



Instructions Given

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

Scripture Passage: Numbers 33:50-56; 34:13-15 Memory Verse: Numbers 33:53

Most Christians probably would say they want to include God in their plans. As they think about life, they want His blessing and guidance, and they want His enabling grace to sustain them through whatever comes their way. Believers want to draw on His strength as they live out their plans.

However, the Bible has a different perspective. God doesn't want us to include Him in *our* plans; rather, He wants to include us in *His* plans! As we yield our lives to His perfect purposes, He will accomplish far more in and through us than we could imagine.

Numbers 33 recounts how Israel arrived at the Jordan Valley, where they could see the land God had promised their ancestors. God told them He was giving it to them, but they needed to act on His instructions. As you study this passage, consider the balance between God's power and our actions. The Lord does not simply do all the work as we sit idly by. Rather, He includes us in accomplishing His perfect plans for the sake of His kingdom. Reflect on how He might be calling you and the adults in your group to take action on His instructions for His glory.



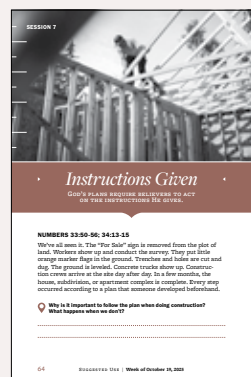
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We've all seen it. The "For Sale" sign is removed from the plot of land. Workers show up and conduct the survey. They put little orange marker flags in the ground. Trenches and holes are cut and dug. The ground is leveled. Concrete trucks show up. 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. (PSG, p. 64)

Why is it important to follow the plan when doing construction?
What happens when we don't?



Understand the Context (Numbers 26:1–36:13)

The Lord instructed Moses and Eleazar the priest to number the people a second time, and the Israelites carefully completed the census under their direction (26:1-51). The Lord also told Moses that the land should be divided among the Israelites by lot (26:52-56). The Levites received no land inheritance, though they were registered by their clans (26:57-62). Besides Moses, only Joshua and Caleb remained from the first census because they alone had believed God's promise to conquer the land for the Israelites (26:63-65).

The daughters of Zelophehad petitioned Moses to grant them an inheritance since they had no brothers (27:1-11). Moses inquired of God, who gave instructions on their behalf. At God's direction, Moses and Eleazar also commissioned Joshua as Moses's successor (27:12-23).

Numbers 28-29 provided instructions for Israel's regular offerings. Some offerings were daily (28:3-8), with added requirements for the Sabbath (28:9-10). God also prescribed offerings for the first day of each month (28:11-15).

In addition, God commanded specific offerings for annual festivals. These included Passover and Unleavened Bread (28:16-25), the Festival of Weeks (28:26-31), the new year, the Day of Atonement (29:7-11), and the Festival of Shelters (29:12-38).

God also stressed the importance of honoring vows (30:1-16). He wanted His people to honor Him by keeping their commitments.

The Lord commanded His people to execute vengeance against the Midianites, which Israel did (31:1-54). The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh then asked to settle the territory east of the Jordan River (32:1-5). Moses granted their request when the tribes assured him that they would help their fellow Israelites conquer the territory west of the Jordan (32:6-42).

Numbers 33 reviewed the many places God's people had journeyed from the time they left Egypt until they reached the Jordan (33:1-49). The Lord reminded the people of the importance of completely driving out the Canaanites and their pagan worship practices (33:50-56).

God outlined the borders of the land (34:1-15) and instructed the leaders to divide the land by lot among the tribes (34:16-29). This included designating cities among the tribes for the Levites (35:1-8), along with cities of refuge where people who accidentally killed someone could flee (35:9-34). The book of Numbers closes with final clarification regarding the inheritance of Zelophehad's daughters (36:1-13).

Read through Numbers 33:50-56 and 34:13-15, paying close attention to the text mentioning a family, clan, or tribe. What was the advantage of organizing the Israelites by these groups? (PSG, p. 65)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Numbers, Deuteronomy*). Make copies of **Pack Item 12** (Handout: *Why This Land?*).

READ:

Ask a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 64 of the PSG. 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.



Group Activity Option

Music

Ask: *Under what conditions should a believer respond to God with a simple, “yes”? What are the consequences of responding, “no”?* Read aloud the lyrics of the chorus “Yes, Lord, Yes” (Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 445). Direct adults to sing the chorus once or twice. Encourage them to pray silently about their own commitment to God's will and ways as the accompanist plays the song one final time.

