

Naso

Take “Jealous Dedication”

Numbers 4:21-7:89

Judges 13:2-25

The Book of *Bamidbar* has been traditionally named Numbers, because of all the numbering and census taking which begins the fourth book of the Torah. This week in our *parashah*, *Naso*, we read about the delineation of certain families with more specificity, along with some additional rites. The Lord spoke to Moses and indicated that the Gershonites, Merarites, and Kohathites, from the ages of thirty to fifty, were to perform certain duties in and around the Tabernacle:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers’ households, by their families; from thirty years and upward to fifty years old, you shall number them; all who enter to perform the service to do the work in the tent of meeting’” (Numbers 4:21-23).

“As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers’ households; from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tent of meeting” (Numbers 4:29-30).

“So Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers’ households, from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting” (Numbers 4:34-35).

In *Bamidbar* (Numbers 1:1-4:20), the Gershonites, Merarites, and Kohathites had been designated the tasks associated with the Tabernacle structure and its accoutrements, including but not limited to its construction, disassembling, and portage. Earlier, the numbering of these Levites included all males from one month of age and older, but now those with strength—and presumably more wisdom—between the ages of thirty to fifty, to physically handle the labor, are assigned specific duties. Apparently, the Lord knew that with some life experience, those given specific duties would be more inclined to take their responsibilities seriously, and perhaps not incur the swift judgment that befell immature Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2), two of Aaron’s young sons.

During the Apostolic Era, the Apostle Paul drew on some of his personal wisdom, as he imparted directions to the much younger Timothy, on how he was

to organize various leaders within the Ephesian congregation. First, despite Timothy's relative youth, he was clearly chosen to handle his calling, with some well defined parameters shared to him by Paul:

“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching. **Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.** Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. **Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity**” (1 Timothy 4:12-5:1).

Youth was a reality for Timothy, but he was not to neglect the unique spiritual gifting that was prophesied over him, with a confirmation from the laying on of hands by an assembly of elders. Nevertheless, Paul warned him to react humbly regarding interactions with any older congregants in the assembly where he served. On the other hand, when it came to recognizing the different overseers within the Ephesian assembly, some wise advice listed some of the godly attributes crucial to being selected as one of their elders. But note, just because someone has a chronological advantage in terms of age, it does not necessarily mean that one should become an elder, especially if one is a relatively new Believer:

“An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. **He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the [assembly] of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.** And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the [assembly]*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:2-7).

Turning back to *Naso*, as the Lord further detailed some of the roles for the Ancient Israelites during their desert sojourn, He was concerned about the possibility of the camp being defiled by the evidence of leprosy. There was some specific admonition given, regarding how they were to properly deal with those who contracted leprosy:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **‘Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. You**

shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst.’ The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the LORD had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did” (Numbers 5:1-4).

Next, there is a brief description about how restitution was to be made for sinning or acting unfaithfully to the Lord. Note the principle that both men and women were equally accountable for their sin, as both were required to confess and atone for their guilt:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, **“When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged.** But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong *must go* to the LORD for the priest, besides the ram of atonement, by which atonement is made for him. Also every contribution pertaining to all the holy *gifts* of the sons of Israel, which they offer to the priest, shall be his. So every man's holy *gifts* shall be his; whatever any man gives to the priest, it becomes his.””

Law of Jealousy

One of the most intriguing instructions within *Naso*, that the Lord gave to Moses, is what is often termed the “law of jealousy” and how to handle human emotions, whether justified or not, when it came to marital relationships. A jealous husband, who was unsure of his wife’s fidelity to him, could have her go through this ritual by which her innocence could be determined:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “If any man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, and a man has intercourse with her and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband and she is undetected, although she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act, if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has defiled herself, or if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has not defiled herself, the man shall then bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring *as* an offering for her one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall not pour oil on it nor put frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of memorial, a reminder of iniquity. Then the priest shall bring her near and have her stand before the LORD, and the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel; and he shall take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put *it* into the water. The priest shall then have the woman stand before the LORD and let *the hair* of the woman's head go loose, and place the grain offering of memorial in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy, and in the hand of the priest is to be the water of bitterness that

