

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

NUMBERS 6-7

Chapter 5 finished with the law concerning the jealousy of a man who suspected his wife of adultery, and we saw that the deeper significance of this law speaks of hidden sin of those in Covenant relationship with God Himself—whether Israel, or you and I. What struck the sages most forcibly about the ritual of the sotah was God's willingness to allow his own name to be effaced in order to make peace between a husband and wife.

The various laws we have looked at in the last few chapters are all about maintaining, or bringing about peace, where there is the potential for conflict and disharmony. Even the Nazirite vow, which we look at in this study, can be seen in this light, as it gave anyone the opportunity of drawing closer to God – of raising oneself to a place of sanctity similar to that of priests – thus avoiding possible feelings of exclusion.

CHAPTER 6 – The Nazirite Vow

"Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD..."

Translations typically do not do justice to the meaning in the original Hebrew. The word translated "special vow" (it may be 'consecrates an offering' in your translation) is *pala* in Hebrew, which speaks of a distinguishing action beyond one's own power to do—an action marvellous and extraordinary. The Nazirite vow was not a vow taken lightly, nor was it easy to do.

The word Nazirite (*Nâzîr* in Hebrew) comes from the root word, *nâzar*, meaning a consecrated or dedicated one. In Numbers 6:2-8 the word "separate" (or similar) occurs eight times, so *separation* is clearly the focus of the Nazirite vow. Significantly, the word for 'crown' on the high priest's turban, is from the same Hebrew root word: Ex. 39:30 "Then they made the plate of the holy crown (nezer) of pure gold, and wrote on it...HOLINESS TO THE LORD."

A man or woman from the general tribes of Israel could make a Nazirite vow to separate themselves wholly unto the Lord for a season—usually 30 days. In doing so, one was agreeing to certain obligations:

- **v 3-4 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink ... he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.**

To not drink wine was a very identifiable stand for God that was understood by the culture. Here we see that not even any grape products may be consumed. If we are to separate ourselves from something that may entice us, we cannot afford to trifle with it at all. Abstinence from alcohol was also required of the Priests when they entered the Tabernacle:

In Leviticus 10:9 we read: *Then the Lord Spoke to Aaron, saying: "do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die."*

- **v 5 All the days of his separation a razor shall not pass over his head.**

The hair is a product of the body that crowns the head. At least for women, it is their crowning glory (1Cor. 11:15). A Nazirite's hair represents his "crowning glory" and becomes a sign of consecration.

It is also interesting to note that shaving the head was a sign of deep grief and mourning, when one might feel separated from God. The Nazirite was to be in intimate communion with God, enjoying his fellowship. There was no place for grief in this holy service.

- **v 6** *All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body... Even for his father or his mother, for his brother or sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head.* Contact with a dead body would 'contaminated his Nazirite head', and require shaving his head, and bringing offerings to again 'hallow his head'. Again, we see a parallel with the High Priest here, which also links with the previous law:

Lev. 21:10-11 *He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother.*

The stipulations for a Nazirite show clear resemblance to the Laws for the High Priest¹, therefore Jewish commentary states: A Nazir "voluntarily raises himself above material matters to reach a level of holiness akin to that of the High Priest." Whilst he cannot wear the crown of a High Priest, nor be anointed with the oil of consecration, his uncut hair serves to 'sanctify his head'.² The sacrifices required when he returns to normal life are also akin to those a priest must offer during their inauguration.³

6:14 *And he shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering.*

1. The burnt offering acknowledged God's sovereign dominion over him.
2. The sin offering acknowledged his imperfection, and promoted humility.
3. The peace offering was for grace to preserve him from doing anything to dishonour God.

6:18 *'Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.* Once His "crown" is removed and placed under the sacrifice peace offering, he may drink wine again.

What stands out most evocatively in these stipulations is the link to the priesthood—particularly the High Priest. It seems to be saying that anyone – man or woman, rich or poor, slave or free – has the capacity to draw close to the presence of God, even though they could not physically enter the holiness of the Tabernacle. Let's have a look at Nazirites in the Bible before we unpack this on a deeper level.

Nazirites in the Bible

There are three men in the Bible who were Nazirites from birth, for life:

1. **Samson**⁴ – *"behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the*

¹ Refer Lev. 10:8 & 21:10-12

² Munk, *The Call of the Torah* p65.

³ See Exodus 29

⁴ Samson means "like the sun".

hand of the Philistines.” (Judges 13:5). Samson’s strength was in his hair (his crown); he brought down the Philistine’s temple on their heads – destroying the enemies of God, and killing himself in the process! Samson was the last of the Judges.

