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Numbers 34

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Alastair Roberts

The boundaries of the Promised Land.

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Transcript

Numbers chapter 34. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Command the people of Israel and say to them, When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Canaan as defined by its borders. Your south side shall be from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom, and your southern border shall run from the end of the Salt Sea on the east, and your border shall turn south of the ascent of Acherubim and cross to Zin, and its limit shall be south of Kadesh Barnea, then it shall go on to Hazar Adar and pass along to Asmon, and the border shall turn from Asmon to the brook of Egypt, and its limit shall be at the sea.

For the western border you shall have the great sea and its coast, this shall be your western border. This shall be your northern border. From the great sea you shall draw a line to Mount Hor, from Mount Hor you shall draw a line to Lebo-Hemath, and the limit of the border shall be at Zidad.

Then the border shall extend to Ziphron, and its limit shall be at Hazar Inan, this shall be your northern border. You shall draw a line for your eastern border from Hazar Inan to Shipham, and the border shall go down from Shipham to Riblah on the east side of Ayin,

and the border shall go down and reach to the shoulder of the sea of Kinnerath on the east, and the border shall go down to the Jordan, and its limit shall be at the Salt Sea, this shall be your land as defined by its borders all around. Moses commanded the people of Israel, saying, This is the land that you shall inherit by Lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe.

For the tribe of the people of Reuben by their father's houses, and the tribe of the people of Gad by their father's houses, have received their inheritance, and also the half-tribe of Manasseh. The two tribes and the half-tribe have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan east of Jericho toward the sunrise. The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, These are the names of the men who shall divide the land to for inheritance, Eliezer the priest and Joshua the son of Nun.

You shall take one chief from every tribe to divide the land for inheritance. These are the names of the men. Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

Of the tribe of the people of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Amihud. Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidat the son of Kison. Of the tribe of the people of Dan a chief, Bukhi the son of Joglai.

Of the people of Joseph, of the tribe of the people of Manasseh a chief, Haniel the son of Ephod. And of the tribe of the people of Ephraim a chief, Chemuel the son of Shiftan. Of the tribe of the people of Zebulun a chief, Elizaphan the son of Parnak.

Of the tribe of the people of Issachar a chief, Paltiel the son of Azan. Of the tribe of the people of Asher a chief, Ahihud the son of Shlomain. Of the tribe of the people of Naphtali a chief, Pedahel the son of Amihud.

These are the men whom the LORD commanded to divide the inheritance for the people of Israel in the land of Canaan. The principles for the division of the land were given in chapter 26 verses 52 to 56. This was before the decision of Reuben and Gad to settle outside of the land.

The instruction was repeated at the end of the preceding chapter in chapter 33 verse 54. The principles as we saw then probably involved the determination of the region of the tribe by lot and the determination of the size of their territory in the region according to their population. The LORD gives the boundaries of the land here.

The boundaries as Jacob Milgram and others know do not seem to correspond with the historic boundaries of Israel at any point in its history and not merely on account of the exclusion of the Transjordan. They do however closely approximate to the boundaries of the province of Canaan during the new kingdom of Egypt. The boundaries extend further north and further to the northeast than they did throughout almost all of the nation's history except perhaps at the high water mark of Solomon's kingdom and perhaps a

couple of years later.

This is not to say that Israel did not have a number of other brief periods during which time Israel possessed substantial territory in contemporary Lebanon and Syria. On the other hand they possessed less land in the south than they would later do. For significant periods of their history Edom was under Judah's sway and Israel enjoyed southern ports on the Gulf of Aqaba at various times.

The southern border of the land here is given as running from the bottom of the Dead Sea moving southwest to Kadesh at its lowest point and then gradually ascending to the Mediterranean. They would not possess the land of Edom, their brother. The western border of the land would be the Great Sea, the Mediterranean.

The northern border ran from the Mediterranean coast to Mount Hor from there to Lebohemath and then extending to Zidad, generally thought to be Sa'dad in Syria about 60 miles northeast of Damascus, to Ziphron and then ending at Hazar'inan. The final eastern border is clearly defined by the Dead Sea and the Jordan up until the Sea of Kinnarat, more familiarly known as the Sea of Galilee. After that however it bulges out to the east incorporating land in modern day Syria although the precise location of its boundary is quite unclear as key locations cannot be identified.

Dennis Olson notes the way that the boundaries of the land given in this chapter seem to correspond with the land that is spied out in chapter 13 verse 21. So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob near Lebohemath. This would be an assurance to the children of Israel that their inheritance in the land had not been diminished since chapter 13.

Also the choice of the men from each tribe to divide out the inheritance in the land in this chapter is reminiscent of the choice of the men from each tribe to spy out the land in chapter 13. Joshua and Caleb are once again involved. Joshua is now overseeing the process with Eleazar the son of Aaron.

The boundaries of the land are also similar to those described in places like Joshua chapter 15. Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the allocation of the land in chapter 47 verses 15 to 18 of his prophecy also seem to have the same general boundaries. This shall be the boundary of the land on the north side from the great sea by way of Hethlon to Lebohemath and on to Zedad, Barothah, Sibraim which lies on the border between Damascus and Hamath as far as Hazar Hatikon which is on the border of Hauran.

So the boundary shall run from the sea to Hazar Inan which is on the northern border of Damascus with the border of Hamath to the north. This shall be the north side. On the east side the boundary shall run between Hauran and Damascus along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar.

This shall be the east side. Likewise during Solomon's reign the land is described as extending from Lebohemath to the brook of Egypt in 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 65. On a few occasions such as Genesis chapter 15 verse 18 the land is envisaged as having potentially even more expansive boundaries extending from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt, presumably the Nile Delta.

As Olson observes however the more modest extent of the land is more typically described in the expression from Dan to Beersheba as Israel did not successfully possess all of the land originally appointed for them. The names of the men listed to assist in the division of the land are loosely ordered by their tribes' possessions in the land from the south to the north. A question to consider are what other occasions in the book of Numbers are persons chosen one from each tribe to represent their tribe in some common activity?