

Ezekiel 20:33-49—The History of Israel’s Rebellions and God’s Great Mercy—Part 3

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.

Revision: Over the last two weeks we have been learning about God bringing the Israelites out of the **land of Egypt**, into the **wilderness**, and then finally into the **promised land**. Remember that if we are to enter the promised land we must grow up or mature in our relationship with God. We do this by:

- Reading and obeying/applying the scriptures—constantly repenting of any sin or worldliness that God reveals to us so our hearts don’t grow hard towards Him
- Learning to walk by faith, trusting God to provide and overcome even when we can’t see how it is possible—we learn that God loves doing the impossible
- We guard our affections, making sure that Jesus remains our first love—anything that becomes more important than God must be either discarded or put in it’s proper place

1 John 2:14b NKJV

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

This week: We will cover Ezekiel 20:33-49. It can be broken down into three sections:

1. The separation judgement of the Israelites between the end of the seven year tribulation and the start of the 1,000 year Millennial reign of Jesus
2. The future restoration/regathering of Israel
3. The coming judgement upon the land of Judah

1. The separation judgement of the Israelites between the end of the seven year Tribulation and the start of the 1,000 year Millennial reign of Jesus

This week we move into the future where we see a revealing of future events. Here is a timeline that shows the order of events to come:

Church age (current) > Rapture > 7 year Tribulation > Second Coming > Millennial Reign > Great White Throne Judgement > New Heavens and Earth

Ezekiel 20:33-38 NKJV

“As I live,” says the Lord God, “surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. ³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. ³⁵ And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. ³⁶ Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord God.

³⁷ “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸ I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

The big picture: At the end of the seven year *Tribulation*, Jesus leaves Heaven to come back to earth with His bride, the church—*The Second Coming*. He comes back as a warrior, a conquering king. Jesus defeats His enemies at the battle of Armageddon, which will literally be a blood bath (see Revelation 19:11-21). When Jesus finishes destroying the antichrist and his armies, He will judge between believers and unbelievers during the 75 days between His *Second Coming* and the start of the *Millennial Reign* (see Daniel 12:11-12). For the gentiles (non-Jews) we know this as the *sheep and goat judgement* described in Matthew 25:31-46. Here in Ezekiel 20:33-38, it describes God's separate judgement of the Jews or Israelites during the same time.

The three separation judgements: The *Rapture*, which occurs before the *Tribulation* begins, and the gentile and Jewish judgements which occur in the time between the *Second Coming* and the *Millennial Reign*, are all separation judgements, and are different to the final or *Great White Throne Judgement* when all unbelievers will be sent to the Lake of Fire (Hell) for eternity.

At the *Rapture*, God will remove the true church from the earth sometime before the *Tribulation* begins because **God doesn't punish the innocent with the guilty**—see Genesis 18:25, Revelation 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. This means that the true believers will be spared *God's wrath*, which will be poured out on this evil world during the seven year *Tribulation* (see Revelation 6:16). **This means that only the unbelievers will enter the Tribulation.** Keep in mind that the suffering we endure now during the church age is simply a general consequence of sin—it's nothing compared to the horrors that will be unleashed by God on an unbelieving and unthankful world during the *Tribulation*.

However, equally true is the fact that **God doesn't let the guilty go free**—the guilty must be punished. Therefore, just as the innocent or righteous were spared from the time of God's wrath, so the guilty or unrepentant will be *excluded* from the glorious time when the kingdom of God is on earth—the *Millennial Reign*. Prior to the beginning of the *Millennial Reign* when Jesus establishes His kingdom on earth, all unbelievers—with the gentiles and Jews judged separately—will be sent to torments in hades, to await their day in God's court at the *Great White Throne Judgement* (the judgement of all unbelievers). **This means that all believers who survived the Tribulation will automatically go into the Millennial Reign and repopulate the earth.**

The separation judgement of Israel after the second coming: Lets summarise what happens:

1. v 33-35: God, by force, rescues all the Jews from the oppression of the antichrist and causes all of them to gather together in one place in the wilderness (in the desert, and not in Jerusalem or Mt Zion where the gentiles will be judged/separated). Though it doesn't specify, this could be Mt Sinai in Saudi Arabia or Edom (now Jordan) where God would have been protecting the Jews who had escaped there.
2. v 35-36: God (Jesus their Messiah) pleads His case with His people face to face.
3. v 37-38: God separates the believing Jews from the unbelieving Jews (those who still haven't accept Jesus as their Messiah). Making them **pass und the rod** pictures a shepherd holding out his rod and forcing the sheep to pass under it single file for counting (example, Jeremiah 33:13). The shepherd would let those sheep that were actually his enter the fold, while those who were not his would be excluded. This is what God means when He says, **"I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel."**

