

Message #7

Numbers 6:1-27

Sometimes things happen in life and individuals just want to get close to God. For us this requires reading and meditating on God's Word and getting alone with God and spending time with God praying to Him and fellowshiping with Him. For Israel, it was different.

The nation Israel was a very unique nation, especially in its relationship with God. The nation Israel is comprised of individuals and yet no Israelite could possibly have a proper relationship with God apart from the corporate worship community.

Now certainly there is an application we may make to this in regard to the church. God's people need the church. But the goal of this passage is not to recruit a bunch of new Nazirites. The goal of this text is not to produce rigid religious legalists who operate by a do not handle, do not taste, do not touch philosophy (Col. 2:21). **The goal of this text is to show that separation and consecration to God and His Word are a prelude to His blessings.**

People who took a Nazirite vow had some specific reason or goal in mind. Usually it grew out of some need. No one is ever commanded to take a Nazirite vow. Also no one was viewed any less spiritual if they did not take a vow. This vow was usually prompted by a specific need or task. But if one opted to do it, it was permitted and highly regulated. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, there were different reasons why someone would take a Nazirite vow:

- 1) Someone with distemper or some other distress would take a 30 day Nazirite vow.
- 2) Some women would take the vow to beseech God to have a baby.
- 3) Some would take a Nazirite vow prior to offering a sin offering.
- 4) Some would take a Nazirite vow if one had accused a woman of adultery.
- 5) Some would take a Nazirite vow simply because they wanted to do it before they died.

We must not make a mistake in terminology. **A Nazirite vow is not the same as being Nazarene. The word "Nazir" is a word that means to be separated or consecrated. This is a special separation vow that is carefully regulated by divine regulations.** Jesus was called a Nazarene because He came from the city of Nazareth, but He never took a Nazirite vow. He drank wine and touched dead bodies.

There are three in the Bible who did seem to take a lifetime Nazirite vow:

- 1) Samuel (I Sam. 1:28; 2:8-28)—Possible this was a lifetime vow (I Sam. 1:22).
- 2) Samson (Judges 13:1-5)—Manoah and his wife put vow on Samson—but he strayed.
- 3) John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-17).

In all three of these cases the common denominator was the mothers were barren and God let them have a baby so they dedicated their children to the Lord. In the case of John, his vow was lifetime.

GOD MADE A PROVISION FOR INDIVIDUAL ISRAELITES SO THEY COULD TEMPORARILY SEPARATE THEMSELVES AND CONSECRATE THEMSELVES TO GOD FOR A CERTAIN TIME; BUT IN ORDER TO DO THAT THEY MUST FOLLOW STRICT LEGAL GUIDELINES.

This was a vow that was made for a specific time frame and it was governed by very strict regulations. This was a purposeful abstinence or restriction one placed on self for the purpose of unique separation and consecration. A person decided this on their own.

Now if we put this in the context of the blessing that follows at the end of this chapter, we would assume that this vow was taken to ask for God's unique, special blessings. **This vow was typically a temporal vow and never a permanent vow.**

One thing is very clear; drawing close to God is not some loose or light matter. Drawing close to God is not some free-for-all. This specific vow required "scrupulous attention to detail and strict attention to all governing regulations" (Glen S. Martin, *Numbers*, p. 282).

In fact, **verse 1** begins by saying this came to Moses directly from God. We may analyze this chapter by under three main Nazirite vow parts:

NAZIRITE VOW PART #1 – The Nazirite vow legal guidelines. 6:1-13

Now this Nazirite vow was a Jewish vow that featured things you were not to do and things you were to do. There are eight strict legal features to this Nazirite vow:

Feature #1 - The vow could be taken by either a Jewish man or Jewish woman. 6:2

The purpose of the vow is clearly stated here. It was to dedicate himself or herself to the Lord for some very specific reason for a temporal period of time.

Now apparently if a woman made a vow and her father or husband heard it and didn't agree with it, they could overrule it (Numbers 30).

Feature #2 - During the vow one must not drink wine or strong drink. 6:3a

Now when one was under a Nazirite vow, one needed to restrain one's self from vineyard products. Drinking wine and strong drink was normally done to express joyous occasions. Wine (yayin) was made from fermented juice of grapes and strong drink (shekar) was made by a distillation process. A good illustration of this would be wine versus brandy. Wine comes from grapes through fermentation and brandy comes from grapes through distillation. But during the vow period all forms of these beverages were "off limits."

There is an interesting text in Jeremiah 35 in which a father named Jonadab demanded that his entire family never drink wine (Jer. 35:6). God specifically told them to drink wine (35:1, 5) and they refused to do it. So God said you would rather obey a man rather than Me (35:16).

This was never intended to be a lifetime restriction. It was for a period of time and for a specific purpose (Num. 6:20; 15:5, 7, 10).

Feature #3 - During the vow one must not drink vinegar. **6:3b**

Now vinegar is a bitter drink or strong sour drink and that was to be avoided.

Feature #4 - During the vow one must not drink grape juice. **6:3c**

Fresh grape juice is the unfermented fruit of the vine and during the time of the vow, no one was to drink fresh grape juice.

Feature #5 - During the vow one must not eat fresh grapes or raisins (dried grapes). **6:3d-4**

For the entire duration of the vow he was not to eat anything connected to a grape. Everything connected with the grape was off limits. Hosea 3:1—raisin cakes used in pagan worship. There are times when the work of God means we must for a while forfeit some normal blessings and comforts.

Feature #6 - During the vow no hair could be cut but must grow long. **6:5**

This apparently represented the idea of turning every area of your physical life, including your hair over to God. Since typically the woman did not cut her hair, perhaps during this vow she would leave it uncovered and loose.

