

Instructions Given

Numbers 33:50-56; 34:13-15

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most Christians probably would say they want to include God in their plans. As they think about life, they want His blessing and guidance, and they want His enabling grace to sustain them through whatever comes their way. Believers want to draw on His strength as they live out their plans. However, the Bible has a different perspective. God doesn't want us to include Him in our plans; rather, He wants to include us in His plans!

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The Lord instructed Moses and Eleazar the priest to number the people a second time, and the Israelites carefully completed the census under their direction (26:1-51). The Lord also told Moses that the land should be divided among the Israelites by lot (26:52-56). Besides Moses, only Joshua and Caleb remained from the first census because they alone had believed God's promise to conquer the land for the Israelites (26:63-65).

KEY DOCTRINE

God

To God we owe the highest love,
reverence, and obedience.

(See Deuteronomy 6:14-15; James 1:22.)

Numbers 33 reviewed the many places God's people had journeyed from the time they left Egypt until they reached the Jordan (33:1-49). The Lord reminded the people of the importance of completely driving out the Canaanites and their pagan worship practices (33:50-56).

THE LAND (NUMBERS 33:50-53)

Numbers 33:1-49 recounts the Israelites' travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai, followed by their wanderings through the wilderness back to Canaan's border. God had demonstrated His faithfulness throughout their journey. As the promised land came into view, **the Lord spoke to Moses** as He had so many times previously. Moses's ministry was drawing to a close. He would see the promised land, but he would not enter it (Num. 20:12; Deut. 34:4).

God's people had camped in the **plains of Moab** (see also v. 48), from which they could look across the **Jordan** Valley to the land they would possess. They were a short distance from the Jordan River that separated them from Canaan.

God gave Moses further instructions concerning the **Israelites**. His words **when you cross the Jordan** assumed Israel's obedience. However, the words may have caused concern for many, since the Jordan River was running high. Once the people crossed the Jordan River, they would enter **the land of Canaan**—their new home and the land that God had promised the patriarchs centuries earlier. The people now were about to take their next step in God's plan for the nation. When they did, the land would belong to them.

The Lord gave the people three objectives to accomplish in Canaan. First, they were to **drive out all the inhabitants of the land**. God had told His people that He was giving them the land, but He also was using them to bring His judgment on the Canaanites. Allowing pockets of the current residents to remain would keep idolatry alive in the land, which would be a snare to Israel.

Second, God's people were to **destroy all their stone images and cast images**. The Canaanites' images of stone were carved or sculpted rock, while the cast images were statues crafted from metal. They had made idols to represent gods they shaped in their own image, but God had forbidden His people to worship Him in that manner (see Ex. 20:4-6).

Third, God's people were commanded to **demolish all their high places**. The Canaanites often established their pagan worship sites atop hills or mountains, and God told the Israelites to rid the land of any trace of such practices.

THE TASK (NUMBERS 33:54-56)

The tribes would **receive the land as an inheritance by lot**. Once the lots were cast, each tribe bore the responsibility of expelling the remaining inhabitants in its territory. Moses also stipulated that the allocations should consider the size of **clans** within each tribe. Larger groups naturally would require more territory, whereas smaller clans would not. The territories of Israel's **ancestral tribes** would be determined by the lot, though discretion could be exercised for individual clans.

God already had instructed His people to drive the Canaanites out of the promised land (v. 52). In fact, centuries earlier, He had told Abraham that his descendants would claim the promised land and witness God's eventual judgment of the Canaanites (Gen. 15:16). However, He would send terrible consequences if Israel didn't **drive out the inhabitants of the land**. The Lord used a powerful metaphor to describe the Canaanites' effect on God's people: **barbs for your eyes and thorns for your sides**. Barbs would hinder their vision or even blind them, while thorns in their sides would cause constant pain. Joshua would use this same example in his farewell speech (Josh. 23:13).

God's sobering assurance **what I had planned to do to them, I will do to you** sounded an ominous warning. God's people would face challenges as they drove Canaan's inhabitants from the land. Yet, they needed to trust God for the victory that He had assured them He would bring. God did not promise the people blessing no matter what. Rather, He expected them to demonstrate their faithfulness through lives dedicated to Him.

THE PLAN (NUMBERS 34:13-15)

Moses commanded the Israelites regarding the distribution of tribal territories in the land. Notice how God's leader assumed the people would follow God's exhortation to conquer the land and drive out its inhabitants. God would keep His promise as the people faithfully obeyed. Each tribe would **receive by lot as an inheritance** a portion within the promised land.

Nine and a half tribes would divide the area of Canaan west of the Jordan River. These tribes were told to conquer and settle the land. However, Reuben and Gad, along with half of Manasseh, would settle east of the Jordan in the territory taken when Israel defeated Sihon and Og (Num. 21:21-35).

Reuben's descendants came from Jacob and Leah's firstborn son (Gen. 29:32). When Joseph's brothers sought to kill him, Reuben tried to intervene with a plan to rescue him (37:21-22). He succeeded in saving his brother's life, though the other brothers still sold Joseph into slavery (37:26-28).

Gad's descendants came from Jacob through Zilpah, Leah's handmaid. Leah had given Zilpah to Jacob to conceive more children for him once she realized that she had stopped bearing children herself (30:9-13). Gad was Jacob's seventh son.

Manasseh was Joseph's firstborn son, but Jacob adopted him—along with his brother, Ephraim—as his own for the purposes of inheritance (41:50-51; 48:5). Since the Manassites and the descendants of Ephraim each received a full tribal allotment, Joseph's family effectively received a double portion of Jacob's inheritance, while Reuben, the true firstborn, did not.

Moses affirmed that **the two and a half tribes** had thus **received their inheritance across the Jordan**, but he also emphasized their pledge to help the other tribes conquer Canaan.

Next Week – Remember, Deuteronomy 4:1-9, 15-20