

Reformation Fellowship Notes • June 2, 2019
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Handout #16
Numbers 33, 34, 35, 36

I. Introduction

- A. This is the final section of Numbers.
 - 1. Ends on an optimistic note.
- B. Why are these chapters placed here?
 - 1. This is a problem throughout Numbers.
 - 2. I will make my proposal after we look at the chapters.

II. Numbers 33:1-49

- A. A list of camping places from the time of the Exodus to the Plains of Moab
 - 1. Only a handful of these places are known to us now.
 - 2. It is probably not a complete list.
 - 3. It is presented with a symmetry.
 - a) Wenham finds 6 groups of 7 sites each.
 - (1) Similar to Matthew having 3 groups of 14 generations each in the genealogy of Jesus
- B. Most of the section is just an itinerary.
 - 1. They journeyed from X and camped at Y, and they journeyed from Y and camped at Z . . .
 - 2. Very little additional comment.
 - a) Only a handful of times
 - (1) Example: “There were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees.”
 - (2) “It was there the people had no water.”
 - 3. But the place names would have conjured up memories of each place.
- C. This list constitutes a rehearsal of the entire 40-year trip.
 - 1. A very fitting inclusion in the end of the book of Numbers (and after Exodus)
- D. Verses 38-40 mark the end of the time of wandering and the beginning of the move toward the land.
 - 1. Death of Aaron
 - 2. Defeat of the Canaanites in Arad

- a) First such defeat

III. Numbers 33:50-56

- A. A description of the nature of the upcoming conquest of Canaan
 - 1. This is the first statement about the rules of engagement.
 - a) They had been told that they would drive out the Canaanites.
 - (1) The rules of engagement for the Midianites were a preview of what they would do when they went into the land.
 - (2) Their instructions become more specific in Joshua.
 - b) The emphasis here is on the destruction of all religious items associated with idolatry.
 - (1) The Promised Land needs to be an idolatry-free zone.
 - (a) All traces expunged
 - 2. They are to possess the land.
 - a) Allot plots of land to Israelites
 - (1) According to number of people
 - (2) By lot
 - (3) By tribe
 - 3. If they fail to drive out the Canaanites, then they will get the troubles intended for the Canaanites.
 - a) Those left in the land will be a nagging problem.

IV. Numbers 34:1-15

- A. Moses describes the boundaries of the land they are about to inherit.
 - 1. Outlines the Promised Land
 - a) Several of the place names are not known.
 - (1) Especially on the east side

V. Numbers 34:16-29

- A. Moses lists the people who will be making the allocations.
 - 1. Eleazar (high priest)
 - 2. Joshua (military commander)
 - 3. One leader from each of the tribes
 - a) Gad and Reuben are left out.
 - b) Caleb is the only one from earlier lists.

VI. Numbers 35:1-8

- A. Arrangements for the Levites
 - 1. Levites in the broader sense (descendants of Levi)
 - 2. They will be allotted cities to live in.

- a) Plus some pasture land outside the city
 - (1) A 2,000 cubit square around the city
- 3. They will receive 48 cities.
 - a) 6 cities of refuge
 - b) 42 other cities
- 4. The Levites were to be spread throughout the country.
 - a) Teachers and priests scattered around

VII. Numbers 35:9-15

- A. Establish 6 cities of refuge
 - 1. 3 in Transjordan
 - 2. 3 in Canaan
- B. Provide refuge for those who kill unintentionally
 - 1. Deuteronomy 19:1-13
 - a) If one intentionally murders, then he should be executed.
 - b) If one unintentionally kills, then he may flee to a city of refuge.
 - 2. This is for sons of Israel as well as foreigners in their midst.
 - 3. Killer flees to city of refuge and is protected until there can be a trial.
 - a) Otherwise the *goel* is obligated to get vengeance.

VIII. Numbers 35:16-21

- A. If the killer intentionally strikes someone with iron, stone, or wood, then it is murder.
 - 1. He is turned over to the *goel*.
- B. If the killer lies in wait for the victim, or if the killer hates the victim, then he is a murderer.

IX. Numbers 35:22-28

- A. The congregation will judge the killer.
 - 1. Judge him innocent if
 - a) There is no reason to suspect ill-intent;
 - b) There is no deadly weapon.
 - 2. And return him to his city of refuge.
 - a) He will stay there until the high priest dies.
 - (1) Then he may return to his own land.

X. Numbers 35:29-34

- A. A guilty verdict has to be based on the testimony of more than one person.
 - 1. No death penalty on the basis of one witness

- B. No murderer nor unintentional killer may be released upon payment of ransom.
 - 1. The murderer must be executed.
 - 2. The killer must stay in city of refuge until the death of the high priest.
- C. Murder pollutes the land.
 - 1. Only the blood of the one who murdered can take away that pollution.
 - 2. Only the death of the high priest can remove the pollution caused by unintentional killing.
 - 3. There are no other options for dealing with this pollution.
 - 4. The land must be free of pollution for God to dwell in it.
 - a) And YHWH is dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.

XI. Numbers 36:1-4

- A. The daughters of Zelophehad, part 2
 - 1. They had a concern that was addressed in chapter 27.
 - a) This is a follow up to that.
 - 2. This time the family heads bring the concern.
 - 3. Last time: What if a man has only daughters? His family will not be able to keep the inheritance.
 - a) In this case, daughters can inherit.
 - 4. This time: What if the only daughters all get married? His family will not be able to keep the inheritance.
 - a) In this case, the daughters must marry within the clan.
 - b) This way the inheritance will be kept in the family.
- B. Conclusion to this section
 - 1. These are the commandments and the ordinances which the Lord commanded to the sons of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho.
 - a) This anticipates the book of Deuteronomy.

XII. Conclusion

- A. Is there a discernable train of thought?
 - 1. This has been a difficult issue at several points in the book.
 - a) Many commentators conclude it was just thrown together.
 - b) Sometime they resort to superficial connections.
 - (1) One word used in adjoining passages
 - c) Both of these approaches are unsatisfying.
 - (1) Punting too soon
 - (2) We will never find continuity if we give up this easily.
 - 2. The most difficult passages tend to be the sections of law.

- a) I assume there is some train of thought.
- b) The commentators I have used all try to find some connection.
 - (1) Some are very complex.

B. What I propose

1. Chapter 33 is a review of the camps where the Israelites stayed on their exodus.
 - a) Fitting at the end of that journey
 - b) It constitutes a review of the entire journey.
 - (1) Memories would have been evoked by each site.
 - (a) This generation would have been young at the time, but they would remember.
 - (b) The younger ones would have heard stories.
 - (2) The Israelites are being encouraged to reflect on the events of the last forty years.
2. Chapter 34
 - a) This chapter deals with the allocation of land once they take possession of it.
 - (1) This is in anticipation of their entrance into the land and conquest of it.
 - (2) Optimistic and exciting
 - (3) Every family will have their own plot (home) in the new land.
3. Chapter 35
 - a) After talking about the allotments for the Israelites, Moses explains what the Levites will get in place of land allotments.
 - (1) This includes cities of refuge.
 - b) Next, he explains the role of cities of refuge.
 - (1) The cities are set aside as a place for those who commit unintentional murder.
 - (2) Any time a person is killed, there must be atonement.
 - (a) If the murder was intentional, then the murderer must be killed.
 - (b) If the murder was unintentional, then the killer must wait until the death of the high priest.
 - (3) This underscores the importance of purity in the land.
4. Chapter 36
 - a) There is more regarding the daughters of Zelophehad.
 - (1) Their father's inheritance is still not secure if the daughters get married.
 - (2) God wants their inheritance to be secured.

XIII. What is the significance of Numbers for me today?

- A. You can't apply a verse, only a worldview.
 1. Our job is to build a sound understanding of the biblical worldview.
- B. Numbers deals with another time and place.
 1. But Numbers shows us God and human beings and the relationship between them.

- a) This is a cornerstone of the biblical worldview.
- C. The picture of the daily existential question that they faced is essentially the one we face.
 - 1. Life is a series of hardships.
 - a) God freed them from Egypt and immediately took them into the desert.
 - b) They were in a place of scarcity.
 - (1) Constant fear of running out of water or food
 - (2) Boredom from the monotony of the diet
 - (3) Grounds for discontent
 - c) These conditions constitute a test.
 - (1) How will I deal with my discomfort, misery, agony?
 - (a) Faithlessness—I will do anything to get out of this.
 - (i) Get me out of here!
 - (b) Faithfulness
 - D. What does faithfulness look like?
 - 1. How will I respond to this hardship?
 - a) I will do anything to get out of this.
 - (1) Get me out of here!
 - b) This is a God-prescribed hardship.
 - (1) I am here because God got me here.
 - (2) God is a loving, almighty God.
 - (3) My job is to work through this hardship faithfully and lawfully.
 - (a) God will provide, and I can handle the monotony.