

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 3

Chapters 5:5 – 6:27

It was still the first day of the second month in the second year out of Egypt.⁵ The LORD had begun putting an order to the camp of Israel that had not been in place before that day. He arranged the different tribes where He wanted them to camp in the arrangement that He required. He placed them around the Levites who were camped around the Tabernacle complex. He named a new leader for each tribe and numbered all the men twenty years old and upward who were able to fight in the battles for the taking of the Promised Land. He divided the Levites into three groups and named them according to the names of those three sons. He then subdivided the groups further by naming them after the grandsons of Levi. He chose a new leader from each Levite family and gave them to the priests for service in the war of warfare in the spiritual things.

With that completed, the LORD redeemed all the firstborn sons of the twelve tribes of Israel by giving one firstborn son of the Levites to Aaron and his sons in their service of worshiping the LORD. There were 273 more firstborn of the tribes of Israel than there were Levites. The LORD required those 273 to be redeemed. Because there were not enough Levites to ransom them, five shekels per person was required and given to Aaron and his sons.

Then the LORD continued to order the camp by instructing that all who had a disease or who had come in contact with a dead person were to be placed outside the camp to make sure the nation of Israel remained holy and undefiled.

The LORD was not finished with ordering the camp. Several more instructions were needed.

Command for Any Person Guilty of Sin of Mankind

^{5:5} Then **the LORD spoke to Moses**, saying, ^{5:6} "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, ^{5:7} 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. ^{5:8} '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. ^{5:9} 'Also every contribution pertaining to all the holy *gifts* of the sons of Israel, which they offer to the priest, shall be his. ^{5:10} 'So every man's holy *gifts* shall be his; whatever any man gives to the priest, it becomes his.'"

In Leviticus 6, this instruction was given. Here it is expanded. A man or woman who was found guilty of a sin that was listed anywhere in Exodus or Leviticus was to face a certain penalty. Sins against people were sins against the LORD. Therefore, restitution was required to the LORD

⁵ Wednesday, Iya 1 2724 ACA, May 11, 1463 BC. See Dr. Jim Hastings, *Book of Days*. Volume 1, © 2018.

and to the person that was wronged. The wrong was to be compensated in full with the additional payback of twenty-five percent. Then the LORD required an offering in the form of a ram, sacrificed for the atonement of the sin committed. It was given to the priest.

Kinsmen Relationships in the Israelite Nation

Brothers
In birth order

Uncles
In birth order

First Cousins
In birth order

**Any Other Male
Relative**
In birth order

If the person wronged was dead, the full payback with the twenty-five percent addition was required to be given to the nearest relative. There was a specific order as to which relative received the redemption. First in line were the brothers in order of age from the oldest to the youngest. Second, were the father's brothers (uncles) in order from the oldest to the youngest. Third, the payback went to the father's brother's sons (first cousins) in birth order. Fourth and final was any other male relative in birth order.

If the wronged person did not have a living Kinsmen Redeemer relationship, the guilty one was to make the payment to the priest along with the ram of atonement.

Next, the LORD provided a method to detect an unfaithful wife. This same method also brought protection to the innocent wife from a devious husband. We will break this process into parts so we can understand the process.

Command for Unfaithful Wife – The Law of Jealousy

^{5:11} Then **the LORD spoke to Moses**, saying, ^{5:12} "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'If any man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, ^{5:13} 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, ^{5:14} 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, ^{5:15} 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.

First, it is important to remember that all the tribes of the Nation of Israel were living in tents, in close quarters, in daily contact with others living and sleeping just a few feet away. Second, it is important to remember that humans were just as human then as they are now. A man catches a woman's eye and a woman catches a man's. Things begin to happen, urges take over and sin abounds! It was no different from now. Sometimes the whole affair goes unnoticed, in secret, at least for a while. No one sees it, no one knows for sure, but rumors begin to creep out. People begin to wonder. The husband begins to wonder. He begins to watch how she looks at another man, maybe the same man, maybe a different man. He just sees her looking at men in a way that does not please him. The whole possibility of his wife being unfaithful consumes him. He just doesn't know. He just can't be sure. He just wants to know for sure. That whole consuming event is called "*a spirit of jealousy.*"

For the camp of Israel, the LORD provided a way for a husband to know for sure if his wife was innocent or guilty. He was to take her to the priest with an offering of **“one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal.”**

Barley was the cheapest grain available in those days. It had little nutritional value and cost much less than fine ground flour. **“One-tenth of an ephah”** was the amount needed for the presentation. An ephah was an Egyptian dry measurement that the Hebrews carried into their culture when they left that country. A tenth of an ephah equaled the weight of an *omer* or the equivalent of about 5 pints, or 2.5 quarts of barley. It was the quantity of manna collected each day for one person in the wilderness.

