

Numbers 34 – 36

1. The section of which these chapters are a part actually begins at 33:50.

A. The land of Canaan is mentioned 16 times in 33:50 – 35:34, and the emphasis is on Israel's entering into the land and claiming their promised inheritance; the Lord wanted the people to know that the thirty-eight year delay didn't alter His plans or annul His promises.

B. The section opens with words of encouragement from the Lord, "When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan."

1. *The inhabitants of the land.*

a. God wanted Israel's invasion of Canaan to be a total conquest – they were to drive out and dispossess the inhabitants, destroy the altars, images, and temples, and then divide the land among the tribes.

b. The command was not new; the Lord had told them this at Sinai. Ex. 23:20-23; 34:10-17.

c. Moses would repeat it in his farewell message to the nation. Deut. 7; 12:1-3.

d. *What were God's reasons for the extermination of these nations?*

1. This was God's judgment because of their wickedness. Gen. 15:15-16; Lev. 18:24-28. How they became so evil and what happened as a result is described in Romans 1:17-32.

2. God wanted to clear the way for the tribes of Israel to claim their inheritance. Num. 33:54.

i. A contractor demolishes old buildings to make way for the new; so God wanted to clear the evil inhabitants to make way for a nation that would glorify Him.

ii. The Promised Land was to be the stage on which God would DISPLAY HIS POWER, POUR OUT HIS BLESSINGS, SEND HIS TRUTH, AND ONE DAY SEND HIS SON TO DIE FOR THE SIN OF THE WORLD.

3. God wanted to remove a temptation from the people of Israel who were prone to worship idols. vv. 55-56.

- i. If the pagans and their shrines remained, it would not be long until Israel would forsake God and begin worshipping idols.
  - ii. Unfortunately, Israel did not obey God's orders and ended up being snared by the practices of the heathen peoples left in the land. Judges 2:6-15.
2. *The boundaries of the land. 34:1-15.*
  - a. There were no surveyors with digital equipment to determine and stake legal boundaries; towns and visible geographical landmarks were used.
  - b. The Lord started with the south boundary (vv. 3-5) then the west boundary, which was the Mediterranean Sea (v. 6), followed by the north border (vv. 7-9) concluded by the east border (vv. 10-13) and the Transjordanic tribes (vv. 14-15).
  - c. Although the Lord gave them a large land and a good land, they didn't defeat all of their enemies and drive them out and claim the land as God had commanded.
    - i. Their western border didn't reach the Mediterranean because the Philistines still held that territory.
    - ii. They did not get as far as the northern boundary that God had outlined.
    - iii. On the east side of the Jordan as you travel north from the border of Manasseh, there were pockets of resistance in cities that Israel didn't conquer and destroy.
  - d. Moses prophecy came true – the Canaanites became barbs in their eyes and thorns in their sides and led some of the Jews into sin. Num 33:55. [NOTE: before we pass judgment on them let us ask if we have claimed all that we have in Christ, if we have driven out all of the pockets of resistance in our lives that draw us away from the Lord. Heb. 4:11.
3. *The dividing of the land. 34:16-29.*
4. *The cities of the land. 35:1-34.*
  - a. 48 cities for the Levites -- scattered throughout Israel so that they could minister to the people and teach them God's law.
  - b. Six cities of refuge – situated so that no one who needed to flee to one of them would have difficulty reaching one promptly.

i. Israel had an army, but no police force – it was up to a family to punish one who murdered a family member.

ii. This did not include manslaughter for which there was no death penalty. A system was established where the elders of the city would hear the one charged and the witnesses and determine the judgment. If murder was the verdict the one convicted was stoned to death; if manslaughter, the one convicted had to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest at which time he was free to return home.

c. Today, guilty sinners can flee to Jesus Christ and find refuge from the judgment of God. Heb. 6:18.

5. *The inheritance of the land.* While dealing primarily with the rights of females to inherit, the law given is actually a simple application of the primary principle that a family's inheritance was never to be permanently removed from the family.

