

Ezekiel 19:1 - 20:17—The History of Israel’s Rebellions and God’s Great Mercy—Part 1

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

The Lamentation of the Lions and the Vine (ch 19)

Here God gives Ezekiel a lament for the dead concerning the last three kings of Judah. After Zedekiah, the nation of Israel or Judah would cease to exist as a sovereign, independent nation for about 2,500 years (1948). This would have been very sad indeed for the nation. Just imagine what it would be like if Australia ceased to exist as a sovereign nation and all us Australians were resettled and used as slave labour in China.

“Ezekiel expressed the Lord’s sadness over the Judean leadership’s failure by chanting this elegy [mournful poem] over her final rulers prior to their deaths.” (Alexander)

“So long as a descendant of David occupied the throne in Jerusalem, the Judean’s could hope in divine protection. After all, Yahweh had made an eternal covenant with David (2 Samuel 7); he would surely not abandon his designated ruler or the people he represented. Ezekiel’s aim in this ‘dirge’ is to demolish another false theological pillar on which the nation’s sense of security was based. Yahweh’s covenant with David is hereby suspended [*not annulled or cancelled—the ultimate fulfilment will be Jesus ruling during the Millennium*].” (Block)

Ezekiel 19:1-9—Lamentation for the final kings of Judah

“Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, ² and say: ‘What is your mother [Jerusalem/Judah]? A lioness: she lay down among the lions; among the young lions she nourished her cubs [princes]. ³ She brought up one of her cubs [king Jehoahaz, son of Josiah], and he became a young lion [a king]; he learned to catch prey, and he devoured men [he was a very cruel and oppressive king].

⁴ The nations also heard of him; he was trapped in their pit, and they [Pharaoh Necho] brought him with chains [taken captive] to the land of Egypt.

⁵ ‘When she [Jerusalem/Judah] saw that she waited, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs [King Jehoiachin of Judah] and made him a young lion [king]. ⁶ He roved among the lions, and became a young lion; he learned to catch prey; he devoured men [he was also a very cruel and oppressive king].

⁷ He knew their desolate places, and laid waste their cities; the land with its fullness was desolated by the noise of his roaring [he ruled with destructive authority].

⁸ Then the nations [led by Babylon] set against him from the provinces on every side, and spread their net over him; he was trapped in their pit.

⁹ They put him in a cage with chains [like a captured lion], and brought him [exiled] to the king of Babylon; they brought him in nets, that his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel [he never returned].

God describes the last kings of Israel as lions who devour prey. Lions are majestic animals, the ‘king of the jungle’ so to speak. But instead of using their God given authority to protect their people, they devoured and oppressed them.

Ezekiel 19:10-14—Lamentation for the end of Judah's sovereign self-rule

¹⁰ 'Your mother [Jerusalem/Judah] was like a vine in your bloodline, planted by the waters, fruitful and full of branches [rulers, kings] because of many waters.

¹¹ She had strong branches for sceptres of rulers [kings]. She towered in stature above the thick branches [other nations], and was seen in her height amid the dense foliage [e.g. King David and King Solomon].

¹² But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried her fruit [Babylonian exile]. Her strong branches [kings] were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. ¹³ And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land [the nation of Judah and Jerusalem has gone into exile to Babylon].

¹⁴ Fire has come out from a rod of her branches and devoured her fruit [the destructive fire comes from one of the branches—Zedekiah], so that she has no strong branch—a scepter for ruling [there are no more kings ruling over Judah/Jerusalem].' ”

This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

The History of Israel's Rebellions and God's Great Mercy (Ch 20)

Outline of Ezekiel chapter 20:

1. Introduction—the elders come to Ezekiel to enquire of God (1-4)
2. Israel's rebellion against God in Egypt (5-9)
3. Israel's rebellion against God in the wilderness (10-17)
4. Israel's rebellion against God in the promised land (18-32)
5. The future judgement/separation of Israel at the end of the Tribulation (33-38)
6. The restoration/regathering of Israel—present day and Millennial Reign (39-44)
7. The coming judgement upon the land of Judah—Babylonian exile (45-49)

This is typical of prophetic writings, bouncing around from the present day (Ezekiel's day), to the end times (thousands of years into the future), and back again. This is why it's so important to understand the basic prophetic timeline as outlined in Daniel 9:24-27. Once we understand the basic order of events (church age > rapture > Tribulation > Second coming > Millennial reign > Great White Throne Judgement > Eternity—new heavens and earth), then we can fit these prophetic scriptures into the timeframe God has established and it becomes much easier to understand.

