THE TIES THAT BIND IN NUMBERS 26–36

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ABSTRACT
After years of being a somewhat neglected area of Pentateuchal/Torah studies compared to Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy, the book of Numbers has recently been enjoying increasing attention. A leading question is whether there is some overall design to the book or is it, as many earlier commentators judged, a loose collection from a number of authors and editors. In relation to this question, a particularly challenging section is chapters 26–36. This article argues there is good evidence that these chapters, although of varied origin, have been carefully assembled and edited to advance two key themes in the book and the larger Torah, namely the promise of descendants (in the emergence of a new generation) and the promise of land (this new generation will inherit the land).

INTRODUCTION
Until the latter part of the 20th century the book of Numbers did not rate highly in historical-critical study of the Pentateuch/Torah. Along with the latter part of Exodus and the book of Leviticus, it was regarded as a collection of post-exilic, priestly material, marking the retreat of a once dynamic, prophetic religion into the safety of legalism and liturgy.¹ The focus of analysis was firmly on Genesis, the earlier chapters of Exodus, and Deuteronomy. More recently, however, there has been a spate of studies and commentaries on the nature and composition of Numbers—although no consensus has so far been reached about these matters. This welcome change is partly due to growing interest in synchronic and literary analysis, fuelled by the conviction that there is more to Numbers than the alleged number involved in its production. This is not to say that historical critical analysis of the book is losing momentum, as is

evident for example in the massive thesis published recently by Reinhard Achenbach.²

Although there is no consensus on the structure or organisation of Numbers, a glance at some recent studies and commentaries that have tackled the question provide helpful clues and pointers for this study. There is a general consensus that 1:1–10:10 constitutes the first large block of material, frequently described as preparation for the journey, or the military campaign. Philip Budd and Baruch Levine differ by identifying a first unit in 1:1–9:14 and 1:1–12:16 respectively.³ With Budd one can see in the break between 9:14 and 15, and following, the same shift of focus as occurs at 10:10; namely from the order of the camp to the movement of the camp. Levine’s division, as far as I can ascertain, depends considerably on his source analysis.

There is considerable difference of opinion about the extent of the next major section of the book, whether it extends to 20:29,⁴ to 21:20,⁵ to 22:1,⁶ or to 25:18.⁷ George W. Coats and Rolf P. Knierim argue for a two-part structure and identify the second section as 10:11–36:13.⁸ Despite the differences one can say that the majority of commentators identifies a second major section of the book with its dominant theme being the murmuring or rebellion in the wilderness. As well as this, a number regard the spy episode in Numbers 13–14 as

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a central feature of the “murmuring in the wilderness” stories that pervade the second section of the book. Because of the exodus generation’s rebellion against God’s plan to have them enter the land they are sentenced to languish in the wilderness for 40 years until they die out. Their children who succeed them will inherit the land (cf. 14:28–34).

What is of particular interest for this study is that several of the commentaries and studies consulted (Achenbach, Budd, Milgrom, Olson, Seebass) identify a third and final major section of the book in 25:19–36:13 (NRSV 26:1–26:13). This section commences in 25:19–26:65 with a census of the people like the one with which the book begins. It is a census of warriors (“everyone in Israel able to go to war”). It concludes with the observation that none of those numbered in the first census remained except the good spies Caleb and Joshua; the whole exodus generation had died in the wilderness according to the decree of the Lord in 14:28–34. As Olson and more recently Achenbach have argued, Numbers 1 and 26 are the two major structural components of the book.9

In my judgement a threefold division of the book into 1:1–10:10; 10:11–25:18; 25:19–36:13 is the most acceptable. The first section is concerned with preparations for Israel’s journey through the wilderness to the conquest of the land, with God leading the way. The second section tells of the exodus generation’s rebellion and God’s decree that it will die in the wilderness, to be replaced by the next generation who will complete the journey and enter the land. These two decrees are vindicated in the subsequent storyline. The exodus generation is exposed as completely unworthy to enter the land in subsequent accounts of rebellion (20:2–13; 21:4–9) culminating in a final fatal fling with the women of Moab and the Baal of Peor (25). Many commentators judge that this episode and that of the golden calf in Exodus 32–34 form a frame around the account of the exodus generation and its demise.10 But God’s decree that their children will inherit the land is also vindicated in the stories of East-Jordan conquest in Numbers 21 and the prophecies of Balaam in 22–24. As those of the exodus generation gradually die out over the 40 years in the wilderness, they see their children replacing them as the heirs to the promised land, in accord with God’s decree. In this way 14:34 is fulfilled; “you shall know my displeasure.” The census of Numbers 26 narrates the completion of this process.11

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9 Olson, The Death of the Old 89, 119–20; Achenbach, Die Vollendung der Tora 451.
10 See for example, Olson, Numbers 153.
11 Lee (Punishment and Forgiveness 266–79) argues that the turning point in the book is 21:1–3, not 25:19–26:65. This means he has to attribute the rebellions in 21:4–9 and 25 to the new generation who are therefore apostates like their parents. How do they then qualify to inherit the land, and what is the point of the second census as stated in 26:64–65? It is also worth noting that in 31:16 Moses refers to “the Israel-
Most of the commentators who identify Numbers 26–36 as a distinct block regard it either as preparations for the conquest and settlement of the land by the new generation, or as a rather loose collection of material that has been located towards the end of the book. There is little doubt that the text of Numbers 26–36 is of varied origin but, in my judgement, the section is more than a loose collection or that it has the land as its sole focus. Dozeman and Olson maintain that Numbers 26 takes up two key themes of the Torah enunciated initially in Gen 12:1–3 and 7.12 These are the promise of descendants (signalled in the new generation) and the promise of land (inheritance). While I agree with their thesis I do not believe they have paid sufficient attention to the way these two themes are unfolded in Numbers 26–36. I will argue that, although the two themes are treated together (signalling that they are not separate but integral components of the divine promise), Numbers 26–32 focuses more on the theme of the generations while Numbers 33–36 shifts focus to the theme of the land. But before the promise of land is brought to the fore there are a number of texts that see to the future good order of this new generation. These recall the provisions made at Sinai for the good order of the exodus generation. As well as this there are texts that confirm that this new generation is a loyal one, unlike their parents. They are therefore worthy of inheriting the promise of the land. Numbers 34–36 then makes provision for the occupation of the land. One can say that Numbers 26–36, in line with the larger Torah narrative, employs the familiar categories of time (the generations) and place (land) to tell its story.13

DIVISION OF THE TEXT AND COMMENT

25:19–26:65: Census. This section can be divided into the following constitutive units: 25:19–26:51 (the census following the plague that kills 24,000 in itsites” rather than “you” as the apostates of Baal Peor. One would expect the latter if Moses were blaming the new generation of warriors that stands before him. 12 Cf. Dozeman, Numbers 215, 262, and Olson, The Death of the Old 186–91. 13 A quite different understanding of the structure and thrust of the book of Numbers is that of Mary Douglas, In the Wilderness. The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers (Oxford: OUP, 2001). According to her the book features alternating narrative and law sections, and each section in the first part of the book (up to Chs 16–17) has a matching parallel (like parallelism in Hebrew poetry) in the second part of the book. The result is what is termed a “ring composition” with each “parallelism” of narrative and law functioning like rungs on a ladder (see Ch. 5 and in particular 117–19). I would agree there are parallel arrangements in the book but, as with Hebrew poetry, the second parallel not only resumes the first but more often than not advances its content. On this basis one would expect her structure to highlight the clear parallels between Numbers 1 and 26 but this is not the case. While she is correct to argue that earlier scholarship erred in seeing the laws as interruptions to the narrative, her analysis does not in my view pay sufficient attention to the way the narrative in Numbers provides an appropriate context for the laws (cf. 150).
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25:9); 26:52–56 (God instructs Moses about the criteria for apportioning the land); 26:57–62a (the separate census of the Levites); 26:62b (reason for the separate census); 26:63–65 (summary). The command in 26:2 to number those able to go to war clearly has the future in mind, as did the very similar command in 1:2–3. But it would also seem to have the preceding divine command in 25:17 in mind. The implication is that this new generation is the one that will execute the command, and this is narrated in Numbers 31. For its part, 26:65–66 reports the complete demise of the exodus generation. 14

The arrangement of text 26 is instructive. There are two enrolments, one of the warriors and the other of the Levites. Each is followed by a statement about land. In 26:52–56 God instructs Moses as to how the land is to be allotted to the tribes, while 26:62b states why the Levites were numbered separately—because “there was no allotment given to them among the Israelites.” 15 The theme of place/land is introduced in the chapter, accompanying the theme of generations/time, but the focus is clearly on the latter. The narrative first needs to ensure the future of the tribes (and their names) in order to subsequently narrate their inheritance in the land. As already noted the respective understandings of land/place in relation to the tribes and to the Levites is resumed in a much more extensive manner in 33:50–34:29 and 35:1–34; the first details the allotment of the land of Canaan to the tribes, while the second provides details about the towns and lands assigned to the Levites from among the tribal allotments. This is in keeping with the shift in focus from time to place in Numbers 33–36.

27:1–11: Intervention of the Five Daughters of Zelophehad. In a sense, this case and its significance within the third section of the book is signalled by the way the five daughters are named at a strategic point in the census (26:33). They are the seventh generation of descendants of Manasseh, a tribe that is listed seventh in the census (reversing the normal order of Ephraim and Manasseh). 16 In 26:53 God instructs Moses to apportion land according to ‘the number of names.’ Within the context those named are the ones numbered—the warriors who bear the names of the respective families, clans and tribes. On this basis however, the daughters, as the only descendants of the family of Zelophehad, of the clan of Hepher, of the clan of Gilead, of the clan of Machir, of the tribe of Manasseh, of the tribe of Joseph, would not be counted among those named and so not be able to inherit.

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14 A number of commentators note that 26:64–65 serves to correct any impression that 26:4b, “the Israelites who came out of the land of Egypt,” refers to the exodus generation (e.g., Scharbert, Numeri 100–11).
15 The term translated in the NRSV here as “allotment” is נַעַלָּה (more accurately “inheritance”), the same term used in 26:52–56 (where the NRSV translates it as “inheritance”).
16 Cf. Dozeman, Numbers 212.
The daughters’ protest, as noted by Dean Ulrich, reveals their concern for, and loyalty to, God’s promise of descendants and, by implication, to the promise made to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3. Their fidelity is matched by God who rules in their favour. When there is no son the generational line is carried forward by a daughter. The continued existence of the family name through a daughter enables it to claim and maintain its inheritance in the land. Thus the primary thrust of this text is about the future—preserving the family/clan name through the generations (time); the issue of inheritance in the land (place) depends on this. As I will argue below, the return of these doughty daughters to the text in 36:1–13 is more about place (land) than time (preserving the family line).

27:11–23: Transfer of Leadership from Moses to Joshua. When one considers the larger context of the book of Numbers, the commissioning of Joshua as the new leader follows logically after the census in Numbers 26. As noted above, this chapter reports the end of the exodus generation, as decreed in 14:28–33, and makes provision for the future. In a similar way 27:11–23 signals the end of Moses’ role as leader, as decreed in 20:12, and makes provision for the future via the transfer of leadership to Joshua. But, as 27:12–13 intimates, this will presumably only take place after Moses’ death; that is, after he climbs the Abiram range and views the land. At first glance 27:11–23 appears to have a somewhat unusual sequence in that God makes a resolution (Moses’ time to die has come), Moses counters with an alternative proposal (appointment of a replacement leader), and God accepts the proposal (instructs Moses to appoint Joshua). However, this or a similar sequence can be observed in the golden calf and spy stories. In both of these God threatens or resolves to exterminate Israel because of its sinfulness (cf. Exod 32:9–10; Num 14:1–12). Moses counters on each occasion with pleas that demonstrate his loyalty to the people and to their continued existence as God’s chosen ones. On each occasion God accedes to Moses’ plea.

The same sequence can be observed in 27:15–23, with Moses’ plea for a replacement leader an expression of his concern for the future welfare of the new generation (cf. v. 17; “so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd”). There is also a link with the census of 26 in Moses’ request for someone “who shall lead them out and bring them in.” As noted by commentators, this expression occurs in Josh 14:11, 1 Sam 18:13–16, 1 Kgs 3:7 and 2 Kgs 11:9 in reference to military leadership and governance. In a neat reversal of the schema or sequence to which I referred above, God

19 Cf. Budd, Numbers 306; Scharbert, Numeri 113.
replies to Moses’ job description for his replacement with a revision of the job description. Only part of Moses’ authority is to be transferred to the new leader who will depend on Eleazar the priest to consult God via the Urim. Two points can be made in relation to these provisions. One is that the part of Moses’ authority that is transferred refers to that of being military commander and governor, as v. 21b indicates. The other follows from this: Moses’ form of leadership is unique and cannot be transferred “in toto” to another. Aspects of it will be shared by Joshua and Eleazar.20

28:1–29:40 (MT 29:39): Community Offerings. Once the text has the next generation of Israelites and its leaders sorted out, attention turns—once again logically—to the one to whom all this is owed and to whom all must be devoted—the Lord. The tent sanctuary is not mentioned in this legislation, a hint perhaps that it is looking beyond its setting in the book—the plains of Moab where the tent is erected (cf. 25:6)—to the permanent dwelling of God in the land? The chapters provide legislation for worship at each ‘appointed time’ (28:2)21; the daily offering, the weekly Sabbath, the feast days—all times and seasons are properly arranged for the worship of God. In this way time is sanctified and past, present and future generations are one in their respective participation in the one enduring and ordered liturgical calendar.22 This legislation is similar to parts of Leviticus 23 and Numbers 15, both of which are also located at strategic points in the Torah storyline—the first at Sinai when the covenant relationship with God is established, the second in the wake of the spy story when the exodus generation was sentenced to die in the desert. It is no doubt significant that the focus of Numbers 15, in the wake of Israel’s disobedience in 13–14, is on the proper rubrics rather than the liturgical calendar.23

30:1–16 (MT 29:39–30:16): Individual Offerings. This looks to be an unusual chapter in the sequence but most commentators note that the term neder for votive offerings in 29:39 is the same term for vow in 30:2. What the NRSV translates as “vow” here may refer to a “vowed offering/sacrifice,” an undertaking to donate or offer a portion of one’s property (an animal, fruit, wine, etc.) to God.24 It may even include the dedication of one’s child as in the case of Hannah and Samuel.25 According to Dozeman, the second term that

20 Joshua’s leadership in Deuteronomy (31:3, 7–8) is also described in terms of military leadership. Joshua 14:1; 17:4; and 19:51 imply that he and Eleazar shared the task of allotting the land.
21 The LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch have “at my feasts,” which is more in line with Lev 23:2.
22 Cf. Dozeman, Numbers 229.
23 The connections between Numbers 15 and 13–14 are explored in some detail by Olson, Numbers 90–101.
occurs in tandem with vow throughout the chapter, namely 'issār (pledge), refers to some self-denial, such as a Nazirite abstaining from wine. However, he notes the distinction is somewhat flexible. Whatever the case, one may say that whereas Numbers 28–29 legislates for what is to be offered to God at appointed times, Numbers 30 caters for those offerings that the worshipper undertakes of his or her free will. And, whereas 28–29 prescribes for all Israel as one, 30 prescribes for the individual Israelite and for the different rights and responsibilities of a man and a woman. The juxtaposition of a text about the people (28–29) and a text about the individual, in particular a woman (30), parallels the earlier juxtaposition of 26 (the census) and 27:1–23 (the daughters of Zelophehad and Moses).

What is significant about this chapter in relation to my argument is that the bulk of it legislates for a woman’s vows and pledges at various stages of her life (so time again). Three stages are listed, of which two involve a male as the “pater familias” or head of the household, either as her father or her husband. In each case the head of the household has the authority to annul her vow or pledge, but only when he hears of it. If at this time he says nothing then her commitment remains valid. The third stage refers to a divorced or widowed woman and so one who is presumably not under such authority. According to v. 9, she enjoys the same rights and responsibilities as a male. All stages of a woman’s life are therefore covered. Scharbert thinks this legislation provided some protection for women from being accused of irresponsibly alienating family property.

It is worth noting that settlement in the land is not mentioned in Numbers 28–30. 31:1–54: War against Midian and 32:1–42, Settlement in East Jordan. I propose to treat these two chapters together because, in my view, they showcase two closely related qualities of the new generation that definitively sets it apart from the exodus generation. At this point in the book it is important that the new generation be portrayed avoiding the two major sins committed by their parents—apostasy and rebellion. Their unswerving loyalty shows that they are worthy descendants of Jacob/Israel and worthy too therefore to inherit the promise of land. According to Numbers 31, the new generation demonstrates loyalty to God in a war against Midian, unlike their parents who are seduced into apostasy by the Midianites in Numbers 25. As a number of commentators have noted, Numbers 25 and the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32–34 form a frame around the account of the wilderness wandering. According to Numbers 32, the Reubenites and Gadites (the half tribe of Manasseh

26 Dozeman, Numbers 234.
27 According to Seebass, the hearing of a vow makes it a public matter and this could have an impact on the good order of a house or the larger society. By the same token it did protect the freedom of women in the private arena (Numeri 273).
28 Scharbert, Numeri 121.
enters late in v. 33) express their readiness to cross the Jordan with their brothers in arms, thereby avoiding a repeat of the division and rebellion described in the spy story of Numbers 13–14.

The literary connection between Numbers 31 and 25 is not entirely smooth—according to 25:16–18 the Midianites deceived Israel whereas according to 31:16 the main culprit is Balaam. Despite this, the thematic connection is undeniable. A key point is whether Moses’ anger that the army has brought back Midianite boys and sexually active women is justified. Does this constitute a breach of the code of conduct for a holy war, presumably the herem or ban? Does it indicate that the new generation is on the way to repeating the sin of their parents at Peor? No word on this is given to God in the chapter but what is significant is that in vv. 48–54, which some regard as an addition, the officers come to the tent of meeting with offerings from all combatants to make atonement for any wrong. 29 In doing so they also report there are no casualties. This implies there is no censure or punishment from God. Their offerings for atonement are in accord with the prescriptions for unintentional sins in Leviticus 4–5. Moses and Eleazar deposit the offerings as a memorial for Israel before God. The implication is that these are to serve as a sign for future generations that this generation conducted the war in good faith (Exod 13:19; 30:16). Is this episode implying that it is Moses who is at fault here for not instructing the new generation of warriors beforehand about the herem and that he and Eleazar are effectively obliged to set up the memorial in the wake of the report of no casualties? Given this is the case, it may be meant to underscore the change of leadership decreed in 27:11–23 and the end of Moses’ role as military commander.

What is striking about Numbers 32 is that texts on the settlement in East Jordan at the beginning and end of the chapter form a frame around the long central section that portrays the integrity of the new generation. As Coats and Knierim note, the text is more a dialogue between the Reubenites and Gadites and Moses than a narrative. 30 In Moses’ eyes the request by the tribes of Reuben and Gad will lead to the kind of discouragement and rebellion that brought the exodus generation undone. When the remaining tribes see Reuben and Gad settled in East-Jordan they will refuse to go to war in West-Jordan. This will result in the same kind of fate that the exodus generation suffered and, in a kind of reversal of the positive role played by Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 13–14, Moses claims that Reuben and Gad will be responsible for the people’s destruction (32:15). Numbers 32 is thus linked to the spy story in 13–14 as well as the two census texts of Numbers 1 and 26.

29 Verse 53 is bracketed in the NRSV indicating the editors regard it as a later gloss. A literal translation is “the men of the army took booty, each one for himself.” The clear sense is that all combatants were involved.

30 Coats and Knierim, Numbers 300.
In response the tribes of Reuben and Gad three times profess their commitment to the completion of the military campaign (in vv. 16–19, 25–27 and 31–32). On the basis of this Moses agrees to assign them the East-Jordan lands. The half-tribe of Manasseh is included in the distribution, presumably an addition to bring it into line with the two-and-a-half tribes’ listing that occurs elsewhere. The thrice-stated commitment by the tribes of Reuben and Gad serves as an assurance that the rebellion that brought the previous generation undone will not recur. The assignation of East-Jordan lands to them serves as a sign that Moses (and God) accepts their commitment as genuine. One could say that in each instance Moses is cast as a kind of devil’s advocate; his aggressive intervention draws forth a response that ‘reveals’ how different the new generation is to their parents. In a sense one could also say that this shows—rather like Numbers 31—that Moses is no longer needed as leader: the Israelites are now firmly focused on God and obedience to God’s word and purpose.

