



Numbers - Chapter Thirty Four

V **Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab** **(continues)**

Summary of Chapter Thirty Four

The Lord gives instructions to Moses to pass on to the Israelites. It is time for them to take the Promised Land of Canaan. The Lord provides details of the extent of the lands four boundaries that the nine and a half tribes may possess to the west of the River Jordan. The other two and a half tribes may possess Transjordan as already agreed.

The land is to be apportioned by lot with the largest tribes receiving a proportion of the land to represent their needs. The high priest Eleazar and the designated leader of the people Joshua will be the two men who will draw the lots. A leader of each of the nine and a half tribes will also be present to ensure the land is allocated fairly.

V.h **Numbers 34:1-15 - The Boundaries of the Land**

The promise to Abraham was that his descendants would be given <<***all the land of Canaan***>> (Genesis 17:8b). But hitherto the boundaries of Canaan have never been stated. The definition here, as the Lord gives it, corresponds to that found in Egyptian texts of the fifteenth to thirteenth centuries BC, which is the era of Moses. In fact, Israel never occupied all this territory for it represents the Promised Land, not the subsequently occupied land, of Israel. The boundaries are not always clear. Oversimplifying, Canaan consisted of the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan plus modern Lebanon and a portion of modern Syria. The closest Israel came to occupying the entire Promised Land came during the days of King Solomon, where some of the land was still occupied by other nations who paid tribute to him and were at peace with Israel.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² Command the Israelites, and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Canaan, defined by its boundaries), ³ your south sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom. Your southern boundary shall begin from the end of the Dead Sea on the east; ⁴ your boundary shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its outer limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and cross to Azmon; ⁵ the boundary shall turn from Azmon to the Wadi of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the Sea.

Numbers 34:1-5

This is the land that shall fall to you. God was about to describe the borders of the Promised Land to Moses and the children of Israel. Although the lands on the eastern side of the Jordan River belonged to Israel and two and a half tribes settled on the eastern lands, those lands were not considered to be part of the Promised Land, that is, Canaan.

For an inheritance. Israel was going to have to take control of the Promised Land by conquest; they would have to drive out the Canaanites to take possession of it. Yet, they should never consider that the land was given to them because they earned it. It was given to them by God as an inheritance. Inheritances are freely given, not earned. The inheritance had been promised long ago: <<*See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land that I swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them*>> (Deuteronomy 1:8), and: <<*the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance'*>> (Psalm 105:9-11).

The southern border of the Promised Land runs from the southern end of the Dead Sea, literally the Salt Sea, south of Kadesh-barnea, to the Mediterranean coast, west of Gaza, i.e. the Wadi of Egypt.

There is some debate about the identity of the Wadi of Egypt; is it the Nile River or a smaller stream towards the south? This would determine whether or not God gave the greater Sinai region to Israel as part of the Promised Land.

The ascent of Akrabbim marks the border with the Amorites: <<*The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upwards*>> (Judges 1:36). It is also referred to as Scorpion Pass.

V.h.ii Numbers 34:6 - The Western Border

Here, the western boundary of the Promised Land is outlined.

⁶ For the western boundary, you shall have the Great Sea and its coast; this shall be your western boundary.

Numbers 34:6

The western border of the Promised Land is the Mediterranean, i.e. the Great Sea: <<*On the west side, the Great Sea shall be the boundary to a point opposite Lebo-hamath. This shall be the west side*>> (Ezekiel 47:20).

V.h.iii Numbers 34:7-9 - The Northern Border

Here, the northern boundary of the Promised Land is outlined.

⁷ This shall be your northern boundary: from the Great Sea you shall mark out your line to Mount Hor; ⁸ from Mount Hor you shall mark it out to Lebo-hamath, and the outer limit of the boundary shall be at Zedad; ⁹ then the boundary shall extend to Ziphron, and its end shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be your northern boundary.

Numbers 34:7-9

Mount Hor was the place where Aaron had died and was buried (Numbers 20:22-29). His body would lie just on the border to the Promised Land, which is similar to that of Moses, who would be buried in a valley below Mount Nebo in the land of the Moabites: <<*Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day*>> (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

Lebo-hamath formed part of the route taken by the spies as they entered the Promised Land about 38 years earlier: <<*So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath*>> (Numbers 13:21).

