
NUMBERS 20:1 The children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month. The people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and was buried there.

The Israelites come to Zin, and Miriam dies, Num 20:1. They murmur for want of water, Num 20:2-5. Moses and Aaron make supplication at the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord appears, Num 20:6. He commands Moses to take his rod, gather the congregation together, and bring water out of the rock, Num 20:7, Num 20:8. Moses takes the rod, gathers the Israelites together, chides with them, and smites the rock twice, and the waters flow out plentifully, Num 20:9-11. The Lord is offended with Moses and Aaron because they did not sanctify him in the sight of the children of Israel, Num 20:12. The place is called Meribah, Num 20:13. Moses sends a friendly message to the king of Edom, begging liberty to pass through his territories, Num 20:14-17. The Edomites refuse, Num 20:18. The Israelites expostulate, Num 20:19. The Edomites still refuse, and prepare to attack them, Num 20:20, Num 20:21. The Israelites go to Mount Hor, Num 20:22. Aaron is commanded to prepare for his death, Num 20:23, Num 20:24. Aaron is stripped on Mount Hor, and his vestments put on Eleazar his son; Aaron dies, Num 20:25-28. The people mourn for him thirty days, Num 20:29.

Verse 1

Then came the children of Israel, etc. - This was the first month of the fortieth year after their departure from Egypt. See Num 33:38, compared with Num 20:28 of this chapter, and Deu 1:3. The transactions of thirty-seven years Moses passes by, because he writes not as a historian but as a legislator; and gives us particularly an account of the laws, ordinances, and other occurrences of the first and last years of their peregrinations. The year now spoken of was the last of their journeyings; for from the going out of the spies, Numbers 13, unto this time, was about thirty-eight years, Deu 1:22, Deu 1:23; Deu 2:14.

Desert of Zin - Calmet contends that this is not the same desert mentioned Exo 16:1, where Israel had their eighth encampment; that in Exodus being called in the original יַדִּין, this here יַדִּין: but this is no positive proof, as letters of the same organ are frequently interchanged in all languages, and particularly in Hebrew.

And Miriam died there - Miriam was certainly older than Moses. When he was an infant, exposed on the river Nile, she was entrusted by her parents to watch the conduct of Pharaoh's daughter, and to manage a most delicate business, that required much address and prudence. See Exodus 2. It is supposed that she was at the time of her death one hundred and thirty years of age, having been at least ten years old at her brother's birth. The Catholic writers represent her as a type of the Virgin Mary; as having preserved a perpetual virginity; as being legislatrix over the Israelitish women, as Moses was over the men; and as having a large portion of the spirit of prophecy. Eusebius says that her tomb was to be seen at Kadesh, near the city of Petra, in his time. She appears to have died about four months before her brother Aaron, Num 33:38, and eleven before her brother Moses; so that these three, the most eminent of human beings, died in the space of one year!

NUMBERS 20:2 There was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

Verse 2

And there was no water for the congregation - The same occurrence took place to the children of Israel at Kadesh, as did formerly to their fathers at Rephidim, see Exo 17:1; and as the fathers murmured, so also did the children.

NUMBERS 20:3 The people quarrelled with Moses, and spoke, saying, "We wish that we had died when our brothers died before the LORD!

NUMBERS 20:4 Why have you brought the LORD's assembly into this wilderness, that we should die there, we and our animals?

NUMBERS 20:5 Why have you made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in to this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink."

NUMBERS 20:6 Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the Tent of Meeting, and fell on their faces. the LORD's glory appeared to them.

NUMBERS 20:7 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

NUMBERS 20:8 "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it pour out its water. You shall bring water to them out of the rock; so you shall give the congregation and their livestock drink."

NUMBERS 20:9 Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

NUMBERS 20:10 Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Shall we bring water out of this rock for you?"

NUMBERS 20:11 Moses lifted up his hand, and struck the rock with his rod twice, and water came out abundantly. The congregation and their livestock drank.

NUMBERS 20:12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you didn't believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Verse 12

Because ye believed me not - What was the offense for which Moses was excluded from the promised land? It appears to have consisted in some or all of the following particulars:

1. God had commanded him (Num 20:8) to take the rod in his hand, and go and Speak To The Rock, and it should give forth water. It seems Moses did not think speaking would be sufficient, therefore he smote the rock without any command so to do.
2. He did this twice, which certainly in this case indicated a great perturbation of spirit, and want of attention to the presence of God.
3. He permitted his spirit to be carried away by a sense of the people's disobedience, and thus, being provoked, he was led to speak unadvisedly with his lips: Hear now, ye Rebels, Num 20:10.

4. He did not acknowledge God in the miracle which was about to be wrought, but took the honor to himself and Aaron: "Must We fetch you water out of this rock?"

Thus it plainly appears that they did not properly believe in God, and did not honor him in the sight of the people; for in their presence they seem to express a doubt whether the thing could be possibly done. As Aaron appears to have been consenting in the above particulars, therefore he is also excluded from the promised land.

NUMBERS 20:13 These are the waters of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

NUMBERS 20:14 Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: "Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the travail that has happened to us;

Verse 14

Sent messengers - unto the king of Edom - Archbishop Usher supposes that the king now reigning in Edom was Hadar, mentioned Gen 36:39.

