

# The Book of Numbers

## Lesson 20

### Chapters 33

With the destruction of the Midianites from the new tribal areas of Reuben and Gad, Moses incorporated into the text of this book the itinerary of the Nation of Israel from its Egyptian departure to the camp at the edge of the Jordan River. This itinerary covers the nation's 40 years in the wilderness. It now becomes the appropriate time to speak about the name of this book. We call it "Numbers" because within its pages the Nation of Israel was originally numbered or counted. The Hebrew name was *bemidbar* which means *in the wilderness*, taken from Numbers 1:1 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai." However, the Jews also called it *vaidabber* which means *He spoke* taken from the same verse, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai." When the Greeks translated this book they named it *Arithmoi*. See the word *arith* in that word. It is where we get our word *arithmetic* and it means to count or number. In Greek it meant *numeration or to number*. When Jerome translated the Scripture into Latin, he used the literal translation of the Greek word and named it *Numeri* from which we arrive at our name for the book as *Numbers*.

The itinerary included 42 stops. The details of the first 15 verses occurred in the book of Exodus. The rest occurred in Numbers. Here is a summary of the travels of the Nation of Israel from Egypt to its camp on the east side of the Jordan.

## Journey from Egypt to the Camp on the East Side of Jericho Beyond the Jordan

### Rameses to Succoth

Num 33:1 These are the journeys of the sons of Israel, by which they came out from the land of Egypt by their armies, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 33:2 Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the LORD, and these are their journeys according to their starting places. 33:3 They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, 33:4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn whom the LORD had struck down among them. The LORD had also executed judgments on their gods. 33:5 Then the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses and camped in Succoth.

On Nisan 15<sup>th</sup>, a Friday morning, the nation gathered in the city of Rameses arranged in order to march out of Egypt, accepted gifts from the Egyptians and then left the city in one mass exodus. At that time, Rameses was a mud brick city in the delta of the Nile River in an area called the land of Goshen. More than likely, the Israelites had made those mud bricks some time in the last 300 years of their lives in that area. A Pharaoh will come into power two hundred years after the

exodus and rebuild the city with the newly formed formula for concrete and some remnants of that city remain today. He was Rameses II. He was not the Pharaoh of the exodus as many commentators speculate. The exodus occurred in 1464 BC; Rameses reigned from 1279 – 1213 BC.

In the days of the exodus, the mud brick city of Rameses was essentially a storehouse for the nation's supplies. Rameses, in the land of Goshen was the perfect place for the Israelites to gather. Joseph's Pharaoh had given the land of Goshen, to the Israelites and Pharaoh employed them to take care of his livestock. Because of their service to Pharaoh, they were, in essence, servants of the high ruler. The same was true with each succeeding Pharaoh through the years. As the years passed, the paid status of the Israelite employees became slavery positions. From there the bondage grew and brought great despair among the people of Israel.

Finally, after 430 years of life in Egypt, Israel cried out for a savior. Moses was sent, instructions were given, miracles occurred and then the Passover meal was prepared on Nisan 14<sup>th</sup>. The blood from the lamb was spread on the door posts of the homes of the Israelites and after dark, on the night of the Nisan 15<sup>th</sup> the death angel passed through Egypt and the firstborn of every family died in the houses where the blood of the lamb was not on the doorpost. Later, Moses informed us that one firstborn Egyptian died that night to redeem every firstborn of the Nation of Israel who did not die. On the first day, in their boldness to leave Egypt, they traveled from Rameses to Succoth where they camped the first night, a trip of just under 30 miles. We know the location of the city of Rameses, we have archeological finds to prove its location; today, Rameses is known as Qantir, Egypt. The exact location of Succoth is not known. Scholars identify two possible locations. The first is the camp previously mentioned about 30 miles from Rameses on the northwest side of the *Great Bitter Lakes*. The other camp was located about 120 miles from Rameses on the eastern side of the *Gulf of Suez*. Unless the Nation of Israel marched three to four days without stopping, this second stop was impossible. Furthermore, in Exodus 12:42, the LORD made a major announcement about the first night out of Egypt at the camp in Succoth. If they traveled two to three days before stopping, the first night out of Egypt would not have been the true first night and that does not make sense. For that reason, we hold to the position that Succoth was located somewhere near the northwest side of the *Great Bitter Lakes*, about 30 miles from Rameses.<sup>29</sup> The name *Succoth* gives a clue to the location. It means to *screen or cover* as with a tent. It was the first night that the Nation of Israel lived in tents and they would continue to do so for 40 years. Therefore, at the time, *Succoth* was not the name of a village but the place where Israel first pitched its tents after leaving Rameses.

