

Psalm 23: Finding Safety in the Wilderness

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 1

1. Beck describes the Judean Wilderness as a place that is as much a **character** in the Biblical narrative as the people themselves.
 - How would you describe this “character” in the narrative of God’s people?
 - What role(s) did this “character” play?
2. The Wadi Quelt is a wilderness place that relates the shepherd to his flock...Beck explains that an understanding of this place helps us to understand the shepherd.
 - Where are the green pastures and still waters? What pushed the sheep and goats out of rolling green hills to this wilderness?
 - The terrain is described as dangerous – what makes it dangerous?
 - The shepherd needs to find just the right paths for the sake of his name - (sound familiar?) To keep his flock safe and healthy, the shepherd has got to **KNOW** the terrain...and then guide his flock there. **How does our Shepherd know our life’s terrain?**
3. The video describes sheep as gregarious and with no defense from predators. **How are we like the sheep?** A quick investigation of sheep offers this description of types: Those that wander...Those needing to be righted up...Those separated from the flock...the vulnerable...Those under attack...Those with the shepherd. **Which type are you most like?**
4. For what did the sheep depend on the shepherd?
 - Can you relate to any of these dependencies on the Great Shepherd, Jesus?
 - Which are easy and which are difficult?
5. John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” This passage becomes illuminated in the dark valleys...
 - Describe the dark valleys in Wadi Quelt.
 - A walk through the wilderness helps us connect the character of the shepherd with the land of the shepherd. What sort of character traits would be necessary for an effective shepherd?
 - The shepherd leaves his place of safety to help the stray sheep find its place of safety once again. **How does this foreshadow Jesus?**
6. We often equate David’s time as a shepherd with green pastures and still waters. This video offers a different view of David’s early training grounds for the shepherding of God’s people as king. David did not have lush pastures and safety when he wrote Psalm 23.
 - Read Psalm 23:1-4...**Identify the verbs...Which pertain to you and which to the shepherd?**
(*lie down, lead, restores, guides, walk, fear, comfort*)
 - **Could it be that David’s close fellowship with the Lord during his early years as a shepherd provided the green pastures (strength...sustenance...) and still waters (peace...contentment...) of this barren wilderness? Discuss**
 - In the quiet and isolation of the wilderness, God is near...focused meditation is available in the barren wilderness. **Have your experiences with wilderness strengthened or weakened your relationship with our Shepherd? What do you think causes the difference?**

Encouragement from the video

*If we can learn to be like the livestock we see here,
we won’t be looking at what we don’t have but rather what we DO have – the Shepherd...providing what we need.*

Where David Hid from Saul | Cave in the Judean Wilderness

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 2

1. For what purpose did David head to En Gedi - in the heart of the Judean wilderness?
2. Through David - God accomplished a great victory for Israel in the challenge between David and Goliath...Saul kept a jealous eye on David thereafter.
 - **What circumstances led to Saul's jealous attitude toward David?**
 - **Have you witnessed the effects of jealousy in your life?**
3. When the Lord takes you into Wilderness...YOU DO NOT COME OUT THE SAME PERSON!!
What makes something a wilderness experience? Can you share one?
4. If we look, there are a multitude of parallels found in Scripture that help us understand God's movement in our lives. **What parallel is described between David and the Israelites led by Moses?**
5. God was using this decade of wilderness to shape David to become a king who would be completely dependent on the Lord!
 - **Can you recall a time that you were shaped in a positive way through a wilderness experience?**
 - **How do we become completely dependent on the Lord? - do we WANT to become completely dependent on the Lord? Why or why not?**
6. In the cave encounter...EVERYTHING David was doing seemed totally irrational to his men. (Doesn't this sound like Jesus and His disciples?!)
 - **In his surrender to God, David had learned to TRUST the timing of God's future for Him...what helps build that trust of God's timing in your life?**

Concluding thought...

