

# NUMBERS

## Chapter 33

### *Recounting Israel's Journey*

These are the stages of the people of Israel, when they went out of the land of Egypt by their companies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 2 Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of the LORD, and these are their stages according to their starting places. 3 They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians, 4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them. On their gods also the LORD executed judgments. 5 So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth. 6 And they set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. 7 And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pihahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol. 8 And they set out from before Hahiroth[a] and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah. 9 And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. 10 And they set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. 11 And they set out from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin. 12 And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. 13 And they set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush. 14 And they set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. 15 And they set out from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai. 16 And they set out from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. 17 And they set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. 18 And they set out from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. 19 And they set out from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. 20 And they set out from Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. 21 And they set out from Libnah and camped at Rissah. 22 And they set out from Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. 23 And they set out from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. 24 And they set out from Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. 25 And they set out from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. 26 And they set out from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. 27 And they set out from Tahath and camped at Terah. 28 And they set out from Terah and camped at Mithkah. 29 And they set out from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. 30 And they set out from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. 31 And they set out from Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. 32 And they set out from Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. 33 And they set out from Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. 34 And they set out from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. 35 And they set out from Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber. 36 And they set out from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin (that is, Kadesh). 37 And they set out from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the edge of the land of Edom. 38 And Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor at the command of the LORD and died there, in the fortieth year after the people of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. 39 And Aaron was 123 years old when he died on Mount Hor. 40 And the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the people of Israel. 41 And they set out from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. 42 And they set out from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. 43 And they set out from Punon and camped at Oboth. 44 And they set out from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the territory of Moab. 45 And they set out from Iyim and camped at Dibon-gad. 46 And they set out from Dibon-gad and camped at Almon-diblathaim. 47 And they set out from Almon-diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. 48 And they set out from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho; 49 they camped by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.

**33:1–49** The numerous places (significantly 40 in number between Rameses and the plains of Moab) in Israel’s desert experience are listed. Unfortunately, most of the sites were desert encampments, not cities with lasting archaeological records; so they are difficult to locate. Many of the places (e.g., in vv. 19–29) are not recorded elsewhere in Exodus and Numbers. Some of the places mentioned elsewhere (e.g., Taberah, 11:2; see 21:19) are missing here. The data warrant these conclusions: 1. Moses recorded the list at the Lord’s command (v. 2). 2. The list should be taken seriously, as an accurate recapitulation of the stages of the journey, despite difficulty in locating many of the sites. 3. The numerical factor of 40 sites between Rameses and the plains of Moab suggests some styling of the list, which helps to account for the sites not included. 4. As in the case of genealogies in the Pentateuch, some factors of ancient significance may not be clear to us today. 5. Ultimately the record is a recital of the Lord’s blessing on his people for the extended period of their desert experience. Although certainly not without geographical importance, the listing of the stages of Israel’s experience in the desert is fundamentally a religious document, a litany of the Lord’s deliverance of his people. (CSB)

Israel’s journeys under Moses’ leadership had come to an end. Having brought his people within striking distance of their ultimate goal, Moses compiled a list of their encampments. The following travelogue is similar to other ancient travel documents, such as the Old Babylonian itinerary (eighteenth century BC), the travels of Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria, and the campaign records of the New Kingdom Pharaohs (fifteenth to thirteenth centuries BC). For the modern reader, this collection of data may be as unexciting as the genealogical tables in Gn. But each link in this long chain of place-names stirred a song of praise in Israelite hearts because a mighty and forgiving God had been with them every step of the way from Egypt to the Jordan. He did not forsake the escaped slaves, no matter where they encamped or from where they set out (v 3). Believers need only to hear the names of the encampments of their pilgrimage to be moved to recount gratefully what God had done for them. (TLSB)

**33:1** *stages*. Lit, “their breaking camp”; a noun derived from the verb translated as “they set out” (e.g., v 3). (TLSB)

