

### NUMBERS

#### Lesson 35 - Chapters 34 and 35

Last time we had just concluded Numbers 33 and this was a kind of Cliff Notes version of the route of the Exodus that enumerated 42 stations where events of significance took place during the Israelite's wilderness journey; a journey that was but weeks from its conclusion.

We discussed how the Lord gave Moses some tough instructions about how they were to go about invading and taking Canaan: they were to drive out all the inhabitants from every corner in the land. The only Canaanites that would be allowed to remain are those who renounced whatever tribal affiliation they had, and joined Israel. This meant that they also had to completely disavow their gods and rituals and obey the Torah. Naturally, there weren't a whole lot who chose to do this. Those who fought against Israel and refused to let go of their land were to be killed.

Moreover the Lord told Moses that if Israel failed to do this not only would the people who remained in the land be a constant thorn in the side of Israel but that the Lord would deal with ISRAEL in the same manner He had intended on dealing with these pagans.

Chapter 33 concluded with the instruction that the allotment of territory among the tribes of Israel should commence immediately and that it was to be done incorporating 2 methods: lots and proportionality. That is that lots would be cast to determine the general region of Canaan that each tribe would receive, but the SIZE of each tribe's territory would be proportional to that tribe's population.

Well as long a road as it's been studying the book of Numbers the book is rapidly coming to a close with some laws about the boundaries of the territory that the Lord is giving to Israel and some other laws about how the land is to be protected and governed.

Starting in last week's study (chapter 33) and progressing to the end of the book of Numbers, the subject is all about the imminent possession of the Promised Land. It's difficult, I think, for us in the 21st century to imagine and to internalize just what a momentous event the occupation of the land of Canaan by the Hebrews was. If we think of the grandest moments of the Bible we'd probably list the Creation, the Great Flood, the parting of the Red Sea and the Exodus, and the advent of Jesus Christ at the top of the list.

But without doubt the realization of the 600-year old covenant of Abraham (that Abraham's descendants would be given a land of their own to possess forever) belongs on that list and right near the top at that. Just as Believers wait expectantly for the return of our Messiah

Yeshua and the establishment of His kingdom, so did Israel await for their covenant-based land inheritance to be given to them by the Lord. And this was because from the time of Abraham up until this point in the Torah the Hebrews had always been a people without a country. From the moment the Lord told Abraham to get up and leave his native land (Mesopotamia), and to disassociate himself from his country and his family (meaning to forsake them, to disavow them) Abraham and all those Hebrews who would come from his loins would, for centuries, be nothing but resident aliens, sojourners, wherever they lived.

Abraham, Isaac, then Jacob, even though they wandered around in various parts of Canaan, lived there at the pleasure of those Canaanites who owned and controlled the territory. When they resided in Egypt it was at the pleasure of the Pharaoh. Joseph, who became the grand vizier of all Egypt, didn't consider Egypt his home and so ordered that his mummified body be taken to the Land of Canaan on that marvelous day when Israel left Egypt for a journey to a land that WOULD be their own.

Believers, in addition to all of this being true and real and actually happening, it is also a pattern and picture of us and our condition. The Torah, with the central theme being the creation of Israel as a people and then as a nation, is a pattern of what the body of Believers would experience in a time future to Moses; a time when the Lord would create another covenant for the purpose of refining just who would be included (and on what terms) among that set apart people of His.

When Abraham accepted Yehoveh as his god (knowing Him only as El Shaddai, God of the Mountain); and leaving everything from the past behind, Abraham was presented a covenant by and with Yehoveh, a promise written in concrete. By accepting the covenant Abraham became locked into the blessings of that covenant. When we accept Yeshua as our god and Savior we leave the past behind as we accept the reality of the Covenant as guaranteed by His blood. And by accepting this renewed covenant we are locked into its many blessings.

Yet after Abraham accepted the covenant (the primary provision being a guaranteed place to live forever that would be his own, a place where he and his descendants belonged, a permanent home) it would be a long time before that home was realized. In the meantime his descendants would be but strangers in a foreign land. As is clear from that pattern, Believers, even though we are already living under the terms of the New Covenant we have *not yet realized* the end result: a permanent place to live, a place where we actually belong, a place set apart just for us. And that place is the Kingdom of God.

I have been a Believer almost my entire life. But it probably has been only the past 10 - 15 years or so that I began to *feel* the effects of *what* I am: a stranger living in a foreign land; and I'll remain in that condition until the Lord decides it's time for me to go home. Truly, I had been quite comfortable in the world. I got along well with the world and I prospered in the world, even though I was spiritually set apart from the world by God due to my acceptance of His son. Yet the Lord has told us emphatically that we don't belong here; that in our new condition we may be IN the world but we're not OF the world.

