

## Numbers 31-36 Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

The countdown has begun to Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

Moses knows that he will shortly be dying so he has passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua.

As the time approaches for them to cross the Jordan & enter Canaan, there are just a few things they need to be instructed in.

### XII. GOD CURSES MIDIAN Ch. 31

**<sup>1</sup>And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>“Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.”**

The Midianites had been the allies of Moab in the whole fiasco that had taken place in chs. 22-25.

You remember – Balaam advised the Moabite king Balak to have the women of Midian & Moab seduce the men of Israel & then invite them to the worship of Baal.

Balaam knew that when Israel began to practice idolatry, God's judgment would be close behind.

The plan worked & a plague was set loose in the camp of Israel that killed 24,000 before Phinehas, the high priest's son, ended it with a spear through Zimri & Cozbi.

God's command here to attack the Midianites seems to suggest that it was they, rather than the Moabites, who were the chief agents in causing Israel's idolatry.

We know that the woman Cozbi was a Midianite – in fact, her father was one of the chief men of Midian.

**<sup>3</sup>So Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Arm some of yourselves for war, & let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for the LORD on Midian. <sup>4</sup>A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war.”**

Just as Midian had served as the devil's agent in prompting Israel's rebellion, now Israel would serve as God's agent in judging Midian.

**<sup>5</sup>So there were recruited from the divisions of Israel one thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.**

**Question** – How many tribes were there in Israel?

Twelve? Thirteen?

Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons, so it is always counted as the 12 tribes of Israel.

BUT – it gets tricky identifying them because as priests, the tribe of Levi is not usually reckoned among the tribes for 2 reasons:

- 1) They didn't receive a territory, region; they were to be scattered throughout the nation in 48 cities.
- 2) They didn't go to battle.

So, that leaves 11 sons of Jacob (Levi is not counted).

Where does the other tribe (12<sup>th</sup>) come from?

Joseph, Jacob's favorite son – had two sons; Ephraim & Manasseh.

Though Jacob's GRANDsons, they end up being counted as full-fledged tribes.

Which is as Jacob intended – for the firstborn son was supposed to get a *double portion*.

Joseph was the firstborn, not of Jacob, but of Jacob's favored wife, Rachel.

So, a thousand fighters were selected from each of the 12 tribes & sent out to battle the Midianites.

**<sup>6</sup>Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe; he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles & the signal trumpets in his hand.**

Because this was a holy war – an act of the righteous judgment of God – His presence was to be among the fighters as they went forth to battle.

So Phinehas, the high priest's son went with them leading the ark & carrying the silver trumpets used in the tabernacle service.

They would be blown to announce the attack & to rally the fighters when the fighting was done.

**<sup>7</sup>And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, & they killed all the males. <sup>8</sup>They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of those who were killed—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, & Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.**

The Midianites were a semi-nomadic people who ranged far over the expanse of the Sinai & Arabian peninsulas.

Different clans & tribes of the Midianites settled among the more indigenous peoples who inhabited the different regions of the Middle East.

*These* Midianites dwelt in Moab, scattered through their region.

The kings mentioned here were more like *chieftains*; clan & tribal leaders.

Living with them was Balaam – the one who started this whole mess.

He was probably being celebrated for his clever advice to King Balak of Moab.

He never got to enjoy the rich reward he had been so greedy for because he was killed in Israel's attack.

**<sup>9</sup>And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, & took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, & all their goods. <sup>10</sup>They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, & all their forts. <sup>11</sup>And they took all the spoil & all the booty—of man & beast. <sup>12</sup>Then they brought the captives, the booty, & the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, & to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho. <sup>13</sup>And Moses, Eleazar the priest, & all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. <sup>14</sup>But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, with the captains over thousands & captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle. <sup>15</sup>And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive? <sup>16</sup>Look,**

**these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, & there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.**

The fighters had killed all the adult males, but had kept all the women & children alive.

When Moses saw all these Midianite women among the captives he was flabbergasted!

God told them to take vengeance on Midian precisely because these women had caused Israel to commit idolatry! The women were far more guilty than the men they'd killed.

The fighters had understood the men of Midian as a threat because they could fight them *physically*.

They didn't recognize the even greater threat the women were to them *spiritually* because they were blinded by their beauty.