brings a curse. The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, ‘If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, *being under the authority of your husband [tachat isheik; under thy husband, YLT]*, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; if you, however, have gone astray, *being under the authority of your husband [tachat isheik]*, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you’ (then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), ‘the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people by the LORD’s making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell; and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away.’ And the woman shall say, ‘Amen. Amen.’ The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness. Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and *cause* bitterness. The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman’s hand, and he shall wave the grain offering before the LORD and bring it to the altar; and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as its memorial offering and offer it up in smoke on the altar, and afterward he shall make the woman drink the water. When he has made her drink the water, then it shall come about, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, that the water which brings a curse will go into her and *cause* bitterness, and her abdomen will swell and her thigh will waste away, and the woman will become a curse among her people. But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, she will then be free and conceive children. This is the law of jealousy: when a wife, *being under the authority of her husband [tachat isheik]*, goes astray and defiles herself, or when a spirit of jealousy comes over a man and he is jealous of his wife, he shall then make the woman stand before the LORD, and the priest shall apply all this law to her. Moreover, the man will be free from guilt, but that woman shall bear her guilt”” (Numbers 5:11-31).

In some regards, the concept of a jealous husband requiring his wife to partake in this sort of ordeal, somewhat mirrors the Lord’s jealous regard for His people. The Torah has already indicated that the Holy One of Israel is a jealous God who desires His people to remain absolutely faithful to Him, and to avoid any association with any alluring false gods they would encounter when in the Promised Land:

“Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters

might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods” (Exodus 34:12-16).

The Prophet Isaiah made an analogy of a marriage between the people of Israel and Jerusalem. What might this mean in evaluating how the Holy One is jealous for His people, that they be in allegiance to Him? The union of God’s people to Himself, involves a description of Jerusalem being considered His “bride”:

“For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will designate. You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. **It will no longer be said to you, ‘Forsaken,’ nor to your land will it any longer be said, ‘Desolate’; but you will be called, ‘My delight is in her,’ and your land, ‘Married’; for the LORD delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, your God will rejoice over you.** On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isaiah 62:1-7).

In the Apostolic Scriptures, the Apostle Paul also invoked an analogy of Yeshua the Messiah serving the assembly, as a loyal husband should serve his wife. This would have been most especially important for many of the early Greek and Roman Believers to hear, who came from cultural backgrounds where the husband was often an autocrat who could do whatever he wanted:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the [assembly] and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the assembly in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also *does* the assembly, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH [Genesis 2:24]. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Messiah and the [assembly]. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Considering the tenor of these different passages in Exodus, Isaiah, and Ephesians—every follower of the Holy One needs to avoid ever provoking Him to

a point where His righteous jealousy, just might instigate some form of trial that is consistent with the ancient procedure we encounter in *Naso*. While it might not be consuming some dust to determine whether one has strayed, the Lord in His infinite wisdom and knowledge of all things, stirring in the hearts of human beings, just might concoct a unique test that will accomplish the same goal that the law of jealousy originally achieved. *Believers beware!* The jealous God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7), and in His inimitable way, He can initiate circumstances that will result in either strict penalties or restitution.

Law of Separation

Numbers ch. 6 largely includes a description of the Nazirite vows. The Nazirite vow was a commitment for a person to separate himself or herself from partaking of the fruit of the vine, remaining unshaven with hair uncut and from the defilement of touching corpses, so that the Nazirite might be totally dedicated to the Lord for a period of time. Apparently, this rite continued into the First Century C.E. When Paul returned to Jerusalem in Acts 21, he was told by James that it had been falsely reported by some Jewish Believers that he was teaching the Jews he encountered in the Mediterranean to abandon the Torah and Jewish customs. In order to prove this claim false, Paul agreed to pay for the expenses of some completing their Nazirite vow. Taking a Nazirite vow was not a normal part of Torah obedience for the community, but was a highly specialized rite. Paul's presence in the Temple complex was useful for him to prove his fidelity to not only the Torah, but also to the Jewish community:

“After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After he had greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they *began* glorifying God; and they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What, then, is *to be done?* **They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law**” (Acts 21:17-24).

