Open Bible Stories

Wandering in the Wilderness

## 0 Introduction

### 0.1 Key Idea

The story of the wandering in the wilderness teaches us how God tests his people and provides for his people in the life of faith.

### 0.2 Creedal Verse

“This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.” Acts 7:36

### 0.3 Metanarrative Summary

The eternal God created all things in six days. He made a good and perfect world. He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation. But humans rebelled against God and ruined God’s creation. God set to restore his world through his promise. God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham. God kept his promises across the generations. God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac. God gave Isaac a wife and she bore twins, Jacob and Esau. God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation. God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons, and used him to rescue his family. God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves. But, God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from their slavery. God sent judged the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land. God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people. God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and

## 1 Biblical Interpretation: Observing the Details of the Story

After reading the crafted biblical story, answer the following questions to familiarize yourself with the details of the story.

### 1.1 Observation Questions

Answer the following observation questions to gain a basic understanding of the the story. Read the story as a community and answer these questions as a group.

#### 14-01

Where did God lead the Israelites after they left Mount Sinai?  
He led them towards Canaan, the Promised Land.

How did God lead the Israelites to Canaan?  
God went ahead of the Israelites in the pillar of cloud. The Israelites followed the pillar of cloud.

#### 14-02

Who was living in Canaan, the Promised Land God said he would give to the Israelites?  
Many different people called the Canaanites were living in the land.

What kind of people were the Canaanites?  
The Canaanites did not worship or obey God. They worshiped false Gods. They did evil things.

#### 14-03

What did God tell the Israelites to do to the Canaanites?  
He told them to get rid of all of them, not to make peace with them, not to marry them, and to destroy all of their idols.

What did God say would happen if the Israelites did not get rid of the Canaanites and destroy their idols?  
If the Israelites disobeyed God and did not remove the Canaanites and destroy their idols, the Israelites would end up worshipping the Canaanite idols instead of God.

#### 14-04

When the Israelites reached the border of Canaan, who did Moses choose as spies?  
Moses chose twelve men. He chose a man from each tribe of Israel.

What were these men supposed to do?  
These men were supposed to spy on the land to see what it was like. They were also supposed to see if the Canaanites were strong or weak.

#### 14-05

How long did the spies travel throughout Canaan?  
The spies traveled through Canaan for 40 days.

What did the 12 spies say about the land of Canaan?  
The land is very fertile and the crops are plentiful.

Why did ten of the spies say the Israelites should not attack the people of Canaan?  
They said, “The cities are strong and the people are giants. If we attack them, they will defeat us and kill us!”

#### 14-06

What did Caleb and Joshua say about the people of Canaan?  
They said, “The people are strong, but we can defeat them. God will fight for us!”

#### 14-07

How did the people respond to the report of the spies?  
The people did not listen to Caleb and Joshua. They became angry with Moses and Aaron. They regretted leaving Egypt and feared dying in battle.

What did the people want to do after they heard the report of the spies?  
They wanted to choose another leader and go back to Egypt.

#### 14-08

What did God think of the Israelites’ refusal to enter the land?  
Go was very angry with the people. He said that they had rebelled against God.

How did God say he would punish the people for their disobedience?  
They would wander in the wilderness until everyone twenty years or older, except Caleb and Joshua, died.

#### 14-09

How did the people react to God telling them their punishment?  
The people were sorry they had sinned.

What did the people do to try to correct their sin?  
They decided to attack the people of Canaan. Moses warned them that God would not go with them, but they did not listen and went up into Canaan anyway.

#### 14-10

Why were the Israelites defeated when they attacked the Canaanites?  
They were defeated because God did not go with them into the battle.

What happened after the Israelites were defeated by the Canaanites?  
The Israelites turned back from Canaan and wandered the wilderness for 40 years.

#### 14-11

How long did the Israelites wander in the wilderness?  
They wandered for 40 years.

How did God provide for the Israelites in the wilderness?  
He gave them manna, sent flocks of quail, and kept their clothes and shoes from wearing out.

#### 14-12

What miracle did God do with a rock to provide for Israel?  
God caused water to come out of a rock to provide for the Israelites.

How did the Israelites commonly respond to God and Moses?  
The Israelites complained and grumbled against God and Moses.

How did God respond when the people complained and grumbled?  
God was still faithful to his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

#### 14-13

What did God tell Moses to do to provide water out of a rock a later time?  
God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would come out of it.

