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The Wilderness School

The wilderness school (DIG): Since “the essence of the life of a believer is to enter our spiritual inheritance as quickly as possible.” What does that mean? Isra’el continually made three mistakes. Give examples of how today we might do each of those things. Why does God allow trials in our lives? What is God’s desire for us? What did Isra’el learn about God during their wilderness wanderings? What does it mean to you that “the Lord is the God of new beginnings?”

On life’s journey, we learn that our Lord is the God of new beginnings.



As Warren Wiersbe describes in his book *Numbers: Be Counted*, the Jewish scholar Martin Buber once wrote, “All life is meeting.” It’s a brief statement, but the more you ponder it, the more enlightening it becomes. Life is meeting new circumstances, many of which we don’t expect and can’t control. Life is meeting new people and developing new relationships; it’s meeting new ideas, some of which may upset us. As much as we try to avoid it, life is meeting ourselves and not always liking what we see. But most of all, life is meeting **God**, for **He** is always there, protecting us, wanting to teach, and always seeking to **conform us into His image (Romans 8:29)**.

What we learn about life: The metaphors for life are many, and each one teaches us

something important. Sometimes life is like a battle and sometimes it's more like a race, but always it's a school where we need to be awake and alert to what **God** is trying to teach us. To Moses and the people of **Isra'el**, life was a journey, but a very special journey: from bondage to freedom, from childishness to maturity, from selfishness to service, from glorifying the past to anticipating the future. From **God's** point of view, there are only three locations in this journey: Egypt, the place of bondage that seems like security; Canaan, the place of unbelief, discipline, and falling short of the good things **God** has planned for us. This truth is elaborated in **Hebrews Chapters 1-5**.

Living the life of a believer begins with deliverance of bondage from Egypt through the grace and power of **God**. This we experience when we **trust Yeshua Messiah, the Lamb of God**, and commit our lives to **Him**. But the essence of the life of a believer is to enter our spiritual inheritance as quickly as possible. When you reach **the Kadesh-barnea** place in life, and all believers do, **trust His Word** and enter into your inheritance by **faith**. Don't worry about the giants, the enemy, the walled cities, or your own weakness and insignificance. Say with **Caleb and Joshua**, "**ADONAI is with us! Don't be afraid of them**" (**Numbers 14:9**); **for only we who believe can enter his rest (Hebrews 4:3)**.

Before **Isra'el** arrived at **Kadesh-barnea**, **God** put them through various trials because a certain amount of wilderness experience is good for people who want to grow (**James 1:2-8; First Peter 1:3-9**). But **the LORD** doesn't want us to stay in the wilderness forever. Yes, there are lessons to learn, but there are even greater lessons to learn after we have claimed our inheritance in **Messiah**. **The Lord** knows what trials we need, when we need them, and how long we need them; **He** always teaches those who are willing to learn. Above all else, in the journey of life, we must be sure to follow **the Lord** as **He** goes before us, and we must not look back or hunger for the old life in Egypt: **Taste, and see that ADONAI is good. How blessed are those who take refuge in him (Psalm 34:8)!**

What we learn about God: **Isra'el** repeatedly committed the same three mistakes that caused them no end of trouble: (1) **They** looked back and glorified Egypt; (2) **they** looked around and complained about **their** circumstances; and (3) **they** looked within and embellished **their** own desires. What **they** should have done was to look up to **ADONAI Nissi** and **trust Him** to see them through. We never learn the lessons we should learn if we plan the curriculum and write the textbook. We must leave it all with **the Lord**. **God's** desire is that we develop character and become more like **Yeshua Messiah**. That's why **He** arranges the experiences of life and causes them to **work together for our good and His glory** (see the commentary on **Romans**, to see link click **Cl - Our Bodies and Redemption**). We can't grow in grace unless we **grow** in the knowledge of **God** as revealed

in **the Master**. As **Second Peter 3:18** tells us: **Keep growing in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Deliverer, Yeshua Messiah.**

How do we learn about **God**? Primarily, we learn about **God** from **His Word**, both in private meditation and public worship. We also learn about **God** from personal experience, our own as well as that of others who share with us what **He** has done for them. In the difficult places of life, **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** helps us recall and apply the truths of **the Word**. This ministry gives us the wisdom to understand the situation better and **faith** to **trust** the promises we need to carry us through.