1. Introduction—the elders come to Ezekiel to enquire of God (1-4)

Ezekiel 20:1-4 NKJV

It came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. ² Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ³ “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” says the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you.” ’” ⁴ Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers.

We studied a similar passage in Ezekiel chapter 14: *Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?* (Ezekiel 14:3 NKJV) There God focuses on the hidden sins of their hearts. Here, however, God proceeds to give them a history lesson (*make known to them the abominations of their fathers—v 4*), which highlights Israel's chronic unfaithfulness to Him and His great patience and mercy towards them over a long period of time. As we go through this chapter, we see that

God definitely did choose the weakest, smallest, and most unworthy nation to showcase His grace, mercy, power, justice, patience, and love. This chapter follows the typical outline of God's dealings with His people—He chastises them, letting them know in uncertain terms how evil they are, but then offers forgiveness in response to repentance, and also promises to keep the unconditional promises that He has made to them.

Application: “I will not be inquired of by you.” (v 3)

If we are unsaved, our sin remains a barrier between us and God, making us His enemy and our legal status before God is 'condemned' or 'guilty'. In contrast, if we are saved, our legal status before God is 'justified' or 'innocent'. However, a saved person can still choose to not submit to God and live by His power. So, although I as a Christian am a part of God's family and I am still a friend of God, I can be out of fellowship with God—I am no longer on talking terms with God. This is what it was like for most of the Israelites: *'Thus says the Lord God: “Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” says the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you.”'* (v 3). It's like a husband and wife who are fighting with each other—they are still married, but are not enjoying sweet communion or fellowship with each other like they should be. Submission to God's will and repentance are the answer in both cases. Then God's Spirit will work in us, giving us the power to obey.

Romans 8:5-6, 11-13 NLT paraphrase

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

¹¹ The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

¹² Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³ For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature [repent], you will live.

2. Israel's rebellion against God in Egypt

Ezekiel 20:5-9 NKJV

“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “On the day when I chose Israel and raised My hand in an oath to the descendants of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I raised My hand in an oath to them, saying, ‘I am the Lord your God.’ ⁶ On that day I raised My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands. ⁷ Then I said to them, ‘Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt [a picture of the world]. I am the Lord your God.’ ⁸ But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, ‘I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.’ ⁹ But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”

v 5-6 **Raised My hand in an oath:** This refers to promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For example “And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:8)

Application: To bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands (v 6)

Here is clear proof that God always desires to give us what is best for us. He loves us so much that He:

1. **Brings us out of the land of Egypt**, a picture of the world, where we are slaves to sin and therefore suffer the miserable consequences of sin which lead to death. God leads us out of Egypt (sets us free from sin) so we can be spared the sad, miserable, and painful existence that results from living in bondage and servitude to sin (the ways of the world).
2. **So He can lead us into the promised land**, where by the power of God living in us, we have the opportunity to walk by faith in obedience to God’s will. This enables us to enjoy the blessings that He has prepared for us in the life of faith, which is what the promised land is a picture of. Some of the benefits that we invited to enjoy while here on earth as a believer living by faith (and not by sight, feelings, emotions, or works) include: freedom from the power, and therefore also the negative consequences of sin; a wonderful, intimate, and unconditional love relationship with God; joy, peace, satisfaction, and genuine contentment that transcends all circumstances; greatly enhanced relationships with others due to our mutual love for Christ; the acceptance and emotional security that comes from belonging to God’s family; eternal hope (heaven—live with God forever); and many more blessings that we can’t even begin to understand until we come into the physical presence of God.

However, you might say that, as a believer, I don’t experience these things to any great degree. Why is this so? The problem is that many of the promises given to us to enjoy here on earth are conditional on our obedience; God never forces us to leave the old life so we can enjoy the new life—He just gives us the opportunity. Consider carefully verse 7, it gives us clear instruction on how to fully enjoy the blessings that God has for us.

v 7 **Then I said to them, ‘Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt** [a picture of the world]: Here we see that our enjoyment of God’s blessings is conditional on our willingness to leave behind our old ways and life so we can enjoy our new life in Christ. The degree or extent that I choose to leave the old life behind and stop defiling myself with evil will be the same degree or extent that I will enjoy the new life, freedom and blessings available to me in my new life in Christ. Always remember that what God commands us to do is **for our good always**.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 NKJV

“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?’ ²¹ then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; ²² and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household [a picture of Jesus defeating satan on the cross—Colossians 2:13-15]. ²³ Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. ²⁴ And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day.

