



Parasha Naso

June 3, 2023

Torah: Numbers 4:21-7:89

Haftarah: Judges 13:2-25

Ketuvim Shlichim: Acts 21:17-32

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 word *naso* means to “lift up,” and in this week’s *parasha* it is understood as “to take a count,” or “take a census.” Lifting up an object singles it out in order to identify it or count it. In this *parasha*, there are a number of subjects. First, ADONAI commanded a census of the Gershon family and then reiterated the Tabernacle tasks which were to be performed by the sons of Gershon, Kehat and Merari, the clans of the tribe of Levi. The complete census found that 8,580 men were available for the work of the Tabernacle in the three groups.

The second subject is ritual impurity and all those who were ritually impure were to be sent out of the camp. This applied not only to the Levites, but also to the *Kohanim* and to the ordinary Israelites.

The third subject covered is an addition to a *mitzvah* given earlier about the *asham*, the guilt offering, which carried with it restitution of the value of the damaged or stolen property plus 20%. The addition in this *parasha* addressed the special situation in which a person confessed that he wrongfully retained his neighbor’s property after having sworn that he did not. He had to pay an additional fifth of the cost of the object and bring a guilt offering to atone for his transgression.

The fourth subject is what is known as “The Law of Jealousies.” A husband who suspected that his wife had been unfaithful brought her to a *kohen* who prepared a drink made of water, dust from the floor of the Tabernacle and ink. If she was innocent, drinking it would not harm her, but would bring a blessing of children. If she was guilty, her abdomen would swell, her thigh would waste away and she would be accursed among the people of Israel.

The fifth subject describes the regulations for a *nazir*. A *nazir*, nazirite in English, is someone who voluntarily vowed to dedicate themselves to ADONAI for a specific period of time. They had to abstain from all grape products, let their hair grow and avoid all contact with corpses. At the end of the specified period, their head was shaved and they brought special offerings to the Tabernacle before returning to normal life. If they failed to successfully complete their count, they had to begin the count again after shaving their head and bringing an offering in the Tabernacle.

The sixth subject is the *Birkat HaKohanim*. The *kohanim* were commanded to bless the people by placing ADONAI’s name on them. The specific words of the blessing are given.

The *parasha* concludes with the completion and dedication of the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle, on the first day of *Nisan* in the second year of the Exodus. The leaders of each

tribe made a gift of carts and oxen to help transport the Tabernacle, as well as gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

These are all subjects which we have covered before. Today, we will look once more at the subject of the *nazir*. In our *Shlichim* reading, we read about *Sha'ul* arriving in Jerusalem and meeting with Yeshua's brother *Ya'acov*, *Shimon Kefa* and the other elders of the congregation in Jerusalem. After *Sha'ul* shared the success of his work among the Gentiles with them, they shared with him about the great number of Jews in Israel who professed Yeshua and were zealous for keeping the *Torah* (v.20), actually tens of thousands of them (myriads). We could say that at that time, Messianic Judaism was well, healthy and growing in Israel. But the elders in Jerusalem had a concern about *Sha'ul* being there. They were concerned that the followers of Yeshua in Jerusalem and Judea would reject him because of the falsehoods they had been told about him. They had been told and believed that he had been teaching the Jews who lived among the Gentiles not to keep *Torah*, not to circumcise their sons and not to follow the Jewish traditions. To counteract those lies, the elders suggested to *Sha'ul* that he pay the expenses for four men who were completing a nazirite vow and to be purified along with them at the Temple. 22 *What's to be done then? No doubt they will hear that you have come.* 23 *"So do what we tell you. We have four men who have a vow on themselves.* 24 *Take them, and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. That way, all will realize there is nothing to the things they have been told about you, but that you yourself walk in an orderly manner, keeping the Torah."* (Acts 21:22-24 TLV).

The taking of a nazirite vow was a very definite demonstration of commitment to ADONAI and the *Torah*. If *Sha'ul* had taken this vow, it would have put to rest the things which had been said about him. Also, as a nazirite, he would be a part of a special group called by ADONAI to special service to Him. Our question is, was *Sha'ul* a nazirite? The two most famous Nazarites in the *Tanakh* are Samson and Samuel. We read about *Shimshon*, Samson, in our *haftarah* portion today (Judges 13:2-25). ADONAI ordained that Samson would be a *nazir* from birth and also required his mother to be a *nazir* during her time of conception and pregnancy. She was barren just as Samuel's mother Hannah was barren. Hannah vowed that if ADONAI would give her a son, she would make him a *nazir* all his life (1Samuel 1:11) and he was. There is also a famous nazirite in the *Ketuvim Shlichim*, *Yochannan HaMatabil*, John the Immerser. ADONAI also declared him to be a *nazir* before his birth (Luke 1:13-15). These three men are exceptional because they were all set aside as nazirites before they were born and all of their mothers had been barren.