While Paul was present at the closing ceremonies of those who took the Nazirite vow, a major incident erupted because of some who came in and shouted out the false claim that Paul was disloyal to the Torah (Acts 21:27-28). The rest of

the Book of Acts records how this was used for Paul to be arrested, appeal to Caesar, and then be transported to Rome.

What does a Nazirite vow mean for Messiah followers today? *It obviously cannot be observed without a Tabernacle or Temple present.* But, the principle, of being separated from certain worldly distractions, is an important one. It is difficult to believe that the Lord God of Creation would be displeased with anyone who had a heartfelt desire to separate himself from certain things, in order to dedicate a time period in his life exclusively to Him. Some of you may actually decide to keep a form of a Nazirite vow, mainly by abstaining from wine or alcohol for a season, or actually letting your hair grow and not cutting it. Whatever you do, let us each remember the admirable exhortation given by Joshua, as the Israelites entered into the Promised Land:

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; **but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD**” (Joshua 24:15).

As the details about the Nazirite vow come to a close, the Lord gave Moses perhaps one of the most revered blessings to be administered by his brother Aaron, the high priest of Israel. In a very direct way contextually, the Almighty was certainly emphasizing that the kind of dedication found in taking a Nazirite vow was something which would receive some profound blessings upon the adherents, to such a commitment to the Lord:

“This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD according to his separation, in addition to what *else* he can afford; according to his vow which he takes, so he shall do according to the law of his separation. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘**Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.**’ So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I *then* will bless them” (Numbers 6:21-27).

What is known as the Aaronic Benediction, is traditionally recited at the close of *Shabbat* services in the Jewish Synagogue, and is also present in Messianic *Shabbat* services. (Even some Christian traditions speak the Aaronic Benediction.) It is beyond a doubt, that these are some of the most cherished words that followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, yearn to hear. The Aaronic Benediction would have undeniably had special significance for those who were preparing to begin or end a Nazirite vow (cf. Numbers 6:2).

Finally, the last chapter of *Naso* describes the completion of the Tabernacle construction, and the consecration of the furnishings, altar, and various utensils. This is followed by offerings made by the leaders of each tribe, as their contributions to the ceremony:

“Now on the day that Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it with all its furnishings and the altar and all its utensils; he anointed them and consecrated them also. Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' households, made an offering (they were the leaders of the tribes; they were the ones who were over the numbered men). When they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for *every* two of the leaders and an ox for each one, then they presented them before the tabernacle. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Accept *these things* from them, that they may be used in the service of the tent of meeting, and you shall give them to the Levites, *to* each man according to his service.’ So Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites. Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service, and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But he did not give *any* to the sons of Kohath because theirs *was* the service of the holy *objects, which* they carried on the shoulder. **The leaders offered the dedication offering for the altar when it was anointed, so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Let them present their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar’**” (Numbers 7:1-11).

Each of the twelve tribes made identical contributions of offerings for the sacrifices, and after twelve days, this consecration of the Tabernacle was completed. In conclusion, Moses confirmed his intimacy with the Lord, describing the voice of the Lord coming from above the mercy seat, which was placed on the Ark of the Covenant:

“Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, 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, so He spoke to him” (Numbers 7:89).

With great confidence, followers of the Holy One today can be assured that what they are studying in the Torah is coming from the heart of God, spoken by His mouth via His servant Moses. With this in mind, should not all that Moses declared be relevant instruction to every person who seeks the Holy One? Would the Almighty Creator want anything less?

May He, by His grace and mercy, give us all the heart and wisdom to hear and obey His blessed word! In so doing, may all who are seeking to know the Lord with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength—be encouraged to “jealously” dedicate themselves and their families—**to serve the Lord!**