A partial fulfilment of this “regathering” prophecy in Daniel’s day: Common in prophecy is “dual fulfilment”, one close to the time of writing and one in a more distant time. For example, God foretold that the Jews would be dispersed or exiled from the land of Israel, and it happened twice (586 BC and AD 70). The same applies to God bringing them back into the land. In Daniel’s day, God did cause the Israelites to return to the land, but it didn’t fulfil all the exact details of this prophecy—for example, not all of the Israelites were gathered into one place, and they didn’t see God face to face. However, the prophecy was partially fulfilled because not all of the Israelites returned to the land of Israel.

Also, God promised to bring them **into the bond of the covenant**—meaning the New Covenant. This is the fulfilment of the promise that God made to Israel that, when He regathers them, He will give them a new heart and a new spirit (see Ezekiel 11:17-21, 36:22-38). Obviously, even to this day, this has not happened to the nation of Israel.

Application: God keeps His promise to finish what He starts

“As I live,” says the Lord God, “...I will rule over you” (v 33): God will rule over *His* people—they will eventually experience the joy that comes from being fully submitted to God, even if they have been persistently unfaithful. This is a picture of God’s grace.

Philippians 1:6 NLT paraphrase

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Remember that the change in us is a work that only God can do. Only He can transform us into His image. We can speed up this process of change called sanctification and make the experience more enjoyable (or less painful) by being more willing to forsake the world and follow Christ instead. However, in the end, no matter how stubborn or immature a believer may be throughout their life here on earth, God will complete His work in them, and they will be with Him, ruling and reigning with Him for eternity (all-be-it with very little reward—they won’t have much to show for their time on earth).

2. The future restoration/regathering of Israel

Ezekiel 20:39-44 NKJV

³⁹ “As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord God: “Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols. ⁴⁰ For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel,” says the Lord God, “there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. ⁴¹ I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. ⁴² Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. ⁴³ And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. ⁴⁴ Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,” says the Lord God.’ ”

Ezekiel 20:39 NKJV—Choose this day who you will serve

“As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord God: “Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols.

v 39 **As for you, O house of Israel:** God has reminded the elders of the nation of Israel sitting before Ezekiel of their sin in Egypt, in the wilderness, and also in the promised land. He then showed them the blessed future He had planned for them. *Now God gives them a challenge.*

v 39 **Go, serve every one of you his idols:** Israel had been suffering from a divided heart for centuries—one foot in the world serving idols and one foot in God’s kingdom. God hates this “lukewarm” or worldly Christian and would rather them be either hot or cold; either live as a believer or don’t, it’s your choice, God won’t force you to love Him, but don’t claim to be a believer when you aren’t living like one because it brings much shame to God. Revelation 3:15-16 says that God will spit the *lukewarm* Christian out of His mouth. To assist with their choice, God gave them everything they wanted; God took them to Babylon, a land that was crazy with their idols—“For it is the land of carved images, and they are insane with their idols (Jeremiah 50:38).

“God called His people to a decision point. If they wanted to serve their **idols**, then they might as well make up their minds and do it. Let them become Babylonians in every regard now that they were in Babylon.” (David Guzik)

Ezekiel 20:40-41 NKJV—When Israel returns to the land they will worship God with their whole heart

For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel,” says the Lord God, “there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. ⁴¹ I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.

v 40 **Shall serve Me:** “They will render priestly service to God, for the word ‘serve’ is the technical term for priestly ministry (compare Exodus 19:6).” (Feinberg)

This is a wonderful promise to the Israelites because very soon the temple would very soon be destroyed, making it impossible to render priestly service to God. God here is promising that the temple would be rebuilt and they would indeed serve and worship Him on His holy mountain once more. This happened under the leadership of Ezra and Zerubbabel.

v 40 **On My holy mountain ... all the house of Israel, all of them in the land ... shall serve Me; there I will accept them:** This despite all their sins and persistent unfaithfulness! God promises to **accept** those who chose to return to the land—meaning those who had chosen to seek God with their whole heart. Returning to the land of Israel meant a difficult and dangerous life, and would have required giving up the worldly comforts and pleasures they had gained while living in Babylon.

v 41 **I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples:** This shows that God would be pleased with them, that He would find great pleasure in them, and that He would willingly and enthusiastically welcome them back. It’s like the parable of the prodigal son where the father runs to meet his repentant son.

v 41 **And I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles:** Our obedience, just like the Jew's, brings honour and glory to God. The opposite is also true; our disobedience brings shame and reproach upon God.

