

1. What prevents us from focusing on God? I ask that question as this chapter has several million Jews gathered in the wilderness with the tabernacle of God as the centerpiece of this gathering. The issue of the moment is, what things can prevent us from collectively focusing upon Him?
 - a) Let me put this in context: So far in this book, God has essentially given the Israelites their instructions on how they are to camp and how they will move forward. Effectively the book of Numbers so far is about how they are to be organized. The main message for the Christian is about how God wants us to organize as an entity as we worship Him.
 - b) Before the Israelites can actually move forward toward the "Promised Land", they (and us) have to consider issues that can get our focus off of Him. This brings us back to the concept that we can't worship God any old way we feel like it. We have to come to Him on His terms, not ours. It does not mean we have to be perfect, but we do have to be perfectly forgiven. At the same time God expects us to make the effort to avoid sin. That is effectively what this chapter focuses upon. If one can grasp that concept, this section of the book will make a lot of sense and apply well to the Christian life.
 - c) This chapter gets into the practical issue of how to separate those that can distract the rest of us from focusing upon Him. The issues listed are not bad enough to have one killed. The issue is about what to do with people who for a specific period of time cannot focus upon God. How do we practically separate such people? For those specific Israelites, it meant they have to pitch their tents away from the rest of that group. What this means for us is when someone or a some group can't focus on God for any particular reason we need to separate them so the rest of the group can focus on Him. The issues listed here are designed to give us examples of how and why we are to separate such people until they are ready to return.
 - d) At this point, let me describe the specific issues stated in this chapter. First, it focuses on people who make either make contact with or emit things that are associated with death. The text states three specific examples: leprosy, a spillage of bodily fluids (I'll explain that later), and those who have come in contact with a dead corpse. These things are all word pictures of death, which I'll explain later in this lesson. The symbolic idea is God wants us to avoid sin, as all sin left unchecked leads to death.
 - i) The second issue brought up in this chapter is about defrauding. When a church body is aware that one person or group has defrauded another, that issue has to be dealt with so it won't spread any further within that community.
 - ii) Finally, most of Chapter 5 then focuses on someone who is accused of adultery. This chapter lays out a long ritual that helps to determine if a woman is guilty or innocent of adultery. This leads to a bunch of questions: What about men who are guilty? What about other Old Testament laws that state anyone caught in adultery must be killed? (See Leviticus 20:10 as an example). The answer is that there is a lot more to this than just an accusation of adultery.
 - e) A big question is what is not listed: Why isn't murder or theft mentioned? What about those there who still worship false deities? Another question is, why doesn't God just blatantly say, avoid these specific things? Why does the text give these strange examples for us to contemplate? What I want to do in this lesson is explain why God gave us these specific illustrations and explain how they apply to us.
 - i) This leads to my lesson title: "What God demands of us as believers." What this chapter essentially says is that when we get together to focus on Him, we have to eliminate things that distract us from focusing on Him. The rest as they say is the details. Speaking of details, let us start Verse 1.

2. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has an infectious skin disease or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. ³ Send away male and female alike; send them outside the camp so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them." ⁴ The Israelites did this; they sent them outside the camp. They did just as the LORD had instructed Moses.
- a) Before I get into the specifics of these issues, notice the Israelites did not have any trouble identifying whom these people were. These people were either known or admitted they had these issues amongst this large group. They had to go live somewhere outside of the camp until these issues went away. The idea for us to remember is that when we need someone to no longer be a part of our church family, it is usually an issue that is blatant enough that everyone knows it is time for them to leave until the issue is resolved.
 - i) The idea is not to kill such people. The idea is the purpose of church is for us to focus on God. If a particular person in our church chooses to live with a particular sin or issue, it is best for the church to let them go until they want to change.
 - ii) What if that person then goes to the church down the street? The answer is that is now their problem and if we can warn that other church leadership, we should.
 - b) I guess this is as good a time as any to discuss how Jesus taught to handle sin issues in the Christian church: The first remedy is to talk to the person one on one. If they still refuse to repent of the sin issue, we are to confront them again with multiple witnesses. If they still refuse to repent, the issue is to be brought up to the entire church. One of the biggest mistakes that many churches face is they refuse to deal with sin issues within that church.
 - i) We often make the mistake of "sweeping problems under the rug" as opposed to trying to deal with it. The point is often if we leave a problem alone it gets worse. That "worse" aspect is what is to be avoided. For example, suppose someone in our church was having an affair and it was well known. Others would think, if it is ok, for him or her to do that and still be here, why not me? Therefore such issues have to be dealt with and the "Matthew 18" model works. Many years ago, I knew of an issue like this with a church elder. He was asked to leave the church. Our bible study group at that time helped out the wife of that situation.
 - c) OK, now that we have established how to deal with a particular sin issue in a church, let us discuss each of these issues and how they relate to not being pleasing to God.
 - i) The first issue mentioned is an infectious skin disease. This is called leprosy in other English translations. In the Middle East, this is a contagious disease and it causes amongst other really bad things, one's skin to change color. In Leviticus, Chapters 13-14, it is explained recognize it and deal with someone who has it. The point here in Numbers is in effect, if someone has this, they can't camp with the rest of the group, as the disease may spread. Notice the text does not say to let them starve or strike them dead. It just says to separate them from everyone else.
 - ii) The point again, is about what is best for the church body. Of course we are to have compassion on those who are sick or diseased. The issue is about not letting something bad spread to everyone else within a church community.
 - d) The second issue mentioned is a "discharge of any kind". Essentially this refers to bodily fluids are spilled (think of a woman's period or the spilling of semen), that is the potential loss of new life. So how does a woman's period represent the loss of human life? I'm not saying it is a bad thing. When a woman loses blood because of her period or when a man spills semen (yes I know all of this is disgusting to bring up ☹), those things represent the loss of potential new life. The point is God is reminding us how sacred life is.
 - i) Such a person must be separated for a specified period of time. It has to do with the biblical concept of sin left unchecked. That leads to "Spiritual Death." The idea is when we emit something that can cause the loss of potential life, that loss is associated with death. When we leave sin "unchecked" that too leads to death.

