



Parasha Naso

June 15, 2024

Torah: Numbers 4:21-7:89

Haftarah: Judges 13:2-25

Shlichim: Acts 21:17-33

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 here 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. ADONAI commanded a census of the Gershon family and then reiterated their Tabernacle tasks. A census of the Merari family was also taken, their duties listed, and the Kohath family also counted. The complete census of the sons of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the clans of the tribe of Levi, was 8,580 men available for the work of the Tabernacle.

In this *parasha*, there are a number of other important subjects, subjects including ritual purity, and further refinement of the *asham*, the guilt offering. Another subject is known as the Law of Jealousies. If a husband suspected that his wife had been unfaithful, he would bring her to a *kohen* who prepared a drink of water mixed with dust from the floor of the Tabernacle and ink scraped from a parchment which had ADONAI’s name inscribed. If she was innocent, drinking the potion would not harm her and would bring a blessing of children, but if she was guilty, she would suffer a horrible death. The regulations governing *Nazir* were next. A *Nazir*, a Nazirite, was someone who voluntarily vowed to dedicate himself to ADONAI for a specific period of time. He or she was required to abstain from all grape products, let their hair grow, and avoid all contact with corpses. At the end of this period, they shaved their head and brought special offerings to the Tabernacle before returning to normal life. We covered this subject in detail last year (June 3, 2023), and you can find it on our website or on YouTube. The next subject is the *Birkat Kohanim*, the High Priestly Blessing. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people according to the blessing ADONAI commanded. *Parasha Naso* concludes with the completion and dedication of the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle, and the gifting of carts and oxen to be used to transport it by the leaders of each tribe.

Our focus today is the *Birkat Kohanim*, the Aaronic Blessing. A portion of this message is taken from my message of twenty years ago, May 29, 2004, a time when we were worshipping in the mini-synagogue, our first congregational home. Some of you here today heard it then. This blessing is something very familiar to us and is a part of each of our services. In addition to *Birkat HaKohanim*, it is sometimes called *Nesiat Kapei'im*, literally, raising the hands, and *Aliyah LaDukan*, ascending to the platform. It is described in Numbers chapter 6, verses 22 through 27: *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).

יְבָרֶכְךָ יְיָהוָה, וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּה *Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishmerekha*. ADONAI bless you and keep you!

יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיַּחֲנֹךְ *Ya'er Adonai panav eleikha vichunekka*. ADONAI make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם *Yisa Adonai panav eleikha v'yasem l'kha shalom*. ADONAI lift up his face toward you and give you peace.

Each line begins by invoking ADONAI's name, יְהוָה, *YHVH*. We substitute ADONAI for יְהוָה, His name which we do not know how to pronounce. Because we don't pronounce His Name, we use either ADONAI, L-rd, or *HaShem*, the Name. Frequently we see the blessing begin in English as “May ADONAI bless you and keep you,” but the Hebrew simply says: “ADONAI bless you.” We see: *Y'varekh'kha Adonai*, *Ya'er Adonai*, and *Yisa Adonai*, the repetition of ADONAI's name. By repeating His name three times, ADONAI placed the emphasis on Himself, the covenant-keeping One, the One who is the source for all blessing.

Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz, in his book written in the 1940s, “The Pentateuch and Haftorahs,” has expounded on The Blessing. He begins by pointing out that the whole blessing is directed to Israel. The Scripture says, “This is how you are to bless *B'nei Yisra'el*, the people of Israel.” At the same time, it is also directed to each individual within Israel because the pronouns at the end of the verbs are in the singular, suggesting that the blessing is addressed to the children of Israel individually but also speaks to them as if they are one body.

By proclaiming: *Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishmerekha*, we are asking ADONAI to keep Israel. The word “keep” is from the word usually used for guard or protect, שׁוֹמֵר *shomer*. This means that ADONAI is the Keeper of Israel. Only He is able to preserve the nation from sin, war, and famine. While at times He used these things against Israel, in spite of all her sins, she will be kept secure by ADONAI in the end. This is also done spiritually for us, all who rely on Him. If we are part of His commonwealth of Israel and redeemed by faith in Yeshua, our Messiah, He will keep us as well. As 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).

