

God's People in the Wilderness: Studies in the Book of Numbers
Numbers 20: Intertwined Tragedies
Park Street Church Christian Formation (Winter Term 2019)

Death of Miriam

Hostile Rebellion of People

Rebellion of Moses (!)

Plea to Edom Rejected

Death of Aaron

Review Questions

From what quarters had opposition come to this point?

Why was the "water of impurity" (chapter 19) necessary?

How should we think about the environment in which the Israelites wandered—for forty years?

Sinai Peninsula: The Wildernesses of Paran and Zin

- The Sinai Peninsula and the various "wildernesses" receive 2-4 inches of rain per year
- Location of Kadesh Barnea
- Proximity to the "border" of Edom

"Itinerary"

- Numbers 14:25 – "go toward the desert along the route to the Sea of Reeds" [note Deut 1:40]
- No further geographical context for intervening events
- Numbers 20:1 – arrived at Zin and stayed at Kadesh
- Deuteronomy 1:46 - they stayed at Kadesh "many days"

Deaths of Miriam and Aaron

- Bookend this chapter, following ch 19 – deaths of leaders illustrative of need of the procedure
- Miriam died at Kadesh and was buried (20:1)
- Aaron died at the top of Mt Hor, near the border of Edom (20:22-23)
- The garments of the high priestly office passed to Eleazar – 30 days of mourning for Aaron

Opposition and Strife (Numbers 20:2-6)

- No water or fresh produce to eat
- People "congregated against" Moses and Aaron
- Preferred the death they had been witnessing in the wilderness (20:3)
- Moses and Aaron fell facedown in God's presence at the Tent of Meeting
- Appearance of God's glory
- What might Moses and Aaron have expected?
- [A short detour]

Water Provision: Contrasts

Exodus 17:1-7

- People “strove” [legal term]
- Moses [to people]: why do you test God?
- Moses [to God]: they are ready to stone me

God’s instructions:

- “Take the rod” [instrument of judgment in Egypt];
- God would stand on the Rock [*tsur*]
- “Strike the rock”

Numbers 20:2-8

- People “strove, declaring they preferred death
- Moses and Aaron left the assembly and went to Tent of Meeting
- God’s glory appeared

God’s instructions:

- “Take the rod”
- “Speak to that Rock [*se/a*]”

Moses’ Rejection of God’s Instructions

- Why the change in God’s instructions?
 - “Take the rod” but . . .
 - “Speak to that rock”
- The term for “rock” (*se/a*) is used seven times in Torah, five of them here
- Moses’ Rebellion
 - “You rebels” – “shall we?” – harsh words of condemnation [and expectation of judgment?]
 - Struck the rock twice

Judgment on Moses and Aaron

- Did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy - play on place name – Kadesh and *kadosh* [“holy”]
- The Rock of God’s presence – 1 Corinthians 10:4
- Deuteronomy 1:37 – this event given as reason for Moses not permitted to enter the Land
- Psalm 106:32-33
- *Lessons*

Request to Travel Through Edom (Numbers 20:14-22)

- Two requests:
 - “we are at Kadesh, on the edge of your territory”
 - “we will travel along the kings’ highway”
 - “we will not use your food or water; if we do, we’ll pay”
- Two refusals and threat of armed resistance
- Israel turned away [Deut 2:1]