2. Wilderness University -- Lessons that must be learned to receive a degree. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11.

A. We learn about life.

1. The metaphors for life are many, and each one teaches us something important.

a. Sometimes life is like a battle and sometimes it's like a race, but it is always a school where we need to be awake and alert to what God is trying to teach us.

b. To Moses and the people of Israel, life was journey, a very special journey from bondage to freedom, from childishness to maturity, from selfishness to service, from glorifying the past to anticipating the future.

c. From God's point of view there were only three locations in this journey: Egypt, the place of bondage that seems like security; Canaan, the place of inheritance where God wants to give His people His best; the wilderness, the place of unbelief, discipline, and falling short of the good things God has planned for us. This truth is elaborated in Hebrews 1 – 5.

2. Living the Christian life begins with deliverance from Egypt (bondage).

a. The essence of Christian living is to enter into your inheritance as quickly as possible

b. When you reach the Kadesh-Barnea place in your life, and all of us have (or will), trust Him and enter into your inheritance by trusting God.

c. Don't worry about the giants, the enemy, the walled cities, or your own weakness and insignificance.

d. Say with Joshua and Caleb, "The Lord is with us, fear them not." Num 14:9. "For we who have believed do enter into rest." Heb. 4:3.

3. Before Israel arrived at Kadesh-Barnea, God put them through some trials in a wilderness experience.

a. Wilderness experience can be an important part of life for people who want to grow. James 1:2-8; 1 Pet. 1:3-9.

b. But the Lord doesn't want us to stay in the wilderness constantly or forever.

1. There are lessons to learn, but there are even greater lessons to learn after we have claimed our inheritance in Christ.

2. Above all else, in the journey of life, we must be sure to follow the Lord as He goes before us, and we must not look back or hunger for the old life in Egypt.

3. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" Psalm 34:8.

B. We learn about God.

1. Israel repeatedly committed the same three mistakes that caused them no end of trouble:

a. They looked back and glorified Egypt.

b. They looked around and complained about their circumstances.

c. They looked within and magnified their own desires.

2. What they should have done was to look up to God and trust Him to see them through.

3. We never learn the lessons that we should learn and need to learn if we plan the curriculum and write the textbooks; we must leave it all to the Lord.

4. God's desire is that we develop character and become more like Jesus Christ.

- a. We can't grow in grace unless we grow in the knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18.
- b. How do we learn about God?
  - i. We learn about God in His word, both in private meditation and public worship.
  - ii. We learn about God in the experiences of life; during their wilderness wanderings Israel learned:
    - a. That God loved them and cared for them, but they didn't always believe it.
      - a. They repeatedly asked what they would eat and what they would drink.
      - b. They should have been saying, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want."
    - b. That God was longsuffering with them but wouldn't permit them to sin without consequences.
      - a. He was willing to forgive them when they cried out to Him, but too often they did not cry out to Him in confession until first they cried out in pain.
      - b. How much pain we could avoid if only we submitted to the will of our loving heavenly father.
    - c. That God is the God of new beginnings.
      - a. It's sad that Israel doubted and disobeyed God so often, but it is encouraging that God gave them a new start and encouraged them to keep moving toward their inheritance.
      - b. True, a whole generation had to die before they could enter into that inheritance, but they died because of their own rebellion.

- c. In His grace, God forgave them; in His government He permitted them to suffer the consequences of their sin.
- d. You can't negotiate the will of God; you either ignore it, resist it, or obey it.

C. We learn about ourselves.

1. Far more than I would like to admit, as we have walked through the wilderness with Israel I have wondered how in the world they could do the things they did and leave undone the things they left undone, only to finally be forced to admit that I have been guilty some of the same things.

a. People are people, whether they are marching slowly through an ancient wilderness or driving at high speed down a modern freeway.

b. Socrates said that the unexamined life was not worth living, but most people don't like to face the truth about themselves.

i. Like our first parents, we run and hide and defend ourselves by making excuses and blaming others.

ii. Rarely do we come to the point that David did in honestly facing and confessing his sin. Psalm 51.

