

DEATH IN THE WILDERNESS

And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there. NUMBERS 20:1

“Let Aaron be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land that I have given to the people of Israel, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up to Mount Hor. And strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son. And Aaron shall be gathered to his people and shall die there.” NUMBERS 20:24-26

“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” PSALM 90:12

I've got a quiz for you. It's one question but has two answers. Let's see how you do. Are you ready for the question? Okay, here we go...what two things are the only things that even a non-believer would say are absolutely certain in this life? Do you have a guess? The answer is...death and taxes. It's a phrase attributed to Benjamin Franklin, but you've probably used it or heard it. Well, here in Numbers 20, we are reminded by God about the nature of sin and its consequences. The people rebel in the wilderness, and they will die in the wilderness. The only ones that survive are the ones that were under age 20 when they distrusted God, Joshua, and Caleb. This isn't new information to us. However, God does teach us things when death hits close to home. Funerals are times of self-reflection as people think about the lives of the dead or their own lives. What does God teach us here about how we view death?

James Boice makes a key contribution here to our discussion. In his book “The Life of Moses,” he states that Psalm 90 is the Psalm that Moses could have written during the days when Miriam and Aaron die. If you read Numbers 20 and Psalm 90 together, you'll see that much of what Moses says in Psalm 90 echoes what he experiences in Numbers 20. Moses writes in Psalm 90:7-9, “For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.” Most of the people will die in the wilderness of Kadesh Barnea. They were so close to entering the Promised Land, but fell short because of their rebellion and distrust of their God. How does Moses describe it? The end of their lives is like a sigh. The end of a hard road that ends with death in the wilderness. Yup...I think that the sigh is a good way to describe it! Moses goes forward to apply the impending death that most of them will face. “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Their earthly destiny has been sealed by their sin. However, they can “take stock” of each day and gain wisdom how to live with obedience under their King. Sure, they have failed. But God. God doesn't destroy them outright (unlike Korah and others). Instead, God gives decades to walking with their God in the desert, seeing God provide for them every day despite their sin. This action could refer to what Moses says in Psalm 90:14: “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” Even in judgment and discipline, God shows His grace by providing daily for them. Moses prays this prayer for God's people that they would be satisfied with God's gracious love towards them.

Men, God teaches us today the same thing He taught to the Hebrews. Death is certain. Will we number our days given to us by our God and follow faithfully His kingdom plan? Will you make this your prayer for God to teach you to walk wisely with God because your days are numbered? How will God use death to bring you to thankfulness and worship today?

Spend some time thinking about the number of your days that God has given you. Ask Him to help you live wisely according to His plans not yours.

For Further Reading: PSALM 90