These three men were lifetime nazirites, but the normal vow was for a short term, from 30 days up to several years. But, not just for men. According to *Torah*, the life of a *nazir* was open to any and all who desired it. The vow could be taken by either a male or female. A female *nazir* was called a *nezirah*. According to the *halacha* of Rabbinic Judaism of today, a Jew can become a nazirite, even without the Temple in Jerusalem. But, "they say," because there is no Temple, there is no way to bring the sacrifices to end the vow, and so, that person would become a permanent nazirite. We don't subscribe to this practice because it is based upon rules other than those found in the *Torah*. There is only one true set of rules describing the *nazir*, those in Numbers chapter 6 and without a Temple and Levitical priesthood, it is impossible to carry out these instructions.

But, was *Sha'ul* a *nazir*? We know that the four men were. The Scripture tells us that. Those four followers of Yeshua were already under a nazirite vow. And, we also know that

they were Messianic because *Ya'acov* had said: "We have four men who have a vow on themselves." (Acts 21:23b TLV). Why would *Sha'ul* purify himself with them unless he, himself, was under a nazirite vow? Maybe *Ya'acov* knew he was under a vow and about to end it and suggested that he end it along with the other four brothers in order to quash any doubts among the Messianic Jews that he taught against *Torah*. There is another Scripture about *Sha'ul* and a vow: *18 ... At Cenchrea Paul had his hair cut off, for he was keeping a vow.* (Acts 18:18b TLV). There was no Scriptural requirement for a person to cut their hair before becoming a *nazir*, but that doesn't mean that a person could not cut off their hair before taking the vow. The command is that the hair was not to be cut during the vow. But, there is not evidence in Acts 21 which shows that *Sha'ul* was completing the vow of a *nazir*. We are not told that he was. It was a completion of the vow for the four men, but not necessarily for *Sha'ul*. If he had taken a nazirite vow at Cenchrea, his vow would have been a longer term vow because he had had his hair cut off almost three and one-half years before he arrived in Jerusalem.

At the end of a vow was when a *nazir* had to present to ADONAI a male lamb as a burnt offering, a female lamb as a sin offering, a ram as a peace offering, and grain and drink offerings (Numbers 6:14-15). At that time, he would shave his head and put his hair on the altar fire along with the fat, kidneys and liver of the peace offering. The peace offering, also shared with the *kohen*, was then eaten by that individual and his family. Was *Sha'ul* actually making preparations to offer those sacrifices when he was arrested? It is possible, but we don't have Scriptural evidence. What we know about *Sha'ul* is this. *Ya'acov* said: *24 Take them, and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads* (Acts 21:24 TLV). *Sha'ul* purified himself along with them and paid their expenses for the offerings, actually, a pretty large sum for all of the sacrifices that were required for four men. But, the verse says "so that they may shave their heads," their heads, making no reference to *Sha'ul's* head. He would be shaving his head if he was ending a vow. There is another verse which we have to consider. It says: *26 The next day Paul took the men, purifying himself along with them. He went into the Temple, announcing when the days of purification would be completed and the sacrifice would be offered for each one of them* (Acts 21:26 TLV). What we don't know is whether the word "them" refers to just the four men or to *Sha'ul* and also to them. That's our evidence, plus the fact that he and the four others were undergoing a seven day purification process. The seven days were almost complete when *Sha'ul's* purification was interrupted by his arrest.

There are some interesting similarities between the word *nazir* and another word which sounds similar. Isaiah wrote: *1 Then a shoot will come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch will bear fruit out of His roots.* (Isaiah 11:1 TLV). In Hebrew, the word "shoot" or "sprout" is *netzer*. There is similarity between it and the word *nazir*. The word *nazir* when anglicized becomes *nazirite* and *netzer* anglicized becomes *Nazarene*. Theologians say that the name of the village of Nazareth in which Yeshua grew up and lived came from the word *netzer*, meaning shoot, sprout, or branch. Some have suggested that the name Nazareth implies "Netzer Town" or "Branch Town" because many descendants of *Yishai*, David's father Jesse, had settled there. And, Yeshua, Son of David, who grew up in "Netzer Town" is "the *netzer*" personified, the shoot from Jesse, the prophesied Messiah.

