

Naso

נשא "Take"

Numbers 4:21 – 7:89

Torah Together



This portion covers several interesting subjects. In addition to the test for an unfaithful wife, the details of the voluntary Nazirite vow are explained. Finally, God instructs Moses to tell Aaron how he is to bless the Israelites with the priestly blessing.

1. The Gershonites and the Merarites - 4:21-33

a) In taking the census of the Gershonites, who exactly was counted? Why just these? What were their duties? Who directed their work?

For both the Gershonites & the Merarites, only males between 30 and 50 were counted, as this was the age when they served at the Tabernacle. The Gershonites were responsible for the curtains and coverings in the Tent of Meeting as well as the curtains for the courtyard. Both groups were directed by Ithamar, son of Aaron.

b) In taking the census of the Merarites, who exactly was counted? Why just these? What were their duties? Who directed their work?

For both the Gershonites & the Merarites, only males between 30 and 50 were counted, as this was the age when they served at the Tabernacle. The Merarites were responsible for the frames of the Tabernacle, crossbars, posts, bases, ropes & tent pegs. Both groups were directed by Ithamar, son of Aaron.

2. The Numbering of the Levite Clans - 4:34-49

How many from each clan of the Levites were counted? What was the total? Why was this number different than the total given in Numbers 3:39?

The results of the census were:

Kohathites: 2,750

Gershonites: 2,630

Merarites: 3,200

TOTAL: 8,580

In Numbers 3:39, all Levite males over one month of age were counted. In this census, only males between ages 30 and 50 were counted.

The previous portion concluded by describing in detail the tasks of the Kohathites. We begin this portion by describing the tasks of the other two Levite clans, the Gershonites and the Merarites. God is very thorough in detailing the responsibilities of the Levites.

Scripture Link:

Numbers 8:24-26

explains that a Levite was in service at the Tabernacle from the age of 30 through the age of 50. He began an apprentice program at age 25 and after age 50, he was able to help others but he was to do no work.

Scripture Link:

Leviticus deals at length about the concept of purity. **Chapter 13** specifically deals with infectious skin diseases. In addition to reinforcing God's requirement for spiritual purity, this command would have the blessing of disease prevention.

Scripture Link:

Leviticus 5:17 – 6:7 contain the details of the guilt offering, the offering required by God to deal with sin involving harm to others. Note that the *Torah* clearly states that with such sin, not only must restitution be made to the offended party, but atonement must also be made because the sinner has been "unfaithful to YHWH."

An Unfaithful Wife?

In this culture, women were often treated just slightly better than slaves. It was possible for a husband to accuse his wife of unfaithfulness without proof, perhaps out of pure jealousy. This law would have kept a faithful wife (who was accused unjustly) from being treated harshly by her husband. Whether guilty or innocent, God would be intimately involved in the life of the wife, providing cursing or blessing as appropriate.

3. The Purity of the Camp and Restitution for Wrongs - 5:1-10

a) What could cause a person to be sent away from the camp? According to verse 3, why was this done? Was the banishment permanent? For what reasons do you think God might have commanded this?

A person was banished if they had an infectious skin disease, a bodily discharge, or had come in contact with a dead body. Verse 3 states that this was done to keep from defiling the camp. Although not stated, according to Leviticus, the banishment was temporary, until the situation was corrected. There are at least 2 reasons for this: 1), to reinforce the need for spiritual purity, and 2), to prevent the spread of disease.

b) For what reasons might a person need to make restitution? According to verse 6, what else happens when someone wrongs another person? What must be done to make restitution? What happened if there was no one to whom to make restitution?

Restitution was commanded for "any wrong common to mankind." Verse 6 says that not only have you wronged another, but you have been "unfaithful to God." Restitution consists of the price of the wrong + 20% given to the person wronged. (If not easily calculated, judges/priests helped set price.) If there was no close relative to whom to make restitution, it was made to a priest.

4. The Test for an Unfaithful Wife - 5:11-31

a) Describe the situation that would lead to the test for an unfaithful wife. Was proof of unfaithfulness necessary? What situation might arise in the absence of this test?

If a man suspected his wife of unfaithfulness (becoming jealous without proof), then he could go to the priest and demand his wife take this test. This prevented a man from accusing (& perhaps divorcing) his wife without cause.

b) Describe the test itself. What was the punishment if the wife was guilty? Who actually carried out this punishment? Do you think this was fair?

The priest would take holy water, mix into it dust from the floor of the tabernacle, and wash the words of the curse written on a scroll into the water. The woman then drank the water and if "her abdomen swelled and her thigh wasted away," she was guilty. This could describe either a physical malady or barrenness. Only God could cause the effect of the curse to be realized or not.

c) Do you think this test was of greater benefit for the husband or the wife? Does this give you any insight into God's character?