Ezekiel 20:42-44 NKJV—“Then you shall know that I am the Lord”

Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers.
⁴³ And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. ⁴⁴ Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,” says the Lord God.’ ”

v 42 **Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel:** God reveals or shows Himself to be real and true by keeping His promises. God, through Ezekiel and Jeremiah, publicly promised to bring Israel back to the land, and He did, with all the nations watching. God has also done the same thing in our day with Israel becoming a nation again in 1948; there should be no doubt in anyone's mind as to God's existence, His goodness, and His faithfulness.

v 42 **For which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers:** Again, God doesn't change (see Hebrews 13:8). God promised the land to Abraham and his covenant descendants in Genesis 12:1–3. Remember that the land belongs to Israel perpetually, even when they were disobedient and God temporarily removed them from the land. Beware of opposing God by not recognising Israel's legitimate and eternal claim to the land of Israel—*I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you* (Genesis 12:3).

Application: What does genuine repentance look like?

v 43 **And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed:** We can learn a lot about repentance from this verse.

v 43 **You shall remember your ways... with which you were defiled:** “Recognition is the first thing in reformation.” (Trapp)

“As elsewhere *zakar* [**remember**] does not mean simply ‘to recall to mind,’ but ‘to acknowledge, take account of, accept responsibility for,’ their conduct.” (Block)

Therefore, **the first thing we need to do when repenting** is to recognise that what we are doing or have done is sinful and has defiled us. We must accept full responsibility for our choices—*“Yes, this is wrong. It was my choice alone. I can't and won't blame anyone or anything else, rather I will take full responsibility for what I have done.”*

v 43 **And you shall loathe [despise] yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed:** **The second thing we need to do when repenting** is to grieve or mourn over our sins, being disgusted by our sin and also recognising our moral bankruptcy—*for I know that in me... nothing good dwells* (Romans 7:18 NKJV). The opposite of this is to justify ourselves and continue to find pleasure in those things which are destroying us. Consider what Jesus says:

Matthew 5:3-4 NKJV

“Blessed are the poor in spirit [who recognise their moral bankruptcy], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn [over their sins], for they shall be comforted.

Application: What does incomplete repentance look like?

We need to understand that Israel’s repentance will only be complete when they recognise Jesus as their Messiah and are welcomed into His Millennial Reign.

“These promises may, in a certain limited sense, be applied to the restoration from the Babylonish captivity; but they must have their proper fulfilment when the Jews shall accept Jesus as their Saviour, and in consequence be brought back from all their dispersions to their own land.” (Clarke)

Again we can learn much from the Israelite’s limited repentance. They repented, but not fully. Even when they returned to the land of Israel there were problems: the rich oppressing the poor, marrying pagan women, worldliness, greed, divorce, and neglect of the temple and things of God.

Yes, they didn’t worship idols any more, which was great. However, their change didn’t go deep enough; there were other areas of their life where they weren’t fully committed or yielded to God, and although they were able to remain in the land, they were almost always under God’s discipline in some way, e.g. famine, poverty etc.

I know that in my life I’ve experienced this. There have been times in my life when I’ve repented and dealt with the “big” sins—the outward sins, the addictions—but I’ve failed to fully seek God. Instead, I’ve held on to some sins that aren’t so obvious, some things that I can continue to enjoy in private. I allow myself to be a little like the world, but not to much. I do enough to stay in the promised land, but I don’t really enjoy it because I’m still grieving the Holy Spirit.

However, what happened to the Israelites eventually? Their hearts became hardened by their sin, and it cost them dearly. Over 400 years later their hearts had become so hard that they rejected and demanded the crucifixion of their own Messiah, and were subsequently kicked out of the promised land *again* by the Romans in AD 70.

Remember—I am either growing closer to God or more distant from Him; there is no neutral ground. In the end, the true condition of my heart will eventually be revealed.

Numbers 32:23 NLT paraphrase

But if you fail to keep your word, then you will have sinned against the Lord, and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.

Luke 8:16-18 NLT paraphrase

“No one lights a lamp and then covers it with a bowl or hides it under a bed. A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light can be seen by all who enter the house. ¹⁷ For all that is secret will eventually be brought into the open, and everything that is concealed will be brought to light and made known to all.

¹⁸ “So pay attention to how you hear. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what they think they understand will be taken away from them.”

