

## Why Did The Lord Lead The Israelites Through The Wilderness?

Why did the Lord lead the Children of Israel through the wilderness and how does that relate to us, hundreds of years later? There are actually two questions here. The first one is: Why did the Lord lead the children of Israel through the wilderness? We can find the answer in Exodus 13:17 & 18; 'When Pharaoh let the people go, God led them not by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer, for God said, "Lest the people change their purpose when they see war and return to Egypt." But God led the people around by way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea'.

Clearly the Lord did not want the Israelites to return to Egypt and to the bondage of slavery. He wanted them to progress to Canaan which was to be their Promised Land. The second question is: Why did the Israelites take 40 years to travel 11 days journey? That is how close Canaan was to Egypt. Even in those ancient times it would have taken only 11 days. See in Deuteronomy 1:2 where it says; 'It is only eleven days journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea' (on Canaan's border).

We can see by these scriptures why the Lord led the Israelites through the wilderness [to prevent them going back into Egypt] and now we'll look at why they took forty long years to get there. The reason the Lord led them around in circles for forty years, is because, way back in those days, they were a stubborn, disobedient, rebellious, wicked, stiff-necked people, who complained incessantly and were constantly ungrateful for the good things the Lord did for them. There are so many scriptures that tell us this, we can't write every one of them down but we can give you a few to look up. Have a look at Deuteronomy 9:6, 7, 13, 24; Psalm 78:8; Acts 7:51; Nehemiah 9:26; Isaiah 30:9; Ezekiel 2:5 & 8; Exodus 32:9 – 33:3 – 33:5 and 34:9. There are a lot more scriptures which you can look up using your Bible concordance.

The Israelites saw many miracles performed by God in Egypt and later in the desert. Firstly, there were the ten plagues in Egypt (Exodus chapters 7 to 12) then the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus chapter 14). Now they had an incredible, supernatural cloud by day to lead and protect them, and a fire by night to lead and warm them. Nothing was burned by this pillar of fire - it was wholly supernatural - yet the Israelites became fearful and complained against God. The Lord purified bitter water (Exodus 15:25). God gave them Manna to eat (Exodus 16:14) which was angel's food (Psalm 78:25) but they complained about it (Numbers 11:1 to 6). God gave them quail to eat (Exodus 16:13) then the Lord gave them so much meat it made the Israelites vomit and many died (Numbers 11:20 then 31 to 34). They saw God bring water out of a rock (Exodus 17:6 & 7). They moaned against Moses in Exodus 14:11 & 12; 'And they said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?"' At one point they wanted to stone Moses (Exodus 17:2 to 4). God gave them everything they wanted and they still complained, and finally God's anger towards them came to a point where He disowned them and threatened to wipe them out (Exodus 32:7 to 11). They ended up bringing judgement upon themselves, by kindling the Lord's anger just by their incessant complaining.

Another reason one whole generation passed away before they could settle into the Promised Land was idolatry. Idolatry was normal practice in Egypt and the Israelites did not know any better than to worship idols. Once the Israelites were out of Egypt, it took another forty years to get the Egyptian influence out of the hearts of the Israeli people. We can read in Exodus 20:4 and 34:17; and also in Leviticus 17:7 – 19:4 – 26:1 where the Lord commanded the Israelites not to make or worship idols, and at first they agreed and promised not to, but went back on their word and disobeyed God.

Moses' brother Aaron helped the people make a golden calf, which they then worshipped (Exodus 32:4 to 11). The Israelites had promised the Lord they would obey Him and serve Him, but they sinned so much, they had broken their initial covenant with God. They complained so much and made the Lord so angry, He swore that first generation would never enter the Promised Land and they all died, except for the only two obedient men in the whole of Israel; Caleb and Joshua

(Numbers 32:10 to 13). It was the second generation of the new nation of Israel who inherited the Promised Land.

In 1 Samuel 15:23 the Lord said; "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as idolatry." The Lord considers rebellion and stubbornness as evil as witchcraft and idolatry; and in turn, He considers idolatry as serious as unfaithfulness in marriage (Ezekiel 23:37). Even after hundreds of years, Paul was still telling the Jews not to worship idols (Galatians 5:20).

So how does this relate to us hundreds of years later? This situation can be observed by us, to warn us not to be like the Israelites were back in those days. The Lord does not want us to go back to the bondage of our old sinful lives and back to the slavery of sin, but to continue to walk with Him and live in freedom from sin. No, we may not bow to idols as the ancient peoples did then, but if you have someone or something in your life that means more to you than the Lord does, then that person or thing is an idol and you are not worthy of the Lord Jesus. 'He who loves his father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me' (Matthew 10:37).

There are explicit scriptures that show us what the Lord wants from us. 'We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength' (Mark 12:30). 'Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Holy Spirit. Speak to one another in Psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs, offering praise with voices and making melody with all your heart to the Lord at all times and for everything, giving thanks in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father' (Ephesians 5:18 to 20).

Do you want God's blessing? Be faithful to Him. Be compliant, obedient, grateful and spend much time in prayer, praising Him and offering thanksgiving, serving God with all your heart. Be content with what you have (Philippians 4:4 to 7) and you will fear nothing from God. Don't bring judgement upon yourself by acting in the same manner the Israelites did, and trying the Lord's patience. We can all learn from their mistakes.

We must make a note here: The Lord is no longer angry with the Israelites. Several times in the Bible, the Lord says He would forgive and restore Israel; and one day all Israel will be saved. Two such scriptures are Isaiah 45:17 and Romans 11:26. See the sermon on this website titled: 'Israel: God's chosen land; Jews: God's chosen people'.

Amen and God bless you.

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