Why was God angry when Moses struck the rock?  
God was angry because Moses dishonored God by not speaking to the rock as God told him to do. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses hit the rock twice with a stick.

How did God punish Moses for his disobedience?  
God said that Moses would not enter the Promised Land.

#### 14-14

What happened after Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years?  
After Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, all the rebellious generation had died.

When Israel reach the edge of the Promised Land again, who did God choose to replace Moses?  
God chose Joshua to lead the people into the land of Canaan.

Who did God promise to send one day in the future?  
He would send another prophet like Moses.

#### 14-15

What did God tell Moses to do before Moses died?  
God told Moses to go up on a mountain to see the Promised Land. Moses saw the Promised land but God did not allow him to enter it.

What happened after Moses died?  
The Israelis mourned for 30 days after Moses died. Joshua became their new leader.

What kind of leader was Joshua?  
He was a good leader because he trusted and obeyed God.

### 1.2 Translation Questions

Use the following translation questions to understand specific details of the passage. Discuss how you might translate these specific elements of the story.

#### 14-01

**all the laws that they must obey** God gave the Israelites many more commands in addition to the Ten Commandments. The Israelites were expected to obey all these laws, not just some of them. How would you express **all the laws that they must obey** to mean all the commands God gave the Israelites which they were supposed to obey?

  

**because of his covenant with them** The word because explains the reason the Israelites must obey the God’s laws was they were in a covenant relationship with God. How would you express **because of his covenant with them** to mean the reason the Israelites must obey all the laws God told them was the covenant God made with them?

  

#### 14-02

**God had promised** God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give their descendants the Promised Land. This promises was made many years ago and not at the time of this story. God would fulfill this promise to Abraham’s descendants. The Israelites are Abraham’s descendants. This statement gives background that summarizes what has already happened in previous stories. How would you express **God had promised** to mean God already made the promise years ago to give the Promised Land to Abraham’s descendants?

  

**They were called Canaanites** The Canaanites were the people groups who lived in the Promised Land, the land of Canaan. They are introduced in the story. We learn that they did not worship or obey God. The worshiped false gods and did many evil things. How would you express **They were called Canaanites** to clearly indicate the Canaanites as those who lived in the Promised Land and did not follow God?

  

#### 14-03

**you must get rid of all the Canaanites there** This is a polite way to say that they were to kill or drive out all the Canaanites out of the Promised Land. God commanded the Israelites to get all the Canaanites out of the land who were living there. How would you express **you must get rid of all the Canaanites there** as a polite way of saying the Israelites must remove all of the Canaanites from the land by killing them or driving them out of the land?

  

**Do not make peace with them** God forbid the Israelites from living peacefully among or alongside the Canaanites. God did not want the Israelites to make a promise or treaty to live peacefully with them. How would you express **Do not make peace with them** to mean God forbid the Israelites from living peacefully among or alongside the Canaanites?

  

**If you do not obey me, you will end up worshiping their idols** The word If introduces the situation that the Israelites would in time disobey God by worshiping idols if the Israelites did not obey God by driving out the Canaanites. If the Israelites became friends with the Canaanites and did not destroy the idols, they would be tempted to worship those idols instead of God. How would you express **If you do not obey me, you will end up worshiping their idols** to mean the Israelites would eventually disobey God and worship idols if they did not obey God by driving out the Canaanites from the land?

  

#### 14-04

**border** A **border** is a line, or boundary, separating two countries. What words in your language mean **border** as in a line, or boundary, separating two countries?

  

**spy** To **spy** is to secretly get information about something or to secretly learn about something. What words in your language mean **spy** as in to secretly get information about something without other people noticing?

  

**go and spy** The Israelites chosen for this mission were to leave the place where they were camped, enter the land of Canaan, and secretly gain information about the land. How would you express **go and spy** to mean as a command telling the twelve Israelites to leave the place where they were camped, enter the land of Canaan, and secretly gain information about the land?

  

**to see if they were strong or weak** The spies were supposed to find out how powerful the Canaanite armies were. They wanted to know if the Canaanites were prepared to fight against them. How would you express **to see if they were strong or weak** to mean the spies were to go in the land to discover, or find out, if the Canaanite armies were powerful or not powerful?

  

#### 14-05

**The land is very fertile** The land was extremely good for growing food. How would you express **The land is very fertile** to mean the land was extremely productive in growing food?

  

**the crops are plentiful** The land produced a lot of food and yielded full harvests. How would you express the crops were plentiful to mean the land produced a lot of food and yielded full harvests?

