



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



NUMBERS 33 - 36

Numbers 33

33:1-3 - "These are the journeys of the sons of Israel, by which they came out from the land of Egypt by their armies, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the LORD, and these are their journeys according to their starting places. They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians,"

Verses 1-49 are a detailed list of the camping places of Israel throughout their forty year journey in the wilderness. The list is given at this point because now Israel has reached the end of the wilderness years. The forty year judgment of the Lord upon Israel because they refused to believe Him and obey Him at the incident of the 12 spies is now behind them. This list serves an important overall purpose even if we are not familiar by name with each camping spot in the list. These 49 verses are a testimony of the seriousness of the judgment of God, the real consequences of rebellion against the Lord, and the faithfulness of God to His own promise and to His people in spite of themselves. Israel deserved to be left in Egypt. They deserved to never make it through the wilderness. Nevertheless, the lord had promised Abraham that He would bring his descendants out of Egypt and back to this land. The Lord kept His promise. He always does.

33:50-52 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places;"

This is the Lord's commission to the nation of Israel as they entered the land of Canaan. It provided a specific focus for their conquest of Canaan. It required more than a strictly military victory over the Canaanites. The Lord commanded them to conquer and drive out the inhabitants of the land, but also to destroy all elements of their religious practices. Israel was to destroy their stone idols, their metal images, and the locations these were found in the high places of the land. This requirement of the conquest of Canaan makes this a spiritual war, not just a physical war. The coming war with the Canaanite nations would be a demonstration for all the nations of the world of the superiority of Yahweh to all the gods worshipped by the Canaanites.

In the exodus from Egypt we saw in our studies that the Lord demonstrated His superiority to every major god worshipped by Egypt from the sun god Ra, to

Pharaoh who was worshipped as a living god by the Egyptians. Egypt attributed their power and prosperity as a nation to the superiority of their gods. In spite of the far greater strength of Egypt from a military and physical standpoint to the weakness of the Israelite slaves, Egypt was not able to stop Israel from leaving. The one God Israel worshipped overwhelmed all the many gods of Egypt and proved for all to see his superiority of each of them in the Ten Plagues.

Now, Israel was to enter Canaan and attack the heart of what the Canaanites most leaned on. If Baal and the other Canaanite gods were real and powerful, then they would surely be able to stop the Israelites from destroying the idols and images dedicated to their honor and protect the sacred places established throughout Canaan for their followers to worship them. If, however, Israel marched into Canaan and systematically destroyed all the idols and images of Baal, and demolished the high places where the people gathered to worship them, then it would be exposed for everyone to see that Baal and the other gods of Canaan were false gods.

This requirement of the Lord for Israel to demolish the religious expression of the Canaanites is one that flies in the face of our modern cultural sensitivities. If these events were happening today there would be a huge outcry from many protesting the actions of Israel. The destruction of the idols, images, and locations of their religion would be decried as the loss of valuable historical and cultural artifacts. People would want the statues and images placed on display in a museum rather than for them to be destroyed. Others would insist that the principle of the freedom of religion would require that they remain undisturbed and the Canaanites be allowed to worship whatever they wanted however they wanted. Apparently the Lord is not as concerned with freedom of religion if that freedom leads to the worship of false gods.

33:55-56 - "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live. And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you."

The Lord gives Israel a warning as they are poised to enter the land. The warning implies that the command of the Lord to drive out the inhabitants of the land was given for their own good. Ignoring this command to any degree will create an ongoing consequence that will trouble Israel into future generations. This warning by the Lord was not a theoretical problem, but a real one which Israel would experience. The Lord warned them because He knew that Israel would receive His command and only carry it out in part. Their partial obedience would also be a partial disobedience. That disobedience would produce the consequence described in these verses. Any Canaanites not driven out would become for future generations of Israel like pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides. We still use this saying today that originated from the Lord's warning to Israel. A thorn

in the side is not life threatening, but is a serious irritation that stays with a person and hinders them from experiencing full enjoyment of their life.

We will see when Joshua leads Israel into Canaan that in some locations all of the Canaanites were driven out. In others, the inhabitants were allowed to remain. In the generations to follow in the book of Judges and beyond, we will discover the ways in which the Canaanite influence which remains is a seed of future spiritual compromise and rebellion against the Lord for Israel. The Lord further warns Israel here that the final consequence of their disobedience in this is that the Lord will one day be forced to deal with rebellious Israel like He was dealing with rebellious Canaan.