The Land (Num. 33:50-53)

50 The Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab 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 all the inhabitants of the land before you, destroy all their stone images and cast images, and demolish all their high places. **53** You are to take possession of the land and settle in it because I have given you the land to possess.”

(v. 50) Numbers 33:1-49 recounts the Israelites’ travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai, followed by their wanderings through the wilderness back to Canaan’s border. God had demonstrated His faithfulness throughout their journey. As the promised land came into view, *the Lord spoke to Moses* as He had so many times previously. Moses’s ministry was drawing to a close. He would see the promised land, but he would not enter it (Num. 20:12; Deut. 34:4).

God’s people had camped in *the plains of Moab* (see also v. 48), from which they could look across the *Jordan* Valley to the land they would possess. They were a short distance from the Jordan River that separated them from Canaan. The book of Joshua records how God parted that river to allow His people to cross on dry ground (Josh. 3:15-17). The people could also see the walled city of *Jericho* from their vantage point. God soon would provide their first victory of the conquest there (Josh. 6:1-25).

(v. 51) God gave Moses further instructions concerning the *Israelites*. His words *when you cross the Jordan* assumed Israel’s obedience. However, the words may have caused concern for many, since the Jordan River was running high. The flood stage was due to the spring runoff from the melting snow on Mount Hermon to the north. When the Lord empowered Joshua to part the water so the Israelites could cross on dry ground, many would remember how God had parted the waters of the Red Sea forty years earlier (Ex. 14:21-22). Seeing God part the waters again demonstrated that the same God who led Moses now led Joshua.

Once the people crossed the Jordan River, they would enter *the land of Canaan*—their new home and the land that God had promised the patriarchs centuries earlier. The people now were about to take their next step in God’s plan for the nation. When they did, the land would belong to them.

(v. 52) The Lord gave the people three objectives to accomplish in Canaan. First, they were to *drive out all the inhabitants of the land*. God had told His people that He was giving them the land, but He also was using them to bring His judgment on the Canaanites. Allowing pockets of the current residents to remain would keep idolatry alive in the land, which would be a snare to Israel.

Second, God’s people were to *destroy all their stone images and cast images*. The Canaanites’ images of stone were carved or sculpted rock, while the cast images were statues crafted from metal. They had made idols to represent gods they shaped in their own image, but God had forbidden His people to worship Him in that manner (see Ex. 20:4-6).

Third, God’s people were commanded to *demolish all their high places*. The Canaanites often established their pagan worship sites atop hills or mountains, and God told the Israelites to rid the land of any trace of such practices. However, the Bible records how God’s people continued to worship on high places in the land throughout their history, in violation of God’s command (1 Kings 3:3; 15:14; 2 Kings 14:4; 15:4; 21:3).

(v. 53) God’s grace and the people’s responsibility appear together in this verse. God told Israel to *take possession of the land and settle in it*. However, He also reminded them of His promise: *I have given you the land to possess*. Note how God spoke of Israel’s taking the land as something certain, as if they already had accomplished it.

However, while God had promised them the land, He also expected them to act on His words. They had to move forward as if they believed it was theirs. As they began the conquest, they would show themselves obedient to God’s instruction and would receive His promise. They would need to avoid the fatal flaw that had doomed their parents’ generation.



SUMMARIZE:

APPLICATION POINT: Following God often requires believers to remove potential distractions.

Point out **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Numbers, Deuteronomy*). Explain that Numbers 33:50–34:15 (today’s focus) reveals some specific instructions God gave regarding Israel and the promised land.

READ:

Direct adults to read silently Numbers 33:50-53 and to underline the directions God gave Moses for Israel. After a few moments, call on volunteers to share what they found.

EXPLAIN:

Highlight God’s commands to drive out the Canaanites and destroy everything related to their idolatry. Summarize this explanation of verse 53 (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. This meant the land they would inhabit would not be the same as what was there now. . . . Its culture, belief systems, religious practices, values, government, and social organization were to be transformed.”

ASK:

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

TRANSITION:

God knew that the idolatry in Canaan would distract the Israelites from Him. As we continue the study, notice that these instructions came with both promises and consequences.



Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Mobile Phone

Display a mobile phone 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?***

The Task (Num. 33:54-56)

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. **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 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.”

(v. 54) The tribes would *receive the land as an inheritance by lot*. The book of Joshua highlights how Joshua cast lots to identify the various tribal territories at Shiloh in Canaan’s central region after the Israelites became the primary force in the land (Josh. 18:1-10).