Israel was IN Egypt a long, long time; but they were never OF Egypt. And as time wore on they

became more acutely aware that they were round pegs trying to occupy a square hole. Just as important the EGYPTIANS became more acutely aware that these Hebrews weren't part of Egypt; that they were odd, they were different, and they didn't fit; they just served a useful purpose as slaves. Oh the Egyptians enjoyed what these Hebrews brought to the game, but at the same time the Egyptians grew to hate them but there wasn't always hatred; at first the Hebrews were welcomed. The Egyptians even learned from the Hebrews, adopted some of their ways and Egypt prospered. Slowly however, decade after decade, the Hebrews' separateness and different-ness began to irritate the Egyptians. In time that irritation turned into bitterness. Finally during the lifetime of Moses that bitterness overflowed into violent hatred and there was no choice for Israel's survival but to be taken out of Egypt and placed into the kingdom that the Lord had prepared for them.

The older I get the more I feel that. I hardly recognize my own country anymore. Some nights it's hard for me to go to sleep, thinking about it all and what kind of world my grandchildren are going to face. I know what is right and what is wrong because the Lord has taught me; but most of the world around me says there IS no right and wrong, there IS no good and evil, it's simply a cultural choice. I know that there is but ONE God, the God of the Bible, and His name is YHWH because I personally know Him; but the world says that IF there is a god He goes by many names including Buddha, Hindi, and Allah to name but a few.

I'm just not comfortable here anymore. I feel like a child who was adopted shortly after birth and one day realizes that he doesn't look anything like his parents or his brothers and sisters, and longs to know who he really is. I know I don't belong here; and the people around me who don't know Yeshua aren't very comfortable with me either, and they're questioning whether I am one of them and whether I belong here, with them.

But like Abraham I too have been placed under a covenant; I have been promised a place where things will finally operate the way they're supposed to, a place where the government will be upon the shoulders of our Messiah, a place where I belong. Like Israel I've been redeemed and I don't belong to my cruel taskmaster anymore; I've begun my Exodus, I've received God's Word and I'm on a journey through the wilderness towards my final destination; but I'm still waiting in a holding pattern, I'm not there yet.

We today sit precisely where Moses and Israel were at this point in the book of Numbers. The promise of God's covenant to us is right there before and we can actually see it, we can almost smell it; and soon, very soon, we'll be able to take hold of it.

Yet this life we're living, and our time we are wandering in the wilderness, is not to be idle time. Our job is to learn the ways of the Lord and to practice them, because once we're at our destination we'll be living those ways more completely and eternally in the presence of Yeshua than we ever imagined.

So here in Numbers as the people of Israel can actually see their destination off in the distance, and know it's but days, hours, before it's theirs, God gives them some instructions about how they're to live in the land.

Let's read some of those instructions in Numbers chapter 34.

### **READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 34 all**

The first 12 verses are simply the boundaries of the Promised Land. Many of the points given are not known today, but many are. Certainly the eastern-most part (the Jordan River), and the western-most part (the Mediterranean Sea) are easy to identify. Even the northern part is fairly certain; but the southern boundary is a little less so.

Look at this map, because it is by far the easier way to understand these boundaries.

Now, there are Egyptian records from approximately this same period (14th century BC) that are virtually identical in describing the boundaries of the land of Canaan as we read here in Numbers; which means that we can know that these are correct. In other words, what the Lord describes here in Numbers 34 was the generally recognized territorial boundaries of the Land of Canaan in those days leading up to Israel occupying that land. Yehoveh did not redefine the boundaries of the land of Canaan; He neither added to nor subtracted from.

But, as for the southern boundary, identified in verse 5 as the *nahlah Mishrayim* (often translated in semi-English as the Wadi of Egypt), this is probably the greatest of the controversies. I do not for a minute buy that this southern boundary is the Nile River. First, nowhere do we find the Hebrew term *nahlah Mishrayim* EVER used to denote the Nile. Second, the term, *nahlah*, more means a watercourse. It doesn't necessarily mean a desert Wadi that is a dry riverbed except when a thunderstorm suddenly fills it; because it can also refer to a brook or a small watercourse that is sometimes but a trickle, seasonally a stream, and occasionally a temporary torrent. That in no way is a term used to describe the Mississippi sized Nile River. Third, as these Egyptian records are so explicit and nearly identical to the record here in Numbers about the boundaries of Canaan, if one took the *nahlah Mishrayim* to mean the Nile, that would assert that Canaan at one time included the entire Sinai Peninsula, and even extended well onto the African Continent, taking in much of the land that has always been ascribed to Egypt. Fourth, as these Egyptian records are from about the same period as the Exodus, had Canaan included the Sinai Peninsula (or even the eastern bank of the Nile if the Nile was that southern boundary), then that means that the Sinai Peninsula was part of the Promised Land. So, it would have been a rather short journey.....maybe a couple of days.....out of Egypt into Canaan and the journey would have been over practically before it started, right?