The deeper lesson in this applies today. "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." (I Corinthians 15:33). The lesson is in the subtle and dangerous influence of spiritual corruption and rebellion. Israel left some Canaanites because it suited them to do so. Some they left because it seemed too difficult to drive them out. Others they left because Israel thought they could make the Canaanites serve them. In either case, Israel believed that they would be able to avoid being influenced for the worse by the remaining Canaanites, and that they would be more of an influence upon them. The Lord knew better. The Lord ordered them all to be driven out because He knew Israel would not be able to resist soaking in the influence of the Canaanites. Of course, the Lord was right. Israel later attempted to blend religious elements of the worship of Canaan with the ways of worshipping Yahweh. The Lord hates this kind of unholy mixture of truth with error. Eventually, that mixture of religions led many in Israel into full blown worship of Baal, with the worship of Yahweh only a memory. The Lord calls us as His people to worship Him exclusively. He wants all of our mind, heart, and soul. Anything we attempt to worship alongside the Lord will eventually take first place in our hearts if we do not destroy that idol.

Numbers 34

34:1-7 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance, even the land of Canaan according to its borders. Your southern sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom, and your southern border shall extend from the end of the Salt Sea eastward. Then your border shall turn direction from the south to the ascent of Akrabbim and continue to Zin, and its termination shall be to the south of Kadesh-barnea; and it shall reach Hazaraddar and continue to Azmon. The border shall turn direction from Azmon to the brook of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the sea. As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea, that is, its coastline; this shall be your west border. And this shall be your north border: you shall draw your border line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor.'"

In this chapter, the Lord describes in detail for the first time the exact dimensions of the future territory He had ordained for Israel to possess as the Promised Land. It is impossible today to draw an exact map of the borders of the land because some of the markers God gave to Moses no longer exist and there is no historical record to identify where those markers were located. However, we are still able to clearly identify enough of the boundary markers to approximate the size and location of the intended borders of Israel.

The first thing to notice is that the Lord revealed the borders of the land to Moses and directed Moses to "Command the sons of Israel..." In other words, the revealed borders were not optional extras in God's plan for His holy nation of Israel. Israel was commanded to enter these territories and take possession of them to the full extent of the boundary lines that the Lord spoke to Moses. In each territory there were current inhabitants occupying that land, but Israel was to drive out those inhabitants and in doing so, they were representing the holiness of God as He was executing His judgment upon those nations through Israel. Failure to conquer the land to the full extent of the revealed boundaries would not just hurt Israel, but would disobediently fail to carry out the judgment of God to its necessary extent. The reason why the Lord commanded, rather than suggested that Israel take possession of these lands is that left to themselves, Israel would follow the inclinations of human nature. They would tend to conquer that which seemed less painful to conquer and inevitably balk at finishing the task when the difficulty of the conquest became too great. The end result would be Israel settling for less than the fullness of God's purpose for them.

As the history of the conquest of the Promised Land unfolds from this point we will see whether Israel fully obeyed the Lord in this command. Israel does conquer Canaan and take possession of the land from here. However, they never, in all their history as a nation completed the conquest and possession of the full extent of the territories marked out in this command of the Lord. For

instance, on the western boundary, the Lord had commanded Israel to take possession of all of the land to the Great Sea, which is the Mediterranean Sea. Throughout the history of Israel, from this point until the reign of King David, which is hundreds of years into the future from this time, Israel never conquered the land all the way to the Great Sea. That territory in the southwest region was the kingdom of the Philistines. Because that region was left unconquered, the Philistines became to Israel exactly what the Lord had warned Israel they would become; pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides. Finally, under David's reign as king of Israel the Philistines were conquered, but even then, they were allowed to remain in their territory, only under the rule of Israel. So, throughout the Old Testament this territory was never fully possessed in obedience to this command of the Lord given here through Moses.

The lesson remains in the lives of believers today. The Lord gives to every believer specific commands which create territory for us to conquer in our lives. The Lord has given us commands in the areas of our finances, our relationships, our commitment to church, our prayer life, our Bible reading, our personal holiness, our service in the kingdom, our family, our work, etc. Some areas in our lives are easier to conquer than others. Others require a concerted and determined exercise of faith and an unwavering commitment to obedience. The test for us, like for Israel is in whether we will, like Caleb, fully follow the Lord, or whether we will settle for a smaller portion of conquered land than the Lord had intended for us.

