

Masa'eí

מוצא

“Stages”

Numbers 33:1 – 36:13

Torah Together



This final portion in the book of Numbers contains a summary of the places where the Israelites had traveled and some details about the land they were entering. One can picture the Israelites encamped on the plains of Moab, looking across the Dead Sea valley at the land of Canaan in anticipation of the final part of their forty-year journey.

1. Stages in Israel's Journey - 33:1-56

a) According to verse 2, who actually recorded the stages in Israel's journey from Egypt to their current location? See how many of the locations you can find on a map.

Moses recorded the stages of the Israelite's journey at God's command. Most of these locations are in the Sinai and/or the Arabian peninsula, southern Israel (Negev), and southern and western Jordan (Edom, Moab, Gilead).

b) Verses 3 and 4 record the Israelite departure from Egypt. What key facts does Moses record about this event that were important (at least to him)?

Moses records that the Israelites left Egypt the day after the Passover “in full view of the Egyptians,” who were burying all their firstborn.

c) What significant event is mentioned in verse 8? Can you determine approximately how much time elapsed between verses 15 and 16? (Hint: see Numbers 10:11-13)

Verse 8 records the parting of the Red Sea. The Israelites spent about a year at Mount Sinai, receiving the Torah and building the Tabernacle. This is the period they spent in the “Desert of Sinai” recorded in verses 15-16.

The Israelite's Journey
Numbers 33:3-49 is a stop-by-stop listing of the Israelite's forty-year journey in the wilderness. Although the exact location of many of the places may not be known today, some certainly are. Furthermore, because certain events are known to have occurred at specific locations, it is possible to construct a general timeline giving estimates of how long the Israelites spent at the different locations. See how many events, locations and times you can match up with the account given here.

Scripture Link:

Numbers 33:37-39

describes a specific event in the lives of the Israelites giving both the location and time. This event is also described in **Numbers 20:22-29**.

Taken together, these two passages provide a firm point in both time and space to locate the activities of the Israelites in history.

Barbs in your Eyes and Thorns in your Side

Given what we now know about the history of the Israelites, it appears that they were not very diligent about obeying this command from YHWH. Can you cite any examples that you know of where they failed to do this? Can you describe any historical events that resulted from this failure?

d) Given that all the places named in verses 19 through 33 are in the Desert of Paran (which is located in the northern Sinai peninsula), about how much time do you think passed during this period? What happened toward the beginning of this period?

Verses 19-33 were likely the places the Israelites encamped during their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Toward the beginning of this period is when the 12 spies were sent out (perhaps from Rithmah or Rimmon Perez, verse 19).

e) Do you know where Ezion Geber is? Where is Mount Hor? What important event happened there? Where did their journey finally end?

Ezion Geber is at the north end of the Red Sea, today's Aqaba, Jordan, and Eilat, Israel. Mount Hor (where Aaron was buried) was on the way to Edom. (Near modern Petra, there is a mountain peak named Mount Hor with a shrine to mark the burial place of Aaron.) Their journey ended when they encamped on the plains of Moab across the Jordan river from Jericho.

f) What specific instructions did God give the Israelites for when they entered the land of Israel? What would happen if they failed to obey? Do you think this applies today?

Verses 51 and 52 record that the Israelites were to "drive out all of the inhabitants of the land," and to "destroy all their carved images, their cast idols, and their high places." Verse 55 states that if they failed to do this, those inhabitants allowed to stay would become "barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides," which certainly was the case. (Canaanite idolatry led to the downfall of Israel.) This might even be applied to today's current situation.

Note that Numbers 33:36 refers to the incident with Twelve Spies (Num 13:26; 20:1) and Numbers 33:37 refers to the death of Aaron (Num 20:22 and ff). This was the majority of the 40 years the Israelites spent in the desert, at Kadesh Barnea. One can make a case that the Israelites spent most of the 40 years in the desert at Kadesh Barnea.

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: "When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, 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. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. . . . 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 trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them."

Numbers 33:51 – 53, 55-56

2. Boundaries of Canaan - 34:1-29

a) Can you find the boundaries described in verses 3 - 12 on a map? Which places are familiar to you and which are unknown? How does this compare to Israel's present-day borders?

