

**Sermon Title: “In the Wilderness”: An Introduction to the Book of Hebrews –
Pastor Charles R. Biggs**

Scripture Lesson: Deut. 29; Isaiah 40:1-3

Scripture Text: Hebrews 1:1-4, 13:20-25

Theme of Worship Service: God has spoken His final word of hope in Christ to His people in the wilderness to encourage, exhort and enable them to endure to the Promised Land.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 1:30-33:** The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.' Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God, who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.

^{ESV} **Psalm 78:40-42:** How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe...

^{ESV} **Isaiah 35:1-6:** The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert...

^{ESV} **Isaiah 43:19-21:** Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

^{ESV} **Mark 1:3-4, 11-13:** ...The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" ⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins....And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." ¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Read as much as you can of the Book of Hebrews aloud with your family. It is an inspired sermon, or “word of exhortation” (13:22) and usually takes about 45 minutes to read aloud. As you read notice: 1) The Glorious Excellency of Christ and how He fulfills all Old Covenant types and shadows of persons, places, things, and events in Himself; 2) The more glorious revelation of the New Covenant compared to the Old; 3) The gracious divine intervention of God in coming to rescue us in our flesh, yet the dangers of life for His people in the wilderness in our quest and pilgrimage from our Exodus from slavery to sin to the glorious freedom of the Promised Land!

Hymns

- 1. Lead On, O King Eternal – 580**
- 2. Let All Things Now Living - 125**
- 3. Jesus, My Great High Priest - 306**
- 4. Gloria Patri - 734**

Introduction

Where are we in redemptive history? What does it mean that we live in the last days? As a congregation on pilgrimage, what should we expect in this present age?

Let's focus on three important aspects of Hebrews by way of introduction?

- 1) Where are we?**
- 2) Who are we to trust?**
- 3) How should we live?**

1. Where are we?

We are in the same place redemptive-historically as the congregation to whom the author of Hebrews wrote in this inspired letter.

- a. Increased time of persecution (Heb. 10:32-39). Being a Christian was not easy.
- b. The last days (1:2) is characterized by the wilderness; they were in the wilderness; we are in the wilderness.
 - i. What is the wilderness?
 1. The redemptive historical situation for God's people between Exodus and Promised Land. We have yet to enter our rest (Heb. 3-4).
 2. What should we expect in the wilderness? The blessed present of Christ who has divinely intruded to redeem and rescue us from our sins (Heb. 1:3-4), but also danger; we are to learn to listen to God's Word.

- 2. Who was the audience to whom Hebrews was written?** Believers who are being tempted to think that confessing Christ was too hard and may require them to give up

their very lives; believers in Rome (Heb. 13:18-25), who probably became Christians at Pentecost and established the church at Rome (or churches) who were growing weary of hard times in the wilderness.

3. **Date of Hebrews?** AD 60s (very probably)
4. **Author?** Probably not Paul, but we really do not know. The people knew who he was intimately. The people knew he loved them as their pastor and he spoke to the people as a caring pastor. It very likely could be Apollos (see Acts 18), but again, we shouldn't be overly dogmatic about it.
 - a. Why not Paul?
 - i. Language used in letter is different than Paul's letters, although it was someone influenced by Paul's theology.
 - ii. Doesn't seem to be Paul's "voice".
 - iii. The author says something that doesn't sound like Paul: Heb. 2:3 (cf. Gal. 1-2).
 - iv. The writer of the sermon doesn't have Paul's way of focusing on teaching and then having a section of application (like Eph. 1-3, and 4-6, or Romans 1-11, and 12-16). The exposition and exhortation, the polemic and paranesis is mixed in as the author proceeds which is unlike Paul's style.
5. **Genre?** An inspired sermon/ "word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). Unique in the New Testament because it is not letter, nor a Gospel, but a written sermon.

2. Who are we to trust? Christ.

We are to keep our eyes on Christ; listen to Christ, and know that Christ has entered into our wilderness, has overcome by perfect righteousness, and ratified the terms of the Trinitarian, Eternal Covenant with His own precious blood as our Great Prophet, Priest and King.

3. How are we to live in the wilderness as God's people in these last days?

Three ways:

1. **Encouragement:** Encouraged in spite of what we see around us, knowing that Christ is with us and we have His sure word of hope to guide us through.
2. **Exhortation:** Exhorted by God's word and so taking sin seriously, and being watchful, careful, and realizing that there are many dangers in the wilderness.
3. **Endurance:** We need to endure to the end; we must hold fast our confession of hope to the end.

Conclusion: Let us not be disheartened and grow weary; let us not be overly realized in our understanding of heaven, we have yet to make it to the Promised Land. Let us hear God as He speaks to us in Christ and listen and believe; let us keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Amen.

Let us pray.

CRB