

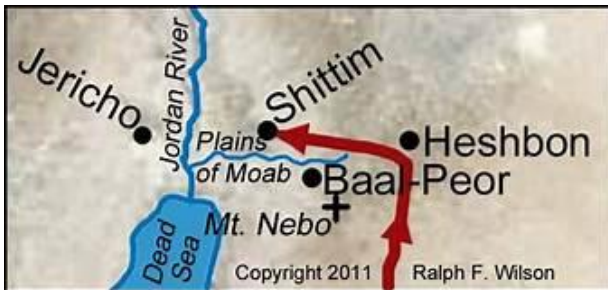
# Numbers 25-36: On to the Promised Land (almost)

Feb. 23, 2025

HPC Trinity Class

## Numbers 25 Moab seduces Israel

Moses and his followers are near the end of their quest to reach the Land of Milk and Honey, **but** “while Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices of their gods. Thus, Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor.” (NU 25:1-2)



In the ancient Near East, any mention of sexual immorality was always tied to sacred rites involving prostitution, which were “essential parts of pagan religious systems of the day.”<sup>1</sup> This passage tells us of Israel’s first encounter with Baal...

...and it signals the demise of the first generation.

[READ NU 25:6-9]. Here is a gruesome act of Phinehas which seems to be an over-kill to us modern readers. However, several commentators (Allen, Zondervan, Keil, et.al.) believe that the description of this event has been watered down by ancient scribes.<sup>2</sup>

- v. 8—“plague??” We do not learn of any plague until it’s over. The courageous act of Phinehas was the proof of loyalty God had demanded of his people. Thus, a deadly plague was ended by God’s hand (vs. 10-13).
- vs. 14-15 are the names of the sinful characters:
  - the young man was Zimri, son of a high ranking Israelite leader;
  - the Midianite woman was Cozbi, daughter of a tribal chief in Midia.

<sup>1</sup> Allen, pg. 915.

<sup>2</sup> “...the actions described here were so very shocking that the scribes of Scripture found it to be quite repellent and that the precise nature of the offense was softened somewhat through time.” Ibid., pg. 918.

Why would the author believe that these names should be mentioned?

1. It adds a sense of history showing that this isn't just a simple fable.
2. The names of the guilty seem to coincide with their sin. Ancient Hebrew scribes would sometimes deliberately alter a character's name slightly in order to match their negative act or disposition.<sup>3</sup> For instance:
  - Cozbi (or Kozbi), the Midianite princess, means "my lie" or "deception."
  - Balaam, the prophet, means "devourer of the people."
  - Jezebel, a future wicked queen in Israel, means "un-exalted."

In each of these names it took only the changing of a letter or two to change the entire meaning. For example, in Jezebel's case, her given name of *'bisabol* ("my divine father is prince") becomes *'izebel* ("un-exalted").

- READ NU 25:16-18.

## **Numbers 26 The Second Census**

Moses ordered that a second military census be conducted.<sup>4</sup> The first one was done almost four decades earlier, when the Israelites were at the foot of Mt. Sinai and preparing to conquer the land that God promised them. This second census was to help determine the size of the new territory that was to be allotted to each tribe (v. 52). Total Israelite men of battle age = 601,730 (v. 51). This count did not include the men from the tribe of Levy because they were priests, and therefore not able to inherit land (v. 62). As God had promised, none of those who began this long journey would survive to enjoy The Promised Land, except for Caleb and Joshua.

- Attacking Jericho was to soon be their first battle.
- The clans of Judah numbered 76,500, the largest tribe. Years later King David would spring from this lineage.

## **Numbers 27 No Male Heirs**

### **[READ 27:3-4]**

This situation had no precedent. The Hebrew rules of inheritance had forever considered the heir of a father to be his son, or at least a male relative.<sup>5</sup> These five daughters of Zelophehad were seeking justice by appealing to God *via* Moses. "It is remarkable to find this piece of humanitarian

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pgs. 923, 887, 890.

<sup>4</sup> "military census," meaning only those of fighting age: 20+ years old.

<sup>5</sup> Exception: daughters could acquire land, but only as a dowry wedding gift from their fathers.  
[Judg 1:13-15]

legislation at such an early date, when the rights of minorities, let alone minorities of women, were so little recognized or noticed, and it emphasizes once again how advanced the Mosaic code really was.”<sup>6</sup>

**In today's world, many people can associate with these sisters in their despair, because they know that there is a God who cares for the downtrodden and deprived.**

vs. 12ff—God allows Moses to finally see The Promised Land,<sup>7</sup> and is told that Joshua will be his replacement. (Joshua proved in Exodus 17 to be strong military commander, as well.) Like Moses, the new leader was chosen by God, not the people.



## Chapter 28 Offerings to God

- Specific directions are given by God on how to present offerings daily, on the Sabbath, monthly, and yearly.

Despite the strict detailed requirements of these offerings, it was not the sacrifices themselves that pleased the Lord; it was the attitude and love of those making the sacrifice which he sought.

- **Passover** was a key celebration time. This was an especially busy times for the priests.

**For Christians today, we remember the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus (1 Cor 5:7), whose death delivers us from the Lord's judgement (1 Thess 1:10).**

- **The Festival of Weeks** = *Shavuot* (“weeks”) was so named because it took place seven weeks after the first barley harvest.

**In Jesus' time this same festival was called Pentecost, and it took on a whole new meaning for Christians.**

## Chapter 29 More Feasts

- **Feast of Trumpets** = *Rosh Hashanah*. Celebrated on the first day of the seventh month, which would be mid-September to mid-October on our calendar.
- **Feast of Tabernacles** = *Sukkot* was another harvest festival. No work was to be done. It was the most joyful of all the feasts. “Tabernacle” or “booths” refers to the small shelters the Hebrews used for shelter after fleeing Egypt.



