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Isra'el's Travel Log

33: 1-49



From the time **the Israelites** left Ramses in Egypt until **they** reached the plains of Mo'av (at the border of the Promised Land), **Isra'el camped at 40 named locations**. On the surface, the lengthy list in **Chapter 33** seems rather dry. But, in reality, it contains some valuable lessons. **Rashi furnishes us with at least one important reason for this lengthy travel log. He says that as the Israelites would read it generation after generation and it would furnish them with a continual reminder of the mercies which YHVH lavished upon them in the Exodus. The very mention of the place names would remind them of what God did for them. He says, "Why are these stations recorded here? In order to declare the loving acts of the Omnipresent (Rashi, S.S.&R. Edition, page 342).**⁷⁴¹

Another purpose which the travel log serves is to provide for us a flip side of the rebellious coin which we have seen so much. It is true that there were times of rebellion. But when we look at this list of journeys we also see that **Isra'el** was faithful to follow **ADONAI** as well. **According to Nechama Leibowitz (1905-1997), this became the story for Isra'el's wanderings through the centuries. She writes at length, "We have been shown an Isra'el composed of rebels and grumblers, having degenerated from the lofty spiritual plane of their religious experience at Mount Sinai, having become slaves to their selfish passions, ungrateful and quarrelsome, hankering after the fleshpots, the onions and garlic of Egypt. Now the Torah changes its note and shows the other side of the picture, Isra'el loyal to their Trust, following their God**

through the wilderness in a land that was not sown (Jeremiah 2). They followed **Him** in spite of all odds, through the wilderness of Sinai, the wilderness of Etham, the wilderness of Paran, and the wilderness of Zin, as well as, through the wilderness of exile among the nations down through the ages. That was also a place of fiery serpents and scorpions and drought where there was no water, where our continued existence would have been impossible, were it not for the grace of **ADONAI** which did not cease, and the virtue of which we have come thus far" (Nechama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bamidbar*, page 394).

There are **40 named locations** listed in **Chapter 33**. Some of them are familiar from previous Torah passages, others will be mentioned in the upcoming commentary on **Deuteronomy**. **Numbers 33:3-18** records the journeys from **Exodus Chapter 12** to **Numbers Chapter 12**. In **Numbers 33:19-36**, we find names which are not mentioned elsewhere in the book of **Numbers**, although **verses 33:31-33** appear to be mentioned again in **Deuteronomy 10:6-7**. Finally, the closing verses, **33:37-49** are the geographical locations mentioned in **Numbers Chapters 20-22**. As a Bible teacher, I wish that all the locations were known. But it is impossible to accurately identify all of them. **Rabbi Hertz reminds us that . . . it is exceedingly difficult to identify the exact route of march, more especially as the names were not names of cities, but of conspicuous landmarks. Which have changed with the centuries, and the designation of the temporary landmarks have been forgotten (Rabbi J. H. Hertz, Pentateuch and Haftarah, page 715).**⁷⁴²