Fulfilled Prophecies

The Wilderness Between Two Covenants



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan wasn't simply a movement from one geographical location to another. It was a covenant journey from slavery into the inheritance God had promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:13-21; Exodus 6:6-8).

† God delivered Israel from Egypt through Moses, brought them through the Red Sea, established His covenant at Mount Sinai, and led them through the wilderness toward the Promised Land (Exodus 14:21-31; Exodus 19:1-6; Deuteronomy 8:2).

† Yet the generation that came out of Egypt didn't immediately enter the promised inheritance. They lived through a forty-year wilderness period during which the old generation died and a new generation prepared to enter the land (Numbers 14:29-35; Joshua 5:6).
† This historical pattern becomes especially important when we examine the first-century transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant (1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 3:7-19).
† Jesus accomplished the greater exodus through His death and resurrection, delivering His people from the bondage of sin and death and bringing them into the promised inheritance of the New Covenant (Luke 9:30-31; Romans 6:6-11; Hebrews 9:15).
† Just as Israel experienced a wilderness transition between Egypt and Canaan, the first-century church experienced a covenant transition between Christ's completed sacrifice and the final removal of the Old Covenant system in AD 70 (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9-13; Hebrews 12:26-28).
† The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple wasn't the beginning of Christ's victory. It was the historical removal of the covenant system that had already been made obsolete through His sacrifice (Matthew 24:1-3, 34; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9).
† The New Covenant was established through Christ's blood, and the first-century transition brought the Old Covenant age to its final historical conclusion (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 8:13).
† Understanding this wilderness pattern helps us recognize why the New Testament speaks of an approaching judgment, an inheritance about to be received, and a promised rest that the first-century believers were being encouraged to enter

(Hebrews 4:1-11; Hebrews 10:37; James 5:8-9).

Israel's First Wilderness Was A Covenant Transition

Exodus 6:6-8

Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the labors of the Egyptians, and I will rescue you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments. Then I will take you as My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the labors of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession; I am the Lord.'

† God's promise contained both deliverance and inheritance. Leaving Egypt was the beginning of the journey, but entering the land was its intended destination (Genesis 15:18-21; Joshua 21:43-45).

† Israel wasn't delivered merely to escape Pharaoh. God was forming a covenant people who would live under His authority and receive what He had promised their ancestors (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

† The wilderness stood between redemption from Egypt and possession of the promised inheritance, establishing a pattern later applied to the first-century church (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Hebrews 3:16-19).

† The greater redemption accomplished through Christ also includes both deliverance and inheritance, but its destination is the heavenly Jerusalem rather than a geographical territory (Colossians 1:13-14; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:22-24).

The Forty Years Were A Time Of Testing And Judgment

Numbers 14:33-35

Also, your sons will be shepherds in the wilderness for forty

years, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your bodies perish in the wilderness. In accordance with the number of days that you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall suffer the punishment for your guilt a year, that is, forty years, and you will know My opposition. I, the Lord, have spoken, I certainly will do this to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. They shall be worn out in this wilderness, and there they shall die.

† The forty years weren't an accidental delay. They were a divinely appointed period of judgment upon the unbelieving generation that refused to trust God's promise (Numbers 14:20-23; Deuteronomy 1:34-35).

† During those years, Israel remained God's covenant nation, but the rebellious generation couldn't enter the inheritance because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:16-19).

† The wilderness therefore became a place where one generation passed away while another prepared to receive what God had promised (Numbers 26:63-65; Joshua 5:6-7).

† This pattern provides an important parallel to the approximately forty years between Christ's crucifixion around AD 30 and Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13).

† The first-century transition wasn't another journey across a desert. It was the passing away of the Old Covenant order while the New Covenant community was being established and brought into the fullness of its promised inheritance (2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Hebrews 12:22-28).

Paul Identified Israel's Wilderness As A Pattern For His Generation

1 Corinthians 10:1-6

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that

our fathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea; and they all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and they all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased; for their dead bodies were spread out in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they indeed craved them.

† Paul deliberately connected Israel's wilderness experience with the circumstances confronting the Corinthian believers (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11).

† The Red Sea, the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, and the wilderness judgments weren't presented as unrelated ancient events. They were examples intended to instruct the generation living during the New Covenant transition (1 Corinthians 10:7-11).

† Israel had experienced deliverance but still faced the consequences of unbelief. Likewise, the first-century church had received redemption through Christ while being warned against abandoning its confidence in Him (Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 10:35-39).

† Paul's warning shows that the wilderness pattern wasn't invented centuries later. The apostles themselves recognized its significance for their own generation (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 3:7-11).

