

Instructions Given
October 19, 2025
Allen Power

Numbers 33:50-56

Would you want to occupy a house if you knew the builders “sort of followed” the blueprint? Would you want to drive a car if the assembly line “kind of followed” the design and assembly plan? Of course not. [Illustration: Our deck, sunroom, porch.]

As we have been studying Numbers a theme has emerged: On their journey to the Promised Land, God gave the Israelites instructions and expected them to follow those instructions completely.

In Moses’ final speech to them before they entered Canaan He gave them this command from God: Your choice is to be blessed or cursed: “...the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...or cursed, if you” [don’t obey and] go after other gods...” (Deut. 11:26–28 ESV)

The instructions to the Israelites in this passage were some of the most challenging God ever gave them. Spoiler alert: They didn’t follow them completely and paid a high price for that. As we look at this passage, we will also address a concern that many Christ-followers toil with when they read this historical account. More on that later.

Numbers 33:50–56 (NLT) — **50** While they were camped near the Jordan River on the plains of Moab opposite Jericho, the Lord said to Moses, **51** “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel: When you cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, **52** you must drive out all the people living there. You must destroy all their carved and molten images and demolish all their pagan shrines. **53** Take possession of the land and settle in it, because I have given it to you to occupy. **54** You must distribute the land among the clans by sacred lot and in proportion to their size. A larger portion of land will be allotted to each of the larger clans, and a smaller portion will be allotted to each of the smaller clans. The decision of the sacred lot is final. In this way, the portions of land will be divided among your ancestral tribes.

- If we skipped verse 52 God’s instructions sound like a “piece of cake!” Just move in, divide up the property, and enjoy the Promised Land.
- That verse proves the truth: When we follow God there will be challenges.
- Verse 52: God commanded the Israelites to “Drive out” all the people living there.
- Question: Why didn’t God say, “*Just settle in among the Canaanites?*” (52b & 55)
- To grasp the necessity of God’s command to “drive out” the Canaanites, we must fully understand the evil practices of those pagan people.
- **Examples of Canaanite evil practices:**
 - **Idolatry and False Worship:** The Canaanites worshiped numerous gods and engaged in idol worship, including Baal and Molech. Their worship

often involved rituals that were against God's commandments (Deuteronomy 12:2-3).

- **Child Sacrifice:** They practiced human sacrifices, especially the sacrifice of children by fire to the god Molech (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5). This horrific practice was abominable to God.
- **Sexual Immorality:** The Canaanites engaged in ritual prostitution and other forms of sexual misconduct as part of their religious ceremonies (Leviticus 18, Deuteronomy 23:18).
- **Occult Practices:** Practices such as divination, witchcraft, and consulting mediums and spiritists were common among the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).
- **Violence and Corruption:** The widespread moral decay included violence, oppression, and injustice that corrupted society (Genesis 15:16, describing the iniquity of the Amorites as full).
- Because of these pervasive evils, God commanded Israel not to intermingle or coexist peacefully with the Canaanites. Allowing their influence could cause the Israelites to adopt these corrupt and sinful practices, endangering their covenant relationship with God and their spiritual health.
- Now, here is a heavy topic. Many (even Christ-followers) struggle with the idea of "driving out" the Canaanites. First, given how evil they were we might not be as uncomfortable if this was simply a "military action" killing evil adults.
- Even the story of the great flood isn't as disturbing because God himself acted.
- The discomfort comes because God commanded the Israelites to do the killing.
- It is further disturbing when we read verses like Deuteronomy 20:16–17 where God commanded them to "destroy every living thing."
- There is not time for a thorough study but here are some key points:
 - The command was limited to a specific historical context—Israel entering the Promised Land—and was not a general principle for all situations.
 - The Canaanites' destruction was a divine judgment not an ethnic war.
 - God withheld judgment for 400 years until the Canaanites' sin had "reached its full measure," (Gen. 15). The Canaanites knew what was coming and had heard of God's awesome power (Joshua 2:10–11; 9:9).
 - Such awareness should have prompted their repentance, but they remained resistant to God. The Canaanite Rahab and her family were saved (and she became an ancestor of King David and Jesus). They are proof that the Canaanites could have avoided destruction if they had repented (Joshua 2). No person had to die. God's desire is that the wicked turn from their sin rather than perish (Ezekiel 18:31–32; 33:11).ⁱ
 - We must remember that God is in control of life and death. Every breath is a gift. When God ends a life—whether by old age, disease, disaster, or judgment—it isn't cruel or unfair. It's within His rights as the Creator.
 - What about the tragic death of innocents? Many believe these innocent souls were (are) received into God's loving presence, where ultimate justice and grace prevail (Matthew 19:14).
 - We are all sinners deserving God's judgment, but He sent Christ to die so that all people can have mercy and escape that judgment.

- Since Jesus' death and resurrection, God's plan works through mercy and grace. Christians now live out justice and love, not warfare.
- Jesus told us in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."
- Today God has given the sword of justice to the government (Rom.13:4).
- If you want to study this further there are links in the footnotes. ⁱⁱ
- Christ-followers are not called to warfare, but to a deeper battle within—to cast aside anything that keeps us from following Christ and becoming more like Him.
- In the next chapter (Numbers 34) God gave specific directions on how the land was to be divided as each "clan's" inheritance. God kept his promise to Israel to give them the land as an inheritance. Today, followers of Christ also have a Spiritual inheritance promised to us. Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:3–4 (NLT) — 3b** ...because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, **4** and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.
- Verses 55&56: God gave the Israelites specific instructions and a warning.

Numbers 33:55–56 (NLT) — 55 But if you fail to drive out the people who live in the land, those who remain will be like splinters in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will harass you in the land where you live. **56** And I will do to you what I had planned to do to them."

- Unfortunately, they did not follow them completely and there were consequences.
- They did not drive out all the Canaanites and the next generation worshipped the idols. (Judges 2:10-11) This led to God punishing the Israelites in the same way by driving them from the land in the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The first application for us is about obedience to God' clear commands.
- There are many passages in scripture that underscore this:
 - Solomon ended Ecclesiastes with this practical truth: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Eccles. 12:13)
 - Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (Jn 14:15)
 - James 1:22 says, "...be doers of the word, and not hearers only..."
 - Psalm 119 says, those who love and obey God's commands will have peace and "not stumble." (Psalm 119:165 ESV)
- Scripture is our blueprint for life; just as a well-built house or car works only when its builders follow the design exactly. A strong spiritual life stands firm only when it's built on full trust and obedience to God's revealed Word in scripture.
- We saw that even when we follow God's instructions there will still be challenges. We are not called to "drive out" evil doers but we are to remove anything that distracts us from following Christ.
- Finally, like the Israelites, God has promised us an inheritance. In our case it is a Spiritual inheritance of His Holy Spirit in our hearts NOW and eternal life forever.

- As we “build” our life with Christ let’s not be careless builders who do shoddy construction. Let’s follow the blueprint of His word and, with His Spirit’s help, build a life of trust, obedience, and blessing.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Canaanites-extermination.html>

ⁱⁱ Links to further study:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Canaanites-extermination.html>

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/thinking-old-testament-violence/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMk9YxUovJ0&t=115s>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/christian-struggles-with-biblical-accounts-of-genocide-and-holy-war/>

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/question-answer/p10/slaughter-of-the-canaanites>