

Illustrated Bible Life

Life in the Wilderness

Wilderness plays such a big part in the Bible that when we study it, we find ourselves returning again and again to it. Our studies this quarter take us to Israel's wilderness wanderings before reaching the promised land.

Have you ever thought about what it must have been like for the Israelites who were condemned to spend 40 years in the wilderness, knowing they would never see the promised land? While there in the desert, they had times of teaching—certainly every Sabbath—when Moses brought them God's instructions that would serve them as an autonomous nation, even while they were on hold in the wilderness. What else did they do?

Imagine your whole life would be spent in a desert community, along with the same people you would see every day for the rest of your life. These were your constant companions, the people with whom you would spend meals, with whom you would entertain yourselves, the ones who went out looking for food with you, or making clothes, or freshening up habitations.

What do you imagine they did every day? If I were in the desert, I know what I would do—search for cool rocks! The desert would be a great place to study geology.

Maybe some of them sought out new plant life or animals they had never encountered before. Wikipedia tells us that there are a number of animals that live in the Sinai desert, among them foxes, various reptiles, and small rodents. Did some of the Israelites watch the animals around them to learn about their habits? Did they learn desert survival tricks from them? Follow them to find water and plant life?

They would have needed shelter, food, and water, like any civilization. Apart from what God provided, how much work would they have had to do in their desert surroundings, and how much time would that have taken each day?

Nights must have been particularly splendid, with millions of stars twinkling overhead in the clear desert sky. If any were inclined to astronomy, they must have had an intimate knowledge of the movements of the stars and planets. They would have seen the Milky Way splashed across the expanse of heaven and used its light to find their way on moonless nights.

Life would have been very close-knit in that community in the desert. They would have celebrated weddings and births and the festivals of Judaism and mourned at the loss of each member of their community.

As we study these lessons on Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy this quarter, consider what it might have been like for you if you had been one of that community. What sort of tasks do you think you would have done? What activities might you have participated in? How can an exercise like this help us to better understand those people who lived so long ago and their relationship with God?