

# Getting a People Ready



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 3

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Numbers 5; Numbers 6; Ezekiel 33:15; Luke 19:8, 9; Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Dear friend, I know that your spiritual life is going well. I pray that you also may enjoy good health. And I pray that everything else may go well with you” (3 John 2, NIV).

**IF YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN A REFUGEE,**<sup>1</sup> you probably never will fully understand how the people of Israel felt. Unlike many refugees today, who do not want to leave the land, the children of Israel wanted to leave Egypt. But still, it must have been upsetting for them to have left the only land they knew and to be wandering in a harsh desert.

Knowing how difficult and frightening it must have been for Israel to leave Egypt, we better can understand some of the rules given to this people, rules that would help them through the wilderness. Some things were ended (such as the manna) after the people finally entered the Promised Land. But many rules represented principles (laws) that greatly would have blessed the people's lives in a world filled with sin and idol worship.

This week we will look at some of the rules that the Lord gave to Israel. These rules include such things as how to deal with some sickness and disease, how to deal with unfaithfulness in marriage, and how to deal with the personal quarrels that arise when people live together.

1. refugee—a person who escapes to another country for safety.

**SUNDAY—OCTOBER 4****DISEASE CONTROL  
(Numbers 5:1–4)**

Try to picture yourself with the people of Israel in the wilderness desert before Mount Sinai. Thousands upon thousands of these people were on the move with their cattle, miles away from any kind of cities or people. What kind of medical care did they have at that time? None. But when we think what medicine was like back then, the people might have been better off anyway! In such a place, how easily disease could spread.

**According to Numbers 5:1–4, what three groups of people did the Lord command Moses to send “ ‘away from the camp’ ” (NirV)?**

Anyone with a serious skin disease might be suspected of being a leper. True leprosy (now called Hansen’s disease) also was included in this group. Any skin disease that could spread easily was a danger to the community (group). So also a bleeding wound or the handling of a dead body in the desert heat might spread disease throughout the camp. Both men and women were removed from camp until they improved in health. The Lord did not hate these diseased persons. But for the sake of the health of the nation, God separated them to an area outside the camp. Even in modern times we have special rooms in hospitals for persons with diseases that can spread easily.



People with certain diseases were removed from the camp until they improved in health.

**What religious reason does Numbers 5:3 give for removing these diseased persons for a time from the camp? What spiritual message can we learn from this reason for ourselves?**

Think about this whole thing from a religious point of view. We should be separated from sin because of what sin does to us. All believers know for a fact that sin can separate a person from fellowship with God. Who has not felt the sense of spiritual separation that comes from being stained by sin before God?

**What things are we watching, reading, eating, doing, or even thinking that make us feel as if we were spiritually separated from the camp? More important, what is the only answer to this problem according to 1 John 1:8, 9?**

**MONDAY—OCTOBER 5****SOCIAL CONTROL (Numbers 5:6)**

It is difficult for us today to under-

stand the great problems that came with thousands of people who traveled together with large groups of cattle and sheep. Now they are “packed” into the wilderness before Mount Sinai. Diseased people had been removed for the sake of the nation’s health. But another serious problem needed attention. The people were taught to love one another (Leviticus 19:18), but that is not always so easy. Even in the best of times, quarrels arise.

**When an Israelite sinned against a person in the camp, whom did he or she really sin against according to Numbers 5:6? Read also Psalm 51:3, 4. How do we understand this idea?**

To wrong our neighbor is to sin against God Himself. This should not be hard to understand. We all belong to God. We are all His property, both by creation and salvation<sup>2</sup> (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; Acts 17:28). If someone were to come onto your property and damage it, the sin was against the property itself and against you, the one who owns it. It works the same way when we sin against someone else. We are sinning against the One (Jesus) who created that person and who, at the cross, bought that person back with His own blood. So it is no surprise that the Bible teaches that by sinning against others we are sinning against God Himself.