This test was probably of greater benefit to the wife, ensuring that an innocent woman was not falsely accused and divorced. It might also help a man curb his jealousy. If she is found guilty however, everyone would know the truth.

5. The Nazirite - 6:1-21

a) The 'Nazirite' voluntarily took a vow before God. Who could take such a vow? For what reasons might someone want to do such a thing? **"Any man or woman who wanted to make a special vow" could take the vow of the Nazirite. Typically, a person took the vow as a sign of their commitment to God.**

b) Typically, the period of a Nazirite vow was 30 days. During this time, what were the responsibilities of the person? What could happen to interrupt this process? What was done in this case?

The Nazirite could not eat or drink anything deriving from grapes (wine, vinegar, raisins, etc.) Also, the Nazirite would let their hair grow during this period and could not come in contact with a dead body. If a person should die in their presence, sacrificial atonement was made and the process was begun again.

c) What process was followed when the period of separation was completed? Do you know of any other references to Nazirites in the Bible?

After the period of separation was over, the person presented himself or herself before the priest at the entrance to the Tabernacle with appropriate offerings (burnt offering, sin offering, fellowship offering) and his hair was cut off and also offered up on the altar. Samson was a lifetime Nazirite (Judges 13:5) as was Samuel (I Sam 1:11). Luke 1:13-17 imply that John the Baptist was a Nazirite from birth. The vow was still practiced in Paul's lifetime as evidenced by the incident described in Acts 21:20-26. (See "Digging Deeper")

6. The Priestly Blessing - 6:22-27

a) Specifically to whom were these instructions given? According to verse 27, what is the effect when these instructions are followed?

Moses was told that these instructions were for Aaron & his sons, i.e., the priests. When the blessing is given, "they will put my name [YHWH] on the Israelites and I will bless them."

b) Analyze the words to be spoken. Do you find any significance in the fact that these words are given by God to be used specifically for this purpose?

In Hebrew, there are 3 lines, each beginning with YHWH. The first line has 3 words, the second 5, and the third 7. They involve God's protection, His presence, and His peace. Similar to Psalm 67:1 & 121. Note also Matt 5:8. God desires to bless His people with His protection, presence and peace.

May the LORD bless you and keep you,
May the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,
May the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you peace.
Numbers 6:24 - 26

What is a Nazirite?

The term Nazirite means 'dedicated one' or 'set apart one.' A person undertakes such a vow to show that he or she is voluntarily separating himself or herself for use by God. In the *Brit Hadashah*, when *Yeshua* is referred to as "Jesus of Nazareth," the original author may have meant to indicate either that *Yeshua* was from the town of Nazareth or that *Yeshua* had taken a Nazirite vow, separating himself for use by God. Either translation is possible from the Hebrew.

Scripture Links:

Judges chapters 13 – 16 tell the story of Samson. In particular, **Judges 13:7** show that God intended for Samson to be "a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death." Also, **I Samuel 1:11** indicate that Samuel too was a Nazirite from birth.

Scripture Link:

The Priestly Blessing spoken in **Numbers 6:24-26** shows that it is God's desire to bless His people with His protection, presence and peace. **Psalm 67** continues this theme, showing that God desires to bless **all** the peoples of the earth in the same way.

Scripture Links:
Numbers 7, Exodus 40,
and **Leviticus 8** each describe the same event. As a general rule, when the *Torah* speaks of a single topic more than once, we should pay close attention – God must think it is important. (Consider the Gospels which present four different views of the life of the Messiah.) Can you gain any further insight by looking at all three of these passages together?

7. Offerings at the Dedication of the Tabernacle - 7:1-89

a) This passage, **Exodus 40**, and **Leviticus 8** each describe the same event. What additional information are we given in this passage? ***Exodus 40 focuses on the initial setting up of the physical tabernacle. Leviticus 8 describes the ordination of Aaron and his sons. This passage details the dedication offerings brought by each tribe of Israel. Each passage adds some detail to the same event, somewhat like the four Gospels.***

b) According to verse 3, what gifts did the heads of the families who were the tribal leaders bring? To whom were these gifts given and how were they allocated? For what were they to be used? Who directed the usage of these gifts?

The tribal leaders brought 12 oxen and 6 covered carts as gifts. They were given to the Levites and Ithamar the priest gave 2 carts & 4 oxen to the Gershonites and 4 carts & 8 oxen to the Merarites. These were to be used to carry the tabernacle materials when the Israelites traveled. (Note that the furnishings themselves were borne on the shoulders of the Kohathites.)

c) After the altar was anointed (vs 10), each tribal leader brought his offering for dedication. Exactly what offerings were brought by each tribal leader? Do you find any significance in these offerings?

