

October 19, 2025

INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN: NUMBERS 33:50-56; 34:13-15

Introductory Activity (ETB LG, 81)

Read: Ask a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 64 of the PSG [See Notes Box]. Briefly discuss new construction they are seeing in their areas. Note again that every construction project needs a master plan to work.

Ask: Why is it important to follow the plan when doing construction? What happens when we don't? (PSG, p. 64)

Lead: Guide adults to discuss other examples in life when it is important to follow instructions and the consequences of failing to do so.

Transition: As we study this last session in the book of Numbers, we will see God's instructions to the Israelites for occupying the land of Canaan. We will read the promises God made to Israel if they were faithful in obedience. As you look at these verses, reflect on how important obedience to God is for the health of our church and for your own spiritual growth."

1. THE LAND (NUM. 33:50-53)

Read (or have someone read) Numbers 33:50-53.

Explain: Moses sets the scene for us. The people have arrived and camped on the plains of Moab. They are camped on the edge of the Jordan, a river they will have to cross. They are camped in sight of Jericho, a city they will have to conquer. In this place on the precipice of all God had promised them, the Lord speaks. He begins with a formal introduction to very important instructions. In the passages we will study today, He will instruct them in three very distinct ways. He will guide them concerning distractions, challenges, and trust. The first three verses reveal the dangers of distraction.

Ask: Have you ever talked or spent time with a person who is easily distracted? What do you find most frustrating about those encounters?

Explain: Distractions and excursions from the plan can be fun when you are on vacation or when exploring a city. It can be amusing when talking with someone who is constantly going off on tangents. However, an artist or novelist who never finishes a project because they constantly jump to a new one will become unproductive instead of the next great artist or novelist. In the business world, people who are easily diverted from a project when they become enamored by a shiny new idea will be unproductive and ultimately unsuccessful. As the Israelites begin the

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Numbers* (Preaching)
- *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Numbers* (TOTC)
- *Numbers* (Harrison)
- *New American Commentary: Numbers* (NAC)

"We've all seen it. The "For Sale" sign is removed from the plot of land. Workers show up and conduct the survey. They put little orange marker flags in the ground. Trenches and holes are cut and dug. The ground is leveled. Concrete trucks show up. Construction crews arrive at the site day after day. In a few months, the house, subdivision, or apartment complex is complete. Every step occurred according to a plan that someone developed beforehand." (ETB PSG, 64)

"The phrase 'tell the Israelites' is used as a formal way to introduce instruction from the Lord to the people (5:6; 9:10; 27:8)." (ETBC, 73)

process of completing the long-anticipated project of taking the land, God warns them about distractions. He does so by first reminding them of the goal.

Read verse 51 and then read verse 53. (See notes box.)

Explain: First, verse 51 reminds them they are not done yet. They have finally arrived at the place they have hoped for during the 40 years of wandering. However, the project is not complete. The people must cross into the land. Second. They are “to take possession” and “settle in” the land that the Lord is giving them. They can’t stop now, and when they get into the land, they must not allow the distractions of the land to divert them from the project.

Explore: Have the group look at verse 52 and call out the possible distractions.

Explain: Two distinct distractions lay before them: A **Poisonous People** and **Potential Idols**.

Poisonous People: We might ask ourselves why the people must be removed from the land. There are many possible reasons, but two stand out. One is related to the peoples of the land. One is related to the people of God.

- **The People of the Land:** The people in the land are unrighteous in their beliefs and their actions. God had allowed many years for them to turn to Him. We see this in the book of Genesis 15:16. There God promised Abraham that His descendants would serve in Egypt and God would bring them back to the land. However, he would wait 400 years “for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” Now with Abraham’s descendants camped on the plains of Moab, God’s judgment had arrived. In Leviticus 19:24 and following, God describes the people of the land. He says they “defiled themselves” because of their “detestable acts.” God will judge them, and He will use His people to do it.
- **The People of God:** The Canaanites must be driven out for the benefit of God’s people as well. We will see more about this in the following verses, but here we can note that we cannot allow sinful people to infiltrate our lives. Moreover, we cannot fill our lives with sinful people. Yes, we will have to interact with the world if we are to win the world for Christ, but our lives must be filled with righteousness and righteous people. Otherwise, the sinful people around us will poison our relationship with the Lord and distract us from His plans.

Potential Idols: Next God tells the people to “destroy all their stone images and cast images, and demolish all their high places.” (v. 52b) In the next passage, we will see the ramifications for God’s people if they fail to do this. First, though, let’s note what they are to do. They are to destroy the idols in the homes and in the streets. They are then to climb to the tops of the hills and destroy their make-shift temples and shrines. “Every remnant

Notes:

Verse 51: ⁵¹ Tell the Israelites: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan,

Verse 53: ⁵³ You are to take possession of the land and settle in it because I have given you the land to possess.

of the Canaanites' religious system was to be removed." (ETBC, 73) This is necessary because the idols of the pagans are potential idols for the people of God. In the West, we do not have many "stone images" or "cast images" that we are tempted to worship.

