

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 3: Purity in the Camp and the Nazirite Vow -- Numbers 5:1–6:27

Picture the camp at dawn. Tents fan out in every direction, smoke from a thousand cooking fires drifting up into the desert sky, and at the very center of it all, the tabernacle, the tent where the holy God of Israel has chosen to live among His people. That is the wonder you have to hold in your mind to read these chapters rightly. The Lord is not far off on some distant mountain. He is right here, in the middle of the neighborhood, close enough to touch. And when God moves into the middle of your life, He brings His holiness with Him.

So God begins to talk about cleanness, about who may stay near the tent and who must step outside for a time. To our ears it can sound cold, even harsh. But slow down and listen with the heart. A God who did not care about His people would never bother with the details of their daily lives. It is precisely because He is near, because He intends to bless them and not destroy them, that He teaches them to keep the camp clean. Holiness here is not God being fussy. It is God making room to dwell with people who would otherwise be undone by His glory.

Then, in chapter 6, something tender happens. God makes a way for an ordinary Israelite, a man or a woman, to say, I want to give myself wholly to the Lord for a season. No grumbling required, no crisis forcing the issue. Just a heart that says, set me apart. The Nazirite let the hair grow, set aside the wine, kept away from death, and walked through the camp as a living sign that a human life can be consecrated to God. And the chapter ends with words you have probably heard at the close of a worship service, the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you. That is what God wanted His holiness to do, to shine upon His people, not to scorch them.

You and I are not camped in the Sinai wilderness, and we are not under the Law of Moses (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8 through 10). We do not take Nazirite vows or send the unclean outside a tent of meeting. But do not miss what God is after, because it presses straight into your week. He still calls His people to be set apart. He still asks for hearts that are whole and undivided. And in Christ, the face of God shines on us more brightly than any Israelite at that tent ever saw (2 Corinthians 4:6). The question this lesson lays at your feet is simple and searching: will you let the holy God who has come near make you His own?

Group Discussion: Why do you think God connected His presence in the middle of the camp so closely with the call to keep that camp clean, and what does that connection teach us about living near a holy God today?

Personal Reflection: Is there an area of your life right now where you have been keeping God at a comfortable distance rather than letting His holiness draw near and change you? What would it look like to let Him in this week?

Read Numbers 5:1–6:27

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 8 through 10, the priesthood, sacrifices, and ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant as shadows fulfilled in Christ; 1 Peter 1:14–16, be holy, for I am holy, the call to holiness carried into the church; 2 Corinthians 4:6, God who said let light shine has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Christ; Romans 12:1–2, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, the New Testament shape of consecration; Acts 18:18 and Acts 21:23–26, Paul and a vow, showing such vows were known but never bound on Christians as law

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com