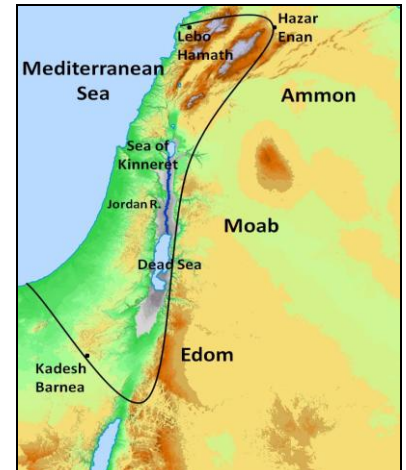
The southern border of Israel starts at the south end of the Salt Sea (Dead Sea) and goes west around Kadesh Barnea to the Wadi of Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. [This includes much of the Negev but does not go south to the Red Sea (Eilat) as today's borders.] The western border was the Mediterranean coast. The northern boundary extends from Mount Hor (different than where Aaron was buried) through Lebo Hamath to Hazar Enan before turning south. (This includes Damascus and much of today's Syria.)

b) How was the land to be assigned to the Israelites? Which tribes were included and which were omitted? Why?

The land was assigned by lot to 9 - 1/2 tribes. (The tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half of the tribe of Manasseh chose land east of the Jordan river)

c) Who was to do the actual assigning of land? Who was to help? Why wasn't Moses included?

Eleazar the priest and Joshua (Moses successor) did the actual assignments. A leader from each tribe helped with the assignment. Moses wasn't included because he was not going to the land; he would die on Mount Nebo.



The boundaries described in **Numbers 34:3 – 12** are slightly larger than the modern state of Israel, including some of today's Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. It should also be noted that the land east of the Jordan River which the Israelites obtained by conquering Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, King of Bashan (see **Numbers 21:21 – 35**), was not included within these boundaries.

Towns for the Levites?
In **Numbers 18:20** God said to Aaron, “You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.” To provide places for the Levites to live in the land of Israel, God prescribed that there would be a total of 48 towns throughout the land set aside in which the Levites were to live. These towns were to include some surrounding pastureland. Six of these towns were to be designated as “Cities of Refuge.”

Murder or Manslaughter
This passage has a lot to say about the killing of another human being. First, intent was the key to determining the fate of the accused. In either case, however, the accused was subject to punishment. Does this seem similar to the system we use today? In verse 33, God explains why it is necessary for a murderer to pay for his sin with his life. Does this make sense to you?

3. Towns for the Levites - 35:1-5

Why weren't the Levites to receive a portion of the land? What did they receive instead? Did they receive any agricultural land at all?

As the priestly tribe, the Levites weren't to receive land as an inheritance in Israel. (God was their portion.) However, the other tribes were to give towns (48 in all) to the Levites along with surrounding pasture land for their cattle and flocks.

4. Cities of Refuge - 35:6-33

a) How many towns were the Levites to receive in the land? Some of these towns were to be set apart for what specific purpose? How many towns were so designated?

The Levites received 48 towns in all, 6 of which were to be “cities of refuge,” 3 east of the Jordan river and 3 west of the Jordan.

b) Why might a person flee to one of these “cities of refuge”? From what was he fleeing? What happened after his arrival at a city of refuge?

If a man accidentally killed another, he could flee to one of the “cities of refuge” to escape the vengeance of relatives. There he would safely await trial to determine whether murder was committed or not.

c) This passage gives further explanation of the difference between what we would call murder and manslaughter. What is the difference? Who determined if one was guilty of murder or manslaughter? What happened to the defendant in each case?

If the person who killed another committed the act with “malice aforethought,” that is, with pre-meditated intent, then it was murder. If it was an “accidental death,” then it was not murder. An assembly of judges heard the case and if found guilty of murder, the defendant was put to death by the “avenger of blood,” also known as the kinsman-redeemer. If not guilty of murder, the defendant would reside in the city of refuge until the death of the current high priest.

In Hebrew, the term go'el hadam is translated “avenger of blood” whereas simply go'el is usually translated as “kinsman-redeemer.” The kinsman redeemer was responsible for the redemption of his brother or his brother's land or property. See the book of Ruth to help explain this.

d) Verses 30 - 32 state clearly some requirements for finding one guilty of murder. What do you find interesting about these requirements?