The northern border of the Promised Land runs from the Mediterranean Sea, north of Byblos, to Hazar-enan, perhaps an oasis on the edge of the desert somewhere east of Zedad.

V.h.iv Numbers 34:10-15 - The Eastern Border

Here, the eastern boundary of the Promised Land is outlined. Moses also reminds the Israelites that Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh could inherit the land to the east of the Jordan River.

¹⁰ You shall mark out your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham; ¹¹ and the boundary shall continue down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the boundary shall go down, and reach the eastern slope of the sea of Chinnereth; ¹² and the boundary shall go down to the Jordan, and its end shall be at the Dead Sea. This shall be your land with its boundaries all round.

Numbers 34:10-12

The eastern border of the Promised Land is the hardest to define. From Hazar-enan it apparently runs southward along the edge of the desert before swinging westward to the Sea of Galilee, i.e. the sea of Chinnereth. From there it runs south along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea.

¹³ Moses commanded the Israelites, saying: This is the land that you shall inherit by lot, which the Lord has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe; ¹⁴ for the tribe of the Reubenites by their ancestral houses and the tribe of the Gadites by their ancestral houses have taken their inheritance, and also the half-tribe of Manasseh; ¹⁵ the two tribes and the half-tribe have taken their inheritance beyond the Jordan at Jericho eastwards, towards the sunrise.

Numbers 34:13-15

This is the land that you shall inherit by lot. Each tribal allocation would be drawn by lot to establish which portion of the land they would receive as their ancestral heritage. The tribes would be allocated land by its size appropriate to their population as already established. Drawing by lot was traditionally the Urim and Thummim that was held in the high priests breastpiece (Leviticus 8:8), which was used to determine a probably 'yes' or 'no' answer from God. Or it may have been simply a draw of names or land allocations from a pot. The tradition of selection was continued into the NT as the replacement for the apostle Judas was also drawn by lot: *<<And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles>>* (Acts 1:26).

Which the Lord has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe.

The Promised Land would be divided among the nine and a half tribes that would settle west of the River Jordan. Transjordan was to be settled by Reuben, Gad and the other half tribe of Manasseh as previously agreed.

V.i Numbers 34:16-29 - Tribal Leaders

Eleazar and Joshua are designated as the two leaders who would conduct the lot. The other distributors are the tribal chiefs of the 10 tribes who will settle west of

the River Jordan. Thus no chiefs of Reuben and Gad are listed, because they are settling in Transjordan. The chiefs are mentioned in the order of the lands they eventually received from south to north.

¹⁶ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁷ These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: the priest Eleazar and Joshua son of Nun. ¹⁸ You shall take one leader of every tribe to apportion the land for inheritance. ¹⁹ These are the names of the men: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh. ²⁰ Of the tribe of the Simeonites, Shemuel son of Ammihud. ²¹ Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of Chislon. ²² Of the tribe of the Danites a leader, Bukki son of Jogli. ²³ Of the Josephites: of the tribe of the Manassites a leader, Hanniel son of Ephod, ²⁴ and of the tribe of the Ephraimites a leader, Kemuel son of Shiphtan. ²⁵ Of the tribe of the Zebulunites a leader, Elizaphan son of Parnach. ²⁶ Of the tribe of the Issacharites a leader, Paltiel son of Azzan. ²⁷ And of the tribe of the Asherites a leader, Ahihud son of Shelomi. ²⁸ Of the tribe of the Naphtalites a leader, Pedahel son of Ammihud. ²⁹ These were the ones whom the Lord commanded to apportion the inheritance for the Israelites in the land of Canaan.

Numbers 34:16-29

The priest Eleazar and Joshua son of Nun. The division of the land was, in fact, a potentially divisive, even explosive, issue among the people of Israel. It was right to take the two most godly and prominent leaders of the nation to direct this essential and controversial duty.

On the principle of allocating land from south to north, Simeon, as the southernmost tribe, ought to precede Judah. But Judah, being the foremost tribe in the Book of Numbers, as determined in Numbers 2:2-9, actually heads the list. Apart from Caleb, the chief of Judah, the other named chiefs are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture; nevertheless, they are important, for: these were the ones whom the Lord commanded to apportion the inheritance for the Israelites in the land of Canaan.