

Land without Borders

VIDEO STUDY GUIDE

The following material is based on author John Beck's six-part video study entitled *Land without Borders*. Filmed on location in the wilderness areas of Israel, the videos give us a fascinating introduction to the rough, austere hills and valleys of biblical wilderness locations. Although the book and the videos stand alone, they may be combined for the greatest study benefit. Each video episode outline will direct you to the related chapter in the book.

Episode 1: What Is Wilderness?

Episode 2: How Does God Use Wilderness?

Episode 3: Wilderness and Faith Witness

Episode 4: Wilderness without Wanting

Episode 5: Wilderness and Forgiveness

Episode 6: Wilderness and Extravagant Love for Our Neighbor

WHAT IS WILDERNESS?

Additional Reading: *Land without Borders* chapter 3, “What Is Wilderness?”

Scripture Connection: Jeremiah 2:6

PROLOGUE

According to Dr. John Beck, there are more than 300 biblical references to the ecosystem we recognize as wilderness. But what is the significance of this term as Bible authors used it? Dr. Beck treks into the wilderness to help us understand seven specific characteristics of the wilderness up close, and this will help us grasp what the writers were talking about when they spoke of this often barren landscape.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. Dr. Beck suggests that as he explains the biblical wilderness, we might have to change our thinking about what a wilderness is. What does he mean by that statement? What is he assuming we might already know about wilderness?
2. The first similarity shared by all biblical wilderness areas is that they are _____ and _____. Dr. Beck explains that the wilderness where he and his students are standing is just twelve miles from Jerusalem, and then he gives its dimensions. What surprises you as he explains these things?
3. Dr. Beck goes on to give the second characteristic of a biblical wilderness: It has precious little _____. What keeps the rains from the Mediterranean Sea from reaching these arid pieces of land?
4. The group moves on to other landscapes, the Wilderness of Paran and the Wilderness of Zin. Here Dr. Beck continues to explain the shared traits of the wilderness. The third trait is that it has very little grain. How does that trait differ from the second trait? And what is the major problem this causes for anyone trying to live in a wilderness?
5. The fourth characteristic is that wilderness is a land of limited permanent _____. One of the main reasons for this is connected to the third trait. Explain how trait three leads to trait four.
6. It is logical then, that this vast, rugged, dry land with no villages would be a place of very few _____.
7. Why was the wilderness a land without borders?
8. Dr. Beck’s general statement, which becomes his seventh trait, is that the wilderness lacks everything. Review the first six traits to remind yourself why the seventh is true. Read Jeremiah 2:6 to get the prophet’s concept of wilderness. Which of Dr. Beck’s traits are mentioned in this verse?

HOW DOES GOD USE WILDERNESS?

Additional Reading: *Land without Borders* chapter 4, “How Does God Use Wilderness?”

Scripture Connection: Deuteronomy 8:2–3

PROLOGUE

While we may never have visited an actual wilderness territory, we certainly face wilderness times when we struggle. Dr. John Beck explains in this session of *Land without Borders* that God uses this kind of metaphor in teaching us about life’s hard times. To do that, he takes his class (and us) to the Wilderness of Zin.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. If you have a chance, examine a map of Israel in Bible times (with an atlas or online) and take a closer look at where the Wilderness of Zin is located. Is there anything about its location in relation to the Promised Land that surprises you?
2. Have you ever considered how short the quickest distance from Egypt to the Promised Land actually is? As Dr. Beck mentions, “Every expectation is that they would, as quickly as possible, move back to Canaan.” Some say that if the Israelites had gone north, as Dr. Beck suggested, it would have taken them about two weeks to get back to the Promised Land. How does that reality give you a new appreciation for why God instead extended their journey to forty years?
3. Reread Deuteronomy 8:2–3. Notice that the author of Deuteronomy mentions all three of the main ways, according to Dr. Beck, that God uses wilderness in our lives. What again are those three things?
4. According to Dr. Beck, “God hates arrogance.” Can you think of some biblical stories in which God’s disdain for arrogance is demonstrated?
5. Think of the comparison Dr. Beck makes between Egypt, where the Israelites resided for four hundred years, and the wilderness, where God sent them to learn more about Him. What about Egypt suggests that it is ripe for arrogance? And what does the wilderness teach, by contrast?
6. Just as the wilderness led to the God-directed question, “Do you trust me?” in the midst of this barrenness, how does a real-life wilderness experience (trouble in our lives) cause us to ask the same question? What are some of the reasons we can answer “yes” to this question in our wilderness episodes of life?
7. While we don’t often face hunger as the Israelites did in the desert—a hunger that was satisfied with God’s supernatural gift of manna—we may face other times when we wait for God’s provision and learn that He is sufficient. How has that happened in your life?

