

Lent

Today, 21st of February 2021, is the first Sunday of Lent. During Lent, Christians remember the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness after John had baptised him. It was an event at the beginning of his public ministry.

As we reflect on Lent, we also recall the beginning of the nation of Israel. They, also, were sent to the wilderness at the beginning of their ministry as a people that God had called to be a light to the world. They would go walkabout in the wilderness for 40 years, before they arrived at the land that God had promised their ancestors.

The biblical wilderness is not like the lush rain forests of Fagaloa, in Samoa, with wild yams, fruit bats, wild chicken and wild pigs for sustenance, with cascading waters to quench the thirst. No. The biblical wilderness is a desert, a place that is hostile to life.



Few animals live in the desert, and they are the deadly types like snakes and scorpions. Yet, that is where God conducts his formation.

Think about it. The God of life, when he calls you to do his biddings in the world, would send you to ‘school’ at a place that is inimical to life, and where the locals will think you were manna.

Deuteronomy 8 provides insights into what Israel, and Jesus, are going through in the desert for. First, *‘to humble and test’* them (v2). Second, *‘to teach them that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’* (v3).

Messianic Rabbi, Kirt Schneider, says the test (trial) prepares people for the challenges that their calls would entail. For Israel, that was to take possession of the Promised Land. For Jesus, it was to be the beloved Son and God’s Messiah.

The wilderness has become a theological theme that refers to a life stripped of its usual comforts. The causes are many and varied, but they include dealing with our own ‘wild beasts and demons’.

Schneider reckons the wilderness is necessary for individuals and groups of individuals, since it is the only time when God can teach us anything.

For a long time, socio economic injustices have plagued the world. The rich and rich countries have been ignoring the cry of the poor. Covid19 has forced the world into the wilderness. The rich are trying to continue with the business-as-usual attitude, but viruses respect no one.

The world could have been heaven on earth, if the rich had considered developing everyone and every nation, but they chose to ignore it. They can ignore the poor this time at their peril.