The women of Midian must have been gorgeous because they were the ones who had seduced the men of Israel.

Moses was angry that the Midianite women had not known the same judgment as the Midianite men.

And now that the women have been taken as a spoil of war, an even more difficult thing will need to be done to carry out the Lord's command of vengeance & judgment.

**17 Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, & kill every woman who has known a man intimately. 18 But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately.**

Why the women had to be executed is obvious – but why the boys among the children?

Understand that in the culture of that time, indeed, in many regions of the Middle East even today, the obligation of retribution was in play.

The idea was this, if you kill someone in my family & I'm a male, I'm honor & duty bound to kill you as soon as I can arrange & get away with it.

If the boys had been left alive, as soon as they had matured, they would have turned into a little army of murderers in Israel. There is simply no doubt about this – it's just the way things were done in that culture at that time.

**19 And as for you, [the fighters returning from the war] remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person, & whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves & your captives on the third day & on the seventh day. 20 Purify every garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' hair, & everything made of wood."**

Touching a dead body made a person ritually unclean, so they had to go through the rite of purification before they were allowed to re-enter the camp of Israel.

**21 Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to the battle, "This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses: 22 "Only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, & the lead, 23 everything that can endure fire, you shall put through the fire, & it shall be clean; & it shall be purified with the water of purification.**

But all that cannot endure fire you shall put through water. <sup>24</sup>And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day & be clean, & afterward you may come into the camp.” <sup>25</sup>Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>26</sup>“Count up the plunder that was taken—of man & beast—you & Eleazar the priest & the chief fathers of the congregation; <sup>27</sup>and divide the plunder into two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to battle, & all the congregation.

The booty of the battle wasn't to be kept only by those who'd gone to war; it was to be distributed among all the people, but in a fair & equitable manner.

It was divided in half; ½ going to the fighters, of which there were 12,000 men, & the other ½ that went to some 565,000 men. [601,000 minus 24,00 who died in the plague & minus 12,00 fighters].

<sup>28</sup>And levy a tribute for the LORD on the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, & the sheep; <sup>29</sup>take it from their half, & give it to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to the LORD. <sup>30</sup>And from the children of Israel's half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, & the sheep, from all the livestock, & give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD.”

<sup>31</sup>So Moses & Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.

A special levy was placed on the spoils as well.

From the fighters' half, 1/500<sup>th</sup> was given to the family of the high priest while the congregation's half gave 1/50<sup>th</sup> to the rest of the Levites.

In Vs. 32-46 we get an accounting of the plunder & how it was dispersed.

Plunder Item	Total	Half	For High Priest	For Levites
Sheep	675,000	337,500	675	6,750
Cattle	72,000	36,000	72	720
Donkeys	61,000	30,500	61	610
People	32,000	16,000	32	320

<sup>48</sup>Then the officers who were over thousands of the army, the captains of thousands & captains of hundreds, came near to Moses; <sup>49</sup>and they said to Moses, “Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who are under our command, & not a man of us is missing. <sup>50</sup>Therefore we have brought an offering for the LORD, what every man found of ornaments of gold: armlets & bracelets & signet rings & earrings & necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD.” <sup>51</sup>So Moses & Eleazar the priest received the gold from them, all the fashioned ornaments. <sup>52</sup>And all the gold of the offering that they offered to the LORD, from the captains of thousands & captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred & fifty

shekels. <sup>53</sup>(The men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.)  
<sup>54</sup>And Moses & Eleazar the priest received the gold from the captains of thousands & of hundreds, & brought it into the tabernacle of meeting as a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD.

The plunder that had been divided up had not included gold, silver, & other precious metals & jewels. The fighters had kept that.

When it was discovered not a single Jewish soldier had been killed, they were overwhelmed with gratitude & made a spontaneous offering from these treasures to the Lord.

These men knew that it HAD TO BE A MIRACLE & responded with a heart of gratitude.

Think of it – the army of Israel was 12,000 strong.

The booty indicates they took indicates this was a major war, not some little border skirmish.

To think that not a single Israeli lost his life is simply beyond comprehension.

It was nothing less than a stupendous miracle & the fighters knew it.

Every man knew that he got home safely because of God's protection.

The reasonable response was to make an offering.

There will be times in you life when you will realize God has just blessed you in a mighty & miraculous manner.