34:16-19 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. You shall take one leader of every tribe to apportion the land for inheritance. These are the names of the men: of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.'"

When the time would come, following the battles ahead, for Israel to take possession of the land, the portions for each tribe were assigned by the Lord through His appointed leaders. Moses would not participate in apportioning the land because he would die before they reached that juncture. The Lord identified Joshua and Eleazar as the co-leaders of the division of the land. Joshua was the man chosen by God to replace Moses as the primary leader of the nation. Eleazar was now the high priest who had replaced his father Aaron. In addition, the Lord named one tribal leader from each of the nine and one half tribes that would possess Canaan. The other two and one half tribes had asked to settle outside the Canaan on the other side of the Jordan River as we have seen. The Lord handles the distribution of the land among the tribes with His great wisdom. Joshua and Eleazar are good and trustworthy leaders of the nation, but there was a wise reason why the Lord did not have those two men divide the land by themselves. The Lord chose one representative leader from each tribe involved in order to give those tribes the assurance that their concerns were properly represented as the land was being divided and apportioned to each tribe. Joshua

was trustworthy, but he was from one particular tribe and by selecting one leader from each tribe, the Lord protected Joshua from any false accusations of showing favoritism toward his own tribe in the distribution of territories.

Numbers 35

35:7-15 - "All the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be forty-eight cities, together with their pasture lands. As for the cities which you shall give from the possession of the sons of Israel, you shall take more from the larger and you shall take less from the smaller; each shall give some of his cities to the Levites in proportion to his possession which he inherits." Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall select for yourselves cities to be your cities of refuge, that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there. The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial. The cities which you are to give shall be your six cities of refuge. You shall give three cities across the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan; they are to be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.'"

Once Israel entered the Promised Land, conquered the Canaanite nations, and began to take possession of the land, they were to make a special provision for the Levites among them. Remember that the Levites were the one tribe of Israel set aside for special service to the Lord in His holy things of the tabernacle and its furnishings. The other tribes were each to be given a portion of territory as their permanent inheritance, but the Levites were not given any territory because the Lord Himself was to be their inheritance. The Lord did make provision for the Levites practical needs however in this law to set aside the Levitical cities. The Lord commanded a total of 48 cities to be given to the Levites. They would not actually own these 48 cities, but each Levite family was to be given a home in one of these 48 cities. The 48 cities were to be donated by the tribes of Israel from their own territory assigned to their tribe by Joshua and Eleazar. In addition to homes in these cities, a designated space immediately surrounding the city was to be set apart for the flocks owned by the Levites to graze.

The donation of the Levitical cities was to be equitable for all the tribes. No tribe was to bear a greater burden than the others. The tribes with a greater amount of land in their territory were to give more of the 48 cities and the tribes with a smaller portion of land were to give a smaller number of cities. The Lord was displaying in this law that the responsibility to support the set apart servants of the Lord was to be shared by the entire holy nation of Israel. This provision called

all the tribes to share the responsibility to support the Lord's servants financially, but it also provided an equal benefit for each tribe spiritually. The Lord's plan for the Levitical cities was a two way plan. The Levites would benefit by having their practical needs met without overburdening any one tribe. Each tribe would benefit by sprinkling all the Levites among all twelve tribes of Israel. This distribution of the Levites would insure a strong holy presence among all the tribes of Israel. The entire nation of Israel was called to be a holy nation set apart for God's service (Exodus 19:6), but the Levites were the chosen symbols of that holy calling. Having Levitical cities dedicated to the servants of the Lord in each tribal territory in Israel was a strong reminder of the Lord's great purpose for His nation once the tribes all settled in their own inheritance.

Of the 48 Levitical cities, six of them were set apart for an additional purpose. Six of the 48 cities were designated cities of refuge. Three of these cities of refuge were to be located in Canaan, and three were on the east side of the Jordan River in the Trans-Jordan territory settled by the two and a half tribes. The location of the six refuge cities provided an accessible location from any city in Israel. The purpose of these cities of refuge was to provide a place of asylum for a person that had killed another person. The person to be granted asylum in these cities was one who had unintentionally killed another person. The reason they needed a place of refuge was because of the cultural practice known as the avenger of blood. If a person of one family was killed, then the nearest male blood relative became responsible for carrying out justice toward the killer of their relation, even if the killer fled to another place. The avenger of blood was responsible to follow them until justice was done. This was not a revenge killing, and the name avenger actually can be translated as redeemer of blood. The goal was justice, not revenge. If it were for the purpose of revenge, then the cities of refuge would not provide asylum.