Normally, barley was mixed with oil if it was going to be baked into a cake for the offering or it was sprinkled with frankincense if it was going to be offered as a grain offering that was burnt completely on the altar. Oil and frankincense were not to be used in a sin offering; therefore, neither could be included in this process. Oil was a symbol of joy; frankincense was a symbol of festivity, and neither was appropriate in this situation.

5:16 'Then the priest shall bring her near and have her stand before the LORD, 5:17 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.

Wife stands with priest at screen door of Tabernacle

The woman was placed at the screen door at the entrance of the Tabernacle. It was the same place where Moses had washed Aaron and his sons in the consecration process. It was the same place where the fire of the LORD came out of the Tabernacle and killed Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu. She was not allowed to go into the Tabernacle where the Holy Objects were on display; only Aaron and his two sons were allowed to do that.

Holy water from basin put in earthen vase

Dust from floor inside Tabernacle put in water

The priest would take water from the basin/laver and put it in an earthen jar. He would then add some dust from the floor inside the Tabernacle. The jar had to be earthenware because in a sin offering the jar would be broken at the end of the process. A brass jar would not work. This new concoction of holy water would have a new name in the next passage, *“the water of bitterness.”*

5:18 '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.

Woman removes her shawl

Woman holds barley

Priest holds vase of bitter water

In the Hebrew culture, the head of a woman was always to be covered with a shawl. With the removal of the shawl and the hair hanging down naturally, the woman was as vulnerable before the LORD as she could be in front of the priests in public.

5:19 "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, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; 5:20 if you, however, have gone astray, *being under the authority of* your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you" 5:21 (~~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; 5:22 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."

Priest administers oath

Woman replies with Amen, Amen

The oath administered by the priest clearly stated the charges against the woman. If she had been with a man, she would be cursed and her abdomen would swell and her thighs would shrink; if she had not been with a man, she would not be cursed; nothing would happen to her body.

After the oath, the woman had to affirm the statement with the words "Amen. Amen."

5:23 "The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness. 5:24 "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.

Priest writes oath on scroll

Priest washes oath off scroll into water

Woman prepares to drink water

This part of the process is extremely interesting. The priest would write the words of the oath on a scroll, most likely with charcoal. He would then take the scroll and wash the words in the holy water in the vase. The water was ready for the woman to drink; however, she was holding the barley offering that must be given to the priest who would exchange it for the vase of water.

5:25 "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; 5:26 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. 5:27 "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. 5:28 "But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, she will then be free and conceive children. 5:29 "This is the law of jealousy: when a wife, *being under the authority of* her husband, goes astray and defiles herself, 5:30 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. 5:31 "Moreover, the man will be free from guilt, but that woman shall bear her guilt."

Priest offers the barley as a smoke offering on the altar

Woman drinks water
Priest and woman wait for result

Man freed of guilt

The priest exchanged the vase of water for the vase of barley. He went to the brazen altar and sprinkled the barley on the fire as a smoke offering. He then instructed the woman to drink the water. They waited together.

If the woman's thighs shrank and her stomach swelled, she was guilty of being with a man who was not her husband. If nothing happened to her body, she was found innocent of the charges. She would be free to continue as a wife, bear children and live without condemnation. The opposite was true if she was found guilty.

At the conclusion of the test, the man was freed from all guilt. This statement is interesting because it sums up the position of the man whether or not the woman is guilty. The test freed the man either way. If his wife was innocent, the man was free to trust her as his wife. If the wife was guilty, the man was free to put her away because she was cursed. In the polygamous society of the nation of Israel at that time, the man still had other wives to bear children. The guilty wife would never be able to bear children after the test.

