To follow the Rabbi is to follow in faith. “Come, let's go.” You don't question it - - he will lead. Trust there is always some purpose to why and where he is taking you.

Welcome to the desert – four deserts (midbar) in the Bible: Sinai (most severe), Wilderness of Tzin (most of the 40 years of wandering), the Negev (where the Patriarchs lived), and the Wilderness of Judea... the desert was a land flowing with milk and honey... a land where there is just enough... a land where you need to depend on God or you will not make it. A land where shepherd and farmer carve out 'gardens' (Gan)... Milk – not from cows, but from goats... who survive on 'green' pastures what grow sparsely between the rocks from the dew on the ground. Honey... from plants, figs, dates, and pomegranates... But don't be fooled – the desert is a harsh place, a place of death. Without food and water – you will not survive for very long.

Desert:
A place where we learn to follow the shepherd. Learn to follow his voice. Learn to follow like a sheep. God led his people into the desert – training time– learning how to be like sheep.

Israel spent 35 years in about 300 square miles of dessert. In the desert, suffering of some will bring shalom for others. The first test – be dependent of God for daily life. A hard lesson for God's people to learn... we think that we provide for our needs – but God does. We see this in the desert experience.

Many metaphors as we wandered in the desert following the rabbi... Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.” He will give just enough... enough for today. The Shepherd knows and the Shepherd will lead. If a boy or girl of 12 can lead a flock of sheep miles through the desert to arrive safely at their destination – how much more will our heavenly Father, and now resurrected Savior lead us safely through the wilderness of life? “He makes me like down in green pastures...” As the sun sets and the early morning mist and dew settle on the ground and every living thing sleeps, tufts of grass are nurtured and sprout for the next days grazing. Sheep and goats awake to God's 'manna' spread out on the hillsides. “He leads me beside quiet waters – he restores my soul.” Cisterns of water – oasis in the dessert. Markers along the dry riverbeds that point the way to quiet waters. Excitement for the shepherd grows as the cool cave in the wall of the cliff filled with water is almost near. But the sheep and goats do not know where the water is... they simply follow the shepherd's voice. God will even bring water out of a rock if necessary! “He guides me in paths of righteousness for his names sake.” Never lose sight of the shepherd. “Live by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The shepherd leads the sheep on sloping trails that zig-zag down the hillside. The path of righteousness is the path that leads straight to the shepherd. Sheep follow the shepherd. Our Rabbi Shepherd Jesus is good and leads us on the right path. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.” During the day, they lead the way – when nighttime comes, they stay close to the sheep... a staff for guidance – a staff for correction – a rod for protection... Psalm 139, “If I say, surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you: the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.” “You prepare a table... you anoint my head... my cup overflows...” Hospitality is #1 among the ancient near east people... how much greater is God's goodness and hospitality toward his own sheep! “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life...”
Desert hiking:
“I don't know if I can do this!” A good metaphor for the desert and for the deserts we encounter in life – don't you think? Every time a breeze would blow across our sweaty skin... we are reminded - God is here!

Kibbutz:
The Old Testament community lived in family units. When a child or family member married, another room was added to the house. Everyone had almost everything in common. This kind of living makes the request of the son in Jesus parable, “I want my share of the inheritance!” doubly offensive. The son is saying, “I'm taking my share from the community.” Living in a kibbutz makes it difficult for the outside world to have great influence on the culture of a family unit. Ancient/Future: Can anyone say 'Early Church!'? “…All the believers were together and had everything in common.” Acts 2:44 “No one claimed that any of his possessions was hi own, but they shared everything they had.” Acts 4:32 The early church functions very much like a kibbutz accept now the family unit is the 'Body of Christ.' “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father over all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-5) “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's see, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29). Pretty cool – we belong to the Kibbutz of Abraham! What's Abraham's is mine and what's mine is Abraham's... actually... it's all ours... or is it Gods?!

A House built on the Sand or the Rock
“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matthew 7:24-27

Sand collects in a wadi... Runoff from years of flash floods deposit sand in the wadi's bottom. Don't build your house on the sand... build it on the rock! Keep alert whenever you are hiking in a wadi. A wadi is place where the rain collects and forms a stream bed through the valleys of the mountains. We hiked through several wadi's where water flows from the Judea mountains and foothills into the dead sea/ rift valley basin. You never know when a flash flood is coming. Could be raining miles away... and with little warning, a flood of water carrying silt, sand, and boulders will come crashing down the wadi... if you don't get to higher ground fast – you will die. Psalm 69:1-2 is a wadi text, “Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me...” Psalm 124:1-5 says, “...if the Lord had not been on our side... the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept over us.” The floods leave behind pools and potholes filled with water and silt. Step into a pool of wet silt/sand and it acts like quicksand... (See also Psalm 18:3-6, 16) Psalm 40, “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.” Psalm 126:4 is also a wadi text, “Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.” The wadi of En Gedi was a favorite place of refuge for David.
Bedouin — Nomadic people with flocks who move from place to place in tents. When you hear Bedouin think Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, Moses. The more settled Bedouin in Israel are mostly Arab descent – yet proudly Israeli.

