

Self-Imposed Wilderness

In the book of Deuteronomy the children of Israel stood on the boundary between the wilderness and the Promised Land; between the past and the future; between past disobedience and future obedience. To be ready to enter the Promised Land, there had been a need for the people to spend some time in the wilderness, but not 40 years! In Deuteronomy 1 Moses reminds the new generation of their fathers' disobedience and unbelief in the wilderness. Moses wants the people to understand that they had spent an extra 38 years in the wilderness unnecessarily. It was a self-imposed wilderness. As with the children of Israel, the wilderness is necessary for us too, because some things can only be learned in the wilderness. At the same time, we don't want to stay in the wilderness longer than necessary and specifically we don't want to be in the wilderness because of unbelief.

Opening Discussion: What are you looking forward to about the sermon series on Deuteronomy?

Read Deuteronomy 1:1-8; 19-46

1. In 1:19-46, Moses recounts to the new generation that the nation ended up in the wilderness for many years. How would you summarize why they ended up in the wilderness for so many years?
2. Re-read 1:26-28. What do these verses reveal about what the preceding generation had believed about God? What terms are used to describe the people in these verses?
3. How would you summarize the warning that the new generation heard in Deuteronomy 1?
4. How would remembering this historical lesson from Moses help the new generation learn what they needed to learn as they prepared to enter the Promised Land?

Steve said:

This morning we need to take to heart the warning of Deuteronomy 1 so that we don't spend time unnecessarily in wilderness (months and years and decades). In light of the negative example we've seen in this passage, let me challenge you to do two things. First, **identify any lies you believe about God**. This is a big topic, and you might need help with this. Generally speaking, we are blind to the lies we believe about God and so we need the help of friends and counselors that we trust. The children of Israel believed the lie that God hated them and wanted to see them destroyed. Consequently, they forfeited their usefulness to God and consequently spent 38 more years in the wilderness than necessary. They couldn't represent Him in the Land if they didn't believe He was for them and that He would fight their battles.

5. It might be rare that we would use language like, "God hates me," to describe our view of God. However, we do at times think or express subtle variations of this lie. What are some of the more nuanced ways that we express this at times?

6. Can you identify any kind of self-imposed wilderness that you've experienced due to lies you've believed about God or because of unbelief?

7. In his book, *Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer said: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . .For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God." How might remembering the gospel, help us move towards a correct mental image of God?