

Numbers 21:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth.

Analysis

And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth. This seemingly simple geographical notation carries profound theological weight within Israel's wilderness journey. The Hebrew verb *nasa* (נָסָא, "set forward") indicates purposeful movement under divine direction, not aimless wandering. Each stage of the journey was ordained by God through the pillar of cloud and fire, demonstrating His providential guidance even through barren wilderness.

Oboth (עֹבוֹת, meaning "water-skins" or "spirits of the dead") represents one of approximately forty wilderness stations between Egypt and Canaan. The location's name may reference the desolate, death-like nature of the wilderness or practical necessities like water storage. This verse appears in the context following God's judgment through fiery serpents (Numbers 21:6) and His provision of healing through the bronze serpent (21:9)—a pattern of judgment and grace that defines Israel's wilderness experience.

Theologically, this journey stage illustrates several truths:

1. God's faithfulness to continue leading despite Israel's repeated rebellion
2. the necessity of progressive sanctification—moving forward step by step toward the Promised Land
3. the reality that spiritual maturity involves both divine discipline and restoration;
4. the covenantal relationship where God remains committed to His promises even when His people fail.

The wilderness journey becomes a type of the Christian life—moving from bondage to freedom, through testing toward the inheritance God has prepared.

Historical Context

Numbers 21:10 falls within the final phase of Israel's forty-year wilderness wandering, approximately 1445-1405 BCE (early chronology) or 1270-1230 BCE (late chronology). Obboth's precise location remains uncertain, though scholars place it in the Transjordan region east of the Arabah, possibly modern Ain el-Weiba near the border of ancient Edom.

This movement occurred after Israel's request to pass through Edomite territory was refused (Numbers 20:14-21) and following Aaron's death at Mount Hor. The route took Israel around Edom's southern border through harsh desert terrain. Archaeological surveys of the Transjordan wilderness reveal sparse Bronze Age settlements, confirming the inhospitable nature of this region.

The historical context includes ongoing conflict with surrounding nations. Shortly before this verse, Israel defeated the Canaanite king of Arad (21:1-3), experienced God's judgment through serpents (21:4-6), and witnessed miraculous healing (21:7-9). The wilderness stations listed in Numbers 33:41-44 provide additional geographical framework, showing Obboth as part of a systematic progression toward Moab and eventually Canaan. For ancient Israel, these geographical markers would have served as memorial stones, reminding later generations of God's faithfulness during their ancestors' formative wilderness experience.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's continued guidance of Israel despite their rebellion reveal His covenant faithfulness, and how should this shape our confidence in His ongoing work in our lives?
2. What does the Hebrew meaning of Oboth ("water-skins" or "spirits of the dead") teach us about finding God's provision and life even in spiritually barren seasons?
3. In what ways does Israel's step-by-step journey toward the Promised Land mirror the progressive nature of sanctification in the Christian life?
4. How does the context of judgment (fiery serpents) followed by grace (bronze serpent) and continued journey (Obboth) illustrate the biblical pattern of discipline leading to restoration?
5. What specific "wilderness stations" in your spiritual journey has God used to shape your faith, and how can you memorialize His faithfulness during those stages?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּסַּע וְ	בְּנֵי יִ	יִשְׂרָאֵל לְ	וַיִּחַן וְ	בְּאוֹבוֹת:
set forward	And the children	of Israel	and pitched	in Oboth
H5265	H1121	H3478	H2583	H88

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