When He does, it's entirely appropriate to respond by marking & memorializing God's blessing in some way.

A special gift is a great way to memorialize His special favor.

### **XIII. SETTLING THE TRANSJORDAN Ch. 32**

<sup>1</sup>Now the children of Reuben & the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; & when they saw the land of Jazer & the land of Gilead, that indeed the region was a place for livestock, <sup>2</sup>the children of Gad & the children of Reuben came & spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, & to the leaders of the congregation, saying, <sup>3</sup>“Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, & Beon, <sup>4</sup>the country which the LORD defeated before the congregation of Israel, *is a land for livestock, & your servants have livestock.*”

<sup>5</sup>Therefore they said, “If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan.”

The tribes of Reuben & Gad asked for permission to reside in the territories they had already conquered on the eastern side of the Jordan river.

It was prime grazing land & they felt good just asking to stay there rather than cross the Jordan & take a possession in Canaan.

<sup>6</sup>And Moses said to the children of Gad & to the children of Reuben: “Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here? <sup>7</sup>Now why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD has given them? <sup>8</sup>Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. <sup>9</sup>For when they

went up to the Valley of Eshcol & saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the LORD had given them. <sup>10</sup>So the LORD'S anger was aroused on that day, & He swore an oath, saying, <sup>11</sup>'Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old & above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, <sup>12</sup>except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, & Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed the LORD.' <sup>13</sup>So the LORD'S anger was aroused against Israel, & He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD was gone. <sup>14</sup>And look! You have risen in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of the LORD against Israel. <sup>15</sup>For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, & you will destroy all these people."

Moses was dumb-struck by the attitude of the Reubenites & Gadites!

This was like a bad dream – déjà vu all over again!

Moses knew that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob belonged in the Promised land, not just East of it!

It was the land on the *west* of the Jordan that had been promised to Israel.

To be a Jew & to be living in the fullness of the covenant meant living where & how the Lord had said in His Word.

And God's Word was clear – the Promised Land was *west* of the Jordan.

Reuben & Gad are saying that *they don't want to live* in the Promise.

They're saying that being *near* it is enough for them.

As a type or symbol, they represent those Christians who are saved, but who have no desire to press into all the Lord has for them.

They enjoy the promise of heaven, but they view it from afar & are not willing or wanting to enter in to all the Lord has for them in THIS LIFE!

No, they are distracted by the goodies of the world, just as Reuben & Gad were seduced by & enamored of the fine fields of Gilead.

Moses saw the danger this lack of faith & perseverance was to the other 10 tribes.

He knew that unbelief is a spiritual cancer that can quickly spread to damage others.

He said Reuben's & Gad's contentment to stay in Gilead would discourage their brothers.

One of the surest ways to discourage the Christian who's zealous of following Christ is to surround him with lazy, apathetic, lukewarm, complacent believers; people who are saved, but content to live spiritually ineffective & sloppy lives.

Christians who are going to heaven, but who are so compromised with the world, they are useless to the Spirit in terms of service.

If you struggle in your walk, let me challenge you with this question: Who do you hang out with?

Are you hanging out with Reuben & Gad or with Phinehas, Joshua, & Caleb?



**16**Then they came near to him & said: “We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, & cities for our little ones, **17**but we ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place; & our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. **18**We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance. **19**For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan & beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan.”

The men of Reuben & Gad said that they would quickly set up some basic homes & secure their own families, then they would go with the other 10 tribes to help them battle the Canaanites.

**20**Then Moses said to them: “If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, **21**and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, **22**and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return & be blameless before the LORD & before Israel; & this land shall be your possession before the LORD. **23**But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; & be sure your sin will find you out. **24**Build cities for your little ones & folds for your sheep, & do what has proceeded out of your mouth.”

**25**And the children of Gad & the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: “Your servants will do as my lord commands. **26**Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, & all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; **27**but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, just as my lord says.”

It sounds like it would take a long time to build cities, but really, all they were doing was *re*-building the cities & fortifications they’d conquered.

This was a work that would take no longer than a few weeks. <sup>[1]</sup>

Moses told them that if they kept their word & helped their brothers take possession of their territories on the western side of the River, they’d be free to return & hold Gilead as their possession.

Make no mistake, Moses is not happy with this – but he’s come to understand that you can’t *make* people believe; you can’t *make* them zealous to pursue all the Lord has for them.