The second line, *Ya'er Adonai panav elikha vichunekka*, “ADONAI be gracious to you,” presents a conundrum. How can He be gracious to us who knowingly sin against Him? The word translated as “to be gracious” or “to show favor” is from the Hebrew root חָנַן, *chanan*. This shows the “grace,” or “unmerited favor,” something we don't deserve, which He continues to give us. *Sha'ul* wrote: 7 *In Him 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). He has lavished a wealth of grace on us, an unlimited amount of grace. The “richness of His grace” is a very important point. As ones who have trusted Yeshua, as long as we can sincerely repent of our sin, His grace remains available to forgive us. No sin is unpardonable if you have a repentant heart. “Make his face shine on you” is an idiom meaning “to be friendly toward.” And this implies the outpouring of His divine love and salvation on us.

The third line is *Yisa Adonai panav eleikha v'yasem l'kha shalom*. 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 it is certain that we have His *שְׁלוֹמִי shalom*, His peace. In John chapter 14, 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). Possibly reflecting on this, Sha’ul wrote: 4 *Rejoice in the Lord always—again I will say, rejoice!* 5 *Let your gentleness be known to all people. The Lord is near.* 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 4:4-7 TLV). The *shalom* of G-d, which passes all understanding, is *shalom shalom*, the doubling of the word *shalom*, “perfect peace.”

The final statement that ADONAI spoke through *Moshe* is also important to the blessing: 27 *In this way they are to place My Name over Bnei-Yisrael, and so I will bless them.*” (Numbers 6:27 TLV). Aaron was to put ADONAI’s name on the people of Israel. By using this blessing the priests throughout the generations have made a spiritual implantation of ADONAI’s sacred name into Israel. Even though His name is not spoken today, we receive His actual name in faith, believing that when He wishes to make its pronunciation known, He will. Through the centuries, there have been those who believed that it is necessary to pronounce ADONAI’s name, and some even make calling Him by His Hebrew name necessary for prayers to be answered. But how is His name pronounced? We don’t know. There are many suggestions but no general agreement. *Yahweh* is probably the most frequently used, and today, we even find it to be the standard in Strong’s Online Concordance. We also hear *Jehovah*, *Yehovah*, *Yehovih*, *Yehowah*, *Yehuwah*, *Yehuah*, *Yuwah*, *Yihweh*, *Yoah*, and possibly others. Most who insist that we must pronounce ADONAI’s name are not Jewish, neither traditional Jews nor Messianic Jews. Does anyone really know if any of these ten names are correct? I’m with the traditional rabbis who substitute either ADONAI or *HaShem* until we know for sure. Continuing our discussion of having His name placed on us, we are shown that by this, we fully identify with ADONAI showing everyone that we are His. Through this, He says He is not ashamed to have us. We, his people, bear His name throughout all of the earth, an awesome privilege and responsibility.

When we think of blessings, Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount comes to mind. Rabbi Dr. Pinchas Lapide, an Orthodox Jewish New Testament scholar from Germany, wrote a book about it. That’s an oxymoron, isn’t it? An orthodox Jew who follows Yeshua? But there are now and have been many Orthodox Jews who have trusted in Yeshua. His book is entitled: “The Sermon On The Mount, Utopia or Program for Action?” Rabbi Lapide regards Yeshua the man as a *Torah*-faithful Jew “who wanted to bring to His disciples the kingdom of heaven in harmony and peace.” Most consider Matthew chapter 5, verses 3 through 10 as the sermon, and while it is actually the whole of chapters 5, 6, and 7, these 9 verses are usually expounded upon the most. They are usually considered to be “super-commandments,” commandments that tell us clearly what we must do to be blessed or other such grandiose pronouncements. Here is a paraphrase of Rabbi Lapide’s remarks regarding what he calls grandiose pronouncements. He said: “These are false explanations because Yeshua actually presented G-d to them with the utmost of seriousness and realism, offering methods which are doable, but which don't make excessive demands on

those who are seriously seeking Him.” It was a completely down to earth approach to following ADONAI.

As the chapter opens, we read that Yeshua is teaching his disciples. After he sat down, his *talmidim* came to him, and he began to speak. In the case of a *rabbi*, the sitting posture points unreservedly to instruction. According to the rules of the great *Torah* schools of the 1st century CE, instruction always takes place seated. And Yeshua was certainly a *rabbi*, a teacher, having been given that title at least fourteen times in the Gospels. The multitude may have listened in the background, but the immediate target audience was the circle of twelve. Those twelve were then to take His teaching to the people.

The first nine verses are known as “the beatitudes,” primarily because of the initial word in Latin, “*beatus*,” which means “happy.” In Christian Bibles the Greek is mostly translated as “blessed,” with “happy” only found in Young's Literal Version. We also see that a number of the Psalms begin with either “happy” or “blessed,” translated from a form of 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 may have been Yeshua's inclination for his teaching in Matthew. This type of writing is also found in a scrap of parchment among the Dead Sea Scrolls. One reads: “Blessed is _____ with a pure heart and does not slander with his tongue.” The blank represents the part missing on the scrap. Another is: “Blessed are those who hold to her (Wisdom's) precepts and do not hold to the ways of iniquity.” There are several more similar ones, beginning with *Ashrei*.

Rabbi Lapide's conclusion regarding the beatitudes is that they are all a call for the “absolute fulfilment” of the *Torah* in its original meaning. He believes that the original meaning of the *Torah* is concentrated in two things, the all-encompassing love of *HaShem* and love of neighbor. These two loves are linked by the statement: “Be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy!” This statement is found in the 19th chapter of Leviticus and is at the very center of the 5 books of Moses: *2 “Speak to all the congregation of Bnei-Yisrael and tell them: You shall be kedoshim, for I, Adonai your God, am holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2 TLV). You shall be *kedoshim*, “holy ones.” Did ADONAI purposefully place this statement in the very center of His *Torah*? This, to me, points out that everything that ADONAI commanded, whether under the Sinai Covenant or the New Covenant, points to His very strong message of holiness. We are called to be holy, and our goal is to be increasingly set apart for ADONAI. As we seek Him daily, our love for Him and for our neighbor increases. This call to “be holy” was considered blasphemy in Greece and Rome, but was understood in Judaism to be the highest of all commandments. According to Rabbi Dr. Lapide, the bottom line 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, are in mourning, are meek, are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, are showing mercy, are pure in heart, are a peacemaker, or are being persecuted because you pursue righteousness, if you believe in ADONAI and have trusted in Yeshua, you are happy. And you are also blessed. We are blessed because we are ADONAI's people. He has placed his name on us and has commanded his *kohanim* to bless us in His name.

Rabbi Weiss in Israel gives us this *d'rash* on the *Birkat Kohanim*. He wrote: “In just 15 words, *Hashem*, via the *kohanim*, promises us knowledge, wealth, security, peace, and

an eternal relationship with Him. For what more could anyone ask?” Several of the technical details of the way the actual *kohanim* deliver this *b'racha* bring an even deeper message. The *kohanim* must face the people as they deliver the blessing, though this means that they have to turn their backs on the ark and *Sefer Torah*. This teaches us that if we want to really communicate with another person and to relate to them in a dignified manner, we must face them and focus on them. When delivering the *b'racha*, the *kohen* lifts his arms towards the people, opening his hands and fingers. This symbolizes that he, and of course, ADONAI, embraces the nation with open arms and hands open to give to all. The open-hand gesture, like the handshake or wave that shows we carry no weapon, symbolizes openness and friendship, as opposed to the clenched fist, which is a sign of selfishness and enmity. The *kohanim* must pronounce their blessing with love. This teaches us that a blessing is no blessing unless it is given in love and that a *mitzvah* is not a *mitzvah* unless it is performed with love. The word *ahavah*, love, derives from the word *hav*, meaning to give. In essence, loving is giving, and the end result of showing love is that we will establish oneness, commonality, and unity with those to whom we show love. The *Kohanim were the former leaders of our people*, Israel. The lessons of the *Birkat Kohanim* should be uppermost in the heart and mind of any person who aspires to lead *Am Yisra'el* today. They must focus on others, welcome them with open arms, and let all their actions generate from a genuine love of our fellow Jew, says Rabbi Weiss.

