



Numbers - Chapter Thirty Three

V Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Three

This list of camping places is unexpected at this point in Numbers. What is its function and why is it here? It comes straight after the threat posed by the settlement in Transjordan, when it seemed that some tribes might not have wanted to enter the Promised Land. Further, this is the only part of the book that is explicitly said to be written by Moses: most of the book is said to have been given to Moses by God, but only this is said to have been recorded by him (v.2). It therefore serves as Moses' testimony of what God has done for Israel during his lifetime.

By mentioning Aaron's death, Moses indirectly reminds the people that he too will die soon because of his disobedience. However, this is not to suggest that God has failed his people; rather, this list of places where Israel triumphed over her enemies, was fed and watered, received the law, and was preserved for 40 years in the wilderness is proof that the Lord can bring Israel into Canaan, provided that they do not imitate the unbelief of their forefathers.

The list therefore concludes with an urgent plea to make sure that all pagan worship is eliminated from Canaan when they enter it. Seventeen of the names in this list occur only here, and nothing more is known than that Israel camped at those places. Even places that are named elsewhere cannot necessarily be firmly located. Although tradition places Sinai at Jebel Musa in the southern Sinai Peninsula, clues within the narrative may point to a more northerly location. However, these geographical uncertainties do not affect the historical and theological point of the passage, namely, God's sovereign and merciful guidance of Israel from Egypt to Canaan.

This chapter is a uniform and complete description that reflects the form of a military itinerary. Such military itineraries are widely attested in the countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean Sea. In ancient Egypt, for example, those of Thutmose III (circa 1479-1425 BC), Amenophis II (circa 1427-1401 BC), and Sethos I (circa 1306-1290 BC) provide prime examples of this literary genre.

V.g. [Numbers 33:1-56 - Summary of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.

V.g.i. [Numbers 33:1-49 - The Stages of Israel's Journey from Egypt](#)

This sub-section mostly recounts the various staging points on the Israelites journey with occasional comments on key events that happened, such as the death of the high priest Aaron.

¹ These are the stages by which the Israelites went out of the land of Egypt in military formation under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

² Moses wrote down their starting points, 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 Israelites went out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, ⁴ while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them. The Lord executed judgements even against their gods.

[Numbers 33:1-4](#)

These verses summarise Exodus 2-12.

[The Israelites went out of the land of Egypt in military formation.](#) The first mention of organising the people for camping and marching comes in Numbers Chapter 2. The statement here likely reflects the organisation after the giving of the law rather than the initial departure from Egypt.

[They set out from Rameses.](#) This statement causes one of the controversies surrounding the dating of the Exodus. First Kings 6:1 says that the Exodus occurred 480 years before the construction of Solomon's Temple; this would imply an Exodus circa 1446 BC, during Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty. However, the city of Rameses is assumed to have been named after Pharaoh Rameses II, who reigned from 1279-1213 BC. This would date the Exodus to some when in the 13th Century BC. Differing interpretations of the time frame of Judges allows for either date to be correct.



The Temple Ruins at Rameses

The Israelites went out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians. Although they were slaves, they did not have to shrink out of Egypt; God gave them the boldness to leave as conquerors, not as escaping slaves.

The Lord executed judgements even against their gods. The defeat of Pharaoh, who was regarded as divine by his people, and the plagues of Egypt demonstrated that the Lord is more powerful than all the gods of Egypt. Just as the Lord had treated the Egyptian gods, so Israel was to abolish the worship of rival deities in Canaan (v.52).

⁵ So the Israelites set out from Rameses, and camped at Succoth.
⁶ They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. ⁷ They set out from Etham, and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon; and they camped before Migdol.
⁸ They set out from Pi-hahiroth, passed through the sea into the wilderness, went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. ⁹ 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 They set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea.
¹¹ They set out from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin.
¹² They set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah.
¹³ They set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush. ¹⁴ They set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. ¹⁵ They set out from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.

Numbers 33:5-15

These verses summarise Exodus 12:37-19:2.

So the Israelites set out from Rameses, and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.

This portion of the journey took them more than a year, but most of the time was not spent travelling, it was spent in receiving the law at Mount Sinai and making all the items necessary to construct the tabernacle.

¹⁶ They set out from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. ¹⁷ They set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth.

Numbers 33:16-17

These verses summarise Israel's journeys in Numbers Chapters 10-11.

They set out from the wilderness of Sinai. This portion of the journey took them some 38 years; not because the distance was so long, but because God led them in wanderings due to the unbelief of the generation who were destined to die in the wilderness before a generation of faith could be raised up to take possession of the Promised Land.

