

Psalm 78:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!

Analysis

How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! The rhetorical *kammâ* (הָקָמָה, "how oft") expresses exasperation at Israel's countless rebellions. *Mārah* (מָרָה, "provoke") means to rebel or embitter—the same root as *Marah*, the bitter waters (Exodus 15:23). *‘Āṣab* (אָשַׁב, "grieve") conveys emotional pain, used of God's grief before the flood (Genesis 6:6).

The parallelism of "wilderness" (*midbar*, מִדְבָּר) and "desert" (*yěšîmôn*, יְשִׁמּוֹן—desolate wasteland) emphasizes the setting: despite miraculous provision in the harshest environment, they repeatedly rebelled. Their ingratitude multiplied in direct proportion to God's miracles—the more He gave, the more they complained.

Divine grief reveals God's pathos—He is not unmoved by human rebellion. His holiness requires justice, yet His love experiences pain when His children rebel. This anticipates the prophets' imagery of God as grieved husband (Hosea 11:8) and finds fullest expression in Christ's weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Historical Context

The 40-year wilderness period contained numerous rebellions: bitter waters at Marah, quail-lust, water-striking at Meribah, golden calf, Kadesh-barnea, Korah, bronze serpent incident, Baal-peor. Each "How oft" recalled specific covenant violations witnesses could enumerate.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What rebellions in your life might be causing God grief despite His abundant provision?
2. How does knowing God grieves over your sin differ from merely knowing He judges it?
3. In what "wilderness" experiences are you most prone to provoke God through unbelief?

Interlinear Text

בִּשְׁעִמּוֹן: וְעִזִּיבָה וְהַר בְּמִדְבָּר יְמִרְאָה כְּפָה
How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness and grieve him in the desert
H4100 H4784 H4057 H6087 H3452

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 4:30 (Parallel theme): And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Isaiah 63:10 (Parallel theme): But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.