33:1–49. Record of Wilderness Journey. In contrast to Numbers 26–32, the theme of land comes to the fore in 33–36, and 32 can be read as providing a transition to this focus. Davies, in his commentary on Numbers, argues that the style of 33:1–49—with the repeated notice of setting out and camping—is close to that of ANE reports of military campaigns. This is in line with the description in v. 1 of Israel leaving Egypt as a šābā, a “host” or, as in the NRSV, “in military formation.” The term šābā (host) occurs also in the census lists in Numbers 1 and 26, and also several times in 10:11–28, which describes Israel setting out on its military march through the wilderness. As noted earlier, a majority of commentators identify 10:11 as marking the commencement of the story of Israel’s journey from Sinai to the plains of Moab. According to 33:2 God commands Moses to record each stage of Israel’s journey. This implies the text is to serve as a sign or memorial for Israel that God guided every step of the journey (cf. 10:33–36). This was no retreat or military defeat but a purposeful march towards the conquest of the land. When we speak of the wilderness “wandering” the impression is of lack of direction and purpose. But this is not how the narrative, nor the itinerary in 33:1–49, understands it.

No moment of the 40 years that Israel lived in the wilderness, nor any journey that they took, fell outside God’s military leadership and guidance. This is indicated in particular by the list of 18 campsites between 33:18 and 33:36 that do not appear in the narrative section from 12:16 (Hazeroth, the setting of

31 So Scharbert, Numeri 125. Budd argues that the Yahwist added this material to his account of Reuben and Gad (Numbers 341–42).
32 Cf. Davies, Numbers 46–81; also Dozeman, Numbers 252.
33 There are 40 campsites from Succoth to the mountains of Abarim, with Rameses and the plains of Moab the start and finish points. The number 40 may be meant to match the 40 years of the desert journey but it is not clear (cf. Seebass, Numeri 22,1–36,13 369).
the spy story) to 20:1 (Kadesh, where Miriam dies). They ‘fill in this gap’ in the narrative. Whatever sources lie behind 33:1–49, within the context of the book of Numbers vv. 18–36 indicate that, as God oversaw every year of Israel’s 40 years of punishment, so God guided every step that Israel took during that period. And each one was an integral stage of the journey and so of the military campaign. That is, an integral part of the campaign involved, one might say, the ‘campaign’ against the sinful exodus generation. While the geographical factor dominates this text, the chronological is also there. Verse 3 reports when they set out from Ramses and vv. 38–39 record the death of Aaron on the 1st day of the 5th month in the 40th year, the final year of the journey.

33:50–56: Allotment of West-Jordan Land. This section maintains the geographical focus of the preceding itinerary but, whereas 33:1–49 records the stages of Israel’s journey from Egypt to the plains of Moab, vv. 50–56 look forward to the completion of its final stage—the crossing of the Jordan and conquest of the land. The centrepiece of this instruction, the allotment of the land in vv. 53–54, resumes the earlier one in 26:52–56 but, as noted, here it occupies a prominent position at the head of an extended series of instructions from God about the land that runs from 34:1 to 35:34. In keeping with the setting in the plains of Moab these are instructions about the future that is reported as implemented in the book of Joshua. Numbers 33:53–54 is framed by warnings in vv. 50–52 and 55–56 that Israel must drive out the inhabitants and eliminate every sign of their worship. There is to be no temptation to repeat the disgrace of the Baal of Peor episode in 25, that final, fatal fling of the exodus generation. Despite the loyalty shown in the war against Midian in Numbers 31, there is a Torah teaching here that Israel can never assume to have it all together and must ever be vigilant about relapsing into sin and rebellion.