During their wilderness journey, **Isra'el** learned that **God** loved **them** and cared for **them**, but **they** didn't always believe it. **What shall we eat? What shall we drink?** were the repeated questions **the Israelites** asked (**Matthew 6:25-34**), when **they** should have been saying to one another, "**ADONAI is our shepherd (Psalm 23:1)**; we shall not lack for anything." **Isra'el** also learned that **God** was **longsuffering** with **them** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**), but wouldn't permit **them** to sin successfully. **He** was willing to forgive when **they** cried out to **Him**, but too often **they** didn't cry out in confession **they** first cried out to **Him**. **For ADONAI corrects those he loves like a father who delights in his son (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:1-11)**. How much pain would be avoided if only we submitted to the will of our heavenly **Father**!

On life's journey, we learn that **the Lord is the God** of new beginnings. It's been said that, "It's always too soon to quit." It's sad that **the Israelites** doubted and disobeyed **God** so many times; but it's encouraging that **God** gave them a new start and encouraged **them** to keep moving toward **their** inheritance. True, **the Exodus Generation** had to die before **the Wilderness Generation** could enter the Promised Land, but **they** died because of **their** own rebellion. In **His** grace, **He** forgave **them**; in **His** sovereignty, **He** permitted **them** to suffer the consequences of **their** sin. You can't negotiate with the will of **God**. Either you obey it, ignore it, or resist it.

One of the tests of spiritual maturity is what **Paul** called **increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10)**. Not just in the knowledge of the Bible or theology, but in the knowledge of **God Himself**. **His** character, how **He** works, and how we can delight **His** heart. **Moses** grew in his understanding of **ADONAI**, but **Isra'el** failed to learn this lesson. **He made His ways known to Moshe, His mighty deeds to the people of Isra'el (Psalm 103:7)**. **The Israelites** saw what **God** did, but **Moshe** understood why **God** did it. That's the difference.

We learn about ourselves: When reading this book, we ask ourselves over and over again,

“How could **the Israelites** do that? Don’t **they** realize what **they’re** doing?” But then I think and confess, “But, **Lord**, I’ve done the same thing. Forgive me.” People are people, whether marching slowly through an ancient wilderness or driving to the grocery store. **For He understands how we are made, He remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:14).** Socrates said that the unexamined life was not worth living, but most people don’t like to face the truth about themselves. Just as our first parents did, we run and hide and defend ourselves by making excuses and blaming others. Not many people can pray as honestly as **David** did in **Psalm 51**.

One of the first lessons we learn about ourselves from **Isra’el’s** experience is that all of us have a fallen sin nature that’s prone to resist the will of **God** (see **Romans Bm - The Consequences of Adam**), and the sooner we admit it, the easier it will be to make the journey. **Isaiah** said: **For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a filthy garment, and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities carry us away, like the wind (Isaiah 64:5),** **Paul** reinforced this truth and stated succinctly: **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).**

Another lesson we learn about ourselves is that we don’t enjoy changes in our lives and the discomfort they usually bring. One day the people were thirsty; the next day they were attacked by the enemy; for forty days, they wondered what happened to **Moses**. All of us want life to be one vast comfort zone where we’re sheltered from change, all the while forgetting that **God**-ordained change can be used to mold our characters and help us grow up.

And if there’s a lesson **the Israelites** frequently failed to learn, it was that complaining and criticizing are sins that **Ha’Shem** judges. When we complain to **God** about our lot in life we not only commit the sin of ingratitude, but we also reveal pride (we think we know more than **God** knows, and why should this happen to us?), unbelief (we don’t really **trust Him**), and impatience. If we would learn to **trust YHVH**, praise **Him** for **His** mercies, and wait for **Him** to accomplish **His** will, we’d grow a lot faster and experience a lot less misery.