## Chapter 30 Vows

Vows were and are sacred. Here Moses gives examples of keeping (or not keeping) vows. His message was mostly directed toward women. Remember, society of the time was dominated by men.

<sup>6</sup> Philip, pg. 280.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy says it may have been Mt. Nebo or the top of Pisgah.

For instance, an unmarried woman who still lived at home could have any vow she made nullified by her father. However, this chapter, as well as the one on the daughters of Zelophehad (Chap 27) show a very gradual shift in society's attitude.

**Compare this with society in the time of the apostle Paul some fourteen centuries later, where we learn of Lydia in Acts 16. She was:**

- a successful businesswoman
- the first known convert to Christianity in Europe
- a key supporter of the Christian cause, offering her home as a meeting place for believers.

### **Chapter 31 Midianite Vengeance** READ 31:1-2.

This is Moses' last battle. He calls for a strike force-- not the whole army—of 1,000 men from each tribe. Phinehas joined them as their priest/warrior. The Israelite troops totally wipe out the Midianites. They “killed every man” (v. 7), which implies that the enemy's women and children were not slain, as v. 9 later states.

This infuriated Moses (vs. 14-15). He ordered that only the Midianite virgins be allowed to live. Any women “who has known a man” were to be killed<sup>8</sup>, as well as all of the boys.

- Married women and harlots: These were the ones who tempted the men of Israel to sin.<sup>9</sup>

- Boys: These could endanger the inheritance rights of Israelite men if not eliminated now.

v. 8 says that the five Midianite kings were killed “with the sword,” but the Hebrew verb used here means “pierced.” In the ancient Near East this would imply “impaling stakes,” meaning that the dead kings' corpses would be skewered and put on display by being hoisted up outside the camp as a gruesome warning to other potential enemies.



The spoils of war were divided between the soldiers and the people. A portion of the soldiers' booty was then given as a tribute to the Lord, which was accepted by the Levites.

### **Chapter 32 Tribes of the Transjordan**

Two tribes of Israel, the Gadites and the Reubenites, had large herds and flocks. Their leaders asked Moses for permission to stay on the east side of the Jordan River (the Transjordan)---broad, fertile grassland--- rather than continue with the rest of the tribes into the cis-Jordan. The fertile grasslands on the east were perfect for cattle, sheep, and goats.

**Moses didn't see it this way.**  
To him they seemed



He viewed this request as a rebellion. To him they seemed unwilling to sacrifice for the



<sup>8</sup> There is no single word for “virgin” in biblical Hebrew (Allen, fn. pg. 968).

<sup>9</sup> Any girls spared would have to have been quite young. Being married by age 12 to 14 was not uncommon.



ultimate goal of conquering the Promised Land. Moses compared these tribal leaders with the spies of years ago, who had lied to the Israeli people when they said that Canaan was full of unbeatable giants. “This is what your fathers did,” he said-- a slap in the face to Moses.

A compromise is reached [READ vs. 16-33].

FYI—“**cis**” is from the Latin, meaning “on the near side of.”

“**trans**” is also from the Latin, meaning “beyond.”

### Chapter 33 Recap of the Journey

- v. 2 is the only place in the Bible where Moses says he is the author.

This chapter summarizes the 40 years of wandering by Moses and his followers. It is not a travel narrative; it is simply an itinerary of places “camped” and “left.”...until v. 50. That’s when God gives Moses a battle goal: [READ NU 33:50-53]

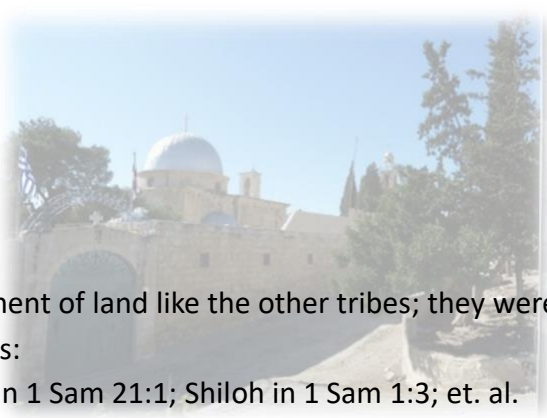
**OR ELSE** “those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides.” (v. 55)

### Chapter 34 Boundaries of Canaan

In v. 13 God tells Moses to assign this new land to only 9 ½ tribes. Who was left out and why?

(Clue: see the map)





## Chapter 35 Towns for the Levites

The tribe of Levy (priests) did not receive an allotment of land like the other tribes; they were number of these priest-towns in later OT Scriptures:

Anathoth in Josh 21:18; Bethel in Judg 20:18; Nob in 1 Sam 21:1; Shiloh in 1 Sam 1:3; et. al.

Six of these Levitical cities were to be designated as “cities of refuge.” These were designed to protect anyone who had accidentally killed someone (vs. intentionally murdered). Otherwise, the slain persons relatives would be obligated to redress his death by being “avengers of blood,” thus protecting their family rights.

## Chapter 36 Questions about inheritance

Zelophehad’s daughters are back in the news! The question was raised to Moses, “What if they marry outside of their tribe?” The result would be that the land the women inherited from their father would become the property of another Israeli tribe. With God’s help Moses forbids any such marriages outside of one’s own tribe.

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The Book of Numbers ends on a positive note for the children of the Exodus. As one commentator commented, “The prospects for the second generation are for good, but the warning from the experience of the first generation must not be forgotten.”

**Amen**

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