- e) This leads to the final issue of "contact with a dead body". The physical danger is when a person dies or some sort of disease like leprosy and that disease can be spread. However, Verse 2 specifies "ceremonially unclean". What does that mean? The short version is that God cares about life and the avoidance of death. Let me explain further:
- i) There is a Jewish tradition that when a person is buried, the rabbi would does not go to the gravesite, but only the family. The idea is that the rabbi (a Jewish priest) is to focus on helping the living, not taking care of the dead. Yes there are people who actually bury the body. The point is those who are called to serve God are to focus on those who are alive and interested in worshipping Him as He desires.
 - ii) Again, this does not mean we do not have compassion for those who are hurting, sick or diseased. The issue of the moment is not letting sin spread in our midst.
 - iii) Therefore, just as we separate the sick today to help them recover, so back then they had to physically separate those are sick to prevent disease from spreading.
 - iv) But John, if touching a dead body just makes one ceremonially unclean as these verses say they are, how is that a danger to our community? The New Testament comments on this as well. Romans 6:16 says in effect that to willfully choose to sin that eventually leads to death (separation from God). In 1st John, (5:16 and 5:17), the writer talks about when a believer is sinning, he or she should turn from that sin as to avoid the spiritual death that eventually leads from that sin.
 - a) That principal is the effective point here in Numbers. When we become aware of someone who is sinning, we are to avoid joining them. We are to not have those who refuse to repent of sin with us when we worship God.
 - b) Again, think of the idea of a person who is living with an unrepentant sin. Others can think, why is person even here after what they did? The idea is about doing what is best for the church body. Yes, we need compassion for the sinner and help them to change if they desire to change.
 - c) As I stated earlier, we don't have to be perfect, just perfectly forgiven. The issue is about those who don't want to repent of their sins and still want to be a part of a church body. The reason these verses focus on contact with a dead body is much more than actually touching a physical dead body. The issue has to do with avoiding those who willfully are choosing to live with a particular sin, which left unchecked eventually leads to death.
 - v) Let me give another practical example. Let's suppose there is someone in our church community who is literally trying to fight the urge to give up some sort of drug usage. As long as they are making the effort to turn from that sin, such a person should be welcome in our church. When that person, "falls off the wagon", we should encourage them to stop, but such a person should not be welcome in our church until they desire to turn from that bad habit. The issue is not about being perfect, but about the desire to be pleasing to God with one's life.
 - a) Think of that person as being "spiritual dead" for the moment. They still may be saved if they believe in Jesus as complete payment for one's sins. The issue is not salvation as much as it is being part of one's church.
 - b) Yes, we are all sinners and we all have issues we have to face. Again I want to stress that the issue is not about all of us being perfect. This is about our willingness to turn from sin when we become aware of it.
 - c) The point is we don't want others to be "infected" by them and that is why such people need to be separated from the church. That is why such issues as contact with a dead body, skin diseases and emission of bodily fluids are mentioned here as examples. The underlying issue is not the particular health risks, but that of keeping a church healthy and focused on God.
 - d) With that heavy topic completed, it is time to move on to the next verse:

