

1. Let me start with my lesson title: "What God wants us to remember and forget about." I'm going to take awhile to come back to that, but once one understands why these two chapters are here, that title will make a lot of sense. These two chapters, on first glance are boring to read. Then I remembered two of my bible rules: One is, put Jesus in the middle of the passage and see if that helps. The other rule is to consider what the passage doesn't say and see if that helps. Once I applied both of those rules, these passages made much more sense, and that lead to my title.
 - a) One of the most famous chapters in the New Testament is Hebrews Chapter 11. Scholars call it the "Hall of Faith" chapter as it describes examples of acts of faith by characters of the Old Testament. What is amazing about Hebrews Chapter 11 is how it ignores the sins those people committed and only listed how they had faith in God.
 - i) Chapter 33 here in Numbers, essentially accomplishes the same goal. It lists where the Israelites have traveled since leaving Egypt. It is in effect a travel log of where the Israelites have been as a nation leading up to this moment in time.
 - ii) After I read it a few times I noticed that the sins the Israelites have committed over the past 40 years are ignored. What is listed instead is in effect their obedience to God as they worked their way from Egypt to the Promised Land.
 - iii) Chapter 34 then focuses on the borders of the Land of Israel. It is to say in effect, here are the exact rewards the Israelites will get after they win that war.
 - iv) The point for you and me is that God remembers how we are faithful to Him and at the same time He "forgets" about our sins. He focuses on the good things He desires to give us for our continuous trust in Him.
 - b) Let me explain it another way: I know that I deal with guilt over things I have done that I know are displeasing to God. I believe He is responding to that idea by telling us, "If you know that I have forgiven you of our sins, why do you still feel guilty about it?"
 - i) To state the obvious, God wants us to turn from sin and confess it as wrong. The point based on this chapter and on Hebrews 11, is I believe when we as Christians go to heaven, God does not say to us, here is a list of all the sins you committed. Instead He lists the acts of faith that we have done to make a difference for Him. That is what Chapter 33 in effects lists for us. Chapter 34 then becomes a model for our rewards for how we have trusted in Him.
 - ii) My point here is that one should not read Chapters 33 and 34 as a boring list of places that the Israelites have been and an equally boring list of where they will live in the future. One should see these chapters as a reminder how God forgets about the sins and mistakes we have made and focuses on how we had faith in Him. In the New Testament, that is what the "Hall of Fame" Chapter in Hebrews is about and that is what these chapters do here in Numbers.
 - iii) With that speech out of my system, let me discuss these chapters a different way:
2. Think of the question, where are we going and how long will it take to get there? If you have ever traveled for a good distance with children, one has heard that question. Chapter 33 reviews where the Israelites have traveled and then Chapter 34 explains where the Israelites are going.
 - a) Chapter 33 appears to be a tedious list of places that say in effect, "The Israelites camped here. After that they moved on and camped there." We get a total of 40 places where the Israelites lived. If that isn't dull enough, we then get specific geographical details of the borders of the land of Israel in Chapter 34.
 - b) Assuming we don't need these chapters as a sleeping aid, why should we care about all of these details of where the Israelites have been and where they are going? The answer is my lesson title about what God wants us to remember what He wants us to forget about.

3. As I read these chapters a few times, I kept thinking about my grandmother and something she did near the end of her life. When she was going senile, she would regularly write lists of things she has accomplished. Yes that list exaggerated. She was writing her obituary and wanted us to find it in her purse and her room after she died.
 - a) I thought of that, as Moses is 120 years old at this point. God told Moses that he was going to die soon. Therefore Moses was probably thinking about how God promised the nation of Israel that He would lead all of them out of Egypt into the Promised Land. While that journey took 40 years, consider where we have been and where we are going. Moses is saying in effect, "God got you this far, and He promises things to you when you get there, so why do we have doubts of His existence?"
 - i) The issue is not so much to care about all of the specifics of where the Israelites traveled. It is the reminder that He has been guiding us every step of our lives.
 - ii) He also has this wonderful future for us as we continue to trust in Him.
 - iii) I will argue that the other important thing to remember is in heaven He does not confront us about our sins but remembers how we have been faithful to Him.
4. This leads me to teach us something about life as a Christian believer. I am convinced that God wants to bless our lives daily not because we deserve it, but just because He wants to. Does that mean we will never experience tragedies or difficult times? Of course not. The idea is that God wants to bless us despite any negative circumstances of the moment. The idea has nothing to do with planning. It is about trusting that God is going to guide us through both the good and bad times of our lives. Despite the fact that we do things that displease Him at times, He wants to guide us into a life of trusting Him with every aspect of our lives.
 - a) Let's assume we get the idea that God wants to guide our lives. Why should I bore myself to death reading all of these details about where the Israelites traveled thousands of years ago and where they are going in Israel? The answer is not about memorizing geographical details. It is for us to remember that He is guiding us. By studying this list of "they went here, here and here, and going here, here and here", we, like my grandmother can recall how God used us to make a difference for Him in this world. It is that reminder that the most precious thing we own is our time and how we use it is the key to living for God.
 - b) Before I start this journey through these two chapters, let me talk quickly about the issue of people that die young: I remember a radio talk show about people who lost children. The host asked the question, would you prefer if they never were born or that they got to live that short time with that tragedy? The common answer given was, "it was better that they did get to live as short a time as they did then if they were never born to begin with".
 - i) The point is that it is not always about us. As I like remind my daughters every so often, the world does not revolve around you. God wants our world to revolve around Him and use our time to make a difference for Him. If we can keep that concept in mind, we will enjoy life far more no matter what the circumstances.
5. All of this leads me back to my title about "What God wants us to remember and forget out." If you haven't figured it out by now, He wants us to confess and literally let go of our sins. At the same time He wants us to let go of the pain of how others have hurt us. What He wants us to remember is that He cares about what we do that does make a difference for Him in this world.
 - a) With that said, I believe we are actually ready to start the verses themselves.
6. Chapter 33, Verse 1: Here are the stages in the journey of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt by divisions under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. ² At the LORD's command Moses recorded the stages in their journey. This is their journey by stages:
 - a) Verses 1 and 2 are an overview of the whole chapter. They say that this chapter is going to a travel journal of how the Israelites got from Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land.
 - b) The point for us is to remember that if God has gotten us from where we started in our relationship with Him to where we are today, then we should keep on trusting Him to guide our lives in the future. When we focus on our problems, we forget about that fact.

- c) It's probably important at this point to talk a little about ancient Egypt in terms of its literal power back then and what that country symbolizes to us as believers.
 - i) We tend to forget today that at one time, Egypt was the most powerful country in that part of the world. They conquered over much of that world and brought a lot of material things back to Egypt. They were a force to be reckoned with.
 - ii) At that time God had the first group of Israelites, about 70 in number, live there. Over a 400-year period, that group grew into a nation of about 2,000,000 people who became slaves there. Then through the plagues on Egypt, the Israelites got to leave out of that nation and start working their way to the Promised Land.
 - iii) Let me also remind us what Egypt represents typologically: The world without God's influence on our lives. At that time, there were multitudes of things that the Egyptians worshipped. One of the purposes of the plagues was that it showed the superiority of the true God over all those things the Egyptians worshipped.
 - iv) By having God's chosen people leave Egypt, it is a symbolic idea of us leaving our old life of not trusting in God to guide us and begin our journey through life. Like those Israelites we are now living our lives in order to do His will.
 - d) Believe it or not, I am still describing Verse 1 and 2. God used Moses and Aaron in order to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses became the civil leader and Aaron became their spiritual leader in order to guide that large group of people from Egypt to Israel.
 - i) While I'm reminding all of us of these background details, the point as it relates to these two chapters is the Israelites had enough trust in God to follow Moses out of that land and start their new life trusting Him. These verses in effect describing a "born again" experience for those Israelites.
 - ii) With that said, it is time for us to go back to Egypt in Verse 3.
7. Verse 3: The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, ⁴ who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods.
- a) It's time for some more summary of the Israelites ancient history. The Passover is the day when the Israelites put lamb's blood on the doors of the house so that they would be spared the plague of the death of the firstborn son. Passover is also the day of the year where Jesus actually died on the cross. The idea is that just as the lamb's blood paid the price for the sins of the Israelites, so Jesus blood is sufficient to pay the price of every sin we ever have committed or ever will commit in our lifetime.
 - b) The main point of these verses is the day after Passover, while the Egyptians were busy burying all of their dead firstborn sons (no matter what the age), the Israelites started their journey out of that country. The symbolic idea is that while the "world" is suffering over the consequences of ignoring the true God of the world, those who do trust in Him are beginning their new life in that relationship.
 - i) I like to explain it this way: Many people who ignore God live a good life. What they fail to understand is that this is all the pleasure that they will ever get in life. While those of us who do trust in God struggle with our relationship with Him as well as struggle with our sins, the point is it is worth the struggle. I believe that just as this chapter doesn't list the sins the Israelites committed, so God does not remind us of our own sins when we reach our own Promised Land.
 - ii) As I said in the introduction, I grieve over sins I have committed because I know that they are wrong. What I need to remember is that if God has forgiven me for those sins, why do I fail to forgive myself at times? The point is we are tougher on ourselves than God is on us when it comes to sin. Yes there are still consequences for our sins, but my point is about eternity. God doesn't make us eternally suffer for the things we have done wrong in this lifetime. That's the Gospel message.

8. Verse 5: The Israelites left Rameses and camped at Succoth. ⁶ They left Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the desert. ⁷ They left Etham, turned back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol. ⁸ They left Pi Hahiroth and passed through the sea into the desert, and when they had traveled for three days in the Desert of Etham, they camped at Marah. ⁹ They left Marah and went to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. ¹⁰ They left Elim and camped by the Red Sea.
- a) OK, I admit, here comes the boring part. Most of this chapter is a list of places where the Israelites camped. Imagine going to someone's house to watch movies of their vacation. What is boring to us is interesting to the one showing us the moves, or say a photo album. This is a list of places the Israelites journeyed from Egypt to Israel.
 - b) Like I said in the last lesson, I'm glad I get to cut and paste these location names and not have to try to pronounce them. As one reads through this list of places, try not to get too obsessed over the specifics. Again, think of this in terms of having to go watch someone else's home movies or sit still while grandma shows you her photo albums. We don't pay attention to make us happy, but to make the person happy who is showing us that.
 - i) Or in the case of my grandma, finding her list of things she (didn't really) do in her life to make her feel like she accomplished a lot. While our family did joke about her senility, it also made us realize how important that was to her, that she wanted others to recall what it was she did in her life.
 - ii) With that concept in mind, let me quickly list most of the verses in this chapter. Don't read them as if one has to memorize those locations. Read them as if one is making one's own grandma happy for a moment by listening to her stories.
 - iii) After that, I'll get back to the significance of what is not said and how all of this relates to our relationship with both God the Father and God the Son.
9. Verse 11: They left the Red Sea and camped in the Desert of Sin. ¹² They left the Desert of Sin and camped at Dophkah. ¹³ They left Dophkah and camped at Alush. ¹⁴ They left Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. ¹⁵ They left Rephidim and camped in the Desert of Sinai. ¹⁶ They left the Desert of Sinai and camped at Kibroth Hattaavah. ¹⁷ They left Kibroth Hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. ¹⁸ They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. ¹⁹ They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon Perez. ²⁰ They left Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah. ²¹ They left Libnah and camped at Rissah. ²² They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. ²³ They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. ²⁴ They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. ²⁵ They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth. ²⁶ They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath. ²⁷ They left Tahath and camped at Terah. ²⁸ They left Terah and camped at Mithcah. ²⁹ They left Mithcah and camped at Hashmonah. ³⁰ They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. ³¹ They left Moseroth and camped at Bene Jaakan. ³² They left Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor Haggidgad. ³³ They left Hor Haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. ³⁴ They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. ³⁵ They left Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber. ³⁶ They left Ezion Geber and camped at Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin. ³⁷ They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the border of Edom.
- a) There, we just made it through grandma's "photo album" in one big swoosh. If we had to sit and actually watch the movies or slides or photos, I'm sure we would have to listen to stories that go with these places. Remember that we sit through those things not for the sake of our happiness, but that it makes the person showing us these things happy.
 - b) At this point, notice what was not said: Remember all of the murmuring the Israelites did? Remember how much they were complaining about their situation and how God punished them because instead of being grateful for being rescued out of Egypt, they were instead complaining about how difficult their situation was? Well, there is none of that here. My point is I believe that if God ever goes over our lives with us, it is not going to be how we sinned "here, and here and here", it will be about how we were obedient to Him and did as He desired that we do with our lives.

- c) Let me explain that one a little better. God's goal for those Israelites was to get them from the land of Egypt into the land of Israel. To get from "Point A to Point B", they had to go through a large wilderness area. What should have been a short trip turned out to be a forty year journey due to the disobedience of those Israelites.
 - i) Which reminds me, do you know what else is not listed here? Those 40 (ok, 38) years that the Israelites had to wander for their disobedience. The locations listed in these verses do not include the locations over that 38-year period. It just focuses on where they camped before that 38 year "death sentence" and where the next generation traveled once that bad period of time was over.
 - ii) My point is God "forgot about" the sin of the Israelites being disobedient to Him by taking the advice of the bad spies. Of course they still had to suffer for their sins. Just as we usually have to suffer in this lifetime for the sins that we commit. However, when it comes to "God's memory" and eternity, I believe that He only recalls to us how we did have faith in Him.
 - iii) Again, that is how this chapter is similar to the "Hall of Faith" chapter in Hebrews Chapter 11. In both cases, only our good deeds are recorded and the bad ones are forgotten in the sense they are never to be brought up again for all of eternity.
 - iv) Now think of that in terms of forgiving others. If God does not bring up the sins we have committed for all of eternity, why do we not forgive how others hurt us in this lifetime? When we hold onto that pain, it only hurts us, not others.
 - a) The reason God wants us to forgive the sins others have committed against us, is not for their sake but for ours. Does that mean people shouldn't be punished now for crimes? Of course not. The point is about separating eternal punishment from justice in this lifetime.
 - v) What I'm getting at is if God did not list the sins the Israelites committed during all of these travel logs here, why do we hold on to the sins that we have committed against God and the sins that others have committed against us? God wants us to let go of that guilt and that anger just as He has let go of it here in this chapter.
 - vi) On that positive thought, it is time to get back to grandma's photo album. ☺
- 10. Verse 38: At the LORD's command Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor, where he died on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. ³⁹ Aaron was a hundred and twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.
 - a) Moses interrupts the "Point A to Point B" travel log to recall the story of how his brother died. It is like when "Grandma still recalls in exact detail the time when her own sibling died." Let's face it, memories of the day our loved ones did die is usually burned into our memories strongly forever. Grant it, that event didn't happen that long prior to this time.
 - b) It may help to remember a few facts about Aaron here. Yes he was called to be the first top priest in Israel. Yes he was Moses' spokesman in front of Pharaoh. Yet he was also the one who built the golden calf that the Israelites worshipped in Exodus Chapter 32.
 - i) My point here is that Moses does not list any of Aaron's faults here. Moses just recalls the exact day and year he died and the fact he was the first top priest.
 - ii) I'm speculating Moses included these verses as he is thinking about his own death is coming soon as God told him his time was almost up. These verses are saying in effect, Aaron used his life to make a difference for God all the way to the point he died when he was 123 years old.
 - c) With that interruption completed, we still have more travel verses to go until we actually get to where the Israelites are standing as of the present chapter. If one looks at a map of their travels, it sort of looks like a giant capital "V" as the Israelites first approached the land of Israel directly from the south. After the 38 years of wandering occurred, they had to travel a long ways "down and around" which is the shape of that letter. They ended up on the east side of the Jordan as described in the last lesson and last chapter.

11. Verse 40: The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev of Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming. ⁴¹They left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. ⁴²They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon. ⁴³ They left Punon and camped at Oboth. ⁴⁴ They left Oboth and camped at Iye Abarim, on the border of Moab. ⁴⁵ They left Iyim and camped at Dibon Gad. ⁴⁶ They left Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim. ⁴⁷ They left Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, near Nebo. ⁴⁸ They left the mountains of Abarim and camped on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. ⁴⁹ There on the plains of Moab they camped along the Jordan from Beth Jeshimoth to Abel Shittim.
- a) Now the good news: This is the last of the "Point A to Point B to Point C" verses. These verses are describing the travels as they went around one territory to approach the land of Israel from the east side. Think of them as being just south of Israel, then the 2,000,000 of them traveled around a big chunk of land to approach Israel again from the east side.
 - b) One has to admit, unless one was part of that group traveling, this would not be very interesting to watch the "slide slow" of these travels. That is why I'm not going to bore you with any more details than I have to. Again, the key to reading this is to see again, what is not said, "The mention of any sins that the Israelites committed at this time." If one goes back to say the last half dozen lessons on Numbers, there were all sorts of sins they committed. Yet this is as if God is saying, "I don't remember what they did wrong, I just know that they eventually got to the Promised Land and here is how they did it."
 - c) Therefore, as one reads through their bible and one comes to this chapter that gives a long list of "Point A to Point B to Point C", don't just think about these literal places. Consider the fact that God recalls how we have used our lives to make a difference for Him and in effect has forgotten about our sins.
 - i) A common fear that people have is that when we die our life flashes before our eyes and God will show us all the sins we have committed in our lives. The more I study my bible, the more I believe that view is wrong. I believe a correct view is that God is going to share with us an edited slide slow (or movie, etc.) that just focuses on what we did right, either individually or as part of a group.
 - ii) Jesus once said that if we did something as simple as giving a cup of cold water to a child, we will not lose our reward. (See Matthew 10:42 or Mark 9:41). His point is not that we are saved based on doing good deeds. His point is that the evidence of our trust in Jesus as both God and our savior is that we then use our lives to make a difference for others. I bring that up here as in effect, the idea is the same as Exodus 33. It is about doing His will with our lives.
 - d) Yes that is good news. The better news is we are now finished with the travel log. Moses then starts to talk about what the Israelites are to do when they enter the Promised Land. The speech coming up is in effect, "God is proud of you that you all have made it this far, and here is how you can make Him happy by what you will do in the future." With that said, it is time to take on the next set of verses:
12. Verse 50: On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the LORD said to Moses, ⁵¹"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, ⁵²drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. ⁵³ Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess.
- a) My loose translation: You are here at the entrance to the Promised Land. This is the land that God has given you to inherit. This land is not empty. It is full of people that must be destroyed. You Israelites must also destroy all of the things that they worshipped. Then you must live in that land, as I (God) have given it to you as a place for you to dwell. As I like to say, the Promised Land is learning to trust Him with every aspect of our lives.
 - b) I also love to share that this promise was not conditional upon the Israelites believing in Jesus. It is an unconditional promise that this is their land, period, period and period.

- c) With that said, let me remind all of us why God wanted them to be so tough on the local inhabitants. Remember that this means not only to kill the fighting men, but also to kill all of the families and all of the small children and babies. Why would God want that?
 - i) Think of it as living with a painful contagious, incurable disease. I used the image of a dog that has rabies in the last lesson. Sometimes the most merciful thing one can do is put such an animal to kill it so that it can't hurt others.
 - ii) Also remember that God told the common ancestor of the Israelites, Abraham over 400 years earlier in effect, "I'm giving these people over 400 years to repent. If they don't, the most merciful thing I can do is kill them all." (See Genesis 15:13). If one has ever studied the history of how these people lived, it is amazing that God waited as long as He did to judge them. To put it mildly, they not only believed in child sacrifices, but a lot of other sexual deviances that are better left unsaid.
 - iii) OK, even if I accept killing everyone there, why would Moses give the command to destroy all of their idol statues? The idea is to not be tempted to worship them or live like them. In fact, the failure of the Israelites to obey this command, is why God eventually allowed them to be "kicked out of the land" by the Babylonians many centuries later.
 - iv) But John, you just said God gave them that land, end of issue. What about when they were kicked out of that land? The point is it is God's job to judge them. I do believe they can be kicked out for collective turning from Him, but those situations are always temporary as He promised the Israelites that is their land. My point is when I read of all the groups that want to destroy Israel as a nation my response is they have no idea who they are messing with.
 - v) Meanwhile, several thousand years ago, here are about 2,000,000 Israelites that are now parked east of Israel. Here Moses is telling them in effect, "It is time for me to die and time for Joshua to lead you into that land. Know that I still have my big death scene coming up in Deuteronomy. Still, you are close to getting started."
- d) OK, and why should I care about all of this? The point is to get the idea that God wants us to conquer over our own "Promised Land". As I love to say, the concept of that land is about completely trusting God with every aspect of our lives. That is why symbolically speaking, God wants us to destroy the "idols" that exist in our lives. Think of idols as things that keep us from trusting Him in some aspect of our lives. With that tough to digest comment stated, let's finish this chapter.

13. Verse 54: Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes. ⁵⁵ " `But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. ⁵⁶ And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.' "
- a) At this point, God is instructing the Israelites, "Once you have won those battles, then you are to distribute the land based on the size of the tribes." If you recall from some chapters back, (Chapter 26) this second generation was counted. The purpose of that count was to know how many people were in each tribe. Now Moses is saying, give a bigger piece of land to a larger tribe and a smaller piece to a smaller tribe.
 - b) The other key point to get out of these verses is that if the Israelites failed to do this, those people who are left in that land will be a problem to them. If you have some familiarity with the bible you know how true that is. That is why God wanted all of the residents killed so that their lifestyle would not come back to affect the Israelites.
 - c) The other thing to catch here is that God is in effect guaranteeing a victory. God is saying that because I am ordering you to do this, you will win. However, if you fail to do as I have instructed you to do, it will be a problem for you and your descendants.

- d) OK John, most of us know all of that. How does any of this apply to us today?
- i) First of all, let's be honest, we don't get direct orders from God to go conquer our lands today, so discerning His will is not as easy as it was for them. To figure out what God wants for our lives, requires time in prayer, time in God's word and just thinking about the question of, what am I good at, or what do I enjoy doing, and how can I use those talents I believe I have or the time I own to make a difference for God? Sometimes that just involves trying different things or even asking one' pastor or priest, where is it that I can be of service, right here and right now?
 - a) My point is if one can use one's talents to make a difference for God, I too, can guarantee a victory in the sense that there is no greater use of our time than to use it for God's glory. That includes the idea of doing a good deed for others or just being helpful. It is a matter of remembering that our lives are bigger than just trying to satisfy our own desires.
 - ii) With that said, let me come back to the Israelites for a moment. When one reads about the Promised Land, a point to consider is that they never did conquer over the entire land. They failed to drive out and kill everything that was there. What they failed to drive out came back to haunt them. Just as when we fail to remove from our own lives what can cause us to sin, that too comes back to haunt us.
 - iii) Back in Verse 52, it said to destroy all of their carved images and their cast idols. The King James Version of that same phrase reads, "Destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images". Let's be honest we don't have a lot of statues that we carry around in our culture. However, notice the word pictures:
 - a) Even back in those days they made pornographic images with the idea of using them to turn on people. God calls on the Israelites to destroy those things. I suspect you get the idea by now. The point is that the only way to defeat sin is literally to remove it as much as possible from our lives.
 - b) Let me try this concept another way: There may be things in our homes that are not tempting to us, but are a problem for someone else around us. There are things we know we can't have in our house as it causes a risk for us. These are the type of things that literally have to be removed from our homes just as God called the Israelites to remove them from their land.