The Ends Of The Ages Had Come Upon The Apostles

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

† Paul didn't say that the ends of the ages would arrive thousands of years after his readers had died. He said they had come upon his own generation (Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20).
† The expression points to the climax of the covenant ages, when the promises given through Israel were reaching their fulfillment in Christ (Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:9-10).
† The apostles were living during the closing period of the Old Covenant age, not predicting the destruction of the physical universe (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:26; Matthew 24:3, 34).
† This explains why the wilderness warnings were so urgent. Their generation stood at a covenant turning point, just as Israel had stood between Egypt and Canaan (Hebrews 3:12-19; Hebrews 10:25, 37).
† The first-century church wasn't waiting for Christianity to begin. Christ had already established the New Covenant, but the Old Covenant system hadn't yet experienced its final historical removal (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9).

Hebrews Warned The Church Not To Repeat Israel's Unbelief

Hebrews 3:7-11

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As on the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers put Me to the test, And saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they did not know My ways'; As I swore in My anger, 'They certainly shall not enter My rest.'"

† The writer of Hebrews applied the wilderness warning directly to believers living in the first century (Hebrews 3:12-14).
† The original generation had witnessed God's deliverance but refused to enter the promised land because of unbelief. The

readers of Hebrews were warned not to repeat that same failure by turning away from Christ (Numbers 14:22-23; Hebrews 3:16-19).

† The issue wasn't whether the church needed to return to the Law of Moses. The issue was whether believers would continue trusting the Son who had fulfilled what the Law anticipated (Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 10:1, 14).

† The warning was especially significant while the temple, priesthood, and sacrificial system still stood as visible reminders of the covenant order that was becoming obsolete (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:8-10).

† The wilderness comparison encouraged believers to remain faithful during a period of covenant transition rather than retreat into a system that couldn't provide the perfection accomplished through Christ (Hebrews 7:18-19; Hebrews 10:11-14).

Joshua's Rest Pointed Beyond The Land Of Canaan
Hebrews 4:8-11

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. Consequently, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let's make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience.

† Joshua brought Israel into Canaan, but the writer of Hebrews explained that this geographical inheritance wasn't the final rest God intended (Psalm 95:7-11; Hebrews 4:1-7).

† The promised rest ultimately finds its fulfillment in Christ, who accomplished the work that the Old Covenant sacrifices could never complete (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 10:11-14).

† The first-century believers were encouraged to enter that rest through faith and perseverance rather than repeat Israel's

unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 4:1-3).
† This wasn't a prediction that Christians would someday inherit a restored earthly Canaan. Their inheritance was connected to Christ's heavenly kingdom and the better promises of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 11:13-16).
† The language of entering rest also demonstrates why the apostles could speak of salvation as already accomplished while still anticipating its covenant fulfillment (Ephesians 2:5-6; Hebrews 9:28; Hebrews 10:36).

The Old Covenant Was Becoming Obsolete

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.
† This verse is one of the clearest descriptions of the first-century covenant transition. The New Covenant had already been established, while the Old Covenant order was approaching its final disappearance (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15).
† Christ's sacrifice had made the former sacrificial system obsolete. Yet the temple and its ceremonies continued to operate during the apostolic generation (Hebrews 9:6-10; Hebrews 10:1-4).
† The writer wasn't describing an Old Covenant system that would continue for another two thousand years. He described something already becoming obsolete and approaching disappearance (Hebrews 10:9; Hebrews 12:26-28).
† Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 brought the temple-centered Old Covenant order to its historical end, confirming the significance of the transition described in Hebrews (Matthew 24:1-2, 34; Luke 21:20-22).

† The Cross established the New Covenant, and the destruction of the temple removed the central earthly institution associated with the former covenant (Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 10:9-14).
† The approximately forty-year period between these events closely parallels Israel's wilderness generation, although Scripture doesn't explicitly identify the two forty-year periods as an exact chronological equation (Numbers 14:33-35; Hebrews 3:7-19).

The Church Was Waiting For The Better Inheritance
Hebrews 10:35-37

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

† The writer encouraged his original readers to persevere because the fulfillment of their expectation was approaching, not because it was thousands of years away (Hebrews 10:25; James 5:8-9).
† The phrase "a very little while" expresses the urgency of the promise within the lifetime of those being addressed (Matthew 24:34; Revelation 22:6-7).
† Just as Israel had to continue through the wilderness before entering Canaan, the first-century church was encouraged to remain faithful while the Old Covenant age approached its conclusion (Hebrews 3:14; Hebrews 10:38-39).
† The inheritance wasn't a return to the land of Palestine. It was the eternal redemption and heavenly inheritance secured through Christ (Hebrews 9:12, 15; Hebrews 11:16).
† Their perseverance wasn't intended to earn salvation. It

demonstrated their continued confidence in the One who had already accomplished redemption (Hebrews 10:14; Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Heavenly Jerusalem Replaced The Earthly Covenant Center

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The writer didn't tell believers that they would someday travel to an earthly Jerusalem to receive their inheritance. He declared that they had already come to the heavenly Jerusalem through Christ (Galatians 4:26; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† This heavenly city was the destination anticipated by the patriarchs, who looked beyond the geographical land to the lasting city prepared by God (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

† The New Covenant community was already participating in heavenly realities, even while the former covenant system remained visible on earth (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1-3).