It would be easy to think of the test as extremely restrictive on the wives in the nation; however, the opposite is the truth. In that society, it was impossible for a wife to defend herself against jealous and abusive husbands who could drum up any reason to rid himself of a wife, free himself from the cost of her care or gain for himself a wife who was more apt to give him healthy children. This test protected the wives from the accusations of the husbands who were unhappy with them and could lie their way out of that relationship, thereby leaving a wife without a means of support in that cultural system.

Nazirite Vow – The Restrictions

Num 6:1 Again **the LORD spoke to Moses**, saying, **6:2** "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, **6:3** he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. **6:4** 'All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from *the* seeds even to *the* skin. **6:5** 'All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long. **6:6** 'All the days of his separation to the LORD he shall not go near to a dead person. **6:7** 'He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. **6:8** 'All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD.

The Scripture "**When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite**" indicates that a Nazirite could be a man or a woman. We know of only one or two Nazirites for sure in the Bible, Samson and John the Baptist. This does not mean that there were not more, possibly Samuel and Paul. However, Samuel took the priestly route and the Nazirite vow was not needed for him. That is not to say that he did not take the vow from time to time. The Scripture tells of his baldness and boys making fun of him. That could have come at the end of his vow or when

he was required to cut his hair and begin the vow anew. We do know that Paul made a special vow during his ministry and he, too, was said to be bald. We often read into the Scripture long-term meetings that are actually short-term in nature and recorded there for that purpose. For instance, we say that Paul was a tentmaker because he took that job in Corinth. What we fail to see in the context of that passage is that Paul was out of money. He needed donations from the churches to survive. He was also nearly totally blind at the time. He had to obtain work that would allow him to use his hands in such a way that he could feel the work he was doing and earn a living. He was a Pharisee to begin with; tentmakers were not Pharisees. Educated people such as the Pharisees, were not tentmakers. That trade was left to the uneducated.

In this passage the vow of the Nazirite was established. During the duration of that vow, which could have been for life or for a short period, a man or a woman would not touch any product of the grape vine, the hair would not be cut nor would the dead be touched even if it was a close relative.

Nazirite Vow – The Warning and Restitution

^{6:9} 'But if a man dies very suddenly beside him and he defiles his dedicated head *of hair*, then he shall shave his head on the day when he becomes clean; he shall shave it on the seventh day. ^{6:10} 'Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. ^{6:11} 'The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and *the* other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him concerning his sin because of the *dead* person. And that same day he shall consecrate his head, ^{6:12} and shall dedicate to the LORD his days as a Nazirite, and shall bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering; but the former days will be void because his separation was defiled.

If by chance the Nazirite touched a dead person, the vow would automatically end. For seven days the Nazirite was unclean. On the eighth day the head was shaved bald (male or female) and a meager offering of at least two turtle doves was presented to the priest at the Tabernacle, one as a sin offering, one as a burnt offering. A lamb was also needed for a guilt offering. Notice it says, **“but the former days will be void because his separation was defiled.”** All the acclaim that the Nazirite might have had in the past was voided. No longer could he say, “I have been a Nazirite for twelve years.” After his defilement, the Nazirite life had to start over.

Nazirite Vow – The Completion

^{6:13} 'Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring the offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. ^{6:14} 'He shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb a year old without defect for a burnt offering and one ewe-lamb a year old without defect for a sin offering and one ram without defect for a peace offering, ^{6:15} and a basket of unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, along with their grain offering and their drink offering. ^{6:16} 'Then the priest shall present *them* before the LORD and shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. ^{6:17} 'He shall also offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, together with the basket of unleavened cakes; the priest shall

likewise offer its grain offering and its drink offering. ^{6:18} 'The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head *of hair* at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings. ^{6:19} 'The priest shall take the ram's shoulder *when it has been* boiled, and one unleavened cake out of the basket and one unleavened wafer, and shall put *them* on the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his dedicated *hair*. ^{6:20} 'Then the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. It is holy for the priest, together with the breast offered by waving and the thigh offered by lifting up; and afterward the Nazirite may drink wine.' ^{6:21} "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."