Thus saith thy brother Israel - The Edomites were the descendants of Edom or Esau, the brother of Jacob or Israel, from whom the Israelites were descended.

NUMBERS 20:15 how our fathers went down into Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers.

NUMBERS 20:16 When we cried to the LORD, he heard our voice, sent an angel, and brought us out of Egypt. Behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the edge of your border.

NUMBERS 20:17 "Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or through vineyard, neither will we drink from the water of the wells. We will go along the king's highway. We will not turn aside to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed your border."

Verse 17

We will go by the king's high-way - This is the first time this phrase occurs; it appears to have been a public road made by the king's authority at the expense of the state.

NUMBERS 20:18 Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against you."

NUMBERS 20:19 The children of Israel said to him, "We will go up by the highway; and if we drink your water, I and my livestock, then I will give its price. Only let me, without doing anything else, pass through on my feet."

NUMBERS 20:20 He said, "You shall not pass through." Edom came out against him with many people, and with a strong hand.

NUMBERS 20:21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border, so Israel turned away from him.

Verse 21

Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border - Though every king has a right to refuse passage through his territories to any strangers; yet in a case like this, and in a time also in which emigrations were frequent and universally allowed, it was both cruelty and oppression in Edom to refuse a passage to a comparatively unarmed and inoffensive multitude, who were all their own near kinsmen. It appears however that it was only the Edomites of Kadesh that were thus unfriendly and cruel; for from Deu 2:29 we learn that the Edomites who dwelt in Mount Seir treated them in a hospitable manner. This cruelty in the Edomites of Kadesh is strongly reprehended, and threatened by the Prophet Obadiah, Oba 1:10, etc.

NUMBERS 20:22 They travelled from Kadesh: and the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor.

NUMBERS 20:23 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the border of the land of Edom, saying,

NUMBERS 20:24 "Aaron shall be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah.

NUMBERS 20:25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor;

NUMBERS 20:26 and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them on Eleazar his son. Aaron shall be taken, and shall die there."

Verse 26

Strip Aaron of his garments - This was, in effect, depriving him of his office; and putting the clothes on his son Eleazar implied a transfer of that office to him. A transfer of office, from this circumstance of putting the clothes of the late possessor on the person intended to succeed him, was called investing or investment, (clothing); as removing a person from an office was termed divesting or unclothing. Among the Catholics, and in the Church of England, this same method is used in degrading ecclesiastics. Hence such a degradation is termed by the common people stripping a man of his gown.

NUMBERS 20:27 Moses did as the LORD commanded. They went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation.

NUMBERS 20:28 Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them on Eleazar his son. Aaron died there on the top of the mountain, and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.

Verse 28

And Aaron died there - Hence, as Dr. Lightfoot has justly observed, we have an "indisputable proof that the earthly Canaan was not the utmost felicity at which God's promises to the Israelites aimed since the best men among them were excluded from it."

The remark of some of the fathers here is worthy of attention: "Neither Moses the representative of the law, nor Miriam the representative of the prophets, nor Aaron the representative of the priesthood and its sacrificial rites, could bring the Israelites into possession of the promised land. This was reserved for Joshua, who was in name and conduct the lively type of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." He alone can bring those who believe in his name into that rest which remains for the people of God.

There are some observations made by Dr. Lightfoot on this and some of the preceding chapters which should be more generally known. "The place where the people murmured upon the return of the spies was Kadesh-Barnea, Num 13:26; Num 32:8; Deu 1:19. This place was called Rithmah before, (Num 33:18, compared with Num 12:16, and Num 13:26), and was so called probably from the juniper trees that grew there; but is now named Kadesh, because the Lord was there sanctified upon the people, as Num 20:13; and Barnea, or the wandering son, because here was the decree made of their long wandering in the wilderness. They continued a good space at Kadesh before they removed; for so said Moses, Ye abode in Kadesh many days; or as the Hebrew, According to the days that ye had made abode, namely, at Sinai, Num 20:6. And so they spent one whole year there, for so they had done at Sinai. And whereas God commands them at their murmuring to turn back to the Red Sea, (Deu 1:40), his meaning was, that at their next march, whensoever it was, they should not go forward unto Canaan, but back again towards the Red Sea, whence they came; (but see on Deu 1:1 (note)). And they did so, for they wandered by many stations and marches from Kadesh-Barnea till they came to Kadesh-Barnea again, seven or eight and thirty years after they had first left it. These marches, mentioned in Numbers 33, were these: From Kadesh or Rithmah to Rimmon Parez, to Libnah, to Rissah, to Kehelathah, to Mount Shapher, to Haradah, to Makheloth, to Tahath, to Tarah, to Mithcah, to Hashmonah, to Moseroth, to Benejaaken, to Horhagidgad, to Jotbathah, to Ebronah, to Ezion-Gaber, to Kadesh again, in the fortieth year. And though it was only eleven days' journey from Horeb, by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea, (Deu 1:2), they made it above thrice eleven years' journey!" Had they trusted in God, and obeyed him, their enemies long ere this would have been discomfited, and themselves quietly established in possession of the promised inheritance. But they grieved the Spirit of God, and did not believe his promise; and it would have been inconsistent with the whole economy of grace to have introduced unbelievers into that rest which was a type of the kingdom of God.

NUMBERS 20:29 When all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.
