Week#	255	Series:	The Gospels	
Title:	Into the Wilderness			
Scriptures:	Mark 1:12-13; Luke 11:20; Matthew 9:37-38; Matthew 4:2; Psalm 11:5; I Chronicles 21:1;			
	Revelation 12:10; Revelation 12:7-9; I Peter 5:8; James 1:2-4			

Into the Wilderness:

All three of the synoptic Gospels tell us that Jesus, after being baptized, went into the wilderness to be tempted.

Mark 1:12-13

¹² Immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness,

¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by the Adversary. He was with the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

There is a lot to unpack in these two scriptures, so we will take it one piece at a time.

Mark 1:12-13

¹² Immediately the Spirit *drove him* out into the wilderness,
The Greek word used here is *ekballo*. It is first used in the Old Testament account of Adam and Eve's explusion from the garden of Eden *Ekballo* is not the normal term used for "send / sent out" as most of our Bible translations have it. The CJB (above) has a little more force with using the word "drove."

Ekballo is a spiritually violent word filled with passion and force. We see this word used several times throughout scripture, and its force does not translate well into English, so we lose a little of its fierceness that use of the Greek word retains.

Luke 11:20

²⁰ But if I **drive out** [*ekballo*] demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you!

Matthew 9:37-38

³⁷ Then he said to his *talmidim [disciples]*, "The harvest is rich, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Pray that the Lord of the harvest will **send out** [*ekballo*] workers to gather in his harvest."

The authority and the force of Jesus casting out demons is the same spiritual force and authority by which he thrust forth laborers. *Ekballo* is the word used when Jesus goes to confront Satan in the wilderness. The Gospel of Mark points out the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert with this fierceness to confront Satan. It seems as if the power and the resistance of Satan and his evil spirits must be confronted by a greater forcefulness and empowerment. When Jesus *ekballos* demons, demons must leave.

Mark 1:12-13

¹² Immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness,

Notes:

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct.

The "finger of God" (in Luke 11:20) refers to what God said to the Israelites found in Deuteronomy 5:15 – that He would take them out of Egypt with the might of only His little finger. Meaning that there is more might in God's little finger than Pharoah had in his entire human force or whatever false gods were behind him. Even when we throw all our might at a situation and don't see it move, God only has to use the might in His little finger to bring about a miraculous move.

Jesus was driven out to "the wilderness" – what wilderness did He go to? The Judean Desert (Hebrew: תְּלָבֶּר Midbar Yehuda) is a desert in Israel that lies east of the Judaean Mountains, so east of Jerusalem, and descends to the Dead Sea.

The Judaean Desert stretches from the northeastern Negev to the east of Beit El, and is marked by natural terraces with escarpments. The northern point is around where the Qumran caves are located – the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947. The southern point is En-Gedi, which is the largest oasis along the western shore of the Dead Sea. This served as a main place of refuge for David and his men when they were fleeing from Saul. The southernmost point of the Judean Desert ends in a steep cliff dropping to the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley. It is crossed by numerous wadis flowing from west to east and has many ravines, most of them deep, from 366 metres (1,201 ft) in the west to 183 metres (600 ft) in the east.

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Judean

"40 Days":

Mark 1:13

¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by the Adversary. He was with the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

This number "40" shows up throughout scripture many times. Here are a few examples (in no particular order):

- 40 years is considered a generation.
- God destroyed everything living on earth by flooding it for 40 days.
- Moses' life was in three segments of 40 years each: 40 in Egypt, 40 in the desert before God sent him back to rescue the people of Isreal from Pharoah; 40 in the wilderness wandering with the people until his death at 120 years of age.
- Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years.
- Moses spent 40 days on Mt Sinai getting instructions from God for the people of Israel.
- Ezekiel laid on his right side for 40 days (after laying on his left side for 390 days) to "bear the iniquity" of Israel's and Judah's sins
- Saul, David, and Solomon all ruled as kings over Israel for 40 years each.
- Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days before David defeated him
- Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all three fasted in the desert for 40 days each.

Can you think of another mention of "40" in the scriptures?

The number "40" in the Bible appears to be connected to many of the	Notes:
same themes with the idea of wilderness. We can easily see 40 as two	
sides of the same coin. We often see wilderness experiences (literal or	
symbolic) timebound by periods of 40 days, years, etc.	
These shared themes include periods of significant trial or testing, or	
sometimes punishment for rebelling against God. Some examples focus	
on the teaching and preparation of God's chosen leaders. And in many	
examples the number 40 shows how God is redeeming His people from	
the world, bringing a time of restoration and renewal.	
The Hebrew language is called "Alpha-Numeric", meaning it does not	
have numbers. Each letter instead has a numerical value assigned to it,	
and when they want to represent numbers, they use the letter (or a	
combination of several letters) to represent it. The number "40" is	
represented by the letter Mem.	
The letter Mem (מ) is the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew Alphabet and is	
the number equivalent of forty (40). The Mem has two forms – open and	
closed – representing that there are mysteries closed off and revealed	
through time.	
40 days of Teshuvah:	
Matthew 4:2	
² After Yeshua had fasted forty days and nights, he was hungry.	
Yeshua's 40 day fast followed by confrontation with the adversary may	
allude to the forty days of repentance in Jewish observance. Like the	
Christian custom of Lenten Season before Easter, Judaism observes a	
period of forty days of repentance, beginning on the first day Elul (the 6 th	
month) and concluding on the Fast day of Yom Kippur (Day of	
Atonement).	
One of the Hebrew words for sin is <i>chet</i> , which in Hebrew means "to go	
astray." Thus the idea of repentance in Jewish thought is a return to the	
path of righteousness.	
The word <i>Teshuvah</i> in Hebrew may also be read "tashuv hey," literally	
"returning the letter Hey." The last letter Hey of the Tetragrammaton	
("Yod Hey Vav Hey") is synonymous with Shechinah, which is how God	
physically manifests Himself as sovereign within the creation. The picture	
of the letter Hey (because Hebrew is a pictograph form of writing) is a	
window, through which we can see beyond – so the meaning is	
"revealed." Yod Hey Vav Hey literally means: "Hand Revealed Nail	
Revealed." That is God's name that He gave to Moses to be used before	
Pharoah when asked who had sent him. This name of God spells out	

