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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

REVIEW AND PROSPECT (33:1–36:13)

The Place of the Passage

The book of Numbers ends with a faithful generation poised on the border, ready to enter the Promised Land. In this final section of the book, the entire trip from Egypt to Moab is reviewed (33:1–49), and then three sets of instructions for inheriting the land are provided (33:50–35:34). Finally, the daughters of Zelophehad reappear (36:1–13). We have met these five sisters before—the entire latter half of Numbers after the second census (26:1–65) is bookended by the story of these godly women (27:1–11 and 36:1–13). By framing the new generation’s story with laws about the inheritance of Zelophehad’s daughters, Numbers is presenting these women as exemplars of the faithful who inherit from the Lord.

The Big Picture

The Lord will grant his people an inheritance in the land he has promised them.

Gospel Glimpses

SUBSTITUTIONARY PRIEST. Most Old Testament lessons on substitutionary atonement involve an animal as the model substitute. However, in a few key places the Old Testament points explicitly to the perfect human substitute: the Messiah. The instructions for the cities of refuge in Numbers 35:9–34 also contribute to that expectation. The accidental killer who takes refuge in a city of refuge is to remain there as long as the high priest lives. “But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession” (35:28). The high priest’s death is to serve as full satisfaction on behalf of all who took refuge under him. The book of Hebrews might allude to this provision when it announces forgiveness for those “who have fled for refuge” under the high priesthood of Jesus (Hebrews 6:18).

Whole Bible Connections

CITIES OF REFUGE. Ancient Israel had no police force. It was the responsibility of all of its citizens to protect the justice due to one another. Thus the nearest kin took the role of “kinsman redeemer”¹ in situations as varied as economic welfare or the resolution of serious crimes such as murder. In any contest, the charged party could appeal to local judges for help. In cases where the death penalty might be issued, the law recognized that the accused party might need special protection in order to receive a fair trial. Cities of refuge allowed those pleading innocence to obtain such a trial under the oversight of the Levites. Once the trial was over, those granted

lifelong asylum were placed under the protection of the high priest. The role of these special places of refuge continued to be important throughout biblical history.

Theological Soundings

ONE FAITH. Modern readers of the Bible often think of Old Testament Israel as a monolithic culture. This is inaccurate, however. The different tribes of Israel had economic disparities, differences in spoken dialects, and other tribal distinctions. The Old Testament histories are full of examples of tensions arising between the various tribes. However, God held the tribes together in one faith through the dispersion of the Levites among them all. Rather than settling the Levites in settlements around Jerusalem, the Lord ordered the Levites to settle in key urban centers within each tribal territory. This was a practical and symbolic provision for the unity of the people of God in one faith.

Glossary of Terms

KINSMAN-REDEEMER. In OT times, a relative in each extended family who had the responsibility to redeem—that is, to buy back—any relative's land in danger of being sold because of debt. In the book of Ruth, Boaz accepted this responsibility..

PENITENCE. The condition of being repentant and sorrowful for wrongdoing.

Please answer the following questions:

Numbers Chapter 33

1. What is summarized in this chapter? (1-49)
2. What were the Israelites to do when they crossed over Jordan? (51-54)
3. What would happen if the Israelites disobeyed? (55-56)
4. This is the first of three sets of inheritance instructions that follow the travelogue. This instruction addresses driving out the idolatry of the land. What will happen to Israel if they adopt Canaanite worship (v. 56)?

Numbers Chapter 34

1. Who set the boundaries of the land of Canaan for the Israelites? (1-12)
2. This land was to be divided among how many tribes? (13)
3. How many men from each tribe were appointed to help assign the land? (18)
4. The second instruction lays out the division of the land among the tribes. This section specifies the external borders of the land and appoints what might be called a "boundary commission" to determine each tribe's inheritance within the land (16-29). Who are the "cochairmen" of this commission (17)?

5. The members of the boundary commission include chiefs from only 10 of the tribes. Which two of the land-inheriting tribes are not represented, and why?

Numbers Chapter 35

1. Why was land around the towns given to the Levites? (3)
2. How many towns in total were to be given to the Levites? (7)
3. How many towns were to be selected as cities of refuge? (6,13)
4. What type of killers was put to death? (16-21)
5. What type of killers was allowed to go to a city of refuge? (22-23)
6. What could happen to a killer who stepped outside a city of refuge? (26-28)
7. At least how many witnesses were required before a man was put to death? (30)
8. The final inheritance instruction provides for the Levites. The other tribes receive land and cities in order to farm and build businesses, but the Levites are to be devoted to the nation's worship and education in God's ways. How will the location of the Levitical cities facilitate this calling?

9. The Levites will not own the cities where they settle. These cities will remain the possession of their host tribes, among whom the Levites will live. One key provision in this arrangement is the grant of exclusive use of the city's best pastureland for the Levites (3–5). What does this provision indicate about the attitude a city's economic leaders should have toward its economically non-productive Levites?

10. Even accidental manslaughter is the perpetrator's responsibility. The avenger is allowed to execute the accidental killer if encountered outside the city of refuge. If the perpetrator takes up residence in the city of refuge, however, he is to be sheltered. When the current high priest dies, the high priest's blood is to be accepted by God as substitution for the accidental killer (28). How does this provision of substitutionary satisfaction by the high priest illustrate the ultimate satisfaction provided by the Great High Priest, Christ Jesus?

Numbers Chapter 36

1. Why must a daughter who inherits land marry within their own tribe? (6-9)

2. Where did Moses give these commands? (13)

3. In the previous passage about Zebphead's daughters, concern for their father's name was addressed. But there remains a threat to the clan's interests. If these women marry into a different clan or tribe, the estate of Zebphead would be transferred from the clan of Gilead to another clan. How does Moses instruct the women to avoid this outcome (5–8)?

4. In the final verses of the book, we are told how the daughters of Zebphead honor their family and their clan heritage in their marriage decisions (10–12). Why do you suppose the book of Numbers concludes its lessons on faithfulness with the testimony of these five women?