Ezekiel 20:44 NKJV—God's mercy and loving kindness in His dealings with men
Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel," says the Lord God.' ”

God's infinite love and mercy would be clearly seen when they came back into the land. They would realise that they did not deserve this great blessing, rather they deserved to be completely destroyed or wiped out. They would truly know that Yahweh is the only true God and they would better understand His great love for them; they would see and know that He truly cared for them. This is what God means when He says—“**Then you shall know that I am the Lord.**”

“Israel would have new understanding of Jehovah, and come to know that the perpetual reason for His operation was the glory of His name [for My name's sake], and not merely punishing them for their evil ways, that is to say, the punishment of Jehovah was never merely vindictive, but always a process moving toward the realisation of His original intention of good to the nations of the earth.” (Morgan)

3. The Coming judgement upon the land of Judah

Ezekiel 20:45-49 NKJV

⁴⁵ Furthermore the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁴⁶ “Son of man, set your face toward the south; preach against the south and prophesy against the forest land, the South, ⁴⁷ and say to the forest of the South, ‘Hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree in you; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched by it. ⁴⁸ All flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.” ’ ’ ”

⁴⁹ Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! They say of me, ‘Does he not speak parables?’ ”

v 45 **Son of man, set your face toward the south:** This means the southern part of the land of Israel, what is known as Judah.

“The Hebrew uses three different words [for **south**] (*temana*, *darom*, and *negeb*). Of these the first two are general poetic words to describe the southerly direction, whereas the third refers to a named geographical area, called in modern Israel the Negev, which lay to the south of the Judean hills.” (Taylor)

“The southern forest referred to the southern kingdom of Judah, a forested area in biblical times, even into the upper Negev.” (Alexander)

v 47 **And say to the forest of the South... “Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree in you:** Everybody knows how easily a forest burns when it is dry, quickly becoming a raging inferno which is basically impossible to put out. So would the coming Babylonian invasion be unstoppable, and equally as destructive. As a major fire destroys all the trees, even the green ones, so the Babylonian army would take captive all the people, even the ones who were relatively righteous.

“That fire would consume every green tree as well as every dry one. The thought is that both the righteous and the wicked would suffer from the devastation caused by the Chaldean invaders.” (Smith)

v 48 **All flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it:** The judgement would be so severe and so complete that there would be no doubt in the eyes of the world that this judgement was from God.

Ezekiel is frustrated because of the nation’s spiritual blindness (v 49)

v 49 **Ah, Lord God!** Ezekiel is once again passionately crying out to God, most likely in utter frustration because he seems to be getting nowhere. No-one seems to be listening and the nation is determined to continue in their rebellion against God. Ezekiel probably feels like He’s banging his head on a brick wall.

b. **Does he not speak in parables:** “The elders of Israel (Ezekiel 20:1) and others rejected or even despised Ezekiel’s message because they claimed it was hard to understand. Their [lack of] understanding was wilful and would be judged.” (David Guzik)

“Men find difficulty in understanding a message which is distasteful to them ... It is well known that to the unwilling heart any message from God appears to be difficult of comprehension.” (Feinberg)

2 Corinthians 3:14, 4:3-4 NLT paraphrase

3:14 But the people’s minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.

4:4 If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing. ⁴ Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

This is important to keep in mind when witnessing. We must never think that we can win someone to Christ, or cause someone to understand some biblical truth, just because we can explain it well. Understanding only comes as the Holy Spirit convicts people and they choose to respond by softening their hearts. This is a spiritual battle and we must labour in prayer for those who we are seeking to win to Christ or bring to repentance.

Application: The Sabbath feast—reality vs shadow (v 12 and 20)

Here we learn why God mentioned the Sabbath feast in relation to the promised land. First, some background on some of the main feasts so we get the context.

The Seven Feasts Picture Salvation History (Wiersbe)

Feast	Reality	Reference
Passover	<i>Christ, the Lamb, who died for us</i>	<i>John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7</i>
Unleavened Bread	<i>The Christian life of fellowship, separation from sin, and feeding on Christ</i>	<i>1 Cor. 5:6–8</i>
Firstfruits	<i>The resurrection of Christ</i>	<i>1 Cor. 15:20–23</i>
Pentecost	<i>The coming of the Holy Spirit</i>	<i>Acts 2:1ff.</i>
Trumpets	<i>The gathering together of God’s people [The Rapture]</i>	<i>Isa. 27:12–13; Matt. 24:29–31; 1 Thess. 4:13–18</i>
Day of Atonement	<i>The future cleansing of God’s people</i>	<i>Zech. 13:1–2; Rom. 14:10</i>
Tabernacles	<i>The future joy of God’s people in His kingdom</i>	<i>Zech. 14:16–21</i>

Colossians 2:16-17 NLT paraphrase

So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. ¹⁷ **For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.**

Consider that to form a shadow, you need an object to cast the shadow. Jesus is that object, and the feasts and other types in the Old Testament are simply shadows that help us to understand the reality—Christ.

