

# BIBLE BRIEFING

**“8mm”**

NUMBERS 33 - 36

## Introduction

Have you ever seen old 8mm or Super-8 movies? Most of them are scenery; **endless scenery** as they were driving across country, or taking some such trip.

The first forty-nine verses of Chapter thirty-three are like that. The Lord commanded Moses to keep a list of the places Israel camped during their wilderness journey.

Here is a sample to show you just how exciting most of this chapter is:

Numbers 33:25 They moved from Haradah and camped at Makheloth.

Numbers 33:26 They moved from Makheloth and camped at Tahath.

Numbers 33:27 They departed from Tahath and camped at Terah.

Numbers 33:28 They moved from Terah and camped at Mithkah.

We'll read the opening verses, then skip the scenery!

Numbers 33:1 *These are* the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 33:2 Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the Lord. And *these are* their journeys according to their starting points:

Numbers 33:3 They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.

Numbers 33:4 For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the Lord had killed among them. Also on their gods the Lord had executed judgments.

Forty places are listed, starting with Rameses in Egypt and ending with the plains of Moab, across from Jericho.

It's interesting to note that, while there was a lot of movement and activity, there was very little progress.

It is the recounting of a people guided by God through discipline. Through shadow and sunshine, through trial and triumph, by ways that were gracious, they were led with unceasing faithfulness by God.

Even though God may chastise, He continues to conduct. He never leaves or forsakes us.

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The land of Canaan is mentioned sixteen times from verse fifty of Chapter thirty-three until verse thirty-four of Chapter thirty-five. God began by discussing His plans for the current inhabitants of the land.

Numbers 33:50 Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho, saying,  
Numbers 33:51 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan,  
Numbers 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;  
Numbers 33:53 you shall dispossess *the inhabitants of* the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.

God wanted Israel’s invasion of Canaan to be a total conquest. Israel was to *drive* out and *dispossess* the inhabitants, *destroy* the altars, images, and temples, and then *divide* the land among the tribes.

How the Canaanites became so evil and what happened as a result is described in Romans 1:17-32. God had been long-suffering with them; they preferred to worship the creation and the creature more than the Creator.

Numbers 33:54 And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone’s *inheritance* shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.

We’ve discussed the “lot” before. God superintended the casting of the lot.

Numbers 33:55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain *shall be* irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.  
Numbers 33:56 Moreover it shall be *that* I will do to you as I thought to do to them.”

Just as a contractor must demolish buildings and clear land to make room for a new structure, so God had to wipe out the pagan societies in Canaan so that His people might move in and build a nation that would glorify God. The Promised Land would be the stage on which God would display His power, pour out His blessings, send His truth, and one day send His Son to die for the sins of the world.

It is of no use for the church to “succeed” in the eyes of man - as Israel had succeeded when they occupied the land and became a legitimate nation, instead of an enslaved people - if it merely allows the corrupt practices and attitudes of the world to take root. If this happens, the church should expect to be eventually driven from its place of “success.”

This brings us to determining the physical boundaries of the land.

Numbers 34:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,  
Numbers 34:2 “Command the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land of Canaan, this *is* the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance - the land of Canaan to its boundaries.

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.

In ancient days, there were no survey crews with scientific instruments for determining property lines. People cited towns and geographical features when they wanted to define boundaries. The Lord started with the south boundary of Canaan (v3-5), then moved to the western border, which was the Mediterranean Sea (v6). Next came the north border (v7-9), the east border (v10-13), and the portion for the Transjordanic tribes (v14-15).

We’ll skip reading verses three through fifteen; *I’d butcher the pronunciations!*

In verses sixteen through twenty-nine, Moses appointed ten elders who would help Joshua and Eleazar divide the land. God's work needs proper oversight. We don't need a bunch of positions; we don't need a slew of committees. But the work needs oversight, and it requires folks who are gifted and called, ready to roll up their spiritual sleeves and see to it the Lord is honored and His people are treated biblically.

Chapter thirty-five addresses the lack of inheritance for the tribe of Levi. If you remember, the Levites had no inheritance; God was to be their portion. Where would they live? God commanded that each tribe give cities to the Levites, so that the Levites would be sprinkled throughout the whole nation.

Numbers 35:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, saying:

Numbers 35:2 "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall *also* give the Levites common-land around the cities.

Numbers 35:3 They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals.

Numbers 35:4 The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites *shall extend* from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around.

Numbers 35:5 And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city *shall be* in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.

They established forty-eight cities for the Levites to dwell in. They were also granted pasture lands adjacent to the cities where they could care for their flocks and herds.

As we have seen, the Levites were scattered throughout Israel so they could minister to the people and teach them God's Law.

To put it another way: If the Levites had their own territory, the people would have to come to them. Instead, they were among the people – true ministers.

Six of the cities of the Levites would double as special cities of refuge. The nation of Israel had an army, but it didn't have anything equivalent to our modern police system. If somebody was murdered, the members of the family and clan saw to it that the murderer was

punished. However, if a man accidentally killed someone, that was a case of manslaughter, not murder; and it would have been wrong to make him pay with his life. Still, the next of kin would go after him and kill him if he could. God commanded them to establish six cities of refuge, where the one who had committed manslaughter could flee. He would be safe until a fair hearing could take place.

