

As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we ended last time by talking about how God used Israel to punish the Midianites for attempting to corrupt Israel. This included not just the fact Israel utterly destroyed the Midianites, but also how the spoils of that war were handled as the army returned to the camp. In all this we are seeing the ending events of Moses' life as God had told him he was to be taken and not be the one who would lead Israel into the promised land. Continuing to look at such events, we finished chapter 31 and are ready to begin chapter 32.

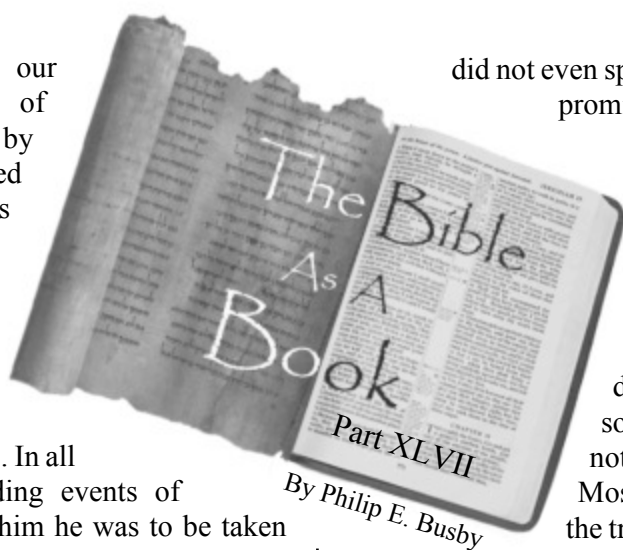
With the punishment of the Midianites behind them, the nation grew ever closer to that time they would cross the Jordan and begin to take the promised land. However, they had by this time already taken a significant portion of land on the east side of Jordan, and the tribes of Reuben and Gad saw this land as very good for grazing cattle, which both tribes had in abundance. This caused these tribes to desire not to take land on the other side of Jordan, but to take as their possession this land on the east side. Thus, they go to Moses and Eleazar with their request, and whether they had considered it or not, Moses is quick to point out to them that their desire to not enter the promised land is very much like the way the original spies had discouraged Israel from going into the land decades ago. He reminds them how those actions were the reason why Israel had wandered the wilderness for these many long years, and now these tribes were threatening to cause another such event or worse!

To this, these tribes respond that they would build the structures and houses needed for their animals and families, but the men of the tribe would still cross the Jordan and fight alongside their brothers until every tribe had gained a possession on the west side of Jordan, except for them. To this, Moses makes it clear that if they really do what they say they will do, then they may take the land they wanted as their possession without any problems. However, if they turned back on their word and failed to go and/or stay with the armies of Israel until the promised land had been taken, there could be no doubt they would suffer punishment from The Lord, the details of which Moses

did not even speculate on. Again, these tribes promised to uphold their words, and this was witnessed by the High Priest, Joshua (who would take the leadership after Moses was gone), and the other princes of Israel. This was important because the end result of whether they did what they said or not was something Moses himself would not be around to see. After this, Moses gives the land to them, and the tribe of Manasseh would end up

with a portion of land on this side of Jordan as well. However, Moses makes it clear no matter what God does to them if they turn back on their word, these tribes would be given possessions on the west side of Jordan and not keep the land they wanted here on the east side. The next verses give us a list of the cities the tribes of Reuben and Gad built and/or restored, even changing the names of many of the places that had been taken. Most of these were walled cities, so their families would not be left vulnerable while they were gone. They also built the barns and infrastructure needed to take care of their cattle, as they had asked to do. Certain families of Manasseh would go further into some of the land to the north and easily drive out remaining Amorites of the area in order to take their cities and lands.

As the three tribes that would take possessions on this east side did their work and the rest of Israel was able to settle down a bit before they crossed the Jordan, Moses would make good use of his time. While I believe Moses had taken the time to keep good records of the events as Israel traveled, and this certainly was not the first time he had had a chance to write, Moses now knew how close he was to the end of his earthly life. It very well may have been during this time Moses organized those writings into more of what we see as these first books of the Bible. It would seem this was also the time to write most of the record we read here in Numbers about Israel's actions as they transitioned from their wandering in the wilderness and began their travel and actions needed to get in a position to cross the Jordan. Refreshing himself on the overall events they had been through may be why in the next verses we have a fairly simple listing of Israel's journey. It starts with where they had begun by leaving Egypt and lists all the notable places they had



camped while on their way to now being spread out across the plains of Moab, most of which Israel had taken back from Canaanites. Moab had lost the land to. One of the most important things to remember is that this is certainly the lead up into the last book of the Torah, as Moses makes sure the generation which were just children, or not even yet born when Israel left Egypt, now understood who they were and where they had come from!