Feature #7 - During the vow one could not go near a dead corpse. **6:6-8**

We saw back in chapter 5 that touching a dead person made you unclean (5:2). This same restriction was put on a high priest (Lev. 21:11). So when one was under a Nazirite vow, one could not touch a dead body or that would make him unclean. He was not to go near a dead body (**v. 6**). This was true even if the person were his father, mother, brother, sister or other member of his immediate family. He is to be holy to the Lord the entire time of His vow.

It is interesting that when Jesus was here he told a would-be follower who wanted to go to a funeral, “let the dead bury the dead” (Matt. 8:22). He was basically saying you need to dedicate yourself to following Me because I am God. In other words, separate yourself to Me now.

If we are to be close to the Lord, we must get away from that which is dead and that which will kill our spiritual life. Sin is that which deadens our relationship with God and those who want a vital relationship with God do not involve themselves in sinful things.

Years ago there was a man who was promoting the fact, based on Numbers 6, that a N.T. believer should not drink wine because he is a priest and the priests did not drink wine. When he was confronted with the rest of the text, he had no answers. Do you drink grape juice? Do you eat raisins or grapes? Do you get your hair cut? Do you go to funerals? He didn't know what to say because he didn't know what he was talking about.

Feature #8 - During the vow if someone died suddenly next to him, it nullifies the vow. **6:9-12**

Now someone could die right next to you, when you were under this Nazirite vow. If that happened, the person under the vow was required to take specific action:

- 1) He must shave his head on the seventh day. **6:10**
- 2) He must have a priest offer a sin offering because of the dead person. **6:11**
- 3) He must bring a male lamb for a guilt offering or the entire vow is nullified. **6:12**

NAZIRITE VOW PART #2 – The sacrifices and offerings after the Nazirite vow is over. **6:13-21**

In **6:1-12** we see regulations for the vow; in **6:13-21** we see regulations for termination of the vow. After the vow was over, the following actions were to be taken:

Action #1 - He was to bring an offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. **6:13**

It is very clear from this that the Nazirite vow did not make the person sinless. They needed to bring their offerings.

Action #2 - He was to bring a specific offering to present. **6:14-15**

- 1) The offering was to include one male lamb a year old without defect for a burnt offering. **6:14a**
- 2) The offering was to include one female lamb a year old without defect for a sin offering. **6:14b**

This vow did not make a person sinless. No matter how much one sets himself or herself apart unto God, he/she is still a sinner. The sacrifice was still needed.

- 3) The offering was to include one ram without defect for a peace offering. **6:14c**
- 4) The offering was to include a basket of unleavened bread and wafers for a grain offering. **6:15a**
- 5) The offering was to include a drink offering. **6:15b**

The drink offering was an offering of wine (Num. 15:5, 7, 10; 28:7-10, 14). So once this vow was over, wine was to be used again.

Action #3 - The priest was to offer the all of the offerings to the Lord. **6:16-17**

Action #4 - The Nazirite was to shave his hair and put it on the fire under the peace offering.
6:18

The long hair was shaved off and burned in the fire. This indicates the vow is over.

Action #5 - The priest shall take a portion of the offering and put them in the hands of the Nazirite to wave them before the Lord. **6:19-20a**

This was all lifted up before God and dedicated to God. The lifting and waving symbolized the transfer of offering to God.

Action #6 - The Nazirite shall drink wine. **6:20b**

This was the law of the Nazirite. Now that the vow period was over, he could resume drinking wine and enjoy the fruit of the vine.

NAZIRITE VOW PART #3 – The priests are to pronounce a blessing on the people. **6:22-27**

This is closely connected to what goes before it. The purpose of this vow was to ask God to pour out His gracious blessings on the individual and on Israel.

God is showing His people that holiness is a critical key to having a relationship with Him.

The words of the vow are restrictive, but the blessings of God are “expansive and gracious.”

In 1979, archeologist G. Barkai was doing work in the Hinnom Valley. He discovered a burial complex from the 7th to 6th century B.C.. Among the remains was a leather phylactery that contained two scrolls the size of a small cigarette. On both of them this benediction was written. The text is near identical to the Hebrew Masoretic text that has been translated into English. This shows the importance of this blessing.

Those who obey His Word and those who dedicate themselves to being holy and godly will discover the following seven blessings and benefits:

Blessing #1 - The Lord will bless you. **6:24a**

The Jew would have in mind physical blessings of numerous descendants and land.

Blessing #2 - The Lord will keep you. **6:24b**

The word is shay-mar that means to keep, watch and guard. The Jew would have in mind the protection of God from enemies to live a long life in good health. His abiding presence would keep them.

Blessing #3 - The Lord will make His face to shine on you. **6:25a**

This metaphor is one that pictures God's favor in which He favors them and shines forth His blessings on them.

Blessing #4 - The Lord will be gracious to you. **6:25b**

Grace is always unearned, not deserved. You cannot earn grace as a form of compensation for faithfulness and you cannot annul grace as a compensation for unfaithfulness. When God chooses to be gracious to someone, it is all Him and He will bless via His grace.

Blessing #5 - The Lord will lift up His countenance on you. **6:26a**

One Biblical scholar said the idea behind this metaphor is that God majestically smiles upon someone and makes them the object of His pleasure and affection.

Blessing #6 - The Lord will give you His peace. **6:26b**

Having peace with God and peace of God with self is something God gives to those who love Him.

Blessing #7 - The Lord will answer their prayers. **6:27**

When God chooses to answer prayer, one is blessed.

What God wants are people who love Him and His Word and are dedicated to applying it in every situation of life. Those who do that will be blessed by God.

Practical Thoughts:

- 1) Before we can have true, close fellowship with God, we must be clean.
- 2) Both men and women may pursue a deeper relationship with God and those who do will be blessed by God.