All you can do is to hold up the Word of God before them & call them to obey.

**28**So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, & to the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel. **29**And Moses said to them: “If the children of Gad & the children of Reuben cross over the Jordan with you, every man armed for battle before the LORD, & the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead as a possession. **30**But if

**they do not cross over armed with you, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan.”**

Moses won't be leading them into Canaan, so he makes his arrangement with the Reubenites & Gadites clear to all the leaders of Israel.

They must send their men over to fight. If they do, then they will have the eastern side of the Jordan as their inheritance.

If they refuse to send their fighting men over to help in the conquest of Canaan, then they will be penalized by being given smaller territories in Canaan.

And any of them who tried to stay *outside* the borders of Israel would come to be seen as foreigners!

**<sup>31</sup>Then the children of Gad & the children of Reuben answered, saying: “As the LORD has said to your servants, so we will do. <sup>32</sup>We will cross over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance *shall remain* with us on this side of the Jordan.” <sup>33</sup>So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, & to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites & the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land with its cities within the borders, the cities of the surrounding country.**

When the tribe of Manasseh saw the Reubenites & Gadites had been given permission to stake their claim in Gilead, half of them said they'd prefer to stay there too.

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In vs. 34-42 we get a listing of the cities Reuben, Gad, & half the tribe of Manasseh took & rebuilt.

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What happened to Reuben & Gad & half the Manasseh-ites? What became of them?

They kept their promise & helped their brothers conquer their lands, then they went home.

But an estrangement set in between those on the West & those on the East. It almost ended in war at one point.

Years later, when the Syrians, & Assyrians invaded, it was the Reubenites & Gadites who got hit first & hardest.

But an even sadder fate befell them that we read about in the NT.

In Mark 5 & Luke 8, we read the story of Jesus visiting this region on the eastern side of the Lake of Galilee.

It was called Gadera- named after the tribe of Gad, & inhabited by a people called the Gadarenes.

As soon as Jesus stepped out of the boat, a severely demon possessed man who was totally out of control & terrorizing the region came running at Him, pleading with Him that He not torment them.

The man was possessed by a many, hundreds if not thousands of evil spirits, all vying for control of the poor guy.

They asked Jesus for permission to enter a herd of pigs that were being grazed not far away.

And when Jesus consented, the pigs went running down the slope of the hill



into the water, & drowned. [1<sup>st</sup> case of “deviled ham”]  
Question: What were the Gadarenes, the distant descendants of Gad, doing raising pigs? They are an unclean animal that is not part of the Jewish diet.  
More than that, pigs are considered an abomination to Jews. So, what’s going on?  
Well, Gadera was part of a larger region known as Decapolis, meaning “Ten-Cities.”  
This was an area which was heavily influenced by Greek culture & the Roman lifestyle.  
Jews & Gentiles mingled easily there. The Jews didn’t eat pork, but the Gentiles did.  
So the Gadarenes had traded in their flocks of sheep & herds of cattle for herds of pigs instead because it was more profitable.  
But you can’t make any profit when your herd drowns itself.  
So the pig-herders ran back to their village & told everyone what happened.  
The whole town turned out to see Jesus & the formerly demon possessed man sitting, clothed & in his right mind.  
And instead of marveling & asking Jesus to stay & teach them, they plead with Him to leave!!!!  
They couldn’t have religion messing with their income!

You know what, if our faith doesn’t mess with our income, our spending, our saving, our investments in time, money, & energy, then we have to stop & ask if it’s a real faith.

Gad & Reuben’s problem began when they put more value, more stock in the rich pastures of the Transjordan for their herds & flocks than in pressing into the Promise & blessing of God.

Being on the border, the edge, the fringe of the things of God was good enough for them.

They were willing to compromise, trying to maintain a balance between being the people of God & being people of this world.

There end as the Gadarenes who urged Jesus to beat it shows us where compromise always lead.

#### **XIV. THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY REVIEWED Ch. 33:1-49**

**<sup>1</sup>These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses & Aaron. <sup>2</sup>Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these are their journeys according to their starting points:**

Moses now rehearses the route of the journey Israel took from the day they left Egypt to that point.

If you compare this list with the narrative of their journey given up to this point & a similar list of their camping places, you realize this list leaves out some places.