Discuss: What are some potential idols we might encounter in our lives?

Explain: We have many potential idols including popularity, wealth, sex, and sexuality. We cannot rid the world of them, but we can rid our lives of their power. In Leviticus 19, just after God condemned the detestable acts of the Canaanites in chapter 18, He charges the people to "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." (v. 2b) The anti-God beliefs of the Canaanites had led to practices that were anti-God. If we believe the potential idols of this world can produce in us what God wants for us, they will lead us to unrighteous living.

Summarize Transition: God begins by reminding the people of their goal to take and settle the land. He warns them to rid the land of distractions of the most important thing: holy living. We, too, should keep our eye on the prize of Christ-like living. We, too, should remove the distractions of poisonous people and potential idols. In doing so, we will face challenges. Let's look at the next passage. As we read the passage, "listen for God's promises and consequences for failing to follow His directions." (ETB LG, 85)

2. THE TASK (NUM. 33:54-56)

Read (or have someone read) Numbers 33:54-56.

Explain: God continues with His instructions for the people. In so doing, He presents the task before them, and that task has some implied challenges. First, we see the challenge to **Believe Who God is**. In verse 54, God gives preliminary instructions on how to divide up the land. (**TEACHER'S NOTE: WE WILL COME BACK TO THE SPECIFICS OF THIS VERSE LATER IN THE LESSON.**) We should not let this instruction pass us by at this point in the account. It is important because God is speaking as if they have already taken the land, driven out the people, and destroyed their religion. As the people stand on the plains of Moab listening to Moses deliver God's words, I can imagine one man listening but gazing in the direction of the flooded river Jordan and the foreboding city of Jericho. Before he can do anything God is commanding him and his fellow Israelites, he must first face the challenge of believing that God is who He says He is. If we return to Leviticus 18:24, in which God speaks of the defiled people in the land and the potential for them to defile Israel, God makes an interesting statement. Speaking of the people in the land, he says that He is "driving out" the people. The Israelites must never forget that God will bring to fruition His promises through His power. So, the first challenge is a mental and emotional challenge. Will I believe God?

Notes:

For more on modern idols, see Tim Keller's book *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power*.

The second challenge is to **Do What God Commands**. In verses 55 and 56, we see “a stern warning of the consequences of disobedience to the instructions of the Lord God.” (ETBC, 76) If they fail to drive out the people, God says they “will become barbs for your eyes and thorns for your sides.” We could dissect the language of the metaphors here, but suffice it to say, the people of the land had the potential to become a hindrance and a nuisance for God’s people. We see all of this play out in the book of Judges and the later history of Israel. First, they fail to drive out the people. At the end of the book of Joshua, we see that the people did settle the land, but they left pockets of the original inhabitants here and there. One scholar writes, “The Canaanites were apparently more determined to live there than the Israelites were. The heathens had more determination to cling to their turf than the believers had to dispossess them.” (Peaching, 351) This is a word to believers today: we must be determined to live righteous and holy lives. This requires intentional effort to face the challenges of temptation, both internal and external.

Discuss: What intentional efforts can we put into place to rid ourselves of sin and sinfulness? (practicing the spiritual disciplines like prayer, study, stewardship, fasting, and participating in Christian community)

Explain: The refusal of God’s people to stay the course and drive out the inhabitants of the land became a problem. “The confrontation demanded by the Lord degenerated into unholy cohabitation.” (Preaching, 351) And this cohabitation was not without its own challenges. The people do indeed become a hindrance and nuisance. We know they are a hindrance to right religion because the people of God eventually turn to the false gods of the pagans. “Allowing the peoples of the land who were the source of idolatry to remain in the land would eventually lead to an infectious disease that would gradually consume the nation like leprosy.” (NAC, 531) The people are also a nuisance because, as the book of Judges shows, they constantly attack and go to war with the people of God. Like the people of God, if we refuse to rid our lives of sin and sinfulness, we will eventually succumb to the temptations of sin and find that we are constantly at war with ourselves.

In verse 56, God lays out the ultimate result if they do not drive out the people. If they failed to drive them out, God says, “what I had planned to do to them, I will do to you.” In Leviticus 18:24 and following, God explains why. The hindrance of the people that will eventually lead to the defilement of God’s people who will make them just as unfit to possess the land as the pagans had been. Therefore, God would dispossess the Israelites of the land just as he had the “Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hethites, Perizzites, Rephaim, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.” (Gen. 15:19-20) In other words, if the Israelites did not follow God’s instructions, they would fail to possess God’s blessings.

