

That The World May Know: Walking With God in the Desert – Session 2: It's Hot Out Here and There Is No Way Out

When We Cannot See the Way

As they journeyed across the desert on ancient trails that led over steep, rocky ridges and through deep, twisting wadis, the Hebrews often could see only a short distance ahead. This fit perfectly into God's plan. He seldom reveals the future to those who follow him. Rather, he demonstrates his daily provision as his people experience the pain, fatigue, and uncertainty of desert circumstances.

1. The Hebrews camped at Mount Sinai for nearly a year. As they started out, how confident were they of God's provision in the unknown desert ahead?
Numbers 10:33 – 36
Numbers 11:1 – 6

When have you faced times of uncertainty that tested your confidence in God's watchful guidance and provision?

How strong was the temptation to rely on someone or something other than God during those times?

2. You can count on God's watchful care and guidance when you walk through difficult and hazardous paths, but he may not eliminate the hardships or show the future. How much of your future do you control. How should you speak about the future and God's provision for it?
James 4:13 – 17
3. As you go through life, where you are sure to face desert experiences, where does God want you to place our hope for the future?
1 Timothy 6:11 – 21
Hebrews 13:5 - 6

Desert Life is Hard, But God Is There

The stark, rugged beauty of the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula and the Promised Land is stunning. To walk into the desert for any distance is to put your strength and endurance to the test. For the unprepared traveler, the desert environment can lead to death.

1. How difficult was life in the desert for Jacob? How was he able to endure?
Genesis 31:38 – 42
2. What was desert life like for the Hebrews? How did they survive?
Numbers 20:1 – 5
Deuteronomy 8:10 – 18
3. What would it be like to lose your way in the desert and know that your life was slipping away if God did not help you?
Psalm 107:1 – 9
Psalm 63:1 – 11
4. How do these images shape your understanding of the intensity of the struggle God's people faced to survive in the desert? What insight do these images give you into the intensity of the struggle in your own personal desert experiences?

God Provides Shade in the Desert

Shade in the desert is a great relief, particularly during the summer months when the sky often is cloudless and temperatures reach 120 degrees. Shade is scarce (as it sometimes is in the desert experiences of your life). Even the shade of a small shrub can make the difference between living or dying.

1. When Abraham sent away his son, Ishmael, and the boy's mother Hagar, they wandered in the desert near Beersheba. How long could a person survive with only the food and water they could carry on their back?
Genesis 21:8 – 20

When their water ran out and death seemed imminent, where did Hagar place Ishmael?

What else did God provide to spare their lives?

2. People today equate God's protection from life's deserts as being equivalent to an air-conditioned room. Often God seems to provide a small amount of shade rather than delivering us from the heat. When have you suffered in one of life's deserts and experienced a small amount of "shade" from God?

How much did that shade meet your expectations and desire for help?

How much did it meet your need by sustaining you?

God Is Our Shade

We may not know or understand why we find ourselves in desert experiences, but while God does not promise escape from the struggle, he does promise to be with us and to help us. When the harshness of the desert threatens to overwhelm us, he is there—watching, guiding, protecting, and sustaining.

1. Biblical writers often used *shade* and *shadow* to convey the protection and refuge of God. Consider how these images contribute to your understanding of what it means to depend on God:

Psalm 17:6 – 9
Psalm 36:5 – 9
Psalm 57:1 – 8
Psalm 63:1 – 8
Psalm 91:1 – 2

2. The Apostle John's vision of heaven describes a great crowd of people whose days of suffering were over. Which metaphors did John use to describe what they had endured? From what experiences did these metaphors originate?

Revelation 7:13 – 17
Isaiah 49:8 – 12

What is God providing for these people?

What is his relationship with them?

3. How does the realization that the "Lamb" of Revelation 7:17 is Jesus, who also experienced desert times during His life, give you confidence that you can trust Him to be your refuge and shade?

John 1:20

God Provides Shade through His People

It is amazing that the Lord God, Creator of the Universe, chose to use the same flawed humans whose rebellion brought sin into his perfect creation to be his instruments in restoring *shalom*—his peace and harmony—in the world. Yet throughout human history, God has raised up such diverse people as Noah, Abraham and Sara, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, David, Hezekiah, Mary, and Paul to bring the comfort of his shade to a broken, suffering world.

1. A cedar tree is considered to be a metaphor representing the coming Messiah. What does it provide and what is its impact on life?
Ezekiel 17:22 – 24

2. Which metaphor did Jesus use to describe the kingdom of heaven that he came to reveal?
Mark 4:30 – 34

3. The prophets envision a time when Israel will return to God and the Messiah will reign in righteousness and justice. What will be the role of God's people in that future kingdom?
Isaiah 32:1 – 8
Hosea 14: 1 - 9

References

Genesis 21
Genesis 32
Exodus 16
Numbers 10
Numbers 20
Deuteronomy 11
1 Samuel 30
1 Kings 19
Psalm 17
Psalm 23
Psalm 33
Psalm 57
Psalm 63
Psalm 78
Psalm 89
Psalm 100
Psalm 119
Psalm 143
Proverbs 3
Isaiah 4
Isaiah 25
Isaiah 49
Jeremiah 2
Ezekiel 17
Hosea 14
Matthew 6
Luke 12
Acts 5
2 Corinthians 5
Hebrews 13
Revelation 7

Genesis 31
Exodus 15
Exodus 17
Numbers 11
Deuteronomy 8
1 Samuel 17
1 Kings 17
Psalm 9
Psalm 20
Psalm 32
Psalm 36
Psalm 61
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Psalm 91
Psalm 107
Psalm 121
Psalm 145
Song of Songs 8
Isaiah 11
Isaiah 32
Isaiah 58
Jeremiah 17
Hosea 13
Matthew 2
Mark 4
John 1
2 Corinthians 1
1 Timothy 6
James 4