But in actuality *nazir* and *netzer* have totally different meanings. *Nazir* (נָזִיר) is spelled *nun, zayin, yod, resh* while *netzer* (נֶצֶר) is spelled *nun, tzadi, resh*. The z sound in *nazir* is *zayin* while in *netzer* it is *tzadi*. The word *nazir* means consecrated, devoted or separated and implies someone under a vow. I am not suggesting that a follower of Yeshua is to be a

nazirite. But, it is true that a follower of Yeshua is one who has made a very serious commitment, in effect, a vow. That commitment is our declaration of faith in Yeshua and our promise to follow Him. And if we are really His disciples we must live by that commitment. Call it a vow if you want. We are saved by faith, but the real journey of a disciple of Yeshua comes afterward, a journey of complete dedication to Him after our commitment was made. Did Yeshua say anything that would lead us to believe that we should dedicate ourselves to ADONAI's service? Yes, He did.

Yeshua said: 6 ..., "I am the way, the truth, and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6b TLV). The goal is to go to the Father and Yeshua is the way, the only way. Coming to the Father means that a person enters into covenant with ADONAI through His active covenant, the New Covenant. Entering through *Yeshua HaMashiach*, Yeshua the Messiah, is the only way that a person can do that. When Yeshua said "I am the way," He could have been using the Hebrew teaching method called *remez* and hinting back at the *Torah*? Moses' father in law Jethro gave him this advice: 20 *Enlighten them as to the statutes and the laws, and show them the way by which they must walk and the work they must do.* (Exodus 18:20 TLV). "The way" is *haderek*, הַדֶּרֶךְ. *Haderek*, "The Way" has also become a description of Yeshua's walk. 1st century followers of Yeshua were called "The Way" because of this verse: 3 *A voice cries out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of Adonai, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* (Isaiah 40:3 TLV). Way is *derek*, דֶּרֶךְ. Yeshua said: "I am *haderek*," I am "The Way." In Exodus 18:20 the statutes and laws, the *Torah* is *haderek*, "the way," the way in which we learn to follow ADONAI. Yeshua is both "the Way" and the "Word" (John 1:1), the Word made flesh who created the Word, the *Torah* (John 1:3). He upheld *Torah* and said that not one jot or tittle of it would pass away before heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 5:17-18). To follow "His way," all we have to do is to model our lives after His life, a life of perfect obedience.

Sampson, Samuel, John and many others fulfilled the vow to serve ADONAI in a more rigorous and devoted way. They were called to be especially holy, set apart for ADONAI according to His calling as *nazirim*. Regarding the *nazir*, Numbers 6:8 says: 8 *All the days of his separation, he is to be consecrated to Adonai.* (Numbers 6:8 TLV). The actual Hebrew word is *kadosh*, קָדוֹשׁ, holy. The TLV has translated it "consecrated to ADONAI." The meaning is clear. Throughout the time of his being a *nazir*, the person is holy for ADONAI. We can't take a nazirite vow today because we have no Temple, no way to carry out the requirements of the *Torah* nor a priesthood to administer the requirements. But many followers of Yeshua today commit themselves to dedicated service of ADONAI in a manner very similar to the *nazir*. Those called to be missionaries or ministers or musicians make a commitment of full time service in addition to their commitment as followers of Yeshua. This is very much like the "nazirite," but without the *Torah* requirements of a *nazir*. But in reality, this extra calling is not just for missionaries and the various kinds of ministers. Yeshua has called each of His followers to this level of devotion.

Yeshua used *remez* when He spoke about the greatest commandment: 28 *One of the Torah scholars came and heard them debating. Seeing that Yeshua had answered them well, he asked Him, "Which commandment is first of all?"* 29 *Yeshua answered, "The first is, 'Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.* 30 *And you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."* (Mark 12:28-30 TLV). Yeshua had called Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5, to this man's attention. If we obey this commandment, obey exactly what Yeshua said here, we are exhibiting a level of commitment equal to that of the

nazir without the Numbers 6 requirements. Someone might say: “But, they had both the *Shema* and the nazirite vow in the days of the Temple. If everyone was to love ADONAI with all their heart, soul, and strength according to Deuteronomy 6:4-5, why then did some people go beyond this and make a vow to serve ADONAI as a *nazir*? To understand the reason for those vows we have to think of the *nazir* of that day as a *kohen*, a priest, in a sense. They were not Levitical priests from the Tribe of Levi and could not perform the duties that the Levitical *kohanim* could, but they did have a special calling to serve ADONAI in a greater way than the average Israelite. The Levitical priests had no choice in the matter. They were called by ADONAI to be *kohanim*. It was their lot in life. But the *nazir*, himself, chose to serve ADONAI. He was called to a higher level of service and commitment than even the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest. According to Leviticus 21 (1-5), the *Kohen Gadol* was allowed to become ritually unclean in order to bury close members of his family, but the nazirite was not allowed to approach the dead at all, not even for his immediate family: 6 “All the days of his separation to Adonai, he is not to go near a dead body. 7 Even if his father, mother, brother or sister should die, he is not to make himself unclean, because his consecration to God is on his head. 8 All the days of his separation, he is to be consecrated to Adonai.” (Numbers 6:6-8 TLV). So, it would appear that the *nazir* was called to a higher level of commitment. Not only was his commitment higher, but it was entirely voluntary. It was his own expressed wish to serve ADONAI in this way, in a way that took even greater commitment than that of the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest.

