

**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY  
"ISIDOR TODORAN" DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

**"DESERT THEOLOGY"  
– THE SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE  
PILGRIMAGE OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE TO THE  
PROMISED LAND**

**- DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY -**

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**Abstract - "The Theology of the Desert" – the spiritual implications of the pilgrimage of the chosen people to the promised land (Negrea Bogdan-Marius)**

**Keywords: theology of the desert, school of the desert, wandering, pilgrimage, sinai, paran, moses, Jews**

The journey through the wilderness was for Israel the main period of rediscovery of its identity. God's work in the wilderness was distinct from Israel's other periods of distress. The wilderness begins with Egyptian slavery, and this, whether we want it or not, is a reality. It is not by chance that the Holy Apostle Paul speaks conclusively on the subject of the exodus, saying: "Therefore let him who seems to stand firm take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12). The Fall, from its beginnings, was marked by disobedience and attracted the need for a descent of God into the life of man in order to solve this dysfunction, and then, for eternity, the descent of men would be dependent on the descent of God (Acts 46:3). In these conditions in which man must follow the path of decay, of reform, the "Theology of the Desert" is also born, a side of Theology that aims at the way in which, marked by pedagogical actions, a period of man's life has the role of repositioning him in the plan of his salvation, of redirecting his ideals towards ecstatic meanings.

The theology of the wilderness appears, historically, in the Pentateuch. Whether we choose to speak of an individual encounter with God, in which there are elements of information and indication of God's will, or whether we choose to speak of its historical meaning and shift our attention to the period of the Israeli Exodus, the "Theology of the Wilderness" constitutes an indissoluble element in defining the relationship between God and man.

In the work entitled ""Theology of the Wilderness" - the spiritual implications of the pilgrimage of the chosen people to the Promised Land" we encounter concepts such as "The School of the Wilderness" and "Theology of the Wilderness", doubled by exegetical interpretations and historical clues, all of which create a vast referential field for the way in which man can experience God's will in accordance with his Law, but also with his own freedom.

Israel is in a difficult period of its own, being a slave in Egypt. Fortunately, for any critical analysis of the event, we cannot simply take the episode of the Exodus and treat it as a particular sequence in the life of Israel, undetermined by previous actions or the expectations

of the people. Thus, with a period of about 450 years as time limits, the present research starts from an identification of Israel in Egypt as having an honorable status and ends with another identification of Israel in the last phase of its "probationary" period. The need for an intersection of several types of research was also the ideal for me regarding the topic in question. "Desert Theology" does not belong only to Theology, but is a phenomenon that, in addition to the historical pattern it comes to represent, focuses on the formation of a special inter-testamental and interdisciplinary arc.

The work is structured in eight complementary sections, starting from a primary discovery of meanings and reaching a powerful process of spiritualization of the concept.

In the first part of the work, chapters I and II, a conceptual approach to the Wilderness and the Theology around it is presented. Thus, for a more correct analysis, literary aspects were discussed, identifying the key terms regarding "Desert/s" and inserting "Law", as a distinctive note of the experience of the Desert. At the same time, for a more comprehensive perspective on the topic treated, aspects related to the current state of research are mentioned. These aspects are presented in the first, inaugural chapter, providing perspective on the research in question and identifying the starting points in the scientific approach.

With the definition of the terms and the evocation of the statutory position of the Law in the life of the Jews, the research opens up the temporal perspective of the Desert. In an attempt to present the broad framework of the biblical action, it is useful to frame the subject in time, place and space. Thus, the temporal delimitation, the indication of the "founder" characters, key characters, the inclusion in the geographical spectrum of the Desert and the study of the phenomenology of the concept are just some of the content elements that the first chapters anticipate, to be developed in the second part of the work.