2. Lessons we learn about ourselves.

a. All of us have a nature that's prone to resist the will of God, and the sooner we admit it, the easier it will be to make the journey.

i. Peter acknowledged that he was a sinful man.  
Luke 5:8.

ii. Paul confessed, "I know that in me ... nothing good dwells. Rom. 7:18.

iii. The Lord warned that "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matt. 26:41.

b. We don't enjoy changes in our lives and the discomfort that they usually bring.

i. One day Israel was thirsty; the next day they were attacked by an enemy; for 40 days they wondered what had happened to their leader.

ii. All of us want life to be one vast comfort zone where we're sheltered from change, all the while forgetting that God-ordained change can be used to mold our character and help us grow.

c. One lesson that Israel failed to learn was that complaining and criticizing are sins that God judges.

i. When the nation failed at Kadesh-Barnea, the fault didn't lie with the young people but with the older people.

ii. To prove it God rejected the older generation (20 years and older), gave it time to die off, and then made a new beginning with a younger generation.

iii. The church needs both the older saints and the younger ones because each generation has something to contribute, and we can all learn from each other. Titus 2:1-8.

iv. Moses was wise to train Joshua to be his successor, and Paul was wise to equip Timothy to succeed him in Ephesus.

D. We learn about faith.

1. Life is a journey that we make by faith; only God knows the end from the beginning.

a. Everybody lives by faith in someone or something.

b. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is the object of that faith.

c. Christians put their faith in God and his word; unbelievers trust themselves, their ability, their money, and perhaps their friends.

d. Israel had the bad habit of walking by sight and not by faith, and it was failure to trust God that caused the nation so much trouble.

i. No sooner had God delivered them from Egypt than they stood trembling by the Red Sea wanting to go back.

ii. They didn't really believe that the God who had delivered them could finish the task.

iii. When God begins a work, he completes it. Phil. 1:6.

2. Faith is not believing in spite of evidence – that's superstition; faith is obeying God in spite of what we see or hear, how we feel, or what might happen.

a. The Jews had been given all of the evidence they needed to prove that God cared about them, had the power to deliver and protect them, and take them to the Promised Land.

b. The devastation of Egypt was evidence of God's power, so why should the nation not trust him?

c. On top of all this they had the example of Moses' faith.

i. His faith chose the imperishable. Heb. 11:24-26.

ii. His faith saw the invisible. Heb. 11:27.

iii. His faith did the impossible. Heb. 11:28-29.

d. Once we have made the choice to follow the Lord and live for eternal values, the rest is bound to follow.

4. Faith must be nourished and exercised if it is to grow strong.

a. This leads us to the word of God, the source of faith.

Rom. 10:17.

b. Every trial of life is an opportunity to clamor against God or to claim God's promises and trust Him to carry us through the valley. Psalm 23.

E. We learn the promise of one believer.

1. God wants all of his children to be the kind He can count on.

a. The Lord could count on Moses and Aaron to lead the people in His will, even though they each disappointed the Lord on occasion.

b. The Lord could count on Joshua and Caleb, and on Eleazar and his son Phinehas.

2. Anybody can be a statistic, a number in a record, but it takes faith and courage to be the kind of person the Lord can count on.

a. We have a choice – we can go with the majority and miss God's very best, complaining our way through life, or we can stand with the minority and dare to believe God and follow His commands.

b. We can crave comfort or respond to challenge.

c. We can look back and long for carnal security or we can look ahead and eagerly anticipate spiritual maturity.



d. We can wander in the wilderness of unbelief, selfishness, and disobedience, or we can enter the Promised land with its battles and trials, trusting God to give the victory.

3. Will we choose to claim our inheritance and use it for His glory? Will we be counted among the conquerors?

A. “32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:32-39.

B. History is His Story.