

That The World May Know: Walking With God in the Desert – Session 1: Join the Journey

Living in a World of Chaos

God's story began in Genesis, when the earth was "formless and empty"—the opposite of God. As his Spirit hovered over the watery chaos, God spoke and by the power of his words formed and filled the chaos, imposing beautiful order onto disorder. Everything God created was in perfect harmony (shalom) and he proclaimed that "it was very good."

1. What effect has the chaos that sin brought into God's creation had on people and their relationships with each other and with God?
Genesis 4:1 - 12
Exodus 1:1 - 14
2 Kings 16:1 - 4
Matthew 2:1 - 9

What kinds of deserts—pain, suffering, hardship—have people experienced because of it?

Which of these deserts have had a role in your life?

What impact have they had on you?

2. God brought chaos back into the lives of his own people in response to their sin. How was the destruction and ruin that God allowed a reminder of what the earth was like before Creation?
Jeremiah 4:22 - 28

What metaphor is used to describe the chaos?

What insight does this give you into the meaning of desert times in life?

Two Kinds of Deserts

What comes to mind when you hear the word "desert?" Windswept sand and sun-bleached bones? Cacti? Snakes? Many of us first picture a desert as a physical place. These deserts have boundaries and certain characteristics: water is scarce, there is little vegetation, and daytime heat can be overwhelming.

1. While the Hebrews struggled physically in the desert, in what sense did they also experience the desert of emotional and spiritual suffering?
Exodus 14:1 - 12
Exodus 15:22 - 27
Exodus 16:1 - 3
Numbers 11:1 - 15

Compare a geographical desert with an emotional desert.

2. Why did God lead the Hebrews into and through the desert for forty years? How did he lead them?
Deuteronomy 8:1 - 9
Psalm 77:16 - 20
Psalm 78:52

Knowing that a desert shepherd leads by voice, what does it appear that God wanted his people to learn about following him that they were likely to learn best in the desert?
John 10:14 - 18
John 10:25 - 30

3. What are some of the deserts David experienced during his life?
1 Samuel 23:7 - 14
1 Samuel 30:1 - 10
2 Samuel 15:13 - 18
Psalm 3:1 - 2

The Three Lands of the Exodus

The exodus began in Egypt. Egypt is where God's people were not only enslaved physically but had chosen the bondage of trusting in Pharaoh and Egypt's gods to provide security, fertility, food, protection, guidance, and moral standards. In the desert, God joined his people on their journey, gave them his words, established an intimate covenant with them, and provided for their needs.

1. What type of bondage did the Hebrews experience in Egypt?
Exodus 1:11 - 16
Exodus 16:1 - 3
Ezekiel 20:1 - 12

In what ways might God's people today be in bondage without even realizing it?

2. During the years God spent leading his people in the desert, what did he desire to accomplish in their hearts and lives?
Exodus 19:1 - 6
Deuteronomy 4:1 - 14

To what extent was God successful?
Jeremiah 2:1 - 3

3. Just before the Hebrews entered the Promised Land, what did God repeatedly remind them to do? Why?
Deuteronomy 4:1 - 8
Deuteronomy 6:1 - 12
Deuteronomy 8:1 - 20

God Shapes His People in the Desert

The exodus was a pivotal event in the Hebrew's story. Because it occurred in the harsh deserts of the Sinai Peninsula and Israel, desert has played a central role in their religious faith. In God's plan, the harsh desert was a place of training and learning. He led them into the desert knowing they would not survive without his help and then even with his provision life would not be easy.

1. What three key things did God desire his people to discover and learn through their time in the desert?

Exodus 29:44 – 46
Deuteronomy 5:32 – 33
Deuteronomy 7:1 – 11
Deuteronomy 13:1 – 5

How import do you think it is for God's people to learn the same things today? How do we learn them?

2. In what ways did God loving provide for the Hebrews in the desert? What did they learn about God and themselves through his provision?

Exodus 13:20 – 22
Exodus 16:1 – 5
Exodus 17:1 – 13
Numbers 10:33 – 36
Numbers 21:4 – 9

How might it help you to walk faithfully with God if you established some regular practices that remind you what God has done for you during your life's deserts?

Returning to the Desert

After Moses died, God used Joshua to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land, the "good land" they had heard about for so long. They left behind the brutal heat and waterless wasteland of the desert and enjoyed springs of fresh water and the Jordan River flowing through their land. As they took possession of the land, they saw their God stop the Jordan River from flowing, drop Jericho's walls, stop the sun in its path across the sky, and rout entire armies.

1. What role was the desert intended to play in the lives of God's people?

Isaiah 40:1 – 5
Hosea 2:14 – 23

2. How strongly did God emphasize to the Hebrews their need to "return to the desert"—to remember the lessons they learned there and to make sure they remained on his path?

Numbers 15:37 – 41
Deuteronomy 4:9 – 14
Deuteronomy 6:1 – 9
Deuteronomy 31:9 – 13

3. In what way did Jesus reinforce to his disciples the importance of remembering when he was with them in the Upper Room before he was arrested and crucified?

Luke 22:14 – 19

What are some ways you can relive those events with Jesus and his disciples as if we were there rather than simply recalling the historical facts of that evening?

References

Genesis 1
Genesis 6 - 7
Exodus 1 - 4
Exodus 19 - 20
Exodus 31
Leviticus 16
Leviticus 24
Numbers 6
Numbers 15
Deuteronomy 4 - 8
Deuteronomy 31
1 Samuel 23 - 24
1 Samuel 30
1 Kings 15
2 Kings 16 - 17
2 Chronicles 36
Psalm 18
Psalm 25
Psalm 55
Psalm 67
Psalm 78
Psalm 121
Isaiah 45
Isaiah 59
Jeremiah 4
Jeremiah 17
Hosea 2
Matthew 2 - 4
Luke 1 – 3
Luke 24
John 10
Hebrews 11
1 Corinthians 14
Revelation 21

Genesis 4
Genesis 12
Exodus 12 - 17
Exodus 29
Leviticus 1 - 7
Leviticus 19
Leviticus 26
Numbers 10 - 11
Numbers 21
Deuteronomy 13
Deuteronomy 32
1 Samuel 26
2 Samuel 15
1 Kings 19
2 Chronicles 28
Psalm 3
Psalm 22
Psalm 32
Psalm 63
Psalm 77
Psalm 105
Isaiah 40
Isaiah 49
Jeremiah 2
Jeremiah 9
Ezekiel 20
Hosea 9
Matthew 16
Luke 22
John 3 - 4
Hebrews 9
1 Corinthians 10
2 Corinthians 4