

Numbers 33:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they departed from Hazerot, and pitched in Rithmah.

Analysis

And they departed from Hazerot, and pitched in Rithmah. The journey from Hazerot to Rithmah moves Israel closer to Canaan's borders and the fateful spy mission that would determine their wilderness duration. Each encampment represents both geographical progression and spiritual testing—God leading His people while proving their hearts.

Rithmah (רִתְמָה, Rithmah—possibly "broom" or "juniper," referring to desert shrubs) likely marks the encampment at Kadesh-barnea, the critical location where Israel received the spies' report and refused to enter Canaan (Numbers 13-14). Though not explicitly identified as Kadesh in this itinerary, the geographical sequence suggests Rithmah corresponds to the extended encampment where Israel's unbelief condemned them to forty years' wandering.

If Rithmah is indeed Kadesh-barnea, this single verse compresses Israel's greatest failure—the refusal to trust God's promise and power to give them the land. What should have been a brief encampment before triumphant conquest became the pivot point determining an entire generation's fate. The unassuming mention of "pitched in Rithmah" masks the tragedy of covenant unfaithfulness that transformed conquest into exile. This illustrates how single moments of unbelief can redirect entire life trajectories away from God's intended blessing.

Historical Context

Most scholars identify Rithmah with Kadesh-barnea (modern 'Ain el-Qudeirat), a major oasis in the northern Sinai/southern Canaan border region. Kadesh served as Israel's base for an extended period, from which the twelve spies were sent to reconnaissance Canaan (Numbers 13:1-3, 26). The location provided sufficient water and grazing for Israel's large population and herds. Archaeological excavations at 'Ain el-Qudeirat have revealed a substantial fortress and settlement dating to later Israelite periods, confirming the site's strategic importance. The spies' forty-day mission and Israel's subsequent rebellion led to God's sentence of forty years' wilderness wandering—one year for each day of spying (Numbers 14:34). This encampment transformed Israel's immediate future from conquest to wandering, from promise to judgment.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the seemingly mundane record of "pitched in Rithmah" contrast with the momentous events of unbelief that likely occurred there?
2. What does Israel's failure at Rithmah/Kadesh teach about the consequences of refusing to trust God's promises when facing intimidating circumstances?
3. In what ways do single moments of unbelief in your life risk redirecting you away from God's intended blessings?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּסְעוּ וּמִצְרָר תִּפְנַת בְּרַתְמָה:
And they departed from Hazereth and pitched in Rithmah

H5265

H2698

H2583

H7575

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 12:16 (Parallel theme): And afterward the people removed from Hazereth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.

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