

NUMBERS

Chapter 33

Stages in Israel's Journey

Here are the stages in the journey of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt by divisions under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. ² At the LORD's command Moses recorded the stages in their journey. This is their journey by stages: ³ The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, ⁴ who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods. ⁵ The Israelites left Rameses and camped at Succoth. ⁶ They left Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the desert. ⁷ They left Etham, turned back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol. ⁸ They left Pi Hahiroth and passed through the sea into the desert, and when they had traveled for three days in the Desert of Etham, they camped at Marah. ⁹ They left Marah and went to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. ¹⁰ They left Elim and camped by the Red Sea. ¹¹ They left the Red Sea and camped in the Desert of Sin. ¹² They left the Desert of Sin and camped at Dophkah. ¹³ They left Dophkah and camped at Alush. ¹⁴ They left Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. ¹⁵ They left Rephidim and camped in the Desert of Sinai. ¹⁶ They left the Desert of Sinai and camped at Kibroth Hattaavah. ¹⁷ They left Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. ¹⁸ They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. ¹⁹ They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez. ²⁰ They left Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah. ²¹ They left Libnah and camped at Rissah. ²² They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. ²³ They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. ²⁴ They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. ²⁵ They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth. ²⁶ They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath. ²⁷ They left Tahath and camped at Terah. ²⁸ They left Terah and camped at Mithcah. ²⁹ They left Mithcah and camped at Hashmonah. ³⁰ They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. ³¹ They left Moseroth and camped at Bene Jaakan. ³² They left Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor Haggidgad. ³³ They left Hor Haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. ³⁴ They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. ³⁵ They left Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber. ³⁶ They left Ezion Geber and camped at Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin. ³⁷ They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the border of Edom. ³⁸ At the LORD's command Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor, where he died on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. ³⁹ Aaron was a hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. ⁴⁰ The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev of Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming. ⁴¹ They left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. ⁴² They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon. ⁴³ They left Punon and camped at Oboth. ⁴⁴ They left Oboth and camped at Iye Abarim, on the border of Moab. ⁴⁵ They left Iyim and camped at Dibon Gad. ⁴⁶ They left Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim. ⁴⁷ They left Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains of

Abarim, near Nebo. ⁴⁸ They left the mountains of Abarim and camped on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. ⁴⁹ There on the plains of Moab they camped along the Jordan from Beth Jeshimoth to Abel Shittim. ⁵⁰ On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the LORD said to Moses, ⁵¹ “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, ⁵² drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. ⁵³ Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. ⁵⁴ Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes. ⁵⁵ “ ‘But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. ⁵⁶ And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.’ ”

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 See map, p 120. 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*. See note, 20:22. 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)

33:52 *drive out all the inhabitants of the land ... Destroy all their ... idols*. 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)