Numbers 36:1–13 (November 2026)

I. Introduction

- We have been studying the book of Numbers on each Communion Lord's Day, and now we have come to the final chapter, chapter 36. What does the conclusion of Numbers teach us? As we approach the end of the book, God continues to give the Israelites instructions concerning the inheritance they will receive in the land of Canaan. As we saw last time, God regards them as those who have already received their inheritance in that land and gives them instructions in advance for how they are to live there. And now, in the final chapter, chapter 36, the book concludes with instructions concerning their covenant inheritance. From the perspective of our present reality, we could say that God continues to speak to us about heaven and then concludes with a message about heaven. In other words, as those who have already received our heavenly inheritance in Jesus Christ, we are given instructions on how to live as citizens of heaven even while we remain on this earth. Therefore, by faith, we look to the reality that we are already God's children who belong to heaven in Jesus Christ. With a firm hope in our heavenly inheritance, we live on this earth in a manner worthy of the calling we have received.

- When we look back over Israel's journey up to this point, is not the grace of God truly amazing? Despite Israel's continual sin and disobedience, God remained faithfully with His people to the very end. At last, their forty years of wandering in the wilderness came to an end, and God brought them to the land of their promised covenant inheritance. This was precisely what God had promised through His covenant with Abraham and what He intended to accomplish through the redemption of the exodus: to bring His people into the land of their covenant inheritance. What does this land of covenant inheritance mean? It is the land where God's people dwell together with God, in the place where He is present. This is also the ultimate reality of salvation that God planned before the foundation of the world and accomplished through Jesus Christ. He leads us into heaven, where we will dwell with God forever. We will dwell forever in the place where Jesus our Savior is. This was God's most gracious and joyful purpose, and it was also the deepest desire of our Lord Jesus, who came into this world to save us. It was with this desire that Jesus saved us, shedding His blood and dying on the cross for us.

- *John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me."*

- That we might dwell with Him where Jesus is was the deepest desire of our Lord. Through His death and resurrection, He has already secured this for us. He is faithfully bringing it to fulfillment even now, and He will certainly bring it to completion. John 17, in particular, records Jesus' prayer for us. Even now, Jesus desires that we be with Him where He is and behold His glory in its fullness. And this will surely come to pass. Please do not forget this. Therefore, we too are to live with the same desire and longing that Jesus has. We are to desire and long for heaven, where we will dwell with Jesus. This was also what God desired for His people in the Old Testament: that they would long for the Promised Land. And their longing for the Promised Land was, ultimately, a longing for God, with whom they would dwell in that land. Thus, the entire book of Numbers tells us how God led His people toward the Promised Land, dealing with

every sin and act of disobedience that threatened to prevent them from entering it, defeating all their enemies, and finally bringing them to the eastern side of the Jordan River, where they could see the land of Canaan. From beginning to end, this journey was guided by the grace of God. And behind that grace was God's deep desire to dwell with His beloved people. In the same way, from beginning to end, by the grace of Jesus alone and according to His desire, we will journey as pilgrims through this world and surely arrive in heaven.

- As we look back at the final stages of Israel's journey in the latter part of Numbers, we can see this desire of God clearly displayed. In chapter 26, God conducts another census on the eastern side of the Jordan for the distribution of the land of Canaan. In chapter 27, He gives instructions allowing daughters to inherit the land when a family has no sons. Beginning in chapter 28, He gives instructions concerning the worship to be offered in the land of their inheritance. In chapter 32, He grants the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan, as they had requested. In chapter 33, He recounts how He has guided His people throughout their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. In chapter 34, He gives instructions concerning the boundaries and division of the land of Canaan. In chapter 35, He gives instructions concerning the cities of refuge that He commanded them to establish in that land. Finally, in today's passage, chapter 36, He gives His final instructions concerning the land of their covenant inheritance. Thus, the latter part of Numbers is filled with God's words and instructions concerning the land of covenant inheritance. This is the land in which God will be the God of His people, and His people will be His people, dwelling together as the kingdom of God. Through these instructions, God directs the faith and hope of the Israelites toward the Promised Land, where they will dwell with Him. And as the time for entering that land draws nearer, He directs their hearts toward it all the more.

- In this background, today's passage begins with a request from the tribe of Manasseh. Representatives of the clans of Manasseh—which had already received its inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan—come before Moses with a concern. They are worried that the inheritance to be allotted to them in the land of Canaan might be diminished, and they ask for a way to protect their inheritance. Let us look at verses 1–4.

- *Numbers 36:1–4: "The heads of the fathers' houses of the clan of the people of Gilead the son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the clans of the people of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and the chiefs, the heads of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel. They said, 'The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the people of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. But if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the people of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So it will be taken away from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubilee of the people of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry, and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.'"*

- What was the concern of the tribe of Manasseh? Here we encounter the daughters of Zelophehad again. In verse 11, we find the names Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah.

These are the same women we encountered in Numbers 27. What happened in Numbers 27? A man named Zelophehad, who belonged to the tribe of Manasseh, died without a son who could inherit his family's portion of the land. He had only five daughters. Under the law as it then stood, however, only men could inherit the land. Consequently, Zelophehad's daughters could not inherit their father's portion, and their family line was in danger of cutting off from Israel. Therefore, the five daughters came before Moses and God and boldly requested that they, too, be allowed to receive their father's inheritance.

- In response, God permitted daughters to inherit their father's portion when a family had no sons. God graciously received the faith of these women, who longed to possess their inheritance in the land of the covenant, and granted their request. In other words, they shared the same desire for the land of the covenant inheritance as God. Yet another problem remained. If these daughters married, their inheritance would become part of their husbands' inheritance. If their husbands belonged to other tribes, the daughters' inheritance would thus be transferred to those tribes. Therefore, the tribe of Manasseh, to which these women belonged, now comes before God and asks that the inheritance of their tribe not be lost because of this provision of the law.

- In Numbers 27, then, we see the daughters of Zelophehad petitioning God for their inheritance in the land. In today's passage, we see the tribe of Manasseh, to which the daughters belonged, petitioning God to protect its inheritance. This concern was especially significant in light of verses 3–4. Every fiftieth year, during the Year of Jubilee, each person was to return to his own inheritance. But in the case of these women, their land inheritance would become permanently associated with the tribes of their husbands, leaving it no longer connected to the tribe of Manasseh. This is why the tribe of Manasseh sought a solution to this problem. God regarded their request as right and granted it. In other words, He was pleased to see that they shared His desire for the land of the covenant inheritance. And He gave them one additional instruction.

2. They Shall Marry Only Within the Clan of Their Father's Tribe

- *Numbers 36:5–9: "And Moses commanded the people of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, 'The tribe of the people of Joseph is right. This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: "Let them marry whom they think best, only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father. The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers. So no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another, for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance."'"*

- We see that, in response to the requests of the tribe of Manasseh and the daughters of Zelophehad who belonged to that tribe, two new instructions were established. The first was that, as God had already declared in Numbers 27, daughters could also inherit when a family had no sons. The second was that, if these daughters married, they were to marry only within their own

tribe, so that each tribe could preserve its inheritance. Therefore, in verses 10–13 of today's passage, we are told what happened as a result of following these instructions, and the book of Numbers finally comes to an end.

- *Numbers 36:10–13: "The daughters of Zelophehad did as the LORD commanded Moses, 11 for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to sons of their father's brothers. 12 They were married into the clans of the people of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's clan. 13 These are the commandments and the rules that the LORD commanded through Moses to the people of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho."*

- As we come to the end of Numbers, there is something we need to recognize once again. As I have already mentioned, the latter part of Numbers concludes with instructions concerning the land of the covenant inheritance. But in fact, the entire book, beginning with its very first chapter, has been centered on this land of covenant inheritance. Indeed, the entire history of Israel's redemption from Egypt and their journey through the wilderness revolves around this land. Think about it.

- In Numbers 1, the first census commanded by God was a census for military purposes. What was that warfare for? It was to take possession of the land of the covenant inheritance. Moreover, the instructions given in connection with the census concerning the locations and organization of Israel's camps, the order of their march, and the setting up, taking down, and transporting of the tabernacle all served the ultimate purpose of guiding them on their journey into the land of their covenant inheritance. The instructions concerning the various sacrifices and festivals were also given so that they might worship God in that land. Furthermore, all the instructions concerning purification from uncleanness were intended not only to preserve the holiness of Israel's camp in the wilderness but also to prepare them to dwell with God in the land of their covenant inheritance, which He would cleanse by driving out their enemies. God's dealings with all the sins of Israel and His granting them victory over their enemies were also acts through which He removed every obstacle that stood in the way of their taking possession of the land of their covenant inheritance. The second census, commanded for the new generation, also served a military purpose, but it was additionally intended to distribute the land of the covenant inheritance among the tribes according to their size.

This is not all. During their time in the wilderness, God brought water out of the rock for His people, sent manna down from heaven, and remained with them through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, providing shade for them by day and light by night. He did all these things to feed them, sustain them, guard them, and protect them as He led them toward the land of their covenant inheritance.