The Nazirite vow offered a natural completion. For those taking the vow for a specific time, the LORD provided the process for ending the vow. In this process, the head was to be shaved too; however, the ceremony with the priest at the door to the Tabernacle was much grander and more glorious and included many more offerings. Seven items were needed to complete the Nazirite process, 1) one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering, 2) one ewe lamb (female lamb) a year old for a sin offering, 3) one ram for a peace offering, 4) a basket of unleavened cakes with oil, 5) unleavened wafers spread with oil, 6) a grain offering and 7) a drink offering. The method of operation with each offering seems detailed, yet, these items were usually offered to the LORD in the same way each time they are presented here, whether or not they were in association with the Nazirite vow. Finally, at the end of the offering ceremony, the Nazirite was no longer a Nazirite and could drink wine.

Because of the detail involved in this instruction, its importance was paramount. It was important for all men and women to take the time, as life transpired, to have seasons dedicated to the LORD with this vow. The absence of the Nazirite vow attributed to the noted people in the Bible does not negate the fact that there were many who took this vow through the years of the Old and New Testament. In addition, during the time in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, the ceremony of the Nazirite vow was probably practiced extensively.

Lord's Blessing

^{6:22} Then **the LORD spoke to Moses**, saying, ^{6:23} "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: ^{6:24} The LORD bless you, and keep you; ^{6:25} The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; ^{6:26} The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' ^{6:27} "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I *then* will bless them."

The LORD had not finished setting up the instruction for the camp; however, enough had been said that it was time for Him to bless the nation of Israel. The LORD instructed Aaron concerning this benediction through the lips of Moses. It is interesting that all the communication between the LORD and Aaron goes through Moses. Did Aaron ever communicate with the LORD One to one? Not that we can find. Moses was always the conduit of communication. That is not to say that Aaron never heard the voice of the LORD. He did so

at the same time as the rest of the camp when the LORD delivered the Ten Commandments almost two years before (Exodus 20).

The blessing is threefold.

1. “The LORD bless you, and keep you.” For two years the LORD had met every need of the individuals in the nation of Israel in the wilderness. Those blessings were physical and spiritual. The LORD had also kept the nation from harm in every way. In the LORD’s keeping of the people, He gave them instructions concerning sin and the bitter effects of it in life. Being blessed and kept by the LORD cuts two ways. First, it plainly tells a person how to stay away from sin and the blessing that will come because of it. Second, it plainly tells a person of the penalty of sin and the curse that will come because of it. Either way, the LORD still blesses and keeps both whether by a life free of sin or a life indulged in sin. The person knows his position before the LORD without excuse.
2. “The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you.” The shining of the face the LORD is likened to the shining of the sun on the earth. It brings radiance to a life. It brings a new day every morning. It brings a new opportunity each moment. All of that is the gracious gift of the LORD to each individual. In opposition to that, we do not want to seek the face of the LORD! To do that means that we are willing to accept the punishment that He will doles out on us when we have committed sin. That is not to say that we should not be willing to face that punishment when we sin; it is to say that we should not sin which would require us to seek His face; we should live as sin free as possible, so the LORD will shine the radiance of His grace upon us rather than His condemnation.
3. “The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.” When a lifted countenance is given towards a person, it is in the form of a cheerful or pleasant look. For example, it is the look that comes on almost everyone’s face when they see a newborn. That is the look we want from the LORD when He sees us. That look gives peace, a peace with God that calms every fear, every concern, every anxiety, every unknown.

What did the nation of Israel need to do to invoke this threefold blessing? They simply invoked the name of the LORD (Numbers 6:27). What a persuasive argument to stay in the good graces of the LORD! He would do that if they would call upon His name. What does it mean to call upon His name? It means to seek the LORD in everything! Always. Every day. Every way. In all things!

We must think of this as a new beginning for the nation of Israel, both as a multitude and as individuals. Although it was new to this group of sojourners, it was not new to their ancestors. In Genesis 4, at the birth of Enos, the Godly line of Adam began to call on the LORD’s name. In Genesis 12, Abraham called on His name. In fact, every descendant of Enos down to Jacob called upon the name of the LORD. It was the one difference between those who were godly and those who were ungodly. The result was the difference between those who would spend eternity with God and those who would not.