Would you agree that the subject of the *nazirite* in Numbers chapter 6 is in some way speaking to us as followers of Yeshua today through its symbolism? *Sha’ul* said: 4 For Messiah is the goal of the Torah as a means to righteousness for everyone who keeps trusting (Romans 10:4 TLV). The Torah’s goal was and still is to point people to Yeshua. While Yeshua is not directly pictured in the actions of the *nazir*, His devotion and faithfulness is. That is the “goal of this Torah” for us, to lead us to be as devoted to Yeshua as a nazirite was to ADONAI. But we don’t have to take a vow or shave our heads and bring sacrifices. We don’t even have to stop eating or drinking something made from the grape. What we have to do is to follow the example of our Messiah and do the things which He has commanded us. If we obey Him completely, we are approaching the dedication of a nazirite.

Yeshua said all these things. He said “repent” (Matthew 4:17). He said “follow me” (Matthew 4:19). He said “rejoice” (Matthew 5:11-12). He said “let your light shine before men” (Matthew 5:16). He said “follow G-d’s Law” (Matthew 5:17). He said “do not lust” (Matthew 5:28-30). He said “keep your word” (Matthew 5:37). He said “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44-46). He said “be perfect” (Matthew 5:46-48). He said “lay up treasure in heaven” (Matthew 6:19-21). He said “seek first G-d’s kingdom” (Matthew 6:33). He said “do not judge” (Matthew 7:1-3). He said “choose the narrow way” (Matthew 7:13-14). He said “honor your father and mother” (Matthew 15:4). He said “forgive those who offend you” (Matthew 18:21-22). He said “be committed in your marriage” (Matthew 19:4-6). He said “be a servant” (Matthew 20:26-28). He said “give to G-d” (Matthew 22:19-21). He said “love ADONAI with all your heart” (Matthew 22:37-38). He said “love your neighbor” (Matthew 22:39-40). He said “keep my commandments” (John 14:15). He said “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Just a few days ago, we saw something truly amazing. We saw 5,000,000 members of Yeshua’s body praying and fasting for Israel sometime during a 21 day period (May 7-28). On the last day, May 28th, there were thought to be 100,000,000 Christians praying. The time of prayer and fasting ended in ceremony in Israel. I awoke at 4:45 AM, just in time to

watch the conclusion ceremony at the southern steps area of the Temple Mount led by Gentile Christians and Messianic Jews. There were several hundred people gathered there and it was raining, something that doesn't happen in Jerusalem at that time of the year. But, it was raining, possibly a sign of approval by ADONAI. The group shared in a communion service led by Christians and a Messianic Jew and then closed with the *Birkat Kohanim* by another Messianic Jew. The service continued being televised for several more hours with parts of it taking place in the King of Kings Congregation in Jerusalem and parts from IHOP in Kansas City. Mary Louise was watching when the program ended. It was the sharing of bread and wine between a Messianic Jew and a Christian Arab at the King of Kings Congregation in Jerusalem. The picture of all of this is very obvious. It's the One New Man, Jew and Gentile, one in Messiah Yeshua (Ephesians 2:11-21). We have had the one new man in principle since the 1st century, but never quite so visibly. This was a coming together of Yeshua's Gentile and Jewish disciples, individuals who sometimes understand and walk out the Scriptures differently. But, in their cooperation and worshipping together, they declared by their actions their love for each other and that a different way of walking in Yeshua's commands did not separate them. My personal prayer is that these two groups, those in the Church and the Messianic Jewish body, would seek to continue the relationship and also to expand it. Each group brings great value to Yeshua's body.