Casting lots provided an objective means for determining which tribe received which area of the promised land. However, biblical writers consistently affirmed a confidence in God’s guidance over lots (see Prov. 16:33; Acts 1:26).

Once the lots were cast, each tribe bore the responsibility of expelling the remaining inhabitants in its territory. Moses also stipulated that the allocations should consider the size of *clans* within each tribe. Larger groups naturally would require more territory, whereas smaller clans would not. The territories of Israel’s *ancestral tribes* would be determined by the lot, though discretion could be exercised for individual clans.

(v. 55) God already had instructed His people to drive the Canaanites out of the promised land (v. 52). In fact, centuries earlier, He had told Abraham that his descendants would claim the promised land and witness God’s eventual judgment of the Canaanites (Gen. 15:16). God had given the people of the land time to repent of their evil practices, but they did not. So, God used His people as His instruments of judgment.

However, He would send terrible consequences if Israel didn’t *drive out the inhabitants of the land*. The Lord used a powerful metaphor to describe the Canaanites’ effect on God’s people: *barbs for your eyes and thorns for your sides*. Barbs would hinder their vision or even blind them, while thorns in their sides would cause constant pain. Joshua would use this same example in his farewell speech (Josh. 23:13).

The word *harass* implies an annoying and oppressive presence that would squeeze God’s people. These enemies would threaten the

Israelites at every turn and prevent them from fully enjoying the land and the faith God wanted to give them.

(v. 56) God’s sobering assurance *what I had planned to do to them, I will do to you* sounded an ominous warning. God’s people would face challenges as they drove Canaan’s inhabitants from the land. Yet, they needed to trust God for the victory that He had assured them He would bring. They belonged to Him, and He had affirmed His covenant with them at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1-8). He already had told them of the blessing that would fill every aspect of their lives if they lived according to His commands (Lev. 26:3-13).

However, He also had warned them of the punishment for choosing to follow their own ways (26:14-39). Yet, even in such situations, the people’s repentance would bring God’s forgiveness and restoration (26:40-45).

God did not promise the people blessing no matter what. Rather, He expected them to demonstrate their faithfulness through lives dedicated to Him. He was about to judge the Canaanites for their wickedness. If His people adopted the same sinful practices, they would receive the same judgment as their enemies. Tragically, God did bring judgment on the Israelites as they consistently rebelled against Him in later years (2 Kings 17:1-23; 25:1-21).

Key Doctrine

God

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



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers can expect to encounter challenges while following God.

Direct a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 33:54-56 while adults listen for God's promises and consequences for failing to follow His directions.

LIST:

Make two columns on the board, *Promises* and *Consequences*. Guide adults to call out the promises and consequences they found as they listened to the Scripture.

EXPLAIN:

Use this content from page 69 of the PSG to explain the visual image God used to describe the negative influence of the Canaanites:

The word translated "barbs" referred to small but sharp objects that could splinter someone's eyes. The result would be discomfort, infection, and maybe even blindness. The lesson was that even the smallest remnant could inflict unbelievable damage. The thorn in their sides could cause discomfort, pain, and even an infection. God's purpose was not just to run the people out but also to remove their idolatrous beliefs and pagan practices. God knew the damage these traditions would do.

ASK:

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

TRANSITION:

God wasn't finished with the instructions for settling in the promised land. Upon entering Canaan, He would direct the people to divide the land tribe-by-tribe.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Prior to the session, enlist a volunteer to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 71 of the PSG and to provide a report to the group on the land, the people, and the gods of Canaan. After the volunteer has shared their information, take a few minutes to summarize how Joshua and Judges describe Israel's encounters with the Canaanites. Allow adults to respond to the questions in the Bible Skill activity.

The Plan (Num. 34:13-15)

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. **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.”

(v. 13) *Moses commanded the Israelites* regarding the distribution of tribal territories in the land. Notice how God’s leader assumed the people would follow God’s exhortation to conquer the land and drive out its inhabitants. God would keep His promise as the people faithfully obeyed. Each tribe would **receive by lot as an inheritance** a portion within the promised land. (See comments on 33:54.) The word “inheritance” stresses the nature of what Israel would get. The land ultimately belonged to God (Lev. 25:23), but He was giving it to the Israelites because they were the heirs to His blessing (Ps. 136:21-22).

