

## A Review of Israel's Journey from Egypt to Canaan

### Numbers 33

Numbers 33:1-48 - *"These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. <sup>2</sup> Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these are their journeys according to their starting points:*

*<sup>3</sup> They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. <sup>4</sup> For the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.*

*<sup>5</sup> Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth. <sup>6</sup> They departed from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup> They moved from Etham and turned back to Pi Hahiroth, which is east of Baal Zephon; and they camped near Migdol. <sup>8</sup> They departed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, went three days' journey in the Wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. <sup>9</sup> They moved from Marah and came to Elim. At Elim were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there.*

*<sup>10</sup> They moved from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. <sup>11</sup> They moved from the Red Sea and camped in the Wilderness of Sin. <sup>12</sup> They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. <sup>13</sup> They departed from Dophkah and camped at Alush. <sup>14</sup> They moved from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink.*

*<sup>15</sup> They departed from Rephidim and camped in the Wilderness of Sinai. <sup>16</sup> They moved from the Wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth Hattaavah.*

Verses 16-36 comprise a list of places where Israel camped in Sinai, where the Law was given, to Kadesh Barnea, where they had sent out the spies 38 years earlier. Verse 36:

*<sup>36</sup> They moved from Ezion Geber and camped in the Wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh. <sup>37</sup> They moved from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the boundary of the land of Edom.*

*<sup>38</sup> Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. <sup>39</sup> Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. <sup>40</sup> Now the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel.*

Verses 41-48 provide a list of the places where the people of Israel camped from Mount Hor, where Aaron died, to the plains of Moab, where Israel would cross over the Jordan River to Jericho. Verse 48:

*<sup>48</sup> They departed from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. <sup>49</sup> They camped by the Jordan, from Beth Jesimoth as far as the Abel Acacia Grove in the plains of Moab."*

## Background Notes

When we look at Bible maps that trace the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, we find that there is disagreement about the exact route that Israel took. One reason is that archaeologists have not yet found some of the places listed in Numbers 33. Remember, these places were not cities, but rather campsites, and a temporary campsite usually doesn't leave a permanent archaeological record. The people of that day didn't leave Styrofoam cups and aluminum cans behind! Archeologists might wish they had left some things behind - but they didn't.

There are two big questions about the locations of the places listed here:

### 1. Exactly where did Israel cross the Red Sea?

The Hebrew words for "Red Sea" can also be translated "Reed Sea," so some people have "watered down" the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea (pardon the pun!), and they say that Israel crossed at a marshy area called the Sea of Reeds. However, the same Hebrew words for "Red Sea" are used throughout the Old Testament for the all of the Red Sea. 1 Kings 9:26 states that King Solomon's navy was located on the Red Sea, and clearly a navy would not be located in a "marshy area." We don't know for sure whether the crossing of the Red Sea was through the Gulf of Suez, or the Gulf of Aqaba, or at the Straits of Tiran. By the way, no confirmed findings of chariot wheels have been **reliably** recorded yet!

### 2. Exactly which mountain is the "real" Mount Sinai?

We can't be sure of that location, either. The traditional Mount Sinai is in the southern Sinai Peninsula, and it's great to hike this mountain on our Holy Land Tours, but we can't be sure if it's the actual biblical Mount Sinai.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God led His people to specific locations when they traveled in the wilderness.

If we only had Numbers 33 as a record of where Israel camped in the wilderness, we might conclude that they chose these locations themselves, or that Moses and Aaron decided where to go. Verse 1 says that they were under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. But Moses and Aaron didn't choose the locations, and the people didn't choose the locations. **God** chose the specific locations. We know that for sure because Exodus 13 says that **God led them** through the wilderness with a "pillar of cloud" by day, and a "pillar of fire" by night. *"The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people" (Exodus 13:21-22).* We read about this wonderful guidance system in Numbers 9 as well. So God **led** His people to specific locations in their wilderness travels.

Does God still lead and guide His people today? Yes! Does He still lead His people specifically in this wilderness world? Yes, He does -- **if we're willing to follow!** Psalm 32:8 says, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye."* Now that's specific guidance! Does this include what job to take, and what

house to buy, and when and where to retire, etc., etc.? Why not? God knows us better than we know ourselves. He certainly knows what's best for us. God will specifically guide us **if we're willing to follow Him**.

He expects us to use the common sense that He has given us when we make decisions, and He expects us to use the biblical principles that He has already given us in His Word. But He will guide us specifically. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."*

As God led His people in their wilderness travels from Egypt to Canaan, so God will lead us in our Christian walk in the "wilderness" of this world. God led His people to specific locations when they traveled in the wilderness.

## 2. God gave His people specific instructions when they entered the Land.

Numbers 33:50-56 - *"Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, <sup>51</sup> 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>52</sup> then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; <sup>53</sup> you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. <sup>54</sup> And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. <sup>55</sup> But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. <sup>56</sup> Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.'"*

Verses 50-56 reveal that when Israel entered into the Land of Promise, they were to drive out the pagan inhabitants of the Land. They were to destroy all the idolatrous stones and molten images, and they were to demolish all the pagan shrines on the high places. After they divided up the Land for the various tribes, each tribe was to finish the job of cleaning out the pockets of enemy resistance. God didn't want His people polluted or contaminated or associated with the idolatry and immorality of the pagan Canaanites in any way. Israel was to clean out the land, and be separate from every form of evil.

The lesson for us is obvious, isn't it? In 2 Corinthians 6:17, we read, *"Come out from among them and **be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you**" [emphasis added]*. Clearly, we are not even to dabble with any form of evil in this world! However, we are not to live as Christian hermits in this world, either! We are to be "salt and light" in this world, as the Lord taught in Matthew 5:13-14 - *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."* As believers, we are to be "salt and light" in this world - but we are to be **separate from the evil** in this world system! That's not always an easy road to travel, is it? What should we do when someone at work tells an off-color story, for example? How should we regulate what programs or movies the family watches on TV? How do we control what we (and our children) read and view on the internet?

God warned His people about what would happen if they didn't follow His instructions when they entered into the Land: *"But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell"* (v55). Do you see the spiritual lesson? If we don't separate ourselves from the **evil** of this world, we will not enjoy the blessings and rewards of the Christian life. In fact, the evil that we refuse to separate from will be a "thorn in our side." It will be a serious life-long problem for us - and our families, as well!

So what's the solution? We must read, study and **know God's instructions** in His Word, and teach it to our children. And we must **separate ourselves from every form of evil**. God gave His people specific instructions when they entered into the Land.

## Practical Application

**Thank the Lord that even your wanderings are all under God's control!**

We usually think that Israel was just wandering around during the 40 years in the wilderness. Well, they certainly did wander, from one perspective, but it's clear from this chapter that God was in control wherever they went, even down to the specific campsites where they camped! Deuteronomy 8:2 says, *"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."* Notice: **remember how God led you!** This verse doesn't say, "Remember how you just wandered around into the wilderness." No, it specifically says **God led you all the way** for all 40 of those years in the wilderness.

So the children of Israel were not just wandering around aimlessly in the wilderness. God was leading them, and testing them, and disciplining them. They were wandering because of their sin, but God guided where they wandered and where they camped. God guided and controlled the specific places to which they traveled, to test them and discipline them.

And this is also true in our lives today. Even when we "wander" in the wilderness of this world, God is using our experiences as tests of our faith and discipline in our lives. He tests and disciplines us to help us grow in our faith, and to draw us closer to Him, so He can bless us in the future. Thank the Lord that even your wanderings are under God's control!