When considering forsaking the world or Egypt, there is no greater example than Moses, who literally did this. His example shows that what is best for us isn't always the easiest or most pleasant road in the short term, however, it does lead to a **great eternal reward**.

Hebrews 11:24-27 NLT paraphrase

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called [identify with] the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his **great reward**. ²⁷ It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, **not fearing the king's anger**. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible.

Application: Not fearing the king's anger (Hebrews 11:27)

Pharaoh is a picture of satan, the ruler of this world system. When, through the power of God, we say no to sin and so disconnect ourselves from the world system, which is satan's kingdom, satan doesn't like it, and he gets even more angry with us. Therefore, he will make life harder for us, meaning that our decision to overcome sin will inevitably result in spiritual warfare—satan will do anything he can to oppose us using trials, persecution, and temptation. This applies to ministry and personal growth. Satan makes it easy to sit back and relax when we are only half-heartedly following the Lord, trying to deceive us that we are all good with God because life is good. However, when an open door comes for effective ministry or personal growth/obedience, then satan makes life hard for us and tries to make us wish that we had never tried to change, that life was better when we were living for ourselves.

1 Corinthians 16:9 NKJV

For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Moses is a perfect example of this principle; if he had only been content to continue to live a life of compromise and remain identified as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he would have had the most easy and luxurious life imaginable. But no, an effective door for ministry and personal growth opened for Moses when God called him to identify with His people (the children of Israel). In giving up the worldly comforts and security he faced many adversaries and experienced much suffering.

We must be like Moses, *not fearing the king's anger*, and resist satan anyway, knowing that Jesus defeated Him on the cross. When we obey satan, it's a sign of a lack of faith in God—that we fear or reverence satan more than God, just like the first generation of Israelites did when they refused to trust God to overcome the giants in the land of Canaan. We would do well to heed the stern warning given to us in the book of Hebrews concerning the first generation of Israelites who left Egypt but never got to enter into the promised land—*eventually, there is a terrible price to pay for being a half-hearted, unbelieving, sin-loving, hard-hearted Christian*.

Hebrews 3:7-19 NKJV

That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear His voice, ⁸ don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested Me in the wilderness. ⁹ There your ancestors tested and tried My patience, even though they saw my miracles for forty years. ¹⁰ So I was angry with them, and I said, 'Their hearts always turn away from Me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' ¹¹ So in my anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter My place of rest.' "

¹² Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. ¹³ You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so *that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.* ¹⁴ **For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.** ¹⁵ Remember what it says: “Today when you hear his voice, don’t harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled.”

¹⁶ And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn’t it the people Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn’t it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn’t it the people who disobeyed him? ¹⁹ **So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.**

What does it mean to not enter into God’s rest? Why is this such a serious consequence? We’ll find out next week. Let’s come back to Ezekiel chapter 20.

v 8 **But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, ‘I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt:** What was the response to God’s promise of deliverance from Egypt? They completely ignored God and went on with their worldly lives—“*But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me*”. We see evidence of this attraction to the Egyptian gods in: Exodus 32:1-6 when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf while Moses was up on Mount Sinai; Joshua in Joshua 24:14 says, “*Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord!*”; and the worship of the golden calves made by Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12:26-33. As a result they were under God’s wrath and God had the right to completely destroy them in the land of Egypt. However, though they deserved to be wiped out in Egypt, they weren’t. Why not? We find out why in verse 9.

v 9 **But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt:** This is amazing to me, that within the nation, God can find no good reason to forgive them and bring them out. So God looks to another reason or motivation—His reputation—“*But I acted for My name’s sake*”. You see, God had made a promise to Israel, publicly, and it would damage God’s reputation among the nations if He didn’t keep His promise to the nation of Israel to bring them out of Egypt. Therefore, God did keep His promise to bring the Israelites out of Egypt—*for His name’s sake*—because He had given the nation of Israel an unconditional promise.