One last lesson from **Isra’el’s** experiences: Age is no guarantee of maturity. It’s possible to grow old and not grow up. When **the Exodus Generation** failed at **Kadesh-barnea** (see **By - The Report of the Spies**), the fault didn’t lie with **their** children, but with **them**. To prove it, **ADONAI** rejected **the old Exodus Generation** (twenty years and older), gave **them** 38 years to die off, and then made a new beginning with **the younger Wilderness Generation**. The Church, made up of **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers (**Ephesians 2:14-15**), needs both the older believers and the younger ones, because each generation has

something to contribute, and we can all learn from one another (**Titus 2:1-8**). But **Moshe** was wise to disciple **Joshua** to be **his** successor, and **Paul** was wise to equip **Timothy** to succeed **him** in **Ephesus**.

We learn about faith: Life is a journey we make by **faith**, for only **the Lord** knows the end from the beginning. Actually, everyone lives by **faith** in someone or something. The difference between believers and unbelievers is the object of that **faith**. Believers put their **faith** in **God** and **His Word**, while unbelievers trust themselves, their experiences, their abilities, their money, and perhaps their friends. But **Isra'el** had the bad habit of walking by sight, not by **faith**, and it was this failure to trust **God** that caused **them** so much trouble. No sooner had **the LORD** delivered **the Israelites** from Egypt than **they** stood by the Sea of Reeds, trembling with fear and wanting to go back. Why? Because **they** didn't really **believe** that the **God** who had redeemed **them** could finish the task and see **them** through. But when **God** begins a work, **He** completes it (**Philippians 1:6**).

Faith is not believing in spite of the evidence, that's superstition. **Faith** is obeying **God** in spite of what we see or hear, how we feel, or what might happen. **The Israelites** had been given all the evidence **they** needed that **God** was concerned about **them** and had the power to deliver **them**, protect **them**, and take them to the Promised Land. The devastation of the land of Egypt was proof of **Ha'Shem's** power, so why should **the nation** not **trust Him**? Once we've made that choice to follow **the Lord** and live for **His** eternal values, the rest is bound to follow. But **faith** must be nourished if it's to grow strong, and that's where the Bible comes in, for **faith comes by hearing, and hearing from the word of God** (**Romans 10:17**). When **Moses** declared **God's Word**, **Isra'el** didn't really hear it, or apply it with **faith**, so **their faith** didn't grow (**Hebrews 4:1-2**). **Faith** is like the muscles in your body: If you don't exercise them, they lose their strength. Every trial of life is an opportunity to claim **God's** promises and **trust Him** for the solution.

We learn the importance of one believer: Numbers is a book of counting. Twice **Moses** counted the men available to serve in **Isra'el's** army, and **he** also counted the Levites. Somebody even counted the number of people who died in the various plagues that **Ha'Shem** sent to discipline **them**. Those ancient **Israelites** would be shocked to see how much counting goes on in today's world, most of it unannounced by electric devices. **God** wants all of **His** children to be the kind of person **He** can count on. **The LORD** could count on **Moshe** and **Aaron** to lead **the people** in **His** will, even though **they** each disappointed **Him** on a couple of occasions. **Joshua** and **Caleb** were men of **God** whom **He** could count on, and so were **Eleazar** and **his son Phinehas**. Anybody can be a statistic, a number in a record, but it takes **faith** and courage to be the kind of person **the Lord** can count on.

We have a choice. We can go with the unbelieving majority and miss **God's** very best, complaining our way through life, or we can stand with the minority and dare to **believe God** and follow **His** mitzvot. We can crave comfort or respond to challenges. We can look back and yearn for fleshly security or look ahead and eagerly anticipate spiritual maturity. We can wander in the wilderness of unbelief, selfishness, and disobedience, or enter the Promised Land with its battles and trials, **trusting ADONAI** to give us the victory. **He chooses our inheritance for us (Psalm 47:4a).** Will we choose to claim **our inheritance** and use **it** for **His** glory? Will we be counted among the conquerors?⁸⁰⁰