

The Use of the Wilderness Motif in the Bible: A Biblical Theology Approach

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Abstract

This paper explores the wilderness theme from creation, the fall, the redemption period, and the New Creation. The Bible refers to the wilderness as a physical place; in other contexts, the term denotes a spiritual meaning. The Old Testament portrays the physical wilderness as a place of suffering, testing, rebellion, and judgment for the children of Israel. At the same time, it depicts the wilderness as a place where God revealed his redemptive plan to humanity through a covenant at Mt. Sinai. Prophets like Isaiah use the wilderness as imagery to point to God's plan to restore the Israelites and to refer to God's future redemptive plan revealed in the New Testament through the coming of the foretold Messiah. The New Testament describes the wilderness as a place of preparation for God's service. It is where John the Baptist spent before his public ministry and where Jesus was tested. In John's vision, the final judgment (Rev 17:3) happens in the desert. Eventually, wilderness will be transformed into a flourishing land, fulfilling God's redemptive plan to restore all creation (Isa 32:15; 41:18). Believers will no longer encounter the harshness of the wilderness; instead, they will enter God's eternal rest.

Keywords: Wilderness Motif, Spiritual Wilderness, Biblical Theology, Theology of Wilderness

Introduction

Wilderness is a theme that runs from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is often characterized by the thirst, dryness, and hunger of wild animals and a place where the risk of death is real, and those who find themselves there depend on God's sustenance (Deut 8:2–6). Reflecting on Ezekiel 19:13, Leal interprets the wilderness as a place of chaos, evil, and desolation that signifies “the judgment, reconciliation, and salvation of God's people.”¹

¹ Robert B. Leal, “Negativity towards Wilderness in the Biblical Record,” *Ecotheology* 10, no. 3 (December 1, 2005): 373.



Gilmore argues that in the wilderness, one is isolated and lonely, which increases emotions of fear and danger. However, he points out that the wilderness imagery can also be viewed positively as a place of deliverance, restoration, and renewal. As a geographical location, wilderness is a place where the faith of God’s people are tested, as well as a place of divine provision.² It is a place of prayer and retreat where one encounters God and receives spiritual nourishment. It is a place for solitude and gives one some moments of silence, total dependence, and reliability on God.³

The word ‘wilderness’ occurs 245 times in the Old Testament, using different Hebrew names. The most used root word in Hebrew is *Midbār*, meaning an inhabited land or uncultivated land that is barren but for pasturing. *Midbār* also refers to a desert, a desolate place.⁴ Similarly, the Hebrew word *Araba* can also be rendered as desert. Wilderness can also refer to a solitary place (heb. *Yešimôn*).⁵ In the New Testament, wilderness is referred to by the Greek root word transliterated *erēmia* (a desert) or *erēmos* (a solitary place).⁶

In some cases, wilderness is where God reveals Himself to humanity. He established His covenant with the Israelites in the wilderness and gave them the Law. Through the wilderness encounters with God, the Israelites believed they were God’s elect.⁷ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, wilderness is viewed as a place that instills a person’s dependence on God and can signify a new beginning and reconciliation with God, as in Mt. Sinai. In addition, wilderness was a place of Jesus’s temptation and where he frequented for prayer.⁸ This study uses a biblical theology approach to examine the wilderness theme by considering its development from creation to New Creation.

Creation

In Genesis 1—2, no plants or herbs were growing in the field when God created the heavens and the earth. At this time, God had not sent “rain on the earth,” and there was no person to tilt the ground before Adam and Eve were created. It is stated that “a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground” (Gen 2:5–6, NKJV here and throughout the paper). Arguably, what is described at creation is a wilderness state since rain was absent and

² Alec Gilmore, “Wilderness in the Bible and the Wild Places of the Earth.,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 7, no. 1 (September 1, 2006): 46.

³ David Douglas, “A Way in the Wilderness: Men and the Environment,” *The Way* 38, no. 4 (Oct 1, 1998): 2.

