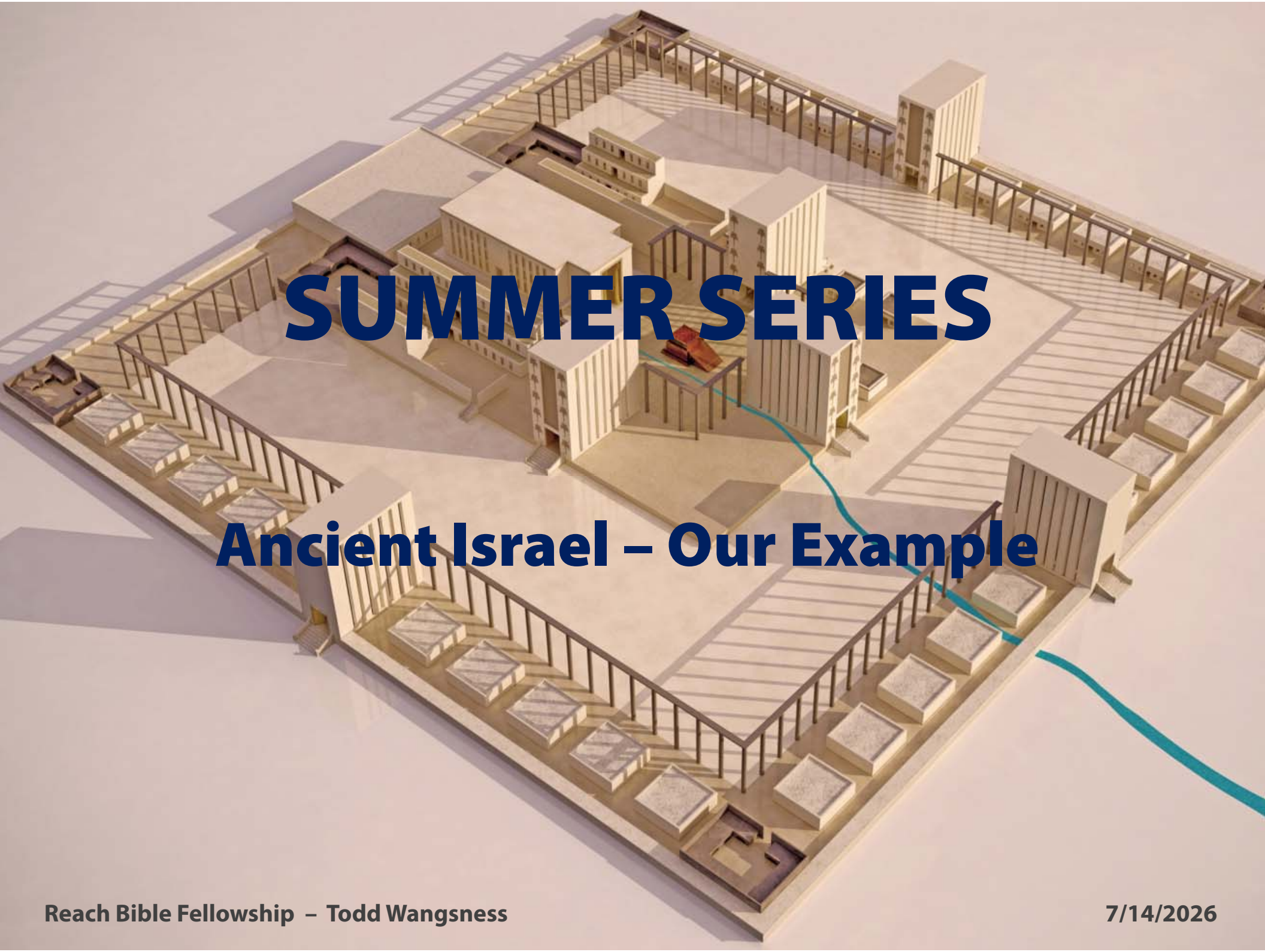


SUMMER SERIES

Ancient Israel – Our Example

Summer Series: Ancient Israel – Our Example

INTRODUCTION

In the unfolding drama of redemption, God called ancient Israel to be a holy nation set apart for His purposes. He commanded them to decisively remove idolatry from their midst and to enter the rest He had promised in the land.

