**Numbers Chapters 33-36**

The novelist James Lane Allen wrote that adversity does not build character, it reveals it. Perhaps no family matter has the potential for greater conflict than dividing an estate among siblings after the death of parents. Often the only tangible asset is real estate which is difficult property to apportion among family members. Often there is disagreement regarding the disposition of property; some want to keep it and some want to convert it into liquidity. I once heard of a family that wanted to turn their land into cash only to discover their parents had prohibited its sale in the will. The children resorted to selling timber and even sold fill dirt for road construction. An unenviable duty is to serve as executor of an estate since family members sometimes view the division of property as unequitable. When large estates are involved, it is best to have an uninterested party serve as executor rather than a family member. In our study of Numbers chapter 33-36, we see that the Israelites have nearly reached Canaan and are preparing to divide the inheritance God gave them.

Chapter 33 is devoted almost entirely to recounting the journey that began in Egypt and continued for 40 years. Note that many of the locations where they camped are not recorded in other parts of the Bible and we are not privy to what might have happened in those places. At the end of the chapter the Israel is camped on the plains of Moab along the Jordan River across from Jericho. God told Moses to tell the people that they were to drive out the people who inhabited the land and to destroy all idols after which the land would be distributed according to the sizes of the clans. He warned that if they did not drive out the inhabitants they would trouble them and He would do to them what He planned for those who occupied Canaan. The Israelites did not obey God and He did indeed drive them out of the land, sending them into captivity in Babylon generations later.

In chapter 34, God gives a detailed description of the land that would be given to the Israelites as their inheritance. The land extended from the Desert of Zin northward to Hazar Enan which is just northwest of Damascus. The western border was the coast of the Great Sea (Mediterranean Sea) and the east border would be the Jordan River. God then told Moses that the land would be assigned to each tribe by Eleazer and Joshua and one leader from each tribe would assist. I think it was important that Eleazer was involved in the division of the land since he had no personal interest in the matter because the Levites did not share in the inheritance of the land. God did make provisions for the Levites in chapter 35. He specified that they were to be given towns to live in along with pastureland in each of the tribal lands. This would ensure that the Levites would be dispersed among all of the tribes so they could minister to them. God also gave instructions to designate 6 Levite cities as cities of refuge so that a person who accidentally killed someone could have a place to flee from an avenger. God made a distinction between accidental death and murder, making it clear that a murderer was to be put to death.

Chapter 36 revisits the story of the daughters of Zelophehad whom we studied in chapter 28. God clarified that they had to marry within their clan so that the land they inherited would not pass to another tribe.

It is significant that God delegated the task of dividing the land to Joshua and Eleazer (but see Ez. Chapter 48). He knew that there would be quarrels over the land and we can see that borne out beginning in chapter 13 of Joshua. Some of the tribes complained about the size of their allotment while others failed to even take possession of any land. It is ironic that after 40 years of wandering in the desert then fighting numerous battles to defeat all the kingdoms in Canaan that they would be so indifferent about claiming their inheritance.