2. **Samuel**⁵ – *Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, she (had) vowed a vow and said, no razor shall touch his head.* (1 Sam.1:11) Samuel was given over to the Lord by his mother for as long as he lived. Samuel was a prophet in the time of transition between judges and kings—most notably, he anointed David as King.
3. **John the Baptist**⁶ – “... *your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ...he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb*” (Lk. 1:15). John was from the Tribe of Aaron (priestly line); he prepared the way for Jesus, calling Israel to “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2).

So we see that each of these men, were used by God in times of major transitions. Finally, preparing for the Messiah of Israel to bring the Kingdom of God to this earth. There are also two striking parallels to note here:

1. Each of these men was born from a once barren womb.
2. The repetitive terminology used: “conceive and bear a son and call his name”.

Repetitive themes and the usage of the same terminology in the Bible is quite intentional, and serves to link different passages together, and bring a deeper truth into focus. So, where else do we see the use of this terminology?

Is. 7:14 *The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us).*

Mary herself was told by the Angel Gabriel, “*behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus (Yeshua/Salvation).*”

Unlike the mothers of the above Nazirites, Miriam (Mary) was not barren, and must have had extraordinary purity of spirit and closeness to God to be the one to bear the Christ child—who, we could safely say, was the ultimate Nazirite, although He did not need to take the vow.

You may recall that the theme of the barren wife was significant throughout Genesis – most notably Sarah, of whom God said to Abraham: “*No, but Sarah, your wife, will bear you a son. You shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him*” (Gen. 17:19). Isaac was a ‘type’ of Messiah, as we saw when he willingly allowed himself to be bound on the altar of sacrifice.

Perhaps we can now see why this vow was placed after the law of the adulterous woman, who, if found guilty, was condemned to barrenness and certain death. (If you have not looked at that study - Numbers 5 - I encourage you to do so). Ultimately, Jesus is the only one who can remove our sinful nature, set us free, and bring fruitfulness to our barren womb.

To return to the Nazirite vows, which depict the ability of the common man, to raise himself virtually to the status of a high priest before God, let us consider some NT scriptures:

Matt. 27:51 *Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.* The presence of God was now available to all through the death of His Son.

⁵ Samuel means “name of God” or “God heard”.

⁶ John (Yôhānān) means “God is gracious”.

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.*

Acts 22:16 *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have **put on Christ**.*

Romans 13:14 *But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.*

For the Christian, the Nazirite vow is commensurate with a vow of complete devotion to Jesus Christ the Nazarene—our great High Priest. He alone is the source of holiness and peace with God— and: *we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*** (2 Cor. 3:18).

1 John 3:2-3 *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that **when He is revealed, we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

How seriously do we take this amazing truth? There are so many NT scriptures exhorting us to leave all behind and follow Christ—not in order to deprive us, but to draw us nearer to Him and remove us from the clutches of this world that seek to keep us from our high calling in Him.

So we see that the law of the adulterous woman, followed by this law of the Nazirite are profound shadows of the remarkable, priceless gift brought to mankind by the life and death of our precious Saviour. As we said at the beginning, it speaks of **a distinguishing action beyond one's own power to do—an action marvellous and extraordinary!**

The Aaronic Blessing – 6:22-27

The Priestly Blessing has a very special meaning to Israel as a nation. It was a climax in their development as a people under God. After a long period of preparation, full of painful experiences, a glorious day bursts forth. Suddenly there comes the blessing entrusted to the High Priest to ensure the survival of the Children of Israel.⁷

This is the only prayer in the Bible that the God of Israel Himself composed. This blessing is not subject to any conditions—there is no introduction of, 'if you obey my law'—the Priestly blessing is absolute and unconditional. It was used by the priests in the Temple, and is still recited daily during daily prayers; it is used to bless the children on a Friday evening, and said to the bride and groom under the *chuppa*. But this divine blessing is not meant only for the children of Israel, it is also given to us.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

This is a precisely structured threefold blessing. In the original Hebrew, the first line has three words, the second, five, and the third, seven (these primary numbers have special significance throughout the Torah). The threefold repetition of the name of the LORD, YHVH, also expresses the great mystery of the Trinity. It is as if each member expresses their own part in the impartation.

⁷ Munk, *ibid.* p.64

May the LORD bless you: The Hebrew word for *bless*, is *barakh*, literally, “to kneel down”. This communicates that God Himself desires to make Himself available to us in a way we never thought possible—to lower Himself to our level, in order to bestow upon His people, His promises and gifts. We might picture here, an earthly father kneeling down to communicate and impart love to his son. Jesus would have knelt down to wash the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper. How must they have felt when their Master humbled Himself so? You will recall that Peter said: “No, you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

Blessing, in the Torah, always means material blessing. (See Deuteronomy 28 for the abundant blessings promised to those ‘who obey the voice of the Lord their God.’) He knows what we need before we even ask. If we but, “seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things shall be given to you.” (Mt.6:33).

... **and keep you:** May He keep watch, protect, guard you. May He bless you, preserve that blessing, and protect you from your enemies. First use of this Hebrew word, *shā-mar*, is found in Gen. 2:15: *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

The LORD make His face shine upon you: The Hebrew word translated as “face”, is *panim*, from a root word meaning ‘to turn’. *Panim* is a plural word, indicating “more than one face”.⁸ This implies a range of different expressions. His “face” speaks of God’s openness to let His presence—His favour, compassion & mercy—be imparted to us and be evident in us. He wants to illuminate His people with the light of His Face. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks puts it this way: “May He leave a visible trace of His Being on the face you show to others.”

Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. (Ps. 80:3)

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the **face of Christ**.* (2 Cor. 4:6)

In contrast: *But your iniquities have separated you and your God, and your sins have **hid His face** from you, that He will not hear.* (Is. 59:2)

...**And be gracious to you-** The “Grace of God” is not confined to the NT – it is fundamental to the nature of God throughout the Scriptures. In Judaism, grace speaks of that quality which sees the best in others and seeks the best for others. It is a combination of gentleness and generosity. Beautiful attributes for us to nurture also.

May the LORD lift up His face toward you: May He show you special consideration and favour by lifting up the fullness of His personhood toward you—bearing you up, carrying you.

...**And give you peace:** The concluding word of this priestly blessing is “peace”—shalom—peace being the ultimate and supreme goal. *Shalom* has such a rich meaning in Hebrew. “It does not mean simply the absence of strife – it means completeness, perfection, the harmonious working of a complex system, integrated diversity, a state in which everything is in its proper place. Peace exists where each element in the system is valued as a vital part of the system as a whole and where there is no discord between them.”⁹

To be at peace with ourselves we must know that we are unconditionally valued. People may be fickle in their attitude towards us, but God loves and values us unconditionally. He never gives up on

⁸ The four faces around the throne of God, in Ezekial & Revelation, may be relevant here.

⁹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, Numbers, p102.

us; He rejects no-one; He never loses faith in us; He lifts us up; He believes in us more than we believe in ourselves.

It is no small thing that, in the context of His departure from His disciples, Jesus said: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (John 14:27)

In Christ we are promised *“the peace of God, a peace that passes all understanding... ”* (Phil. 4:7);

Are you walking in the shalom that the Holy Spirit imparts to you?

6:27 *“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”*

This is an absolutely extraordinary blessing, which places the very name of the LORD upon His people—all that He is, His very essence, He desires to impart to His people. It is not the priests who bless the people. Rather, it is *through* them that God Himself blesses the people. In Jewish tradition, when imparting the Aaronic blessing, the hands of the Kohanim are spread out over the congregation forming the letter Shin (ש), an emblem for *Shaddai*, "Almighty [God]". The blessing must be performed with love. I have no doubt that Jesus would have prayed the Aaronic blessing over his disciples when he departed from them:

Luke 24:50-52 *...and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*

CHAPTER 7 – Offerings at the Dedication of the Tabernacle

7:2-3 *On the day when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle and had anointed and consecrated it with all its furnishings and had anointed and consecrated the altar with all its utensils, the chiefs of Israel, heads of their fathers' houses, who were the chiefs of the tribes, who were over those who were listed, approached and brought their offerings before the LORD...*

This harks back to the final chapter of the book of Exodus, which describes the setting up of the tabernacle and ends with the report of the cloud covering and the presence of the Lord filling the tabernacle.

With much repetition of language, this chapter (the longest in the Pentateuch), records the magnificent, and identical gifts given to the Lord for tabernacle service from the leaders of the 12 tribes. No command is given for these gifts to be brought, so they are assumed to be freewill offerings. Whilst we will not look into the detail of these offerings, we can be sure each and every one of them is significant – for example, silver speaks of redemption, and gold, of kingship.

The fact that the record of these gifts follows the text of the Aaronic benediction seems fitting: in response to God's promise to bless His people, they bring gifts to him in twelve sequential days of celebrative pageantry.

7:89 And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him.