

Sunday July 29th 2007
The Land and the Rain – Part Four
‘Thorns and Briars’

1). Heb 6:7 *For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*

a). As we revisit our foundational scripture here in Hebrews for the last time in this series, let us once again remember that this metaphor of the land and the rain works on several levels.

b). The land that ‘drinks in the rain that often comes upon it’ is a picture of the Christian who receives the word of the Kingdom – and I would refer you back to last week’s message to see more foundation in respect of this.

c). And the land is also, determined by what it produces, connected with either the land of our calling or the land of our birth.

d). Just as in the Parable of the Sower, where the classification of the ground in which the Christian finds himself - by the wayside, stony places, amongst thorns and thistles, good ground – is determined by the individual's response to the Word of the Kingdom – so in Hebrews our response to that same word will align us with our heavenly calling or this world.

2). As we go back into Genesis it is interesting to note this - Ge 3:17 ¶ *Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return."*

a). And here in foundation we have the very type for our Christian experience.

b). We are born dead in trespasses and sins and all that is associated with our first birth brings forth thorns and thistles as this ground is rejected by God.

c). Yet, in the midst of this, we are to eat the herb of the field and in the sweat of our face we are to eat bread.

d). And all this involves toil on our part. The land must be cultivated, the weeds kept at bay, the seed planted and nurtured.

e). This would undoubtedly speak of the constant conflict we encounter between the flesh, the thorns and thistles, and the spirit, the herbs of the field, and the striving we must do to be fruitful and eat bread – Lu 13:24 *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able."*

f). Ac 24:16 *"This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men."*

g). Php 3:14 *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

3). Sin then has resulted in a curse, not only on the material creation, but also on that to which the material creation points – our sin nature, our old man, our first birth.

a). Everything connected to this first birth is unfruitful with regards to our inheritance and can only produce thorns and thistles exactly as God said in Genesis 3.

b). Only that coming from our new birth – walking in the Spirit – is able to produce fruit – the herbs of the field – and this requires consistent, continual, hard work.

4). And working hard to produce fruit to gain access to our heavenly calling is essential for us to understand because of what scripture teaches about the ultimate destination of the material creation - 2Pe 3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 ¶ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,*

a). Here we see the Day of the Lord, the 7th Day, the Millennial Kingdom, coming suddenly and without warning – coming with shock and horror to those who are not prepared for it, just as a thief who breaks in in the middle of the night.

b). And then, at the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom, we see the earth, the material creation, and the works that are in it, being burned up.

c). The Holy Spirit, through Peter, then asks the question *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,*

d). And the reason for the question is this – if the material creation, presently under a curse is to be burned up, and exactly the same fate awaits that to which the material creation points – our first birth, the works of the flesh – then what should we be doing to escape that?

e). And this of course is exactly what we have read in our Hebrews 6 scripture – the cultivation of the land to produce herbs, holy conduct and godliness, receives blessing – thorns and briars are to be burned.

5). Now if we go back to the Parable of the Sower for a moment we will remember that it is those described as being sown in good ground who alone produce fruit - Mt 13:23 *"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."*

a). So our scripture in Hebrews 6 has to be dealing with the possible consequences for this group – for those who are producing fruit – as contextually we are looking at those who come into a mature knowledge of the truth and then choose to turn away from that truth. We have looked at this scripture before, but let's visit it again - Heb 6:1 ¶ *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*

b). And here we see the call to go on to perfection, to achieve our goal, moving on to maturity by building on the elementary principles of Christ, which we will do if God permits.

c). We then see that if anyone comes into a mature understanding of things surrounding the coming Kingdom of Christ and then 'falls away' from that truth – 'falls away' = apostatize = to step away from – they cannot be renewed again to repentance.