Next, God goes into instructions that, again, were to make it clear to Israel that the Laws He had given them to follow were not just about how to live as they journeyed from Egypt to the promised land, but words every generation was to follow. These instructions are also about making sure a good foundation for future generations was laid by those who would take the land to begin with, by cleansing the land of things Israel was not to have as part of their lives. First off, they were not to simply live among the people of Canaan. Israel was to drive these inhabitants out, and the success God gave Israel as they punished the Midianites was a clear example of what this meant, which was not to just drive them away but destroy them as a people. That might sound harsh, but this was God using Israel to exact the same kind of judgment on the entire land of Canaan that He had placed on Sodom and Gomorrah during their forefather Abraham's day. Along with destroying the people, Israel was not to adopt their culture(s) in any way, especially their religious beliefs. Israel should have known by having the Law that they were not to worship false gods. However, in the minds of pagans, false gods are often connected and somewhat specific to the land upon which they are worshiped. God wanted Israel to have no doubt in their minds that this land was God's and no false god need be preserved, respected, or remembered in order for the land to prosper.

Thus, Israel was to destroy all the carvings, drawings, and the like of these gods and whatever the Canaanites worshiped. They were also to destroy all the statues of these gods and their places of worship. This would include not just items and structures the Canaanites had built for such purposes, but one needs to understand the idea of temples being built using columns to support their roofs has its roots in an earlier idea. In early times it was common for people to create places of worship by planting and/or using trees to surround a specific opening of ground which would serve as the central point of worship. Israel was to cut

these groves of trees down and leave no evidence to this kind of activity on the land. The history and culture of the Canaanites were to come to an end so they and future generations in Israel would not turn to these places or use these items as special, but look only to The One True God for their needs. The land was also to be divided up between the tribes and families in Israel. This is not just a repeat of an earlier commandment. While the words are all here about those with greater populations getting more land and those with less getting smaller portions, the real point of saying this in this set of instructions was to make it clear Israel would possess all the land!

This meant there should not be left pockets of land that were considered to be possessions which did not belong to Israel. Driving every last inhabitant of the land out was not a job that would be accomplished overnight. The fact the work was ongoing, or at least needed to be, even by the time of Joshua's death is why Joshua's final words were about how there was still work each tribe and the nation as a whole needed to continue forward with. This needed to be done in spite of the fact they would no longer have a central leader as Moses and Joshua had been. In dividing up what land belonged to what tribe and even what families in those tribes, there would be a clear picture as to whose job it primarily was to drive the Canaanites out of each specific location across the land, especially as Israel's population continued to expand. These instructions are capped off by making it clear that if Israel was to leave any of the Canaanite population, those people would not be allies of Israel but continue through time to cause Israel trouble. They needed to remember this was about more than just giving Israel the land they wanted. This was about doing the work of God in this land. If Israel failed to be willing to do that work, God would do it; but such a cleansing of the land would include God doing to Israel what He wanted done to the Canaanites.

To be clear of just what land should be initially divided among the tribes and their families, God lays out the general borders of the promised land. In our time it can be hard to pin down exactly what all is being specified here as God talks about various places being markers for where to draw the lines, but especially when it comes to the southern border, these instructions should have been very clear to Israel. You see what they are told is basically that the southern border would extend right down to the area they had

traveled along on their way from Egypt. The southern border was actually defined quite well to Israel as they first sent in the spies from this south end. The Edomites claimed an extensive piece of the land going south from the south end of the Dead Sea. We clearly see this fact as Israel wanted to travel around that south end and asked the king of Edom for permission to do so by going through his land. Now, Israel was to extend their border south to meet up with the northern border of the Edomites right at the extreme south end of the Dead Sea. From there it would go on to the southwest and drop as far as Kadesh-barnea, which should have been a very familiar place to Israel. It was from this area Israel sent out the spies at the time God first intended them to start taking the land. (Num. 13:26-27, 32:7-8) It was also in this area where many other events took place during Israel's travels, including when they sent the message to the king of Edom requesting the ability to pass through and go around the end of the Dead Sea. (Num. 20:14-17)

Just below this place there was a river that ran northwest into the Mediterranean. This river was considered the dividing point of passing from the land of Canaan into the area the Pharaohs of Egypt claimed. Israel's travels show Egypt held little interest and/or real governing power over this area; but it is a very general reference and is likely why this river is called the river of Egypt, which should not be confused in this portion of Scripture as referencing to the Nile. Israel's south border would follow this river, and its most western point would be at the river's outlet into the Mediterranean. This makes the western border very easy to see as one heads north, for it simply was to be the coastline of the Mediterranean going up from there. One should note this clearly takes in the land which in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was held by the Philistines. The truth of the matter is that those Philistines are likely the reason the river we just talked about was considered the cut off for how far north along the coast there was any long-term consensus as to where one crossed from Egyptian territory into Canaan.