3. Verse 5: The LORD said to Moses, ⁶ "Say to the Israelites: 'When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty ⁷ and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged. ⁸ But if that person has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belongs to the LORD and must be given to the priest, along with the ram with which atonement is made for him. ⁹ All the sacred contributions the Israelites bring to a priest will belong to him. ¹⁰ Each man's sacred gifts are his own, but what he gives to the priest will belong to the priest.' "
- a) To explain these verses, it is necessary to state that the issue is not theft but fraud.
 - i) I say that because the book of Exodus already spells out a penalty for theft (see Exodus 22:1). For theft, someone must pay back five times what they stole.
 - ii) In these verses, the penalty is 20% of the fraud, not five times the amount.
 - b) At this point let me describe what is happening in these verses and then I'll explain why they are here in this chapter:
 - i) Suppose someone has defrauded another person or group. Let's say the frauding person promised to do something and didn't follow through. Let's say a person promised to give something in exchange for something else and did not follow through. That is fraud. Isn't that the same as stealing? The difference is to steal is when we take what doesn't belong to us. To fraud is to promise to do something and not following through with that promise.
 - ii) The remedy is spelled out in these verses. Whatever the cash equivalent value of the fraud was, it must be repaid, plus a twenty percent penalty. If the person who was defrauded is no longer alive, the money goes to the nearest relative. If there are no living relatives to give the money to, it goes to the church. The point is the situation has to be dealt with in order for the person to come back to the camp.
 - c) Here are some things to think about in this situation:
 - i) First, the person has to admit they have defrauded someone. Either that, or the act has to become aware to the community so that the person who committed that fraud has to realize it is known and then the defrauder has to "pay up or get out".
 - ii) As to the literal penalty, it may not seem that bad to be kicked out of the camp for a while. The real idea here is that we cannot get close to God when we are guilty of defrauding someone. When we hurt others even by defrauding, we are also hurting God because He desires that we live a life pleasing to Him. That means making every effort possible to not hurt other people.
 - iii) Forgetting the issue of how did that work practically, the issue for us comes back to the concept that when we get together as a group of believers, our focus needs to be upon God, and not our issues. If we see someone in church and realize that person is guilty of (unrepentant) fraud, we may not be able to concentrate as we may be thinking, why is that person here?
 - a) Yes there are worse crimes. We haven't touched murder, theft or even those who committing idolatry. The bible covers those issues elsewhere (See the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 as the prime example). The point here is even something as light as defrauding has to be dealt with as it prevents others from focusing on God.
 - b) So are you saying we have to go around being the sin police? Hardly. The issue is not about looking for other's sins. It is about the public awareness (at least within our church body) of such an issue and then having to deal with it. This goes back to the "Matthew 18" model of how to deal with sin. That is, we first confront them ourselves when we are aware of an issue. Then we bring witnesses. If that person still refuses to deal with an issue, only then should the church body be told.

- d) Remember the big picture idea is not about fraud specifically or even contamination from things that can lead to death. The issue is about things that get our focus off of God. The reason we gather as a group of Christians is to worship Him together and help each other draw closer to Him. Things that distract us from that worship have to be dealt with. That in effect is the issue here.
- i) So why not just say, deal with issues that are distractions? Why the example of fraud and spell out the punishment for that? The best answer is that God wants us to think about it. By spelling out an example for us, we have to think about why God said it this way and why He used this specific example.
 - ii) Remember that God is a "God of justice" as well as a "God of love". That means He cannot stand any defrauding, let alone issues like theft or murder. If a sin issue like this becomes public, it has to be dealt with so there is justice within our church bodies. Does that mean we have to conduct trials every now and then? No, but when there are issues like this that have to be dealt with, we shouldn't just "sweep the issue under the rug" and hope it goes away. In other words, any issue that can cause problems within a church has to be dealt with and Jesus gave us a procedure to follow in order to properly deal with such a problem.
- e) Let me come back to the verses and finish them. Again, if there are no living relatives to compensate, then the cash equivalent of the damage plus a penalty goes to the priests. What is implied is the priests are in charge of dealing with this situation.
- i) The point for us is when the leaders of our church become aware of this issue, they have to take charge to deal with it.
 - ii) If you go back to the text, you will notice that the guilty party also had to offer a ram as a sacrifice for their actions. OK, why a ram?
 - a) This goes back to the book of Genesis (Chapter 22), when Abraham offered Isaac. God provided for Abraham a ram to offer instead of his son. The point is the ram as an animal become symbolic of a substitute penalty.
 - b) So where did the "defrauder" get a ram? Remember a lot of animals are with the Israelites as they travel in the desert. The guilty party in effect had to acquire one to offer as a sacrifice.
 - c) OK John, and how does this affect me? In effect, Jesus is our substitute ram as He agreed to pay the price for our guilt.
- f) Let me explain all of this one more way and then we can move on. Are any or all of us Christians ever guilty of defrauding someone? We are in that we all made a commitment to serve God and do His will. When we sin, we in effect have defrauded God because we have broken our commitment to serve Him. That is why we should also see Jesus is our substitute ram for our own sins that we have committed against God the Father.
- i) So does this mean we have to go find a ram and offer it for each of us? Of course not, as the full price for our sins has been paid once and for all. The idea is to realize that each of us are guilty of "defrauding". Yes, there are specific instances where a person in our community may have done something and we don't want that issue to have to spread within our group without being dealt with.
 - ii) The big picture idea is that as a Christian, that means that God calls on each of us in effect to do His will throughout the rest of our lives. God is in effect saying to us, "You want to commit your life to serving Me (God)? Well, that means that I am now in charge of your life and I want to guide you." Whenever we sin, we have in effect committed fraud against that commitment to Him.
 - iii) That fraud on our behalf is the reason why this whole example is laid out for us here in the middle of the chapter. It is only when we realize our sin and turn toward Him that we are welcome back in fellowship with God.
 - iv) OK, on that heavy note, we are ready for the final issue of this chapter:

4. Verse 11: Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him ¹³ by sleeping with another man, and this is hidden from her husband and her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act), ¹⁴ and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure--or if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure-- ¹⁵ then he is to take his wife to the priest. He must also take an offering of a tenth of an ephah of barley flour on her behalf. He must not pour oil on it or put incense on it, because it is a grain offering for jealousy, a reminder offering to draw attention to guilt.
- a) Let me start this section by stating that the issue here is jealousy. The example given is when a husband suspects his wife is having an affair. The main issue is not whether or not the wife is actually guilty, but when a husband is suspicious of this issue.
 - b) Obviously there are lots of questions. Let me summarize the ritual being described and then I'll discuss why it given here for us to contemplate:
 - i) First, again the issue is a husband suspects a wife is having an affair.
 - ii) The husband is to take the wife to one of the priests. (Aaron and his sons.)
 - iii) The husband is also to bring to the priest a handful of flour. The point is back in the book of Leviticus (Chapter 2), this flour was symbolic of celebrating joy with God. Think of it in terms of "I'm so happy to be close to God, let me in effect share a meal with Him to express my joy of being close to Him."
 - a) Now comes the "however": When flour is given to the priest to celebrate joy with God, usually that flour is mixed with oil or incense. The idea is that flour "tastes better with oil or smells better with incense". The point is the husband is angry with his wife, so the symbolic act is to offer up some grain to God without the oil in order to say in effect that I can't have any joy with God right now because I am suspicious about this issue.
 - iv) The next set of verses will further describe this ritual about how the priest and the possible guilty wife are to deal with this jealousy issue. The short version is it involves the woman taking a test to see whether or not she is guilty. We will get to that ritual in a few moments. First I of course, have other things to say. ☺
 - c) At this point I would like you to consider a few questions:
 - i) What about if a husband is the guilty party? Why bring up the woman here?
 - a) In fact, both Exodus (20:14) and Leviticus (20:10) state it is a death sentence to commit adultery. When Jesus was brought a woman caught in the act of adultery, the religious leaders said that women should be stoned for her act. My point is doesn't this text here in Numbers contract the prescribed punishment for adultery? The answer is no. That is because the main issue here is jealousy over possible adultery and not adultery itself.
 - ii) So why have this elaborate ritual? Why not just ask the potentially guilty party to state whether or not they are guilty and let a judge (or whoever) decide the fate?
 - a) If this was just about a jealous husband, I think the bible would have been a lot briefer in this issue. Just like the first two issues brought up in the chapter, there is a lot more to this, and we'll get to that.
 - d) Before we move on, I want to give an idea to consider for us: Remember I stated earlier in this lesson that the "defraud" is in effect an indictment against us and our commitment to God? Even going back to the issue of "contamination" from the early verses, the issue for us is we get contaminated from our contact with the world and God wants us to separate ourselves from the "world" in order to be in close fellowship with Him.
 - i) My point here is in effect, God is the "jealous husband". We are the wife that are possibly guilty of adultery. We are the one's that need to be tested. In the bible the words "adultery" and "idolatry" are synonyms. That is because in both cases we are turning from the one we are supposed to be committed to in our lives.

