

When “Shock and Awe” Don’t Work

When the desert-wandering Israelites complained to Moses about the water situation, he rebuked them: “Why do you test the LORD?” (Ex 17.2). This makes sense. Testing is something you do to things, not to people. Let’s say my son tried to test me in this way: “Dad, give me ice cream. If you don’t, that will mean you don’t love me.” Not only would he not get ice cream, but he would also get a talking-to from a dad who likes to hear himself talk.

That’s the thing about Israel in the desert—they kept needing these really cool miracles, and God kept providing them. But the effect never lasted. Frontal assaults on the senses can produce a cool ‘Gee-whiz!’ effect, but people don’t stay impressed for long. They just get acclimated and addicted to constant shock-and-awe.

A few years later in the same desert, the desert-wandering Jesus also had an opportunity to “test the LORD” by demanding a spectacular miracle (Luke 4.9-12). But he wasn’t interested in subjects who bent to his will in response to an overwhelming display of power. Rather, he wanted brothers and sisters who had freely chosen to know and love him. So he chose the only path where such flowers can blossom—the path of the hidden, the small, the easy-to-ignore.

In our 40 days in the desert, may we join him there.

~ John Stonecypher