

Preparing the Individuals (Chapter 5)

The armies have been mustered, the marching order has been determined, the instructions for moving the tabernacle and the camp has been given. Preparations are quickly falling into place for the Israelites to move up and take possession of the Land of Canaan. This chapter takes into account the preparations of the individual believers, especially the *spiritual preparations*.

The Israelites were going to be traveling in the company of the most High God. Their God was powerful, loving, and *holy*. Already in Leviticus, the LORD had set down “cleanliness” laws for them to illustrate the fact that anyone who came before Him must be holy too. For example, if they touched a dead body they would be “ceremonially unclean” for a period of time. Depending on what had made him unclean, a person might have to remain outside the camp for a certain number of days or go through a ceremonial washing. Many of the regulations concerning cleanliness were outlined in Leviticus 13-15. It was all to picture for the people their own sinfulness and God’s holiness. How they could look forward to Jesus Christ who would *truly* wash away their sin and make them “clean” before God!

This chapter in the book of Numbers revisits some of the instructions from Leviticus., reminding the people that they were to be pure before God.

- vv1-4** A person was *unclean* if:
- He had a skin disease,
 - A bodily discharge, or
 - Touched a dead body (human or animal)
- The unclean person was sent outside the camp.
- vv5-10** *Restitution*. If a man or woman did wrong to someone else, it would have to be made right. The sinner would confess his sin and then work to reverse the damage that had been done by it by making full restitution to the person wronged plus 20%.
- With laws concerning restitution, the LORD taught them several things.
 1) Sin is serious 2) Sin has consequences 3) People you have wronged are entitled to get back what they lost because of you.
- Read v5 again. Who is ultimately being sinned against when we hurt someone else? How does God deal with us? Do we ever make “restitution” to God? (Consider the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19) . How is restitution really a matter of the *heart*?

vv11-31

The Laws of Jealousy. God had already made it perfectly clear to the Israelites that adultery was a sin against Him. Husband and wife were to remain sexually faithful to one another for as long as they lived. In the days of Moses, the consequences of adultery was death. The temptation to adultery for the Israelites was constant. They lived and traveled in close quarters– many people from many families– working, eating, and sleeping together.

Here, however, God gives the people some instruction regarding what to do if they suspect a spouse has been unfaithful but they aren't sure. Suspicion of sexual unfaithfulness can destroy a marriage in a hurry, so the LORD wanted these feelings dealt with quickly.

Here is the example:

If a man suspects that his wife has been unfaithful to him but he has no real proof, he is to bring her and a small “jealousy” offering before the priest. This indicated the fact that they were bringing their problem before the LORD for judgment. The “jealousy” offering was also called a “reminder” offering because it symbolized and reminded the couple of guilt.

Then, the priest would take some water in a clay jar and put some dust from the floor of the tabernacle into the water. The woman would let down her hair and place her hands on the reminder offering while the priest held the bitter water. The priest then put the woman under oath to answer truthfully. The woman calls God to witness the fact that she is telling the truth. If she is not, she asks God to bring evil down upon her (vv19-23).

On a scroll, the priest writes the evils God will bring if she is not telling the truth. Then he washes the writing off into the water mixed with tabernacle dust. The priest takes the jealousy offering from her hands, waves it before the LORD and burns a part of the grain as a memorial offering. Then the woman is asked to drink the water.

If she has been unfaithful to her husband and lied about it to him and to the priest, the LORD would bring evil upon her through the drinking of the water. It would cause her bitter suffering and her abdomen would swell and her thighs would waste away. If none of this happened, however, it meant that the LORD was witness that she had told the truth and had not been unfaithful. She would be cleared of guilt.

- ! Sexual unfaithfulness is serious business. It destroys the marriage bond between husband and wife and brings ruin to families. There is temptation to unfaithfulness in our day just as there was in Israel. We need to “keep the marriage bed pure” as God desires.
- ! What is an oath? What is the difference between swearing and cursing?
- ! Today, we do not bring sexual unfaithfulness before the priest quite the way the Israelites did. But when we sin, we do need to bring our guilt LORD, confess it, trust in His forgiveness, and with His help seek to turn from our wickedness. **For your own thought:** How might a Christian couple today deal with suspicions of sexual unfaithfulness?
- ! As “clean” as they tried to be, the Israelites would always be tainted by sinfulness, even as we are no matter how hard we try to be pure. How did God deal with this among the Israelites? Did He overlook it? How does God deal with it among us? Were the Israelites saved by a different means than we are?
- ! Why was the LORD so concerned that the Israelites remain pure? Why is He concerned that we remain pure?