5. Verse 16: "The priest shall bring her and have her stand before the LORD. ¹⁷ Then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water. ¹⁸ After the priest has had the woman stand before the LORD, he shall loosen her hair and place in her hands the reminder offering, the grain offering for jealousy, while he himself holds the bitter water that brings a curse.
- a) Meanwhile, it is time for us to get back to the ritual itself, and then I can explain how it ties to our own relationship with God the Father. At this point, let me give some of the details of the ritual here and explain its significance.
- i) Verse 16 says the accused woman is to be brought before the priest and "stand before the LORD". Obviously, God is everywhere. The point is the tabernacle and in particular the main object within it, the "ark of the covenant" represents His presence amongst His people. The idea is the accused has to be brought to the priest at this tabernacle.
- a) Something to consider: Given the fact there are two million people out there wandering in the desert and only one high priest, I doubt this ritual happened very often. I suspect, as this ritual became well known, a lot of husbands thought, "If I am suspicious of her, let me ask her about it." This whole ritual is in effect designed to prevent men from physically attacking their wives if they are jealous and gives them a ritual to deal with this.
- ii) Verse 17 requires the priest to collect a few items: "Holy water, a clay jar (cup) and some dust from the floor of the tabernacle." Let me comment on these items:
- a) First of all "Holy water" is not anything special. It is ordinary water that is separated for God's use. In this case, think of it as water used in the rituals involved in the temple.
- b) Next a clay jar is any sort of cup that can hold water. The idea is that it is not one of the items normally kept in this sanctuary. I suspect that part of the ritual was for the accused or her husband to bring this cup. The idea is the accusation brings shame and therefore an "unholy" cup (that is, one not permanently separated for God's use) is used.
- c) Finally, some dirt is taken from the tabernacle floor. One of my favorite bits of bible trivia is the fact that when this structure was built, there was no floor. The book of Exodus gives great details on how to build every aspect of that structure, but never mentions flooring. It wasn't until I saw a visual model of it one time that I realized it never had flooring.
- (1) So why no floor? It is part of the same reason that when Exodus describes the priests clothing in great detail, there is no mention of shoes. The idea is the priests are to walk barefoot on bare ground. The idea is that the ground where one walks in God's presence is holy, just as Moses had to remove his shoes in God's presence back in Exodus Chapter 3, Verse 5.
- d) OK, I got distracted there on a bit of bible trivia. ☺ Coming back to these verses, the point is simply that the priest is to take a little bit of dirt from the ground in the temple and put it in the cup along with the water. Why?
- (1) The idea of dirt is to remind us, that God created us from "dirt" and to "dirt" we will return. (My paraphrase of Genesis 3:19).
- iii) Now imagine the shame a woman must feel to even be brought in the presence of the priest for this act. The priest is saying in effect, "I have taken the water that is separated for God's use and I'm adding dirt from the ground, not to show one is definitely guilty of this sin, but to show that we as people are contaminated by the world and therefore all of us are sinners before God." The priest is also to hold the "jealousy grain offering" to emphasize the point.

