

The Lord Gives Israel the Boundaries of the Land

Numbers 34

Numbers 34 - *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 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. ³ Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; ⁴ your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akkrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; ⁵ the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea. ⁶ 'As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border; this shall be your western border.*

⁷ 'And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your border line to Mount Hor; ⁸ from Mount Hor you shall mark out your border to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; ⁹ the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.

¹⁰ 'You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; ¹¹ the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; ¹² the border shall go down along the Jordan, and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.'"

¹³ Then Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying: "This is the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe. ¹⁴ For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received their inheritance; and the half-tribe of Manasseh has received its inheritance. ¹⁵ The two tribes and the half-tribe have received their inheritance on this side of the Jordan, across from Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise."

¹⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁷ "These are the names of the men who shall divide the land among you as an inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. ¹⁸ And you shall take one leader of every tribe to divide the land for the inheritance. ¹⁹ These are the names of the men: from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; ²⁰ from the tribe of the children of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud; ²¹ from the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon; ²² a leader from the tribe of the children of Dan, Bukki the son of Jogli; ²³ from the sons of Joseph: a leader from the tribe of the children of Manasseh, Hanniel the son of Ephod, ²⁴ and a leader from the tribe of the children of Ephraim, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan; ²⁵ a leader from the tribe of the children of Zebulun, Elizaphan the son of Parnach; ²⁶ a leader from the tribe of the children of Issachar, Paltiel the son of Azzan; ²⁷ a leader from the tribe of the children of Asher, Ahihud the son of Shelomi; ²⁸ and a leader from the tribe of the children of Naphtali, Pedahel the son of Ammihud."

²⁹ These are the ones the LORD commanded to divide the inheritance among the children of Israel in the land of Canaan."

Background Notes

At this point in their history, the children of Israel were on the plains of Moab, ready to cross over the Jordan River and conquer the land that God had promised to give them. Numbers 33 reviewed their 40 years of travel from Egypt to the plains of Moab, and specific instructions were given for conquering the Land. They were to drive out **all** the inhabitants, and destroy **all** idolatrous shrines and images.

The specific boundaries of the Land that Israel was to possess are given in the first half of Numbers 34. Compare these boundaries with the land that the Lord gave to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 15, under the Abrahamic Covenant. The Numbers 34 boundaries are not as extensive as the Genesis 15 boundaries. Under the Abrahamic Covenant, for example, the northern border was located all the way up at the Euphrates River.

Why the difference? The boundaries given in Numbers 34 define the land area that Israel was to immediately conquer and occupy. Even with the smaller land area, they didn't fully conquer and occupy this territory. Israel did rule over a good portion of this territory during the reigns of King David and King Solomon. In fact, they even controlled somewhat more than what was given here in Numbers 34. However, even though Israel has never occupied all the land that was given to them under the Abrahamic Covenant, they **will** occupy this land in the future. When Israel, as a nation, returns to the Lord, the Lord will restore all of this land to them.

Doctrinal Points

1. God determined the boundaries of the Land of Israel.

Who determined the boundaries of the land of Israel that are given here in Numbers 34? Did Moses? Did Israel? Did an international governing body? No! **God determined the boundaries!**

That's true for all nations, by the way. Deuteronomy 32:8 says, "*When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples...*" And Acts 17:26 says, "*He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings...*" So God determines the time periods and land areas for all nations. And that goes all the way back to the scattering of mankind at the Tower of Babel and the "Table of Nations" in Genesis 10.

In Numbers 34 the Lord gave the specific boundaries of the Land that His people were to immediately possess. Follow along on your Bible maps as I describe the boundaries given here, in general terms. For the southern boundaries, start at the lower end of the Dead Sea, and draw a half circle that starts down the Arabah, and then circles across toward the Mediterranean Sea. The boundary joins the Mediterranean Sea where the Brook of Egypt enters the Mediterranean (v5). (The "Brook of Egypt" is not the Nile River, but the Wadi El-Arish.)

The western boundary was obviously the Mediterranean Sea, called the "Great Sea" (v6-7). For the northern boundary, draw a line from the Mediterranean Sea about 60 miles north of Sidon, eastward to about 75 miles northeast of

Damascus, Syria. (“Mount Hor” in verse 8 is obviously not the same Mount Hor of Numbers 20, where Aaron died -- that was somewhere south of the Dead Sea.) For the eastern boundary, draw a line from the northern boundary 75 miles northeast of Damascus, down to the Sea of Galilee, called the Sea of Chinnereth (v11). Continue the eastern boundary down the Jordan River all the way to the starting point at the southern point of the Dead Sea, called the Salt Sea (v3,12). So this is a general description of the land boundaries given in Numbers 34.

Notice that a good portion of what is Lebanon and southern Syria today is included within these boundaries. Think of the size of the State of New Jersey as an approximation, although the total area would be somewhat larger than the area of New Jersey. In addition, there was the land area on east side of the Jordan River that was given to the two and a half tribes (v14-15).

The important point is that God gave Israel the Promised Land and its boundaries. The boundaries were not determined by what Israel conquered. No. **God had already given to Israel the Land that Israel conquered.**

God Himself determined the boundaries of the Land of Israel.

2. God determined the territories for the tribes of Israel.

Verse 29: *“These are the ones the LORD commanded to divide the inheritance among the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.”* In Numbers 26 God told Moses that the tribal territories in the Land were to be determined by drawing lots, after the second census of the men of Israel was taken and the sizes of the tribes were determined. The larger tribes would receive larger territories, and the smaller tribes would receive smaller territories. Numbers 26:52-56 - *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the tribes of their fathers. Their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.”*

Look, too, at 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.”*

Joshua, Eleazar the priest, and representatives chosen from each of the 9½ tribes were to apportion the Land. They were to draw up 9½ territories based on terrain, water supply, forests, grazing land for herds, fields for planting, and natural borders like mountains, valleys and streams. Some of these territories would be larger than others, and some smaller. Then the tribes would draw lots. The larger tribes would draw lots for the larger territories, and the smaller tribes would draw lots for the smaller territories.

We might think that “luck” was involved in drawing the lots for the territories, but Proverbs 16:33 says, *“We may cast the lot [throw the dice], but the Lord determines how they fall.”* So what seems like chance was really determined by the Lord.

Even the drawing of lots, God controlled which tribe would get which territory. *“Every decision is from the Lord.”* The result of the drawing of lots is found in the book of Joshua.

God determined the territories for Israel.

Practical Application

Let God determine your territory!

Look at what God says in Numbers 33:53 - *“I have given you the land to possess.”* And Numbers 34:13, *“This is the land you shall inherit by lot, that the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and one half-tribe.”* So God gave the Land, and God determined the boundaries for Israel.

Besides being an accurate report of part of Israel’s history, this chapter on boundaries and territories has an application for us as believers today. God is **a God of detail** - even in the matter of boundaries and territories!

There’s a spiritual application here. God gives each of us certain “territories” - specific spiritual gifts, certain talents, certain areas of ministry, various responsibilities, etc. God gives us this “territory,” and He expects us to “possess and occupy” this territory for His glory. We are not to “play God” and determine our own territory, nor anyone else’s territory. We are not to try to grab more than what God has determined for us, or grasp at something different than the territory God has given us. Trying to play God in the area of determining territories leads to all kinds of problems in the church -- and in our own personal walk with the Lord as well.

So - let **God** determine your territory!