

Numbers 33:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Analysis

These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

This verse introduces the detailed itinerary of Israel's wilderness wanderings from Egypt to the plains of Moab. The Hebrew word for "journeys" (mas'ei, מַסְעֵי) comes from the root nasa (נָסָה), meaning to pull up tent pegs, to set out, to travel. This suggests organized movement and divinely directed stages rather than aimless wandering.

"Went forth out of the land of Egypt" recalls the exodus, Israel's foundational redemptive event establishing national identity and covenant relationship with Yahweh. The phrase "with their armies" (tsiv'otam, צִיּוֹתָם) can also mean "in their companies" or "organized groups," depicting orderly departure rather than chaotic flight. This military terminology emphasizes that exodus was divine conquest, Yahweh leading His covenant people as their commander.

"Under the hand of Moses and Aaron" acknowledges dual leadership: Moses as prophet and lawgiver, Aaron as high priest. Their complementary roles foreshadow Christ's combined prophetic and priestly offices. Theologically, the wilderness journey represents the believer's pilgrimage from bondage (Egypt/sin) through sanctification (wilderness testing and teaching) toward promised inheritance (Canaan/eternal rest). Each stage had purpose in God's redemptive plan. The meticulous record demonstrates God's attention to detail, His faithfulness through

extended trials, and His providential guidance. The forty-two stations (verses 1-49) remind later generations that seemingly interminable wilderness experiences have divine purpose and will conclude with entrance into God's promises.

Historical Context

Numbers 33 provides the most complete biblical itinerary of Israel's wilderness wanderings spanning approximately forty years (1446-1406 BCE according to early exodus dating, or 1270-1230 BCE according to late dating). The chapter serves as historical summary near the end of Numbers as Israel camps on the plains of Moab preparing to enter Canaan. Moses writes this record (verse 2) as memorial for future generations, ensuring accurate preservation of this formative period.

Archaeological and geographical research has attempted to identify the forty-two encampment sites mentioned. Some locations are clearly identified (e.g., Kadesh-barnea, Mount Hor), while others remain uncertain. The route likely followed available water sources and pasturage for the massive population with flocks and herds. Egyptian records and Sinai inscriptions provide some historical context for the period, though direct archaeological evidence of Israel's wilderness sojourn is minimal due to nomadic lifestyle leaving few material remains.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples maintained travel itineraries for military campaigns, trade routes, and royal journeys. Israel's itinerary served both historical and theological purposes: documenting God's faithful preservation, identifying sacred sites, and establishing property boundaries. Jewish tradition has preserved these place names in liturgy and commentary, while Christian interpretation sees the wilderness journey as typology for Christian pilgrimage. Early church fathers used Israel's journey allegorically for spiritual formation, while Reformation interpreters emphasized historical-grammatical meaning. The historical journey became pattern for understanding God's guidance, testing, provision, and faithfulness during believers' earthly pilgrimage toward heavenly rest.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does understanding our Christian life as a pilgrimage (like Israel's journey) shape our response to trials and delays?
2. What do the forty years of wilderness wandering teach us about God's purposes in prolonged seasons of testing?
3. How should we respond when our spiritual journey seems to involve circular repetition rather than linear progress?
4. In what ways does Israel's organized, staged journey under Moses and Aaron's leadership model proper church order and pastoral guidance?
5. How can we cultivate gratitude for God's faithfulness during extended wilderness experiences when we don't yet see the promised land?

Interlinear Text

אֵלֶּה	מַסְעֵי	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲשֶׁר
H428	H4550	H1121	H3478	H834
These are the journeys of the children of Israel				
וְיָצְאוּ	מֵאֶרֶץ	מִצְרַיִם	לְצִבְאוֹתָם	בְּיַד
H3318	H776	H4714	H6635	H3027
which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand				
מֹשֶׁה	וְאַהֲרֹן:			
H4872	H175			
of Moses and Aaron				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 77:20 (References Moses): Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Micah 6:4 (References Moses): For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

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