The reason is found in his use of the term, “starting points” here in v. 2.

This list contains only their major encampments, when they were in one location long enough to put their flocks out to pasture.

Shorter stops where they would stay for no more than a few days were not included here.

**<sup>3</sup>They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. <sup>4</sup>For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.**

Each of the plagues was a judgment on one of the Egyptians deities who were supposed to give the Egyptians so much of their power & might.

In vs. 5-37 we track them from Egypt all the way to Mt. Hor 40 years later.

[Show map of route]

**<sup>38</sup>Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, & died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first *day* of the fifth month.**

**<sup>39</sup>Aaron was one hundred & twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. <sup>40</sup>Now the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel.**

He attacked Israel & was roundly defeated.

In Vs. 41-49 the narrative of the journey resumes & brings us up to date in the plains of Moab.

## **XV. DIVIDING CANAAN Chs. 33:50-35:34**

### **A. *The Command to Take & Divide It* 33:50-56**

**<sup>50</sup>Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, <sup>51</sup>“Speak to the children of Israel, & say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>52</sup>then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, & demolish all their high places; <sup>53</sup>you shall dispossess *the inhabitants of the land* & dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.**

Israel was to utterly displace the Canaanites – all of them.

They were to make sure the Canaanite worship centers were obliterated.

Besides the usual city temples, the Canaanites also worshiped on the tops of hills & in forests.

They would set up an engraved stone of some kind & then make that the focus of their devotion.

All of these places were to be wiped out.

**<sup>54</sup>And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, & to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone’s *inheritance* shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.**

The land was going to be broken up into regions by Joshua with the territories

being of varying sizes & shapes.

The larger tribes, as determined by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Census taken in Ch. 26, would be assigned larger territories, the smaller tribes smaller regions.

Once this basic division was made, then who got what would be assigned by lot.

**55** But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain *shall be irritants in your eyes & thorns in your sides, & they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.* **56** Moreover it shall be *that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.*”

It's important to realize that God wasn't just giving the Land to Israel & giving some kind of harsh & cruel judgment on the Canaanites.

By the sovereign hand of God, Israel was arriving on the border of Canaan at a moment when the Canaanites had fallen into the most heinous kind of brutality & perversion.

Their cultures had degenerated to such low levels, I cannot even describe how abominable some of their practices were.

Unthinkable atrocities were being committed – & God used Israel as the instrument of His judgment on them.

This had been foretold to Abraham some 600 years before.

In Gen. 15:16 God said that Israel would return to the land of Promise when the iniquity of the people was full. Overflowing is what it was.

Now God warns them they are to utterly dispossess the people from their land.

If they don't, then they will end up being like sand in their eyes & like a troubling wound in Israel's side.

And God says, what He intended Israel to do to the Canaanites, dispossess them of the land, He will do to them, the Israelites.

What happened? Israel didn't expel the Canaanites.

The Canaanites ended up teaching them the ways of idolatry, & for this, first Assyria, & the Babylon came & carried them away captive. They were dispossessed of their land, just as God said.

### **B. Borders of the Land 34:1-15**

**1** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Command the children of Israel, & say to them: ‘When you come into the land of Canaan, this *is* the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries.

Now we get the outer borders of the Promised Land in vs. 3-12

[Show map]

**13** Then Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying: “This *is* the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes & to the half-tribe. **14** For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, & the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received *their inheritance*; & the half-tribe of Manasseh has received its inheritance. **15** The two tribes & the half-tribe have received their

inheritance on this side of the Jordan, *across from Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise.*”

**C. The Leaders of the Land 34:16-29**

**16**And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **17**“These are the names of the men who shall divide the land among you as an inheritance:

**Eleazar the priest & Joshua the son of Nun. 18**And you shall take one leader of every tribe to divide the land for the inheritance.

In vs. 19-29 we’re given the list of the tribal leaders.

**D. Levitical Cities 35:1-8**

**1**And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan *across from Jericho*, saying: **2**“Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, & you shall *also* give the Levites common-land around the cities. **3**They shall have the cities to dwell in; & their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, & for all their animals. **4**The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites *shall extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. 5*And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, & on the north side two thousand cubits. The city *shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.*

In v. 7 we discover the Levites were to be assigned a total of 48 cities scattered evenly throughout the land.

