

Numbers 33:1-56

Now in chapter thirty-three you have a summary of their exodus out of Egypt. Moses sort of wrote down all of the places where they had stopped as they made this journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. And for the most part it's just a lot of names that you don't recognize; some of them are new, some of them are the first time we see them, some of them we remember from our journey in the book of Exodus.

Now in verse fifty-one of chapter thirty-three the Lord commanded Moses,

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. (Numbers 33:51-53)

Now God wanted all of the artifacts destroyed because the pictures, for the most part, were extremely lewd, lascivious. The molten images, for the most part, were their gods that they worshipped, which were in many cases grotesque and exaggerated sexual features. And the high places where they offered the sacrifices unto their gods and they went through their religious rights were ordered utterly destroyed lest there remain that polluting influence in the land because, again, whatever a man sows that he also's gonna reap. And if you are planting in your mind the images of sexual lasciviousness then you're gonna be reaping to your flesh. God wanted all of those things to be obliterated, to be wiped out, and so he ordered them to utterly destroy the pictures, the molten images, and the places of worship, the high places that were in the land.

And you're to divide the land by lots for the inheritance (Numbers 33:54)

In other words, dividing off the land and then casting lots to see which tribes would get which area. And then the tribes were to divide up the land and to divide it up to the families. In other words, each family within the tribe was to be given its land grant. And so this is the dividing out of the land, giving a portion of the land to everybody, each family getting its own land grant and this land was to then remain in those families perpetually.

Now in verse fifty-five the Lord warns them,

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. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. (Numbers 33:54-55)

In other words, these people will drag you down and ultimately I will have to destroy you out of the land, even as I destroyed them out of the land.

Sin always has a polluting influence. When I was a child my father used to always tell me about the one rotten apple in the barrel. How it can spoil the whole barrel and how it is important to choose your friends and to select them, because you get one who's bad whose influence can be bad on the entire group. So, God ordered them to drive out the people completely lest that they would vex them. The areas of land that Israel failed to clear the land continue to be problematic today (e.g., the Gaza strip and the "West Bank" (i.e., Judea and Samaria).

Now, Israel failed to obey the Lord in this. A lot of times we think we know better than God. We think that we can handle it. We think that God really doesn't understand the case completely or he doesn't understand us completely. And yet that rule might apply, you know, to others but surely it doesn't apply to me. And we learn to our own dismay and shame the folly of disobedience and we discover that God knew us better than we knew ourselves and we realize how foolish it was for us to not to completely obey God.