- What does all this teach us? We see that God directed Israel's entire journey through the wilderness—and indeed the entire journey of His redeemed people—with the purpose of bringing them into the land of their covenant inheritance. God's purpose was to work all things together to strengthen their faith in the covenant inheritance and to bring them safely to the land where they would dwell with Him. If so, what kind of faith were the Israelites to live by

throughout their lives? They were to live by faith in the land of their covenant inheritance to be with their Lord. Yet they repeatedly turned away from this faith, forsaking God and seeking to return to Egypt. Each time, God dealt with their sins and even disciplined them, yet He finally brought them all the way to the Jordan River. And this is not true of Numbers alone. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy also contain God's instructions concerning salvation, worship, and life, given so that His people might receive the land of their covenant inheritance and dwell there as His kingdom. Indeed, the entire history of salvation in the Old Testament follows this pattern. What does this teach us?

- In 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul tells us that the entire history of Israel's redemption from Egypt and the events recorded in Numbers were written as examples and warnings for us. Ultimately, the purpose of God's entire work of saving us and leading us throughout our journey is to bring us into heaven, the land of our eternal inheritance. We can therefore describe the Christian life in this way: Jesus has accomplished the whole work of salvation to bring us into heaven, and God has given us faith so that we may begin living on this earth the life we will live in heaven. He deals with our sins, which hinder or obstruct our journey toward heaven; He defeats every enemy that would lead us into temptation and cause us to fall into evil; and He addresses the weakness of our faith, which longs simply to remain in this world. He does all this so that we may persevere in faith to the end, enter heaven, and dwell with Jesus forever. Therefore, what kind of faith does God desire us to live by? He desires us, too, to hold fast to Jesus alone and live by faith with our hearts set on heaven. In light of this, we must carefully examine the purpose for which our church and every member of our congregation are living, the desires and longings, and the destination toward which we are journeying.

3. The Eternal Inheritance in Jesus Christ

- In today's passage, we see that God desires His people not merely to receive the land of their covenant inheritance, but also to preserve that inheritance and continue living in it. Even before they entered the land of Canaan, God graciously heard the request of Zelophehad's daughters, who desired to receive their inheritance. He also regarded the request of the tribe of Manasseh, which sought to preserve its covenant inheritance, as right. And even when daughters inherited land, He required them to marry within their own tribe so that each tribe would preserve its inheritance. Thus, verse 7 says, “for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers,” and verse 9 likewise says, “for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance.” In other words, God repeatedly emphasizes the importance of preserving their inheritance. After the Israelites entered Canaan, God also commanded them to continue preserving and living in that covenant inheritance. What, then, was the way for them to preserve the land of their inheritance?

- *Deuteronomy 4:40: “Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”*

- The way for the Israelites to preserve the land of their covenant inheritance, which God had given them, was to obey the statutes and commandments of the LORD—in other words, to love God and obey His Word. This was a life of worship. To preserve the land of their covenant inheritance ultimately meant to preserve a life of obedient worship of God in the kingdom of God established in that land. Thus, under the old covenant, if they lived faithfully in worship, they would dwell in the land of their covenant inheritance for a long time. But if they turned away from that life of worship, they would lose the land of their covenant inheritance and be driven out of it.

- We see this same reality already in Genesis. God created Adam, gave him the Garden of Eden as his inheritance, and commanded him to preserve it. Genesis 2:15 says, *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."* What was Adam to do in order to preserve that land? He was to obey God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, keep the covenant God had established with him, and preserve the holiness of that place against the entrance of sin. In other words, he was to live a life of worshiping God. But Adam sinned and fell, and he failed to preserve that land. Consequently, he was driven out of it.

- We see the same reality in Israel. By the grace of God, the Israelites finally received the land of their covenant inheritance. But afterward, did they preserve God's covenant by obeying His Word and worshiping Him faithfully, thereby keeping the land as a holy kingdom of God? They did not. They disobeyed God's Word, broke the covenant He had established with them, and defiled the land through idolatry. Their worship had become corrupt. Therefore, just as Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden, Israel had to be driven out of the land of Canaan. They were cut off from the blessed reality of dwelling with God in His kingdom. Under the old covenant, then, the land of covenant inheritance that God gave His people was a land they could preserve or lose depending on their obedience or disobedience. This was the limitation of Israel under the old covenant. Moreover, the land of their covenant inheritance itself was also limited.

- In today's passage, we see the tribes of Israel anxiously concerned that their respective inheritances might become smaller. They worry that if the women of their tribe marry men from other tribes, their land might be taken away from them. Furthermore, in Numbers, God establishes the boundaries of the land of Canaan that Israel will receive and distributes that land among the tribes. Yet when we come to the book of Joshua, the descendants of Joseph—that is, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh—complain that their inheritance is too small, even after receiving the land allotted to them. Joshua tells them to expand their territory for themselves through warfare. In this way, the inheritance of Canaan was not yet a perfect inheritance. It was a land they had to worry about losing, having taken away from them, or becoming smaller. It was also an inheritance they still had to expand through warfare. And eventually, because of Israel's sin and disobedience, they would lose the entire land of their inheritance and be deprived of it. Although they had dwelt with God in the land of their covenant inheritance, their worship had become corrupt, and their joy and longing were no longer directed toward God. They had made the kingdom of God like the kingdoms of this world. Consequently, the glory of God departed, and they themselves had to be driven out of the land.

