

Numbers 11:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.

Analysis

The naming of Taberah (Hebrew תַּבְּעָרָה, tav'erah, from ba'ar meaning 'to burn') created a permanent memorial to God's judgment on complaint. Ancient Near Eastern cultures understood that naming a place encoded meaning and preserved memory—every time Israel spoke 'Taberah,' they would remember both divine judgment against murmuring and divine mercy through Moses' intercession. The practice of naming locations after significant events appears throughout Scripture (Bethel, Peniel, Ebenezer), serving as geographical reminders of spiritual truths.

The explanation 'because the fire of the LORD burnt among them' indicates the fire's supernatural origin—not natural wildfire but divine judgment. The phrase 'among them' (Hebrew bam, בָּם) emphasizes that the fire struck within the camp, affecting the Israelites themselves, not merely their surroundings. God's judgment was personal and immediate, demonstrating that sin has consequences and divine patience has limits. Yet the fire consumed only 'the uttermost parts of the camp' (verse 1), showing divine restraint—judgment was real but limited, punitive but not annihilating.

This memorial name would function as perpetual warning to future generations about the danger of complaining against God's provision. The location itself became a sermon, preaching the seriousness of sin and the necessity of faith. This anticipates the New Testament principle that Old Testament events serve as warnings and examples for believers (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). The church today

needs similar 'Taberahs'—reminders of God's holiness and the consequences of unbelief—to guard against presumption and cultivate reverent faith.

Historical Context

Taberah was located somewhere between Mount Sinai and Kadesh-barnea, early in Israel's wilderness journey. The incident occurred shortly after leaving Sinai (Numbers 10:11-12), setting an ominous tone for the wilderness period. Archaeological efforts haven't definitively located Taberah, partly because wilderness campsites leave minimal archaeological footprint and partly because exact locations of many wilderness sites remain uncertain. The significance lies not in geographical precision but in theological meaning—this was where Israel first tested God after Sinai, and where divine judgment demonstrated the seriousness of unbelief.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the practice of naming locations after significant spiritual events help preserve collective memory and provide ongoing warning against sin?
2. What does the limited extent of God's judgment (only 'the uttermost parts') teach about divine mercy tempering divine wrath even in moments of legitimate judgment?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּקְרָא	שֵׁם	הַמָּקוֹם	הַהוּא	תַּבְּעָה	כִּי	בָעָה
And he called	the name	place	of the	Taberah	H3588	burnt
H7121	H8034	H4725	H1931	H8404		H1197
בְּ	אֵשׁ	יְהוָה:				
H0	because the fire	of the LORD				
	H784	H3068				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 9:22 (References Lord): And at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah, ye provoked the LORD to wrath.