 - c) Yes I realize I'm working on guilt for all of us, myself included. My point is just to realize that in order to eliminate sin from our lives, we often have to remove from our homes what causes us to stumble in the first place.
 - e) While we all, are contemplating where we are guilty here, let's sneak over to Chapter 34.
14. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Command the Israelites and say to them: `When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance will have these boundaries:
- a) A couple of things bothered me as I read through this chapter: My first thought was that Moses has never been to Israel (as far as the bible records) so how does he know how to establish the borders. Some possibilities:
 - i) When the 12 spies, spied out the land, they reported possible boundary locations.
 - ii) When Moses was young, he was raised to be the next Pharaoh, and maybe part of his training was to learn the geography of the greater area surrounding Egypt.
 - iii) After Moses ran away from Egypt the first time and before he was called by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he spent 40 years as a shepherd. Maybe during that time is when he learned about this local geography.
 - iv) Whatever the way, Moses had enough familiarity with the geography of the land of Israel that he could map out the boundaries based on the descriptions as given in this chapter.
 - b) The main point here is that Moses was commanded by God to know what exactly is the land of Israel that they are to conquer and receive as an inheritance.

- c) Time for a quick deviation to discuss the land of Israel itself.
 - i) It is strange to consider the concept that the God of the Universe who created all things said in effect, this little plot of land, roughly the size of New Jersey (for the sake of my American readers) is special and it belongs to Me.
 - ii) This land is considered the spiritual home of Christians, Jews and even Muslims consider it important, as they believe Mohammad was taken to heaven from here.
 - iii) Even for the Jewish people, it is not considered a land that they own. From God's perspective, they are tenants of that land. If they refuse to obey Him, they are to be kicked out of His land. If they collectively obey Him, He protects them there.
 - iv) Do I believe modern Israel is biblical predicted? Yes in the sense that God giving them that land is not tied to them accepting Jesus. The land of Israel was given to the Jewish people as an unconditional promise. The borders of which are given in this chapter. Do I believe modern Israel can do no wrong? Of course not. I just know that God gave that land to them as an unconditional promise and if I accept the idea that the bible is the Word of God, I accept that land as belonging to them.
 - d) Let me talk about the land of Israel a different way: If this is "God's land", why not make it much bigger? Why just this little corner of the globe?
 - i) For starters, it was more than enough room for them, and the Israelites have never fully conquered over all of this area that was allocated to them.
 - ii) A better way to look at this is to consider that location as a land bridge between three different continents. To walk or get an army from Europe to Africa or from Asia to Africa, one has to cross Israel. Therefore, that would require people who lived there to be a good witness to those who cross through this area. This is also a reason why there have been so many wars there over the millenniums. Control of this location is controlling the natural land bridge to three continents.
 - e) With those geographical thoughts in mind, we are ready to discuss the geography itself.
15. Verse 3: " `Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. On the east, your southern boundary will start from the end of the Salt Sea, ⁴ cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue on to Zin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon, ⁵ where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea.
- a) Before I describe this actual boundary, tell us again why we should care about where are the actual boundaries of Israel. Why is this in the bible?
 - i) For starters, it tells us where the land of Israel is supposed to start and stop.
 - ii) For us, it teaches us where is "God's land" and it's borders.
 - b) If this is the homeland for Jewish people, and that land exists today, why don't all Jewish people move there? For example, there are more Jewish people living in New York then there are in the entire country of Israel. Doesn't God desire that all of His people live in "His land"? Yes and no. First, remember that a large percentage of people with Jewish heritage are not that religious, just as most say, Americans with Christian backgrounds don't go to church every week or rarely at all. Even for a devoutly religious Jewish person who lived elsewhere in the world, realize that today they could move there if they desire. Often they argue that until the Messiah comes, they can live wherever they want.
 - c) One positive thing to say about the United States is that even with all of its problems, it allows religious freedom. Jewish people have for the most part been welcome to live in this country since it's beginning. While there have been some dark spots in our history that deal with prejudice against the Jewish people, the problems are minimal compared to living in other parts of the world.
 - d) For those who like geography, these verses describe the southern and eastern boundary of the land of Israel. In between Israel and Egypt is a desert area. A natural boundary is the Salt Sea, which these Israelites just traveled around. The point is God is using specific recognizable boundary markers to say where the land of Israel starts and stops.

- e) Coming back to the idea of "How did Moses know these places", one logical explanation for this part of the area is that the Israelites just spent 40 years traveling through this area, so they would know first hand exactly where these boundaries are. While some of these specific locations are debated among scholars, I am sure that after spending most of one's lifetime wandering around this area, Moses knew exactly where these borders are.
