

That The World May Know: Walking With God in the Desert – Session 4: When Your Heart Cries Out

Sands of the Wadis and the Seashore

There is little sand in Israel other than in the desert wadis and the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea, yet sand is mentioned as an illustration twenty-five times in the Bible. The expression “sands of the seashore” characterizes something that is countless and communicates clearly to anyone who has seen a sandy beach. In ancient times, people gathered this sand to make plaster and glass. Take a look at some of these images and consider how they speak to us from the pages of the Bible.

1. How does the Bible describe the size of the Philistine army assembled to fight Israel?
1 Samuel 13:1 – 7

What impact did the size of this army have on the men of Israel?

How does the sand-related metaphor help to create a vivid picture of the situation?

2. Like many rabbis of his day, Jesus used familiar images from daily life to teach about the kingdom of God and what was required to be his disciple. When Jesus described flooding streams and the wise man building on the rock and the foolish man building on the sand, what kind of location would his listeners have pictured?
Matthew 7:21 – 29

Obviously people who lived in Israel recognized the foolishness of building a house on the sand in the bottom of a wadi. How did this image impress on them the foolishness of not practicing what Jesus taught?

When Floodwaters Come

It is hard to imagine the terrifying power of floods that occur in the wadis of Israel’s deserts, but we can try. On a cloudless day with the blazing sun overhead, the temperature may be well over 100 degrees. Suddenly you must climb the walls of a wadi as flood waters rumble through the wadi. Join the Hebrews as they learn to know their God and discover his purpose in the floods they experience.

1. The flood story of Noah is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. It is the first account of God using floodwaters to bring judgment against people who refuse to obey him. How did the flood also accomplish God’s desire to redeem his creation, starting with righteous Noah and his family?
Genesis 6
2. The kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom faced a crisis in the desert when they set out to end the rebellion of the king of Moab. What was the crisis? How serious was it? Where did the kings seek help?
2 Kings:1

What are the indications that God provided a wadi flood to deliver his people from their crisis and to execute judgment on the army of Moab at the same time?

How is the dramatic appearance of floodwaters a metaphor for the sudden deliverance that God at times provides for suffering people?

God’s People Will Face Floods

We often want God to make our lives comfortable and pain-free. We want to enjoy a life of prosperity, health, and wealth in which we lack nothing. Although God promises a desert-free and flood-free life in the age to come, that is not what he promises for his people living on earth. No matter what trouble we face, we must learn to cry out to God even when we are weak, exhausted, and see no hope. God may not provide relief exactly as we would like, but he hears our cries and will respond.

1. How do we know that God wants us to cry out to him when we need help?
Luke 18:1 – 8
2. God loves all people, but he particularly listens for and responds to the cries of certain people. Whose cries deeply touch the heart of God?
Exodus 22:22 – 23
Psalms 10:16 – 18
Psalms 34:15 – 22
Proverbs 15:29

How does God’s care for such people in need encourage you to cry out to him when the floods of life overwhelm you?

3. David faced many overwhelming floods in life, and through those desert experiences he came to know and love God as no other king of Israel ever did. How intimate and honest was he when he cried out to God for help?
Psalm 55:1 – 8

How comfortable are you talking with God as David did—letting everything in your heart spill out to him?

Wadi Floods: A Metaphor for Life

Biblical writers drew from myriad images of their physical world—plants and animals, deserts and fertile hillsides, planets and stars, wind and rain, mountains and valleys—to describe their theological beliefs about life, God, and what it meant to live in relationship with him. Take a look at some of the ways images of desert wadis can lead us to think about life and how God wants us to live it in relationship with him.

1. When God created the universe, he established *shalom*—peace, unity, and harmony—on the earth. As Creator, he has power over his creation. As the maker of humankind, he has a heart that desires to bless his people and bring *shalom* into their lives. Which powerful image of the desert wadis did the psalmist use to describe the judgment God brought on his people because of their sin?
Psalm 107:33 – 34

What did God then do in the desert and wadis to express his love and to bless those who had suffered in life?
Psalm 107:35 – 43

2. What state of injustice and oppression concerns God?
Amos 5:1 – 15

How did this situation offend God? What did it lead him to do?
Amos 5:21 – 23

Which metaphor of desert wadis was used to describe what God desired to see happen?
Amos 5:24

How may the sudden appearance of a powerful, roaring river of justice change this situation? How would it change injustices in our culture?

Wadis: A Picture of God's Shalom

Many biblical writers wrote prophetically about the coming age of God's *shalom*—the restoration of harmony and peace God desires for his people. Sometimes these writers used the wadi metaphor of flooding streams to portray God's coming redemption. Look for the hope of restoration that only God can provide. Although you may be inclined to focus on when and how these promises will be fulfilled, try to focus on the writers' description of the *shalom* God promises.

1. How did Isaiah describe God's coming *shalom*? What desert images do you recognize?
Isaiah 35

What taste of the *shalom* that God will one day bring to all things has he brought into the deserts of your life?

How has this taste of *shalom* been for you like a blossoming crocus, a rushing stream, or a bubbling spring in the desert?

2. What did the Lord God do for his people after their time of great suffering in the desert of exile?
Psalm 126

What impact did this restoration of fortune have on God's people and on the witnessing nations?

3. What did God promise for the future?
Isaiah 21:1 – 2

Jewish readers would understand a reign of righteousness and justice to mean the coming of the kingdom of God—the restoration of *shalom*. What will each person become at that time?

References

Genesis 6	Genesis 22
Exodus 13 – 17	Exodus 22
Numbers 11	Deuteronomy 2
Deuteronomy 8	Joshua 11
Judges 3	Judges 4
Judges 5	Judges 7
1 Samuel 13	1 Samuel 23
2 Samuel 22	1 Kings 4
1 Kings 19	2 Kings 3
Job 6	Job 14
Psalms 10	Psalms 18
Psalms 23	Psalms 34
Psalms 36	Psalms 40
Psalms 42	Psalms 55
Psalms 61	Psalms 69
Psalms 77	Psalms 78
Psalms 88	Psalms 91
Psalms 107	Psalms 124
Psalms 126	Psalms 145
Proverbs 15	Isaiah 32
Isaiah 35	Isaiah 41
Isaiah 44	Isaiah 55
Isaiah 66	Jeremiah 33
Hosea 1	Amos 5
Jonah 2	Matthew 7
Luke 18	Acts 7
Romans 15	1 Corinthians 10
1 Corinthians 12	Hebrews 11