- What, then, is the conclusion that today's passage teaches us as an example and a warning? First, we are sinners just like the Israelites, and there is no hope in us. Yet God had compassion on His people, who were sinners without hope, and promised them an eternal land of covenant inheritance that could never again be lost or taken away. He promised an eternal land of covenant inheritance that would be received through a new and greater exodus redemption—a land of covenant inheritance that does not belong to this world. He also promised the coming of the true Savior and Mediator of the new covenant, through whose perfect obedience, rather than the obedience of His people, this eternal inheritance would be secured so that it could never be lost or taken away. He promised the day when His people would dwell with Him forever in that land, living together as His kingdom. This is the time when Jesus comes to bring us into heaven.

- Jesus Christ, God the Son, came into this world and became a man like us in order to be our Savior and Mediator of the new covenant. Through His life of perfect obedience, His death, and His resurrection, He saved us from all sin and judgment and gave us heaven as our eternal inheritance. Therefore, even now, all our sins have been forgiven through the blood of Jesus. Furthermore, God has accepted us as those who have perfectly obeyed Him, just as Jesus did, and has made us heirs who will receive the heavenly inheritance together with Jesus. The Bible describes the salvation accomplished by Jesus in this way:

- Hebrews 9:15: "Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."

- 1 Peter 1:3–4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

- In these two passages, the purpose of the entire work of salvation accomplished by Jesus is described as enabling us to receive an eternal inheritance. It is an inheritance in heaven that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Unlike the tribe of Manasseh in today's passage, we do not need to worry that this inheritance might be taken away from us or become smaller. We have received in full the entire heavenly inheritance that Jesus has obtained for us. Nor do we need to fear that we might lose our heavenly inheritance again or have it taken away because of our sins and disobedience. This is an inheritance that our Lord Jesus has obtained and preserves for us through His blood and perfect obedience. God desires us to live with our faith fixed on this heavenly inheritance in Jesus Christ.

- From now on, heaven stands at the center of everything in the life God has redeemed and is leading. In order to make us citizens of heaven, bring us into heaven, and enable us to enjoy its eternal blessings and glory, God sent His only Son and accomplished the whole work of salvation. Even now, He enables us to begin living by faith on this earth as those who belong to heaven. He works all things together in our earthly lives to preserve our faith in Jesus and His heavenly Kingdom, and He will finally bring us safely there. This is God's gracious and joyful purpose for our lives: that we might be where God is, where Jesus is. For this purpose, God did

not spare even His own Son, and Jesus endured even the agony of death on the cross. How great was His longing? How deeply does He love us? God uses everything that happens in our lives—even our sufferings and trials, and indeed even our sins and failures—to accomplish His good purpose of leading us into heaven according to this deep desire of His heart.

- Therefore, God calls us to live by faith in the heavenly inheritance He has given us by grace through Jesus Christ. This means living a life of worshiping God, beginning here on this earth. It also means following the path that Jesus has already walked before us. Like Jesus, we are to look toward the joy set before us and press on by faith toward heaven. What was the joy set before Jesus? Where were His desire and longing directed? He desired that we might be with Him where He is. He desired to dwell with us forever in a perfect fellowship of love. How deeply did He desire this? Jesus took the entire burden of our sins upon Himself and saved us through His love displayed on the cross, giving Himself completely for us. Even now, He is with us in that same love, preserves us, and leads us into heaven. Therefore, He will bring us to be with Him where He is. Believe this. Please also believe that God uses everything that happens in our lives to lead us into heaven.

- Therefore, may God grant us the same desire and longing that Jesus has: the desire to dwell with Him forever. With this longing in our hearts, let us run with perseverance the race of faith to the very end. Even today, Jesus gives us the bread and wine, which signify and seal His body and blood, and calls us to partake of the blessed reality of heavenly salvation that He has accomplished through His death and resurrection. He calls us, as those who have already received our heavenly inheritance, to the heavenly table of fellowship prepared before the throne of God, where He grants us fellowship with Him in perfect love. Spiritually speaking, in this very moment, we have come to be with Jesus where He is. We are beholding Him face to face and enjoying the fellowship of His love. The day will soon come when we will fully enjoy the heavenly reality that we now partake of by faith in this sacrament. Until that day, may the Lord grant us a deep longing for heaven, where we will dwell with Him, and enable us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received.