David's wilderness experience helped shape him to be the kind of leader God needed him to be.
Can I enter my wilderness experience BELIEVING THAT the Lord will improve who I am on the backside of it?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...

from Hebrews 12:2

Where Jesus Was Tempted in the Desert

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 3

1. Wilderness has shaped the culture of the Bedouin people; theirs is the same condition and landscape that Jesus experienced...but without the lack of food and shelter. **What do you think is meant by, “The wilderness makes the rules - we have to do the hard work of adapting”?**
2. The Bedouin pass on the secrets of wilderness survival – or as they say, doing the difficult life. **Where do we receive secrets of survival in our wilderness seasons of life?**
3. God used the wilderness to humble, test and teach His followers – as Beck states, “no person who enters the Wilderness leaves unchanged.”
 - **What wilderness stories do you recall from Scripture?**
 - **Are people changed because of their wilderness experience in those stories?**
4. Alone, without water, without food, evening predation...so many conditions leave a person vulnerable and in danger in the wilderness. Just before His public ministry, Jesus is baptized and then immediately, the Spirit leads Him into the Wilderness. **Why do you think Jesus needed to experience the wilderness alone?**
5. This land and the challenges of surviving in it provides the perfect backdrop for God to ask His followers a simple question - do you trust ME? **Are there wilderness experiences in your life that have increased your trust in Jesus?**
6. Beck advises that knowing the tactics of the enemy helps us in our defense or management of OUR wilderness times. The enemy times his encounter with Jesus carefully, challenging Jesus’ trust in His father at the end of 40 days w/o food, water, or restoring rest. Turn these stones into bread!
 - **Where does Jesus draw His strength?**
 - **At what sorts of times are you most vulnerable to faltering in the faith? What gives you strength to persist in the life of faith?**
7. Jesus’ wilderness temptation allows just enough detail to connect His wilderness experience with that of ancient Israel.
 - **What do the stories have in common?**
 - **How do the stories differ?**
8. While hunger raged...the question persists in their minds...Will you trust me even when the fundamentals for survival are not in view? At one point, the Israelites struggle with the wilderness led them to want to be taken back to their life of slavery. In contrast, Jesus boldly answers this struggle with Moses’ words found in **Deuteronomy 8:3 – Read them.**
 - **What can we do when we feel like returning to whatever bad influences enslave us?**
 - **Knowing what to do in the wilderness is not the same as doing it! When is obedience to God difficult for you? What helps you yield in obedience to God?**
9. **Read Matthew 3:16-4:11 - What do you think Beck meant when he stated: the battle for eternal destiny was being played out in the stones and dust of this place?**
10. Jesus came to do what we could not do...and undo what we had done. His ability to enter and leave the wilderness with the same trust is His Father reveals who He is...not only human...Divine! HE had the power to conquer the wilderness. Beck concludes - This is a story of how Jesus changed wilderness... for us. **Do you agree or disagree? Elaborate.**

The Doorstep to Israel: The Coastal Plains

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 4

1. Abraham lived in modern day Iraq...2,000 miles from the Promised Land...when God called him into a covenant through which all people would one day be blessed. **Why do you think God would choose this region as the stage for such an epic story of blessing for the world?**
2. **What was it about the Holy Land, in particular the Coastal Plain, that made every ancient empire want to have it under their control?**
3. **The ancient city of Ashkelon helps us understand something of this region's prosperity in Biblical times.**
 - Who occupied it?
 - The oldest surviving mudbrick arch-gate in the world stands here – **what is significant about this gate to the story of the coastal plain?**
4. Ancient Israel ended up settling in the mountainous region west of the coastal plain. **Compare the culture of the coastal plain to the culture of Jerusalem proper in Biblical times.** (apparently it isn't so different today!)
5. Though the coastal plain was part of the Promised Land, it was never controlled by the people of God – but rather, by the world beyond. **What design might God have in placing His chosen people amid this pagan setting?**
6. **Though this place does not host many Biblical stories, Beck describes it as an access point – for what? How would that location serve to spread God's message of hope to the world thousands of years later?**
7. Beck makes the point that God puts people right where He needs them to be for His purposes. **Have you seen this play out in your life?**

Jaffa: Where Peter Had A Change of Heart

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 5

1. Describe the vision Peter received that would spur on a major theological shift in the world. If this unfamiliar to the group – then read: Acts 10: 9-16
2. Compare Jaffa (same city as Joppa) to Caesarea.
While Jaffa was more familiar to Peter, both in culture and religious influence, Caesarea is where Jesus called him to follow the call.
 - How do you react when you find yourself in an unfamiliar environment?
 - How can that influence your expression of faith?
3. Jesus knows us completely and often engages us according to our uniqueness. A voice from heaven called out to Peter – *don't call unclean that which I have declared clean...*and this vision repeated three times!
 - What are ways the number 3 is significant to Peter?
 - What helps you know that God/Jesus is speaking to you?
4. Cornelius, the centurion, called for Peter. In what ways might Peter have felt he was in jeopardy by spending time in this Roman town?
5. Sophisticated, wealthy, and polytheistic...the culture of Caesarea.
In calling Peter, what was the centurion seeking? (or...what was lacking in this culture?)
6. Beck describes the result of Peter's encounter with Cornelius as a "second Pentecost."
 - How did this encounter change the centurion?
 - How did this encounter change Peter?
7. How does the artistic hanging tree featured in the beginning of the video relate to Peter's change of heart?

Joshua and the Battle of the Benjamin Plateau

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 6

Jericho is located on the eastern edge of Israel in the Jordan Valley. It's where the Israelites entered the Promised Land for the first time after centuries in Egypt and 40 years wandering in the desert. We know it today as part of the Palestinian West Bank. The story of the Benjamin Plateaus begins in Jericho shortly after the walls tumbled down.

In this video we learn the whole story of how God gave His people control over the Promised Land despite Joshua being tricked by the Gibeonites and not following God's orders.

1. As Beck describes everything in this story is about God leading His people into a land to call their own.
 - a. **Describe who occupied the Promised Land upon Joshua's arrival.**
 - b. **What about the geography of this region required Joshua to send out spies?**
2. Jericho sets the tone for the conquest - upon entering the Promised land, the Israelites would need a home base from which to fight their numerous battles against the occupants of God's promised land.
 - a. **What would the Benjamin Plateau provide for the invading Israelites who were commanded to take this land?**
 - b. **Why was this piece of land battled over for years prior to the Israelite's occupation?**
3. Much can be learned about obedience from this story.
 - a. **What did God command of Joshua upon claiming the Promised Land?**
 - b. **What deception led to Joshua's stumbling?**
 - c. **Sin has consequences...what consequence did Joshua's disobedience have on the Israelites conquest of the Promised Land?**
4. Joshua remains faithful to this ally who had tricked him when other city-states tried to conquer the Gibeonites. Joshua leads his army through the night to find the Gibeonites surrounded by enemy city-states. **How does God intervene to fulfill His promise that His people would occupy this new land?**
5. Regardless Joshua failed leadership with Gibeonites - God in His sovereign goodness provides and accomplishes victory for His people to fulfill His covenant of the Promised Land.

Similarly, our story doesn't end in our mistakes - it ends in Jesus' victory fulfilling His covenant with us. When we are in the in between places - places of uncertainty - we can know that God is in control.

Read Romans 8:28

- a. **How is this scripture lived out in the story of the Benjamin Plateau?**
- b. **How has this Scripture been lived out in your story?**

Why the Stories of the Bible Need to be Shared

~ Shephelah ~

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 7

1. Shephelah means low. Describe the geography of Shephelah and how that connects to the idea of it being a meeting place.
2. What is significant about each of the three regions Beck connected in today's video (mountains, foothills, coastal plain)?
3. Places can have Divine purpose.
 - a. What Divine Purpose does Beck lift up for this foothills region between mountain and sea?
 - b. Have there been places in your life, geographic or metaphorical, that you recognize as places of Divine purpose?
4. Beck focuses on the "flow" of God's message to the world through the various stories that took place in the Shephelah. Does it retreat to the mountains...or flow out to the rest of the world via the international "highway" of the coastal plain? Beck describes a series of meetings that took place in the Shephelah involving the ancient Israelites that fell short of moving God's message forward to the rest of the world. **The NT story of Philip and the Ethiopian stands in contrast - how?**
5. In this video we meet Emanuel.
 - a. How does the story of Philip and the Ethiopian shape who Emanuel is as a person?
 - b. Is there a particular story from the Bible that has had a significant shaping of you as a person? Share as comfortable.
6. Read the final words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 28: *Go make disciples...Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*
 - a. Beck challenges us to consider...**When I am in meeting places of my life...am I living out their gospel sharing potential?**
 - b. **What influences whether I will share something of the Gospel in a given situation/meeting place?**

Below find a commentary describing the Shephelah that compliments this video and may support your group's discussion.