Trees of the desert:

Acacia Trees — A Bedouin necessity – Acacia trees that live in the floodplains... an amazing tree: burns for 24 hours, flowers can be eaten for food – a handful of pods can feed a camel for a week. They can lie dormant without water for years and then come back to life when water comes. Sometimes it doesn't look lush... This is the tree of Psalm 1. “Blessed is the one who meditates on the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields is fruit in season, and whose leaves do not wither, whatever he does prospers.” An acacia tree person is one who meditates on the Torah of God – his every word and enters into the desert of challenges of others. Are we a tree planted by a stream of water in the desert? Are we like the Acacia tree – available for those who are trying to make it through the dessert? Can we admit that God has placed us in the desert?

Broom Tree:

In the desert, shade is extremely valuable. There is a tree called the broom tree... more like a small bush. It grows in the wadi's and ravines throughout the deserts of Israel. It's the kind of tree that Hagar found shade when she was fleeing from Sarah. Its the kind of tree that Elijah found shade under when fleeing from Jezebel. A broom tree is often just large enough to give just enough shade to cover the head and sometimes, just your person. In the desert, even this much shade can be enough for life to continue – the difference between life and death. Israel was to be shade to the gentiles. Isaiah 32 says, “A king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.”

Psalm 121 says, “The Lord watches over you – the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life.” God will protect his people in the extreme hot and cold climate of the desert. God calls his people to be shelter, shade, stream of living water, shade like a broom tree...

We are called to be shade to those who are in the desert. The kingdom comes when we are to shade for those who are hurting.

In Acts 5:12-15 we read, “The apostles were performing many miraculous signs... As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by...” It's God's way to be shade... that's grace. It's God's call for his people to be shade... more grace. God desires for us to participate in his story... be God's grace to others.

Ararah Tree:

Tree – grows in the deepest desert, near Oasis... the Fruit looks very good – open it up, it's empty - dry air... and filled with poison. Put together on the outside but empty on the inside. It looks great on the outside – promising juicy fruit – but it can kill you. I wonder if the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was similar to this tree. It promises everything but delivers nothing – only death. “Cursed is the man who depends on his own strength.” (Root: Arar) Jeremiah 17:7-8 says, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream... it's fruit never fails.” Maybe this is the type of tree in the garden like the tree of life.
Tamarisk Tree: *(Ethel)*

Must have water... its the slowest growing tree in the Middle East. We saw a tamarisk tree at least 1,000 yrs old. “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and there he called on the name of the Lord, the eternal God.” *(Genesis 21:33)* It can withstand heat and long dry spells by sending roots deep into the earth. It's one of the better shade trees in the region. To plant a tamarisk tree is to plant for the future, for your children... How many 'tamarisks' have you planted for your children? That is... what have you 'planted' that will have long term repercussions that will never benefit you personally?

*(Abraham has...)*

Sereem: nasty dry, thorny bush taking up space and good for nothing... a curse of a plant.

“If you don't care for the poor I will send sereem into all your fields.” When it burns is cracks/pops – “laughter of an idiot is like the burning of sereem.” *(Ps. 58:9)* Hosea brings words of judgment from God on Israel... “Rebuke her... for she isnot my wife, and I am not her husband....She said, 'I will go after other lovers (idols).'... I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst... Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes (sereem), I will wall her in so she cannot find her way.” *(Hosea 2:2,3,5,6)* Choose a path in life – but if it is the wrong one, God will cause sereem will grow. Probably the thorn bush that caught the ram for the substitute sacrifice for Isaac.

Creation Story:

The Egyptian and the Neubian empires both had creation stories that predate the writings of Moses... and in their myths they had a god who speaks and things are created... things and people are gods... the gods took dust and breathed life into it...

In Egypt, living with the Egyptians for 400 years, they understood chaos and order. They worshipped the gods of Egypt and had forgotten God's name. Now, they will see through the experience of the 10 plagues that the Egyptians had the wrong gods. A showdown? Yes and no. Who can compare to YHWH?

How far the sons of Jacob have come since the days of Goshen... talk about milk and honey! Pharaoh gave them the most fertile land... They had the best of the land - - - and now, we're leaving this for the desert? A different 'land flowing with milk and honey'? The Israelites were accustomed to Egypt's ways... earning the equivalent of $75,000 a year... they were buying into the Egyptian Dream... slaves yes... but not a bad life... Work seven days... have three off... not too bad. The manual labor does get old... but...

The Exodus Story:

The Pharaoh had no memory of Joseph... certainly had no respect for his people. He made them his slaves...

