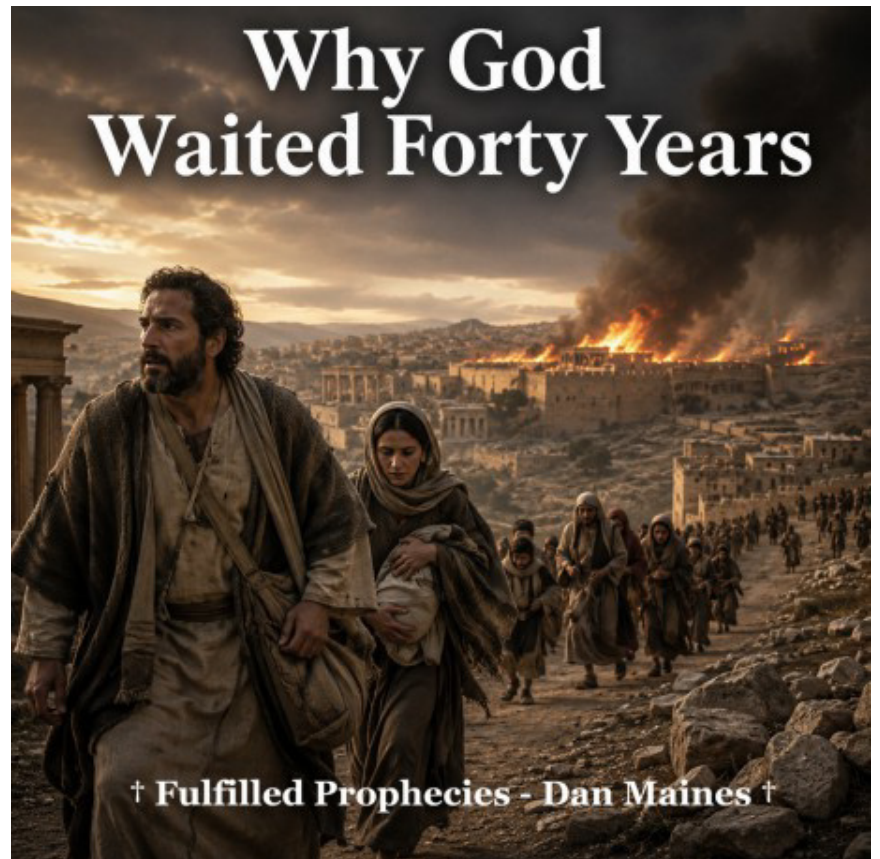


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Covenant - Why God Waited Forty Years



By Dan Maines

Why God Waited Forty Years

Introduction

† One of the most overlooked questions in Scripture is why God waited about forty years after the cross before Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. If Israel rejected and crucified the Messiah, why wasn't judgment immediate? The answer is found in a biblical pattern that began long before the first century.

† God had already established a forty-year period of testing, patience, and covenant transition in Israel's history. The generation that rejected Him in the wilderness wandered for forty years before judgment finally came. The generation that rejected Christ followed the very same pattern.

† The cross secured the victory, but God gave that generation one final period of mercy, calling them to repentance before the covenant judgment of AD 70.

Numbers 14:33-34

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.

† God established a forty-year judgment pattern after Israel rejected His promise in the wilderness. (Deuteronomy 8:2; Psalm 95:8-11)

† That unbelieving generation was given time before the sentence reached its completion.

† The first-century generation repeated the same unbelief, rejecting the greater Joshua, Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 2:14

Now the time that it took for us to come from Kadesh-barnea until we crossed over the Wadi Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war perished from within the camp, just as

the Lord had sworn to them.

† This confirms the wilderness judgment lasted until the entire unbelieving generation had passed away. (Numbers 14:33-34)

† God did not shorten the period or extend it beyond what He had declared.

† Jesus likewise allowed the first-century generation to run its full course before judgment fell. (Matthew 24:34)

Matthew 23:37-38

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 announced that the temple had been abandoned by God long before it was physically destroyed. (Matthew 21:43)

† The words "your house" reveal that it was no longer God's house.

† The verdict had already been declared, but the execution of judgment would come later.

