

## Parashat Nasso

### **Parashat Nasso - 'Lift' (Numbers 4:21-7:89)**

This week's portion is named for a word in the second verse.

**Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe lemor:**

**Naso et-rosh b'nei Gershon gam-hem l'veit avotam l'mishp'chotam:**

**Then Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: "Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers' house, by their families."**

Numbers 4:21-22

This week's portions name, "Nasso" comes from the first word in the phrase, "*Naso et-rosh b'nei ger'shon* [Lift the head of the sons of Ger'shon]."

This was about naming the name of each man - and identifying him with who he was, and to Whom he belonged. In each case, they were men who had a G-d-given destiny. It was about being who they were created to be. At the end of last week's Torah portion we saw that the sons of K'hat [Kohath] were identified (by lifting their heads). As Levites, it was their duty to carry the furniture of the Tabernacle. Two more families of Levites are named and given duties in this week's parasha: Ger'shon and M'rari (Mer-ari).

The naming of names continues in this parasha, and then we have some seemingly disconnected passages. Let's look at a summary of the contents of this week's portion:

- Naming and duties for the sons of Ger'shon (4:21-28) which consists Carrying the curtains, both of the Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle, essentially all that has to do with the hanging coverings.
- Naming and duties for the sons of M'rari (4:29-33) which also consists Carrying everything that has to do with supporting or hanging all the curtains and coverings that the sons of Ger'shon were tasked with carrying.
- Where those who are *tamei* [unclean] should dwell (5:1-4)
- Confession of sin, and restitution (5:5-10)
- The test of the suspected *sotah* [suspected wife] (5:11-31)
- The instructions regarding the Nazarite vow (6:1-29)
- The *Birkat Kohanim* [Aaronic Blessing] (6:22-27)
- The offerings and dedication of the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle] (7:1-89)
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The theme of all of these verses is the same. They are all about living consistently as we were created to be; and thus bringing glory to the One Whose Name has been placed upon us. Again, it is all about "names" - and it is about "lifting up" Adonai's Name.

Of particular interest is the connection between the "test of the suspected *sotah*" and the *Birkat Kohanim*. You may ask, "*What does the test of a suspected unfaithful wife, have to do with the Aaronic Blessing?*"

It's A Name, family.. **His Name.**

There is great significance in the "*sotah*" passage (that is, the test of the suspected unfaithful wife). There are deep truths in this passage and its companion passages of Isaiah 54, and John 8:3-11. Isaiah 54 is an encouragement that G-d will vindicate His own. John 8 is about the woman "caught in adultery" brought to Yeshua to see what He would do. What connects this to the *sotah* passage is the fact that under Torah, there were **only** two possibilities for this woman "caught in the act":

- Under Torah, produce at least two **eyewitnesses**. In which a trial must take place (no spontaneous stonings permitted in Torah) by the assembly (Sanhedrin).
- Under Torah (in this week's portion), absent **eyewitnesses**, let her husband bring a charge against her - and the test of the suspected **sotah**. To be carried out in the Temple itself - where Yeshua was during the John 8 episode.

Considering the test of the suspected *sotah* and the use of the dust from the Tabernacle/Temple floor in testing her innocence, it brings a whole new angle to the common question, "What was Yeshua writing in the dust?"

Of course, we know that Yeshua was not abrogating Torah in demanding **two valid eyewitnesses** ("*He who is without sin, cast the first stone*") as others may have believed: Yeshua was using Torah correctly: **to reveal sin, to bring one to repentance, and to set one free**. Which brings us to the main point, **The Name**.

In the test of the suspected *sotah*, the priest will take some water from the Laver in the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle] and mix some dust from the floor of the *Mish'kan*. Then the priest will place the woman under oath with a curse attached to it. Then the oath will be written down, and then the letters scraped off into the water that has the dust of the *Mish'kan* in it. Then the woman, if she agrees, will drink the mixture. If she is innocent, then she will be openly declared as innocent, and she will conceive and have children. If she is guilty, the curse will be applied to her, and her, "*belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people.*" Sounds like some tough medicine indeed. Of particular interest is this "oath" that is written down, and then scraped into the water and dust mixture.

*Then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman "Adonai make you a curse and an oath among your people, when Adonai makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; and may this water that causes the curse go into your*

*stomach, and make your belly swell and your thigh rot." Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it." WHOA!! Wait a minute. By the time the curse is spelled out you would think that when this woman said "Amen, so be it", she knew what was coming if she was guilty! Don't know about you, if I was the guilty one facing that punishment, I would RUN!*

*Then the priest shall **write** these curses in a book, and he shall **scrape them off** into the bitter water.*

Numbers 5:21-23

Lets look at the words being scraped off. They include the **ineffable Name** of G-d, listed twice in the oath are **scraped** into the water, basically the ink is scraped. Notice, this is the only time in the entire Scripture that the Name of G-d is **erased** in this manner. This is serious stuff indeed. What does this water do? It either opens the womb of the suspected *sotah*, or it curses her. **The Name of G-d becomes a curse to her?!!**

We've seen something like this before. The very Word of G-d either brings freedom, or it brings death. It brings freedom in the *revelation of the path of salvation* - or it brings condemnation and death for those unwilling to repent. So let us understand that the words of the Creator of the Universe have **always** had two possible outcomes for man: life, or death. Isn't it interesting how often we describe G-d's Word as a sword - and yet sometimes fail to remember that the very analogy describes something that **cuts both ways**? Scripture makes sure we understand this by repeatedly making that comparison. In Hebrews we are told:

*For the Word of G-d is living and powerful, and sharper than any **two-edged sword**, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is **a discerner of the thoughts** and intents of the heart.*

Hebrews 4:12

G-d's Word does indeed cut both ways. It brings life to those who are following the path back to the Tree of Life - the path with Messiah **through the veil**. It brings death to those who, by disobedience, and a lack of repentance stubbornly seek for **their own way** back to the Garden. G-d's Name cuts both ways as well. It is a Name that can bring blessings and life, and it is the Name that will condemn the wicked.

The *Birkat Kohanim* [Aaronic Blessing] is also about the Name (Numbers 6:24-27). The *Birkat Kohanim* is used in some circles as a way of benediction, or placing a general wellbeing upon G-d's people. Our parasha tells us the reason for the *Birkat Kohanim*: it is about **the Name**, and **placing it upon us, thereby blessing us**. It is the essence of these past two week's parashot are about: being who the Creator created us to be. It is about ownership. The *Birkat Kohanim* is like saying, "These are My treasured possession. They are Mine. **My Name** is written on them." It is why it is said with the *kohen's* hands in the shape of the letter *shin*, which is symbolic for one of G-d's Names, "*El Shaddai*."

The *Birkat Kohanim* merely the placing of a blessing on the people by an Aaronic priest. It is G-d, standing behind the *kohen*, placing His Name upon the people **through** the priest. **The blessing... is His Name on us.**

The *Birkat Kohanim* can have special significance to those who love Messiah and His Torah. It is often part of the weekly Shabbat, which begins Friday evening in the homes of believers - with the man of the home (as representative for the family) placing the Name of the Almighty upon His family. Ashkenazi tradition also has the *chazan*, the prayer leader, pronouncing the *Birkat Kohanim* during Morning Prayers.

We who know Yeshua have had our heads lifted. We have had Him speak His prophetic blessings upon us - writing His Torah upon our hearts and causing us to walk in His ways. He has given us His Name **as our identity**. He has given us clear instructions not to sully His Name, (that word "sully" has a broad list of don't's including taint, defile, soil to name a few), but to bring it glory. We do that not by what we claim we believe... **but how we live.**

*For we are **His workmanship**, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which G-d prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Ephesians 2:10

*Y'varech'cha Adonai v'yish'm'recha*

*Yaer Adonai panav elecha vichuneka*

*Yisa Adonai panav elecha*

*V'yasem l'cha shalom.*

*Adonai bless you and keep you*

*Adonai make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you*

*Adonai lift up His countenance upon you and give you shalom.*

Numbers 6:24-26

*So they shall put **My Name** on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.*

Numbers 6:27

### **Haftarat Nasso 'Lift' (Judges 13:2-25)**

This week's Torah portion includes the instructions in Numbers 6 regarding the Nazarite vow. Most folks do not know much about Nazarites, the vow of the Nazarite, or the purpose for Nazarites. Beloved, there is much about the instructions regarding Nazarites that we honestly do not know. Scripture does not tell us directly the purpose of the Nazarite. Our haftarah reading from the Prophets includes the account of how Samson was promised, and the instructions about how he was to be a lifelong Nazarite.

First, regarding Nazarites, there are some important facts we can be certain of:

- They are in no way related "Nazarenes" - Nazarenes are residents of the village of Nazareth.
- There are lifelong Nazarites (like Samson or Samuel) and temporary Nazarites.

- The Nazarite decides to dedicate himself to Adonai for a period of time, determined within the vow.
- During the time of the vow, the Nazarite abstains from:
  - Any grape product
  - Cutting the hair on his head
  - All contact with the dead

In addition to that, the Nazarite will on the day of the completion of his vow:

- Bring the following offerings to the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle]:
- Male lamb for a *korban olah* [burnt offering]
  - Ewe lamb for a *chatat* [sin offering]
  - Goat for a *shalem* [peace offering]
  - Unleavened bread
  - Grain offerings and drink offerings
  - Take his shaved hair and give it as an offering

Then the Nazarite may drink wine, cut his hair, and bury the dead thereafter. So, what is the Nazarite vow all about? Family, it is about separation. The word *nazar* means to separate or to consecrate. To be a Nazarite is to be consecrated to Adonai for a special purpose. That may be all we can read directly from the Scripture regarding purpose, but the examples of Nazarites give us a better idea.

Although Nazarites having nothing to do with "Nazarenes" - Nazarites have everything to do with Messiah.

Our haftarah deals with the calling of Samson as a Nazarite. Samson was a Nazarite from before his birth. He is a type (a foreshadowing) of messianic figure. Our haftarah begins this way:

*Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of Adonai appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful **not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean**. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a **Nazarite to G-d from the womb**; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistine."*

Judges 13:2-5

When Manoah later meets up with this mysterious "Angel of Adonai" he asks him his name.

*Then Manoah said to the Angel of Adonai, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" And the Angel of Adonai said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is **wonderful**?"*

Judges 13:17-18

An interesting thing happens when you unpack that little word "wonderful." Is this a proper name? It does not appear that way. The Gutnick Chumash translates this word as "hidden." It is the word *peily* which means, "incomprehensible." It reminds us of another Scripture passage:

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called **Wonderful**, Counselor, Mighty G-d, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Adonai of hosts will perform this.*

Isaiah 9:6-7

In Isaiah 9:6, the word used as a Messianic title is *pele*, and you guessed it - the noun form of *peily*. It means, "incomprehensible." Let's look at another passage:

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called "Faithful and True," and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a Name written that **no one knew except Himself**, (incomprehensible to us). He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His Name is called "The Word of G-d", (John 1:1). And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty G-d. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: "KING OF KINGS AND L-RD OF L-RDS."*

Revelation 19:11-16

Let's turn back to the Nazarite vow... we read of another famous Nazarite in Acts 21:17-28. The Apostle Paul took a Nazarite vow, and accompanied four other believers in fulfilling their Nazarite vows, following the instructions from Numbers 6. Paul was accused of being against the Temple, the Torah, and the Jewish people. Even believers had begun to believe this false testimony regarding Paul.

Ya'akov [James] an elder of the Jerusalem congregation suggested that Paul prove his devotion to the Temple, the Torah and the Jewish people by fulfilling a Nazarite vow, and paying for others to fulfill their Nazarite vows.

When Paul came to Jerusalem, the elders of the congregation of believers in Jerusalem describe their pious congregation this way:

*And they said to him [Paul], "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Torah."*

Acts 21:20b

*Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the Torah.*

Acts 21:23-24

Of course Paul, who was falsely accused by both believers and unbelievers, agrees to the suggestion.

*Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the Temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.*

Acts 21:26

There is an interesting thing regarding the Nazarite vow; if it could not be ended in the *Mish'kan* or later the Temple, with the offerings, then it could not be ended. Is it possible that Paul lived the rest of his life as a Nazarite? In Acts 22 it appears that Paul was unable to complete his Nazarite vow.

Which leads me to my favorite Nazarite of all. Did you know that Yeshua was a Nazarite? No, He was not a Nazarite while He ministered here. However, something interesting takes place at His last Passover Seder before His death and resurrection.

*But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom.*

Matthew 26:29

A temporary Nazarite vow is made with a declaration of intent for it to be fulfilled at a later date. And it cannot be fulfilled until the Nazarite returns to the *Mish'kan* or the Temple to cut his hair and offer the offerings from Numbers 6.

One final Scripture:

*Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,** and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."*

Revelation 1:12-18