Nine and a half tribes would divide the area of Canaan west of the Jordan River. These tribes were told to conquer and settle the land. However, Reuben and Gad, along with half of Manasseh, would settle east of the Jordan in the territory taken when Israel defeated Sihon and Og (Num. 21:21-35).

These tribes assured Moses they would help their Israelite relatives conquer Canaan, after which they would return to their territory east of the Jordan (32:16-19). The book of Joshua states that these tribes repeated their assurance to Joshua (Josh. 1:12-18). After the conquest, Joshua sent them home to their territory with his blessing because they had done exactly what they had promised to do (22:1-6).

(v. 14) *Reuben’s descendants* came from Jacob and Leah’s firstborn son (Gen. 29:32). When Joseph’s brothers sought to kill him, Reuben tried to intervene with a plan to rescue him (37:21-22). He succeeded in saving his brother’s life, though the other brothers still sold Joseph into slavery (37:26-28).

Later, Reuben sinned against his father Jacob by sleeping with Bilhah (Rachel’s handmaid and Jacob’s concubine). As a result of his sin, Jacob stripped him of the blessings and privileges usually given to the firstborn son (35:22; 49:3-4).

Gad’s descendants came from Jacob through Zilpah, Leah’s handmaid. Leah had given Zilpah to Jacob to conceive more children for him once she realized that she had stopped bearing children herself (30:9-13). Gad was Jacob’s seventh son.

Manasseh was Joseph’s firstborn son, but Jacob adopted him—along with his brother, Ephraim—as his own for the purposes of inheritance (41:50-51; 48:5). Since the Manassites and the descendants of Ephraim each received a full tribal allotment, Joseph’s family effectively received a double portion of Jacob’s inheritance, while Reuben, the true firstborn, did not.

The Reubenites and Gadites initially had asked for Moses’s blessing to live east of the Jordan because they saw the region was good for livestock (Num. 32:1). Manasseh later requested and received territory in Canaan as well because the tribe was so large (Josh. 17:14-18).

(v. 15) Moses affirmed that **the two and a half tribes** had thus **received their inheritance across the Jordan**, but he also emphasized their pledge to help the other tribes conquer Canaan. The city of **Jericho** stood at the edge of the Jordan Valley at Canaan’s eastern border. Israelite tribes whose territory bordered the Jordan River included Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. These tribes could look east **toward the sunrise** and know that their fellow Israelites occupied the region beyond the Jordan River and beyond the mountain range that extended alongside the Jordan Valley.



Tribal Allotments of Land

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



APPLICATION POINT: We can trust God to keep His promises.

SUMMARIZE: Use the following from pages 69-70 of the PSG to summarize the first twelve verses of Numbers 34.

The opening verses of this chapter delineate the geographical boundaries of the land the Israelites were to inhabit. Doubtless, the spies who scouted out the land gave information to Moses, information he used to describe the land to be inherited. . . . The property divisions were not decided by human ingenuity or design. It was according to what the LORD commanded.

READ: **Read aloud Numbers 34:13-15** as adults jot down information about the inheritance of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Remind adults that in Numbers 32 these tribes had asked to live on the east side of the Jordan River.

REVIEW: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Why This Land?*). Encourage adults to scan the article and to summarize an answer for the question, “Why this land?” Point out that while Israel remains politically and geographically important, it is most vital because this is the land where God sent His Son and where He launched the gospel to the “ends of the earth.”

PRAY: Emphasize the blessing of the Israelites finally having their own land. Guide adults to make a list of blessings they have received and to spend a few moments offering prayers of thanksgiving to God for His blessings.

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



CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 72 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *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.*

EVALUATE:

Guide adults to evaluate which statement they believe is the hardest for most people to accept. Lead them to consider which one is most difficult for them. Remind them that past blessings are wonderful reminders of God's faithfulness and care as we await the fulfillment of His promises.

DISCUSS:

Direct the group to review the first set of questions on page 72 of the PSG. Lead them to take turns sharing fulfilled promises and how their faith has been increased because of those promises. Point out the other set of questions on that page and urge adults to spend time in the days ahead considering those questions for themselves.

PRAY:

Close the session in prayer thanking God for His faithfulness in fulfilling promises and for His provisions for our lives.

AFTER THE SESSION

Email or text the group following the session to remind them of the second set of questions on page 72 in the PSG. Encourage them to spend time reflecting on things that negatively influence their relationship with the Lord and how they might guard against those things in the future.

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