Matthew 24:34

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

† Jesus put a time limit on every prophecy He had just spoken.

† The same generation that rejected Him would live to see Jerusalem's destruction. (Luke 21:20-22)

† Forty years later, exactly as Jesus said, that generation came to its end.

Luke 13:6-9

And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Look! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, leave it alone for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

† God's character is patient, even when judgment has already been determined. (2 Peter 3:9)

† Israel was given every opportunity to repent through Christ, the apostles, and the early church.

† When the nation remained fruitless, the judgment Jesus predicted finally arrived.

Acts 2:40

And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on urging them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

† Peter wasn't warning them about the end of the physical world.

† He was warning that very generation to escape the coming covenant judgment.

† Thousands responded, but the nation as a whole continued in unbelief. (Acts 3:19-26)

Acts 3:22-23

Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your countrymen; to Him you shall listen regarding everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

† Peter warned Israel that rejecting Christ would bring covenant judgment.

† The destruction would be from among the covenant people, not from the physical planet.

† This warning was still being extended during the forty-year period of mercy. (Acts 2:40)

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.

† Hebrews was written during the forty-year transition between the cross and AD 70.

† The Old Covenant was still standing outwardly, but it had already become obsolete.

† God was allowing time for the New Covenant to be fully established before removing the old covenant order forever.

Hebrews 10:37

For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

† The writer expected the fulfillment to occur very soon.

† This fits perfectly within the closing years before AD 70.

† The Old Covenant was about to disappear exactly as Hebrews declared. (Hebrews 8:13)

Luke 21:20-22

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.

† Jesus identified the destruction of Jerusalem as the fulfillment of everything written concerning that covenant judgment.

† The forty-year period ended exactly as the wilderness period had ended, with judgment falling upon the unbelieving generation.

† God's patience did not cancel His judgment, it delayed it until His appointed time.

Matthew 24:14

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

† God did not bring covenant judgment until the gospel had first been proclaimed throughout the Roman world. (Colossians 1:6, 23)

† The forty years provided time for the apostles to carry the gospel to Israel and the nations.

† Judgment followed only after God's witness had gone forth.

Historical References

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6, Chapters 3-5, records the horrific destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, confirming the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, records that Christians remembered Jesus' warning and fled Jerusalem before the

city's destruction.

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 4, Chapter 26, speaks of God's long-suffering before bringing judgment upon the disobedient.

How It Applies To Us Today

† God's patience should never be mistaken for approval of sin.

† God's promises and judgments always arrive exactly when He has determined.

† We live under the completed New Covenant where God's dwelling is with His people, not in temples made with hands.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why didn't God destroy Jerusalem immediately after the crucifixion?

A: Because He followed the same forty-year pattern He established in the wilderness, giving that generation time to repent before covenant judgment came. (Numbers 14:33-34; Acts 2:40; Hebrews 8:13)

Q: Why forty years?

A: Forty years represented a complete period of testing and probation in Israel's history. The first wilderness generation failed after forty years, and the generation that rejected Christ did the same. (Numbers 14:33-34; Psalm 95:8-11)

Q: What happened during those forty years?

A: The gospel was preached throughout Israel, the New Covenant was established, and believers were called out before Jerusalem's destruction. (Acts 2:40; Acts 3:19-26; Hebrews 8:13)

Q: Does this prove AD 70 was part of God's covenant plan?

A: Yes. Jesus foretold Jerusalem's destruction as the days of vengeance in which all things written would be fulfilled. (Luke 21:20-22; Matthew 23:37-38)

Q: Why did God wait forty years instead of judging Jerusalem immediately?

A: Because God's pattern had already been established in Israel's history. The wilderness generation received forty years before judgment was complete, and the generation that rejected Christ received the same covenant period of testing, mercy, and warning before Jerusalem fell in AD 70. (Numbers 14:33-34; Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies. †

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Source Index

† Numbers 14:33-34, Deuteronomy 2:14, Matthew 23:37-38, Luke 13:6-9, Acts 2:40, Acts 3:22-23, Hebrews 8:13, Hebrews 10:37,

Matthew 24:14, Matthew 24:34, Luke 21:20-22

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6, Chapters 3-5, Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 4, Chapter 26

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