**To wrong our neighbor is to sin against God Himself.**

**What was the guilty person to do according to Numbers 5:6–8? Read also Ezekiel 33:15 and Luke 19:8, 9.**

The principle of making wrongs right with other people is still good today. How do we make right the wrong we have done to God? This means we have sinned against Him too. But the fact is we cannot make up for the sin against God. It is way too late for us to make ourselves right with God. This is why Jesus came. He came to set us right with God. Jesus did so, not through anything we could do but only through what He has done for us (Colossians 1:20).

**Keep in mind what Jesus has done to make things right between you and God. Now, what do you need to do to make things right with someone with whom you have quarreled?**

2. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

**TUESDAY—OCTOBER 6****FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE  
(Numbers 5:11–31)**

The Creator God established marriage in Eden by creating humankind in two sexes and celebrating the first union (Genesis 1:26–28; Genesis 2:21–24). Two commandments of the Ten Commandments, the seventh and the tenth, protect the marriage of man and wife. In God’s government, unfaithfulness was to be punished by the death of both who were involved (Leviticus 20:10).

**How are we to understand Numbers 5:11–31 today?**

The Lord wanted to show how serious He was about unfaithfulness in marriage, which is the greatest threat to the happiness of the family. So He created a test to prove a woman’s faithfulness—or her unfaithfulness in marriage.

The test involved a special act of God. The key to the test was a drink. The water in the drink was holy. And the ground from which the priest took a few specks of dust to add to the drink was holy too. Holy water and dust did not make the water bitter. It just showed the drink’s holiness. The priest wrote down God’s curses against unfaithfulness in a book. Then he scraped the curses into the water. The written judgments/curses washed off into the water that

the priest then gave to the woman to drink. If the water tasted bitter, this bitter taste meant the woman was guilty of being unfaithful to her husband. “Everything depended on the woman—if she was holy [without guilt] or unholy [guilty]. If the holy met the unholy, judgment was sure to happen. If the holy met the guiltless, there was peace and unity.”<sup>3</sup> —Adapted from Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002), page 46.



**The priest wrote the curses down in a book and scraped them into the water.**

This method might be strange to us. But it was not an example of magic. Rather, it was a test that ex-slaves could understand. It was not the water but the Lord who read the wife’s heart and who punished or cleared her.

**How was this method also a protection for the woman? For**

3. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people or things are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.

**example, what if the woman was the victim of a husband's unfair jealousy? In this case, how would this test actually protect her?**

This whole thing may seem strange to us today. But it shows how important the marriage vow is in the eyes of God. Only God alone knows just how much pain, suffering, and damage has been caused by unfaithfulness by one partner or another. How sad it is that in so many societies marriage is not treated with enough respect.



The woman drank the water. If it tasted bitter, she was guilty of breaking the marriage vow. If it tasted pure, she was without guilt.

**What things can you do, what choices can you make, to help you have a pure heart?**

**WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 7**

**COMMON PEOPLE MADE HOLY  
(Numbers 6:1–21)**

God planned to organize (arrange)

Israel into “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6, KJV). He did this so they would witness to the nations far and near and share the truths about the living God and the Creator of all things. At Sinai the Lord chose priests and Levites to serve Him in connection with the worship services of the sanctuary.<sup>4</sup>

**According to Numbers 6:1–21, what vow (promise) could a common person (woman or man) take to devote a certain period of time to the Lord? What spiritual lessons can we learn from this vow for ourselves today to improve our spiritual lives and our own faithfulness to the Lord?**

A Nazirite was a “consecrated [holy; set apart] one” who dedicated himself or herself to the Lord for any length of time. A parent could dedicate (set apart; give) a child to be a lifetime Nazirite. For example, Samson’s mother dedicated her son with the help of an angel so that he would begin to free Israel from the Philistines (Judges 13:2–5; Judges 16:17). The angel Gabriel instructed Zacharias to bring up John (the Baptist) as a Nazirite for his service in opening the way for the Messiah (Luke 1:15). Hannah also vowed Samuel to be a lifelong Nazirite (1 Samuel 1:10, 11).