Also, just imagine that I went home today and instead of hugging my wife, I hugged her shadow body, held her shadow hand, and talked to her shadow face. She would think I was nuts. However, sadly, there are many who claim to have a relationship with the risen Saviour, but who are, in effect, only hugging and talking to shadows, as they seek to gain or achieve their righteousness by keeping certain feasts or laws. Just remember what the Scriptures say about trying to keep the law—if you want to be made right with God, you must keep **all** of the laws **perfectly**—*And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them*—Ezekiel 20:11 (also see Leviticus 18:5, Ezekiel 20:13, Romans 10:5, Galatians 3:12). The whole point of the law was to show us that we are sinners in need of a Saviour because we are all born with a sin nature—see Romans 8:3. Jesus was the only one who was able to fully obey the law. Now we don't have to because His perfect life is imputed or credited to us when we repent and believe—it's just-if-I'd lived a perfect life—I am justified by God.

The Sabbath feast: Now we come to the Sabbath feast as mentioned in Ezekiel 20:12 and 20—¹² Moreover I also gave them [Israel] My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. ²⁰...hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you [Israel]. (Also see Exodus 31:13)

To understand the **Sabbath reality**, we must first understand the **Sabbath Shadow**.

Exodus 20:8-11 NKJV—**The Sabbath shadow**

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work... ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Clearly, the **Sabbath shadow**, ritual, or rule is all about resting from our physical work.

In contrast, we will now learn from the book of Hebrews that the **Sabbath reality** is simply resting in Christ by ceasing from our own works or self-effort (see Hebrews 4:10). This is also what it means to live by faith and not by sight, and is also represented or pictured by life in the promised land (see Hebrews 3:10).

“The promised land is a picture of the **Sabbath reality**, where one must by **faith** daily depend upon God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

In John 15:5 Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do **nothing**.” What this means is that we must, by faith, depend upon God for **everything**. Also see Galatians 2:20.

In Hebrews 3:7-4:11, God explains the **Sabbath reality** using the children of Israel and the failure of the first generation to enter the promised land, e.g.—“**They shall not enter My rest** [that is, they shall not enter the promised land] (3:11).”

Hebrews 3:7-4:11 NKJV—**The Sabbath reality**

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial **in the wilderness**, ⁹ where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. ¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.’ ¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, **‘They shall not enter My rest.’**”

¹² Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you **an evil heart of unbelief** in departing from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be **hardened through the deceitfulness of sin**. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵ while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

¹⁶ For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? ¹⁷ Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear **that they would not enter His rest**, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹ **So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.**

⁴ Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; ***but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*** ³ **For we who have believed do enter that rest**, as He has said:

“So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’”

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; ⁵ and again in this place: *“They shall not enter My rest.”*

⁶ Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ **For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.** ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Conclusion: The promised land was a land flowing with milk and honey, the best of all the lands, the land that God had gone to great pains to search out for them. Yet it was also a place where it was impossible, humanly speaking, to survive. There were hostile giants and cities with high walls that they were helpless against. So why was this the best place for them? Because when they **learned in the wilderness** to: trust God, to walk by faith, to live in submission to and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to allow Christ to live His life through them, and then and only then could they experience the sweet fellowship, peace, love and joy that comes from abiding in Christ (see John 15).

The same is true for us today. However, our promised land is not a physical one, but a spiritual one. Instead of physical enemies that we can’t overcome, we have three enemies that, without Christ, we are powerless against—our sinful nature, the world, and the spiritual realm (demons). We must learn to fight with spiritual weapons, to trust in what we cannot see, to study the word so that our faith will grow, and most importantly, be willing to give up worldly or temporary things so we can enjoy the eternal things. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:15, Paul uses the example of the failure of the Israelites to explain why so many Christians end up disqualified or stuck in the wilderness—a **lack of discipline, craving evil things, worshipping idols, worldliness, and sexual immorality.**

Don’t be disqualified, don’t spend your life wandering in the wilderness—cease from your own efforts, forsake sin, cross the Jordan, enter into God’s rest, and your joy will be full.