### Succoth to Etham

<sup>33:6</sup> They journeyed from Succoth and camped in Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness.

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<sup>29</sup> Exodus 12:37

On the second day, the Nation of Israel traveled another 20 to 25 miles to the northeast corner of the large body of water that today we call the *Gulf of Suez*. Moses states that it was “on the edge of the wilderness” and that is true. East of the *Gulf of Suez* waters is a dry wilderness area called the *Wilderness of Etham*. It is not a flat area. Rather, it is a rough and rugged mountainous area. At the edge of the *wilderness of Etham*, Moses had three choices for his journey on the following day. First, he could travel east a few miles and then turn north to go around the northern edge of the mountain range, but that would take the nation right to the foot of the land of Canaan and too close to the Promised Land. Israel was not ready for that. Second, he could continue south to the main body of the Red Sea and then follow the coast a short distance until he would either have to climb the mountain or be blocked at a dead end. Third, he could go directly east through a valley and make his way between two mountain ranges until he came to the northern coast of the *Sea of Aqaba* from which he could arrive at Mount Etham. From there he could take a direct route southeast to Mount Sinai. That was the plan he chose.



**Location of Mount Etham**  
Also known as Ithm, Itm, Yitm, Lithm, and Ithem



**Map 19: Israelites turn back (west) and then turned front (east) to enter a pass through the mountains that led them to a beach where they are surrounded by mountain walls and water.**

### Etham to Pi-hahirth/Migdol

33:7 They journeyed from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol.

Moses took the valley route between the two mountain ranges headed for Mount Etham at the top of the *Sea of Aqaba*. According to the record in the book of Exodus, Pharaoh was approaching quickly. The nation could not get around the *Sea of Aqaba* quickly enough and the LORD directed it with the pillar of cloud and fire to turn back and cause Pharaoh to think they were wandering without a clear path. He turned them west until they came to Migdol where they camped.

### Pi-hahiroth/Migdol through the Sea to Marah

33:8 They journeyed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness; and they went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah.

From Migdol they followed a narrow cut in the mountain that led to a beautiful beach where they camped. As Pharaoh followed them down the cut, the LORD blocked them a pillar of fire. The nation had nowhere to go. The beach was surrounded by high cliffs. They could not go south or north without entering the sea and trying to keep from drowning as they tried to escape from Pharaoh. But the LORD had another plan. They were to go directly east across the sea, through the sea – on dry ground but with walls of water on either side of them. That happened! On the other side of the sea, they turned around to see Pharaoh’s army drown as the water returned to its original place. Then, they journeyed south for three days in the eastern half of the *wilderness of Etham* south of Mount Etham and they finally camped at Marah.<sup>30</sup> It was at Marah that the only water source was bitter and Moses made it sweet by throwing a branch in it.

### Marah to Elim

**33:9** They journeyed from Marah and came to Elim; and in Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there.

The direction had been set. They were not going to journey the easy route to Mount Sinai. Rather, they hugged the coast line of the *Sea of Aqaba* and headed south where they would finally arrive at Elim, the place of the twelve springs and 70 palm trees.

### Elim to Red Sea

**33:10** They journeyed from Elim and camped by the Red Sea.

After camping at Elim for a short time to rest, the LORD led them a short distance to camp by the main body of water called the Red Sea.<sup>31</sup> One of the items that would be needed to give to Moses in just a few days was porpoise skins for the Tabernacle complex. The nation did not know that yet, but it was there that they took the time by the Red Sea to gather those skins for personal use to waterproof their own tents.<sup>32</sup> The Red Sea was not red, neither was the sand red. The word is *yam suph* which means *weedy sea*. We call it the Red Sea, but in reality, it should be the *Reed Sea*.

