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In the Wilderness

Jeff Ploegstra

Dordt College, jeff.ploegstra@dordt.edu

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In the Wilderness

Abstract

"Are you prepared to have the valleys filled in, the mountains made low, all your hiding places removed, and God's glory revealed in you?"

Posting about freedom in Christ from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/in-the-wilderness/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

In the Wilderness

 [inallthings.org /in-the-wilderness/](http://inallthings.org/in-the-wilderness/)

December 3,
2016

Jeff Ploegstra

Daily Scripture Readings

[Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19](#)

[Isaiah 40:1-11](#)

[John 1:19-28](#)

...John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'make straight the way for the Lord.'"—John 1:23

When John the Baptist replies to the priests and [Levites](#), he says that he is speaking with the words of Isaiah. However, Isaiah 40 is subtly different from the words that John uses. Isaiah reads: "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" In the case of the text from John, the wilderness is where the "calling" occurs. In Isaiah, the wilderness is where "the way for the Lord" is to be prepared.

I don't want to over-interpret this difference. Obviously, all English translations are just that – translations. However, when I look at the context of the two passages, I don't think this is simply a grammatical difference. Generally, in our reading of John, the word "wilderness" is often overlooked; it simply sets the context for the story – the place where John was ministering. In no sermon on this text do I recall anyone ever talking about the importance or meaning of "wilderness" here.

Isaiah, on the other hand, is clearly talking about a location for the "way." The parallel statement following, "...in the desert...", emphasizes location as well. This really shifted my perspective on how a Jew would likely have heard John's words. In Isaiah, the location of "preparing the way" – the wilderness, or the desert – bears much weight. It calls up images of Israel wandering in the desert, freed from slavery, intimately aware of God's presence and his providence. It also speaks to another captivity and another freedom from captivity – Babylon.

It's hard for me to imagine how a Jew would understand the word "wilderness." It is not ingrained in my ethnic heritage to feel the deep, pulsing desire for freedom. I have never had my basic liberty *taken* from me. I have never been *made* a slave or been *taken* captive. Rather, I willingly give up my freedom in a thousand subtle and not-so-subtle ways. I have chosen to become captivated by worthless things; things that make me feel secure, self-sufficient, accomplished, in control. I exile myself from God. I take refuge in the hills of my vanity. I hide in the valleys of my self-assurance, but there is no manna to be found.

"A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed..." (Isaiah 40:1-5, NIV)

Maybe these verses should become my morning meditation – a question to myself: Are you prepared to have the valleys filled in, the mountains made low, all your hiding places removed, and God's glory revealed in you?

Maybe the passage should even scare us a little.

Christ didn't come only to forgive our sins. He came to transform our landscape. He came to free us from our captivity.

Prepare the way.