- b) I can just see most of you thinking right now, "I know am not guilty of adultery and at the moment I am not suspicious of my spouse (or whoever). I don't want to bring anyone to my priest or pastor for that accusation, so why should I care about this stuff?"
 - i) Again, this elaborate ritual would discourage men from wanting to physically hurt their wives if they were strongly suspicious of an affair. It helps to prevent men from taking matters into their own hands by beating their wives.
 - ii) There is a bigger picture that I want to bring up here. Let's look at this in context of the whole chapter. First, this chapter dealt with the issue of (symbolically) separating people from the "church body" who were dealing with sin issues. Next the chapter dealt with fraud. The symbolic idea was that when we break our commitment to serve God, in effect, we have defrauded Him.
 - iii) So given that, why have the last part of this chapter give a detailed ritual about how to deal with jealousy? The answer is to consider God as a "jealous husband".
 - a) Back in Exodus when God gave the 10 Commandments, He Himself stated that He is a jealous God. (Exodus 20:5.) This is not jealousy in the sense that He wants to hurt those who are unfaithful. The idea is that God cares about and wants to protect our relationship with Him. The idea is when we turn from Him, God wants to do all He can to draw us back to Him.
 - b) The idea is God is jealous in that if we do commit our lives to serve Him, He does not want us "serving" (for the lack of a better word) anyone else in our lives. Obviously we still have to care for our loved ones and the world around us. That is not the issue. In fact we show God's love by sharing His love with others around us. The idea is about turning from Him and trying to depend upon our willpower to accomplish His will for our lives.
 - iv) Without going into much more detail at this point, understand that the reason this chapter has a whole long session about dealing with jealousy is that it is model of how God cares about us and what we need to confess when we turn from Him.
 - a) In the meantime, we still have more verses to go to deal with this ritual.
6. Verse 19: Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, "If no other man has slept with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you. ²⁰ But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have defiled yourself by sleeping with a man other than your husband"-- ²¹ here the priest is to put the woman under this curse of the oath -
- a) At this point it is time to get back to the actual ritual that the priest performs here.
 - b) The priest is to say to the woman in effect, "Drink this water mixed with a little dirt. If you are not guilty of having an affair, then no harm will come to you. However, if you are guilty, then you will be under the curse of this oath."
 - i) Consider the literalness of drinking this potion. Will drinking a little water mixed with dirt kill us? It may make us sick for a while, but such a potion cannot cause death for any fairly healthy person.
 - c) So why not just ask the woman if she had an affair and judge her answer? Why have this elaborate ritual of drinking "dirty water" to test one's guilt? Why not just tell the woman, "If you have had an affair, you have sinned". Why all of this?
 - i) To answer, remember again that "idolatry" and "adultery" are synonyms. To have an affair is to cheat on one's commitment to one's spouse. To turn to another god is about cheating on our commitment to Him. That is why those terms are considered synonyms in the bible.
 - ii) OK, so why have this elaborate ritual? It is for us to consider the seriousness of our sins before God. The idea is that He does not take sin lightly. I once heard Phillip Yancy stated, "Leviticus (dealing with sin) reads like a book on how to carefully dispose of nuclear waste". The idea is sin is never to be taken lightly.

- d) The point of this whole ritual is to understand how seriously God takes our relationship with Him. I suppose there were times in Israel's history where husbands brought their wives to the high priests for this ritual. What is more important is the idea to understand how "cursed" we are when we willfully decide to turn from God in our lives. God is not asking us to perform this exact ritual. However, when we do realize we have turned from Him in our lives, He wants us to confess our sins and turn from them.
 - i) It is a good time to actually explain confession here. It is to simply realize, "God's way of doing things are right and what I did was wrong." We then make the effort to turn from that sin and if damage was done by our actions, we should make the effort to deal with the damage.
 - ii) The biggest mistake most Christians make (myself included) is to simply think, "OK, I have confessed my sin. Now I can get back to my life. Yes God wants us to turn from our bad actions, but He also wants restitution. That is why specific Israelites had to leave the camp when they were guilty of one of the things listed earlier in the chapter. That is why when defrauding was mentioned, the guilty party also had to pay a 20% penalty for his or her actions. My point is not so much the specifics of those particular issues, but to understand the concept that there are consequences in life from turning from God.
 - a) Let me explain with an example: Children learn quickly that when they do something wrong, they can wrongly think, I can just confess to my parents what I did and then go back to my life. It is only when children receive consequences for their actions that it sinks in not to repeat that action.
 - b) That same principal applies to us. The purpose of having consequences is not just to pay for our actions, but to let the sinful action sink in, in terms of what we did wrong and what to avoid in the future. This is why the bible lays out specific penalties for specific sins as to learn what we must do in order to restore our relationship with God.
 - iii) Meanwhile, back in the wilderness, the priest is still cursing out the accused. ☺
- 7. Verse 21 (continued): -"may the LORD cause your people to curse and denounce you when he causes your thigh to waste away and your abdomen to swell. ²² May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells and your thigh wastes away. "
 - a) The priest is saying in effect, "If you are guilty, may you be cursed by your people. Next, may your "thigh waste away" and may your "abdomen swell". OK, I would say that requires a little bit of explanation.
 - i) First, the "denouncing" and "cursing" is the idea that adultery brings shame. Again, remember that God cares about our commitments. This includes our commitment to Him as well as our spouses. Are you saying that adultery is an unforgivable sin? Of course not. Jesus stated in effect that the only unforgivable sin is a lifetime denial that He is God. (My paraphrase of Luke 12:10.)
 - ii) What about divorce? Jesus taught that it is only acceptable in cases of one's spouse having an affair. Again, it is not an unforgivable sin. Divorce is an elaborate topic that I won't get into here. My point here is just that it is not an unforgivable sin.
 - iii) The point is that adultery brings shame and that is what the priest is emphasizing when we turn from the relationships that we make a vow to commit to.
 - b) OK, it's time to talk about the weird ones: What does "thigh waste away" and "abdomen swell" mean" and why should I care?
 - i) Think of it in terms of the punishment fitting the crime. For a woman to open her thighs is symbolic of having sex and in this case, an adulterous relationship.
 - ii) As to the "abdomen curse", think of it in terms of not being able to have children, which in that society for a woman was a major loss. Divorces were even common if a wife failed to produce children for one's husband.

