

**Bible Devotions: Lock Stock & Barrel**  
**Devotional Reading for Outdoorsmen**  
**(Old Testament)**

Exodus 13:17-18

Wilderness or War

*Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea.*

Wilderness or war. Those were the only routes available to the Israelites as they ventured from captivity to the Promised Land. There were unknown dangers in either choice. Only God knew what His children could handle. He always knows (I Corinthians 10:13).

Wilderness is a playground for outdoorsmen but it's also a dangerous arena. Even the best woodsmen have been swallowed by it. Take the Grohs brothers for example, the true discoverers of Nevada's Comstock Mine in 1859, perhaps the greatest single mineral find in history. The tough brothers perished as a result of injuries they sustained in the wilderness. Although they had staked their gold claims, others are now credited with their find (Wallace, 1933). Unkind wilderness!

Wilderness doesn't seem to be as dangerous today as it was 150 years ago. We've tamed it a bit. In fact, we now classify wilderness into four types, each of which offers some degree of challenge: primitive areas, wild areas, wilderness areas, and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (Merrill, 1963). Danger, however, is not defined by how far one is from civilization but how close one is to death. That can be a thousand miles from nowhere or a thousand feet from the E. R.

And then there is war. The chapters of history are marked by man's achievements or his violent campaigns. War introduces us to gruesome death, ghastly wounds, and mental anguish. General William Sherman described it best when he said, "You don't know the horrible aspects of war. I've been through two wars and I know. I've seen cities and homes in ashes. I've seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, war is hell!" (Sherman, 1879).

We just don't know what awaits us in wilderness or war. We can count on a few things for certain: hunger, thirst, injury, illness, peace, chaos, life, and death. So it was with the nation of Israel. Only God knew how they would react when face to face with the Philistines. Yet God was also aware that the wilderness would provide other challenges for His children.

For it seems that all they did in the wilderness was complain. They complained about an advancing Egyptian army (Exodus 14:11-12). They complained because they were hungry or thirsty (Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3). And, oddly enough, they complained because God showed Himself to be their Lord (Exodus 16:8, 12). The wilderness served up death, they thought, yet what would they have done in the face of war! God was right, of course. They would have changed their minds about freedom and returned to Egypt. They were not ready for war (but their time would come). Decades of oppressive captivity had taken a toll on their drive to survive. As it was, they were hardly ready for the wilderness.

God chose their route to freedom – not through nearby war zones but through seas and rivers, over mountains and hill country, across desert and plain. Into the heart of the wilderness where He could get their attention, undistracted by the noise of clashing arms. Into the wilderness where He would write His law upon their hearts. Into the wilderness where they could complain and live. You can't do that in war.

The words that caught my attention in Exodus 13:17 were, "*although that was near.*" What we think is convenient, God knows is trouble. Where we seek a shortcut to the Promised Land, God saw a long and costly road to the cross. While men complained in the wilderness, Jesus waged war with death.

Our journey to the Promised Land now goes through neither wilderness nor war. It goes directly through the cross that Jesus bore for our sins. It goes through the grave that Jesus overthrew for our redemption. It goes directly to His throne for forgiveness and healing.

*You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation* (Exodus 15:13).

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## Bible Devotions: Hook Line & Sinker (study guide)

Exodus 13:17-18  
Wilderness or War

### HOOK

1. What's the biggest complaint you have about using public land for your outdoor purposes?  
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2. What feature of the wilderness do you find most dangerous or unappealing? What about war?  
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3. Make a list of items you'd take on an overnight canoe trip in late autumn.  
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### LINE

God chose their route to freedom – not through nearby war zones but through seas and rivers, over mountains and hill country, across desert and plain. Into the heart of the wilderness where He could get their attention, undistracted by the noise of clashing arms. Into the wilderness where He would write His law upon their hearts. Into the wilderness where they could complain and live. You can't do that in war.

What we think is convenient, God knows is trouble. Where we seek a shortcut to the Promised Land, God saw a long and costly road to the cross. While men complained in the wilderness, Jesus waged war with death.

Our journey to the Promised Land now goes through neither wilderness nor war. It goes directly through the cross that Jesus bore for our sins. It goes through the grave that Jesus overthrew for our redemption. It goes directly to His throne for forgiveness and healing.

As a Christian, what do you complain about the most? Be honest! If you are not a Christian, what do you complain about the most? Be honest!

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God has chosen only one way to be saved from the bondage of sin. Describe your journey. If you have not experienced God's forgiveness, describe what you think that journey involves.

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### SINKER

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts on this devotional. Reflect on your own experiences.

Key words: wilderness war complaining

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