6). This is the same thought that we see again in - Heb 10:26 *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three*

witnesses. 29 *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

a). As we compare our two scriptures we would conclude that ‘falling away’ – to apostatize – would be the same thing as sinning willfully.

b). Then in our Hebrews 10 scripture we have the added detail of a *certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries* for those who fall away.

c). And this fiery judgment that will result in worse punishment for Christians found unworthy at the Judgment Seat is consistent throughout scripture in relation to entrance into or exclusion from the Millennial Kingdom.

i/ Mt 13:30 *'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"*

ii/ Mt 13:40 *"Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.*

iii/ Mt 13:49 *"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, 50 "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."*

iv/ Joh 15:6 *"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*

v/ 1Co 3:15 *If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

7). Now as we begin to unravel this willful sin that is expressed in apostasy, that causes us to produce thorns and briars whose end is to be burned, let us remind ourselves of something concerning sin - Heb 3:12 *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.*

a). Sin and unbelief are one and the same – they cause us to depart from the living God – apostatize – and sin is deceitful.

b). Sin can deceive us, and the deception is always with regard to one thing - Ge 3:1 ¶ *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the*

field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said,

c). To cause us to choose our own course of action over the word of God.

8). We can see this in relation to the works of the flesh - Ga 5:18 *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

a). Our scripture is very clear – any Christian who practices the works of the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom of God – the Millennial Kingdom.

b). Practice = Greek word – *prasso* = to perform repeatedly

c). Now we can see that we are dealing here with lifestyle.

d). And it is easy for us to see that the practice of these sins as lifestyle will of necessity mean we have departed from the living God by simply looking at - Ro 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

e). The only way we are able to renew our minds is through the word of God. So if we remain conformed to this world, practicing the works of the flesh, we have automatically turned away from the word and therefore from God Himself, who is the word that was made flesh. And the deception that brings this about is exactly the same – ‘has God indeed said’.

9). Please note at this point that the willful sin, apostasy and practicing the works of the flesh are not things we can accidentally fall into. A lapse into sin, even if it happens often, is not what this is about – God has made provision through Christ’s present High Priestly ministry to deal with that – no, we are dealing with a mindset that says, ‘I am committing adultery, I enjoy committing adultery, I don’t see anything wrong with committing adultery, irrespective of what scripture says’.

a). We may struggle with the same sin all our Christian life, but the key is the struggle. It is the calloused knees, the gritted teeth, the white knuckles as we wrestle to overcome, as we strive to enter by the narrow gate, rather than a passive capitulation to the inevitable.

10). The example of the works of the flesh is a very obvious one, and it is possible for us to deceive ourselves into thinking we are OK, because we can check off those sins and say, 'I don't do that'.

- a). But sin can be more subtle in its deceptive work within us.
- b). And it is this I would like us to look at as we continue.

10). To set the stage, so to speak, let's draw on some OT examples.

a). Firstly Esau - Ge 25:32 *And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?"* 33 *Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.* 34 *And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

i/ Simply, Esau was hungry, Jacob had a pot of stew, and Esau was willing to give up his birthright to make his life easier. And what does the last sentence of our scripture say?

ii/ As part of our process towards maturity we need to make sure that we fully understand what our birthright is, and come into an understanding of how this is the greatest thing the God of the universe could offer to His creation. If we don't get that, it would be easy for us to consider it of only marginal value and therefore not be overly fussed about it. This will produce thorns and briars.

iii/ Once we understand the enormity of it we would pluck out our eye and cut off our hand to get it – not literally of course.

b). Secondly we have Lot, who became so embroiled with the affairs of this world that he couldn't hear and therefore wouldn't receive the warning he was given - Ge 19:17 *So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountain, lest you be destroyed."* 18 *Then Lot said to them, "Please, no, my lords!* 19 *"Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil overtake me and I die.*

i/ To escape to the mountain would have required Lot to die, to die to self, and this he wouldn't do, considering it to be an evil that would overtake him. Sin prevented him from hearing properly resulting in his rejection of God's warning. This is producing thorns and briars.

c). If we become so comfortable with sin, it will prevent us from hearing what God says we are to do about it – here is deception.

d). Next we have Saul - 1Sa 15:20 *And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the*

LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 "But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." 22 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

i/ Saul had been given instructions by God to destroy Amalek and everything that was his, but he didn't do so, keeping back the best of the animals to sacrifice to the Lord, deceiving himself into believing that God would be pleased with the sacrifices.

ii/ But God, through Samuel makes clear - *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*

iii/ We can deceive ourselves into believing that what we do for God – our sacrifices – is more important to God than our obedience. We see it as some kind of a trade off – if I do this for Him then He will reciprocate by overlooking that for me – this produces thorns and briars because we do not take God seriously when He said we must put to death the deeds of the flesh – destroy everything connected with Amalek.