So, you can see how none of that makes much sense. Now, there are more serious and reasonable disagreements over exactly where that *nahlah Mishrayim* is, but it could NOT have extended into the Sinai, which was always known as Egyptian territory.

Now, the next thing that people can get confused over when discussing the boundary of the Promised Land is when one looks at this in Numbers, and then goes on to read Ezekiel. The Ezekiel 47 land division is somewhat different than what we read of in Numbers, but nowhere as extreme as has been taught and that I at one time believed.

Let's turn to Ezekiel 47 and read verses 13 - 23, and then move right into Ezekiel 48 and read from verse 1 to 14.

### **READ EZEKIEL 47:13 - 23 AND 48:1 - 14**

Now, if you'll look at this map you'll see that the territorial allotment is little different. It is somewhat bigger, the Levites ARE given territory (but they are not given any in the Numbers allotment), and they are stacked like a totem pole with the boundary lines essentially starting on the west at the Mediterranean and extending a bit farther east, especially in the north. So what gives?

We discussed in some earlier lessons about how there are some interesting transformations at a certain point in Ezekiel; not the least of which is the re-institution of sacrificial worship at a rebuilt Temple, but also a change in the ritual procedures that seem to reduce the role and importance of the priesthood to one of religious emcees over commemorative (rather than effectual) ceremonies. In other words, just as we celebrate Passover or Resurrection Day or even Communion, these observances are not some type of ritual that affects some sort of ordained response from God. We don't have our sins forgiven as a result of those ceremonies, we don't get into better standing with God, we aren't purified, etc. These rather standard Christian and Messianic Jewish ceremonies are simply joyful commemorations of gratitude to our Lord in remembrance of the great things He has done. So it will be in Ezekiel, but at a time when even MORE works of Yeshua will have been accomplished.

It is my position that the reason for the differences between these visions we read of in Ezekiel versus what we read in Torah is that Ezekiel is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom period, also called the 1000-year reign of Messiah Yeshua, Jesus Christ that immediately follows the Armageddon event. As He will be literally and physically dwelling in and ruling from Jerusalem, and for a period of time evil and rebellion will not exist on planet Earth, there is much that will necessarily be different. For one thing the numbers of Believers that will be clamoring to live in and around Jesus the King (even though we'll be able to choose to live anywhere we wish on the planet) are going to be far larger than the territorial allotment of Numbers would ever be able to accommodate. I can tell you that when that day comes I certainly plan on living over there; so, we see this enormous amount of land being set aside for this purpose in Ezekiel. However the main thing that happens in the Ezekiel description of the Kingdom land as opposed to the Moses description in Numbers, is that land on the EAST side of the Jordan (more or less the land that Moses permitted Reuben, Gad, and 1/2 of the tribe of Manassah to settle in) is included.

In any case, one negative to all this is that Israel, in its entire history, has NEVER controlled or even inhabited all of the territory God gave to them in Numbers, let alone what is described in Ezekiel. But, it is key to grasp that whether they ever occupied it or not, the Lord still reserved it exclusively for Israel.

Now what else is so interesting and relevant to us in 2009 is that the Promised Land boundaries of Numbers 34 include virtually all of present-day Syria and Lebanon. Is it any wonder that Syria and Lebanon are in constant war (sometimes cold sometimes hot) with

Israel? The government of the reborn nation of Israel has never laid claim to Syria or Lebanon, but all parties are well aware of what the Torah says about it. Muslims know better than most Christians and Jews what the Torah says about who owns this land, which is why they are willing to fight to the death over it as Satan's proxies. More important though is that both Yehoveh and Satan know the score; the people of Syria and Lebanon are living on land promised to Abraham and his Israelite descendants. The fact that earthly governments and institutions (even the Church) deny this means nothing in the heaven.

Yet it also cannot be denied that the land as described to Moses, and then later to Ezekiel, is a little different yet than what is described to Abraham. Look at this map. The thing to understand about what was given to Abraham is that is far more general in nature than what was given to Moses. Plus since tribes moved over time and nations rose up, empires came and went, boundaries changed, and people groups grew or shrank or disappeared altogether, there was much change in place names and tribal locations by the time of Moses, and then later Ezekiel.