Following the coast north, you eventually get to the mountain range traditionally known as the mountains of Lebanon. The reference to Mt. Hor here would seem to indicate a tall mountain not far from the coastal town of Tyre. This would put the north border starting point at the coastline of the Mediterranean before entering the region held by what we later know

best as the land ruled by the kings of Tyre and Sidon. From there it would follow a path northeast that would likely be defined most of the way by adjoining the territory claimed by these kings until it got to a northern extreme one could find by drawing a line almost straight east from Sidon. The border would then head more directly east until it was just past being a direct line back down to the Sea of Chinnereth, which is better known as the Sea of Galilee in later times. This would basically bring the border to adjoin the territory the tribe of Manasseh had pushed the Amorites out of, and which was considered part of the land to the east that three of the tribes took possession of before Israel crossed over Jordan. In spite of this, God gives a line for the east border that did not include these tribes' territory, but which followed their western side back down to the east shores of the Sea of Chinnereth. From there the east border would continue to be defined as the Jordan River all the way down to the Dead Sea and its eastern coast, until it met up with that southern corner at the south end of the sea where we started to define the southern border.

Now, if it seems a bit odd that these borders did not include the territory already being possessed by those tribes that would live east of the Jordan, keep two things in mind. One is that God is defining what He intended to be the initial borders of the promised land even if those tribes had not possessed land to the east right from the start. Along with that is the fact these borders would be the land those tribes would have to move into if they failed to hold up their end of the agreement for staying east of the Jordan. The second point is that the very next verses tell us these borders were the land now intended to be divided between the rest of the tribes which had not taken land to the east. This included the remaining half of the tribe of Manasseh that had not yet possessed land on the east side. After this, God tells Moses it would mainly be the job of Joshua and the High Priest Eleazar to lead this effort of surveying and parceling out the land each tribe would receive. However, we are also given a list of names that include one prince, from each of the tribes that would be given this land, who was to help with the details, likely the more fine points of dividing each portion between the families within their respective tribes.

Next, God would tell Moses where the Levites would live since they were not to inherit a specific parcel of land such as the other tribes. Instead, the

Levites would be given cities and land surrounding those cities inside each of the other tribes' possessions. In order to keep their livestock and have vineyards and the like, these cities were to include land on all sides of the city measured from the wall of the city out to a thousand cubits. This would be land different families of the tribe might personally own and sell among themselves as they desired. Going on out from that land on all sides, there was to be measured another two thousand cubits. This land, most likely, was for open pasture the entire community of Levites could manage and use. It would also leave room for expansion of any kind they might need, even if they did not initially make use of it at all. Of these cities given to the Levites, there were to be forty-eight in all, but six of them would be designated as cities of refuge. Of course, the bigger tribes that had greater amounts of land would be expected to give more cities, in order to fulfill what was to be given to the Levites, than the smaller tribes with smaller amounts of land would be expected to give.

By making six of the Levite cities those of refuge, God was continuing to show how the priestly tribe was to be the administrators of the justice system in Israel. Three of these cities of refuge would be on the east side of Jordan, and three of them were to be on the west. This set up an interesting way to handle the crime of murder. If a person felt they had caused a death by accident or that in some way they were justified in killing who they had, such as self-defense, they could run to one of these cities where their right to a trial was to be protected. This was true for both those citizens of Israel and those just in the land for other purposes. What this meant was if you killed someone and simply tried to hide it, if/when you were found out, you would likely end up being punished by those who wanted revenge, and your guilt could be assumed without trial. According to the Law of Moses the punishment for murder was death, so that should be the outcome. However, if you felt you had a case for being innocent of murder, you needed to admit what had happened by at least attempting to reach one of these cities where you would be protected until your case could be heard. If you made it to one, this act alone didn't absolve you of a crime, but it was a chance to plead innocence as apposed to basically admitting guilt by not even giving yourself this opportunity to stand trial!