### Red Sea to Wilderness of Sin

**33:11** They journeyed from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin.

From the Red Sea the camp moved up into the *wilderness of Sin*. This, too, would prove to have been a necessary stop. It was not a village but a place large enough for the camp to settle for a while. This wilderness was filled with acacia trees, a product that would be useful in tent making but it was also going to be called for to build the Tabernacle complex. The nation did not know at this time that wood would be needed but surely the LORD was providing all they would need to give in a free-will offering soon - when it was needed. But something else was important

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<sup>30</sup> Exodus 15:22

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 15:27

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 10:19

about this place. It was where they grumbled about their food. It was where the LORD began giving them *manna* to eat, to eat for 40 years, but they did not know that yet. It was also there that the LORD gave them quail for the first time.

### Wilderness of Sin to Dophkah

33:12 They journeyed from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah.

On to the camp at Dophkah, a place not mentioned in the book of Exodus, but no doubt this site was close to the home of Moses' wife and his father-in-law, Jethro.

### Dophkah to Alush

33:13 They journeyed from Dophkah and camped at Alush.

From Dophkah, the camp moved into the mountain range near Mount Sinai. They called the camp Alush. It is not mentioned in the book of Exodus but no doubt it was in the valley leading to Rephidim.

### Alush to Rephidim

33:14 They journeyed from Alush and camped at Rephidim; now it was there that the people had no water to drink.

Leaving Alush, they entered a large flat plain within the mountain range called Rephidim. It was there that they needed water. It was there that Moses struck the rock and water came forth.<sup>33</sup>

### Rephidim to Wilderness of Sinai

33:15 They journeyed from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.

Finally, the nation made its way through the hard terrain to Mount Sinai where it would stay until the beginning of the second year, receive the 10 Commandment tablets, the Levitical Law, and build the Tabernacle complex.



**Split Rock at the location called Rephidim. Mount Sinai (top left) Blue line Mount Sinai. White line split rock at**

### Wilderness of Sinai to Kibroth-hattaavah

33:16 They journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah.

<sup>33</sup> Exodus 17

“Kiborth-hattaava” means *the graves of desire*. It was not a village but a stop along the road to Kadesh-Barnea where the Israelites murmured again against God. It was a three-day journey through the rugged terrain from Mount Sinai. We do not know the location but what happened here is told in the book of Exodus.<sup>34</sup>

At this point we must make an important distinction. This itinerary does not include the journey that the nation made from Sinai to Kadesh and back to Sinai in the second year after leaving Egypt. That event was mentioned in Numbers 10. But this second visit to Kiborth-hattaava was a reference to an unnamed stop on the journey from Sinai to Kadesh recorded in Number 20, just months before this passage in Numbers 33 at the end of the 40-year wilderness stay. Therefore, this first stop away from Sinai was where many of their ancestors had been buried 38 years before.

#### Kilbroth-hattavah to Hazeroth

33:17 They journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth.

Hazeroth is but a blur too; its location is not known. However, Numbers 12 speaks of the rebellion that happened there with the family squabble between Miriam and Moses. The consequence of that squabble was leprosy for Miriam and the journey was stalled because of her sin. But that sin occurred 38 years before this visit. This second visit was not mentioned in Numbers 20 when they stopped there. We would not have known about it save for this record of the itinerary. We can only wonder what she thought about the place when she arrived there that second time. Surely, she did not make the same mistake.

#### Hazeroth to Ritmah

33:18 They journeyed from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah.

“Rithmah” means *juniper trees* and Numbers 13 indicates that the next stop from Hazeroth was in the *wilderness of Paran* which begins at the north shore of the *Gulf of Aqaba*. (Just south of the *wilderness of Paran* was the *wilderness of Etham* that we mentioned in earlier in this chapter.)

#### Ritmah to Rimmon-perez

33:19 They journeyed from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez.