These directives were not merely historical or national; they stand as profound types and shadows pointing forward to the spiritual realities of the New Covenant. The New Testament believer's walk with Christ is richly illuminated by Israel's journey.

Just as Israel was called to purge every threat of idolatry with unflinching obedience and to cease from their own labors by trusting in God's provision, so the follower of Jesus is summoned to a deeper, inward fulfillment of these commands.

Through the finished work of Christ, the true Sabbath Rest, we are called to mortify the deeds of the flesh and to enter the spiritual rest that God has provided.

In this sacred parallel, the experiences of ancient Israel become a mirror and a map for the Christian life, revealing both the gravity of sin and the surpassing beauty of grace.

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"'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.' The apostle doth not say, 'Mortify your sins,' but 'your members which are upon the earth'. Indwelling sin is compared to a person, a living person, called 'the old man,' with his faculties and properties, his wisdom, craft, subtlety, and strength. This, says the apostle, must be killed, put to death, mortified, that is, have its power, life, vigor, taken away by the Spirit.

This is that which the Israelites were commanded to do with the Canaanites; they were not to make a league with them, nor to spare any of them, but to 'utterly destroy them'. So must it be with our lusts; they are the Canaanites that must be destroyed; not one of them must be spared alive. Be about killing sin or it will be killing you.

'The promise of entering into God's rest still stands. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience [as Israel].' The rest promised to the ancients was an outward, typical rest in Canaan. But the rest promised to us is spiritual and heavenly. They failed through unbelief and disobedience. Let us fear the same. True mortification and true rest are joined together. He who is most diligent in mortifying sin is the one who most fully enters into rest; for in mortifying sin, he ceases from his own works and rests in the finished work of Christ."

- **John Owen**

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Israel as a Type and Example

1 Cor 10:1-11

1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

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- The New Testament clearly establishes a symbolic relationship between the Believer's Christian walk and the ancient Israelites' journey from Egypt into the Promised Land
  - Israel's physical journey, deliverances, provisions (manna, water from the rock), and repeated failures (lusting, idolatry, sexual immorality, grumbling) are typological pictures of the New Covenant believer's spiritual journey
- The New Testament believer is called to be a "spiritual Israel" … a people set apart by God … who must wage holy war against internal idolatry and fleshly lusts in the same way ancient Israel was commanded to deal with external idolatry, false prophets, and Canaanite corruption in the land
  - *1 Cor 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*
- Typologies:
  - **Egypt:** The world and former life of bondage to sin
  - **Red Sea/Baptism:** Deliverance and identification with Christ's death and resurrection
  - **Wilderness:** The present age where we walk by faith, facing tests
  - **Promised Land:** The fullness of inheritance in Christ (rest, victory, fruitfulness)

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External Judgment → Internal Mortification

- **In ancient Israel, idolatry and its promoters were dealt with ruthlessly because they threatened the covenant community's existence and purity (false prophets and entire cities seduced into idolatry were to be put to the sword)**
  - ***Deu 13:15-16 'Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods" … if such an abomination was committed among you, 15 You shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword. 16 And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for the LORD your God.***

- **Likewise, in the New Testament, this principle is internalized and radicalized**
  - ***Col 3:5-6 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them***

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- The same word for "put to death" (Greek *nekroō*) echoes the Old Testament's capital punishment language
- What Israel did to external threats and corrupt influences in the land, the believer must now do to the fleshly members within himself … the internal "Canaanites" of lust, greed, anger, and idolatry
- The old covenant dealt with the symptom (external acts and external tempters) with the sword
    - The new covenant, through the cross and the indwelling Spirit, deals with the root (the heart and the "old man") with the cross (*ref Rom 6:6, 8:13; Gal 5:24*)