When the person unintentionally killed someone they were allowed to flee to the nearest city of refuge. The boundaries of those cities must be honored by the avenger of blood. The unintentional killer would then settle in that city and live there for as long as the present high priest over Israel remained alive. The death of the high priest signaled a new era for the nation and the unintentional killer was allowed to return to his original home at that point. If the killer left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest however, then they forfeited their right of asylum and the avenger of blood was justified in killing them for the death of their relation.

35:16-24 - "But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. If he struck him down with a stone in the hand, by which he will die, and as a result he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he struck him with a wooden object in the hand, by which he might die, and as a result he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him. If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and as a result he died, or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and as a result he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury, then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger according to these ordinances."

This standard described in this section clarified the guidelines for determining the asylum status of any killer that fled to the cities of refuge. Once the killer arrived in one of those cities the people of that city were responsible to determine the nature of the case. If it was determined that the person was a murderer, then they would be executed as a murderer. If they were determined to be an unintentional killer then the city was to provide safe asylum for them. This emphasized once again the critical difference in the Law of God between murder and killing. Murder is identified as always wicked and was punishable by an immediate death penalty. There was no allowance of further appeal for a convicted murderer. The death penalty was to be carried out in such cases in all six cities of refuge. God's justice for the welfare of the entire nation was thus represented and preserved. If it was determined that the person had not murdered, but had unintentionally killed, then their actions were considered to be not worthy of punishment.

Various scenarios are described in this section in order to aid the people of the cities of refuge in discerning whether a murder or unintentional killing had taken place in each case. If it was previously known that there was enmity between the two people involved that was a major factor weighing toward a conviction of murder. We describe that in our justice system today as establishing motive. If they were discovered with a stone, a wood implement, or other deadly item in their hand then the judgment was that their intent was to murder the person that died. This is what we describe as evidence of a murder weapon. In other words, the standards involved here are righteous standards of judgment designed to establish the truth of what actually occurred. Our society rightly continues to apply the standards established by these principles today.

35:30 - "If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness."

In either case, the appropriate standard for the conviction of murder which led in every case to an immediate death penalty was a minimum number of eyewitnesses. In the ancient world, in many societies, the standard in such cases was a single eyewitness. The Lord did not allow a murder conviction on the basis of a single eyewitness. The reason for this was to prevent the abuse of the justice system as a way of giving false testimony by a single person in order to remove a person they wanted executed. The minimum standard is not specified here, but it is in other passages of the Law. The standard was a minimum two or three witnesses. This standard did allow some actual murderers to escape immediate punishment when only a single witness was present, but the Lord would Himself intervene in such cases to maintain the integrity of His Law and the purity of His holy nation. The safeguard this standard provided confirms the Lord's priority to establish the certainty of His justice.

Numbers 36

36:1-3 - "And the heads of the fathers' households of the family of the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the heads of the fathers' households of the sons of Israel, and they said, "The LORD commanded my lord to give the land by lot to the sons of Israel as an inheritance, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. But if they marry one of the sons of the other tribes of the sons of Israel, their inheritance will be withdrawn from the inheritance of our fathers and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they belong; thus it will be withdrawn from our allotted inheritance."

Earlier in Numbers we studied the special provision the Lord made for the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-8). Their father had died without producing any sons to receive the family inheritance. They had appealed to the Lord through Moses to be given the inheritance rights as daughters. Remember, normally, only the sons of the family received the inheritance since they were the heads of their households and the leaders of the family for the next generation. In this case, the Lord received their appeal and made provision under the law for the daughters to receive the inheritance when there were no sons to receive the inheritance. The Lord made this provision in order to preserve His long range purpose for each family in Israel. In this way their father's name would be perpetuated as a continuing family rather than the inheritance rights being transferred to the nearest male relative.