Notes:

“The book of Judges gives a vivid picture of the harassment of Israel by the pagan peoples left in the land.” (ETBC, 77)

Summarize and Transition: God promised to give the people the land. They had to face the challenge of believing Him. They then had to face the challenge of doing what He commanded. We are in the same situation. We must face the challenge of believing in God and following God. If we fail to follow God's instruction, we too will fail to receive his blessings.

3. THE PLAN (NUM. 34:13-15)

Read or have someone read Numbers 34:13-15.

Explain: This passage might not seem very important or very applicable to the lives of modern believers. However, we can glean some great practical wisdom from it if we consider it deeply. First, let's consider what God said in verse 13 alongside what he said in the previous passage, chapter 33:54.

Reread verse 54 (see notes box).

Explain: God had a plan to divide the land. It was a plan that, if followed, would help the people act like God's people. Let's see how.

First, verse 54 reveals that God will sovereignly apportion the land. This was not going to be a mad "land rush" like history reports happened in 1889 when men and families lined up around the "unassigned" lands that would become Oklahoma. On April 22, 1889, those seeking land in the "promised land" waited until noon for a signal like the booming that would come from the cannon at Fort Reno. With the boom of the cannon or the shot of an officer's musket, the people were off. They charged into the territory to claim their 160 acres of land. "It was a day of chaos, excitement, and utter confusion." The chaos and confusion led to contested claims and disagreements in the years to come.¹ The sovereign apportionment of Canaan by its rightful owner, the Lord God, would result in less chaos and confusion. The people would receive what the Lord had for them as determined by the divinely ordained falling of the lots. This plan would cut down on disagreements or accusations of corruption. No one could lobby for a certain portion of land, and no tribe could take a portion of the land from another by force.

Verse 54 also reveals that God would fairly divide the land. The larger tribes would receive more land and the smaller tribes less. To this, too, would help the people act righteously. No one could say they were slighted or did not get enough land or that some other group got more than they deserved.

Application: Numbers 33:54 and 34:13 show us that the Lord had a plan, and He would command who got what part of the land. We can apply this to our lives in an interesting way. It reminds us to **Trust the Plan**. Sometimes, in business or the community, we do not always want to work the plan or follow an established process for decision-making. This can be

⁵⁴ "You are to receive the land as an inheritance by lot according to your clans. Increase the inheritance for a large clan and decrease it for a small one. Whatever place the lot indicates for someone will be his. You will receive an inheritance according to your ancestral tribes.

¹ <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=LA014>

true in the church as well. Churches have ways of doing things that are not bad but might seem a little cumbersome to some. Some might ask, Why do we need a committee to do this or that. Or why do we need a budget to guide our spending? Or why do we need to have a business meeting and vote on this “widely agreed upon idea?” These processes are important because if they are followed, they will cut down on future disagreements, allegations of coercion, or allegations of “dictates from on high.” We should follow the process because the process helps us act like God’s people.

Explain: Not only do we see that we should trust God’s plan. But we also see that we can **Trust God’s People**.

Reread Number 34:14-15.

Explain: This might require a bit of background to understand. We can learn what is going on here if we go back to Number 32. In that chapter, we see that two tribes requested land on the east side of the Jordan, and half of one tribe was rewarded with land there as well. This land was outside of the land promised by the Lord, and initially, Moses hesitated to allow such a thing. He said their request was akin to the faithlessness of their parents’ generation, who had refused to enter the land. However, the tribes who would eventually settle east of the Jordan agreed to march with the armies of the other tribes and do their part in taking the land. In Joshua 4:12, we see the armies of the Transjordan leading as the people marched into the promised land.

Application: We might not think much about this, but this bit of information can provide practical application for us today. It reveals that we should trust the people of God and be trustworthy people of God. We might apply this to business and community life, but we can also apply it to church life, discipleship, and service. The Transjordan tribes had received their inheritance, yet they fulfilled their responsibilities. As believers today, we have received our inheritance as children of God. We should faithfully ensure that others receive theirs as well. We do this through faithful evangelism. We also do this by discipling the next generation and serving in the church. We are not saved sit, soak, sour. Instead, we are saved to win the lost, work in God’s kingdom, and willingly serve others.

Summarize and Transition: While this passage might seem insignificant to us on first glance, it can remind us how we are to go about the business of the Lord. We work the processes in place to help maintain order in the church. We also do our part to ensure the work of the church and God’s Kingdom moves forward. We can trust God’s process and trust God’s people.

CONCLUDE

In our lesson, God gave practical, important instructions to the people as they prepared to take the Promised Land. He instructs them to rid the land of spiritual distractions. He reveals the challenge to trust Him. Lastly, he challenges them to trust the system He has established. We, too, should rid our lives of spiritual distractions, trust the Lord, and trust the established processes to accomplish His tasks.

Close in Prayer