

## Monday Week 17 Experiences In the Wilderness

Q65 What did the Children of Israel do while Moses delayed coming down from Mt. Sinai?

A. When Moses delayed coming, the people made a golden calf. (Exodus 32:1-6)

Wes was poking around in the back room of his father's barber shop. He was waiting to go home. His eyes spotted something through the slats of a closet door. Could it be a Christmas present? He father wouldn't know if he peeked. Wes opened the door. Yes! It was a race car set! Before he could look really close, he heard the door open from the shop. "Wesley, what are you doing?" It was his father. Wesley quickly closed the closet door. But his father had seen him. Now the surprise for Christmas morning was ruined. Wesley was embarrassed. He wished he hadn't opened that closet door.

When Moses was up the mountain talking with God, the people got tired of waiting. They wanted something to happen. So they did something very wrong. Instead of being patient, they made an idol – a golden calf. God was so displeased and sent destruction on the people. Many people died. It is a warning to us. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:6a)

### Thinking Deeper

People need to worship. It is a characteristic of humanity through the ages. For most of history, atheism was not much of an issue. Most of the time the issue was the worship of idols or false gods. Even today, most atheists worship at some altar. For example, it is almost eerie to see the kind of veneration Charles Darwin gets by atheists.

Do you know there is a "Darwin Day Celebration"? It is advertised as a "global holiday that transcends separate nationalities and cultures." It is a day, in the words of its organizers, of "celebrating ... the universal understanding we share." That universal understanding, of course, is evolution. Dr. Raymond Parades, Texas Higher Education Commissioner in rejecting Institute for Creation Research application to give online degrees for science educators, reasoned that creation based teaching doesn't give evolution "the proper attention it deserves." It is almost as if teachers must bow to the altar of evolution, or they are unqualified to form the minds of students. Which shows the propensity of man to worship.

Man will worship something. The question is, what or who will man worship? The golden calf became a substitute for worship of the true God. That misplaced worship deteriorated into a copy of paganism, with the accompanying indulgence of the lusts of the flesh in various manifestations.

Within forty days of seeing Moses going to the holy mount, the Children of Israel who had been led by the fire and the cloud, were violating the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." They didn't neglect to worship. Their sin was in worshipping according to their own minds. We often say we should worship according to the dictates of our own conscience. But that is inadequate. We must worship within the parameters God has given us in his word. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord."

Q66 What did Moses do when he saw the people dancing before the golden calf?

A. Moses threw down the tablets and ground up the golden calf. (Exodus 32:15-20)

Did you know that you can zap virus cells with lasers? Scientists have done it in experiments. Viruses can be bad. They can give you a cold. They can make you very ill. How can viruses be cured? Sometimes you must get a lot of rest so that your body can fight off virus. Medicine can help in some cases, but often viruses are too hard to treat that way. Now there may be a way to attack viruses by shooting them with lasers. The laser causes the virus to fall apart, but it doesn't harm healthy cells. They are still working on it, but the viruses better watch out. Someone will figure out how to get them!

When Moses came down from God's presence with the Ten Commandments in his hands, he saw the people dancing in front of an idol. The idol needed to be destroyed. It was causing the people to sin, and sin would destroy them. Moses was very upset. He threw the tablets down. They broke. Then Moses destroyed the golden calf. He ground it up so that it was like dust, and scattered it in the water. Then he made the people drink it.

God is not happy when people sin. Sin must be destroyed. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

Later God called Moses back up to the mountain again for another copy of the commandments. God does not give up on His Word.

### Thinking Deeper

A young man was at the youth camp altar crying and praying. He was seeking God, but something was troubling him greatly. Finally, he admitted his problem. He had been listening to hard rock music and was having trouble giving it up. The young man understood that what he'd been listening to was directly contrary to Christ and the life of "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." The early stars of rock music were open about what they were doing. The Beatles said they were more popular than Jesus Christ. A singer named Blondie said rock was one hundred percent sex. Themes of rebellion fitted well with the hippie movement in the sixties and groups like The Rolling Stones sang rebellion into the culture. Another theme of rock music glorified Satanism and the occult. The young man saw the battle between Christ and the message he'd been listening to. So he was struggling. The music had him in a kind of bondage. Finally, he decided to yield his music listening to God. When he did, he realized he had to get rid of his music. The next morning the youth camp sponsored a bonfire. Along with others, he brought his music to be burned.

Sometimes the only thing to do with evil things is to destroy them. Moses knew that the golden calf was a snare. It had to be destroyed. There was no sanctifying it. It had to be ground to powder. There is no negotiating with sin. It must be destroyed. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:6).

Q67 Why did God ask for an offering to be taken in the wilderness?

A. God asked for an offering to make the tabernacle. (Exodus 35:1-11)

A little boy wanted to give something in the offering, but he didn't have anything in his pocket except for a few marbles. So he put them in the offering plate as it passed by. After the church service one of the ushers who was counting the money asked the boy if he wanted the marbles back. The boy said no. "I gave them to the Lord Jesus." Later, a man heard about the boy's offering. He gave the church one hundred dollars for the marbles. So the offering the boy gave turned out to be far greater than he would have imagined.\*

God asked the Children of Israel to give offerings in the wilderness. Some of them gave gold. Others gave valuable animal skins. Oil, spices, incense, precious stones, and fine wood were among the offerings the people brought. They were bringing supplies to make a tabernacle. The tabernacle was made so the people could come and worship the Lord. The people were very willing to give to God's work. "God loveth a cheerful giver."