 - f) Since I'm not good at drawing maps, if one wants to see the exact boundaries it is best to look in the back of most bibles or simply to google maps of ancient and modern Israel.
 - g) Meanwhile, we have more boundaries to describe.
16. Verse 6: " `Your western boundary will be the coast of the Great Sea. This will be your boundary on the west.
- a) This is the easiest boundary to describe. What the bible calls the Great Sea, due to its size in comparison to the Salt Sea, is the Mediterranean Sea.
17. Verse 7: " `For your northern boundary, run a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor ⁸ and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad, ⁹ continue to Ziphron and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north. ¹⁰ " `For your eastern boundary, run a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. ¹¹ The boundary will go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain and continue along the slopes east of the Sea of Kinnereth. ¹² Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Salt Sea. "This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side."
- a) The northern and the eastern border require some "drawing" on the parts of the Israelites. In other words not everything was a natural boundary like a mountain range or a river. Therefore, they had to draw lines from "Point A to Point B" and say this is the boundary.
 - b) As one can tell from these descriptions, there are a lot of natural boundaries that are used to describe the land of Israel as well as some lines to be drawn to fill in the gaps.
 - c) Let me move on to a related topic. If God says that this is their land, why are so many countries that surround Israel today "hell bent" on destroying them and removing the Jewish people from that land? I am convinced that unless one studies their bible there is no natural explanation for it. From a Jewish perspective, they need to have a homeland in order for the Messiah to come and rule from that land. From a Christian perspective, the Nation of Israel must exist there so that when Jesus returns He can rule from there.
 - d) That is why one can understand that Satan is "hell bent" on getting the Jewish people out of that land in order to delay or prevent Jesus to return from that land. If one understands that, one can understand why Muslim nations are making just about every effort possible to eliminate the Jewish people from controlling this particular piece of real estate.
 - e) With that said, we have finished describing the borders itself.
18. Verse 13: Moses commanded the Israelites: "Assign this land by lot as an inheritance. The LORD has ordered that it be given to the nine and a half tribes, ¹⁴ because the families of the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance. ¹⁵ These two and a half tribes have received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan of Jericho, toward the sunrise."
- a) Before we move on, there is still a comment to be made about the two and one half tribes that live outside of these borders. As I taught in the last lesson, the comment is in effect, "If that is where those people want to live, I won't force them to do otherwise." God will only take us as far as we want to go in life. If we don't want to completely trust Him with our lives, then He'll allow us to only go "half way".
 - b) Was it the desire of God that these two and one half tribes live in the land of Israel? Yes it was. However, since they chose not to, God is telling Moses who is then telling the rest of the Israelites, if that is what they want, then that is what they are to get. The point is that the rest of the Israelites are to respect their decision. Even though the men had to go fight with the others, they have the right to go live outside of Israel if they choose. That is one biblical basis for the argument that Jews today don't have to live in that land today.

- c) Let me sneak in one more thing that some people get curious about: Are there any lost tribes of Israel? Throughout history, many people and groups claim to be the lost tribes of Israel. That includes the Mormons and even some who settled in England at one time.
 - i) Let me quickly say that there is no evidence for any of those claims.
 - ii) The best way to describe this is that after King Solomon, he had a son that can be best described as lousy king. I like the word "jerk" to describe him. The land of Israel was split into two kingdoms during that time. They became known as the Northern Kingdom called "Samaria" and the Southern Kingdom called "Judah".
 - iii) The first leader of the Northern Kingdom didn't want people to travel every year to Jerusalem located in the south as those people might turn away from him. That is why the Jewish priests who lived in the northern kingdom were kicked out.
 - iv) What is implied is by that time Jewish people no longer lived in their assigned areas and now they were scattered around the land of Israel.
 - v) By the time Israel was conquered centuries later by the Assyrians (who conquered the Northern Kingdom) and the Babylonians (conquered the Southern Kingdom), many of them still lived in their assigned area. My point is that even though they became scattered, there was no specific lost tribe that moved somewhere else. Those Israelites remained living amongst those kingdoms and the Israelites who were alive at that time still lived in that general area.
 - vi) By the time of Jesus many more centuries later, there are a number of references to the twelve tribes of Israel scattered throughout the area. My point is that there are no lost tribes. The individual Jewish people just became scattered throughout the area and Israelites no longer lived in their assigned territory.
 - vii) I give this little speech is to rebuke the idea that there was a lost tribe of Israel that moved as a collective group to some other part of the world.
 - viii) Meanwhile, it is time for us to finish this chapter.
- 19. Verse 16: The LORD said to Moses,¹⁷ "These are the names of the men who are to assign the land for you as an inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun.¹⁸ And appoint one leader from each tribe to help assign the land.
 - a) Remember that Moses knew he was going to die before the Israelites actually entered the land of Israel and start to conquer it. Moses is saying to the rest of the Israelites, once that is done, then distribute that land by tribe.