⁴ James Strong, John R. Kohlenberger, and James A. Swanson, *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Larger Print Edition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 1410.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1401.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1500.

⁷ Robert Barry Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness*, Studies in Biblical Literature, v. 72 (New York: P. Lang, 2004), 52.

⁸ Douglas, “A Way in the Wilderness,” 342.



the land was not habitable, for there were no plants or even shrubs. However, when God created mist, the plants and the herbs were watered and grew, and the area they covered was no longer in chaos but a pleasant garden (Gen 2:9–10). However, when Adam and Eve sinned, the ground was cursed, and henceforth, we would have a physical wilderness because of sin. The earth was formless and void (Gen 1:2), so it was a wilderness and chaos that needed God’s intervention to bring about form and meaning. Hence, God transformed the void and the chaos through creation. Desmond argues that the Garden of Eden was “a place where divinity and humanity enjoyed each other’s presence,” thus, Adam and Eve interacted with God “face to face.” However, the fellowship with God was soon disrupted by the rebellion of Adam and Eve, and their actions affected all creation, subjecting it to futility.⁹

Wilderness as a Consequence of the Fall

When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost their open fellowship with God and were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:23). They experienced physical barrenness whereby they would have to toil and sweat for food. As a result, humanity lost the intimate communion with God and became alienated from God. The effects of sin not only affected humanity but also the whole creation. The corruption of humans “drew all creation down in ruins” even though the rest of creation had not participated in sin.¹⁰

According to Genesis 3: 17–18, the ground was cursed, and all humanity would have to toil to eat from it. God declared that the land would bring forth thorns and thistles. Later in Romans 8:20, it is stated that “creation was subjected to futility, not willingly,” and therefore, it “groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.” Thus, the geographical wilderness has harsh conditions because of sin. The wilderness became a place of suffering, testing, rebellion, and even chastening, as was evident in the prolonged journey of the Israelites, where they rebelled against God, and He responded by chastening them.¹¹ Wilderness is construed as a place under a curse, where security and order are absent, which makes it “a hateful place.”¹²

⁹ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 22.

¹⁰ Adeyemo et al., *Africa Bible Commentary*, 77.

¹¹ Wesley Nottingham, “An Old Testament Biblical Theology of Wilderness: From Simple Setting to Cosmic Context” 6, no. 1 (2022): 23.

¹² Leal, “Negativity towards Wilderness in the Biblical Record,” 370.



Wilderness as a Place of Danger and Wandering

Due to the fall, the wilderness became a place of danger and wandering for humanity.¹³ Genesis 4:12 depicts the story of Cain, who killed his brother Abel. As a result, Cain evoked a curse from God, which caused him to be a wanderer, and the ground would fail to yield crops for him. It points out a wilderness state of alienation from God and away from God's rest. Moreover, when Adam and Eve fell into sin, the human heart became sinful in nature. Due to sin, Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar, the Egyptian slave, until she fled to the wilderness, a harsh and dry land without water (Gen 16:7). However, in the wilderness she encountered God, who delivered her and her unborn son from death when He opened her eyes to see a well of water.¹⁴

Wilderness as a Place of Testing and Rebellion

When the Israelites had left Egypt and were in the wilderness, they feared life in the desert (Exod 14:12). This is evidenced by their faithlessness when they could not find water in the wilderness of Shur. Due to the sinful nature of the human heart, the Israelites forgot God's miracle of parting the Red Sea, and they complained against Moses (Exod 15:22–25). This showed a lack of trust in God. To test their faith, God turned the bitter water sweet.