Description of Shephelah from Ray Vander Laan – That the World May Know

The Shephelah is important because it is between the coastal plain to the west and the Judea Mountains to the east. Contact between the people in the mountains and the people on the plain would naturally occur in the foothills between the two.

Two other factors add significance to the region. First, the main trade route of the ancient world was on the coastal plain. It entered the plain through a pass in Mount Carmel and continued through the narrow spot between the coastal swamps and the Shephelah at Gezer. Therefore, the coastal plain was to the land of Israel what the Panama Canal is to North America, perhaps even more so. Second, several valleys penetrate the Shephelah and act as corridors between the mountains and the plain. Anyone in the mountains who wished to reach the trade route (for peaceful reasons or otherwise) would use these valleys.

The Old Testament Israelite, who lived primarily in the mountains, saw the Shephelah as a place of contact, in peace or in conflict, with the people of the plain and with those who used the trade route. The people living on the coastal plain wanted to control the Shephelah to prevent interference from the Jewish settlements in the mountains, so they developed great cities like Gezer, Azekah, Beth Shemesh, and Lachish to guard the area.

Whoever controlled the Shephelah dominated the relationship between the two peoples. This is the geographic setting and significance of most of the Philistine-Israelite conflicts in the Bible.

GOD RAISES UP HEROES

Since the Israelites had not taken possession of the coastal plain as God wanted, they exerted little influence on the rest of the world. They were strong enough, however, to create headaches for the Philistines. So the Philistines put pressure on Israel in the Shephelah so that they could establish their way of life. In response, God raised up heroes like Jonathan (1 Sam. 14), Samson (Judg. 13-16), and David (1 Sam. 17). God's victory through these biblical heroes established the dominance of his values and preserved his plan for the salvation of the world.

THE MODERN "SHEPHELAH"

Today, there are values in conflict in our civilization. Some are God's values and champion what he commands. Others represent the pagan practices of Western culture. Where these values meet is the modern "Shephelah." God calls us to live in the "Shephelah," to be the front line of those who would influence the world. If we avoid that battle and withdraw, we are living in the "mountains" and have no impact on the secular society around us. The Israelites tried to do that, and they discovered that it violated God's commission. What's more, the pagans came looking for them anyway, so it was useless to withdraw.

The Christian community today can learn a valuable lesson from the Philistine-Israelite conflict in the Bible. To live in Western culture is to live where opposing values clash...that is, in the "Shephelah." Our calling before God is to confront the secular values of our world and win. Who knows? Maybe God will so bless our struggles that we will gain control of the "coastal plain," where we can influence the world for God.

Where David Defeated Goliath: Shephelah

The Holy Land | Season 2 - Episode 8

1. The Elah Valley in the Shephelah was a meeting place for the epic story of David defeating Goliath...but Beck suggests it was also a story about leadership.
 - a. What leaders are compared in this story?
 - b. Describe the purpose of this meeting between them and their adversary, Goliath.
2. Both David and Saul represent God's people, and both would lead them.
 - a. Describe the national emergency in this meeting of David and Saul.
 - b. How had each leader been equipped for this stand-off with the Philistines?
 - c. From where do you believe each drew their confidence and motivation?
3. The Israelites were waiting and watching for a leader to follow in this national emergency.
 - a. What are the characteristics of a leader that make it easy for you to follow? Why?
 - b. What are the characteristics of a leader that make it difficult for you to follow? Why?
4. Beck suggests that, like David and Saul, we are all destined to face spiritual challenges in our own "meeting places." David's years as a shepherd prepared him for this spiritual challenge.
 - a. Can you think of a season of your life that, in retrospect, you realize equipped you for a spiritual challenge?
 - b. Has God used you to help equip someone else? If comfortable share- sharing our stories helps strengthen our faith.

*"All of us have influence...Where we place our trust affects those around us...
it will either move them away from God or toward Him."*