

# JEWISH MOVEMENT

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

There is a trend amongst all biblical commentators in the Jewish world to view the biblical description of past events that occurred to our ancestors from the time of Abraham through the beginning of Second Temple times as being not only a description of past events but to also subtly indicate the course of all events that would befall the Jewish people.

This type of idea perhaps helps us to understand why the Torah goes into such detail in the naming all of the way stops of the Jewish people during their forty-year sojourn in the Sinai Desert. The Torah indicates to us that the Jewish people were and are a wandering and traveling group.

Even though the commentators point out to us that the Lord favored Israel by allowing it to remain in place at one oasis for thirty-eight years and that all of the many other way station stops listed in this week's Torah reading took place only over a relatively short period of time, of approximately two years, the list of stops and starts is impressive if not even astounding.

Since most of these locations are unknown to us today and have limited meaning to later generations, the broader message encompassed in this travelogue is to be considered and studied. All of the commentators to the Bible have advanced insights and explanations to enlighten us as to the reasons for this detailed accounting of the travels of Israel in the desert of Sinai.

Rashi sees it as a type of recollected history of the events, failings and triumphs of the Jewish people on the road from Egyptian slavery to the settling of the Land of Israel. The Torah, in its usual cryptic style, only records the names of the places and we are to fill in the missing event that should be part of our memory bank. But that requires a certain amount of knowledge, sophistication and national memory. These items are always in short supply in every generation.

If one views Jewish history as a whole, then one realizes that this pattern of movement, stops and starts, continuing travel and social instability recorded for is in this week's Torah reading, is really an ongoing pattern in all of Jewish history. The Jewish people, again as a whole or in its many subdivisions, have literally seen the entire world in their wanderings.

Already in First Temple times the prophet describes Jewish mercantile activity in faraway places of the ancient world. In the long exile and in the far-flung diaspora of the Jews, there is no place on our globe that has not seen Jewish settlement or activity.

Many commentators saw this phenomenon as a positive thing - the spreading the ideas of

monotheism and of Torah values to a pagan and uncaring world. Others have seen it as the source of the angst and punishment of Israel for its betrayal of those very same values and beliefs. Perhaps both approaches are correct and have meaning for us.

Nevertheless, we now live in a shrinking Jewish world. Entire ancient Jewish communities no longer exist and the Jewish people are concentrated in a relatively small number of national enclaves, basically in the Western world and the Land of Israel. One would hope that both our travels and travails will soon come to an end.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)