\*(From Ruth Dow, in Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, P. L. Tan.)

### Thinking Deeper

It has been stated that the measure of a person's commitment is whether or not it has affected his wallet. Someone said that "the last thing to be converted is the pocketbook." On the bright side, converted people have often found great joy in giving. Another popular saying is "you can't outgive God," with its corollary "God will be no man's debtor." These sayings point to the truth that there is genuine blessing in giving to God.

Giving people are more apt to be interested in the work of God. Jesus said that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If you don't give to God's work, your heart will be elsewhere. Try it. Give a substantial offering to some aspect of the work of the Lord and see whether or not you have an increased interest in that work. You will likely perk up when that particular endeavor is mentioned. Why? You have some of your heart there. Tony Compolo said that when there was flight from the urban churches, his family didn't leave because his father had bought the offering plates. There was no way they were going to a suburban church. Those plates were in the city church!

When the Israelites gave of their possessions to build the tabernacle, they had their hearts turned toward the tabernacle. Give cheerfully to the work of the Lord and you'll be surprised how your heart is turned in His direction.

## Thursday Week 17 Experiences In the Wilderness

Q68 If the people sinned, what were they to do?

A. If the people sinned, they were to bring a sacrifice to be offered to God.

Jason, can I borrow your rod?" asked Eric. "Mine's out of line and I want to fish." "Sure, just be careful with it." While he was fishing, Eric put the rod on the dock and walked away. Suddenly he heard the rod being dragged off of the dock. A big fish must have taken the bait. Before he could stop it, the rod dropped into the water and sank out of sight. What was Eric to do? He couldn't get the rod because the water was too deep. He went home with a heavy heart.

When Eric told his dad what happened, they talked about what to do. They decided that Eric needed to buy a new rod for Jason. Eric got enough money to buy the rod from his savings. He had wanted to buy a new bike, but that would have to wait.

"I'm sorry, Jason," said Eric the next day. "I lost your rod, but here's a new one to replace it." Jason was happy with the new rod, and Eric went home with a clear conscience. He had done the right thing.

When people sin, they need to make it right as much as they can. They also need to get right with God. God told Israel to bring Him a sacrifice when they sinned. Later on, Jesus became the sacrifice for our sins on the cross. When we confess our sins, we trust in Jesus to cleanse us and forgive us because he died for us. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3b).

### Thinking Deeper

Many people endeavor to bring some kind of sacrifice to appease their god. In ancient times people would bring children to the fire god Molech. Sometimes they would pass their children through the flames arising from a fire in the lap of the idol. Other times they might take a child and place it as a complete sacrifice into the god's glowing arms heated red hot by those flames. Hindus have been known to sacrifice children to the god of the Ganges River, who accepted the little victim with a swirl in the water and snap of a crocodile's jaws. Countless sacrifices have been made to appease the many gods that people have invented.

The God of the Israelites asked for a sacrifice. After the example of Abraham offering Isaac and God providing a ram, the Jewish people understood that God does not require human sacrifice. Rather, the sacrifices made were types of the coming sacrifice of the Promised One, the Messiah. "**Christ** also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a **sacrifice** to God" (Ephesians 5:2) The sacrifice on Jewish altars was not so much them appeasing God, but looking forward to the sacrifice that God would be making to appease Himself-- God working on behalf of man in the ultimate sacrifice. "God so loved ... that he gave his only begotten Son."

## Friday Week 17 Experiences In the Wilderness

### Review the Week's Questions

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Three boys were taking a hike through some woods. They had gone farther from home than ever before, and the smallest boy became frightened and wanted to be home. He started to cry out. An older boy asked him what good that would do. "Maybe someone will come and help," suggested the little boy. But no one did. They had to trudge along themselves until they finally found their way home. The little boy was really glad to get home.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness they were far from a place they knew. They had to learn new things. They had to learn about God's law and how to deal with their sins. They didn't have a place they could really call home. But they kept walking. God was leading them. Even in the wilderness, God was there.

It is important to keep walking with God, even when things are strange. "The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah." (Psa. 46:7)

### Thinking Deeper

There is such a thing called "the wilderness state." That is where people who have come a distance in their walk with Christ find themselves with not much spiritual feeling, not much sense of direction, yet with fears and trembling and questions unanswered. Some may even question, "where is God?" or "where am I in relation to God?" This condition is often associated with the valley of decision between initial salvation and entire sanctification. That can sometimes be a helpful description of one who has not made a complete consecration of their heart to God. After observing people for years, one can see those who have halted, like those Israelites in the wilderness, because of unbelief. Yet others persevere and go on to the promised land.

However, it is also an observation that people who have "entered Canaan" sometimes experience such a state. What are we to make of this? One thing is sure: the way through the wilderness is the way of faith. The promises of God, regardless of one's state of grace, are to be taken by faith, not by the senses.

A godly man was overheard praying, "Lord, I take you today as my sanctification." He was affirming faith in God's promises in the present tense. It is ongoing faith that keeps our relationship with God in place. What seems like the wilderness seems lonely, but it can be a place of reaffirmation and strengthening of your faith. "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Hebrews 4:11).

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