† The destruction of earthly Jerusalem didn't create the heavenly city. It marked the removal of the old covenant center as the New Covenant order stood complete in Christ (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:26-28).

† The greater exodus therefore led from covenant bondage into the heavenly Jerusalem, where access to God was secured through the mediation of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 10:19-22).

The Shaking Removed What Belonged To The Former Order

Hebrews 12:26-28

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

† The shaking language draws upon the prophetic imagery of God's judgment and the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (Haggai 2:6-9; Hebrews 12:18-24).

† Within the covenant context of Hebrews, the things being removed represent the temporary order associated with the former covenant, while the unshakable kingdom of Christ remains (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9).

† The writer didn't describe the end of the physical planet. He contrasted what was temporary with the kingdom that couldn't be shaken (Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:32-33).

† The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple provides the historical setting for understanding the removal of the Old Covenant order in the fulfilled perspective (Matthew 24:1-2, 34; Luke 21:20-22).

† Believers weren't waiting for Christ to establish a kingdom that didn't yet exist. They were receiving the kingdom that had already been inaugurated through His victory (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).

† Unlike Israel's temporary covenant administration, Christ's kingdom remains because His priesthood and sacrifice are

permanent (Hebrews 7:23-28; Hebrews 10:12-14).

Jesus Announced Judgment Upon His Own Generation Matthew 23:36-38

Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

† Jesus identified the generation that would experience the judgment associated with Jerusalem's covenant unfaithfulness (Matthew 23:29-35; Luke 11:49-51).

† His announcement concerned the very city and religious leadership responsible for rejecting God's messengers and ultimately rejecting His Son (Matthew 21:33-43; Matthew 22:1-7).

† The desolation of Jerusalem's house pointed toward the destruction of the temple, which Jesus explicitly foretold immediately afterward (Matthew 24:1-2).

† This judgment wasn't disconnected from the covenant warnings given through Moses. Israel had been warned that continued rebellion would bring national devastation and exile (Deuteronomy 28:49-68; Leviticus 26:27-33).

† The generation that rejected Christ experienced the covenant judgment culminating in Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (Luke 19:41-44; Luke 21:20-24).

† The parallel with the wilderness generation is unmistakable in its pattern. Both generations witnessed extraordinary acts of God, faced covenant warnings, and experienced judgment because of unbelief (Numbers 14:22-23; Hebrews 3:16-19).

Jesus Established The Time Boundary Of The Covenant

Judgment

Matthew 24:34

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus placed the fulfillment of the events He had described within the lifetime of His contemporary generation (Matthew 23:36; Luke 21:32).

† The destruction of the temple was the immediate subject that prompted the disciples' questions, and Jesus gave them recognizable signs of the approaching judgment (Matthew 24:1-3; Luke 21:20-22).

† The Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 occurred within the first-century generation, fulfilling the historical judgment Jesus had announced (Luke 19:41-44; Luke 21:20-24).

† The covenant transition therefore wasn't an open-ended period stretching across thousands of years. Its prophetic judgment reached its conclusion within the generation Jesus identified (Matthew 16:27-28; Matthew 23:36).

† The approximately forty years between the Cross and Jerusalem's destruction provide a meaningful historical parallel with Israel's forty years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:33-35; Hebrews 3:7-19).

† The essential point isn't that every detail of the two periods must correspond mathematically. It's that both involved a divinely governed transition, a generation facing judgment, and the fulfillment of a promised inheritance (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 4:8-11).

The New Jerusalem Is The Fulfilled Inheritance

Revelation 21:2-3

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her

husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† The destination of the greater exodus wasn't another earthly nation. It was the New Covenant relationship in which God dwells with His redeemed people through Christ (John 14:23; Ephesians 2:19-22).

† The New Jerusalem represents the fulfilled covenant community, described as the bride prepared for her husband (Galatians 4:26; Revelation 21:9-10).

† The promise of God's dwelling recalls His covenant purpose with Israel, but its fulfillment is greater because access to Him is now established through Christ rather than through the earthly sanctuary (Exodus 25:8; Hebrews 10:19-22).

