

# The Book of Numbers

## The Division of Canaan Among the Tribes of Israel

Text: Numbers 32 – 35

### Introduction:

1. As has been noted, the book of Numbers ends with preparation for the taking of Canaan by the Israelites.
2. There are several transitional actions taken by God to help Israel in readying themselves for what is to come.
3. This last lesson includes the instructions for the division of the land – to the tribes who stayed on the east side of the Jordan River (Ch. 32) and to those who crossed over into Canaan (Ch. 33 – 35).

### I. The Request of Three Tribes (32:1-5)

- A. There were three tribes who requested to settle on the east side of the Jordan River:
  1. The tribe of Reuben (vs. 1)
  2. The tribe of Gad (vs. 1)
  3. ½ of the tribe of Manasseh (vs. 33; cf. 34:14)
- B. Their motivation for such action was material and not spiritual – they wanted the land because it was good for cattle.
  1. Also note the selfishness of their request.
  2. It was a land for which the battle had already been fought.
  3. It was a land nearby that did not require crossing the Jordan.
  4. They asked for it for themselves, not for the entire nation.
- C. Consider that this was also a rejection of the promise of God (Gen. 12:1-7; etc.). *{They were walking by sight, and not by faith.}*
- D. There were disadvantages for not crossing the Jordan River:
  1. They were more exposed to enemy attacks.
  2. They would be more closely associated with the Gentile nations.
  3. In fact, these were the first tribes to be carried away into captivity.

### II. The Response of Moses (32:6-15)

- A. Moses warned these tribes that their chosen path was a dangerous one.
- B. First, they would not be engaged in fighting the enemy, hindering the progress of their brethren.
- C. Next, they would discourage their brethren from going into and conquering Canaan.
- D. Finally, this sin could result in the wrath of God causing another generation of Israelites to be lost in the wilderness.

### III. The Promise of the Tribes (32:16-19)

- A. As a result of Moses' words, the tribes offered a compromise.
- B. They would build cities to house and protect their families and cattle.
- C. Then, they would leave them behind and go with the other tribes to fight their enemies in the land of Canaan.

# The Book of Numbers

- IV. The Settlement on the East of Jordan (32:20-42)
- A. God allowed these tribes to settle on the east side of Jordan, but that does not mean that He desired or approved of their actions.
  - B. If they did not keep their word and help the other tribes fight in the land of Canaan, then it would be a sin (vs. 23).
    - 1. The phrase – “be sure your sin will find you out” – indicates that they would not get away with transgressing God’s Word or their promise.
    - 2. Every sin has a consequence – ultimately, death (Rom. 3:23) – and those consequences cannot be escaped, whether or not the sin is known by others.
    - 3. The only way for man to avoid punishment for sin is by the mercy of God through the blood of Jesus.
  - C. Moses passed these instructions and conditions to Eleazar and Joshua, who would guide Israel after his death.
- V. The Summation of the Journey of Israel (33:1-49)
- VI. The Instructions for Conquering Canaan (33:50-56)
- A. God’s instructions for the children of Israel when they crossed into the land of Canaan were clear.
  - B. They were to drive out the inhabitants of the land.
  - C. They were to destroy their idolatrous images, whether engraved or molten.
  - D. They were to tear down the places of idolatrous worship.
  - E. They were to take possession of the land and dwell in it.
  - F. They were to divide the land by lot among the families or tribes.
  - G. If they failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land:
    - 1. They would become troublesome for the Israelites.
    - 2. It would bring God’s judgment upon Israel.
- VII. The Instructions for Dividing the Land (34)
- A. Vs. 1-5 – Southern Boundary
  - B. Vs. 6 – Western Boundary
  - C. Vs. 7-9 – Northern Boundary
  - D. Vs. 10-12 – Eastern Boundary
  - E. Vs. 13-15 – Inheritance determined by lot
  - F. Vs. 16-29 – Leaders from each tribe chosen by God to divide the land

## Overseen by Eleazar and Joshua

|                 |         |                 |          |
|-----------------|---------|-----------------|----------|
| <b>Judah</b>    | Caleb   | <b>Ephraim</b>  | Kemuel   |
| <b>Simeon</b>   | Shemuel | <b>Zebulun</b>  | Elizphan |
| <b>Benjamin</b> | Elidad  | <b>Issachar</b> | Paltiel  |
| <b>Dan</b>      | Bukki   | <b>Asher</b>    | Ahitud   |
| <b>Manasseh</b> | Hanniel | <b>Naphtali</b> | Pedahel  |

# The Book of Numbers

- VIII. The Instructions for the Cities of the Levites (35:1-8)
- The Levites were to be given 48 cities throughout the land (including 6 cities of refuge).
  - Each city also included its suburbs – land for flocks and herds, up to ½ mile around the city (possibly ¾ mile).
  - The details of these cities are found in Joshua 21.
- IX. The Instructions for the Cities of Refuge (35:9-34)
- God had promised this earlier (Exo. 21:13).
  - These six cities were to be a place of refuge for one who had accidentally killed another.
  - These six cities were:
    - Golan, Ramoth-Gilead, and Bezer (east of the Jordan River)
    - Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron (west of the Jordan River)
  - These cities demonstrated the justice of God.