Numbers 35:6 “Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites *you shall appoint* six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities.

Numbers 35:7 So all the cities you will give to the Levites *shall be* forty-eight; these *you shall give* with their common-land.

Numbers 35:8 And the cities which you will give *shall be* from the possession of the children of Israel; from the larger *tribe* you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives.”

Numbers 35:9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 35:10 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan,

Numbers 35:11 then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there.

Numbers 35:12 They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.

Numbers 35:13 And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge.

Numbers 35:14 You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, *which* will be cities of refuge.

Numbers 35:15 These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.

Numbers 35:16 ‘But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:17 And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:18 Or *if* he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:19 The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.

Numbers 35:20 If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies,

Numbers 35:21 or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck *him* shall surely be put to death. He *is* a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

Numbers 35:22 'However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait,

Numbers 35:23 or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing *it* at him without seeing *him*, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm,

Numbers 35:24 then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.

Numbers 35:25 So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

Numbers 35:26 But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled,

Numbers 35:27 and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood,

Numbers 35:28 because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.

Numbers 35:29 'And these *things* shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Numbers 35:30 Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not *sufficient* testimony against a person for the death *penalty*.

Numbers 35:31 Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who *is* guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

Numbers 35:32 And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest.

Numbers 35:33 So you shall not pollute the land where you *are*; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.

Numbers 35:34 Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.'"

There were three cities of refuge on each side of the Jordan. The man could flee to one of the cities of refuge and present his case to the elders who would hear him and the witnesses. If they thought he was guilty of murder, they would turn him over to the family and the authorities for punishment. If they concluded that he was innocent, they allowed him to stay in the city of refuge under their protection until the death of the high priest. Then he was free to return home. He was not allowed to pay a ransom and be freed sooner.

If the man was guilty, he was stoned to death. Murder was a capital crime in Israel for which there was no ransom.

Unjudged murders defile a nation; when murderers are not brought to justice, there is a blot on a nation that only the severe judgment of God can cleanse. The way to avoid this defilement is to judge, and execute murderers.

The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion:

1. Psalm 46:1, says *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*. More than 15 other times, the Psalms speak of God as being our refuge.
2. Hebrews 6:18 says, *That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us*. We can flee to Jesus for refuge!

A few comparisons are in order:

1. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are **within easy reach** of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
2. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are **open to all**, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.
3. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would **live**; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.
4. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the **only alternative** for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
5. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection **only within their boundaries**; to go outside meant death.
6. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with **the death of the High Priest**.
7. *A crucial distinction*: The cities of refuge only helped the *innocent*; the *guilty* can come to Jesus and find refuge.



Chapter thirty-six is more like the 8mm reel we started watching; but, instead of scenery, it's relatives we never met! Back in Chapter twenty-seven, we read about the daughters of Zelophehad. Their father had died, leaving them without any inheritance. Moses decided to allow the daughters to inherit and gave some guidelines.

The decision created some additional problems with regards to property rights. If the land was given to the daughters, then when the daughters married, the land would go their husband's tribe - and eventually, the original tribe's lands would become depleted.

This last chapter takes up the problem and presents the solution.

Numbers 36:1 Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel.

Numbers 36:2 And they said: "The Lord commanded my lord Moses to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters.

Numbers 36:3 Now if they are married to any of the sons of the *other* tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance.

Numbers 36:4 And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers."

Numbers 36:5 Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying: "What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right.

Numbers 36:6 This *is* what the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.'

Numbers 36:7 So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.

Numbers 36:8 And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers.

Numbers 36:9 Thus no inheritance shall change hands from *one* tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance."

Numbers 36:10 Just as the Lord commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad;



Numbers 36:11 for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to the sons of their father's brothers.

Numbers 36:12 They were married into the families of the children of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's family.

These ladies were restricted to marriage within "the family of their father's tribe." It's really no different today. **If you are a believer, you must marry another believer.** A real, sincere, genuine believer.

Numbers 36:13 These *are* the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho.

They were looking towards Jericho. They were looking towards the Promised Land. Egypt was behind them; the wilderness was behind them.

They had God's "commandments" and His "judgments." His commandments would be those things that are set, solid, black-and-white. His judgments would be more like the application of those commandments; the principles and insights for living.

We cannot live by commandments alone. We must know the wisdom of God to apply His Word.

## Conclusion

Israel repeatedly committed the same three mistakes that caused them no end of trouble:

1. They looked back and glorified Egypt.
2. They looked around and complained about their circumstances.
3. They looked within and magnified their own desires.

What they should have done was to **look up** to Almighty God and trust Him to see them through.

G. Campbell Morgan:

“As I read this book my heart is almost overwhelmed as I watch God providing for these people, patient with them, persistent in spite of their failure... As I see God gently persistent and patient, and forevermore moving a stage forward for the accomplishment of His purpose, I know that God cannot be defeated... [The subtle] danger... is in the infidelity of His own people. But He cannot be defeated there. At last His purpose will be fulfilled.”