**33:5–49** Moses surveyed the people’s past from the exodus (Ex 12:37; 13:4) to their arrival in the plains of Moab 40 years later (vv 48–49). The list names the places recorded in the preceding accounts of their wilderness wanderings. The journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai is repeated in vv 5–15 (Ex 12:37–19:2). But this section also names two new sites (Dophkah, Alush, vv 12–14). In vv 16–49, the names of many more sites supplement the sketchy account of Israel’s progress from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab (10:11–26:3). This log does not mention some encampments that appeared in the preceding record (21:18–19). The location of some of these stations cannot be identified. Consequently, the exact route of the wanderings, particularly during the last 38 years, cannot be definitely established. (TLSB)

**33:8** *three days’ journey*. Moses seems to distinguish travel camps (for an evening) from more permanent camps, as at Marah. (TLSB)

**33:38** *first day of the fifth month*. Ab 1407. (TLSB)

**33:39** *Mount Hor*. High places were regarded as sacred. (TLSB)

**33:40** Alludes to the battle at Arad (21:1–3). (TLSB)

**33:42** *Punon*. Likely within the borders of Edom. They may have crossed Ammonite or Edomite territory to camp here. (TLSB)

**33:49** Encompassing c 7 mi. (TLSB)

**33:1–49** God guides Israel every step of the way to the Promised Land. He dwells among them as He had promised (Ex 25:8). He is always their God for the sake of His love toward them in the coming Messiah, although many times the Israelites do not behave like God’s people. Even now, in Jesus the Messiah, the Lord walks with you and remains ever faithful, calling you to repentance, faith, and a blessed future. • “Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you, O Christians, lest the foe destroy you; For Satan has designed your fall. Wield God’s Word, the weapon glorious; Against all foes be thus victorious, For God protects you from them all. Fear not the hordes of hell, Here is Emmanuel. Hail the Savior! The strong foes yield To Christ, our shield, And we, the victors, hold the field.” Amen. (LSB 668:1) (TLSB)

### *Drive Out the Inhabitants*

**50 And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, 51 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places. 53 And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it. 54 You shall inherit the land by lot according to your clans. To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance. Wherever the lot falls for anyone, that shall be his. According to the tribes of your fathers you shall inherit. 55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell. 56 And I will do to you as I thought to do to them.”**

**33:52** *drive out all the inhabitants from the land ... destroy all; their metal;images...demolish all their high places.* What Israel had accomplished in the war against the Midianites (ch. 31) was now to be extended to all the inhabitants of Canaan. Particularly important was the command to destroy all symbols of the pagan religious system of the Canaanites. (CSB)

At times, the Lord speaks of displacing the Canaanites; at other times, of destroying them. The two approaches do not appear to conflict, because the goal in either case was to make room for Israel. The Canaanites’ idolatrous symbols and sites of worship were to be demolished. At this time, their measure of iniquity was complete (Gn 15:16). (TLSB)

**33:54** *by lot according to your clans.* The extent of each allotment was proportionate to the size of the tribe, which had been established by the census. (TLSB)

**33:56** The Israelites were to know that their God was not a partisan or national deity. If their disobedience to this command later brought about their apostasy, He would punish them as severely as He did the Canaanites (Dt 8:19–20). Unfortunately, the Israelites disregarded this warning and broke the covenant. God carried out His threat. Cf 2Ki 17; 25. (TLSB)

**33:50–56** God does not want the religions of the heathen Canaanites to influence the Israelites or to lead them astray as did the Midianites. God’s people today should avoid all syncretism with other religions, lest the teaching of God’s Word be corrupted. As you interact with others who do not know or believe in Christ, pray for their deliverance, life, and salvation. Rejoice in the inheritance the Lord grants you as His beloved children. • “Preserve Your Word, O Savior, To us this latter day, And let Your kingdom flourish; Enlarge Your Church, we pray. O keep our faith from failing; Keep hope’s bright star aglow. Let nothing from truth turn us While living here below.” Amen. (LSB 658:1) (TLSB)