  

**The cities are very strong** The cities had strong walls around them, so it would be very difficult for the Israelites to attack them. How would you express **The cities are very strong** to mean the cities were fortified with strong walls that would make them hard to attack?

  

**the people are giants** This was not simply referring to unusually tall people, but a particular race of people that were far larger than even the tallest normal people. The Israelites spies said the Canaanites were much taller and stronger than they were. How would you express **the people are giants** to mean the Israelite spies said the Canaanites were far larger than even the tallest normal people and were far stronger than even the strongest normal people?

  

**If we attack them, they will certainly defeat us and kill us!** This is a strong statement that emphasizes that the Israelites were certain the Canaanites would defeat them in battle. How would you express **If we attack them, they will certainly defeat us and kill us!** as a strong statement that the spies believed if they attacked the Canaanites they would surely lose the battle and die?

  

#### 14-06

**Immediately** Caleb and Joshua spoke right after the other spies gave their report. How would you express **Immediately** to mean something that happens right away after something else without delay?

  

**but we can certainly defeat them** The word but indicates that there was an exceptional reason why the Canaanites would be defeated rather than the Israelites. Caleb and Joshua acknowledged that the Canaanites were tall and strong. Even though the Canaanites were tall and strong, Caleb and Joshua said that the Israelites would beat them in battle. This is a different result than people would normally think would happen. How would you express **but we can certainly defeat them** to mean Caleb and Joshua were confident that the Israelites would surely beat the Canaanites in battle even though they were tall and strong?

  

**God will fight for us!** Caleb and Joshua made a strong statement that God would battle alongside the Israelites and help the Israelites defeat the Canaanites. How would you express **God will fight for us!** as a strong statement that emphasizes God would battle alongside the Israelites and help the Israelites defeat the Canaanites?

  

#### 14-07

**But the people did not listen** The word But indicates that the refusal of the people to listen was different/opposite to the reasoning of Caleb and Joshua. How would you express **But the people did not listen** to mean the people not listening was different/opposite of what Caleb and Joshua told them?

  

**Why did you bring us to this horrible place?** The people were not expecting an answer from Moses or from God. The news about the Canaanites made them think the place was terrible. Their question expressed that they thought the place was terrible and they wished that they had never come there. How would you express the question **Why did you bring us to this horrible place?** to mean the people thought the plan was terrible and they wish they had never come there?

  

#### 14-08

**He came to** God did not appear as a person, but came in some other form that showed his glory and power. How would you express **He came to** to mean God appeared in a way that showed his glory and power?

  

**You have rebelled against me** God said that the Israelites refusal to follow God’s instructions and remove the Canaanites from the land was rebellion against God. To rebel means oppose God by rejecting his authority and what he says. How would you express **You have rebelled against me** to mean God said the Israelites opposed God by rejecting his authority and not doing what he said?

  

**so all of you** The word so explains the consequence of the people rebelling against God was that they would wander in the wilderness. How would you express **so all of you** to mean the consequence/result of the Israelites rebelling against God was to wander in the wilderness?

  

**to wander in the wilderness** God would lead the people around in the wilderness with no specific destination until all of the adults who rebelled against him died. How would you express **to wander in the wilderness** to mean Israel would travel around barren and uncultivated land with no specific destination or direction?

  

#### 14-09

**When the people heard God say this** The word When explains that the people had become sorry they had sinned at the moment they heard God words of judgment. How would you express **When the people heard God say this** to mean the people had become sorry they had sinned against God by not conquering the Canaanites at the moment they heard God words of judgment?

  

**Moses warned them not to go** Moses told them not to go to fight against the Canaanites because they would be in danger if they did that. How would you express **Moses warned them not to go** to mean Moses told them in advance that they should not go into Canaan and would be in danger if they chose to go into Canaan?

  

**God would not go with them** God would not be with them to help them. Because of the Israelites’ disobedience, God withdrew from them his presence, protection, and power. How would you express **God would not go with them** to mean God refused to help the Israelites fight the Canaanites?

  

**but they did not listen to him** The Israelites did not obey Moses. They went to attack the Canaanites anyway. The word but indicates that the Israelites deciding to attack the Canaanites is opposite/different than what Moses had warned them. How would you express **but they did not listen to him** to mean the Israelites decision to attack the Canaanites was opposite/different than what Moses warned them?

  

#### 14-10

**God did not go with them into this battle** God did not help them in this fight. How would you express **God did not go with them into this battle** to mean God did not help the Israelites fight in this battle against the Canaanites?