- c) OK, time for more of my symbolic stuff. ☺ What does any of this have to do with our relationship with God the Father? Will our thighs going to rot if we sin this way? No.
 - i) The issue comes back to taking our relationship with God seriously and taking sin seriously. The issue is to show that there are consequences when we sin.
 - ii) The classic biblical example is when David sinned by having an affair with a woman named Bathsheba. In Psalm 51, David confessed that sin to God. The point is David realized at that point what he did wrong and confessed it to God. If you know the story, God did forgive him, but God still punished him for that sin. That punishment didn't involve rotting thighs, but it does us show that there are consequences for sins and David had to suffer those consequences.
- d) Meanwhile, back in the wilderness, we have the woman's response to these charges:

8. Verse 22 (continued): " `Then the woman is to say, "Amen. So be it."

 - a) Notice this answer is a requirement. Think about a couple about to be married and they are rehearsing their wedding vows. A pastor or priest will say to the bride during the rehearsal ceremony, you shall say, "I do". That type of requirement is in play here.
 - b) Notice the woman is not admitting guilt. She is simply agreeing to this test. If she is innocent, the worst damage she will have is to drink some dirty water. If she is guilty, then the bad thigh and stomach thing should happen.
 - i) So did this happen in reality? The bible never records any incidents of such. I suppose it is possible, but there are no stories like this recorded. Personally, I suspect the issue is guilt. If one believes one is guilty of a crime, one can let all sorts of things happen to us in order to alleviate that guilt.
 - c) Meanwhile, the ritual is not over yet.

9. Verse 23: " `The priest is to write these curses on a scroll and then wash them off into the bitter water. ²⁴ He shall have the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and this water will enter her and cause bitter suffering.

 - a) If you think this ritual is strange so far, the next part gets even worse.
 - i) The priest is to write down the curse on some paper (probably "papyrus").
 - ii) Then the priest is to take some of the dirty water and wash off the ink from the paper before it dries.
 - iii) Then the woman is to drink the water mixed with the ink.
 - b) Most likely, drinking the water mixed with dirt won't kill us, but it could make us sick for a little while. The idea for the woman is a ritual of "taking a curse" and the words of that curse are now "inside of us".
 - c) Let's pause and consider why all of this is necessary.
 - i) What if the wife is truly innocent? Why would she have to go through this? Think of it this way. Part of the reason for the ritual was so that a man would not take matters into his own hands and beat his wife if he is suspicious. In effect, this is all a case about how to handle domestic disputes in a civilized way.
 - ii) So why not just bring the suspected wife to trial? It is for us to contemplate our relationship with our spouses and even our relationship with God. The idea is that God takes our relationship with Him seriously, in the sense He doesn't want us to cheat on Him or our spouse.
 - iii) What about if a husband cheats? Why doesn't he have to go through this ritual?
 - a) First of all, the penalty for adultery is death as I stated earlier in this lesson.
 - b) Does that mean we should kill people guilty of this today? Of course not. However, if such a person is living in that sin and refuses to repent, such a person should be separated from our church, like I stated happened in a church I used to belong to many years ago.
 - c) Meanwhile, if a wife is suspicious, my guess is she has to put in God's hands and say in effect, "if he is guilty, make it obvious for me to see."