Since the Levites weren’t going to be assigned a region among the other tribes, they would need cities to dwell in.

These cities would not be newly built but would come from the list of cities conquered by Israel.

It was important that the priests be spread throughout the nation so that their influence as priests would help keep the Lord before the people.

These Levitical cities were administrative centers that would help unite the nation & make sure the different tribes didn’t end up going to war against each other after a couple generations.

Along with the cities themselves, God appointed some of the lands just outside the city wall as common land for the crops & flocks of the Levites.

Now, it has been fun reading all the different ways scholars interpret how to measure these common lands.

If you just take it at face value, it appears contradictory because Moses first mentions 1,000 cubits as the common land, then he says it’s 2,000 cubits.

Look first at v. 4 – & take out the italicized words, added by the interpreters.

**4**The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around.

[Draw image]

**5**And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two

**thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, & on the north side two thousand cubits. The city shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.**

[Draw image]

This doesn't seem to make much sense. Why not just say 2,000 all around? The simplest solution is to see that the first measurement of a thousand cubits is supposed to be the *starting point* of the measurement of the common lands. Why? Because over time, cities grow – & room for growth had to be considered & planned for.

[Draw image]

So, the common lands were set by first counting outside the city walls to a 1,000 cubits (1,500 ft.) Then they measured another 2,000 cubits, or 3,000 ft.

**6“Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities.**

We'll look at the cities of refuge in a moment . . .

**7So all the cities you will give to the Levites shall be forty-eight; these you shall give with their common-land. 8And the cities which you will give shall be from the possession of the children of Israel; from the larger tribe you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives.”**

Judah & Simeon furnished a total of 9 cities. Naphtali, 3; & the rest of the tribes furnished 4 each.

#### **E. Cities of Refuge 35:9-34**

**9Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10“Speak to the children of Israel, & say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 11then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. 12They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.**

Of the 48 cities to be given to the Levites, 6 of them were to be special places of refuge for those who'd accidentally killed someone else.

Remember earlier I mentioned the custom of *blood-feud*; if a member of a family was killed, it was the nearest male kin's duty to go after the slayer & kill him.

Well, what about a case of *accidental* death?

The cities of refuge were places where someone could flee & be safe from the avenger of blood.

If the fugitive could enter the gates of the city before the avenger caught him, the Levites would protect him.

A trial would be held & evidence, testimony & eyewitnesses heard.

If the man was innocent, then he could remain inside the city of refuge, safe

from the avenger. He would be allowed to return to his own city when the current high priest died.

If he was found guilty of murder, he has turned over to the avenger.

3 Cities of refuge were set up on the western side of the Jordan, & 3 on the eastern side, pretty evenly spaced so a person could reach it in a day.

The roads to the cities of refuge were to be kept in good repair as well, to facilitate travel. [Deut. 19:3]

[Show map of cities]

**13**And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge.

**14**You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, & three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, *which* will be cities of refuge. **15**These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, & for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there. **16**But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies,

If he strikes him with the intent of killing him . . .

he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. **17**And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, & he does die, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

**18**Or *if* he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, & he does die, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. **19**The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. **20**If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, **21**or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck *him* shall surely be put to death. He *is* a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. **22**However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, **23**or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing *it* at him without seeing *him*, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, **24**then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer & the avenger of blood according to these judgments. **25**So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, & the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, & he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. **26**But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, **27**and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, & the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, **28**because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.



Some important guidelines are given for the judges of Israel to determine guilt or innocence; if it was manslaughter or murder.

They were to consider the implement used.

They were to consider the situation & context of the killing.

They were to look at the relationship between the slayer & the victim.

And they were to consider the state of mind of the slayer, as evidenced by his actions. In other words, they could draw a reasonable conclusion about his state of mind at the time of the killing by considering all the other factors.

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The cities of refuge provide us a wonderful picture of Jesus. <sup>[2]</sup>

Some 15 times in the Psalms God is referred to as our refuge, something that would have reminded the people of ancient Israel of the cities of refuge.

For example, Psalm 46:1 . . .

**God is our refuge & strength, a very present help in trouble.**

In the NT we have Heb. 6:18 which says that in Christ we . . .

**. . . have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.**

Consider some of the ways the cities of refuge & Jesus are alike . . .

