

The word I chose for my study is “Wilderness” from Exodus 13:18. To further explore the word here are a few translations: NIV “ 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”, NLT “So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle”, (ESV) “But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle”, and AMP “ But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea; the sons of Israel went up in battle array (orderly ranks, marching formation) out of the land of Egypt”. According to each translation, the sound and the feel expresses the wilderness as a deliberate act of God to take the children of Israel through the wilderness and not a place of dwelling. According to Widbin, the wilderness/ desert was used as a negative universal image in the Bible. Hence, the wilderness is a place described by the different translation as the way through, roundabout way through, and around by the way of, confirming it was not meant to be a place of dwelling but a place that one passes through.

As a result, the transliteration from Strong’s concordance defines wilderness in Hebrew as *midbar*, pronounced *mid-bawr* meaning wilderness, pasture, uninhabited land, wilderness, large tracts of wilderness (around cities), and mouth (as organ of speech). The latter meaning is interesting because the masculine noun is derived from the root word *dabar* (verb meaning to speak, declare, converse, common, promise, warn, threaten, sing) in the sense of driving. This word also conveys the meaning to subdue, to command. The root word brings further meaning to God’s plan for the children of Israel. According to The Easton’s Bible Dictionary, *midbar* is an open tract for pasturage, an open field. Exodus 3:1 states the backside of the desert is west, the region behind a man, as the east is the region in front. The same Hebrew word is rendered

“wilderness”, and is used of the country lying between Egypt and Palestine (Gen 21:14, 21; Ed 4:27, and 19:2). The wilderness of the wanderings was a grazing tract, where the flocks and herds of the Israelites found pasturage during the whole of their Journey to the Promised Land. The same Hebrew word is used also to denote the wilderness of Arabia, which in winter and early spring supplies good pasturage to the flocks of the nomad tribes then roam over it (1King 9:18). The wilderness of Judah is the mountainous region along the western shore of the Dead Sea, where David fed his father’s flocks (1 Samuel 17:28; 26:2). Thus in both of these instances the word denotes a country without settled inhabitants and without streams of water but having good pasturage for cattle; a country of wandering tribes, as distinguished from that of a settled people (Isaiah 35:1; Jer 4:11). Such, also, is the meaning of the word “wilderness” in Mat 3:3; 15:33, and Luke 15:4.

After a close analysis of the word wilderness I discovered the children of Israel exodus from Egypt was God's plan to lead them by the way of the wilderness which connects to the root word that states to speak and declare. It was God who initiated their deliverance from bondage. It was God who sought out Moses to execute His plan. The wilderness was the place where God not only led, protected, fed, and cared for them, it was also a place where he spoke. The wilderness may have been a place that was uninhabited by people but it was a great place to take the sheep to graze. The wilderness extended from the borders of Egypt and the Mediterranean on the west, to the plateau of Arabia on the east. Exodus 3:1 states that Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father in law, the priest of Midian and he led the flock to the backside of the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb (Mount Sinai which may have derived from the name of Sin). Hence, the wilderness is where God led his flock to be built up until they reach the land of promise. It was a place that was beneficial for the flock in every way. When we are led

by God we don't have to worry if the path He chooses is not the most comfortable, we can trust in the God that leads. Deuteronomy 29:5 (NLT) states "For forty years I led you through the wilderness, yet your clothes and sandals did not wear out". The children of Israel needed the guidance of God similarly a sheep needed the guidance of a shepherd. Sheeps are known to be defenseless against predators. They can't fight back and they can't outrun predators because they panic. Hence, Deuteronomy 29:7 states when the king of Heshbon came against them, it was God who gave them the victory. Sheep are also afraid of water and can only be led to still water because they can't swim, Psalms 23:2 (ESV) " He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters". A sheep is totally dependent on the shepherd. Furthermore, the wilderness was a place of much complaining and murmuring. Similarly sheep tend to eat down the grass to its roots destroying the pasture, this is why the shepherds lead them to green pastures. The wilderness was also a place where sin occurred with the building and worshipping of the golden calf. This was the backside of the desert, the mountain of God, Mount Sinai which derived from the name Sin is the place from where God called Moses. As well as the place the ten commandments was given warning against disobedience and idolatry. Moreover, when we get to Matthew 3:3 we find one crying in the wilderness to make his paths straight. A reference to the straightening or preparing of one's life in a right relationship with God in order to prepare for the coming of a King (Jesus). In addition, Luke 15:4 speaks of God's love that searches for the one in the wilderness. The sheep is always under the constant vigilance of the shepherd, just as believers are under Jesus' constant care. He watches over them day and night and only his voice do they know. Although they may be in the wilderness only his voice they will obey and follow as he leads.

The word wilderness is important in this verse because it's God's divine will for our lives that matters. He knows the way that would lead to a better life but that can't happen without him. True happiness and peace comes only through Him. When the children of Israel were released by Pharaoh God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, although it was near; for He said "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt" (Exodus 13:17 NLT). If we can recall the nature of the sheep is to panic at the sight of danger so it's in the best interest of the sheep to be led in a path of peace. When Jesus spoke of the Good Shepherd he was speaking of himself as the one who would lay down his life for the sheep. The wilderness can present many challenges but it was a place God used to feed his sheep. It wasn't a place of dwelling but a place of caring and nurturing. A place where they learned his character and his voice. When we know the voice of God, a stranger we will not follow, but will flee from him, for we do not know the voice of strangers John 10:5. Jesus is the true Shepherd who guards His flock because sheep are absolutely helpless and vulnerable without the shepherd. Similarly God did not lead the children of Israel by the way of the Philistines. And since sheeps have no natural defense, no way to fight back, and are slow on foot, the wilderness would be a better option for them. Like the children of Israel we were held captive but by sin Romans 6:20 "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness" but when Jesus our deliverance came he led us in the path of righteousness. The wilderness for the believer is a time of testing and temptation. After the children of Israel experienced deliverance from Egypt it was a time of celebration. Yet what followed was a journey through the desert that would prove them. However, the wilderness for the believer may be a time of intense spiritual warfare, or a time of physical or emotional hardship. While we may cry out for relief it is God's way to build and strengthen our faith. It's also a place of growth in our understanding of who God is. We are

drawn closer into a relationship that is rich and meaningful for the believer. Jesus himself was led into a wilderness where he spent forty days and was tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-2 NIV). God sent his son not to experience a life void of temptation but he entered to redeem us back to a loving father. This was always the plan of God from the very beginning. It wasn't pleasant for Jesus but he endured to the end so it is for the one who endures to the end they will be saved (Matthew 24:13).