¹⁸ They set out from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. ¹⁹ They set out from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. ²⁰ They set out from Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. ²¹ They set out from Libnah and camped at Rissah. ²² They set out from Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. ²³ They set out from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. ²⁴ They set out from Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. ²⁵ They set out from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. ²⁶ They set out from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. ²⁷ They set out from Tahath and camped at Terah. ²⁸ They set out from Terah and camped at Mithkah. ²⁹ They set out from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah.

Numbers 33:18-29

This section of the wilderness journey is mentioned only here.

They set out from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. Kibroth Hattaavah (v.17), Hazeroth and Rithmah: the listing of Israel's encampments comes rapidly; more than 30 place names are given in quick succession in the coming verses. During this time, there was a lot of activity for the people of Israel but no progress. They were not coming any closer to the Promised Land, and would not come closer until the generation of unbelief had passed away.

³⁰ They set out from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. ³¹ They set out from Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. ³² They set out from Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. ³³ They set out from Hor-

haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. ³⁴ They set out from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah.

Numbers 33:30-34

This section of the wilderness journey is also probably mentioned in Deuteronomy 10:6-7, if the similar place names are in fact the same places.

³⁵ They set out from Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber. ³⁶ They set out from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin (that is, Kadesh). ³⁷ They set out from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the edge of the land of Edom.

Numbers 33:35-37

Ezion-geber is probably at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba.

³⁸ Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor at the command of the Lord and died there in the fortieth year after the Israelites had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. ³⁹ Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

Numbers 33:38-39

Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. Details of the death of Aaron and the passing of the high priest's role to his son Eleazar were given in Numbers 20:22-29. Here, additional information is given about the great age of Aaron, Moses elder brother.

⁴⁰ The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the Israelites.

Numbers 33:40

The Canaanite, the king of Arad. The king went out to fight Israel and took some of them captives. Israel asked the Lord to give this people and their lands into Israel's hands and he did so. All the towns were destroyed (Numbers 21:1-3).

⁴¹ They set out from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. ⁴² They set out from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. ⁴³ They set out from Punon and camped at Oboth. ⁴⁴ They set out from Oboth and camped at Iyeabarim, in the territory of Moab. ⁴⁵ They set out from Iyim and camped at Dibon-gad. ⁴⁶ They set out from Dibon-gad and camped at Almondiblathaim. ⁴⁷ They set out from Almondiblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. ⁴⁸ 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.

Numbers 33:41-49

Verses 38-49 sum up Israel's journeys in Numbers Chapters 20-25.

V.g.ii. Numbers 33:50-56 - Directions for the Conquest of Canaan

This stern warning against religious syncretism and cultural assimilation is repeated often in Deuteronomy and Judges. It concludes with a warning that it will be Israel that will go into exile if the people compromise on God's commands to them: <<*I will do to you as I thought to do to them*>> (v.56).

Its insistence that the land must be divided among the tribes in proportion to their size and allocated by lot (v.54) repeats the instruction of Numbers 26:53-56. The census had determined the size of the tribes; now the focus is on the land. Its boundaries will be defined in Chapter 34, and the chiefs are appointed to oversee the allocation of the land (Numbers 34:17-29).

⁵⁰ In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ⁵¹ Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ⁵² you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places. ⁵³ You shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess.

Numbers 33:50-53

You shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you. God had a unique role for the nation of Israel in regard to the people of Canaan. He used them as a unique instrument of judgement against the Canaanites.

Destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places. This unique purpose explains why Israel was commanded not only to defeat them militarily, but to erase the remains of the idolatrous culture. Modern archaeology has documented the corrupt and demonic worship practices of the Canaanites. They were truly a culture ripe for the judgement of God.

⁵⁴ You shall apportion the land by lot according to your clans; to a large one you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small one you shall give a small inheritance; the inheritance shall belong to the person on whom the lot falls; according to your ancestral tribes you shall inherit.

⁵⁵ But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides; they shall trouble you in the land where you are settling. ⁵⁶ And I will do to you as I thought to do to them.

Numbers 33:54-56

You shall apportion the land by lot according to your clans. God's intent was not only to bring judgement on the corrupt culture of the Canaanites, but also to give the land to Israel to possess.

But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. If Israel failed to drive the Canaanites out of the land, they could still occupy the Promised Land. However, the corrupt practices and heart of the Canaanites would find a place among Israel, and Israel itself would eventually be driven out of the land.

This became true of Israel's history. They did not fully drive out the Canaanites, and although they possessed the land, the corruption of the Canaanites continued among Israel until eventually God allowed Israel to be driven out of the land into exile. It is of no use for the church to succeed in the eyes of man - just as Israel had succeeded when they occupied the land and became a legitimate nation, instead of an enslaved people - if it merely allows the corrupt practices and attitudes of the world to take root. If this happens, the church should expect to be eventually driven from its place of success.