

Numbers 33:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they removed from Libnah, and pitched at Rissah.

Analysis

And they removed from Libnah, and pitched at Rissah. The relentless succession of encampments throughout Numbers 33 emphasizes the monotonous reality of wilderness wandering—moving, camping, moving again, without reaching the promised destination. This reflects the consequence of unbelief: purposeless repetition instead of purposeful progress toward God's promises.

Rissah (רִסָּה, Rissah—"ruin" or "dew") presents either a sobering or hopeful meaning. If derived from roots meaning "ruin," it memorializes the devastation of Israel's wasted wilderness years—a generation dying without entering God's rest. If related to "dew," it points to God's sustaining provision even in judgment, as morning dew accompanied the manna (Exodus 16:13-14; Numbers 11:9).

The dual possible meanings reflect Israel's wilderness experience: ruin through disobedience, yet sustained by divine grace. They suffered the ruin of lost opportunity but survived through God's dew-like provision of manna, water, and protection. This paradox defines all divine discipline—judgment that preserves rather than destroys, severity that serves ultimate mercy. For believers, even seasons of spiritual barrenness under God's discipline include His sustaining grace preventing total ruin.

Historical Context

Rissah's location is unknown, presumed to be in the wilderness region where Israel wandered during the thirty-eight year period between the Kadesh rebellion

and the conquest preparation. The encampments listed in this section of Numbers 33 are largely unmentioned elsewhere in Scripture, reflecting the biblical authors' minimal interest in recording the unproductive wandering years. The reference to either "ruin" or "dew" captures the dual reality Israel experienced—the ruin of a generation dying in wilderness judgment, yet sustained daily by miraculous provision (manna with dew, water from rocks, clothes that didn't wear out). Archaeological surveys of Sinai and the Negev have identified numerous ancient campsites, though connecting specific sites to biblical place names remains speculative without corroborating evidence.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the repetitive pattern of wilderness encampments illustrate the futility of life lived outside God's intended purposes for us?
2. What does the dual meaning of Rissah (ruin/dew) teach about how God's discipline combines severity with sustaining grace?
3. In what ways do you experience God's sustaining provision even during seasons when disobedience has brought spiritual barrenness to your life?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּסְעוּ	מִלִּבְנָה	וַיִּחַן	בְּרִסָּה:
And they removed	from Libnah	and pitched	at Rissah
H5265	H3841	H2583	H7446