Moving north, the camp stationed at “Rimmon-perez.” The name means *pomegranate of the breach*. Its location is unknown, and the meaning of the name is unclear. At this



<sup>34</sup> Exodus 10-11

point in the itinerary, the Nation of Israel is going to make 16 stops in the *wilderness of Paran*, all unknown locations.

### Rimmon-perez to Abronah

**Numbers 33:20** They journeyed from Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. <sup>21</sup> They journeyed from Libnah and camped at Rissah. <sup>22</sup> They journeyed from Rissah and camped in Kehelathah. <sup>23</sup> They journeyed from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. <sup>24</sup> They journeyed from Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. **Numbers 33:25** They journeyed from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. <sup>26</sup> They journeyed from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. <sup>27</sup> They journeyed from Tahath and camped at Terah. **Numbers 33:28** They journeyed from Terah and camped at Mithkah. <sup>29</sup> They journeyed from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. <sup>30</sup> They journeyed from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. <sup>31</sup> They journeyed from Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. <sup>32</sup> They journeyed from Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. <sup>33</sup> They journeyed from Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. **Numbers 33:34** They journeyed from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah.

From Rimmon-perez to Abronah, the camp made 16 stops along the way. None of these locations are known today. Each place was named by the Israelites when they stopped at that location because of something that was natural to the site or some event that occurred there. The only thing we can assume about the locations of these stops is that they were on the east side of the *Sea of Aqaba* from between Mount Sinai to the south and to the north a few miles of the northern tip of the shore of the sea and east of Ezion-geber.



All the camps of the Nation of Israel from Mount Sinai to Ezion-Geber fall somewhere within the green box seen in this map, east of the *Sea of Aqaba*.

### Abronah to Ezion-geber

**33:35** They journeyed from Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber.

For the first time after leaving Mount Sinai, the camp arrived at a place that we can identify. Ezion-geber rested on the northwest shore of the *Sea of Aqaba*. Many years later, it would be from this sea port that Solomon would send his ships to Ophir to bring back gold. <sup>35</sup>

### Ezion-geber to Kadesh

**33:36** They journeyed from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin, that is, Kadesh.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Kings 9:26

Finally, the camp arrived at Kadesh-Barnea, the place where they had sinned by not trusting the LORD 38 years before. It was from here that Moses sent the spies and they brought back the bad report. This time, at this location, Miriam died and was buried there. Kadesh is in the *wilderness of Zin*. “Zin” does not mean *sin*. A *wilderness of sin* does exist, but it is southwest of Mount Sinai, 247 miles away as mentioned in Numbers 22. There, in the *wilderness of Sin*, a camp was established by the nation before arriving at Mount Sinai the first time.

It is not exactly clear why the LORD led Israel back to this place called Kadesh save for two things, the sin of Moses and the death of Miriam, but no other reasons are indicated in the Scripture. It was here that Moses disobeyed the LORD by striking the rock for water rather than speaking to it. While camped there, Moses sent messengers to the Edomite cousins asking for permission to march through their land to go up the east side of the Jordan River. The request was twice denied. The LORD would then turn the nation southeast and take it back toward the mountain range from which it had just come to the southern border of Edom’s boundary line and the location of Mount Hor.

#### Kadesh to Mount Hor

<sup>33:37</sup> They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. <sup>33:38</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 sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt, on the first *day* in the fifth month. <sup>33:39</sup> Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. <sup>33:40</sup> Now the Canaanite, the king of Arad who lived in the Negev in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the sons of Israel.

By the time Moses was recording this itinerary, Aaron had died several months before at Mount Hor although it was in the same year. Here, the Canaanite king decided to attack Israel resulting in the first battle victory for Israel.<sup>36</sup>

#### Mount Hor to Abarim

<sup>Numbers 33:41</sup> Then they journeyed from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. <sup>Numbers 33:42</sup> They journeyed from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. <sup>Numbers 33:43</sup> They journeyed from Punon and camped at Oboth. <sup>Numbers 33:44</sup> They journeyed from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, at the border of Moab. <sup>Numbers 33:45</sup> They journeyed from Iyim and camped at Dibon-gad. <sup>Numbers 33:46</sup> They journeyed from Dibon-gad and camped at Almon-diblathaim. <sup>Numbers 33:47</sup> They journeyed from Almon-diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo.