Interesting, too, is the command about drink. The grape vineyard made the people think of a well-settled land of farms and homesteads. When the

4. sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times. Here the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

Nazirites would not drink from the vineyard, they were showing their belief that they were looking forward to a home in heaven. The vineyard symbolized the settled life. But the Nazirites showed by the way they lived that they desired “a better country. They wanted one in heaven. So God is pleased when they call him their God. In fact, he has prepared a city [in heaven] for them” (Hebrews 11:16, NIV).

**How do we live, as Seventh-day Adventists, looking forward to a “better country,” no matter what country we are living in now? How can we protect ourselves from getting so caught up with our “vineyards” here that we forget our “better country”?**

### THURSDAY—OCTOBER 8

#### THE PRAYER OF BLESSING (Numbers 6:24–26)

**After reading carefully the blessing in Numbers 6:24–26, answer the following questions:**

- **How does this blessing show us who God is? Read also Matthew 28:19.**
- **How does this prayer show that Israel depended on God totally? Read also John 15:5.**

- **How important is the fact that the priests themselves were the ones to pray this prayer for the people’s sake? Hebrews 7:25.**

There are several points of interest here. Each of the lines of Numbers 6:24–26 begins with God’s personal, covenant<sup>5</sup> name (Yahweh, Lord). In the prayer, each person in the group was talked to as one person. Each person could know what the blessing meant for him or her. No matter how large a community (group) Israel was, each one could have a personal relationship with the Lord.

Israel had no Bible at this time. But the people could see the Lord’s blessings in the form of their freedom from slavery, of the crossing of the Red Sea, and of their food and water. God’s “keeping” power could have been seen by His presence in the sanctuary. In the sanctuary, the burnt offering, incense,<sup>6</sup> and lampstand were always burning day and night.

Here is clear proof that Old Testament religion was all of grace<sup>7</sup> (Galatians 3:7–14; Hebrews 4:1, 2). Numbers 6:26 comforts the believer with the knowledge of God’s “smile” and peace (read Matthew 11:28–30).

**How have you experienced the blessings listed above in your own life? What things might you be doing that are making it difficult to**

5. covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

6. incense—sweet-smelling perfume given off by certain spices when burned. The smoke and the sweet smell of the incense represented the prayers of God’s people rising to Him in heaven.

7. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

**believe that these things are coming true in your walk with God? What changes, no matter how painful, must you make?**

### FRIDAY—OCTOBER 9

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “Make yourself holy to God in the morning. Make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Yours. I put all my plans at Your feet. Use me today in Your service. Remain with me, and let all my work be done in You.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning make yourself holy to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His leading shall show you. So day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God. And so your life will be fashioned more and more after the life of Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 70.

“Events may separate friends. The restless waters of the wide sea may roll between us and them. But no event, no distance, can separate us from the Savior [Jesus]. Wherever we may be, He is at our right hand, to support, uphold, and encourage. Greater than the love of a mother for her child is Christ’s love for His saved

people. It is our honor to rest in His love and to say, ‘I will trust Him; for He gave His life for me.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*, page 72.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We all know the dangers of getting too hooked on the things of this world and forgetting our heavenly home. But is it possible for us to be so interested in our desire for heaven that we forget our responsibilities (duties) here on earth? If so, how? How can we keep the right balance in this important topic? What examples can you think of in which people have gotten so caught up in thoughts of going to heaven that they neglect their responsibilities here?
- ② What are some of the stresses that society<sup>8</sup> puts on marriage? How can your church, in that society, deal with these challenges in a way that protects the holiness of marriage?
- ③ In class, talk about the times when you were wrong, or wronged someone else, and how you finally could solve these problems. What lessons did you learn from these experiences? How do you deal with the wrongs that seem unforgivable?

8. society—people living together as a group, or forming a group, with the same way of life.