

Joshua 5:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

Analysis

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

This verse provides comprehensive explanation for the forty-year wilderness period. The Hebrew tammu (תָּמּוּ, "were consumed") means finished, completed, or exhausted—the entire condemned generation died. The cause was explicit: "they obeyed not the voice of the LORD" (lo shamu beqol YHWH, לֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה). Disobedience brought death; obedience brings life—a principle woven throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

The phrase "unto whom the LORD sware" (asher nishba YHWH lahem, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לָהֶם) indicates a divine oath of judgment—just as God swore to give the land, He swore the disobedient would not see it. Divine oaths guarantee both promise and warning. The contrast is poignant: "the land which the LORD sware unto their

fathers that he would give us"—the same land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would go to the children, not the parents.

The description "land that floweth with milk and honey" (eretz zavat chalav udvash, אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבַשׁ) depicts abundant fertility and blessing. This phrase appears throughout the Pentateuch, symbolizing covenant blessing. The tragedy is that those who came closest—having left Egypt, witnessed miracles, received the Law—forfeited blessing through unbelief. This warns that proximity to truth doesn't guarantee salvation; only faith appropriates promise. From a Reformed perspective, this demonstrates the distinction between external covenant membership and internal regeneration—many within the visible church lack saving faith.

Historical Context

The forty-year period (approximately 1446-1406 BCE, traditional dating) was not arbitrary but precisely calibrated to divine justice. Numbers 14:34 explicitly states: "After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years." This proportional judgment—one year per day of faithless spying—demonstrates God's precise justice.

Archaeologically, evidence of significant Israelite presence during this period appears mainly in Kadesh-barnea and the Transjordan region rather than the central Sinai. This aligns with the biblical narrative that they wandered primarily in the southern and eastern regions, not through the barren central Sinai mountains. The generation that died in the wilderness left no permanent settlements—a fitting memorial to their transience and forfeited inheritance.

The phrase "land flowing with milk and honey" reflected Canaanite agricultural richness. Archaeological excavations confirm that Late Bronze Age Canaan supported mixed agriculture (grain, grapes, olives) and animal husbandry (sheep, goats, cattle). The coastal plains and hill country terraces provided diverse ecological niches for productive farming. Honey likely refers to date or grape syrup rather than bee honey, as both were common sweeteners. The description

contrasted sharply with the wilderness' austerity, making the forfeited blessing all the more tragic.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between God's oath to give the land and His oath to withhold it demonstrate that divine promises and warnings are equally certain?
2. What does this passage teach about the relationship between disobedience and forfeiting blessing, even when blessing has been promised?
3. How does the wilderness generation's failure warn against presuming that exposure to spiritual truth guarantees salvation?
4. In what ways might you be like the wilderness generation—hearing God's promises but failing to enter through unbelief?
5. How does Hebrews 4:1-11's application of Canaan rest to Christian salvation help us understand that earthly Canaan prefigured heavenly rest?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| יִשְׂרָאֵל | בְּנֵי | הָלַכְוּ | שָׁנָה | אַרְבָּעִים | כִּי |
| H3478 | H1121 | H1980 | H8141 | H705 | H3588 |
| of Israel | For the children | walked | years | forty | |
| אֲנִשׁ־י | הַגֹּיִם | כָּל | תִּנְחָמוּ | עַד | בַּמִּדְבָּר |
| H376 | H1471 | H3605 | H8552 | H5704 | H4057 |
| the people | till all the | consumed | were | in the wilderness | |
| שָׁמַעְוּ | לֹא | אֲשֶׁר | מִמִּצְרַיִם | הֵיצְאָה | הַמִּלְחָמָה |
| H8085 | H3808 | H834 | H4714 | H3318 | H4421 |
| because they obeyed | | of Egypt | which came out | of war | |
| לְבָלְתִּי | לָהֶם | יְהוָה | נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי | אֲשֶׁר | יְהוָה |
| H1115 | H0 | H3068 | H7650 | H834 | H3068 |
| that I | of the LORD | swore | of the LORD | not the voice | |
| יְהוָה | נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי | אֲשֶׁר | אֶת | הָאֲדָמָה | הַזֹּאת |
| H3068 | H7650 | H834 | H776 | H853 | H7200 |
| of the LORD | swore | them the land | that he would not shew | | |
| חֶלֶב | זָבַת | אֶת | לָתֵת | לְאֲבוֹתָם | |
| H2461 | H2100 | H776 | H0 | H1 | |
| with milk | that floweth | them the land | that he would give | unto their fathers | |
| וְדָבָשׁ: | | | | | |
| H1706 | | | | | |
| and honey | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 14:23 (Parallel theme): Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

Deuteronomy 2:14 (References Lord): And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight

years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD swore unto them.

Hebrews 3:11 (Parallel theme): So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

Deuteronomy 2:7 (References Lord): For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.

Deuteronomy 1:3 (References Lord): And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them;

Exodus 3:8 (References Egypt): And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Jeremiah 2:2 (References Lord): Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

Deuteronomy 8:4 (Parallel theme): Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

Ezekiel 20:15 (Parallel theme): Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands;