

The Book of Numbers, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Purity in the Camp and the Nazirite Vow

Numbers 5:1–6:27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in these chapters is the holiness of God and what it means for Him to dwell in the midst of His people. The purity laws, the jealousy test, and the Nazirite vow were all given by God to Israel under the Old Covenant. They are not binding on Christians, for the ceremonial law was a shadow fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8 through 10). The teacher must guide the class to read these laws rightly, neither dismissing them as primitive nor binding them on the church, but receiving them as the Word of a holy God who teaches us, through Israel's shadows, the timeless truth that He is holy and that His presence calls His people to be set apart.

At the same time the lesson aims squarely at the spiritual formation of the student. The deeper current running through every section is consecration, a life made whole and undivided and given to God. Confession and restitution (5:5–10) press toward integrity in our relationships. The jealousy test (5:11–31) teaches us to trust God as the One who sees and judges what is hidden. The Nazirite (6:1–21) holds before us a vivid picture of voluntary, wholehearted devotion. And the Aaronic blessing (6:22–27) lifts the student's eyes to the face of God shining upon His people, a blessing fulfilled and surpassed in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Aim, then, not merely to inform but to form. Let the class leave longing to be set apart, ready to make old wrongs right, willing to trust God with what only He can see, and warmed by the certainty that in Christ the holy God has turned His shining face toward them in grace and peace.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Numbers 5:1–4 God commands that those with certain uncleanness be put outside the camp so they would not defile the camp where He dwelt. What does this teach us about the holiness of God and what it means for Him to live among His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 5 opens with God commanding that those with a serious skin disease, a bodily discharge, or defilement from contact with a dead body be sent outside the camp. The reason is given plainly in verse 3: that they defile not their camp, in the midst whereof I dwell. The center of gravity is the presence of God. Israel's camp was not an ordinary settlement. It was the dwelling place of the holy Lord, and that changed everything about how the people were to live.

We must be careful here. This was not God despising the sick or treating sufferers as worthless. The same Law made gracious provision for the unclean to be examined, restored, and brought back (see Leviticus 13 through 14). The point was instructional and protective, a vivid, physical lesson that sin and corruption cannot simply coexist with the holy God as though His presence made no difference. Holiness is not negotiable when God draws near.

For Israel this was the Old Covenant order, given for that people in that time. We are not bound to send the unclean outside a camp, for Christ has fulfilled and removed the ceremonial law (Colossians 2:14–17; Mark 7:18–19; Acts 10). Yet the abiding truth remains, and the New Testament presses it on the church: be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15–16). The God who dwelt in the camp now dwells in His people by His Spirit, and that nearness is still a call to purity.

The teacher should help the class feel the weight and the wonder together. The weight is that God is holy and will not be trifled with. The wonder is that this holy God chose to live in the middle of an ordinary, struggling people, and still does. Holiness is the natural climate of His presence, not an arbitrary burden.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's holiness is central to who He is and shapes how His people must live near Him.
- The ceremonial purity laws were given to Israel under the Old Covenant and are not bound on Christians (Colossians 2:14–17).
- Uncleanness here is instructional, not contempt for the sick; the Law made provision to restore the unclean.
- Christ touches and cleanses the unclean and has removed these ceremonial barriers (Mark 7:18–19; Acts 10).
- The abiding lesson is the call to holiness now carried to the church (1 Peter 1:15–16).

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing God lives among His people change the way we think about everyday holiness?
- How do we hold together God's holiness and His compassion when reading laws like this?
- What does it mean for the church today that God now dwells in His people by His Spirit?

Question 2

Student Question:

These verses say uncleanness affected the whole camp, not just the individual. Where do you see your own choices, clean or unclean, quietly affecting the people closest to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The text is striking on one point: uncleanness did not stay private. It defiled the camp, the shared space where everyone lived in the presence of God. One person's condition touched the whole community. This was not a private spirituality where what I do behind my tent flap is no one else's concern. In God's economy, lives are woven together.

That truth survives the passing of the Old Covenant and lands squarely in our own homes and congregations. Sin is rarely as private as we tell ourselves. A hidden bitterness sours a marriage. A secret habit drains a father's patience. A quiet compromise teaches children more than a hundred lectures. Our choices, clean or unclean, leak out into the people closest to us.

The flip side is just as true and far more hopeful. A life kept clean, a heart kept whole before God, also touches everyone nearby. Holiness is contagious in its own way. The point of this question is not to provoke guilt but honesty, to help each student see that they are never sinning, or obeying, in a sealed room.

The teacher should keep this warm and personal. Let people name, even just to themselves, the ways their choices ripple outward. The goal is tenderness toward the people they love and a fresh resolve to walk clean for their sake as well as for God's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal choices affect the whole community, not just the individual.
- Sin is rarely as private as we imagine; its effects leak into those nearest us.
- A life kept clean before God also blesses and steadies the people around us.
- Personal accountability, our own choices and their real consequences, not inherited guilt.

Discussion Prompts

- Whose life is most affected, for good or ill, by your daily walk with God?
- Where have you told yourself a sin was private when it was quietly hurting others?
- How could pursuing holiness this week bless someone close to you?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Numbers 5:5–10 God deals with a person who wrongs another and is guilty. What does the requirement to confess the sin, make full restitution, and add a fifth to it teach us about true repentance toward both God and the person wronged?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 5:5–10 turns from ritual uncleanness to moral wrong between people. When a man or woman commits any sin against another and so trespasses against the Lord, God lays out a clear path: confess the sin, make full restitution to the one wronged, and add a fifth part, twenty

percent, on top. Notice that the wrong is named as a trespass against the Lord even though it was done to a neighbor. Every sin against a person is also a sin against God.

True repentance, then, has more than one direction. It looks up to God in confession, and it looks across to the person harmed in restitution. The added fifth makes the point unforgettable: real repentance is not content merely to break even. It goes the extra distance, restoring more than was taken, because love wants to make things genuinely right, not just technically settled.

This stands as a permanent rebuke to cheap repentance, the kind that says sorry to God in private while leaving the victim still robbed, still wronged, still waiting. Zacchaeus understood this when he met Jesus and gave back fourfold (Luke 19:8). The form of restitution changes from age to age, but the heart of it, owning the wrong and making it right, is timeless.

Teachers should let this section search the conscience gently. Many believers carry confessed sins they have never actually made right with the person involved. God's path here invites them to finish their repentance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every sin against another person is also a sin against God.
- True repentance includes both confession to God and restitution to the one wronged.
- The added fifth shows repentance goes beyond bare minimums toward genuine restoration.
- Repentance is a vital part of the obedient, trusting response God has always required.
- Zacchaeus models restitution flowing from a changed heart (Luke 19:8).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God count a sin against a neighbor as a trespass against Himself?
- What does the added fifth teach us about the spirit of true repentance?
- Where can confession to God become an excuse for avoiding the harder work of making things right?

Question 4

Student Question:

Read Numbers 5:6–7 again. Is there a wrong you have confessed to God but never actually made right with the person you hurt? What is keeping you from doing that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves the truth of 5:6–7 from the head to the hands. It is one thing to agree that repentance should include restitution. It is another to walk to a person we have wronged and actually make it right. The gap between those two is where many of us have quietly camped for years.

We are good at telling God we are sorry. The vertical confession feels safe and private. The horizontal repair feels exposed and costly. Yet Scripture knits the two together so tightly that James can say confess your faults one to another (James 5:16) and Jesus can say leave your gift at the altar and first be reconciled to your brother (Matthew 5:23–24).

The teacher's task here is to create honest, low-pressure space. Some restitutions are financial, some are an apology long overdue, some are a relationship to be sought out. The point is not to manufacture guilt but to help students notice a specific, doable next step they have been avoiding.

Be careful to keep the gospel central. We do not make wrongs right to earn God's favor, but because we have received His grace and want our repentance to be real. Grace fuels restitution; it does not excuse us from it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance is incomplete when we confess to God but avoid the people we hurt.
- Scripture binds vertical confession and horizontal reconciliation together (Matthew 5:23–24; James 5:16).
- Restitution flows from grace received, not as a way to earn God's favor.
- A real next step is usually specific, costly, and within reach.

Discussion Prompts

- What makes making things right with a person harder than confessing to God?
- What is one specific wrong you could begin to make right this week?
- How does the grace you have received in Christ make restitution possible rather than terrifying?

Question 5

Student Question:

Numbers 5:11–31 gives the law for a husband consumed by jealousy, a test placed entirely in God's hands. What does this strange passage reveal about God as the One who sees the hidden truth and judges righteously when human beings cannot?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 5:11–31 is one of the strangest passages in the Law, the ordeal of jealousy. When a husband was consumed by suspicion that his wife had been unfaithful, but there was no witness and no proof, the matter was brought before the Lord at the tabernacle. The woman drank water mixed with dust from the tabernacle floor, and God Himself, not the husband and not the priest, would reveal the truth through the outcome.

Several things deserve careful handling. First, this law actually restrained a jealous husband. In the surrounding cultures a suspicious man might simply punish or divorce his wife on a hunch. Here the matter was taken out of his hands and placed before God. Second, the outcome depended on a miracle of God, not on the natural properties of the water. This was God stepping in to judge what no human court could see.

Above all, the passage reveals God as the One who sees the hidden truth and judges righteously when human beings cannot. Guilt or innocence that no witness could establish was open and bare before Him. He is the searcher of hearts (Hebrews 4:13).