The Israelites “cried out (ze'akah).” *(Exodus 2:23)* Ze'akah is a loud cry for help – painful, pathetic, passionate. And God hears these cries! Even if the cry is not particularly to YHWH directly. God sees from heaven all oppression, suffering, and injustice. Remember Abel's blood in the ground crying out to God. *(Genesis 4:10)* Remember the cries Sodom and Gomorrah. *(Genesis 18:20)* Remember Hagar in the desert as she lost hope hearing Ismael crying,dying under a bush. *(Genesis 21:17)* YHWH hears the cry of the oppressed. He heres the cries of concern for the poor and needy. For Abel it was injustice of murder... For Sodom and Gomorrah it was the injustice toward the poor and possibly those
who were sexually abused. For Hagar and Ishmael it was being led out to die in the desert by Abraham and Sarah. For Israel in slavery, “I have heard the crying out of my people (ze’ akah). I have remembered my covenant. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm... I will take you as my own. I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord...” (Exodus 6:5-8) The knowing of God (yadah) is not to be only for the Israelites... but for all the people's of the earth... by way of the plagues and the Red Sea to come, “… the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out.” (Exodus 7:5)

And Moses has been prepared for this service. A child of obedient parents... defying the edict of Pharaoh to report all newborn baby boys so they can be disposed of... Raised in Pharaoh's household... familiar with all Pharaoh's ways... Forty years of being a shepherd... a man of poor speech “a stutterer.” A man in need of dependence on God, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I the Lord? Now go! I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” Moses must depend 'on every word that comes from God.' Exodus 4:11-12. Moses, whose name means 'drawn out.' As a baby drawn from the waters of the Nile... will soon lead God's people through the waters... they will be 'drawn out' and defined forever in the waters of the Red Sea... a baptism of judgment and deliverance. Moses as the shepherd of God's people living his destiny... 'to draw out.' Ancient/Future: The baptism of John and of Jesus is packed with fulfillment in Moses and the Exodus...

From the beginning, with the promise to Abraham, God's intent with his covenant partner was for his people to be a blessing to all nations. “I will make you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse... and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.” God remembered this promise... and through the plagues, through the Red Sea to come, and through his people Israel – the world will know that I am the Lord!

10 Plagues:
Originally, there were 10 gods of Egypt and the Egyptians lived life on a 10 day calendar cycle. In the 10 plagues, YHWH demonstrates that he is greater than the gods of Egypt. When you attack Pharaoh you attack the gods. When you attack the gods you attack Pharaoh. The plagues were an affront to Pharaoh's power. Pharaoh was to keep the chaos away... he was supposed to have the power to restore and keep order... but he couldn't stop YHWH. In the plagues, each god of the Egyptians was dismantled from the least to the greatest. YHWH in the process of the plagues dismantles their creation myths. 18X's Pharaoh's heart hardened (9Xs Pharaoh does it, 9Xs YHWH does it). He 'heavied his heart' and this is a sin against the god's. The gods weigh your heart to see if it is heavy or light. And Pharaoh 'heavied' his heart. It's interesting that Pharaoh is supposedly the only 'sinless' person. God is saying, “Pharaoh, you are a sinner.” Before the 10th plague the people were to kill lambs and spread the blood on the doorposts. (Ancient/Future: Passover fulfilled in Jesus.) Then hang the lamb on the door. This was a serious insult/affront to the Egyptians... they had to trust in YHWH to do this. The battle between YHWH and the gods of Egypt is a cosmic battle... Pharaoh had a book that guided his spiritual life – the Book of the Dead. YHWH's book is the Book of Life. The two worldviews cannot live side by side... In a show of YHWH over the gods of Egypt, Moses staff of 'authority' eats the staffs of the Pharaoh's magicians... YHWH systematically dismantles the Egyptian gods and the worldview it preaches. God's goal in the breaking down of the Egyptian worldview, myths, and gods is so that the Egyptians will know... Every picture and image of Pharaoh with an raised arm now suddenly looks out of place...
God is bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth. And when it comes – chaos is pushed back and shalom takes its place. It begins with the 'finger of God' an act of power... The Egyptian magicians acknowledge before Pharaoh that to his raised arm... the God of Israel need only 'raise his little finger' and Egypt is overcome. The magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” (Exodus 8:19) It begins with (1) the finger of God – then (2) the people call him Lord and King – and then (3) the people follow the Lord in obedience.

The Lord begins to fulfill his promises outlined to Moses:
1. “I will take (bring) you out...” (Get you out from under oppression – the yoke of slavery.)
2. “I will set you free...” (Take your slave nature away.)
3. “I will redeem you...” (Clean you up.)
4. “I will take you to be my people...” (Never to return to Egypt.)

At the waters of the Red Sea – God once again tests his people... they are in training... instead of heading further into the desert God says, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near the Sea... I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army... and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” (Exodus 14:2-4) And Pharaoh comes with his army and the people of Israel are trapped between the army and the sea... The Israelites ze'akah again, this time to the Lord (Exodus 14:10) God tells the people to “move towards the water... the Egyptians you see today you will never see again.” (Exodus 14:13-15) Step into the water! Bury your old self... your slave nature... and be 'drawn out' to a new self – the people of God! “I will bring you out! I will bring you to the land.” “The Egyptians will know (and you will know) that I am the Lord when I gain glory for myself.” (Exodus 14:17-18) The Lord brings his people through on dry ground and the army host of Egypt are swallowed up in the judgment of God. Egypt was gone... The finger of God.

And Miriam leads the procession of praise! Of all the things they packed... and they couldn't take much... the woman packed tambourines. Faith? Yes... We will dance! “Our God is greater than Egypt!” “The Lord will reign forever and ever.” (Exodus 15) If there is reigning – then there is a king! The people call YHWH Lord and King.