Each tribal leader brought a silver plate and silver sprinkling bowl filled with flour & oil as a grain offering, a gold dish filled with incense, a young bull, a ram and a lamb for burnt offerings, a male goat as a sin offering, and 2 oxen, 5 rams, 5 goats, and 5 lambs as fellowship offerings. The offerings consisted of those required by God. In addition, the tabernacle received the bowls & dishes for permanent use. Also, the entire tribe probably participated in the fellowship offering celebration.

d) A different tribal leader brought their offering on each day. In what order were the tribes presented? Why do you think the text lists each tribe's offerings separately?

The tribes presented their gifts in the same order in which they marched when on the move: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, & Naphtali. Perhaps the repetitious nature of this passage is meant to indicate that each tribe had a special day in which they alone "fellowshipped with God." Each tribe was important to God.

e) Compare verse 89 with **Exodus 40:34-35**. Do these seem contradictory to you? How do you resolve this?

In vs 89, it says that whenever Moses entered the Tent of Meeting, God spoke to him from between the two cherubim on the atonement cover. Exodus 40:34-35 indicates that whenever the cloud (glory) of God rested on the Tent, Moses could not enter. Perhaps God spoke to Moses when the cloud was not present? Or perhaps in one case, the writer was referring to the Holy of Holies.

Digging deeper

1. Read **John 8:1-11**. Compare this story with the “Test for an Unfaithful Wife” in **Numbers 5:11-31**. Why do you think *Yeshua* was writing on the ground? What do you think he might have been writing? What character traits of God did *Yeshua* demonstrate by his actions?

Several differences exist between this situation and the test in Numbers 5. First, the text indicates the woman was actually caught in the act of adultery, not merely suspected of it. Next, where was her husband or the man who had committed the act with her? In one case, the husband must accuse his wife and in the other, the man caught in the act with her is equally guilty. Yeshua may have been thinking of this test when he was writing on the ground. (Perhaps she was not guilty, but merely suspected.) He may have been writing the words of the curse indicated in Numbers or the name of God, Yahweh. In any case, he demonstrated God’s quality of mercy. He was able to see into the woman’s heart and determine that she was either not guilty or truly repentant.

2. Reread **Exodus 32:15–29**. What connections can you find between this story and the “Test for an Unfaithful Wife” in **Numbers 5:11-31**? Does this give you any insight into God’s view of idolatry?

It’s clear who the “jealous husband” is in this episode. The parallel between the man who suspects his wife of unfaithfulness and God, who knew that Israel had been unfaithful to Him, are striking. It helps to reinforce the concept that to God, idolatry is the same as adultery between a man and a woman.

Unfaithfulness

Additional insight into God’s character can be gained by considering His feelings about unfaithfulness. Certainly, God considers unfaithfulness to the marriage vow to be of paramount importance. (Think of the simplicity and directness of the seventh commandment: “Thou shall not commit adultery.”) The fact that God considers our unfaithfulness to Him through idolatry to be the same as the sin of adultery helps us understand the importance He places on the vows we make, whether to our mate or to Him.

Food for Thought

As can be seen from this story in **Acts**, the practice of making a vow of separation to YHWH in the manner described in **Numbers 6** had been kept alive in Hebrew society for hundreds of years at the time of *Yeshua*. Do you think you might be interested in making a similar vow of separation to God? If so, how might you go about it today?

3. Read **Acts 18:18 and 21:17 - 26**. The four men mentioned in verse 23 had taken a Nazirite vow. Why do you think it was necessary that they undergo the rite of purification? Why was it suggested that Paul join these men in their vow? What did Paul do?

The 4 men may have come into contact with a dead body or in some other way become defiled as described in Numbers 6:6-12. The purification rite is then that which is described in Numbers 6:9-12: the men were to shave their heads and offer 2 doves or pigeons as sacrifice. (Paul would pay for these.) The vow was to begin again and this time, Paul would join them. This suggestion was made so that the Jews (who had been told that Paul was teaching that believers need not obey the Torah) would see that he himself was obedient to the Torah. Paul heeded this suggestion and joined in the Nazirite vow with the four men.

NOTE: A case can be made that Yeshua was a Nazirite:

1. *The Hebrew term "Yeshua of Nazareth" could as easily have been translated as "Yeshua the Nazirite."*
2. *He began his vow with a mikveh, being baptized by John the Baptist.*
3. *He ended his life without drinking of the vine. (He refused the vinegar during his crucifixion.)*

For further study, see

Haftarah : Judges 13:2-25

Brit Hadashah : John 7:53-8:11; Acts 21:17-32