Like the rest of this ceremonial provision, the ordeal belonged to Israel under the Old Covenant and is not practiced by the church. But its great truth stands forever: nothing is hidden from God, and He will judge what is secret with perfect justice. The teacher should resist the temptation to either mock the ritual or defend every cultural detail, and instead point to the holy, all-seeing God behind it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is the One who sees the hidden truth and judges righteously when human beings cannot.
- The ordeal actually restrained a jealous husband by placing the matter before God.
- The outcome depended on God's direct intervention, not on the water itself.
- This ceremonial provision was for Israel and is not practiced in the church.
- Nothing is hidden from God; He searches and judges the secret things (Hebrews 4:13).

Discussion Prompts

- What does this passage reveal about God's knowledge of things no human can prove?
- How does it comfort or sober you that God sees and will judge what is hidden?
- Why is it wise to leave ultimate judgment of hidden matters in God's hands rather than our own?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you have been wrongly suspected, or when you have wrongly suspected someone else, how have you handled it? What would it mean to truly trust God to be the One who sees and judges what is hidden?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question brings the all-seeing God of 5:11–31 into our own experience of suspicion. Most of us have stood on both sides of it. We have been wrongly suspected, our motives doubted, our name quietly stained by someone's assumption. And we have wrongly suspected others,

building a case in our minds with no real evidence, convicting them in the courtroom of our own imagination.

The ancient ordeal handed the verdict to God. That is exactly where suspicion still belongs. When we cannot know another's heart, we are not called to play God, manufacturing certainty we do not have. We are called to trust the One who does see, to refuse to slander, and to wait on Him.

There is comfort here too for the wrongly accused. When others misjudge you and you cannot prove your innocence, God knows. He sees what no one else can see. You can entrust your reputation to Him as Jesus did, who when He was reviled did not revile in return, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23).

The teacher should let this be practical and pastoral. Suspicion poisons marriages, friendships, and churches. The cure is not naivety but a settled trust that God sees, God knows, and God will judge rightly, freeing us from the exhausting work of being everyone's judge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are tempted both to be wrongly suspected and to wrongly suspect others.
- When we cannot know a heart, judgment belongs to God, not to us.
- The wrongly accused can entrust their reputation to the God who sees (1 Peter 2:23).
- Suspicion, left unchecked, poisons marriages, friendships, and congregations.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you been wrongly suspected, and how did you handle it?
- Where are you tempted to play judge over someone's hidden motives?
- What would change if you truly trusted God to see and judge what you cannot?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Numbers 6:1–8 the Nazirite separates from wine, from cutting the hair, and from contact with the dead, all signs of being set apart to the Lord. What does this vow teach us about wholehearted consecration and devotion to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 6:1–8 introduces the Nazirite, from a Hebrew word meaning to separate or consecrate. Any Israelite, man or woman, could take this vow to be set apart to the Lord for a season. Three outward marks accompanied it: abstaining from wine and anything from the grapevine, leaving the hair uncut, and avoiding contact with the dead, even of close family.

Each sign pointed to wholehearted devotion. Setting aside wine meant forgoing an ordinary, even good, pleasure as a token of focused dedication. The uncut hair was a visible, public banner that this person belonged to God in a special way. Avoiding the dead kept the Nazirite from the deepest ceremonial defilement, a picture of being preserved wholly for the living God. The vow took good and normal things and surrendered them for a time to say, I am the Lord's.

Crucially, this was voluntary and usually temporary. It was not a higher class of super-Christian, and it is not a vow bound on us today. The Law of Moses, including the Nazirite regulations, has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Hebrews 8 through 10). Yet as a picture, the Nazirite shines. Here is a human life deliberately set apart for God, marked out, consecrated, whole.

The teacher should lift up the heart of the vow rather than its mechanics. The Nazirite preaches a sermon to us: God delights when a person says, not because I am forced, but because I love Him, I will set myself apart and give Him my whole heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Nazirite vow expressed voluntary, wholehearted consecration to the Lord.
- Its signs (no wine, uncut hair, avoiding the dead) all pictured being set apart for God.
- The vow was voluntary and usually temporary, open to both men and women.
- The Nazirite law is part of the Law of Moses, fulfilled in Christ and not bound on Christians (Hebrews 8 through 10).
- As a picture, it calls every believer to a life consecrated to God (Romans 12:1).

Discussion Prompts

- What does the Nazirite's surrender of good things teach about devotion to God?
- Why does it matter that the vow was voluntary rather than commanded of everyone?
- How does this picture of being set apart speak to the Christian's call to consecration?