WILDERNESS AND FAITH WITNESS

Additional Reading: *Land without Borders* chapter 5, “Wilderness and Faith Witness”

Scripture Connection: 1 Samuel 24:1

PROLOGUE

Doesn't the word “oasis” sound somewhat exotic? Maybe it's because we've seen beautiful examples of this refreshing water source in movies. Or maybe just because we understand how exciting it must be for thirsty travelers to arrive at a place where cool spring water can restore their weary bodies. But regardless, we know that finding an oasis is a significant event. And, as Dr. John Beck explains, an oasis played a key role in the life of one of the Bible's most remarkable characters: David.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. Did you enjoy Dr. Beck's explanation of the water system in relation to the watershed line? How does that explain why there is an oasis where Dr. Beck and his students are located?
2. Why do you think God allowed Saul to so relentlessly chase the eventual king of Israel, David?
3. The En Gedi area was where David went to hide from Saul. Saul took 3,000 men with him, but there was probably only one place he would go where his men would not go to protect him. What was that one vulnerable situation, and what surprising event happened when Saul thought he was alone? Think about whether this was coincidence or God's guidance.
4. What do we learn about David and his relationship with God through this incident?
5. Imagine if we were to live so someone could say about us as Saul said to David, “You are more righteous than I.” What experiences—even wilderness experiences—can we use to have such a faith witness?
6. Dr. Beck said the wilderness was reshaping David. How can we make sure our tough times reshape us into the kind of people God wants us to be?

WILDERNESS WITHOUT WANTING

Additional Reading: *Land without Borders* chapter 6, “Wilderness without Wanting”

Scripture Connection: Psalm 23

PROLOGUE

Psalm 23. Majestic. Calming. Divine. Those words describing this much-loved passage—among the greatest pieces of literature ever written—don’t sound like what we would recognize as related to the wilderness. But as Dr. John Beck explains in our fourth session of the *Land without Borders* study, Psalm 23 is a special kind of wilderness narrative—one that, when seen rightly, does indeed connect with the wilderness.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. What are some previous connections you have had with Psalm 23? In what ways has it calmed your heart or brought peace to your troubled soul?
2. What was your first thought when you heard Dr. Beck say that Psalm 23 should be placed in the context of wilderness? Did that surprise you? Did it cause you to quickly think through the passage in your mind to see how this could be true?
3. As has been mentioned, Psalm 23 is powerful. Think about the prospect, as Dr. Beck says, that when it is placed in its proper context of wilderness, “the language becomes even more powerful than it had been before.” Were you skeptical about that assertion, or were you excited about what this might mean for you?
4. Was it a new idea for you that in biblical days, sheep and shepherds had to move into the fringes of the wilderness during crop-growing season? What is the standard picture you had of where sheep and their shepherds would hang out during the day?
5. “The Lord is my shepherd, I just don’t lack a thing,” Dr. Beck paraphrases Psalm 23:1. David saw his relationship with the Lord reflected in his flock’s relationship with him. They lacked nothing as David lacked nothing. Are you feeling more or less like David at this moment in your life? Why?
6. Dr. Beck points out that just as a good shepherd leads his sheep over the rugged terrain of the wilderness safely, our good Shepherd “is always picking the right way to go.” How is that true for us as we traverse our somewhat dangerous and rocky journey of life?
7. The psalm begins in the wilderness, Dr. Beck observes. However, it does not end in the wilderness. It ends, he says, “at home.” Think about the contrast of life on earth (wilderness) and the life God has promised us (heaven). What comfort and hope does it promise you that, at the end, our Shepherd leads us home?

WILDERNESS AND FORGIVENESS

Additional Reading: *Land without Borders* chapter 7, “Wilderness and Forgiveness”

Scripture Connection: Matthew 4:1–11; Deuteronomy 8:3

PROLOGUE

Had you ever thought to connect the story of Jesus’s temptation by Satan in the wilderness to the Old Testament story of God’s people, the Jews, while they were in the wilderness? If not, you’ll be in for an interesting new concept as Dr. John Beck takes you and his students back into the Judean wilderness to make that connection. And you’ll see how the idea of forgiveness is also clearly related to this wilderness incident.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. Dr. Beck walked his small cadre of students deep into the wilderness for this teaching segment. He did so to give them a glimpse of what the wilderness can do to a human—and to have them think about how it must have affected Jesus. Think through real-life symptoms Jesus must have felt while being in that barren landscape for forty days without food.
2. After reading Jesus’s quote of Deuteronomy 8:3, Dr. Beck suggests that Matthew (who told this story of Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1–4) has a strategy in mind. What is that strategy, and what is your first reaction to hearing about it?
3. Dr. Beck then details parallels that he suggests occur between the two stories: Jesus’s temptation story and the children of Israel in the wilderness. He suggests, for instance, the parallel that God led both the Israelites and Jesus into the wilderness. And in doing so, He was asking them, “Do you trust me?” What are some wilderness times you have experienced in which God was asking you, “Do you trust me?” How did you do in those trials?
4. What Jesus did in the wilderness, according to Dr. Beck, is a picture of His putting salvation into action. “We see Him living out the obedience we and Israel owe the heavenly Father, but we couldn’t deliver,” he explained. “We know that Jesus has already succeeded on our behalf.” How did Jesus meet the temptation Satan offered Him, and what does that tell us about how we should battle temptation?
5. “Jesus lived the life I couldn’t so that I can walk out of here forgiven,” Dr. Beck concludes. What are some of the ways you are thankful for the forgiveness that Jesus so freely offers us?

WILDERNESS AND EXTRAVAGANT LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

Additional Reading: *Land without Borders* chapter 8, “Wilderness and Extravagant Love for Our Neighbor”

Scripture Connection: Luke 10:30

PROLOGUE

You can assume that most people have heard something about the story of the Good Samaritan. That term itself is part of both religious and secular vocabulary. But you may not know that this is a wilderness travel story. In the final trip into the wilderness for Dr. John Beck and his intrepid students, we’ll discover what this wilderness travel story teaches us about demonstrating inconvenient, extravagant love to others.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. The story of the Good Samaritan is directly related to the wilderness because the incident Jesus told about in Luke 10:30 took place on a narrow road that meandered through the Judean wilderness. That road went from Jericho to Jerusalem. What difference does it make to you to realize that the story took place on a specific road going through a specific geographic place?
2. At the outset, Dr. Beck mentioned that there were some built-in animosities between Samaritans and Jews back in the day when this story was told. This sets up the tension in the moment the Samaritan comes up to the Jewish man who had been left for dead. Explain what the Samaritan did to show inconvenient, extravagant love to the injured man.
3. Dr. Beck goes on to explain some of the other dangers that a traveler would encounter on the road—dangers that make the fact that the Good Samaritan stopped even more surprising. What were some additional dangers that might have made stopping more of a risk?
4. Loving our neighbors is one thing, but the Good Samaritan story, Dr. Beck says, sets up a totally different view of how we interact with our neighbors who are going through tough times—who are going through the wilderness. Think back on someone who was going through tough times. Was their situation handled with the same inconvenient, extravagant love the Samaritan showed toward the Jew? What new ways to think about helping your neighbors have you gained from listening to Dr. Beck in this session?
5. Dr. Beck closes by asking his students to allow the message of the wilderness to move from text to ground to heart. As you think back to these six lessons taught in the barren wilderness, which ones do you most desire to move from text to ground to heart for yourself?