

The Requirements of the Nazirite Vow and the Priestly Blessing

Numbers 6

Numbers 6 - *"The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the LORD as a Nazirite, ³ they must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or other fermented drink. They must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. ⁴ As long as they remain under their Nazirite vow, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins. ⁵During the entire period of their Nazirite vow, no razor may be used on their head. They must be holy until the period of their dedication to the LORD is over; they must let their hair grow long.*

⁶ "Throughout the period of their dedication to the LORD, the Nazirite must not go near a dead body. ⁷ Even if their own father or mother or brother or sister dies, they must not make themselves ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of their dedication to God is on their head. ⁸ Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the LORD. ⁹ "If someone dies suddenly in the Nazirite's presence, thus defiling the hair that symbolizes their dedication, they must shave their head on the seventh day—the day of their cleansing. ¹⁰ Then on the eighth day they must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ¹¹ The priest is to offer one as a sin offering^{ab} and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for the Nazirite because they sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day they are to consecrate their head again. ¹² They must rededicate themselves to the LORD for the same period of dedication and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because they became defiled during their period of dedication.

¹³ "Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the period of their dedication is over. They are to be brought to the entrance to the tent of meeting. ¹⁴ There they are to present their offerings to the LORD: a year-old male lamb without defect for a burnt offering, a year-old ewe lamb without defect for a sin offering, a ram without defect for a fellowship offering, ¹⁵ together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and a basket of bread made with the finest flour and without yeast—thick loaves with olive oil mixed in, and thin loaves brushed with olive oil. ¹⁶ "The priest is to present all these before the LORD and make the sin offering and the burnt offering. ¹⁷ He is to present the basket of unleavened bread and is to sacrifice the ram as a fellowship offering to the LORD, together with its grain offering and drink offering.

¹⁸ "Then at the entrance to the tent of meeting, the Nazirite must shave off the hair that symbolizes their dedication. They are to take the hair and put it in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering. ¹⁹ "After the Nazirite has shaved off the hair that symbolizes their dedication, the priest is to place in their hands a boiled shoulder of the ram, and one thick loaf and one thin loaf from the basket, both made without yeast. ²⁰ The priest shall then wave these before the LORD as a wave offering; they are holy and belong to the priest, together with the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. After that, the Nazirite may drink wine. ²¹ "This is the law of the Nazirite who vows offerings to the LORD for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation."

²² The LORD said to Moses, ²³ "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴ *“The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”* ²⁷ *“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”*

Background Notes

In 1975 a significant archeological discovery was made in the Hinnom Valley outside of Jerusalem. In an ancient tomb, two tiny rolled-up silver scrolls were uncovered. They were likely jewelry, used as little silver amulets or charms. In 1982 a process was developed to unroll these fragile scrolls, and when they were unrolled they were about the size of a postage stamp! But written on them, in ancient Hebrew script, was the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26:

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

This is the oldest extant Hebrew Scripture that we have (at least the oldest to this date). These two little silver scrolls are dated to the 7th century BC - that would be back in Jeremiah's day, before the destruction of Solomon's Temple! So if anyone ever asks you, "What is the oldest fragment of the Bible available today?" you can tell them it's the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26. These two little silver scrolls are on display in the Israel Museum today.

Verse 23 tells us that Aaron and his sons were to use this priestly blessing to bless the people of Israel. It was probably used as a benediction after the daily sacrifices, and on many other occasions as well. The Christian tradition of a benediction at the end of a church service probably finds some of its roots all the way back to this priestly blessing of Numbers 6. God wants to bless His people: *“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them” (v27)*.

This is still true today. God wants to bless His people! He wants to bless us and protect us. He wants to radiate His joy to us and be gracious to us. He wants to look with favor on us and give us peace. The priestly blessing of Numbers 6 is a guarantee that God wants to bless us. And He **will** bless us - because **we are His people!**

Doctrinal Points

1. The Nazirite vow involved separation.

The word "Nazirite" comes from a Hebrew root word meaning "to separate." A Nazirite was a layperson of either sex who took a vow of consecration to God's service for a specific period of time, or in some cases, for life. Three notable Nazirites in the Bible were Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Unfortunately Samson didn't keep his Nazirite vow.

Don't confuse "Nazirite" with "Nazarene"! Our Lord was called a Nazarene because He grew up in Nazareth, but the Nazirite vow has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth.

Taking a Nazirite vow was not like becoming a monk or nun, and living a celibate life off in a remote monastery or convent. Nazirites could be married, and they could hold secular jobs, but they did give up certain pleasures of life during this time of consecration. So the Nazirite vow did involve separation, as the Hebrew root of the name implies.

There were three requirements for anyone taking a Nazirite vow:

1. Nazirites were to abstain from wine and strong drink, and from any product made from grapes.
2. Nazirites could not cut their hair.
3. Nazirites could not go near anything that was dead.

The three requirements of the Nazirite vows symbolized the kind of commitment that was called for in the Nazirite vow, and these requirements have plenty of application for the committed believer today.

1. In the Bible, wine is a symbol of joy. By abstaining from wine and all associated products, a Nazirite was symbolically stating that “all my joy is found in the Lord.” Now, let me ask you as disciples of our Lord - are we that committed? Is our joy found primarily in earthly pleasures - or only in the Lord?
2. The uncut hair would clearly mark out any man who was a Nazirite. He could not hide the fact that he was a Nazirite. In fact, he took the Nazirite vow knowing that his separation would be clearly marked out, and thus he was not ashamed to be a Nazirite. Once again, the question for us is: are we willing to let it be known that we’re committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do we try to hide the fact that we’re Christians? Does your life and lifestyle clearly identify you as a Christian, or are you ashamed for people to know that you’re a Christian?
3. Under the law, touching a dead person caused any person to be ceremonially unclean and defiled. Nazirites were not even to go near the dead - symbolically emphasizing their separation from anything that defiles. What about us? Do we separate ourselves from the defiling things of this world? Are we careful to stay far away from anything that would defile us? There’s plenty of trash and corruption in this world that would make us unclean, so we must **practice separation**. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 says, *“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,” says the LORD Almighty.*”

Now remember that the separation under the Nazirite vow was not only **separation from** certain things, but it was **separation to the Lord**. How important it is for committed disciples today to remember this principle! The Nazirite vow involves separation.

2. The Nazirite vow involved sacrifice.

Verses 9-21 give the procedures for the termination of Nazirite vows, either as planned or when broken. Even when the Nazirite vow was broken accidentally (for example, if a person died suddenly beside a Nazirite), the vow was to be terminated. The person could rededicate himself, but he had to start all over again. *“They must rededicate themselves to the LORD for the same period of dedication and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because they became defiled during their period of dedication.”*

The lesson for us is obvious. When we become defiled by the corruption of this world - even when we didn't intend to be affected - our fellowship with the Lord is broken and must be reestablished. Even a sinful thought or a sinful look is enough to disrupt our fellowship with the Lord.

When Nazirites completed their vows, they had to present the required offerings. All of these offerings emphasize the fact that completing a Nazirite vow didn't atone for any sins. Furthermore, these sacrifices all pointed forward to the one Great Sacrifice to come.

When the Nazirite completed his vow, he shaved his head and threw the hair into the fire on the altar, emphasizing that his whole Nazirite experience was a living sacrifice unto the Lord. The Nazirite vow involved sacrifice.

Practical Application

You too can be a “Nazirite”!

Of course this application is not literal, because Nazirite vows were only for God's Old Testament people. However, we can apply this to our lives in the sense that we, as believers, should be dedicated and consecrated and committed and separated to the Lord. We are to be serving Him, not ourselves.

In Philippians 3:8 the apostle Paul said, *“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...”* Now you may not be the next apostle Paul, but you can be just as dedicated and committed and consecrated and separated unto the Lord as the apostle Paul was. Did you ever realize this? You too can be a “Nazirite”!

Notice Numbers 6:2. **Any** person could become a Nazirite – so you too can be a “Nazirite”!