Here God also clarifies what constitutes a

murder for which the death penalty should be used as punishment. This would also give guidance for the person (most likely a family member who wanted to punish the killer for taking the other's life) as to if they thought they would be justified in pursuing the person in an attempt to get them before they had a chance to reach one of these cities. Thus, if the person used an object of metal to kill another, that would be murder because it proves your intent was to kill no matter your motive at that moment, or, at the very least, you knew death was very possible. There are other actions that show this same kind of intent or lack of concern, and examples are used to define such actions. If you killed a person by throwing a stone at them, that would be murder. Using a wooden object would not necessarily be a way to attempt to or not care if you killed a person, but that would change if the wooden item you used was a weapon. Obvious intentional acts would be things such as approaching a person in anger or waiting to catch the person off guard. In these cases it would not matter what you used, even if it was just your bare hands, it would be murder. Now, unintentional acts could include stabbing or hitting a person in a way that caused death, but the circumstances would need to show your lack of intent. This would include the dropping or throwing of an object, such as a stone; but hitting a person you were not angry with, had not been trying to catch at a vulnerable moment, and not a person others knew was an enemy you might take the opportunity to kill if you could make it seem like an accident, would be looked at.

Now, a determination of guilt was not to be made just on the word of the one who wanted revenge, but there was to be other witnesses who could testify as to what they saw happen. This would mean the revenger's time was better spent building their case against the killer than just trying to overtake them before they could get to the city. In the end of looking at the facts, it was the congregation's job to decide if a person who had fled to one of these cities was guilty of murder or not. If they were guilty, the person was to be turned over to the individual (again most likely a close male family member) who looked for vengeance for the crime, and it would be by their hand the sentence of death was to be carried out. This means the "state" - to use a modern term - would not often be the executioner of someone found guilty of death. That would only happen in cases God had specified in the Law that the congregation was to dispose of the

individual(s), and that usually was done by stoning.

If the killer was found to have killed by accident without intent or reason to do so, it still did not mean they were free to just go home. This was partly a punishment for the seriousness of one person killing another for any reason, and partly because a not guilty verdict does not always appease family and friends of the one who lost their life. It was the congregation's job to protect both the person who had killed and the one who might still desire to kill them; for if the person wanting revenge was to kill them after being found not guilty, that person would be found guilty of murder. The answer to handling all this was for the person who had been tried to live in the city of refuge until the death of the current High Priest. This would specifically give the Levites the primary job of protecting such a person. However, it is made clear that at any time if the person ventured outside the limits of that city of refuge to which they had fled, the responsibility to protect them vanished. What also vanished was the person who sought revenge needing to abide by the outcome of the trial.

If the revenger was still convinced or just angry enough they desired to kill the other, and they found that person outside the limits of the city of refuge, they could take the opportunity to kill them. In doing so, they would not be held guilty of the crime of murder, nor would they have to flee to a city of refuge to live. The responsibility to stay inside the city for protection was upon the one who had been found not guilty. However, after the death of the High Priest they were free to return home, and anyone taking revenge upon them after that would be guilty of murder. Again, taking the life of another human was not to be done lightly. God even tells Israel that while it is necessary to carry out capital punishment when a person is found guilty, for only the blood of the killer can cleanse the blood of the one killed, it is still not something anyone should take joy in. This is why the one seeking revenge should do it. There was not to be people who were executioners for a living. God would not have the nation encouraging people to have no trouble taking a life, and certainly not those who generally might enjoy it. This way of handling murder cases was to be the law throughout all Israel's habitations and throughout all their generations.

One more issue that is brought to Moses was a question that arose concerning the earlier

information about families of only daughters being able to inherit possessions of land. This comes up because it had become clear each possession belonging to a family would reside in the borders of the land given to the tribe that family was part of. If the daughter or daughters were to marry a man not of that tribe, this would mean the tribe would lose a piece of its overall land to another tribe. This could also become very confusing as small parcels of land here and there within a tribe's region would have to be tracked as then being part of another tribe's possessions. Even the stipulations about returning possessions during a year of Jubilee would not fix such an issue. Moses told the people this was a very good question to settle, and the answer from God was that the woman or women have to choose whether to marry or not. However, if they chose to marry, they could only marry a man who was of their tribe. This way the possession they had inherited would stay with the tribe to which it had always been a part of. This would leave the choice up to the women as to what was more important to them, for if they couldn't find a man of their tribe they really wanted to marry, it did not free them to marry someone outside the tribe if they wanted to hold their inheritance in order to preserve their father's name. We are told the daughters who first brought up this issue of women getting to inherit their father's land for that very reason followed this stipulation, and each married a man from their tribe of Manasseh.

With these instructions we finish the words God gave to Moses for the children of Israel as they camped on the east of Jordan in preparation to crossing over to the promised land.

Let's stay in God's Word!