clearly what Jesus' mission and purpose from the beginning was to be. He was to be the one who, through the hand and the nail, would reveal God

to us once more. Our sin separated us from God, but through Jesus we	Notes:
can have that intimate revelation of God once more in our lives.	
The ten final days of Teshuvah leading up to Yom Kippur (the Day of	
Atonement) are specifically designated for <i>Teshuvah</i> , when the gates of prayer and repentance are more open than at any other time during the	
cyclical Jewish year.	
Jewish tradition derives the period of 40 days from the story of Moses on	
Mount Sinai. After the sin of the golden calf, Moses told Israel to repent.	
Meanwhile, he went back up on Mount Sinai for another 40 days without	-
food or water, he descended with the new tablets and a glowing	
countenance. According to tradition, Moses descended the mountain on	
the Day of Atonement.	
These forty days are regarded as the allotted time to examine one's life,	
identify one's shortcomings, and to make teshuvah (repentance) in	
preparation for Yom Kippur, the day of judgment.	
The story of Yeshua's forty days began with John's call to repentance.	
Matthew 4:2	
² After Yeshua had fasted forty days and nights, he was hungry.	
Jewish liturgy treats the Day of Atonement as a day for dealing with Satan	
and his accusations. In the Temple ritual for the Day of Atonement, the	
goat for Azazel (the name for the fallen angel in some early Jewish	
sources) is led out into the wilderness and destroyed in an annual ritual	
celebrating the defeat of evil. The imagery of the forty days of	
repentance, which culminate in a Day-of-Atonement-style, wilderness,	
fast-day showdown with the devil seems to be suggested in the story of	
Yeshua's temptations.	
Two takeaways from this lesson:	
First, Jesus didn't choose the wilderness. He didn't schedule a National	
Geographic expedition, or plan a desert marathon to improve his	
cardiovascular fitness. The Spirit of God "drove" him, compelled him,	
forced him, into the desolation of a wild and unsafe place.	-
This rings true to life. Most of the time, we don't choose to enter the	
wilderness. We don't volunteer for pain, loss, danger, or terror, but the	
wilderness happens, anyway. Whether it comes to us in the guise of a	
devastating pandemic, a frightening hospital stay, a broken relationship, a	
hurting child, or a loss of faith, the wilderness appears, unbidden and	
unwelcome, at our doorsteps, and sometimes it is God's own Spirit who	
drives us there.	
God does not desire us to suffer or for bad things to happen, but He is	

ready to teach, shape, and refine us through those moments of suffering.

In the startling economy of God, even a dangerous desert can become	Notos
holy, and our wilderness wanderings can reveal the divine. This is not	Notes:
because God takes pleasure in our pain, but because we live in a chaotic,	
fragile, and broken world that includes deserts, and because God's modus	-
operandi is to take the things of shadow and death, and wring from them	
resurrection.	
Second, our wilderness journeys sometimes last a long while. I can't	-
imagine that Jesus's time in the wilderness passed quickly. He	-
experienced each day as a battle of mind, spirit, and body. Maybe the	
hours stretched on, and the nights felt endless. Maybe the landscape	
itself mocked his weary senses, its unvarying bleakness breaking his heart.	
For those of us who live in this impatient, quick-fix culture, this aspect of	
the wilderness is daunting, because we tire and despair so quickly. We	-
ask: Why is the pain not ending? Why are our prayers going unanswered?	
Where is God? Maybe, we need to ask a harder question: Why did Jesus	
need the wilderness? Why do we?	
Mark's story begins with an account of Jesus's baptism. When Jesus rose	
from the waters of the Jordan River, the heavens tore open, and God	
announced Jesus's identity loud and clear: "You are my Son, the Beloved;	
with you I am well pleased."	
In the desert Jesus came face to face with the reality of His mission – His	
calling. His purpose was refined. He knew who God had said He was, but	
it is in the desert that that knowledge of who He was came to be tested.	
It is the same for us. In the desert is where God refines in us who we are –	
our mission, our purpose, and His way for us to fulfill that in our lives.	
Jesus gave us a picture of how each of our desert wanderings should be	
approached, and how we are to face testing when it comes – because it	
will come.	
James 1:2-4	
² Regard it all as joy, my brothers, when you face various kinds of	
temptations; ³ for you know that the testing of your trust produces	
perseverance. ⁴ But let perseverance do its complete work; so that	
you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing.	
James seems to indicate here that the testing you face in the desert times	
is what produces the wholeness found only in God – lacking nothing. It is	
only through God that we lack nothing. He can miraculously take the trials	

of life and make miracles out of them. He can breathe life back into things that were once dead. We would not see God's miracles in our lives if we

did not have those desert / wilderness times. It is these times that make us appreciate much more the times of rest that come in the oasis.	Notes: