



Parasha Naso

May 22, 2021

Torah: Numbers 4:21-7:89

Haftarah: Judges 13:2-25

Shlichim: John 8:1-11

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha! Our *parasha* today is *Naso* meaning “take.” It begins: *21 Again Adonai spoke to Moses saying, 22 “Take a census also of the sons of Gershon, by their ancestral households and by their families”* (Numbers 4:21-22 TLV). The first verses of the *parasha* are about a census of the Gershonite branch of the Tribe of *Levi* and the assignment of them to their jobs in the Tabernacle. There are other subjects in the *parasha*, but we’ll just speak about two of them today and a third briefly.

We begin with the *Birchat Kohanim*, the High Priestly Blessing, also called the Aaronic Blessing or Aaronic Benediction. It’s also sometimes called *Nesiat Kapei'im*, literally, raising the hands, and also *Aliyah L'Dukan*, ascending to the platform. *22 Again Adonai spoke to Moses saying, 23 “Speak to Aaron and to his sons saying: Thus you are to bless Bnei-Yisrael, by saying to them: 24 ‘Adonai bless you and keep you! 25 Adonai make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you! 26 Adonai turn His face toward you and grant you shalom!’ 27 In this way they are to place My Name over Bnei-Yisrael, and so I will bless them”* (Numbers 6:22-27 TLV). Each line begins by invoking Adonai's name. In the Hebrew, it’s YHVH, יהוה. We don't pronounce his name, but substitute either ADONAI meaning “My L-rd” or *HaShem*, meaning “the Name.” The first line begins *Y'varekh'kha ADONAI*, the second *Ya'er ADONAI* and the third, *Yisa ADONAI*. By repeating His name three times, the emphasis is placed on ADONAI himself, the covenant-keeping One, the One who is the source of every blessing.

Rabbi, Dr. J. H. Hertz wrote his work “The Pentateuch and Haftorahs” in the early 1940's. In it is a wonderful explanation about this subject. To begin with and originally, the whole blessing is directed to Israel in the flesh, the Jewish people. The *Torah*, speaking of Aaron, says “*Thus you are to bless Bnei-Yisrael,*” the people plural. But at the same time it is also directed to each individual because the pronouns at the end of the verbs are singular. Dr. Herz suggests that this blessing which is addressed to the children of Israel, plural, speaks to them as if they are one, a united body yet individuals. Today there are others who are a part of Israel. We who are not Jewish who have trusted Yeshua now also have this blessing directed to us. We are one body being blessed, but we are also blessed individually. This blessing is ADONAI’s statement that “He will do it.” “He will bless.” We don’t have to ask Him. If His blessing is pronounced on Israel, He will do it!

Y'varekh'kha ADONAI v'yishmerekha! ADONAI bless you and keep you! He will keep Israel. The underlying word in *v'yishmerekha*, וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ, is *shamer*, שָׁמַר, meaning guard or protect. You can see the *shin mem resh* of *shomer* within *v'yishmerekha*. Scripture teaches us that ADONAI is the Keeper of Israel. Only He is able to preserve the nation from sin, war, and famine. In His punishment of Israel, He used these things against her, but Israel in spite of all her sins will be kept secure by ADONAI in the end. And He does this on a spiritual level for us, all of us who rely on Him. If we are part of His community, redeemed by faith in Yeshua our Messiah, He will keep us. Yeshua said: *29 “My Father, who has given them to*

Me, is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:29 TLV). But, this should in no way imply that ADONAI doesn't keep those in Israel who have not trusted in Yeshua. On the contrary, the truth that Israel is a nation once again and that Jerusalem is once again its capitol, demonstrates His faithfulness in guarding Israel as a people. And His prophets confirm that He will do the same for the each individual with the ultimate salvation of "all Israel."

The second line, *Ya'er ADONAI; panav eleikha vichunekka* is translated "*Adonai make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you!*" How can He be gracious to us who knowingly sin against Him? *Vichunekka*, נָחַם, which is translated "to be gracious" is from the Hebrew root, *channun*, חָנַן, from which we also get *chen*, grace. This again shows the "grace," the "unmerited favor," which ADONAI continues to give us. 7 "*In Him (Yeshua) we have redemption through His blood—the removal of trespasses—in keeping with the richness of His grace 8 that He lavished on us*" (Ephesians 1:7-8a TLV). ADONAI has lavished an unlimited amount of grace on us. As long as we are able to repent of our sins, to be truly sorry for what we did against Him, His grace remains available to us. "Make his face shine on you" is also said to be a Biblical idiom which means "to be friendly toward," an indication of the outpouring of His divine love and salvation on us.

The third line is *Yisa ADONAI panav eleikha v'yasem l'kha shalom*, *ADONAI lift up His face toward you and give you peace*. If ADONAI is our friend as "make his face shine upon you" implies, and if He also keeps us, and if He freely lavishes us with His grace, then there is no doubt that we will have His *shalom*, שָׁלוֹם, His peace. Yeshua, the *Sar Shalom*, the Prince of Peace, said that he came to give us peace: 27 "*Shalom I leave you, My shalom I give to you; but not as the world gives! Do not let your heart be troubled or afraid*" (John 14:27 TLV). Yeshua said "What I am leaving with you is *shalom* -- I am giving you *My shalom*." We have it! *Sha'ul* expresses this principle to us this way: 6 "*Do not be anxious about anything—but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the shalom of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua*" (Philippians 4:6-7 TLV). ADONAI's *shalom* is given to us through Yeshua. We express "the *shalom* of G-d which passes all understanding" as His *shalom*, *shalom*, perfect peace.

Here is ADONAI's final statement to *Moshe*: 27 "*In this way they are to place My Name over Bnei-Yisrael, and so I will bless them*" (Numbers 6:27 TLV). Aaron and his descendants were commanded to put ADONAI's name on the people of Israel. By blessing Israel, *kohanim* throughout the generations have put ADONAI's sacred and holy name in the hearts and minds of His people, Israel. In many Scriptures (the first is in Deuteronomy 28:10) Israel is referred to as being called by "G-d's name." But an exhaustive search by me has not revealed how we are called by His name. Nowhere are we called YHVH or I AM. Isaiah said: 7 "*Everyone who is called by My Name, whom I created for My glory. I formed him—yes, I made him*" (Isaiah 43:7 TLV)! The only way that I can find that we are called by His name is that He has placed His name on us through the *Birkhat Kohanim*. We are ADONAI's. This shows to others not only that we fully identify with Him, but that we are His possession. We are bought with a price, Yeshua's blood. In placing His name on us, ADONAI is saying that He is not ashamed to have us. We, His people, bear His name throughout all of the earth. What an awesome privilege and responsibility.

ADONAI has commanded that we be blessed and Yeshua tells us how we are blessed. Thinking of blessings, what comes to mind almost immediately is Yeshua's Sermon on the

Mount. In most Bibles, including the Tree of Life Version, Yeshua begins each of the nine statements with "Blessed are you." Pinchas Lapide was an Orthodox Jewish scholar of the New Testament from Germany and later Israel. An Orthodox Jewish scholar of the New Testament is an oxymoron isn't it? It doesn't compute. But it is true. He wrote a book called: *The Sermon On The Mount, Utopia or Program for Action*. He regarded Yeshua the man as a *Torah*-faithful Jew "who wanted to bring the kingdom of heaven in harmony and peace." Matthew 5, verses 3-10 are usually the focus even though the Sermon is actually all of chapters 5, 6 and 7. These 9 verses are usually expounded upon the most and are almost considered to be "super commandments," verses which tell you clearly what you must do in order to be blessed.

As the chapter opens, Yeshua is teaching His *talmidim*, his disciples. After He sat down, His disciples came to him and he began to speak. In the case of a rabbi, the sitting posture points to instruction. We see that in John chapter 8 from which we read today: *1 But Yeshua went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn, He came again into the Temple. All the people were coming to Him, and He sat down and began to teach them* (John 8:1-2 TLV). According to the rules of the two great *Torah* schools, Hillel and Shamai, instruction always takes place seated. And Yeshua was certainly a rabbi, a teacher, having been given that title at least 14 times in the Gospels. On the mountain, the multitude may have listened in the background, but His immediate target audience was the circle of 12. These 12 men were then to take His teaching to the people.

These first 9 verses are known as "the beatitudes," primarily because the initial word "happy" is *beatus* in Latin. In Christian Bibles the Greek is mostly translated as blessed, with happy found only in Young's Literal Version. But we do see that a number of the Psalms begin with "happy," translated from the Hebrew, *ashrei*. Psalm 1:1 says: *1 Happy is the one who has not walked in the advice of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of scoffers* (Psalm 1:1 TLV). This and other Psalms could have been Yeshua's motivation for his teaching in Matthew in part.

Dr. Lapide's conclusion regarding the "beatitudes" is each of them is a call for the "absolute fulfillment" of the *Torah* in its original meaning. He believes that the original meaning of the *Torah* is concentrated in two things, the love of ADONAI and the love of neighbor. These two loves are linked by the statement: *2 "Ye shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy"* (Leviticus 19:2b JPS *Tanakh* 1917). This statement is located at the very center of the 5 books of Moses. Here it is in visual form: The all encompassing love of ADONAI for us and us for Him <> You shall be holy for I am holy <> Love your neighbor as yourself. It is ADONAI's calling for us. Our goal is holiness, that is, to increase our set-apartness, our holiness, for Him. As we continue to seek Him, walking in Yeshua's footsteps, our love for both Him and our neighbor increases. In Judaism, the call to be holy is considered to be the highest of all commandments. The bottom line according to Dr. Lapide is not that "whoever believes will be happy," but that "whoever believes, sincerely and unshakably, is already happy. So, regardless of your situation, whether you are poor in spirit, in mourning, meek, hungry and thirsting for righteousness, one who shows mercy, are pure in heart, are a peacemaker, or are persecuted because you pursue righteousness; if you believe, you are happy. And you are also blessed. We are blessed because we are ADONAI's people. He has commanded His *kohanim* to bless us and in being blessed, His name is placed on us.

In our congregation we don't have a *kohen* to pronounce the *Birkat HaKohanim*, but we do have a very strong prayer ethic. We believe that it is necessary that we ask ADONAI to

bless our people and us as individuals as we close each service. To do this, one who is not a *kohen* must pronounce the blessing. We don't do this lightly or without precedent. Most of our Messianic Jewish rabbis are not *kohenim* and they pronounce the blessing in the authority of being ADONAI's leaders. We do it for the same reason.

When the blessing is pronounced, we are specifically asking three things: that ADONAI will "keep us, or guard us," that he will "give us His grace," and that He will "give us His *shalom*, His peace." When we pronounce this blessing, as the Scripture says, we are placing His name on our congregational calling: Love ADONAI and love our neighbor, the essence of Yeshua's beatitudes.

A second them in *Parasha Naso* is marital faithfulness. Numbers 5:11-31 describes what was to be done when a man suspected his wife of infidelity. Certain *Torah* scholars and Pharisees used this very set of verses to challenge Yeshua's authority. With regard to His observance of *Torah*, Yeshua was almost constantly being challenged. We read about it earlier today. Yeshua was teaching in the Temple, possibly in Solomon's Portico across the Temple mount from the Temple itself. The *Torah* scholars and Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught in adultery and accused her before Yeshua. They said: 5 "*In the Torah, Moses commanded us to stone such women*" (John 8:5 TLV). That is not in *Parasha Naso*, but in Numbers 20. It is very obvious to every reader that they were trying to get Yeshua to make a judgment so that they could trap Him. At that point, Yeshua began writing in the dust on the pavement with His finger. What Yeshua was doing makes no sense unless it is examined in the light of the *Torah*. Yeshua was faithful to *Torah*. He was not only a *Torah* observant Jew, but according to John 1 He was also the author of *Torah*. The *Torah* scholars and Pharisees didn't know it, but they were up against a formidable foe in Yeshua.

How does what happened at the Temple in John chapter 8 relate to Numbers chapter 5? To begin with, these *Torah* scholars and Pharisees who brought the woman to Yeshua were in violation of *Torah* by even bringing her to Yeshua. Numbers 5:15 says of the man who suspected his wife: 15 *Then he should take his wife to the Kohen*. He in this verse was the husband. It was the husband who was to accuse his wife, not some outside accusers. In this situation, where was the husband? And where was the man who committed adultery with the woman? Also, if this was a legitimate case of jealous husband, it would have been presented before a *kohen* and the woman would have undergone the "ordeal of bitter waters" described in Numbers 5. But, with regard to the woman brought before Yeshua, it is apparent to almost everyone who reads this that it was a set-up by the accusers as an opportunity to catch Yeshua in some fault.

It has been suggested that this has nothing to do with Yeshua's mercy, that He was acting only on the facts before Him. I agree with that. Yeshua looked at the facts. Although He is a compassionate judge, He is also a righteous judge. He cannot overlook sin. In this case He did not overlook sin because the woman was only accused. There were no witnesses to testify against her. What Yeshua did was to dismiss her because of lack of evidence.

By saying: 7..... "*The sinless one among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her,*" (John 8:7 TLV), was Yeshua saying that a sinner had no right to cast a stone? In this case He identified the sin of the *Torah* scholars and Pharisees for falsely presenting the adulteress. But Leviticus 20 directs that both guilty parties are to be executed by stoning and according to Deuteronomy 17:7, the witnesses are to be the first to cast stones at both the man and the woman. The accusers brought no witnesses or if they were there, they slunk away. These

Torah Teachers and Pharisees would have been the first to cast a stone if the sentence had been carried out. But their plan backfired when Yeshua called them out.

Was Yeshua being merciful when He said: 10 “*Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?*” 11 “*No one, Sir,*” she said. “*Then neither do I condemn you,*” Yeshua said. “*Go, and sin no more*” (John 8:10-11 TLV). Yeshua’s response was not due to His mercy. There had been no proof that the woman had sinned except for the statement of the Torah scholars and Pharisees who accused her. No witnesses testified. If they were there, they disappeared. Yeshua dismissed her case on the ground of lack of evidence. Everything had to be done according to *Torah*. But, Yeshua, knowing all things, also knew that she had sinned, that she had committed adultery. He essentially said: “there is no evidence to convict you, but go and don’t sin again.”

What did Yeshua write in the dirt: 6 *Now they were saying this to trap Him, so that they would have grounds to accuse Him. But Yeshua knelt down and started writing in the dirt with His finger.* (John 8:6 TLV). Jeremiah 17 says: 13 “*Adonai, You are the hope of Israel! All who forsake You will be ashamed. Those who depart from You will be written in the dirt, for they have forsaken Adonai, the fountain of living waters*” (Jeremiah 17:13 TLV). Some believe that Yeshua was writing the Pharisees names and their sins in the dirt. Others believe Yeshua was demonstrating His authority, as ADONAI did when He carved the Ten Commandments with His finger. Still others believe that Yeshua had written only one word – the word forgiven. We don’t know for sure what Yeshua was writing, nor do we know if anyone saw what He wrote. Whatever He wrote, it was not the content of what He wrote that was important because we don’t know it. What was important was that He used His writing in the dust along with His spoken words, to disarm His accusers. By writing in the dust and reminding them of the dust of Numbers 5, without words He brought the applicable *Torah* to the minds of the *Torah* teachers and Pharisees. They knew that they had been caught, that without using words, Yeshua had said to them, “Do what *Torah* says.”

What does this episode mean to us today? Adultery is a serious crime, one punishable by death under the *Torah*. We don’t have a Temple and a Levitical priesthood today and so, we are not under that part of *Torah*. The laws which have to be carried out by the Levitical priesthood and executed in the Temple have been abrogated. By the destruction of the Temple, ADONAI has caused them to be suspended. But adultery is still a crime against ADONAI and Yeshua’s words confirm that it is still a major sin. Yeshua said: 31 “*It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery*” (Matthew 5:31-32 TLV). Adultery takes place today among many who call themselves Yeshua’s followers. By divorcing and marrying for their convenience, they commit adultery. Yeshua said that a man who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality is himself committing adultery and causes anyone who marries her to commit adultery. Yeshua was not changing *Torah*. He made it clear in Matthew 5:17-19 that not a single letter of *Torah* would pass away until heaven and earth pass away. He was clarifying what *Torah* meant. First century history tells us that men were taking advantage of the *Torah* command which allowed a husband to “give his wife a get,” a bill of divorcement, for any reason. But, Yeshua also made it clear that it works both ways: 11 *And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she is committing adultery”* (Mark 10:11-12 TLV). Yeshua said that we are not to divorce for trivial reasons, but only for sexual immorality. In other words, anything other than sexual

immorality is for trivial reasons. He is not changing *Torah*, but correcting wrong Pharisaical interpretation. Yeshua's real point is the sanctity of marriage. He opposed divorce to protect the covenant of marriage and to protect the family. And, also to prevent spouses from betraying innocent spouses. Every divorce case among followers of Yeshua today must stand on its own merits. Our prayer is that divorces among Yeshua's followers of today would be few and on Biblical grounds. As followers of ADONAI and *talmidim* of Yeshua, we are expected to keep the marriage covenant faithfully.

I close with a brief word about the *nazirite* vow found in Numbers 6:1-21. A *nazir* was an individual with a special calling to serve ADONAI for a period of time with special requirements such as not drinking wine or being defiled by the dead. Sampson and Samuel were both *nazirites* from birth, Sampson by ADONAI's calling and Samuel by his mother's vow. All other *nazirites*, both men and women, took the vow themselves because as *Torah* says, they vowed to be separate for *Adonai* for a period of time.

Being a follower of Yeshua is very much like being a *nazirite* except that we can drink wine. We are required to be separate for ADONAI, not from birth, but from the time of our acceptance of Yeshua to the time of our death. There are very specific commands which we are to follow which can be summed up as "walking in Yeshua's footsteps." We have been set apart for ADONAI by Yeshua's blood and called to love ADONAI and our neighbor. And as ADONAI has told us: "You are to be holy because I am holy." *Shabbat shalom!*