So now its on to obedience... the hard work of obedience. And when God's people are obedient. Shalom breaks out! Israel is now in training to be partners in bringing shalom to chaos.

10 Commands:
How is it that I say to God, “I do!” Obedience... About 40 days later, the people end up at Sinai. How is it that I say to God, “I do.” Obedience... Obedience that even Moses had to follow as he was called to go up and down Mt. Sinai 4X's – a grueling climb! God says, “I will take you.” The same word for marriage... and the law given at Mt. Sinai was a wedding ceremony. There was thunder and lightning and smoke! (Exodus 20:18) There was a covenant contract: 10 commandments. (Exodus 20) The Sabbath Day functions like a wedding band. (Exodus 16:29, 20:8-11) The commands read like a marriage vows: “No other lovers... a regular date night... I give you my name... get along...” The people took the 10 commandments and said, “We Do!” (Exodus 24) The covenant is confirmed and 7X's the Lord speaks to Moses (echo of 7 days of creation and the 7th time God spoke in Exodus he spoke about Sabbath!) and the tabernacle comes into existence. God is making space and filling the space... just like he did in creation. (Exodus 25-31) God made space in the creation for us... he made space for his presence among his people... Is there space for God in your life? In everything? If you make the space – he will fill it! Ask yourself this... “What if I don't make space?”
Obedience is not about the 'rules' its about displaying God's glory. To live in such a way so that the world may know what and who God is. Do these things and “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest,” (Exodus 33:14) Shalom! How do I say 'I do'? Obey...

Yet – the slave nature is hard to shed... deeply ingrained in the psyche of these young covenant partners... they complained and grumbled about food and water, “If only we had died in Egypt...” (Exodus 15:2 – only 10 verses after Miriam's song of deliverance!) They rebeled against Moses... even Miriam and Aaron usurp his leadership. Moses leaves them for a short time to meet with God on the mountain and they take their rings of gold, make an image/idol and worship it. Moses goes up the mountain to meet with YHWH, thunder and lighting visibly seen... and the people have an 'affair'. They break covenant with God before the marriage is even sealed... And God punished his people as 3,000 died... (Ancient/Future: 3,000 new 'people of God' at Pentecost.)

Yet, God is faithful to his promises... he didn't destroy them all. Isaiah 54:5, “For your Maker is your husband – the Lord Almighty is his name – the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit – a wife who married young, only to be rejected...” God remains faithful to his wayward bride... (Think Hosea and Gomer... )

In the desert God continues to shape his people... the deliverance from the curse of the poisonous snakes... Nissi is banner. A snake on a banner is lifted up and all who look to the banner (God) will be saved. Ancient/Future: Jesus is lifted up... like a banner. Look to Jesus and you will be saved. Isaiah 11:10, “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.” John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32-34, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life... When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know that I am the one I claim to be... when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself...”

Moses as a contrast to Pharaoh:
In every picture of Pharaoh, he is seen with a raised arm – always having a stick - and often beating someone or something. He rules with the power of the stick. It's interesting that Moses also is given a stick (staff) but for an entirely different purpose, “To do the wonders of God.” (Exodus 4:21) A true shepherd of sheep or of people leads with his voice. God commands by way of word... Sheep follow a shepherds voice.

In one instance God commands Moses to throw a stick into the Water and the it becomes sweet... in this case, any stick in the hand of God will do. The bitter water was called Mara – bitter. (Exodus 15:22-27. In another instance, Moses is deliberately defiant and strikes the rock rather than speak to the rock to receive water and Moses calls the people 'mara' - bitter. (Numbers 20:1-13) The place is called Meribah (place of quarreling.) As a result, Moses is told by God he can't lead the people anymore... A shepherd leads with his voice. Context: Miriam is traditionally seen as being responsible for the water supply when traveling. Miriam died and they ran out of water... the job, for whatever reason, was not getting done. Moses is angry with the people. His hitting of the rock is like 'hitting' the people. And this is not how a shepherd leads. Leadership in God's community is by the power of the word!

Already in Exodus 15:26 God says, If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes... I will not bring diseases on you... I am the God who heals you.” We need only listen to God's voice.
Ancient/Future: Jesus says of himself, “I am the Good Shepherd... the sheep listen to his voice... He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... he goes ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice... (Follow) me... and find pasture. I lay down my life for the sheep... I know my sheep and my sheep know me...” (John 10:1-18)

Word (dabar) and desert (midbar) have the same root in Hebrew. God leads his people into the desert. so that they will learn to life on 'every word that comes from the mouth of God.' The people of God needed to learn dependence... remember Manna... collect only enough for the day, every morning there will be just enough... and every day before Sabbath, collect two days worth of daily bread. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercy never comes to an end – they are new every morning! Great is your faithfulness!” Ancient/Future: Jesus says of himself, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35) A stark contrast to what the Israelites hungered and thirsted for... Egypt...

Israel is now in training as God's partner in bringing Shalom to Chaos.

Sukkot: The feast of Booths/Tabernacles. A pilgrim feast (travel to Jerusalem). It takes place on the 15th day of Tishrei (late September or October) and lasts for 7 days. It remembers the 40 years in the wilderness of living in booths or huts. It is associated with harvest when the threshing floor and the winepress are in full use! Thanksgiving for the harvest. “Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.” (Exodus 23:16) "Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be joyful in your feast!” (Deut. 16:13).

