

Numbers 20:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?

Analysis

The question 'And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness' blamed Moses and Aaron for bringing Israel to this place. Yet Moses and Aaron merely followed God's command—the pillar of cloud and fire led Israel (Numbers 9:15-23), not human decision. By blaming the leaders, the people implicitly blamed God while maintaining deniability. This indirection characterizes much human rebellion: criticizing God's appointed means while avoiding direct accusation of God Himself.

The phrase 'congregation of the LORD' ironically invoked their covenant status while rebelling against covenant leadership. They claimed identity as God's people while rejecting His provision and providence. This inconsistency appears throughout Scripture: people claiming God's promises while refusing His commands, wanting divine blessing without divine lordship. The New Testament warns against similar hypocrisy (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Timothy 3:5).

The complaint 'that we and our cattle should die there' revealed their concern: physical death. They feared dying in the wilderness, the very judgment God had decreed forty years earlier (Numbers 14:28-35). Their parents' generation died in the wilderness as judgment; this generation would die there by God's plan. Yet rather than trusting God's provision during their appointed time, they complained. The fear of death exposes lack of faith in divine purpose and providence.

Historical Context

The complaint echoed the previous generation's rebellion at Kadesh forty years earlier (Numbers 14:2-3), showing tragic continuity between generations. The 'wilderness' (Hebrew midbar, מִדְבָּר) was the desert region where Israel wandered for forty years. The complaint about cattle dying alongside humans indicates they viewed their livestock as critically important—these animals provided food, milk, sacrificial offerings, and breeding stock for future prosperity. Economic concern mingled with physical fear, both trumping spiritual trust.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does blaming human leadership for God's providential leading illustrate the way rebellion often works indirectly, criticizing visible agents to avoid confronting God directly?
2. What does the people's fear of death in the wilderness teach about how legitimate concerns (physical survival) can become idols when we refuse to trust God's sovereign purposes?

Interlinear Text

וְלָמָּה הַ	הֵבֵאתֶם	אֶת	קֹהֶל	יְהוָה הַ	אֵל
H4100	And why have ye brought up	H853	the congregation	of the LORD	H413
	H935		H6951	H3068	
הַמִּדְבָּר	הִזָּה הַ	לָמָּה וְ	שָׁם	אֲנִי וְ	וּבְעִירָנוּ:
into this wilderness	H2088	should die	H8033	H587	that we and our cattle
H4057		H4191			H1165

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 17:3 (Parallel theme): And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?