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Shadows vs. Substance

- **The physical, national, and ceremonial aspects of Old Testament Israel serve as shadows, while the substance and reality are found in Christ and the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the church and individual believers**
  - ***Col 2:16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.***
- **The ceremonial aspects of Israel (food laws, Sabbaths, new moons, festivals, clean/unclean distinctions) were shadows cast by the coming reality of Christ**
  - **Our Territory: The land of Israel was a shadow of the believer's new "territory" … the heart and life yielded to the Holy Spirit**
  - **Our Conquest: The conquest of Canaan (driving out enemies) shadows the believer's conquest of the flesh and its deeds**
  - **Our Purity: The purity laws shadow the call to inward holiness**
  - **Our Redemption: The sacrifices and priesthood find fulfillment in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice and our access as a royal priesthood**

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- **Thus, the command to "put to death" the deeds of the body (*ref Rom 8:13; Col 3:5*) is the New Covenant version of Israel's holy war**

- **Instead of taking up physical swords against external nations or false prophets, we take up the cross and the sword of the Spirit against the world, the flesh, and the devil operating within and around us**

- **The call is not less severe than Israel's … it is more profound**
  - **We do not stone the adulterer or the idolater outside us**
  - **We execute the adulterous and idolatrous desires inside us so that Christ may be all in all**

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Symbolic Framework	
Old Testament Israel [Shadow]	**New Testament Believer** [Substance in Christ]
Physical nation in the land	Spiritual people … the believer in Christ
External idolatry and false prophets	Internal heart-idolatry and lusts of the flesh
Put false prophets/cities to the sword (Deu 13)	Mortify the members of the earthly body (Col 3:5)
Drive out Canaanites / possess the land	Mortify the deeds of the body by the Spirit (Rom 8:13)
Ceremonial purity, Sabbaths, foods	Reality of union with Christ, rest in Him, freedom in the Spirit
External circumcision	Circumcision of the heart (Col 2:11)

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Gathering Firewood on the Sabbath

- ***Num 15:32-36 Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. 33 And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation … 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." 36 So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.***

- **The incident in Numbers 15 is one of the starkest examples of Sabbath violation in the Old Testament**
  - **Symbolically, it serves as a powerful warning and illustration for New Testament believers regarding the nature of rest in Christ**
  - **Firewood represented human effort to provide for oneself (warmth, cooking, survival)**
  - **Doing this on the Sabbath meant he was refusing to rest in God's previous provision (manna had already been given; God had promised to supply their needs)**

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- **Symbolically, this pictures the New Testament believer who refuses to rest in Christ alone and instead tries to add his own works, self-effort, or religious performance to the finished work of the cross**
  - **It is the mindset of legalism: "Christ's work is good, but I still need to gather my own 'sticks' (good deeds, rule-keeping, spiritual striving) to be acceptable to God"**
  - **It is the danger of self-righteousness or mixture: Trying to mix grace with works for justification or sanctification**
  - **It violates the very heart of the New Covenant Sabbath: Ceasing from dead works (*ref Heb 6:1; 9:14*)**
- **This ties beautifully into the broader symbolism we discussed earlier: Just as Israel was to purge external threats to covenant purity, the New Testament believer must "put to death" every internal impulse to gather his own "sticks" … every form of self-reliance that undermines rest in Christ**
- **In short: The man gathering sticks on the Sabbath is a sobering picture of the believer who refuses to fully rest in Christ's completed work and instead keeps laboring in his own strength**
- **The call of the New Covenant is clear: Stop gathering sticks! Enter His rest!**

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The Promise of Rest Still Stands – Hebrews 4

- **The author of Hebrews takes Psalm 95:7-11 (which refers back to Israel's failure in the wilderness) and applies it to New Testament believers**
  - ***Heb 4:1-2 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.***

- **God's rest is not a day (the weekly Sabbath), a place (the land of Canaan), or even a future millennial kingdom**
  - **It is first and foremost a spiritual reality found in a Person … the Lord Jesus Christ**

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1. Rest from Our Own Works

- ***Heb 4:9-10 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.***

- **This is the heart of it ... just as God completed His creation work and then rested on the seventh day, we are invited to cease from our own labor to earn, merit, or maintain righteousness**
  - **The "works" here are not good deeds done from rest, but dead works of self-effort, legalism, and self-justification**
  - **This directly contrasts with the man gathering sticks in Numbers 15**
  - **He refused to rest in God's provision and kept working on the Sabbath**
  - **Many believers do the same spiritually … they keep "gathering sticks" (striving, performing, adding rules, trying to be good enough) instead of resting in the finished work of Christ (*"It is finished" John 19:30*).**

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2. A Present Reality, Not Just Future

- ***Heb 4:3 For we who have believed do enter that rest***

- **The rest is something we can enter now ... it is not reserved only for heaven or the millennial kingdom**
- **When we truly believe the Gospel, we enter God's rest:**
  - **Rest from the guilt of sin (*Justification*)**
  - **Rest from the power of sin (*progressive Sanctification by the Spirit*)**
  - **Rest from anxious striving to please God through performance**

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3. A Warning Against Unbelief and Disobedience

- ***Heb 4:2, 6, 11 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. 6 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience … 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.***

- **The Israelites heard the good news (the promise of the land) but it did them no good because they did not combine it with faith**
  - **They hardened their hearts and tested God**
- **The author applies this solemnly to the church … it is possible to profess faith, attend church, and still fail to enter rest because of unbelief (doubting God's promises) or disobedience (refusing to stop sinning or ceasing from self-works)**
- **The "striving" is not fleshly effort … it is the fight against unbelief and self-reliance**
  - **It is the daily choice to lay down our "sticks" and trust Christ**

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4. The Word of God Exposes Our Need

- ***Heb 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.***

- **Immediately after talking about rest, the author highlights the piercing power of God's Word. Why?**
  - **Because self-deception is easy**
  - **We can convince ourselves we're resting in Christ while secretly relying on our own efforts, gifts, or reputation**
  - **The living Word discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart and calls us back to genuine rest**

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5. Connection to Our Great High Priest

- ***Heb 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***

- **The chapter ends by pointing us to Jesus, our sympathetic High Priest who has passed through the heavens**
- **Because He successfully entered rest (having completed His redemptive work), we can come boldly to the throne of grace for mercy and help in our time of need**

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6. Practical Implications for the Believer

- Rest is relational, not merely behavioral
  - It is abiding in Christ (John 15), not just attending services or following rules
- True rest produces fruit
  - Those who rest in Christ are not passive or lazy … they become the most fruitful because their work flows from dependence rather than striving (*ref Mat 11:28-30*)
- Ongoing mortification flows from rest
  - This ties back to Colossians 3:5. We are best able to "put to death" the deeds of the flesh when we are resting in Christ's finished work and His power, not our own willpower
- Warning against modern "stick-gathering"
  - Legalism, performance-based Christianity, burnout from religious activity, and mixing grace with works are all contemporary versions of gathering firewood on the Sabbath
- Hebrews 4 presents the rest we have in Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath
- It is a present spiritual reality we enter by faith, where we cease trusting in ourselves and fully rely on Christ's completed work
- The tragedy of the wood-gatherer in Numbers 15 becomes our cautionary tale: Do not keep working when God has invited you to rest in what He has already accomplished

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- ***2 Cor 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.***

- ***Rom 6:6-11 Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The typology of Israel's calling to slay idolaters and enter God's rest finds its ultimate fulfillment not in external conquest or a weekly observance, but in the transformed heart of the New Testament believer.

What Israel was commanded to do outwardly with the sword, cutting off every form of idolatry, the believer is now called to do inwardly by the power of the Holy Spirit, putting to death sexual immorality, greed, and every form of heart-idolatry.

Likewise, the physical Sabbath and the promised land pointed forward to the profound rest found in Christ, where we cease from self-justifying works and rest confidently in His finished labor on the cross. May we, therefore, heed the examples written for our instruction.

Let us rigorously mortify the flesh while joyfully entering the rest that remains for the people of God. In doing so, we honor the same holy God who spoke to Israel at Sinai and who now speaks to us through His Son, the true Israel, our Sabbath, and our Inheritance.