

# The Wandering Years

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***"Remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness."***  
*Deuteronomy 8:2*

The plan seemed simple enough

- leave Mt. Sinai, journey toward Canaan, and then enter it.

But it didn't work out that way.

When the Israelites learned they would have to fight their way into Canaan,

fear gripped their hearts and they refused to enter it.

As a consequence...

...they ended up wandering the wilderness for forty years.

What is the spiritual significance of "wandering?"

## 1. WANDERING

Our sermon today focuses on this concept of "wandering"

It's a phrase that comes up a number of times in Scripture...

- individuals wandering streets, fields, desert, etc.
- and, of course, famously, in reference to the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness

1st "**Wandering**" =

- "...not knowing what truth and good are..."* (AC 382)
- ignorance is not a crime

Carries the idea of **discovery**

It could mean...

- learning things we didn't know before
- struggling with a new idea
- changing our opinion
- letting go of bad ideas

2nd "**Wandering in the wilderness**" =

*"...being carried away into various errors..."* (AC 2679)

"Wilderness" (barren, empty, dry, harsh environment) =

- state of obscurity (AC 2708)
- state of ignorance
- key idea* - limited sight of truth (AC 3900)

Then we get the specific teaching that says...

**"The travels and wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness represented their temptations..." (AC 2708:6).**

\*(And, of course, this reminds us of how the Lord Himself frequently went out into the wilderness and experienced temptations)\*

## **2. WANDERING WITH A PURPOSE**

We typically think of "wandering" as being directionless or pointless

First of all, it can be therapeutic

- exploring (travel)
- wandering in the woods
- letting go of needing to reach a "destination"

Secondly, it's a *necessary* process, as necessary as it was for the children of Israel

It's something that our SPIRIT is doing every day!

- our body may be stationary but our spirit wanders, travels...

We need time to sort things out...

- notice contradictions
- things that don't make sense

As our reading this morning said...

***"We are like fruit as yet unripe, to which shape, beauty, and flavor cannot be given in an instant..." (AC 2679)***

As a result,

***"We are given by the Lord to think much about eternal life, and so to think much about the truths of faith; **but because we do so from the proprium (or self)...we cannot help but wander into this position and then into that [position] both as to doctrine and life**" (AC 2679)***

**"Wandering" of the Israelites had a PURPOSE...**

Point?

It was because they weren't "wandering" on their own!

- the Lord was doing the leading
- **every step of the way**

E.g., show two diagrams. 1st with straight line from point A to B

2nd with squiggly line from point A to B

Also mention London Underground Map

- the real one showing the actual routes of all the train lines (squiggly lines)
- vs. the nice clean straight lines of the underground map for the public

They learned important "life skills" during these forty years.

Within the first three months of living in the desert...

Moses and the Israelites were given...

1. *The Ten Commandments - received on Mt. Sinai (40 days)*
2. *Food and Water - manna, quail, water from the rock*
3. *Combat Training - battle against the Amalekites*
4. *Jethro's Advice - rulers of 1,000's, 100's, 50's, 10's*
5. *Instructions for building the Tabernacle - also, received on Mt. Sinai*

These five "wilderness tasks" transformed their bleak, dry, barren surroundings into a landscape full of hope, purpose and meaning.

The conditions were harsh, difficult, and sad at times,

but it also kept them focused and busy and useful.

### **3. THE PURPOSE OF OUR STRUGGLES (TEMPTATIONS)**

Why do we have to struggle so much?

Why do we have to go through so much pain and hardship?

What is the *purpose* of these struggles, these temptations?

Our reading today gives us a surprisingly simple and refreshing answer:

It's so that we may be "strengthened" in our resolve to embrace that which is good, true, noble and kind

**NOTE: - qualities or loves that only the Lord can plant in us!**

The *overarching* purpose of the wilderness journey, the wandering years, signifies:

**"...that under Divine guidance we are led by means of temptations to a firm acceptance of the truths and goodness of faith..." (AC 8098).**

POINT?

One of the most important questions to keep asking ourselves (and those we love is)...

**WHAT DO I WANT?  
WHAT DO YOU WANT?**

*Why? Because often (deep down inside) we don't know what we want.  
(we aren't always sure what's motivating us to do what we do)*

Of course, our lives become directionless and pointless if we replace God with our own god.

The Israelites certainly faced this struggle (temptation) in the wilderness  
- repeatedly wanted to go back to their old life in Egypt (promptings of proprium/self)

Similarly, many of our "forays" into the pursuit of happiness,

into what we "think" will make us happy,

only bring us back to where we started

- we don't find ourselves any happier, or peaceful or content.

Like that generation of Israelites,

there are certain habits,  
behaviors,  
and attitudes inside us

...which need to die off before we can enter Canaan (heaven).

**\*\*1 minute exercise: You've spent enough time in the wilderness...\*\***

**- What bad attitude or negative behavior needs to die off in you?**

#### **4. THE LORD IS LEADING US - (this world is our wilderness)**

*"Remember that the Lord your God led you all the way..." (Deut. 8:2).*

As soon as we recognize *"that under Divine guidance we are being led by means of temptations"* to conjoin or unite true ideas with good loves (AC 8098),

our wandering years begin to make sense.

We see that our wilderness journey is preparing us for *"a new will [or conscience] not yet formed..." (AC 8753).*

The Lord takes us on this journey to give us new loves,

ones that will truly make us happy,  
peaceful,  
and content,  
not just in this life but to all eternity.

Truth is the means, and struggles (temptation) are the norm,

for *"a new will comes through the introduction of truth..."*

and the struggles that ensue (AC 8457).

#### **5. ENJOY YOUR WANDERING YEARS**

Our "wandering years" are not random, pointless, or directionless.

Like the ancient Israelites, the Lord is guiding us to

##### ***1. Follow His Law***

- *best way to show my love for Lord and my love for the neighbor?*
- *what spiritual practice can I develop?*

**2. Trust that the Lord will Provide**

- *what can I do to be truly content, grateful?*
- *what spiritual practice can I develop?*

**3. Be a warrior for the truth**

- *who needs my help, needs me to stand strong with them?*
- *stand up for those who are defenseless? (Amalekite attacks)*

**4. Cut our problems down to size**

- *easy to get "overwhelmed" by the weight of the world (so many heavy issues right now)*
- *what can I do to put things in perspective?*

**5. Spend time in prayer**

- *cultivate a regular prayer routine*

Let us close with these words from Psalm 107 (verses 4-9):

They wandered in the wilderness by a desolate way;  
 They found no city to dwell in.  
 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.  
 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,  
 And He delivered them out of their distresses,  
 And He led them forth by the right way,  
 That they might go to a city for habitation.  
 Oh, that people would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness,  
 And for His wondrous works to the children of men!  
 For He satisfies the longing soul,  
 And fills the hungry soul with goodness.

**AMEN.**

**Lessons: Deuteronomy 8; AC 8098, 2679**