 - b) Notice that Moses is implying that the leaders named at the end of this chapter will each live through the war and they will be around to actually distribute the land.
 - c) So if this is not to be done until after the war is over, why bring it up now? Since God speaks directly through Moses and not all the Israelites, God is telling Moses who is to be in charge of this distributing process. In other words, here is the next civil leader (Joshua) and the next religious leader (Eleazar). Listen to them as you have listened to me.
 - d) With that said, the rest of the chapter, simply lists the current leaders of each of the twelve tribes. Each man listed in these set of verses except for two (Joshua and Caleb) are part of that second generation and are much younger than Joshua, Caleb or Moses. Joshua and Caleb are the two spies who brought back the good report. They are both rewarded with being leaders. Joshua was specified rewarded as being the next head guy.
 - e) OK, John, why should I care about any of this ancient history?
 - i) It is not about memorizing names. It is about realizing that God wants things done in an orderly fashion. It is the realization that He cares about every aspect of our lives including how we are to organize. Also, it teaches us the importance of respecting those who are in leadership over us and respecting their decisions.
 - ii) God is saying, let these twelve men be in charge of organizing and distributing the rewards for service after the victories in life that God will (big "will") give them.
 - iii) With that said, it is time to list the individual names.

20. Verse 19: These are their names: Caleb son of Jephunneh, from the tribe of Judah; ²⁰ Shemuel son of Ammihud, from the tribe of Simeon; ²¹ Elidad son of Kislun, from the tribe of Benjamin; ²² Bukki son of Jogli, the leader from the tribe of Dan; ²³ Hanniel son of Ephod, the leader from the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph; ²⁴ Kemuel son of Shiphtan, the leader from the tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph; ²⁵ Elizaphan son of Parnach, the leader from the tribe of Zebulun; ²⁶ Paltiel son of Azzan, the leader from the tribe of Issachar; ²⁷ Ahihud son of Shelomi, the leader from the tribe of Asher; ²⁸ Pedahel son of Ammihud, the leader from the tribe of Naphtali."
²⁹These are the men the LORD commanded to assign the inheritance to the Israelites in the land of Canaan.
- a) Once again, I'm glad I can cut and paste the names, and I don't have to read them. The short version here is that these are the 10 leaders of the nine and one half tribes of those who will actually live in the Promised Land. So why 10 leaders? Why not 12? I suspect that when the other two and one half tribes got their inheritance outside of the land of Israel, their leaders were established at this point.
 - i) Remember that the purpose of these leaders was to help Joshua distribute the land of Israel. The idea is if one tribe got this "box" area. These leaders are then to say, "Ok, family #1 lives over here. Family #2 lives over there."
 - b) So why should I care about any of these people? First, remember that you and me are not the original intended audience, but these Israelites. If nothing else, it helps to support the literal idea that the Israelites were divided into twelve tribes. Here we have the names of their leaders who lead the process of distributing the land.
 - i) For us, it is not about memorizing these names. It is about realizing that God has rewards for us for our obedience to Him and He in effect appoints the leaders over us who rule over us as we live to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) I stated in the introduction to this lesson, when one is not sure why something is listed, think about what is not written. Notice the tribe of the priests is not on this list. That is because the priests are to be scattered throughout the land to help the rest of the people grow in their faith in God and assist in the worship of Him.
 - iii) Think about what God calls on us Christians to do, be a witness to Him to a lost and dying world. That is a function of the priests and a topic in the next lesson.
21. Let me end this lesson by coming back to my title: What God wants us to remember and forget about. I believe memorizing these places and names are secondary. What is important is the principals being taught about God remembering our faithfulness to Him and then know that we get rewarded based on that faithfulness. I am convinced He wants us to let go of our fears over our sins. He wants us to confess them as wrong, no matter how often we commit them and then accept the idea that we are forgiven of those sins. Then He wants us to forgive others who have hurt us, so that we don't hold on to that pain of how we are hurt.
- a) God wants us to remember that He does keep track of all the good deeds that we do to make a difference for Him in this world. If He remembers those things, we don't have to write down a list like my grandmother did. We can trust that He is aware of what we do and rewards our service to Him as we use the most valuable thing He gives us, our time in order to make that difference for Him.
 - b) On that positive note, I'll end this lesson with my closing prayer.
22. Father, as we read about these people and the places that they have been, help us to realize that You are guiding our lives just as You guided theirs. Help us to use the most valuable thing we own, our time in order to make a difference for You. Help us to let go of the guilt we have over how we have hurt You or others, and how others have hurt us. Give us the strength to deal with whatever it is we have to face today. Help us to learn to trust You with every aspect of our lives, as that is what the Promised Land is to us as believers. Guide us as we make that difference for you. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.