The desert appears in the life of the Jewish people, on a universal note, only after a period of 400 years of wandering. The naming of the 400 years in Egypt as years of wandering is due to the fact that the reception of the wilderness and its quality as a reforming environment could only be achieved after knowing the "good", after experiencing a "corrosive" decay. From the status of "guest" to that of "slave", Israel has managed to reach without being concretely anchored in a temporal limit.

Chapter 4, the most extensive in the work, is the chapter that describes, in addition to the historical situation of Israel, the environment in which the action takes place from a scriptural/theological point of view. The school of the Desert did not originate in the Desert of

Sinai or Paran, but with the oppression of Pharaoh brought to the "guest" people. This is where the knowledge of God comes in, through Moses in the first phase, through signs and wonders later, and then, in a final part, through the direct revelation of His will.

Chapter 4 attempts to capture a transition in Israel's history. Not only the change in the status of Israel is important, but even the change of the main characters in the course of the action. The death of Jacob, in anticipation of a decay, Israel being centered around his memory, is the one that identifies to us the fact that a major change must occur in the biblical story. The latter has Moses as its key character, and it is this "investiture" that gives credence to the possibility of opening up to a triumphant action of liberation.

The exegesis contained in chapter 5 envisages a parallel presentation of two central events in the history of the chosen people. Once the presentation of the historicity of Moses is completed, in Exodus 3 the attribution, even the appointment of Moses at the head of the mission of liberation of the people, is presented. Desert theology, in essence, had to have a promoter, appointed by God. This promoter and leader of Israel, through the harshest years of the rediscovery of the people, is the one spoken of in the exegetical treatment of the two chapters of the book of Exodus: 3 and 6. The exegesis carried out takes into account the treatment of Old Testament paradigms, such as: The relationship between promise and fulfillment, remembrance as a recurring phenomenon in the Jewish mind, the name and the "Theology of divine names", but also the manifestation of God's providence.

Chapter 6 considers analyzing Mount Sinai geographically, symbolistically, and theologically. Centered on the experiences of Moses within Sinai and the theophanies presented in the Holy Scripture in relation to the mountain, this 6th chapter presents the ways of receiving Sinai and the mountain formations within the monotheistic religions. Combining a geographical, a theological and a philosophical approach, this textual fragment seeks to reposition the theme of the mountain (as a place of communication between man and divinity) at the center of spatial approaches to the biblical desert.

Numbers 13-14 represent the passage that the vast majority of exegetes consider defining for the "Theology of the Wilderness". Chapter 7, completed by chapter 8, is oriented in this sense towards an exegetical treatment of the Book of the Desert (*bemidbar*)/Numbers. Through a fragmentary analysis of chapter 1 and chapters 13-14 of the book of Numbers, an excursion through the history of the exchange of generations is made. Chapter 8 defines the terminology specific to the theme and sub-themes of the book: "The House of Captivity, the

School of the Desert and the Theology of the Desert". In order to validate the functionality of the concepts mentioned above, the analysis of chapters 13 and 14 of the book "The Desert" constitutes the scriptural foundation. For this reason, for a better transdisciplinary receptivity, chapter 7 begins with an ideological reorganization regarding the theme of this work, revalidating in a historical and geographical manner the place of the "desert" in History, in the exegetical space and in literature, but not only.

For chapter 8, the centrality is the delimitation of the concepts that revolve around the Desert, mentioned above: "The House of Slavery, the School of the Desert and the Theology of the Desert". The latter are recognized as functional even in a New Testament key sketched at the end of the work.

The main objectives of the work are, as simple as possible, as comprehensive. The wilderness is one of the key factors in Israel's evolution. For this reason, in order to receive the subject of the work as correctly as possible, a geographical approach intertwined with a historical one is necessary. The work aims to provide an overview of the Theology of the Desert, which is why the analysis of certain scriptural passages that address major themes and major characters in the existence of Israel is not accidental. The work places the Theology of the Desert in time, provides it with the necessary support from a textual point of view and validates it historically by marking its transcendental character and identifying it, together with the "School of the Desert", as a pattern, a necessary element in becoming a Christian.