34:1–29: Boundaries of the Land. This section may be further divided into God’s instructions about the boundaries of the promised land in vv. 1–12, Moses’ instructions in vv. 13–15 that include the allotment in East-Jordan to the two-and-a-half tribes as part of Israel’s inheritance, and God’s instructions in vv. 16–29 as to who are authorised to allot the land, beginning with the joint leaders Joshua and Eleazar. This recalls the leadership established in 27:11–23 to replace Moses and prepares, at the level of the canonical text, for the actual account of the allotment that is narrated in Joshua 13–19. What is notable about vv. 1–12 is the way God effectively maps out the boundaries of the land. The precise map of the land that God traces out here parallels the precise map of Israel’s divinely guided journey through the wilderness in 33:1–49. The parallel may imply that Israel’s God and no other is Lord of the wilderness as well
as the land—contrary to what Moses feared that the inhabitants of the land would say if the exodus generation was destroyed ‘at one time’ (14:15–16).  

35:1–8: Provision for the Levites. In Numbers 1–4 and 26 the Levites are numbered after the rest of Israel. In keeping with this distinction their life in the land is legislated for after the allotment of land to Israel in 34. Further, they are provided with towns and grazing lands within the boundaries of tribal lands in line with the priestly legislation in Lev 18:21–25 that they do not inherit land. Recall that in Num 1:48–53 and 2:17 the Levites are assigned a special place around the tent sanctuary. This visible sign of the Levites’ special status and function during the wilderness journey is now transferred to the land by assigning them special locations within the tribal boundaries. They are an integral part of the community of Israel but at the same time distinct.

35:8–34: Cities of Refuge. Six cities of refuge are here selected from those assigned to the Levites; three in East-Jordan and three in West-Jordan. Two things may be noted in relation to my proposal. One is the role of these cities in providing a place for a “slayer” (NRSV) from an avenger of blood. Such a person has no safe haven or place within his or her own tribal lands. Related to this is the desire to avoid the spread of hostility and division that can erupt when a family or clan member is accused and on the run. The legislation seeks to preserve good order in a dangerous situation. A second point is the concern to avoid a situation where the shedding of blood would pollute the land in which God dwells. God’s presence in the land makes it a holy place, as God’s presence in the tent sanctuary made it and its environs a holy place that the Levites were assigned to protect (cf. 1:51–53). Numbers 35:34 leaves the reader somewhat uncertain as to whether the land is holy because the tent sanctuary will be erected in it in due course (although not mentioned as such) or whether the land is holy because it will replace the sanctuary. This ambiguity may be deliberate.

36:1–13: Daughters of Zelophehad. My understanding of 27:1–11 is that it seeks to ensure the continuity of a family name through the daughter when there is no son. In order to secure an inheritance in the land one needs to bear the right name. Numbers 36:1–13 deals with the implications this has for maintaining a tribe’s inheritance in the land when a daughter marries into another Israelite tribe (v. 3). Loss of land could lead to impoverishment and hostility. As with the cities of refuge the concern is to maintain right order in the land by maintaining the right boundaries that God marks out in 34:1–12. According to

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34 One could say that Numbers 33–34 combines with 26–32 to affirm that YHWH is the one Lord of history (time) and creation (place).

35 Biblical texts vary considerably about how the Levites lived in the land. The matter cannot be gone into here; for a brief discussion see Dozeman, Numbers 264.
v. 4, land alienated via a daughter’s marriage cannot be regained even in the Jubilee year. There is considerable debate about this verse because the legislation on the Jubilee in Leviticus 25 applies to property purchased or sold, not to one’s inheritance in the land. But, as Budd points out, this may actually be the point.\textsuperscript{36} The law of Jubilee does not include inherited land, which cannot be purchased or sold, or at least the author of the text wants to make this claim. Hence the solution is that a daughter must marry within her clan in order to safeguard the tribe’s inheritance (vv. 6–9).

I conclude therefore that, in what may look like a loose collection of add-on chapters in Numbers 26–36, the trajectory of the twin promises of descendants and land is carefully and skilfully tracked through the crisis of the sin and the demise of the exodus generation and their continuation and realisation in the new generation. Time and place, descendants and land, and the various ways these two themes are developed and connected, form the ties that bind these chapters together into a reasonably coherent whole and an integral part of the larger book.

\textsuperscript{36} Budd, Numbers 389.