It took more than one witness to convict someone of murder. Murder could not be “ransomed,” that is, it was not possible to pay some penalty for the crime and be freed; murderers must be put to death.

e) In verses 33 and 34, what does God say about murder? Do you think this still applies today?

God said that bloodshed pollutes the land and that atonement cannot be made for it except by the one who shed it. This seems to tie the shedding of human blood with the land requiring atonement for any bloodshed.

5. Inheritance of Zelophehad’s Daughters - 36:1-13

a) What situation is described in this passage that was of concern to the heads of the tribe of Manasseh? (See **Numbers 27:1-11**) What was their concern?

The men of Manasseh were concerned that the tribal lands given to Zelophehad’s daughters would be taken from the tribe if any of the daughters married outside the tribe. (Thus the tribal lands of Manasseh would be unfairly reduced in size.)

b) What solution to this problem did God give to Moses? How would this solve the problem? Did Zelophehad’s daughters do as Moses commanded?

God, through Moses, commanded that the daughters of Zelophehad only marry within the tribe of Manasseh, thus assuring that the land would remain within the tribe. Zelophehad’s daughters did as commanded, marrying cousins within their tribe leaving the tribal lands intact.

Avenger of Blood

The “avenger of blood,” also called the “kinsman redeemer,” was the nearest male relative to the person who had died. Among other things, it was his responsibility to avenge the death of his relative by carrying out the death sentence if the accused was guilty of murder. If the accused fled to a city of refuge, he would be protected from the avenger of blood until his guilt could be determined. (See question 2 in the “Digging Deeper” section for more on the “kinsman redeemer.”)

Preserving Tribal Inheritance

The governmental system that God prescribed for the Israelites when they lived in His Promised Land ensured that the portions of land given to each tribe remained intact throughout history. (This system, which involved the Year of Jubilee, is described in **Leviticus 25**.) Had the Israelites been obedient to God and His *Torah*, today descendants of the sons of Jacob would still be living in the portions of land that they originally received and settled in when they took possession of Canaan. (The exact extent and boundaries of these tribal allotments are described in the book of **Joshua**.)

Digging deeper

1. This portion describes where and how the Levites were to live and provide for themselves in the land of Israel. Can you explain how this fits with the prophecy that Jacob (*Israel*) pronounced over them in **Genesis 49:5-7**? What happened to Levi's brother, Simeon, who also shared in this prophecy? (See **Joshua 19:1-9**)

In Genesis 49, Jacob prophesied that both Levi and Simeon would be "scattered in Jacob, dispersed in Israel." The tribe of Levi, as the priestly tribe, was dispersed throughout Israel and did not have a large, single territorial inheritance. According to Joshua 19, the Simeonites received their territorial inheritance entirely within the territory of Judah. Eventually, the tribe of Simeon was absorbed into the tribe of Judah.

Scripture Links

The book of **Ruth** provides more information on the role of the "kinsman redeemer." In addition to avenging the killing of a close relative, the man would also buy back family land sold during a crisis (**Leviticus 25:25**), buy back enslaved relatives (**Leviticus 25:47-49**), and provide an heir for a dead brother (**Deuteronomy 25:5-10**).

2. Chapter 35, which explains the cities of refuge, speaks of the "avenger of blood," also known as the "kinsman redeemer." What role did this person play? We know that *Yeshua* acts as our "kinsman redeemer." What symbolism do you see here? Is this a good analogy for what *Yeshua* did for us?

If a person was killed, his relatives had a responsibility to determine if his death was accidental or intentional and then to avenge the death of their kinsman. The kinsman redeemer had several responsibilities: 1) to buy back family land sold during a crisis (Leviticus 25:25), 2) to buy back enslaved relatives (Leviticus 25:47-49), 3) to provide an heir for a dead brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), and 4) to care for relatives in difficult circumstances (Jeremiah 32:6-25). God is sometimes referred to as the kinsman redeemer of Israel (Exodus 6:6-8, Job 19:25, Psalms 19:14; 69:18 and Isaiah 43:1). In our case, Yeshua is our kinsman redeemer, buying us back from slavery (to sin) that we might be reunited with God. Alternatively, Yeshua paid the penalty for our sin that we might not have to pay it, freeing us to return to God.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Jeremiah 2:4–28; 3:4; 4:1-2

Brit Hadashah : James 4:1-12