How is it possible for us to have the kind of love for our Father and for our Messiah and also our fellow man that we have been commanded to have? It is only through *Ruach HaKodesh*, the Holy Spirit living in us, that we are able to approach this level of commitment. The presence of the Spirit is necessary in our lives. It was through ADONAI's *Ruach* that our hearts were first circumcised and His *Torah* was written on them. We must have the ability to take the written word of the page, the word originally written in stone, and understand that it is now written on our hearts. But, followers of Yeshua can also suppress the *Ruach* and can even ignore the presence of His Spirit in their lives. But, ADONAI's voice speaks powerfully to those who will listen: 44 "*For I am Adonai your God. Therefore, sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy*" (Leviticus 11:44 TLV). He is calling to us today, "consecrate yourselves and be holy." And, He has told us why. He said: "For I am holy." Because He is holy, we must be holy. We cannot hope to serve ADONAI and Yeshua without separating ourselves from the world. As the imperfect beings that we are, we can never completely be holy. But, we can seek to attain holiness. But, if our goal in life is to be "almost holy," we are far from what Yeshua has called us to be and are much closer to the condition of being "lukewarm" (Revelation 3:16-16). On the other hand, when our goal is to attain holiness, we are on a path of nazirite-like commitment in our service to Yeshua.

Our recent congregational prayers have also been for Yeshua's body, especially those who have strayed or fallen away. Surveys show how many have left the Church. We have prayed for *teshuvah*, the turning from their sinful ways back to Yeshua. But, the pot can't call the kettle black. We are not sinless. We too, must make *teshuvah*. If we have "worldly ways," we must abandon them. If we are "serving ourselves" more than ADONAI, we must change. ADONAI has called us to "be holy," and to be holy means to seek the level of commitment of a *nazir*. This is not to say that we should avoid grapes or dead bodies or not cut our hair. But, walking in obedience to Yeshua is something that each person who has trusted in Him should want to do.

Was *Sha'ul* a nazirite? The evidence which we have reviewed doesn't support his being one. In the past, I have suggested that he was a nazirite. But, another look makes that idea inconclusive. But, that was not what all this was about. Whether or not *Sha'ul* was a nazirite

was not the point. The point *Ya'acov* was making was that “he upheld *Torah*.” Whether he was a nazirite or not does not diminish the fact that he underwent a purification process required by *Torah* and paid for the offerings required for the four men. *Sha'ul* upheld *Torah*, the example which *Ya'acov* sought for the believers in Judea. He didn't have to be a *nazir* for us today to know how great his level of commitment to ADONAI was. He endured beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonment and death as a follower of Yeshua.

His level of commitment was extraordinary and he is the example of what we are called to be. Speaking to Gentiles, he said: *11 It is clear that no one is set right before God by Torah, for “the righteous shall live by emunah”* *Galatians 3:11 TLV). This is a verse that many misunderstand. It is usually read as: “the righteous shall live by faith.” Yes, that's true. We do live after trusting in Yeshua by the faith that He is truth. But, that's not the full meaning of this verse. *Emunah* means faith, but it also means faithfulness and that's what *Sha'ul* was telling the Galatians. The Complete Jewish Bible puts it this way: *11 Now it is evident that no one comes to be declared righteous by God through legalism, since “The person who is righteous will attain life by trusting and being faithful”* (Galatians 3:11 CJB). Both meanings of *emunah* are used in this translation, trust or faith and also faithful. This is in agreement with the Greek *pisteos* which also means both faith and faithfulness. There is more to being a follower of Yeshua than having faith and believing. *Sha'ul* understood *Torah* and upheld it, not because there was any salvation, any justification in it, but because he was faithful and walked according to “the Way.” The same is true for us. There is no justification, not even at attempt at justification, salvation, in keeping *Torah* after trusting in Yeshua. What we are doing is not even trying to be a nazirite. What we are doing by trying to be obedient to *Torah* is holiness. ADONAI said “Be holy, for I am holy.” Everyone believes in something. Even the Atheist has belief. His belief is in his own understanding. But, we who follow Yeshua cannot follow our own understanding. We must know and understand what His Word commands us to do and then, understanding it, we must also have faithfulness, actions. We have not taken the vow of a nazirite, but we have made a lifetime, binding commitment to follow Yeshua. What are we to take away from our study of the *nazir*? We take the understanding that ADONAI takes seriously His command for us to “be holy.”

What occurred in the body of Messiah this May was a great beginning, a beginning of understanding by both the Church and those in Messianic Judaism. That so many followers of Yeshua prayed for Israel was amazing. We pray for Israel regularly and also for the salvation of all Israel. But, for so many Christians, a group which is very divided about the Nation of Israel, to have received that Spirit call, shows us that ADONAI is at work to fulfill His Word. Let each of us examine our personal walk with Yeshua to see if it is in agreement with His Word. May those of us in Messianic Judaism and those in the Church continue in the spirit of unity and love of those powerful twenty-one days in May. *Shabbat shalom!*