A 'wave offering' is done – wave branches – for seven days, three hours a day. Waving palm branches sounds like rain.

Solomon dedicates the temple on Sukkot... and prays – “Send rain. Send us living water!” Hosanna... God save us!

Ancient/Future: By Jesus time, another thing is added... priest walks through the temple court with an empty golden pitcher... and shows it to the people... then walks over to the pool of Siloam, fills the golden pitcher, and then walks to the altar and pours it out, and says, “Hoshannah – God save us!” For seven days the priest does this. On the last day, the 7th day, The Great Hoshannah Rabbah (the great salvation – the 'many' hoshannah's), same ritual, walks to the Pool of Siloam with the golden pitcher, fills it with water then returns to the altar... walks around the altar 7 times and then is handed a silver pitcher filled with wine – he then pours the water and the wine out together on the altar... He prays a prayer for two things: for rain and the Messiah to come. He quotes Psalm 118:25-26, “O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you.” As Jesus witnesses this practice... he stands up during the ceremony and says, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me!” (John 7) “... and rivers of living water will flow from him.” (Ezekiel 32, 47) I cannot help but think about Jesus on the cross. As the soldier took a sword and pierced Jesus side and the blood and water flowed... water and wine... poured out on the altar... “God save us!”

In order to be affective we must be streams in the desert. May need to be in the desert for years... taste it... before wanting living water.
David:
In the shephalah we learned about David as a boy. That early on, God has his hand on David to be 'a king for YHWH.' We looked over the battle ground where he slew Goliath, disrupting the Philistine threat, and put God's glory on display. Early on, David was king material. But David and Saul's relationship was strained at best. King Saul was jealous of David. David grew popular after killing Goliath... and David won battle after battle... the people began to chant, sing, and dance whenever he returned victorious, "Saul slew his thousands... but David his ten thousands." (1 Samuel 18:7) And jealousy burned within King Saul. Finally, Jonathon, Saul's son and David's closest friend told David to flee for his life... and he did. Saul pursues David... And twice David spares Saul's life. Two times he had opportunity to kill Saul... once as he relieved himself in a cave. David cut the corner off of Saul's robe... (1 Samuel 24:4) David feels terrible for doing this... Did David cut off Saul's tassel off of the 'wings' of his robe? (kanaf/tsitsit) Saul realizes God's protection has been removed... Saul says to David, "I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands." (1 Samuel 24:20). Again, some time later, David spares Saul's life again in the desert of Ziph (midbar Ziph). Saul's army was resting and David, along with Abishai crept into the camp and took Saul's spear and water jug from beside him. (1 Samuel 26) And Saul admits he has sinned... "Acted like a fool and have erred greatly." David gives back Saul's things but does not come hear Saul. And Saul says, "May you be blessed, my son David, you will do great things and surely triumph." Saul once again passes his Kingship to David. David goes overboard to show grace... he is a king after God's own heart.

En Gedi:
When David was in the wilderness – he often visited En Gedi. It was a refuge and a stronghold. A place of hiding and refreshment. Just add water to the desert and it comes to life. The trickling stream of water that flows through En Gedi and comes out of the rocks above the dead sea is from the ancient rains of Bethlehem and Judea mountains some 2,000 years ago - seeping through the ground, making it's way to En Gedi, bringing life to everything it touches when it finally finds it way out of the earth. A thousand springs feed En Gedi. (God provides for us way in advance.) It banks are lush with green growth and animals come to drink. Papyrus on the left and hyssop on the right. The waterfalls of En Gedi are a delight... this 'paradise' influenced David's writings: waterfalls, a stream in the desert, the spring of a deer, wild goats on the cliffs... While in En Gedi, you don't want to leave... it's a place where you can feel the timelessness of God... Psalm 18, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer... The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me... He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters..." (Describing a Wadi) Psalm 42, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (En Gedi) Psalm 63, "O God you are my God, earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary... beheld your power and glory..." (En Gedi) En Gedi is living water – water that comes from God.

Living water is to flow from God's people. We are to be 'En Gedi' to people. Imagine a dry and thirsty person in the middle of a dry and weary time... and along comes a person who brings 'living water'... When I am in the 'desert', what is my living water? When others are in the 'desert', am I 'living water'? Envision someone in a 'desert' and finding En Gedi... climbing the wadi canyon, and coming upon the pools we jumped in and the waterfalls we waded under? How many people would say I am their En Gedi? Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, a spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water (they have turned me into a cistern.)" Jeremiah 31:9, "...I will lead them beside streams of water..."
To be an En Gedi you have to be in the desert. Be an En Gedi for others. When another is crying ze'aka! Be the community of En Gedi!

**Cave of Adullam:**
(1 Samuel 22:1-5 and possibly Psalm 142 written here – a prayer of when he was in the cave.) “I cry to you... listen to my cry... the righteous will gather around me because of your goodness to me.” A hidout of David.