† The New Jerusalem's open gates demonstrate that the invitation to receive the water of life continues through the completed work of Christ (Revelation 21:25; Revelation 22:17).

† The first-century wilderness transition reached its covenant conclusion, but the blessings of the New Covenant didn't end in AD 70. They continue because Christ's kingdom and priesthood are everlasting (Hebrews 7:24-25; Hebrews 12:28).

Historical References

† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 6, Chapters 4-5, describes the burning of the Jerusalem temple and the devastation that accompanied the Roman conquest in AD 70. His account confirms the historical destruction of the earthly sanctuary central to the former covenant system (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:20-24).

† Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 7, Chapter 1, describes the destruction remaining after Jerusalem's conquest. His testimony

helps establish the historical setting of the judgment Jesus announced against the city (Luke 19:41-44; Matthew 23:37-38).
† Tacitus, Histories, Book 5, Chapters 10-13, provides a Roman account of the Jewish revolt, Jerusalem's defenses, and the siege. His historical testimony independently confirms the first-century conflict that culminated in the city's destruction (Luke 21:20-22).
† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, records the tradition that Christians in Jerusalem departed for Pella before the city's destruction. This account is consistent with the importance of Jesus' warning to flee when the approaching judgment became recognizable (Matthew 24:15-16; Luke 21:20-21).
† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7, also connects Jerusalem's destruction with the rejection of Christ and the suffering of the Jewish nation. His interpretation demonstrates that early Christian writers recognized the theological importance of AD 70 (Matthew 23:36-38; Luke 21:22).
† These historical writers confirm the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, but the covenant interpretation rests upon Scripture. The historical accounts support the setting, while the apostles explain the significance of Christ's completed redemption and the passing of the former covenant (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:26-28).

How It Applies To Us Today

† We aren't living in the wilderness between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. That first-century transition has already reached its historical conclusion (Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 24:34).
† We aren't waiting for another temple, another priesthood, or

another system of animal sacrifices. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient, and His priesthood is permanent (Hebrews 7:24-27; Hebrews 10:12-18).

† We don't need to return to Mount Sinai to find acceptance with God. Through Christ, believers have access to the Father and belong to the heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:24-26; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† The wilderness warnings still teach us the importance of faith, obedience, and perseverance, even though their original covenant-transition setting belonged to the first century (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

† We aren't trying to earn the promised inheritance through religious works. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, who accomplished what the Law couldn't accomplish (Romans 8:3-4; Ephesians 2:8-10).

† We don't need to fear another future destruction of the Old Covenant age. That judgment belonged to the generation Jesus addressed (Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34).

† The kingdom isn't waiting to arrive. Christ reigns now, and His people are already citizens of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).

† The New Jerusalem isn't a distant earthly construction project. It's the heavenly covenant reality into which believers are brought through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).

† The invitation to come to Christ remains open. The Spirit and the bride continue to invite the thirsty to receive the water of life without cost (Revelation 22:17; John 7:37-39).

† Israel's wilderness journey teaches us that God keeps His promises. The greater exodus teaches us that those promises have reached their fulfillment in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20;

Hebrews 9:15).

† We live on the fulfilled side of the covenant transition, enjoying the permanent blessings of a kingdom that can't be shaken (Hebrews 12:28; Hebrews 13:20-21).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why compare Israel's forty years in the wilderness with the first-century church?

A: Because Paul and the writer of Hebrews explicitly applied Israel's wilderness experiences to their own readers. The approximately forty years between Christ's crucifixion and Jerusalem's destruction also provide a meaningful historical parallel, although Scripture doesn't explicitly establish an exact forty-year prophetic timetable (1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 3:7-19).

Q: Did the New Covenant begin in AD 70?

A: No. Jesus established the New Covenant through His blood. AD 70 marked the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, bringing the former covenant's earthly institutional order to its historical end (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 8:13).

Q: Was the Old Covenant still necessary after the Cross?

A: No. Christ's sacrifice accomplished what the Old Covenant sacrifices couldn't accomplish. The temple system continued historically for a time, but it no longer provided the means of approaching God through the former covenant (Hebrews 10:1-18; Hebrews 8:13).

Q: Was the first-century church waiting for salvation to begin?

A: No. Believers already possessed salvation through Christ, but they were also awaiting the fulfillment of promises connected with the approaching end of the Old Covenant age (Ephesians 2:5-8; Hebrews 9:28; Hebrews 10:36-37).

Q: Was the promised rest a future earthly kingdom in Palestine?

A: No. Hebrews explains that Joshua's entrance into Canaan didn't provide the ultimate rest. That rest is found in Christ and the better inheritance associated with the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 4:8-11; Hebrews 11:13-16; Hebrews 12:22-24).

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