

Instructions Given

GOD'S PLANS REQUIRE BELIEVERS TO ACT ON THE INSTRUCTIONS HE GIVES.

Numbers 33:50-56; 34:13-15

33:50 The LORD spoke to Moses in the **plains of Moab** **A** by the Jordan across from Jericho, **51** “Tell the Israelites: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, **52** you must **drive out** **B** all the inhabitants of the land before you, destroy all their stone images and cast images, and demolish all their **high places**. **C** **53** You are to take possession of the land and settle in it because **I have given you** **D** the land to possess. **54** You are to receive the land as an inheritance **by lot** **E** 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**. **F** **55** But if you don’t drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, those you allow to remain will become **barbs for your eyes** **G** and thorns for your sides; they will harass you in the land where you will live. **56** And what I had planned to do to them, I will **do to you.**” **H** (. . .)

34:13 So Moses commanded the Israelites, “This is the land you are to receive by lot as an inheritance, which the LORD commanded to be given to the **nine and a half tribes**. **I** **14** For the tribe of Reuben’s descendants and the tribe of Gad’s descendants have received their inheritance according to their ancestral families, and half the tribe of Manasseh has received its inheritance. **15** The two and a half tribes have received their inheritance across the Jordan east of Jericho, toward the sunrise.”

Exploring Key Words

- A** A flat region south of Jericho on the west side of the Jordan River. Israel camped here (Num. 22:1) until after Moses’s death (Deut. 34:1).
- B** “Take possession, inherit, or dispossess.” It is often used in reference to Canaan. To eradicate the land’s idolatry, God commanded Israel to show no mercy toward its enemies.
- C** Such pagan shrines on hilltops were thoroughly condemned by the prophets (1 Kings 13:2,32). They would be a perpetual sign that Israel allowed idolatry to remain in the land.
- D** While possession of the promised land would require effort from Israel, God was fulfilling a promise He made to Abraham (Gen. 15:17). Through Him, victory was assured.
- E** Each family’s inheritance was assigned by “lot.” The lot was not subject to chance. It ensured that God ultimately determined who would possess which piece of property (Prov. 16:33).
- F** The tribes of Israel. Twelve tribes received a parcel of land. The tribe of Levi, Israel’s priestly tribe, received forty-eight cities scattered among the other tribes (Num. 35:1-8).
- G** Like a splinter in the eye, paganism among the people of God would lead to unending and debilitating suffering. “Thorns for your side” is a parallel image that conveys the same warning.
- H** Rather than executing God’s judgment against the Canaanites, Israel would become the target of His judgment because of their idolatry.
- I** Most Israelites would live west of the Jordan. God allowed the tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with half of Manasseh, to settle east of the river. They had received this land from Moses with the understanding that they would still help conquer Canaan (Num. 32:1-38).



The Land (Num. 33:50-53)

- God spoke to Moses while the Israelites were still camped on the Plains of Moab, just east of Jericho.
- He instructed Moses to tell the Israelites that they would have to drive out the land's current inhabitants and destroy the idols and high places devoted to the worship of false gods. The land would belong to them, given to them by God.

The Task (Num. 33:54-56)

- The land would be divided out by the ancestral tribes, each tribe possessing its own land.
- If the Israelites failed to drive out the current inhabitants, the people would remain in the land and become problems for them.

The Plan (Num. 34:13-15)

- Moses detailed the land each ancestral tribe would receive on the other side of the Jordan River.
- Nine and a half tribes would live west of the river. Two and a half tribes—Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh—had already received their allotment of land east of the Jordan (Num. 32:33-34).

Summary Statements

God's plans require believers to act on the instructions He gives.

- Following God often requires believers to remove potential distractions.
- Believers can expect to encounter challenges while following God.
- We can trust God to keep His promises.

Memory Verse

Numbers 33:53

Key Doctrine

God

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.
(See Deuteronomy 6:14-15; James 1:22.)

ENGAGE

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

- 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. From there, the ground is leveled, and 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 had developed beforehand.

Bonus: Apart from God, how do people create a "plan" for their lives?

EXPLORE

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

Bonus: What are some things that distract you? How do you work around those distractions?

- God's people had camped in the "plains of Moab," from which they could see the land they would possess. The Jordan River was the dividing line for the Israelites. On the eastern shore was their past. To the west was their future.
- The Lord had a two-fold message for His people about their responsibilities after they crossed the Jordan. First, they were to "drive out" the inhabitants. Of course, God would be the One who actually defeated the Canaanites, but He would use Israel to accomplish His plans.
- Second, His people were to remove any remnant of idolatry from the land. Stone images, cast images, and high places were all to be targets of Israel's cleansing. This would help Israel avoid spiritual distractions and remain loyal to the Lord.

Why was it important to destroy the idols and high places devoted to false gods? (PSG, p. 67)

- After ridding the land of its current inhabitants and destroying all vestiges of their pagan worship practices, only then could the Israelites take possession of the land. The only way the Israelites could inhabit the land was by honoring the God who gave it to them (see Deut. 9:5).

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

Bonus: Which produces more satisfaction: A job done easily or a job that requires effort? Why?

- God could give Israel the land because it belonged to Him (Ps. 24:1). The land would be divided among the tribes by casting lots. The people did not see this as leaving things to chance. They understood that God controlled the process and could reveal His will through it (Prov. 16:33).

- The Lord warned what would happen if His people did not drive out the Canaanites. The words "barbs" and "thorns" suggest pain and physical damage.
- God knew the spiritual damage that the Canaanites could do if they remained in the land with His people. In fact, Israel's penchant toward pagan worship led to the Assyrians and Babylonians conquering them and removing them from the land centuries later.

What principles do you glean from these verses that can help you live a life of obedience to God? (PSG, p. 69)

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

How do God's promises serve as a motivator to remain faithful to Him? Should they? Explain. (PSG, p. 71)

- Numbers 34:1-12 delineates the geographical boundaries God allotted for His people. Nine and a half tribes would live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The remaining tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) would live in the land taken from the Amorites east of the Jordan. However, they would not fully possess their land until they helped the other tribes conquer Canaan.
- God was fulfilling the promise He had made to His people and to the patriarchs centuries earlier. The tribes received these lands as an inheritance. They understood that ultimately the land was a gift from God.

Bonus: What promises do you need God to fulfill in your life? How can you be confident in His words?

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss times when God has kept His promises.

How does reflecting on those promises increase your faith? (PSG, p. 72)

Examine your life for the things that might draw you away from remaining loyal to the Lord.

What actions can you take to safeguard yourself from the influence of beliefs and practices that are contrary to what God has outlined in His Word? (PSG, p. 72)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (P. 71, PSG)

Use a Bible dictionary to understand a Bible passage.

Read about Canaan in a Bible Dictionary—the land, people, and gods. Ultimately, the Israelites did not drive out all the land’s inhabitants, and God’s warning of Numbers 33:55 came true. Joshua records how the Israelites conquered the Canaanites physically; the book of Judges records how the Canaanites conquered the Israelites spiritually. ***What factors do you think led the Israelites to fail to obey completely God’s command to take the land and drive out its inhabitants? Why do Christians today sometimes stop short of keeping God’s commands fully?***

Prior to the session, enlist a volunteer to provide a summary of Israel’s relationship with the Canaanites using the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 71). After the report, discuss the questions in the Bible Skill activity.

OBJECT LESSON: SMARTPHONE

Display a smartphone and lead adults to consider whether they spend more time scrolling on their phone today than they did a few years ago. Point out that some surveys have found adults spending between four and six hours a day scrolling through their phones.

Ask: Is this practice a distraction or a productive use of time in your busy day? How is this distraction a potential barrier to spiritual growth in your life? What other distractions do you deal with regularly?

Encourage adults to examine their lives for spiritual distractions in their lives. Challenge them to be honest about them with God and to ask Him to help them avoid things that will pull them away from Him.

DIG DEEPER

FOLLOWING GOD COMPLETELY

In this passage, readers can sense a tension between the sovereignty of God in giving His people the promised land and their responsibility to take action to receive it. In a very real way, God’s gift of the land was conditioned on the obedience of the people. The previous generation passed away in the wilderness because of their lack of faith in God and their unwillingness to take action on His words. To the new generation, Moses renewed God’s promise to give them the land, but he did not diminish God’s command to take it by driving out the wicked inhabitants who lived there.

Along with God’s command came a stern warning of what would happen if they refused to obey: the remaining Canaanites would be a never-ending source of pain and a constant temptation. They would lead Israel astray, and the punishment for refusing to drive the Canaanites out of the promised land would include Israel being driven out instead.

God’s plans require believers to act on the instructions He gives. After committing to absolute obedience to God’s commands (Ex. 24:7), the Israelites demonstrated by their actions the depth of their commitment to the Lord. Yet, within forty days, they were worshipping an idol they had made of gold (32:4). Except for the intercession of Moses on their behalf, God would have

wiped them out (32:10). Thus, Israel demonstrated a penchant toward idolatry virtually from the day of its birth. Over time, their refusal to take the sin of idolatry seriously would prove to be the nation’s downfall.

This passage teaches the importance of obedience. It is a dangerous thing when God’s people trifle with His instructions. His punishment may come in two different forms: He may act in a specific moment, or He may allow sin to work its consequences over time. Either way, the results are devastating.

Only the gospel can free people from such a depraved state (Rom. 1:16-17). Logically, it makes no sense that people who have experienced Christ’s redemption would disregard His commands. Our lives prove our loyalty one way or the other (John 14:15).

BONUS CONTENT

***Tribal Allotments of Land***

See how the promised land would be divided up among the twelve tribes.