Now, in this passage, it is not the daughters of Zelophedad that approached Moses, but the leaders of the tribe of Manasseh. They came to Moses to appeal to the Lord regarding the inheritance given to the daughters of Zelophedad. They were not asking for the inheritance to be removed from them, but they were concerned about losing that inheritance. While the inheritance did not personally benefit these men in any way, they were concerned on behalf of the entire tribe of Manasseh. Each tribe was to be given its own total portion of the Promised Land once Israel conquered Canaan. The territory given to each tribe was the Lord's ordained portion and was assigned by the Lord as a total distribution to the tribe. Then, the tribal leaders were responsible to divide up the territory appointed for each tribe among each family within that tribe. Those families were responsible to settle on the specific portion given to them and maintain that portion of land as an inheritance for future generations of their family.

These leaders of Manasseh were concerned because of the unique circumstance of the daughters of Zelophedad, and the potential loss of inheritance lands for their tribe. Because the daughters of Zelophedad were women and not yet married, their current situation would change when they did marry. Once married, whatever possessions they owned at the time of their marriage would become the property of their new husbands. Since they were each given inheritance rights for land given by lot to the tribe of Manasseh, the tribal leaders were concerned to lose that land to another tribe. If the daughters of Zelophedad married an Israelite man from another tribe than Manasseh, then their portion of Manasseh land would be legally transferred to the ownership of a member of another tribe and Manasseh as a tribe would lose out in the long run by having their allotted land in Canaan reduced. The appeal of the tribal leaders may at first seem self interested, but what they asked directed attention to an issue that could undermine the Lord's original purpose in assigning specific territories for each tribe. The Lord intended each tribe to maintain its own identity and to settle and maintain its own portion of Canaan.

36:5-10 - "Then Moses commanded the sons of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph are right in their statements. This is what the LORD has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry whom they wish; only they must marry within the family of the tribe of their father.' Thus no inheritance of the sons of Israel shall be transferred from tribe to tribe, for the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. Every daughter who comes into possession of an inheritance of any tribe of the sons of Israel shall be wife to one of the family of the tribe of her father, so that the sons of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. Thus no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another tribe, for the tribes of the sons of Israel shall each hold to his own inheritance." Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the daughters of Zelophehad did:"

The Lord received the appeal of the leaders of Manasseh and gave one more law to provide the necessary balance to the earlier law granting the daughters inheritance rights. As described in that study, the Lord does not add this law as a neglected oversight. The Lord chose to wait until this issue arose to give this specific law. The example of the circumstance of the daughters of Zelophehad becomes then a model for future generations to observe and apply. The new law leaves the inheritance rights with the daughters. The Lord did not invalidate His own earlier decision, but this new law modified the down-line implications of the earlier law. The Lord agreed with the leaders of Manasseh that the inheritance lands belonging to Zelophehad should remain with the tribe of Manasseh throughout the future generations. If the daughters married men from other tribes there would be no way to avoid a transfer of the inheritance to their husband's tribe of origin.

The Lord's solution was wise, and preserved the inheritance for Manasseh while at the same time granting the daughters what had been promised to them. The requirement of this new law called the daughters to remain within a limited boundary in their marriage prospects. They would be free to marry anyone they wanted, only they must choose a man from the tribe of Manasseh to marry. That way, their lands would always remain as part of the larger territory assigned by the Lord to Manasseh. This solution was agreeable to all concerned and the daughters of Zelophehad honored the boundaries of the Lord and each married husbands from the tribe of Manasseh.

The larger issue highlighted by their circumstance has an application in a New Covenant context. Tribal lands and inheritance rights are no longer a concern in the New Covenant when making a choice in marriage, but the spiritual principle displayed in this law does apply. The real issue revealed in the circumstance of these daughters is that the Lord had the right to determine the boundaries for them of who to marry and who not to marry. We live in a society today in which most people, even many who consider themselves Christians feel that it is their

own choice who to marry. The Lord does not agree. He has placed a similar boundary upon the lives of every believer in identifying who is and who is not available for a believer to marry.

"A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." (I Corinthians 7:39). The wording in this passage in Corinthians is very similar to the wording in the law from Numbers. "Let them marry whom they wish; only they must marry within the family of the tribe of their father." The similarity is in an announcement of freedom of choice in marriage that is limited by a specific boundary of the Lord's choosing. We are free to choose, but our choices are limited to the group that the Lord approves. In the Old Testament example they were free to marry any man as long as he was from the tribe of Manasseh. In the Corinthian passage the believers were free to marry anyone they chose as long as they chose from among other believers. To ignore this boundary would be to dishonor and disobey the Lord. In limiting believers to only marrying other believers, the Lord is not limiting the potential for our greater good and happiness but protecting us and directing us for our greater good and happiness.