Both Jesus & the cities of refuge are *within easy reach* of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.

They are both *open to all*, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.

They both became a place where the one in need would *live*; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.

Both Jesus & the cities of refuge are the *only alternative* for the one in need; without this specific protection, they are destroyed.

They both provide protection *only within their boundaries*; to go outside meant death.

With both Jesus & the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the *death of the High Priest*.

**But there is a crucial distinction:** The cities of refuge only helped the *innocent*; the *guilty* can come to Jesus & find refuge through forgiveness, through being turned from guilty to innocent through the blood of Christ.

**<sup>29</sup>And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. <sup>30</sup>Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.**

One witness was not enough simply because such testimony could actually be used as a way for a vindictive person to *murder* someone *through the legal system*.

**<sup>31</sup>Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.**

Justice was to be blind to a person's social class or standing. The murderer couldn't wangle his way out of being executed by paying a fine.

**<sup>32</sup>And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of**

refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest. **<sup>33</sup>So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, & no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.**

**<sup>34</sup>Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.”**

God considers the shedding of innocent blood as something that defiles the very land of a nation.

The only way to remove the moral & spiritual pollution of innocent blood is by expunging it through the shedding of the murderer’s blood.

We need to see that this isn’t something that was true just for Israel.

We find much the same thing said at the murder of Abel by Cain.

God said that Abel’s blood cried out to him from the ground. [Gen 4:10]

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There is a huge debate today over capital punishment.

While I would love to go into this in greater depth, because of time, I’ll need to be brief & maybe we can get into it more at another time.

While you & I as Christians are not to exact revenge, & to turn the other cheek & all that, the same rule does NOT APPLY to the role of civil government!

In Romans 13 Paul makes it clear that God gives to the State the power of the sword, to restrain evil.

It’s the duty of civil government, to show neither harshness nor mercy, but to do *pure justice*.

Capital punishment is entirely proper when a murderer has been tried in a manner consistent with Biblical standards of equity & justice.

A guilty verdict ought *never* be found in a case where the evidence is purely circumstantial in nature or when the evidence is merely 1 eye-witness.

A judicial system that doesn’t handle all cases & people with the same standards also isn’t right & needs to be reformed.

## **XVII. FEMALE HEIRS Ch. 36**

**<sup>1</sup>Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near & spoke before Moses & before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. <sup>2</sup>And they said: “The LORD commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, & my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. <sup>3</sup>Now if they are married to any of the sons of the *other* tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, & it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. <sup>4</sup>And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.”**

Last week we saw in ch. 27 about the Daughters of Zelophehad. They had no

brother & realized that their family name & inheritance of land was going to die out of Israel.

So they went to Moses & asked what could be done.

He settled it by giving the land to the women, saying that the land would belong to them until a male heir could be raised up through one of them.

Now the other men of Manasseh come & say, “Hold on – if these women all marry outside our tribe, their lands will get gobbled up by those other tribes & they will have little pieces of holding inside our territory.”

**<sup>5</sup>Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, . . .**

So Moses went to the Lord & asked Him what to do.

**<sup>5</sup>Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying: “What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right. <sup>6</sup>This *is* what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, ‘Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father’s tribe.’ <sup>7</sup>So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. <sup>8</sup>And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father’s tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. <sup>9</sup>Thus no inheritance shall change hands from *one* tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance.”**

**<sup>10</sup>Just as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad; <sup>11</sup>for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, & Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to the sons of their father’s brothers. <sup>12</sup>They were married into the families of the children of Manasseh the son of Joseph, & their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father’s family. <sup>13</sup>These *are* the commandments & the judgments which the LORD commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho.**

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[1]

From the *New Bible Commentary* • If we accept that the events of chs. 20–36, from Miriam’s death, spanned the fortieth year, then the question of settling in Transjordan would have been raised at some time around December (*i.e.* the ninth month). This would be after the early rains, & the rich pastures would have been attractive (1, 4). Before the end of the year, on the first day of the eleventh month (Dt. 1:3), Moses summoned all Israel to hear the law again before he ascended Mt Nebo & died. This leaves an interval of about one month or so in which these tribes organized their settlement.

[2]

Blatantly ripped off from David Guzik’s excellent OnLine Commentary on Numbers 35.