“When God could find no basis in them for extending to them His mercy and grace, He did it solely for His name’s sake, that is, for His own glory.” (Feinberg)

“The divine reputation depends on the fate and welfare of his people. All of God’s dealings with Israel were public—before the eyes of the nations. Israel was to be the agent through whom the nations would come to know that he is Yahweh.” (Block)

Application: Saved by grace through faith

Guess what, the same is true for us today. Keep in mind that in the exodus, God bringing the people out of Egypt, we have a picture or type of salvation:

- The blood of the passover lamb voluntarily applied to the door posts protected those who believed (the trust or belief being demonstrated by their obedience to actually apply the blood) from the destroyer; this is a picture of the blood of Christ shed on Calvary protecting those who voluntarily receive it from God's wrath towards sin.
- The Red Sea crossing is a picture of being baptised into, identified with, or immersed in Christ (see also Romans 6:3-5).

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 NKJV

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body [the body of Christ]—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

There was and is nothing in us that makes us, the church, deserving or worthy of being saved, so God makes salvation available to us gentiles simply because He had promised to in the Old Testament. *God always keeps His promises.* Consider some of the Old Testament quotations in Romans 10 regarding the salvation of the gentiles:

Romans 10:11-12, and 19-20 NLT paraphrase

As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." ¹² Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. ¹³ For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

...¹⁹ But I ask, did the people of Israel really understand? Yes, they did, for even in the time of Moses, God said, "I will rouse your jealousy through people who are not even a nation. I will provoke your anger through the foolish Gentiles."

²⁰ And later Isaiah spoke boldly for God, saying, "I was found by people [the gentiles] who were not looking for me. I showed myself to those who were not asking for me."

In the end, the salvation of any man, Jew or gentile, comes down to God acting for His name's sake. Because He loves us, He promised, through the Messiah's death on a cross, to make the way of salvation available to all mankind, and so He did, even though we were not looking for or asking for God. This is sobering, but also very comforting. Why? Because this is the greatest demonstration of grace, God's underserved favour towards us. We don't have to meet some minimum requirement of goodness or morality to be saved, God accepts us as we are—morally bankrupt—there was no good in us. None of us can say that God saved me because I was a good person. Not one of us deserved to be given the opportunity to accept God's invitation to be reconciled to Himself.

Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

3. Israel's rebellion against God in the wilderness

So Israel wasn't grateful for what God did for them in bringing them out of Egypt. Surely they would change their attitude when they saw God's loving care for them in the wilderness?

Ezekiel 20:10-17 NKJV

¹⁰ “Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. ¹¹ And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, ‘which, if a man does, he shall live by them.’ ¹² Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. ¹³ Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, ‘which, if a man does, he shall live by them’; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them. ¹⁴ But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out. ¹⁵ *So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands,* ¹⁶ *because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.* ¹⁷ Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness.

Have a look at the parts that are underlined. This shows the depraved condition of man’s heart—completely ungrateful, unthankful and selfish. God delivered His people from their slavery and bondage in Egypt, yet they continued to rebel against Him in the wilderness. The same thing happens as when they were in the land of Egypt:

- Their rebellion against God incurs His wrath—they deserve to be destroyed—*Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them.* (v 13)
- But God can’t destroy them because He has made a promise in verse 6 to bring them into the promised land—*On that day I raised My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands.*
- So God preserves His reputation by keeping His promise—*But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out* (v 14). Remember that it is through Israel that God is revealing Himself to the nations.
- In the end God shows them mercy—*Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness* (v 17).

Application: The consequence of their rebellion

We read previously in Hebrews 3:12-19 that the first generation of the Israelites were not able to enter the promised land, the land of Canaan, because of their hard hearts and their sin of unbelief. Yes it’s true that God didn’t destroy them, but He also left them wandering in the wilderness (see v 15-16— *So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them... for their heart went after their idols*). As we learned before:

- *Eventually, there is a terrible price to pay for being a half-hearted, unbelieving, sin-loving, hard-hearted Christian—I am choosing to live in the wilderness.*
- *The degree or extent that I choose to leave the old life behind and stop defiling myself with evil will be the same degree or extent that I will enjoy the new life, freedom and blessings available to me in my new life in Christ.*

Learning about the wilderness experience will help us to understand what it means to walk by faith and enter the promised land.

Application: Legitimate and illegitimate wilderness experiences

Firstly, what is the wilderness experience a type of in the life of the New Testament believer? It's a time of learning to trust God, to understand who He is by reading His Word, and to learn how to please Him. Remember that when we come to believe in Him we are all babies who are weak in our faith. We don't know how to overcome sin, we don't know enough about God's character to trust Him very much, and we don't know much about what God expects of us. So there is a legitimate time when we are "learner Christians"—we are learning to trust God and learn who God is through the Scriptures.