**Qumran community** (Essenes – possibly John the Baptist?)
We visited a grouping of ruins just above En Gedi – just south of the Wadi on the mountainside above the Dead Sea. Located about 22-28 miles from Jerusalem. A great location for living because of the available 'living' water supply. Multiple dwellings found and evidence of terraces. Most everyone thinks this was Qumran's study place. They still haven't found good evidence of living space.

Quick history:
586BC - Hebrews exiled by Babylonians
500BC - Came back with Ezra/Nehemiah
337BC – Greeks show up – Hellenism influences everything. The Jewish people fought it.
   Later the Hasmanians – family of the Maccabees ruled the Jewish people. Gradually the rulers became more and more Hellenistic... finally, some had enough and broke into different groups... the Pharisees, Sadducee's, Essenes and Zealots.
150-130 the Essenes gave up on the temple and move out into the desert.

**Qumran** is the place where over 960 scrolls have been discovered in 1947-1956. the Dead Sea Scrolls have been found in caves (11 containing scrolls so far) in the sheer cliffs and terraces of the mountainside – perfectly preserved for 2000 yrs!
   1/3 books of Old Testament Deuteronomy most common, followed by Isaiah, and then Psalms...
   (Jesus quotes mostly from these three sources.)
   1/3 commentaries “This is fulfilled here...”
   1/3 rules of order... community rules
   They didn't have Esther but did have Psalm 151.
Qumran is thought to be the City of Salt referred to in Joshua 15:61, “…in the desert, Beth Arabah... City of Salt (Qumran?), and En Gedi...”

**Ancient/Future:** The Dead Sea Scrolls taught, “Love your friend, hate your enemy.” Yet, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you; Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your father in heaven. (Sons of light!” (Matthew 5:43-45) Jesus knew the text and he knew the teaching of the different sects present in his day. He was able to interact with all of them.

Many terms come from Essene language. They were a community ahead of its time in recognizing the signs of the times. Even some of their practices anticipated in uncanny ways the coming of Christ. Probably because they knew there text – the the Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets all point to a coming Messiah. Talk of Pentecost fire and preparing for something was part of their language. In place of the temple they practiced a Messianic banquet – found 20,000 bowls – they broke the bread “his meat” and raised the cup of wine “his blood” in their banquets believing the Messiah was present - - this all predates Jesus. Foreshadowing... They were 'preparing the way!'
Thought: Could the work of the Essenes, actually and literally, prepared the way for Jesus coming? How do we prepare the way of Jesus coming again? Why is it that Qumran has just now been recently found? Time to prepare the way... Finger of God... (pushes back chaos), Kingdom comes... (People call him Lord), Live it out! (Do what he says!)

*A path is made by walking...* If we want to see God's presence and see the Kingdom come... walk the path – prepare the way of the Lord.

It's fascinating that Jesus showed up 4 miles away from Qumran to be baptized in the Jordan river... “Could we be Essene... give up everything for the book. We can't do it alone. But we can do it in community.” *What should we cry?*

The Essenes:
A priestly group of sadducees who gave up the 'high' lifestyle to prepare a path for the Lord. They lived with very little and spent most all of their time studying and copying Torah. Four people checked every marking and letter to make sure it was correct. If they would make a mistake in copying the text – it was to be burned. If they came to a place in the text where the name of God was to be copied (YHWH), they first took a ritual bath (*micveh*) of cleanliness/purity.

*Micveh*: (or Micvah)
A ritual bath designed for a ritual immersion into Judaism. Also used for ritual purity. Literally means – 'a collection of water.' Generally, a micveh's source of water must remain in contact with some form of living water – from rain, stream, spring, or underground well. The concept of micveh brings to mind images of creation, the Red Sea experience, Psalm 1, Ezekiel 47... They had to enter the micveh clean/pure. “repent” - change paths... the new path is called 'fruit'. This is John's sermon too – you entered the water pure... Jesus was the perfect example of purity! This is a washing for believers!

They intentionally lived to be separate – a pure people. How do you remain pure? You get rid of stuff. They were willing to give away everything... Others besides priests did join them. What was thought to be a community of only males seems to be made up of mostly males. Recent excavation of a cemetery to the East of the community has some female graves.

“You prepare a path by learning to walk it.” They studied scripture and memorized it. After a trial period, you would be asked to give everything to a community fund or take back your possessions and leave the community. Is there something I couldn't give up?

The Essenes date back to 260BC... They prepared the way for the Messiah to come. It's not agreed upon that John the Baptist was an Essene or that this community of huts above En Gedi was the Qumran people, but all of this certainly fits the M.O.! John the Baptist, “The voice of one crying, “In the desert, “Prepare the way for the Lord.”” (Isaiah 40:3) “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Re repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near...” (Matthew 3:1-2) “It is written in Isaiah the prophet; “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way.” And so John came, baptizing in the desert region...” (Mark 1:6 – echoes of Elijah) “And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel...” (Luke 1:80) “The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins... John preached the good news to them.” (Luke 3:3, 18) John was not asking for converts... he was calling people to a righteous walk. “John testifies concerning him – (Jesus).” (John
The Essenes were desert people who were preparing the way for the Messiah to come. This certainly sounds like John. The Essenes would take children who would be given by parents for training. Was John the Baptist given to the Essene community as a child? They studied the text – day after day. Memorizing it. Living it out. All of this prior to Jesus – they even called themselves, “Followers of the way! Sons of light.” Their were mikveh's everywhere... for baptism of repentance?... Did John give up on the temple as so many Essenes had? “God is coming to judge the threshing floor... (temple)” (Solomon built the temple on the threshing floor.)