Upon leaving Mount Hor after the death of Aaron, the nation of Israel skirted to the east of the land of Edom to enter the lands that originally belonged to Moab and Ammon. Seven camps are noted but we do not know the exact locations. These were the camps of the nation as a whole; this itinerary does not include the camps of the army of Israel as it marched all the way to Mount

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<sup>36</sup> Numbers 21

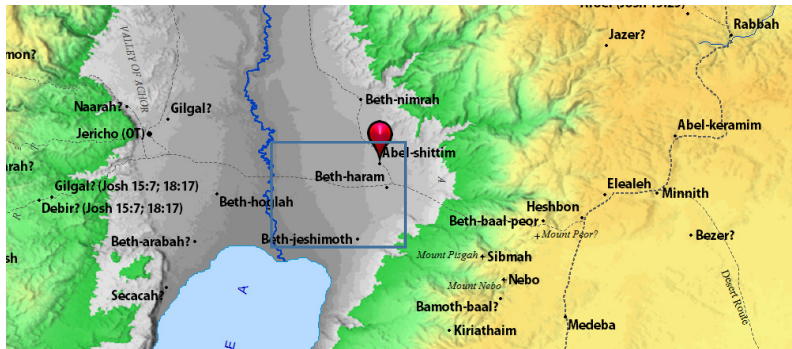


Herman north of the *Sea of Kinneret* (Galilee) to fight against the Amorite kings of Sihon and Og. The entire camp did not leave its resting place mentioned in the next passage called “the plains of Moab by the Jordan *opposite* Jericho” while the warriors fought the battles.

### Abraim/Nebo to Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim

33:48 They journeyed from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan *opposite* Jericho. 33:49 They camped by the Jordan, from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.

The Jordan River rested in the Jordan Valley. On either side of the valley was a mountain range. On the east side of the Jordan River the camp settled west of the mountain range. Israel sprawled for about five square miles, from the river’s edge to Abel-shittim and down to Beth-jeshimoth. It was for this reason that Balak was not able to show Balaam the entire nation from one location; he had to relocate three times on three mountains to see the entire camp.



### Instruction for the Taking of Canaan Land

Num 33:50 Then **the LORD spoke to Moses** in the plains of Moab by the Jordan *opposite* Jericho, saying, 33:51 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places; 33:53 and you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it. 33:54 'You shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to the larger you shall give more inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give less inheritance. Wherever the lot falls to anyone, that shall be his. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. 33:55 'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them *will become* as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live. 33:56 'And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.'"

The LORD’s instruction was to **“drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you.”** The Canaanites were not to remain in the land at all. They were to be driven from the land that they had controlled since the time of the Tower of Babel debacle 974 years before. Out they must go, away from the land, by foot or by death.

The LORD then said, **“destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places.”** “Figured stones” is *maskiyotham* and it means pictures

carved on stones. “Molten images” is *tsalmey messechotham* and it means all the metallic figures made under certain constellations. Both were to be destroyed because they were used in the places of worship by the Canaanites. The “high places” were also to be demolished. Any worship of anything related to Canaan’s god was to be destroyed.

But the LORD also warned the camp about what would happen if they did not drive all the Canaanites from the land. They “**will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live.**” A constant irritant that is! And because we can read ahead, so it shall be. They will not rid the country of all the Canaanites and they will fulfill this prophecy of the LORD. The Canaanites are still there. The Canaanites are still an irritant and a thorn in the side of Israel today. Look at what they are still doing. Today they are called *Palestinians* and they should not be living anywhere near Israel or the Gaza Strip.

One last thing the LORD said in this passage. “**And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.**” The plan was for the Canaanites to be run out of the land. If Israel did not fulfill this order from the LORD, then He would one day run Israel from the land. And so He did, 700 hundred years later when He sent Israel into exile in Assyria.