **Notice that the wilderness shows us God’s desire for His children’s success. It was meant to be a place of preparation for them.** *Exodus 13:17 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Numbers 14:9 Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.* We often think of the wilderness as this great place of testing and trials, but the wilderness was the easier of the two routes. The Israelites were not at all prepared to go up against the Philistines. The Lord knew this. He did not want to lead them into something that they were not ready for. Thus, He led them through the wilderness instead. Unfortunately, they did not use the journey as an opportunity to prepare themselves for the battles that awaited them. Instead, they were discontent with the journey, and they were weary before they had ever even fought a single battle for the Lord!
8. **Notice that the Lord had equipped them for the wilderness journey, but He also showed them quickly their unpreparedness for battle and His willingness to help them.** *Exodus 13:18 But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. 14:12 Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. 14 The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.* If there was ever any doubt as to whether Israel was prepared for conflict, their response to Egypt’s pursuit clearly showed that they were definitely not ready for battle yet. Of course, they had everything they needed to be successful. God made sure that they were equipped (harnessed) for the wilderness journey. They were greatly lacking, though, in both courage and faith. Moses assured them that God would fight the battle for them. After this, they were eye witnesses to God’s easy victory over Egypt. The Lord showed them this miracle to prepare them for the battles that awaited them. Unfortunately, they did not learn from this encounter, and they did not prepare themselves.