It's like joining the army or the police force. They don't immediately send you to the front lines, instead they train you for a year or so, preparing your mind and body, and then put you to work. This is also the way God works. There is a time of preparation, a time of learning, a time of developing and maturing our relationship with God, a time when we learn to respond to God's promises and overcome sin in our lives (1 John 2:14). God makes us into a vessel of honour so He can use us for His glory and honour (1 Timothy 2:21).

This was also true for the nation of Israel. It took time to change from thinking as slaves to thinking as free people, as God gave them safe opportunities to learn to trust Him instead of Pharaoh. God revealed His tremendous power at Mount Sinai, His ability and faithfulness to provide for them with; manna and quail for food, water from the rock, the cloud by day and the fire by night. He also gave them more of His written word through Moses.

The legitimate wilderness experience for the Israelites was under two years—taking into account travel time from Egypt to Saudi Arabia (Mount Sinai) and the year spent at Mount Sinai, and the travel time to Kadesh Barnea at the border of the promised land. God took this time to work with the people, demonstrate His power and faithfulness to them, and teach them His ways. Then He took them to the border of the promised land, Kadesh Barnea, and told them that it's time to enter the promised land—bootcamp is over, it time to get into the fight.

Deuteronomy 1:2-3 NKJV

It is eleven days' journey from Horeb [Mount Sinai] by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea [the border of the promised land]. ³ **Now it came to pass in the fortieth year**, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments to them,

The illegitimate wilderness experience was 40 years for the nation, the entire first generation of those who were over 20 years old ended up dying in the wilderness. Notice the rebuke present here—It is eleven days' journey from Horeb—Now it came to pass in the fortieth year. They made it to the border in 11 days the first time, but here they are again, at the same place, at the same level of maturity, 40 years later. 40 years on and still none of the Israelites (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) have experienced walking by faith. Unfortunately, I believe that there are many Christians today who are like the first generation of the children of Israel—they spend their whole lives wandering. We'll see what they look like at the end.

As we have already read in Hebrews, they still didn't trust God and the spies gave a bad report of the land because they didn't believe that they could overcome the huge people and fortified cities that were there—they didn't have enough faith to live by faith. As a result God told that generation that anyone over 20 would not enter the promised land. Thus followed the longest funeral procession in history. Probably two million people died in the wilderness as they wandered aimlessly through a wilderness wasteland. It was a tragedy. Yes Israel was still God's people, but their unbelief had rendered them useless and they missed out completely on all the blessings that God had waiting for them in the promised land. Here's what happened:

Deuteronomy 1:19-38 NKJV

“So we departed from Horeb [Mount Sinai], and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. ²⁰ And I [Moses] said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. ²¹ Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’

²² “And every one of you came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’

²³ “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe. ²⁴ And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.

²⁵ They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God is giving us.’

²⁶ “Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; ²⁷ and you complained in your tents, and said, ‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. ²⁸ Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, “The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim [giants] there.”’ [this is their doubt and unbelief showing]

²⁹ “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. ³⁰ The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’ ³² Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, ³³ who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.

³⁴ “And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, ³⁵ ‘Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers, ³⁶ except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord.’ ³⁷ The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, ‘Even you shall not go in there. ³⁸ Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. [there would be some who would, by faith, enter the promised land]

Conclusion: what does an illegitimate wilderness experience look like?

A person may be a true or genuine believer, yet be:

- someone who wastes their life living for themselves instead of God
- someone who chooses not to repent and instead continues in their sin
- someone who never really learns to trust God to overcome difficulties—they usually fret and worry when hard times come, and seek help from the world but not God
- someone who doubts God’s love for them despite all the good that He does for them
- someone who continues to be a friend of the world and finds pleasure in worldly entertainment
- someone who complains instead of giving thanks
- someone who neglects God’s word, prayer, fellowship, and giving
- someone who is not committed to consistently serve God and play their role in their local church—instead they church hop, looking for the best experience, what make them feel the best or what church best suits their needs
- someone who is carnal (immature) and so doesn’t have a good understanding of God’s Word (see 1 Corinthians 3:2, Hebrews 5:12-14)

If this is you, if you are not growing in your walk with Christ, if your at the same point in your relationship with God now as you were a year or two years ago, if you don’t have a hunger for righteousness, a thirst for God’s word, and a desire to pray, then repent of your lack of faith—ask God to change your heart so you can walk by faith.