e). And our last example, not surprisingly – Israel at Kadesh Barnea Nu 13:31 *But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." 32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. 33 "There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."*

i/ In essence, from Israel's perspective, the enormity of conquering the land was too great a challenge. It was going to be too hard and too difficult – they were focused on the giants and their own inadequacy and not on the God who had delivered the giants into their hands. This produced thorns and briars and the whole generation 20 years old and above, except Caleb and Joshua died in the wilderness short of their inheritance.

ii/ Now from our perspective God has told us everything we need to know about the land of our calling, the kingdom of the heavens and what is expected of us to gain our inheritance there.

iii/ Then as we look at what God requires of us – faithful obedience to His word in every aspect of our lives - we see giants and walled cities, we see the extent of the life change we have to make and declare, just like the 10 spies, ‘I can’t do this – it’s impossible’ – and here is the lie, here is the deception – we believe that the word that describes our failure to be obedient is ‘can’t’, removing the responsibility from us, rather than ‘won’t’, which is what it really is, which would require us to accept all the responsibility.

iv/ Do we realize that in taking such a stance as, ‘I can’t’, we are denying the voracity of the Word of God to transform us, we are professing the inadequacy of the blood of God on the Mercy Seat on our behalf and denying the power of God to deliver us from the hand of our enemy?

v/ This can only produce thorns and briars resulting in the loss of our inheritance. This is willful sin because we deliberately choose to refuse to believe and act in faith upon that which God has said. We turn away from the truth.

11). To go to a concrete example, let’s just return to where Dan Colley was a few weeks ago, the role of the husband and wife. And I make no apologies for going to this example again, as that which the marriage relationship pictures is the most significant truth we will ever find, and destroying this picture, through the destruction of marriages within the church universal is at the forefront of our enemy’s onslaught.

12). Now I am head of my wife by God’s command - Eph 5:23 *For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.*

a). This is neither conditional or negotiable – whether I like it or not, or want it or not, or do it or not, from God’s perspective as soon as I said, ‘I do’, I was the head.

b). And my choice to operate in that role is not dependant on Ann, it’s dependant on my obedience to the command of God. And I will be judged on that obedience alone – there are no extenuating circumstances.

c). My obedience is not conditioned on Ann’s compliance, but the seriousness with which I perceive my heavenly birthright, taking seriously God’s warnings for not doing so.

d). If Ann were the most exacting, difficult, overpowering, vocally critical harridan on the face of the earth, that must not affect my obedience

to the role God has given me. Now it may be incredibly difficult, but that is not the issue.

e). If this were the situation and I was to use Ann as the excuse for not being obedient to God's command for me to be the head, this would be no different from Saul blaming his people for his not destroying all that was Amalek's – and we saw what God's opinion on that was.

f). Or I might look at our 27 years of marriage and say, 'well I never have been the head, according to scripture, it's too late to start now.' After all, you can't teach an old dog new tricks, right? Hogwash – that is the wisdom of the world not the wisdom of God.

g). It makes no matter whether we are 9 or 90 or how long we have been doing something contrary to scripture, once we know the truth we are obligated to put it right. If we won't do that we place ourselves in rebellion against God – this is thorns and briars and there is no inheritance at the end of this.

h). And of course, the principle here, applies to every aspect of our lives.

13). Please remember this - 1Co 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

a). Temptation – Greek word – *peirasmos* = putting to the proof, testing, discipline.

b). We are either going to believe what this scripture says or we must make God a liar.

14). If anyone of us has refused to deal with our giants the solution is simple confession of our sin and repentance – changing our mind about not doing it, and doing it. If we refuse to do that we shut the door on our inheritance. And once it is shut it won't open again.

15). And as we close out this series I would like to leave us with this encouragement – the same giants and walled cities faced the second generation of Israel out of Egypt, yet what did we see at Jericho as Joshua acts in faithful obedience to the command of the Lord? –

Jos 5:13 ¶ *And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" 14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the*

army of the LORD I have now come..... Jos 6:2 And the LORD said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.

16). And one final visit to Hebrews 6 - Heb 6:1 ¶ *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. 7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. 9 ¶ But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. 10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*