

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 13
Numbers 26 – 36

Key Concepts: The key concept in this section is that the “murmuring people are gone” (having died out in the wilderness) and God is ready to take a new generation of faithful people into the Promised Land. This is made clear by the taking of a second census. In addition virtually all of the instructions given to the old generation are given again to the new generation.

Stories: We begin with a second census of the tribes of Israel (26), rules for women and inheritance (27:1-11), Moses anointing Joshua to lead the people (27:12-23), Various offerings for particular occasions (28-29), women and vows (30), Holy war against Midian (31), the designating of the Transjordan to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (32), the orderly movement of people toward the Promised Land (33), the boundaries of the Promised Land (34), designation of Levitical cities and cities of refuge (35), and a declaration that tribal territory cannot be transferred (36).

Brief Summary: As with the first half of Numbers we watch a series of events unfold before us. We watch the second census in which some tribes have flourished while others have diminished. The total number of people is slightly less, but not enough to make a significant difference. Again this is a reminder that God continued to fulfill God’s end of the covenant even in the face of rebellion.

We watch some interesting rules being offered for women. In chapter 27, if there are no sons to inherit, then the daughters receive the inheritance. Later on we learn that while women’s vows can be negated by a father or husband, if a woman is widowed or divorced her vows cannot be negated.

We watch an initial instance of Holy War. In this war the Israelites slay not only all the men, but all of the women who were no longer virgins. What we need to see in this story is a theology of holiness or separation. In other words if the people of God are to remain absolutely true to God then they cannot intermarry or have foreigners living in the land that is theirs. Therefore all of those who might tempt or corrupt the people must be expelled or killed. We will discuss this more in the Book of Joshua.

We watch the first division of the Promised Land when Reuben, Gad and Manasseh are given the land on the eastern side of the Jordan. In order to get this land however the tribes need to promise to engage in the conquest of the rest of the land. Once the land is taken and settled they may return to their side of the Jordan.

We watch the orderly journey of the people through the wilderness. Note that this time there is no murmuring, no rebellion and no apostasy. This is a new group of people who have learned to be faithful and are ready to follow wherever God leads.

We watch God lay out the boundaries for the Promised Land. This is the second portion of the fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham. The first fulfillment came in the census when we witnessed the people become as numerous as the sands on the sea shore. Now we witness the giving of the land (though it will still need conquering). We will have to wait for Jesus for the final part of the covenant to be completed.

Finally we witness special cities being given to the Levites (since they do not get land), cities of refuge being designated to protect innocents and the command that all land remains with a particular tribe in perpetuity.

1. Why do you think God let one generation die off before moving the people to the Promised Land?
2. How do you deal with the idea of Holy War in this part of the scriptures?
3. What do you think is the reason behind the perpetual gift of land to each tribe?