



## PAVING A PATH TO PURITY

Numbers 5-6

Neither a church nor an individual can hope to follow and honor the Lord without a commitment to pursuing holiness. As these chapters in Numbers remind us, a holy life is not sin-free, but it is marked by a desire to be free of sin in every relationship and activity of life.

In the book of Numbers, the Lord is preparing Israel to follow Him through the wilderness and into the promised land.

They need to be ready for battle, and they need to be aware of God's presence, as we saw in chapters 1 through 4. Now here in chapters 5 and 6, the Lord puts the people on the path to personal purity as well as holy living as a nation.

The Lord speaks to Moses at the beginning of chapter 5:

*“Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead. . . . that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell.”* (verses 2-3)

This command might appear to lack compassion, but earlier in Leviticus 13:46, the Lord delivered this same command concerning ceremonial uncleanness.

You see, at this point, these physical illnesses symbolized sin, and God wanted sin kept out of the camp. So, He's saying to His people, “It's time to make the camp clean. I live here; I dwell in your midst, and I'm calling you to holy living.” This is not a heartless command. In fact, there were additional laws about allowing these same people back into the camp once they were cleansed.

Paving the path to purity not only involved cleanness in the camp; it included interpersonal relationships as well. We read here in verse 6 what God says:



Model of Egyptian artisans



*“When a man or woman commits any of the sins . . . and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin . . . And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong.”*

In other words, if the community is to be pure, the people need to deal with sin in their personal relationships. Unresolved conflicts are poisonous to a community of God’s people. They can destroy a nation, a school, a family, a ministry team.

The Lord Jesus addressed this when He said if you know someone has something against you, you should immediately go and be reconciled to that person. This even takes precedence over worship (Matthew 5:24).

And sometimes reconciling with a person you have wronged involves making restitution. God says here that you don’t just apologize for stealing or causing someone loss; you pay for the person’s loss.

But what happens if someone is stealing another person’s husband or wife? That’s a whole lot more serious. The remainder of Numbers 5 outlines a trial procedure involving an accusation of adultery.

We’re given a case here where a husband suspects his wife of being unfaithful. He’s not sure his suspicions are correct. She’s denying it, and there are no eyewitnesses to testify against her.

Now keep in mind that this rather unique trial procedure is going to depend on God’s direct intervention. He *is* an eyewitness and knows the truth.

First, the jealous husband brings his wife to the priest here in verse 15 along with a grain offering. We then read in verse 16, “And the priest shall bring her near and set her before the LORD.”

Then the priest puts some dust from the tabernacle floor into a jar of water taken from the basin. All

this has symbolic significance and points to the holy presence of God.

The Lord’s instructions continue:

*“The priest shall make her take an oath, saying, ‘If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while you were under your husband’s authority, be free from this water of bitterness that brings the curse. But if you have gone astray . . . and some man other than your husband has lain with you, then . . . May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels and make your womb swell and your thigh fall away.’ And the woman shall say, ‘Amen, Amen.’”* (verses 19-20, 22)

The woman’s “Amen,” or “Let it be,” expresses her agreement with God’s judgment.

So, if she’s guilty, she will essentially have immediate internal pain and will remain forever childless. But what if she’s innocent? The text says in verse 28, “But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, then she shall be free and shall conceive children.”

I imagine by now a guilty woman would break down and confess rather than drink this water and risk her future health. But remember, this is a public trial; so, you can imagine this serious moment when secret sin is going to be revealed by God.

I can imagine the other Israelites in this crowd doing a heart-check on their own secret thought life—perhaps even their own adulterous relationships. This is a moment in the life of the entire community when God is paving a path to purity.



Now the other side of the coin here is the possibility of an unreasonable, jealous husband. He's accused his wife without physical evidence, perhaps without a heart-to-heart talk with her and a serious evaluation of his own heart. If she's innocent, he is about to be publicly humiliated—not to mention the tragic consequences to his own marriage and the disgrace he's going to bring to his wife and family.

So, this isn't a trial procedure that everybody's going to run to if they feel a little suspicious.

And the falsely accused wife can take comfort in the fact that she is standing "before the Lord." She can rest in knowing that He knows her heart and her life—and He's about to reveal her innocence.

Let me tell you, this trial from the Lord is divinely brilliant. Who's going forward with it when you have the obvious presence of God there in the pillar of cloud? Maybe that's why we have no record in Scripture of this trial ever being used in Israel. It seems it was certainly enough to make a statement, however—and pave a path to purity.

Now in chapter 6, the subject turns to the holy vow of a Nazirite. The Nazirite vow was a voluntary oath setting oneself apart to serving God for a specific period of time. The Nazirite was identified by his uncut hair, abstinence from any product of the grapevine, and the avoidance of contact with anything that had died.

In these two chapters, God illustrates—and encourages—taking a path that leads to purity, whether it's ceremonial cleansing, reconciled relationships, marital faithfulness, or a vow to avoid any appearance of sin or compromise.

And if you're thinking, *I'm glad I'm not living in Old Testament times, where purity was such a big deal*, well, think again. The apostle Paul encourages the same passion for purity in 2 Corinthians 7:1: "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." The New Testament believer should be no

less passionate about purity than an Old Testament individual.

Now here at the end of Numbers 6, the Lord gives the priests a blessing to speak over the people of Israel. The words may be familiar to you:

*"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."* (verses 24-26)

Wow, this blessing is the icing on the cake. It gives you and me, to this day, the highest motivation we can have to pursue holiness and live for God. Why? Because we love this great and gracious God who blesses us and keeps us and causes His face to shine upon us and gives us peace.

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What role does prayer and God's word have in your efforts to resolve conflict with others? Why is "avoidance" in resolving conflict such a powerful tool in Satan's tool box? Who is always the innocent "third person" in any unresolved conflict between believers?

Married or Single: what are you actively doing to honor and guard your marriage or relationships from impurity? What does this ritual teach about God's view of marital or relational purity?

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