

Joshua 15:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it went out to the south side to Maaleh-acrabbim, and passed along to Zin, and ascended up on the south side unto Kadesh-barnea, and passed along to Hezron, and went up to Adar, and fetched a compass to Karkaa:

Analysis

And it went out to the south side to Maaleh-acrabbim, and passed along to Zin, and ascended up on the south side unto Kadesh-barnea. The boundary's westward progression traces crucial wilderness landmarks. Maaleh-Acrabbim (מַעֲלָה עֲקָרְבִּים) means "Ascent of Scorpions"—a steep, dangerous pass infested with scorpions, located in the Arabah valley south of the Dead Sea. This formidable terrain marked the transition from the Jordan Rift to the Negev highlands.

The wilderness of Tsin (תְּשִׁין, not to be confused with Sin, סִינָה) recalls Israel's forty-year wandering. Here Miriam died (Numbers 20:1), and Moses struck the rock in disobedience (Numbers 20:11-12), forfeiting entry into Canaan. Including this location in Judah's boundary converts judgment geography into inheritance geography—God redeems even places of failure. Kadesh-Barnea (קָדֵשׁ בָּרְנֵעַ, "Holy [place] of the Desert of Wandering") served as Israel's wilderness headquarters, where the spies' evil report triggered forty years of judgment (Numbers 13-14).

Theologically, this boundary commemorates both judgment and grace. The landmarks testify to God's discipline (wilderness wandering) and faithfulness (eventual inheritance despite failure). The next generation inherits land their fathers forfeited, illustrating redemptive continuity across generations.

Historical Context

Kadesh-Barnea, identified with Ein el-Qudeirat in northeastern Sinai, was a major oasis providing water for substantial populations. Archaeological excavations reveal a fortress from the 10th-7th centuries BCE, confirming Israelite presence. The site's strategic location at the intersection of trade routes and its water resources made it ideal for Israel's wilderness encampment. The Ascent of Scorpions likely corresponds to modern Naqb es-Safa, a treacherous pass ascending from the Arabah to the Negev plateau. Ancient travelers feared this route's combination of steep terrain, extreme heat, and dangerous wildlife. The Wilderness of Zin encompassed the central Negev's limestone plateau, characterized by rugged wadis and sparse vegetation supporting only nomadic pastoralism.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's inclusion of failure sites (Kadesh-Barnea where Israel rebelled) in Judah's promised inheritance demonstrate His redemptive purposes?
2. What scorpion-infested 'ascents'—difficult, dangerous passages—has God used to strengthen your faith and lead you into blessing?
3. How can remembering places of past discipline help you appreciate present grace and avoid repeating previous failures?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּצֶא	וְעַל	הַמֵּעָל	מִצְבֵּחַ	אֶל	וְאֶל	וְעַל	רַקְבִּים	וְעַל	רַקְבִּים	וְעַל	רַקְבִּים
And it went out	H413	on the south side	H5045	H0	to Maalehacrabbin	H4610	and passed	H5674			
H3318			H5045		H4610		H5674				
בְּרִנְצָן	וְעַל	הַמֵּעָל	מִצְבֵּחַ	אֶל	שְׁמֵן	וְעַל	בְּרִנְצָן	וְעַל	בְּרִנְצָן	וְעַל	בְּרִנְצָן
along to Zin	and ascended up	on the south side	H5045	H0	unto Kadeshbarnea	H6947					
H6790	H5927		H5045		H6947						
וְעַבְרָה	וְעַל	הַמֵּעָל	מִצְבֵּחַ	אֶל	בְּרִנְצָן	וְעַל	וְעַבְרָה	וְעַל	וְעַבְרָה	וְעַל	וְעַבְרָה
and passed	along to Hezron	and ascended up	H5927	H146	to Adar	H146	and fetched a compass	H5437			
H5674	H2696		H5927		H146		H5437				
בְּקַרְקָעָה											
to Karkaa											
H7173											

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 34:4 (Parallel theme): And your border shall turn from the south to the ascent of Akrabbim, and pass on to Zin: and the going forth thereof shall be from the south to Kadesh-barnea, and shall go on to Hazar-addar, and pass on to Azmon:

Judges 1:36 (Parallel theme): And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.