John the Baptist and the Essenes believed in a 2 Age Theory: Now is the evil age and an age is coming when Messiah will rule: The Age of the Kingdom. The Pharisees believed in a 3 Age Theory: Live in an evil age/ then evil and good together/ then the Kingdom will come. Jesus taught a three age theory. We see Jesus correct John in Luke 13:6-9. Jesus point about not cutting down the fig tree yet, but leaving it planted for one more year, digging around it, fertilizing it, is that now isn't the time for judgment... not yet. This is different than John's message, “The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Luke 3:9)

Isaiah 40:1-5. The Essenes come to the desert to make a path and to walk it. They studied the path and walked it. Day and night they meditated on the word to become a righteous community. If they do this, “The glory of the Lord will appear.”

Where are the Essenes today? The commitment to the text? Give up everything for the 'word?' Paving the path by walking it?

The Word the Lord is eternal... it comes in fire...

In Hebrew, the pictures of 'living life' have to do with path and walking. A path is 'life.' Walking is 'living.' The paths are not going to be easy – like many of the hikes in the desert wilderness. Life has stones in it... there is thirst and hunger... wild animals... But God is in the desert, in the rock, in the water, on the path. He journeys every step with us. “Stand at the crossroads, ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, you will find rest.” We should never pray for an easy path... we should pray that God will give us the 'right feet.' Pray for what you need to climb the heights... “Give me feet like a deer so I can stand on the heights.” Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” A Lamp gives just enough light to be able to see the next step... just enough strength to make the next step. That's what we should pray for.

John baptized up and down the Jordan River valley... from Bethany (Sea of Galilee) to Anon (near Salin on the way to Sea of Galilee) and Near Jericho (where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea.) The Parallels with Elijah are stunning: Elijah is referenced at Bethany (fed by ravens), near Anon (he chooses Elisha), and Near Jericho (he is taken up to heaven.) John went to Elijah places and wore an Elijah 'suit.'

John the Baptist took his fiery message all the way to Herod. He attacked Herod's kingship. John knew the text: Herod should not be king. He was placed in jail for his public judgment of Herod. John is later beheaded by Herod as a request from his wife Herodias, through her daughter who pleased him with dancing... (Matthew 14:1-12)

While John was in jail he asks Jesus by way of his disciples, “Are you the coming one?” John didn't have everything right about the coming one... or he would have known that Jesus was the one...
Messiah came in an unexpected way, even to John... Jesus replies back, “Report to him what you see and hear: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor... from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom has been forcefully advancing...” (Matthew 11:1-18) Jesus and John both know the text... Jesus is speaking about Isaiah 35 & 61 and saying, “I AM!” Isaiah 35 & 61 says, “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert...”

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...”

John the Baptist thought that if TORAH is followed, then God's judgment will come. The Messiah will come if we follow the path, the Kingdom will come, judgment follows... this was not entirely correct.... Jesus leaves out judgment for now... it's a time of grace. In a way the Kingdom did come – through Jesus!

Sacrifices:

God makes a covenant with Abraham. (Genesis 15) The lesser party brings the sacrifice (Abraham). And the greater party declares the conditions and what is required (YHWH). It was a covenant of unequal partners. Five animals were sacrificed: a heifer, goat, and a ram were cut in two along with a dove and a young pigeon. Abraham fell into a deep sleep (trance)... “Your descendent's will be strangers in a country not their won, be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years, and afterward they will come out.” The greater party walks through first – “If I don't keep covenant... you can do this (cut in two) to me!” Then the lesser party does the same. Abraham sees a torch and a smoking firepot pass through the animals... the presence of God! God walked through the blood for Abraham. Abraham is scared to death... thinking – “Once I touch the blood I will be dead.” He knows he can't keep the agreement. Abraham has essentially said, “If I don't do this – you can do this (cut in two) to me.” Ancient/Future: At that moment – he sentences Jesus to die. Why a sacrifice? Because God promised to take our sins. The bigger party doesn't bring the sacrifice and yet, God did... that's love. Jesus 'walked' through the blood for us.

The Hebrew sacrificial system is similar to that of other nations and cultures of the time. Sacrifices were done every 3rd (mid morning) and 9th (mid afternoon) hour of every day. “Remember God's promise of mercy.” A shofar would sound and people would pray. Ancient/Future: When Jesus was crucified... at the 3rd hour – shofar sounds. At the 9th hour – shofar sounds and Jesus looks up and says, “It is finished.” and he died at the moment of the sacrifice. “I did it! Father – I did it.”

