

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 20**

**THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

**CHAPTER 33-34**

**INTRODUCTION**

If history is just the mere records of dates and events, it is dull and meaningless. In the light of the revealed will of God, history is really “His Story”. Today is what it is because of what it was yesterday, and tomorrow will be what it is because of today. History is not mere facts and figures, dates and events, people and places, but it is the movement of God’s eternal purpose and revealed plan. History moves towards a goal, a definite finale! Contrary to man’s wishful thinking of existentialism, man’s history will just keep going and going without ending.

But the revealed will of God given in Holy Scriptures, the Bible, teaches that history proceeds to God’s *telos*—God’s final goal or end! In chapter 33, God commanded Moses to record the history of the children of Israel from the time they left Egypt to their present place in the plains of Moab, prior to entering the land of promise. There must be a purpose for God to command Moses to recapitulate their journey in the wilderness. While many may think that there is not much to look into because it is just mere repetition of the previous records, a keen eye and mind would discover some precious truths about God and His

purpose. Israel and the generations that follow when reading Moses’ summary of their journey in the wilderness will see precious truths if they want to see.

Chapters 33 and 34 can be divided into four sections:

- 1) A recount of the journeys of the children of Israel since they left Egypt until they now pitched their tents on the plains of Moab (33:1-49);
- 2) God’s final instructions to the children of Israel prior to entering the Promised Land (33:50-56);
- 3) God set the boundaries of the Promised Land (34:1-12); and
- 4) the committee for the allotment of the land (34:13-29).

**OUTLINE**

**A. The Journeys of the Israelites from Egypt to Plains of Moab (33:1-49).**

1. The children of Israel were led out of Egypt by Moses and Aaron and the journeys recorded by Moses (33:1-2).
2. The departure from Rameses in Egypt to Mount Sinai (33:3-15).
3. The journey from Mount Sinai to Ezion-gaber (33:16-35).
4. The departure from Ezion-gaber to the plains of Moab (33:36-49).

**B. The LORD Instructed the Children of Israel Regarding the Occupation of the Promised Land (33:50-56).**

1. The LORD spoke through Moses to the children of Israel (vv.50-51).

2. They should drive out the Canaanites (v.52a).
3. They must destroy the idols and images (v.52b).
4. They must possess the land which God had given them (v.53).
5. They should divide the land by lot for an inheritance among their families (v.54).
6. If they disobeyed the LORD, the Canaanites would be a vexation to them, and the LORD would do to them as He would do to the Canaanites (v.55).

### **C. The Boundaries of the Promised Land (34:1-12).**

1. The boundaries of the land described by the LORD to Moses (vv.1-2).
2. The southern border stretched from the southern tip of the Dead Sea to Kadesh-barnea and to the sea (vv.3-5).
3. The western border was simply the Great Sea (v.6).
4. The northern border formed from the Great Sea to Mount Hermon (vv.7-9).
5. The eastern border stretched from the north along the eastern shores of the lake of Galilee, down the river Jordan to the Dead Sea (vv.10-12).

### **C. The Allotment of the Land and the Appointed Leaders (34:13-29).**

1. The land just described will be allotted by lot to the nine and the half tribes (v.13).
2. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had received

their inheritance on the east of Jordan (vv.14-15).

3. The LORD appointed Eleazar, the priest, and Joshua, the son of Nun, and the leader of each tribe were to divide the land (vv.16-18).
4. The names of the leaders of the nine and a half tribes that would divide the land among the tribes (vv.19-29).
  - a) The tribe of Judah: Caleb (19).
  - b) The tribe of Simeon: Shemuel (20).
  - c) The tribe of Benjamin: Elidad (21).
  - d) The tribe of Dan: Bukki (22).
  - e) The half tribe of Joseph-Manasseh: Hanniel (23).
  - f) The tribe of Ephraim: Kemuel (24).
  - g) The tribe of Zebulun: Elizaphan (25).
  - h) The tribe of Issachar: Paltiel (26).
  - i) The tribe of Asher: Ahihud (27).
  - j) The tribe of Naphtali: Pedahel (28).
  - k) These were the leaders appointed by the LORD to divide the land among the children of Israel (29).

## **COMMENTARY**

### **The Journeying**

The LORD commanded Moses to write the account of Israel's journey from the time they left Egypt until the present moment when they were at the plains of Moab. It was a period of forty years of Israel's history. Moses recorded forty-two stations where they moved and pitched their booths

(see attached, Keddie's Figure 4). Wenham (*Numbers*, pages 217-219) noted that the number forty-two is divisible by seven, and the result is that it shows some interesting features in six stages of their journeys. For example, at the first stage, when they left Egypt, the miracle was the death of the first-born of all those who did not observe the Passover. At the first station of the second stage, the miracle of giving manna and quails occurred. At the fourth station of the first stage, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and defeated the Egyptians, and the interesting parallel is that at the fourth station of the second stage, the Amalekites were defeated. And in the sixth station of the fourth, fifth and sixth stages, (Moseroth=Moserah, Deuteronomy 10:6) Mount Hor, and the mountains of Abarim (Nebo) were the scenes where Aaron and Moses' deaths (see attached chart of the six stages of the journey). The biblical numbers of 1, 3, 4, 7, and 12 are recognized by some as specially significant, and epoch-making events happened. The number seven being the number of perfection and completion. The six stages constitute an open-ended symbolism in which the six stages of desert wanderings lead to the seventh and final stage, that is, the entrance into the Promised Land, the inheritance, the conquest, and the rest of God's people (Keddie, *Numbers*, 206). The record of these stations in their journey from Egypt to Canaan, the Promised Land, demonstrates the working of God's eternal purpose and plan in behalf of His people.

One other interesting feature of the record is that the murmurings and grumbings of the people were

not recorded. The complaints at Marah, and the rebellion led by Korah were not mentioned at all. The death of Aaron was recorded but the reason why he died was not given. These show that the LORD God does not want to remember the sins of His people. As far as the east is from the west, He has removed the iniquities of His chosen people. Instead His goodness towards them is mentioned in Elim where there were twelve fountains of water and seventy palm trees to indicate His providence and benevolence towards His people.

### **The Commission**

The LORD renewed His commission to Israel through Moses. The LORD said, "When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan" (33:51), they must drive out the inhabitants of the land and destroy all the images and idols and the high places where they worshipped. The LORD then committed them to possess and dwell in the land which He had promised and given to them. But the LORD also warned them that if they did not drive out the inhabitants of the land but let them remain in the land, these people would be "pricks in your eyes," and "thorns in your sides," and they would vex them in the land wherein they lived (33:55).

The LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that are therein. Every thing and every man belong to Him. God, therefore, has the right to do as He pleases. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. God is the Potter, and we are the clay, and He does as He pleases. The land belongs to God, and He used the nation of

Israel as His instrument of judgement upon the Canaanites. What is man that he should question God concerning His ways and acts? For God has testified of Himself that He is a just and righteous judge (Deuteronomy 32:4 *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he*). When the sins of the Canaanites are full, the Judge of all judges will judge with all righteous judgement and no man, woman or child can stand guiltless before Him (cf. Gen. 15:16).

### The Promised Land

The LORD delineated the boundaries of the Promised Land. He marked out the four corners of the land. In the south the boundary is from the wilderness of Zin through the coastline of Edom. Moving northwards along the coastline of the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) forms the western border. In the north it stretched as far as Mount Hor (a different mountain from the one where Aaron died). The east is bounded by the eastern shore of lake Galilee and along the Jordan river until it reaches the Dead Sea. In this case, the land of Gilead, which is on the east side of Jordan, where the children of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh asked for, were not part of the promised land. God knew the mountains and valleys of these places. He showed great care in defining the boundaries, thus demonstrating His meticulous attention to the details of His gift.

In the allotment of the land when they entered, the LORD Himself appointed the officers who were responsible for the distribution

of the land by lot. In addition to Eleazar and Joshua, ten princes of the remaining ten tribes were chosen, namely: From the tribe of:

Judah: Caleb, "attacker, seizer"

Simeon: Shemuel, "heard of God"

Benjamin: Elidad, "loved of God"

Dan: Bukki, "reverer of Jehovah"

Joseph-Manasseh: Hanniel, "grace

"of God"

Ephraim: Kemuel, "assembly of God"

Zebulun: Elizaphan, "whom God shields"

Issachar: Paltiel, "whom God rescues"

Asher: Ahihud, "friend of union"

Naphtali: Pedahel, "whom God redeems"

Surely God made the right choice of these men to be responsible for the fair allocation of the land by lot. The LORD is a God of order and discipline. Everything should be done orderly and decently.

### SUMMARY

God's sovereignty is clearly indicated in these two chapters. The Lord commanded Moses to write the history of Israel (33:2); the LORD gave specific instructions concerning the things they ought to do when they entered the promised land, and if they neglected those commandments, they would be chastised (33:50, 56). The LORD delineated the boundaries of the land (34:1-2); and the Lord appointed the officers to allocate the land by lot (34:16-18). Although God is sovereign, His people had a responsibility and a

duty to work out His plan and purpose. The Israelites had to work in claiming their inheritance. This is a precious truth that we, as God's children, must learn. It is a great truth that God is sovereign and no one can thwart His purpose and plan, but there is a responsibility and duty He expects from His children. This has always been the pattern of God's dealings with us. In claiming the promises of God to us, Paul exhorted us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). It does not mean that we work to earn our salvation, but to do the things that are expected of us to claim the promises of God to His children. This is the part of man's responsibility in light of God's sovereignty.

The recapitulation of Israel's journeys from Egypt to the doorsteps of the Promised Land shows God's faithfulness in keeping His Word. He encouraged the new generation of Israelites by giving them the assurance that they would enter the land. Two times he assured them that they would enter and possess the land. The first time was when the LORD renewed the commission. On two occasions, He promised the children of Israel: "When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan" (34:51); and He repeated these words when He gave the commandment to the children of Israel to delineate the borders of the land: He said, "When ye come into the land of Canaan" (34:2). God is sovereign and He keeps His promises. There is no question about it. We too are comforted and encouraged, and our faith strengthened that our

salvation and sins forgiven and forgotten are securely assured because God said it and that settles it.

Another wonderful revelation of God is that when he recounted the history of Israel, He does not remember their sins and iniquities, their shortcomings and weaknesses. He removes them. Instead He reminded the Israelites of His tender mercies and loving kindness. God has said that He does not deal with us according to our sins. But His love and mercy towards His children are everlasting. However, that should not lead us to sin more because God is so gracious towards us; no, rather we should be moved by God's grace and love to live holy lives and not sin against Him.

If the history of Israel parallels our spiritual life, the Words of the LORD to Israel have a bearing on our life. Just as the Israelites have to drive out the Canaanites who worshipped idols and images when they entered the land, we too should destroy the idols in our life. There should be no room for these things. And if we neglect to remove them, they will be like pricks in our eyes and thorns in our sides. They will be "snares and traps" in our life, and the danger is that they will entice us to sin against God.

God approves order and discipline in carrying out His work. He showed this by appointing leaders whose responsibility and duty is to see that the work of the LORD was properly carried out. In addition to Eleazar and Joshua, He appointed ten others to help them to distribute the land to the people. The church should always recognize its leaders and work with them to carry out the will of God. Opposition to God's ordained

servants would result in His displeasure and cause divisiveness and unhappiness in the church. The earlier we learn this well, the better it is for the church to move ahead. AMEN

**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**MONDAY: Numbers 33:1-15; Isaiah 46:9-13.<sup>1</sup>**

**1. What incident is not mentioned when they were in Marah?**

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**TUESDAY: Numbers 33:16-35; Psalm 103:6-14.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: 11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it. 12 Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that *are* far from righteousness: 13 I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 103:6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. 8 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to

**2. At Rithmah (near Kadesh) what incident was not mentioned?**

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**3. What other incidents were not mentioned?**

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**4. What was not mentioned about Aaron's death?**

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anger, and plenteous in mercy. 9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us. 13 Like as a father pitieth *his* children, *so* the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust.

**WEDNESDAY: Numbers 33:36-56; Joshua 24:15; Hebrews 2:1-4.<sup>3</sup>**

**5. One commentator remarked, "There has been a great deal of inconclusive and unprofitable debate among the commentators as to where most of these places are located." What are your thoughts to this remark?**

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**6. In your opinion, how does the word of the LORD in 33:51 affect the children of Israel?**

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 24:1 {A Psalm of David.} The earth *is* the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Joshua 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. 2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; 3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; 4 God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

**7. What did the LORD command the children of Israel to do in Canaan?**

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**8. What would be the consequences on their part for neglecting the commandments of God?**

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**THURSDAY: Numbers 34:1-8; Psalm 24:1; Joshua 23:9-14.<sup>4</sup>**

**9. In what way did God allay the fear and anxiety of the children of Israel?**

<sup>4</sup> Joshua 23:9 For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but *as for* you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. 10 One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he *it is* that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. 11 Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. 12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: 13 Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. 14 And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof.

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**12. What has God revealed about Himself in these two chapters?**

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**FRIDAY: Numbers 34:9-29; Romans 12:3-8.<sup>5</sup>**

**10. Who appointed the officers to the committee that was responsible for the allotment of the land? What does it tell us about him?**

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**11. What evidence is there to indicate that God's sovereignty works together with individual responsibility?**

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith; 7 Or ministry, *let us wait* on *our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.