However, this did not change their hearts, and when they encountered hunger in the wilderness of sin, they still complained against Moses (Exod 16). Complaining and murmuring was a sin that the Israelites kept committing while in the wilderness. God used the wilderness to test them and gauge the faithfulness of the Israelites towards Him. Again, the testing was also for God to ascertain His relationship with the Israelites so that "He might bless their faithfulness."¹⁵ Unfortunately, the Israelites failed the test in Exodus 17. While camping at Rephidim, they complained and grumbled against Moses because there was no water to drink. They put God to the test after encountering God's miracles and divine provision. This distressed Moses, and "he called the place Massah and Meribah" (Exod 17:7), for the Israelites quarreled against God and Moses at that place.

In the wilderness, Nadab and Abihu died because they offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded (Lev 10:1). In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron sinned against God by speaking against Moses. God was angry with the sin and struck Miriam with

¹³ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 52.

¹⁴ John T. Noble and John T. Noble, *A Place for Hagar's Son: Ishmael as a Case Study in the Priestly Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 17.

¹⁵ Nottingham, "An Old Testament Biblical Theology of Wilderness: From Simple Setting to Cosmic Context," 24.



leprosy. Throughout the Pentateuch, we find the rebellion of the Israelites that results in judgment.

While at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, the Israelites were at the edge of Canaan's land, and they only needed to obey God, their deliverer, to conquer the land. On the contrary, the chapter reveals their rebellion against God as their King, and they failed to trust that He would bring them into the land of promise. Since Israelites were God's elect, their unbelief and disobedience to God signified a rejection of God as their King, just as it happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve failed to obey God as their King. Just like the fall of Adam and Eve, the Israelites, too failed to submit to God as their King (Num 14:11).

Wilderness as a Place of Judgement and Suffering

God judged the Israelites for their unbelief and declared that all that rejected Him shall not enter His rest, "They certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it" for they tested God, "and have put me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded my voice," (Num 14:22). The effect of the sin was felt by those who were not guilty of unbelief. Joshua and Caleb, too, suffered the impact of God's wrath and, together with the rest, wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

Deuteronomy 6:16 states, "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah." Moses uses the events in the wilderness as an illustration. He chastens the Israelites so that they do not repeat the sins they committed in the wilderness, their rebellion against God, and their unfaithfulness. Deuteronomy 33:8, the Israelites repeat the sins that they committed and use them as an illustration of the way they tested God in the wilderness at Massah and Meribah, "Let Your Thummim and Your Urim be with Your holy one, Whom You tested at Massah, and with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah."¹⁶

The Bible recounts the wilderness account of how it became a place of disobedience and punishment in (Ps 78:18,40,56, 95:8; 1 Cor 10:9; Heb 3:7–11,15; 4:7) so that all those who believe in Yahweh learn from the Israelites that they do not test the Lord and walk in rebellion. The psalmist records, in Psalm 95:8, "Do not harden your hearts," as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, also in the Scriptures states in (1 Cor 10:9), "Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents."

Wilderness, in its basic sense, is a place. The fall resulted in the geographical wilderness becoming a place of harsh conditions. Judges 8:16 describes wilderness as a place

¹⁶ Kenneth E. Pomykala, ed., *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions: 10* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2008), 45.



full of thorns and briars, signifying pain and suffering. It is a place of hunger, thirst, and weariness (2 Sam 17:29). According to Job 12:24, it is a place of wandering. The books of the prophets in the Bible also use the word ‘Wilderness’ as a figure of speech. In most instances, it represents a place of chaos, evil, hostility, and wild animals that haunt humans, and it is attributed to destruction and punishment by God.

Wilderness is illustrated as an abhorrent place as Isaiah uses it to describe the literal destruction of Babylon and metaphorically to point out eschatologically the final judgment that will fall upon all that rebel against God. Wilderness is also a desolate and abandoned place inhabited only by wild animals (Isa 13:21), “but wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of owls.” Hosea suggests that his harlot wife might be made “like a wilderness” and stripped naked (Hos 2:3). He uses metaphor to show God’s wrath on the disobedient Israelites if they do not repent and turn to God. The wilderness that the Israelites wandered through after leaving Egypt is described as “a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death” in Jeremiah 2:6.

According to Zephaniah, Nineveh would become a desolation compared to the wilderness, where there is “Every beast of the nation” (Zeph 2:14–15). The harsh conditions of wilderness portrayed in all these instances are used to describe the worst punishment from God due to rebellion that prophets could imagine and warn God’s people.¹⁷

To highlight the predatory life and behavior of sinful humans, the author uses the animals of the wild: “Like wild donkeys in the desert, they go out to their work, searching for food. The wilderness yields food for them and for their children,” (Job 24:5). The wilderness is untamed, unruly, and unforgiving. (Lam 4:3), offers a parallel picture in which ostriches in the wild are connected to cruelty. Ezekiel symbolically associates wilderness with chaos, sin, and God’s judgment upon His people. Ezekiel 20:35, “And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, where I will plead My case face to face with you.” Thus, ‘wilderness’ is a theological image of judgment in this context, not just a geographical location.¹⁸

Wilderness Imagery and the Redemption Story

In Genesis 12:2, God made a covenant with Abraham that would bring blessings to the ends of the earth. God told Abraham (Gen 15:13–14) that his descendants would be “strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.”

¹⁷ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 372.

¹⁸ Leal, “Negativity towards Wilderness in the Biblical Record,” 372.



However, God promised to deliver them. Thus, wilderness is also portrayed positively as a place to meet and covenant with God (Exod 4:27; 19:1–6), a place of provision (Exod 16:32).

Wilderness as a Place of Divine Intervention and Covenant-Making

The story of Hagar foreshadows the events that Abraham’s descendants would go through in the wilderness by God’s leading: the scorching sun, thirst, the struggle to survive, the threats of the desert, and the divine intervention by God through self-revelation.¹⁹ God had promised to deliver and redeem them as His chosen people and fulfill His covenant with Abraham. However, God expected complete obedience from the Israelites and put away all forms of idolatry, for Yahweh would be their King and their only true God. That way, God would safely bring them to the promised land.

According to Exodus 23:20–22, God promises to send an angel to guide and protect them from their enemies, keep them on their way to Canaan, and lead them to the promised land. However, the promise is based on a condition that the Israelites obeyed Him and did not “provoke Him, for He will not pardon your [Israelites] transgressions; for My name is in Him” (Exod 23:21). They are assured of Yahweh’s presence in that angel with the name of the LORD in Him, verse 21. He was not just an ordinary angel but was Jehovah Himself, a foreshadowing of his physical appearance as Christ the Messiah. In the Wilderness of Sinai, God established a covenant with the Israelites.²⁰ Moses “told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments,” and the people committed to all the commandments (Exod 24:3). So, “Moses wrote all the words of the LORD” (Exod 24:4). Thus, the wilderness can also be viewed as a place where the Israelites accepted and entered into a “covenant relationship with God and pronounced as God’s chosen people.”²¹

In the wilderness of Sinai, God established a covenant with the Israelites in His plan to redeem His people. It was significant for covenant-making because it was a place of separation from Egypt and other nations. Whereby God entered a covenant with the Israelites to be their King and gave them a law to follow, which is the Ten Commandments (Exod 19–20). Moses “built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel” (Exod 24:4). On it, he sacrificed to YAHWEH, burnt a peace offering; he “took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar,”

¹⁹ Pomykala, *Israel in the Wilderness*, 43.

²⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Bible History, Old Testament - the Exodus and the Wanderings in the Wilderness* (Createspace Independent, 2015), 119.

²¹ Nottingham, “An Old Testament Biblical Theology of Wilderness: From Simple Setting to Cosmic Context,” 21.



which signified that they were reconciled with God. Then Moses read from the “Book of the Covenant,” and the Israelites promised to obey and do everything written in it.

Then Moses sprinkled the blood, which had been used as a means of reconciliation with God, “and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words” (Exod 24:7–8).²² And now the sacrificial meal, the blood sprinkling ceremony, and the sacrifice itself in the wilderness were to usher in the covenant. Israel was elected as God’s people. It served as the basis for all subsequent acts of sacrificial worship. God gave them “the law and commandments” (Exod 24:12), established the Tabernacle, then the priesthood, and all its functions only after the covenant. Thus, this sacrifice served as a type of the one that Christ made for His church, which serves as the basis for our faith and access to God.²³ It represented wilderness as a place of covenant, and the blood foreshadowed God’s redemptive plan for humanity through Christ, who would offer himself as a sacrifice on the cross and shed His blood for all humankind. Thus initiating a new covenant.

Wilderness as a Place of Restoration

Even though God had chosen the Israelites as His elect and established a covenant with them, they failed to keep part of their promise to obey. Thus, God judged them. According to Numbers 21:4–20 in the Wilderness at Mount Hor, the Israelites complained and spoke against God and Moses, and God judged them for their sins, “So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many of the people of Israel died.”

When the people recognized that they had sinned against God, they asked Moses to pray to God to remove the serpents. God told Moses to “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole,” and whoever is bitten and “looks at it, shall live.” Moses did what God told him, and everyone bitten by the snakes would look at it and live (Num 21:7–9). The “bronze serpent” had no supernatural power; its purpose was to direct the hearts of the Israelites toward God. The repentance of the people, whereby one set their heart to Yahweh our Father in heaven, was symbolized by looking at the “bronze serpent.” Their healing occurred when they recognized that they had sinned and turned their hearts to “their Father in heaven” by looking up at the “bronze serpent.”²⁴

During the time of Hosea, the Israelites were unfaithful to their God. Hosea speaks of God’s judgment that would befall Israel. God would “punish her for the days of the Baals to

²² Edersheim, *The Bible History, Old Testament: The Exodus and the Wanderings in the Wilderness*, 119.

²³ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁴ Pomykala, *Israel in the Wilderness*, 75.



which she burned incense” (Hos 2:13). Even then, Hosea was still longing for that day when God “Will bring her [Israel] into the wilderness and speak comfort to her (Hos 2:14).” This wilderness imagery shows God’s plan to return Israel to a covenant relationship and restore her. Despite God’s covenant with Israel and His acts of redemption through the wilderness, Israel constantly fell into unfaithfulness and worshipped other gods. Thus, there was a need for a Messiah to redeem all humanity.

Wilderness Imagery in the New Testament

The NT makes several references to the experience of OT Israel in the wilderness for believers to learn from their experience with God (for instance, John 3:14; Acts 7:30–44; Heb 3:8). The Greek transliterated word for ‘wilderness’ is *erēmos*, which refers to a lonely, solitary place that is uninhabited.

Wilderness as a Place of Preparation and Solitude

Mathew 3:3, Luke 3:4, John 1:23, and Mark 1:2 quote the words of Isaiah 40:3: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD.’”²⁵ The wilderness is where John the Baptist began his ministry as prophet Isaiah had prophesied. From there, the people came to him for repentance and baptism (Matt 3:5).²⁶ The baptism of John the Baptist was a pointer to Christ the Redeemer. It was a call for repentance and forgiveness of sins that would be fully realized in Christ.

Wilderness in the New Testament is portrayed as a place where God’s people are prepared for service in preaching the gospel. Jesus frequented the mountains and wilderness for prayers (Matt 4:1–2), So “He [Jesus] went up on the mountain by Himself to pray” (Matt 14:23). He also preached from there, as seen in Mathew 15:33, when His disciples asked Him, “Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?” (Mark 1:1–13). The temptation of Jesus, his baptism, and John the Baptist’s preaching occur in the wilderness, a place of preparation and solitude. Christ was led to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit.²⁷ There, Satan tempted Him, but unlike the Israelites, He overcame the temptation, and the “angels ministered to Him” (Mark 1:13). The Israelites were also led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness just like Jesus. However, unlike Christ, who committed no sin, they sinned against God and rebelled on their own accord.

²⁵ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded With the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 4th edition (Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 272.

²⁶ Marco Rotman, *The Call of the Wilderness; The Narrative Significance of John the Baptist’s Whereabouts*, (Peeters Publishers, 2020), 158.

²⁷ Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 520.



Although not comprehensively discussed, wilderness is also associated with demons, as stated in Luke 8:27–29, where the demon-possessed man, after the demons possessed him, “was driven of the devil into the wilderness.” This implies that the demons would take the man to their region. Moreover, this demon-possessed man “neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.” These incidences associate the demons with the wilderness.²⁸

According to John 3:14–15, just “as Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” at the cross. Just like the Israelites, through an act of faith, looked at the serpent of bronze and were saved, sinners who repent and turn to Christ will be saved. This severe judgment on the Israelites is also a reflection of all those who do not believe in the Messiah; they also shall not enter eternal rest. Hebrews 3:18, “And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey.” Likewise, in Galatians 1:17–18, after his conversion, Paul “went to Arabia” before He began ministry. This implies it was a place where God prepared Him for His work before He started.

New Creation

After the fall of man, the ground was cursed to produce thorns and thistles (Gen 3:18). The wilderness “was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.” Being part of God’s creation, the wilderness will also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty” (Rom 8:21–22).

Isaiah, in his prophecy, states that the wilderness “shall be glad” in the new creation and “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose,” (Isa 35:1–2). However, not in the way we see roses on this earth but as roses in their perfection.²⁹ In the New Creation, “the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water” (Isa 35:7). The earth will be established because the Lord shall rule with righteousness. The world, including the wilderness, shall be glad, and the fields shall be joyful (Ps 96:10–12). In Isaiah 41:19, the Lord states, “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together. ” Wilderness in the new creation will no longer exist, for the desolate and barren places will flourish just as they were at creation. The suffering, pain, and death in the wilderness shall no longer be there, and “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (Isa 65:25).

²⁸ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 377.

²⁹ Gilmore, “Wilderness in the Bible and the Wild Places of the Earth,” 54.



Though the wilderness has previously been rendered as a place of chaos, pain, suffering, and punishment, Isaiah describes that in the end, it will be transformed and become a place where God's people are restored. God will make wilderness flourish again just as the garden of Eden (Isa 51:3); therefore, for those who believe in Christ, the wilderness that was once a place for judgment will now become a garden for the redeemed of Christ.

In Revelation 21:1–5, there shall be a new heaven and new earth,

The first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. Then I, John, 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 heaven saying, 'Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.'

Humanity encountered wilderness (as imagery) when Adam and Eve lost their communion with God because of sin. However, through Christ's redemption, those who believe in Christ shall be God's people, and the spiritual wilderness will cease to exist. Wilderness will be transformed to become a place of restoration and abundant life. The desert will blossom, and all the chaos will be wiped away. The troublesome place will be transformed into a blessing for the redeemed of God.³⁰

Conclusion

The wilderness theme in the Bible has been portrayed physically as a desolate place but also of spiritual value. Due to the fall of humankind to sin, wilderness became a place of danger, wandering, alienation from God, and away from God's rest. Negatively, wilderness became a place of testing, judgment, and suffering due to their constant rebellion and unfaithfulness to God. At the same time, wilderness is a figure of speech, portraying it as a place of chaos, hostility, and punishment from God. Positively, wilderness is portrayed as a place of divine intervention, restoration, and where God entered a covenant with the Israelites in His plan to reconcile humanity to Himself. It is a place of preparation for God's service. The harshness and hostility in the wilderness point us to the final judgment and punishment that shall come upon those who are disobedient to God since they shall not experience God's eternal rest. Complete redemption of the wilderness will be realized in the new creation, when all the

³⁰ Ibid., 28.



chaos, pain, and suffering will be taken away, and God's people will be restored and no longer experience a state of wilderness.

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