  

**turned back from Canaan** The Israelites left Canaan and went back into the wilderness where they were before. How would you express **turned back from Canaan** to mean to leave Canaan and go back in the direction they were before?

  

**wander through the wilderness** The Israelites would live in the wilderness. Together they moved from place to place in that large, dry land, looking for food and water for themselves and their animals. How would you express **wander through the wilderness** to mean move from place to place in the large, dry land with no specific destination?

  

#### 14-11

**God provided for them** God gave the Israelites everything they needed for food, water, and shelter during their time in the wilderness. How would you express **God provided for them** to mean God gave the Israelites everything they needed during their time in the wilderness?

  

**bread from heaven** Overnight, this thin, bread-like food fell onto the grass like dew from the sky. They called it manna. Almost every day the people gathered this manna and cooked it as their food. How would you express **bread from heaven** to mean bread-like food that fell onto the grass like dew from the sky?

  

**flocks of quail** God caused a large number of medium-sized birds to fly into the Israelite camp. How would you express **flocks of quail** to mean a large number of medium-sized birds?

  

#### 14-12

**God miraculously made it come out of a rock** By doing something that only God can do, God made water pour out of a rock so the people and animals could drink. How would you express **God miraculously made it come out of a rock** to mean God supernaturally caused water to come out of a rock in a way that was not explainable by natural causes but only that God caused it to happen?

  

**God was still faithful** God continued to do what he had told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob he would do. God did not break his promise. How would you express **God was still faithful** to mean God did not break his promise but continued to do what he had told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob he would do?

  

#### 14-13

**he dishonored God** Moses disobeyed God and disrespected God. God had a specific way He wanted Moses to show the people God’s power to provide for them. When Moses disobeyed God by doing it in a different way, he showed a lack of respect for God. HOw would you express **he dishonored God** to mean Moses disrespected God by disobeying God’s command?

  

**Because you did this** The words Because explains Moses’ disobedience as the reason God would not allow him into the Promised Land. How would you express **Because you did this** to mean the reason the reason God would not allow Moses into the Promised Land was because of Moses’ disobedience?

  

#### 14-14

**those who had rebelled against God** The people who refused to obey God when he told them to go into the Promised Land died in the wilderness. How would you express **those who had rebelled against God** to mean the people who rejected God’s authority and refused to obey God when he told them to go into the Promised Land?

  

**so God chose** The word so indicates that Moses’ old age is the rea**so**n God chose someone else to lead Israel. How would you express **so God chose** to mean the reason God chose Joshua to lead Israel was because of Moses’ old age?

  

**one day** Some time in the future God would send another prophet like Moses. How would you express **one day** to mean some unspecified day in the future?

  

#### 14-15

**God did not permit him to enter** Moses was able to see the Promised Land even though God did not allow him to enter it. How would you express **God did not permit him to enter** to mean God did not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land?

  

**because he trusted and obeyed God** The word because indicates Joshua’s trust in and obedience to God is the reason he was a good leader. How would you express **because he trusted and obeyed God** to mean the reason Joshua was a good lead was his faith in and obedience to God?

  

## 2 Theological Dialogue: Discussing the Meaning of the Story

Take time to explore the meaning of this story together as a community. Use the following discussions as a way to grasp what truth the story teaches.

### 2.1 Discourse Questions

##### How did God prepare the Israelites to enter the Promised Land, the land of Canaan? (14-1, 14-2)

##### What did God tell the Israelites to do to take the Promised Land? (14-2, 14-3, 14-4, 14-5)

##### Why did the people fail to attack the Canaanites and take the Promised Land? (14-5, 14-6, 14-7, 14-8, 14-9, 14-10)

##### How did God provide for the Israelites in the wilderness? (14-11, 14-12)

##### How did God provide leaders for the Israelites? (14-13, 14-14, 14-15)

### 2.2 Theological Questions

Answer the following theology questions as a community. Discuss what truths this story teaches.

1. Why do people disobey God? What does Israel’s failure to take Promised Land tell us about causes of disobedience?
2. How can people mature their faith in God? How can God’s discipline of and provision for Israel help mature the faith in God?
3. Why are godly leadership important for God’s people to grow in their faith? What examples of godly and ungodly leadership do we see in this story?

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## 3 Personal Reflection: Following the Teaching of the Story

Take a moment to allow this story to evaluate your own life and to consider how God would have you respond. After this reflection, use the quality checking questions to check your translation draft among the translation team.

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