History leading up to Herod the Great:

Alexander the Great - - Ptolemy – Seleucid's (Greeks) – Zealots (Jews resisted Seleucid's) – Maccabees (family of priests, at first were godly then became corrupt) – Split into three groups (Pharisees, Essenes, Terrorists/Zealots. There was a Civil War and eventually Herod the Great was named governor of Galilee as a 'deal' of war. Marc Antony made him King (ruler) of the Jews. In a way, Herod is a self-proclaimed King of the Jews by way of bribery and shady, under the table dealings with Roman Empire. This left a bad taste in the mouths of the Jews because Herod wasn't Jewish. Herod controlled the spice trade and had more money than anyone and this creates a bubble around him from Roman pressure to change his brutal and dishonest ways. Because of what he can afford it only feuls his lust for more... At one point he employed much of the Jewish nation from is own private accounts.
Herod married a woman of Jewish priestly line, Miriam. He was obsessed with his wife Miriam. When she died he had her embalmed and put on display at Masada. He talked to her constantly. He had other wives as well (11), many of whom he killed. Herod the Great (Herod the 'wicked') was brutal, consumed with alcohol, wine, women, and power. Herod killed almost all of his sons. Yet, upon his death, his kingdom was split and ruled by three sons: Archlaeus – over Judea/Idomea until 6AD, Phillip over region North of Sea of Galilee (a 'good' king) until 44AD, and Antipas over Galilee, Samaria, and Perea until 4AD. After that, Herod Agrippa I ruled brutally – killed James. And Herod Agrippa II ruled well, married to Bernice, who heard Paul's testimony. Herod ruled for 33 years from 37BC to 4BC. He is known for 9 Major building projects in all including Ceasarea overlooking the Mediterranean, the Herodian (self-made mountain fortress overlooking Bethlehem), Masada, and the Palace on the temple mount in Jerusalem.

Masada:
Herod the Great built Masada in 35 BC. It was one of seven fortresses. Masada was built as a safety route of escape if his kingdom was ever under threat. Herod was always defying nature with his ingenious and decadent buildings, palaces, cities, and fortresses. Masada is no different. The nearest water was 24 miles away (Oasis of En Gedi). He built a series of cisterns at the mouth of a wadi... and workers carried water into the Masada fortress. He had the ability to store some 4 million gallons (400 cubit feet of water within the fortress.

There was a Western Palace with a throne room and a large bath house. The Northern Palace is where Herod spent most of his time. A throne room and a lookout point with significant vantage point for viewing up the rift valley to the north, east, and south. Below the north palace is where Miriam was embalmed. Below that were Herod's living quarters. Herod died in 4BC. Jesus birth is thought to be 6BC.

In the 60's AD, the Zealot's captured Masada and sealed themselves in – they were surrounded by 35,000 Roman Soldiers hung out for 3-4 years. They built a huge siege ramp (with Jews as slave workers.) 996 people/zealots hid in Masada. 960 people died – killed each other rather than acknowledge Rome. Only a few people survived to give Josephus an account of what happened.

The Jericho Road:
The Jericho Road is a treacherous road that runs along steep cliffs, boulders and rocks, and narrow canyons. The trail is narrow, hot, and in the open. There is barely enough room to pass another person with a donkey in tow. Parable of the Good Samaritan: This adds greater insight into what it would take for someone to 'pass by' a man beaten and left for dead on the side of the road... All the men in the parable couldn't have missed seeing him and probably passed him only a few steps away. There is little to no room to pass by on the other side. The priest may not touch anything dead or dying... he made being kosher (clean) more important than helping the beaten and stripped man. The Levite may not touch anything dead or a dying body either or he will be unclean. Typically, in stories like this that are told by rabbi's the third person is a Pharisee... But Jesus instead inserts a Samaritan. The Samaritan touches the dying man four times. What makes the parable so powerful is that a Samaritan is considered an enemy. The main point of the parable is to love your enemy. It's fascinating that at the end of the parable, Jesus asks, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor?” The expert of the law can't even say his Samaritan, he responds, “The one who had mercy on him.” “Now go and do likewise...” (Luke 10:25-37) Be a city gate! Be En Gedi... bring Shalom to people's chaos!
P.S. This illustrates the different schools of teaching between Hillel and Shammai. Shammai would say that the second most important commandment would be the Sabbath - and then some others before
coming to 'love your neighbor.' Hillel says the second most important is to 'love your neighbor.' The man who questions Jesus says, “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus says, “What is written in the Torah?” And the man answers, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and 'love your neighbor as yourself.’” (the Shema) Jesus affirms this answer... This teacher of the law is of the house of Hillel. And Jesus affirms Hillel's teaching. In general, Jesus agrees in principle much more with Hillel than with Shammai. Hillel is less rigid in interpretation. Shammai is more rigid in interpretation.

Mary and Joseph: Mary traveled the Jericho road being nine months pregnant. Joshua and the army of Israel could have taken similar roads into Canaan, if not the Jericho road.

Arad: The distinctiveness of Arad is the faithfulness of the people. The only worship center (temple) without any Baals or foreign gods ever to be found. Built on a scale of 1/12th of Jerusalem's. The bloodstone still in place... In excavation, six cities were discovered in built on top of each other. Hezekiah apparently told them to fill in the worship center because the only legitimate worship center according to YHWH was to be in Jerusalem. The people of Arad were obedient. “Act so that the world may know...” Hezekiah lived this out... the people of Arad obeyed.