Question 8

Student Question:

The Nazirite chose to give up good and ordinary things for a season to mark a life set apart for God. What is one good thing you might set aside, or one ordinary habit you might surrender, to show God you belong wholly to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the picture of the Nazirite and gently asks the student to feel its pull. We do not take this vow. But the impulse behind it, the desire to mark our lives as belonging wholly to God, is one the New Testament not only permits but commends. Paul calls us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1).

There is something clarifying about voluntarily setting aside even a good thing for a season. Many believers practice this instinctively, fasting from a meal, stepping back from entertainment, giving up a comfort to make more room for prayer. The point is never that the thing is evil, but that surrendering it sharpens our focus and trains the heart to say, God is more to me than this.

The teacher should make clear this is invitation, not law. We are free in Christ. But freedom is most beautiful when it is freely laid down in love. Encourage students to think concretely, what is one good thing I could set aside, or one ordinary habit I could surrender, to show God He has my whole heart?

Keep the focus on devotion, not deprivation. The Nazirite gave things up in order to give himself more fully to the Lord. The aim is not a grim self-denial but a glad consecration.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Setting aside good things for a season can sharpen devotion to God.
- The New Testament calls us to present ourselves wholly to God (Romans 12:1).
- Such surrender is free invitation in Christ, not a binding law.
- The aim is glad consecration, not grim deprivation.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one good thing you might set aside for a season to focus on God?
- How can voluntary surrender deepen rather than diminish your joy in the Lord?
- What ordinary habit, if surrendered, would most clearly say God has your whole heart?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:22–27, the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. How is this blessing, the face of God shining upon His people, fulfilled and even surpassed for us in Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 4:6; John 1:14, 16–17)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 6:22–27 gives the Aaronic blessing, the words God put in the mouths of the priests to bless Israel: The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. Three lines, each naming the Lord, rising from blessing and keeping, to His shining face and grace, to His lifted countenance and peace.

At the heart of it is the face of God turned toward His people. In the ancient world a king's shining face meant favor, acceptance, and welcome. For the holy God whose presence had to be

approached with such care to turn His face in grace toward Israel was an astonishing gift. And God adds a promise in verse 27: they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them. The blessing was real because God Himself stood behind it.

This blessing finds its fullness in Jesus Christ. In Him the face of God has shone upon us as never before. Paul writes that God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). John says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, and of His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (John 1:14, 16–17). What the priests could only speak, Jesus has brought near in person.

And the peace of the final line is the very peace Jesus secured and gives, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). The teacher should let this be the warm, glad climax of the lesson. The whole movement of these chapters, from a holy God who must be approached with care, lands here, on a God who turns His shining, gracious, peace-giving face toward His people, supremely in His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Aaronic blessing centers on the face of God turned in favor toward His people.
- God Himself stood behind the blessing; His name was put upon them (6:27).
- The blessing finds its fullness in Christ, in whose face the glory of God shines (2 Corinthians 4:6).
- The peace of the blessing is fulfilled in peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:1).
- What the priests spoke, Jesus has brought near in person (John 1:14, 16–17).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the holy God turns His shining face toward His people?
- How is this blessing fulfilled and surpassed for us in Jesus Christ?
- How should the certainty of God's gracious face shape the way you live this week?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole passage, the clean camp, the call to make wrongs right, the test that trusts God to judge, the Nazirite set apart, and the shining face of God, name one specific way Jesus is forming you to be a person set apart and wholehearted toward Him.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage. We have walked through a clean camp where the holy God dwells, a call to make wrongs right with both God and neighbor, a test that hands hidden judgment to God, a Nazirite set apart in wholehearted devotion, and a blessing in which God's

shining face turns toward His people. One thread runs through all of it: a holy God draws near and calls His people to be set apart and whole toward Him.

That thread runs straight into Jesus. He is the holy One who came and dwelt among us. He is the One who makes us clean, who calls us to integrity, who sees and judges in perfect righteousness, who consecrates us to God, and in whose face the glory of God shines. Everything Israel saw in shadow, we have in Him.

So the question turns personal. Not what did I learn, but how is Jesus forming me through this passage? Perhaps toward a holiness I have neglected, a wrong I need to make right, a suspicion I need to surrender, a consecration I have been avoiding, or a fresh confidence in the gracious face of God. The teacher should give space for honest, specific reflection.

End by pointing students back to the blessing. The same God who turned His face toward Israel has turned His face toward us in Christ, full of grace and peace. To be formed by this passage is to walk out of the room more whole, more set apart, and more sure of His favor than we walked in.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One thread unites the passage: a holy God draws near and calls His people to be set apart and whole.
- Every shadow here finds its substance in Jesus Christ.
- Spiritual formation means letting the passage actually change how we live.
- The gracious face of God in Christ is the ground of our holiness and peace.

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this passage pressed most personally on your heart?
- Name one specific way Jesus is forming you to be set apart and wholehearted.
- How will the assurance of God's gracious face shape your week ahead?