Beginning in verse 13 we get a summation of some facts: for instance the Promised Land is to be divided among 10 tribes, not 12 as was originally set down. Actually, it was 9 tribes plus 1/2 of the tribe of Manasseh who were to get portions. The reason, of course, is that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and 1/2 of the tribe of Manasseh chose to stay OUTSIDE of the Promised Land, and so gave up rights to living in Canaan.

The chapter concludes with a long listing of the tribes of Israel, and who, at the moment in history, was the prince....the chieftain.....of each of the tribes. Therefore, these 10 men would be given the territorial allotment for the tribe they controlled, and then it was up to them to subdivide their territory among the various clans and families within their tribe as they saw fit.

Let's move on to Chapter 35.

### **READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 35 all**

Here the matter of living accommodations for the tribe of Levi is taken up, beginning with a reminder that a) Moses was allotting the land, and b) Israel was on the eastern edge of the Jordan River in the former land of Moab when this land allotment took place.

And, in verse 2, we see that (as there were to be 48 cities set aside for the Levites) each tribe was to decide which cities they would give to the Levites as a permanent holding. In addition to the city proper, there was an amount of land contingent to each city to be used as pastureland for the Levites' animals.

Let's not be naive about what the Levites were given; they were NOT walled or substantial cities. And they were, generally speaking, not cities that the Israelites would build from scratch. Rather, these 48 cities would be from among the hundreds, if not thousands, of small villages and towns the Israelite army would capture from the various Canaanite tribes during the conquest. Most of these "cities" would consist of a handful of buildings.

Let's also understand that like the Jubilee Year (an essential part of the laws concerning the

prohibition against permanently transferring land to other than the original owner), a celebration that records indicate never even ONE time occurred, the Levites never got their full compliment of 48 cities. Oh, they may have been assigned the 48 cities; but it was critical to the ability of the Levites to inhabit these cities that each tribe would consistently care for those Levites who were to live in the assigned Levite cities in their territory; and in many cases it simply didn't happen.

The book of Joshua speaks of several of these Levite cities by name, but only the larger ones. I have no doubt that some tribes chose to give the Levites unlivable and burnt out villages to inhabit (ones that were of little value to that tribe); so the Levites simply never moved in and instead concentrated themselves in the more substantial cities they had been given, especially the few that had walls. After all, they (like all the other Israelites) had to protect themselves from the never-ending series of attacks from marauding bands of bandits and occasionally the armies of kings intent on expanding their territory. The foreign tribes made no distinction between Israel and the Levites and the Priests; all were fair game.

Verse 6 begins to speak of the famous "cities of refuge"; and there are to be a total of 6 of these. Interestingly, 3 of them are to be on the east side of the Jordan (for the 2 1/2 tribes that lived over there), and the other 3 on the west side of the Jordan for the 9 na tribes that lived in the Promised Land. And, we're told that just as part of the formula for deciding the territory each tribe would receive was based on that tribe's relative size, so it would be that the size of the cities given to the Levites would be based on the amount of territory each tribe received. If a tribe had a large amount of territory, then the cities given to the Levites were to be larger.

Since that was the case, a rather ingenious method of deciding how much pastureland was to go along with each of the 48 cities was ordained; it was that the longitudinal measurement of 1000 cubits (about 500 yards) was to be IN ADDITION to the length of the town itself. So, the bigger the town the more was added to the 1000 cubits of pastureland afforded each of the Levite cities.

Now, the 6 cities of refuge (these were 6 of the 48 cities, not in addition to the 48) were central to Yehoveh's justice system; but even more, the laws concerning them dealt with this foundational theological principle: God is so holy that He cannot possibly be present on land that has been defiled by murder.

When we think back to Leviticus, we see how key blood is to all of God's laws. Yet, we are also shown that while blood is the ONLY efficacious means of expiating sins (that is, only blood could bring atonement), the improper spilling of blood is an abomination to the Lord and therefore it defiles. One of the clearest examples of this is the matter of menstrual blood, which is a defiling thing for which there must be purification. Yet, the blood of a properly sacrificed animal could atone for all but a few of the most egregious (or as the bible calls them, high-handed) sins.

Here, the issue is the killing of a human being; and whether or not this killing is murder or manslaughter. So, these verses define just what murder is, as opposed to what manslaughter is; and what the role of the cities of refuge are to be in each case.

Next week we'll examine this and the role of the Blood avenger. And, next week we will finish our study of the book of Numbers.