

THE INCIDENT AT KADESH-BARNEA IN RELATION TO
THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO
DR RICHARD W JOHNSON FOR THE COURSE
BIBLICAL BOOK STUDY: EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS
RELI 432-01

AUSTIN J ALEXANDER

02-04-2005

Throughout the history of the region on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean there have been many areas known by the name Kadesh, or at least variants of that name: Kadesh on the Orontes, Kadesh of Naphtali, and Kadesh-Barnea to name a few¹. The latter two, Naphtali and Barnea, are better attested in ancient Jewish literature than any of the others. For instance, Kadesh of Naphtali is named in the writings of Josephus² and 1 Maccabees³, while Kadesh-Barnea is mentioned both in the apocryphal book Judith⁴ and throughout the Hebrew canon⁵. Kadesh-Barnea is best known for the extremely significant incidents that occurred there during the time of Moses. It is this Kadesh, Kadesh-Barnea, which is mentioned (interestingly not by name) in the so-called *Epistle to the Hebrews* and is the topic under study in the current paper.

Kadesh-Barnea is mentioned at least twenty-eight times in the Hebrew Bible and is therefore a subject of great interest.⁶ Located near the southeastern border of the land of Canaan, in the wilderness of Paran, Kadesh-Barnea was the site for one of the most pinnacle moments in the early history of the nation of Israel during her time in the wilderness. It was at Kadesh that the first Israelites were commissioned by Yahweh and Moses to step foot into the land of their inheritance, Canaan. The men chosen were given the task of searching out the land and to ‘See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are

¹ For more information on places called ‘Kadesh’ located in Palestine see entries in: T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, ed., *ENCYCLOPÆDIA BIBLICA*, vol.2 (London: The Macmillan Company, 1899). Available at Case Western Reserve University’s websites: http://www.cwru.edu/univlib/preserve/Etana/encyl_biblica_e-k/jozabad-kedesh.pdf and http://www.cwru.edu/univlib/preserve/Etana/encyl_biblica_e-k/kedeshah-kushaiah.pdf

² Josephus, *Antiquities* 9.235

³ 1 Maccabees 11:63, 73

⁴ Judith 1:9; 5:14

⁵ Canonical and non-canonical sources for this paper were found using the search engines available at the Perseus website (www.perseus.tufts.edu) and http://www.spiritualworx.com/skw_template.php?page=apocrypha_search.php

⁶ The following is the current writer’s own summary of the events recorded in Numbers 13-14.

few or many.’⁷ This survey of the land was supposed to be simply the next step in the new nation’s journey out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Unfortunately, upon the return of the ‘spies’, the author of the Book of Numbers informs the reader that Israel’s journey through the wilderness is far from over. The returning men report that while the land is plentiful, Israel would be crushed if they attempted the conquest. The spies’ bad report is countered in the narrative by the two spies, Caleb and Joshua son of Nun, who think that conquest is more than possible. Caleb and Joshua exclaimed, ‘the land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us-- a land which flows with milk and honey.’⁸ However true and passionate their speech may have been, the majority of the people would not heed their words and instead desired to stone Caleb and Joshua for their analysis of the land. Yahweh intervenes and informs Moses that he has had enough of the rebellious nation and therefore says, ‘Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.’⁹ Yahweh punished the people for their lack of trust in his ability to fulfill the promise he made to the patriarchs; for every day that the spies were in the land, Israel was punished one more year in the wilderness. Therefore, Israel was doomed to wander the desert for forty more years.

Throughout the rest of the Hebrew canon and apocrypha Kadesh-Barnea is either mentioned in passing simply as a place name (e.g. Deuteronomy 1:2; Ezekiel 47:19; Judith 1:9)

⁷ Numbers 13:18. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the Bible are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*.

⁸ Num. 14:7b-8

⁹ Num. 14:22-23

or it is used as an illustration remembering Israel's unbelief, fear, and lack of faith (e.g. Deut. 1:19-40; and implied in Psalm 95:10). It is the implied reference to Kadesh-Barnea in Psalm 95 that is of the greatest importance in the current paper. This importance is because the author of the Book of Hebrews quotes major sections of this psalm throughout his argument in chapters three and four of the book. After arguing that Jesus is greater than Moses, the author of Hebrews begins to quote extensively from Psalm 95, specifically those parts concerned with the rebellion of Israel at Kadesh-Barnea. The author of Hebrews uses the forty-year judgment of Israel as an example of unbelief. He explains that Israel was unable to enter God's rest because of her disobedience and encourages his audience to succeed where Israel failed. However, the prize for the recipients of Hebrews is not a geographical land and therefore physical rest, but a heavenly land and therefore spiritual rest for those who believe and obey God.

While mentioned in many ancient sources, Kadesh-Barnea will always be remembered best as a place for disobedience. The incident at Kadesh-Barnea was a turning point for the children of Israel. The entire first generation of those taken out of Egypt were not allowed to enter the promised land because of their lack of faith in Yahweh. Using the memory of that disobedience the author of the Book of Hebrews masterfully argued that his audience needed to remain faithful and seek to enter the rest of God, which Israel was unable to obtain. The author of Hebrews urges his audience to continue into the Promised Land.