10. Verse 25: The priest is to take from her hands the grain offering for jealousy, wave it before the LORD and bring it to the altar.²⁶ The priest is then to take a handful of the grain offering as a memorial offering and burn it on the altar; after that, he is to have the woman drink the water.²⁷ If she has defiled herself and been unfaithful to her husband, then when she is made to drink the water that brings a curse, it will go into her and cause bitter suffering; her abdomen will swell and her thigh waste away, and she will become accursed among her people.²⁸ If, however, the woman has not defiled herself and is free from impurity, she will be cleared of guilt and will be able to have children.
- a) Meanwhile, we still have to finish the details of this ritual. The text says in effect, that the woman is to drink the water mixed with ink, and see what happens. If the woman's thigh and belly do not change, the priest and her husband will know she is innocent. If her thigh and belly physically change, they will know she was guilty.
 - i) Remember that this is about the punishment fitting the crime. That is why the wife's thigh is mentioned as it is symbolic of opening up one's thighs in order to have illicit sexual relations. The belly is mentioned as the punishment will be a lack of an ability to produce children based on this action.
 - ii) Does this mean if a woman has a miscarriage, she is guilty of adultery or somehow displeasing God with her life? Of course not. I know of a lot of Christian couples who struggled with miscarriages prior to having children. In the cases I have seen, it is often simply God teaching us things through those difficult times.
 - b) The real point is that God does punish adultery, "His way and on His timing". This ritual is more about dealing with jealousy than actual adultery. One of my favorite quotes on this subject came from Chuck Smith of "Calvary Chapel" fame when he said, "God often punishes adulterers by making them then live with the person they had the affair with".
 - c) Getting back to the ritual, the grain offering that was brought to the priest as part of this ceremony was still required to be burned on the tabernacle altar. What if this woman is innocent of this accusation? Why does this grain still have to be offered? I suspect it is to show that God still loves the woman no matter if she is guilty or innocent.
 - i) It is another reminder that God desires we turn from sin and turn back in our relationship to Him, even if we are guilty of adultery or idolatry. It is another reminder that the only unforgivable sin is a lifetime denial of Jesus as both God and as complete payment of all of our sins. Remember that this whole ritual has nothing to do with salvation. It has to do with discovering guilt over a particular sin and having a punishment that is "fair" for that sin. If the woman turns out to be innocent of the crime, her only punishment is to drink dirty water, which is a whole lot less painful than possible physical harm inflicted by her husband.
11. Verse 29: " `This, then, is the law of jealousy when a woman goes astray and defiles herself while married to her husband,³⁰ or when feelings of jealousy come over a man because he suspects his wife. The priest is to have her stand before the LORD and is to apply this entire law to her.³¹ The husband will be innocent of any wrongdoing, but the woman will bear the consequences of her sin.' "
- a) To fully comprehend this, one has to understand the biblical principal of responsibility. The short version is for a married couple, the man is designated as the leader and the wife is under her husband's authority. The way I put it is, "If two people slow dance together, some one has to lead and God says the husband is to lead the wife".
 - i) I state that here because if the husband fails to deal with the possibility of his wife having an affair, in effect, he bears the responsibility. In effect, this whole ritual is about a way for a man to deal with jealousy in a healthy way and bring the issue to a head. Remember this lesson has to do with dealing with issues that distract us from worshipping God. If a husband is suspicious of a wife, he cannot focus on God and this is a healthy way of dealing with that issue.

12. I am the first to admit, this is a hard lesson to take on. It is not easy to deal with a chapter that focuses on sin, potential sin and dealing with accusations against sin.
- a) In effect, this whole chapter is about how God wants us to deal with problems.
 - i) The first set of problems dealt with issues that are symbolic of death and people who have been in contact with "death" needed to be separated from God's people.
 - ii) The next set of issues had to deal with fraud within the church. Those people too, need to be separated so the rest of the church body can focus on Him.
 - iii) Finally, we have an elaborate ritual to deal with jealousy. This ritual is not for us to follow today. If a couple is dealing with a possible affair, the best answer is for them to seek counseling and try to work through the issue. I've learned that an adulterous affair is usually a sign of a marriage that is having problems to begin with. My point is divorce is acceptable in such situations, but marriages can also be worked out if both parties agree to try to work it out. In the meantime, God is providing a healthy way to deal with jealousy.
 - a) The related idea is that God is jealous of our relationship with Him. He wants to guard that carefully. When we confess our own sins before God, we are in effect, completing this ritual of being tested for "adultery" as again, adultery and idolatry are very similar concepts.
 - b) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, simply be grateful that Jesus has paid the price for all the sins we ever have, or ever will commit. Yes God still demands obedience from us and He may punish us for disobedience in order to draw us closer to Him. The other thing to get out of this lesson is the idea that God cares about how we worship Him. He wants us to eliminate distractions when we do focus on Him. The examples given in this chapter show us ways we can be distracted from focusing on Him.
 - c) I promise you the next lesson is going to be a lot more positive. In effect, this chapter says, "Here are the potential problems in worshipping Me. Now that I've laid all of that out for You, let me tell you how you can individually draw close to Me." That in effect is the main point of Chapter 6, in the next lesson.
 - d) In the meantime, it is time for my closing prayer, and I'll focus on forgiveness.
13. Heavenly Father, All of us are guilty of turning from You in our lives. All of us have sinned. We thank You that we are forgiven. Help us never to take that forgiveness for granted. Help us to remember that You desire we draw close to You and make a difference for You with our lives. Help us to be a good witness for You and draw upon Your power as we show love to one another as servants of You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen