

Are verses 7-9 an accurate description of the land of Israel? To our Midwestern eyes, the Holy Land is a dry and stony place, hardly the bountiful paradise pictured here.

But the central mountain ridge, the heart of Israel stretching from Shechem to the Negev with Jerusalem at its center, actually receives 20-40 inches of rain per year. Much of the rain sinks into fissures in the limestone and emerges elsewhere as “fountains and springs.” But with cisterns to collect the water and terraces to contain the soil, these hillsides can produce abundant crops of wheat, barley, olives, and grapes. Drier areas provide pasture for sheep and goats. And the deep fissures cutting across the terrain provide natural defenses from invaders.

According to the *Atlas of the Bible* by Carl G. Rasmussen, “It was in the central mountain range that the Israelites first settled – in Galilee, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah. Because the international powers of antiquity were primarily interested in controlling the coastal plain, the location of the Israelite villages and farmsteads in the mountains provided the people with security. Only during periods when they considered their power to be great did the Israelites move out into the coastal plain and attempt to control it (e.g., during the days of Solomon, Uzziah, and Josiah), but this

almost always resulted in conflict with one or more of the great powers, and in each instance Israel was eventually forced back into her hill-country heartland. The remoteness, security, and provincialism of the central mountains contrast sharply with the openness, insecurity, and more cosmopolitan nature of the coastal plain.”

It was also only during the times of Israel’s expansion to the full extent of the land given to them that she had access to copper in Moab and iron in Lebanon to make her own weapons. At other times, she was dependent on her neighbors for metals (1 Samuel 13:20-21).

So when the Lord God brought Israel into a land where the vineyards were already planted and the cisterns dug, He gave her all she needed to ensure her own prosperity. She was set as a testimony among the great powers of Africa and Asia, and given protection against them and independence from them if she continued in obedience, but she herself was not to be a great power by the standards of the world.

*“But we urge you, brothers ... to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one”* (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12).

### Questions:

1. According to verse 8:2, why did the Lord lead His people through the wilderness for forty years?
2. What evidence is given here that the Lord desires good for His people? How does this apply to us?

3. Where is verse 8:3 cited in the New Testament? What does it mean?
4. When are we particularly in danger of being forgetful of the Lord, according to verses 8:11-14?
5. According to verse 8:19, what is worse than forgetting that the Lord God has brought you blessings?
6. According to verse 9:5, is the Lord giving Israel the land as a reward for their goodness and obedience to him? If not, what is the reason?