An Israeli bus driver and a pious rabbi die on the same day. They are brought before the heavenly tribunal, and the bus driver is immediately admitted to heaven. The rabbi is told to wait; his case must be examined more carefully. The rabbi is outraged: “I know for a fact that that bus driver was a totally irreligious Jew, while I gave a *shiur* in *Talmud* every day.” “That is all very true,” the angel tells him. “But when you taught *Talmud*, you caused many people to sleep. When that driver drove his bus, everybody prayed.” That joke is also from Parasha Naso twenty years ago.

We don't have a *kohen* attending our congregation, but we do have a very strong prayer ethic. We also feel 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. One special *Birchat HaKohenim* which some of us had was at *Shiloh*, the site of the first Tabernacle. Ronnie Cohen, our tour leader for our first three *Beit Shalom* tours of Israel, as his name proclaims, is a *kohen*. In 2005, standing with us in the imprint of where the Tabernacle once stood, our friend Ronnie blessed us. What an awesome feeling of closeness to ADONAI. We have no *kohen* as a regular attendee, but whenever a *kohen* is present, he is invited to come up at the appropriate time and pronounce the blessing. 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 place His name on our congregation as a part of Israel. We are declaring that we are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel and that we individually are His, and He declares that we are His. As we receive this blessing, we are reminded that we must remember our calling: Love ADONAI and love our neighbor, both of which are the essence of Yeshua's beatitudes.

Here are some verses from the Scripture about being a Nazirite. I call attention to the major points. 2 “*Speak to Bnei-Yisrael and say to them: Any man or woman who desires to vow a Nazirite vow to be separate for Adonai, 3 is to **abstain from wine and any other fermented drink. He is not to drink any vinegar made from wine or any fermented***”

drink, or any grape juice, or eat grapes or raisins. 4 “All during his days as a Nazirite he is not to eat anything from the grapevine—even the seeds or skins. 5 All the duration of his Nazirite vow, **no razor is to come on his head until the time of his consecration to Adonai is over. He is to be holy**, and the hair of his head is to grow long. 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 6:2-8 TLV). There is no way that a person can become a Nazirite today and I’m not suggesting that we should. But I believe that the *Nazir* is a spiritual picture of Yeshua’s followers today. Not that we should not drink wine or not go near dead bodies, but rather that we take ADONAI’s and Yeshua’s commands which we can follow today very seriously. Why did ADONAI tell the *Nazir* not to eat or drink the fruit of the grape or not go near a dead body? I believe He could just as easily have commanded that they not eat pickles and ride donkeys. His purpose was to have them be completely obedient to that which they had committed. For us today, when we follow ADONAI’s kosher laws, we are, in a sense, being a Nazirite. ADONAI gave no reason for commanding us not to eat pork. He just said, “Don’t.” He didn’t explain. And the same is true for all His commandments, including those about which He has told us why. We must obey. ADONAI said: “Be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy!” This means that we must not take His commandments lightly.

In Leviticus 23, ADONAI lists the holy day of *Shabbat* and six *moedim*, festivals, containing seven special Sabbaths. 1 *Then Adonai spoke to Moses saying: 2 “Speak to Bnei-Yisrael, and tell them: These are the appointed moadim of Adonai, which you are to proclaim to be holy convocations—My moadim.”* (Leviticus 23:1-2 TLV). What is an appointed *moed*? It’s an appointed time, a time that ADONAI has appointed for His followers to appear before Him. And they are “holy convocations.” The modern definition of a convocation is: “the action of calling people together for a large formal assembly.” Applying this to Leviticus 23 means that ADONAI is calling all His followers to assemble before Him on every weekly *Shabbat* and every one of the seven special *Shabbats* – every year. Are there excuses or reasons for our not assembling ourselves together? Of course there are. We talked about them two weeks ago. But we must be careful not to take Yeshua’s gracious allowance of “the ox is in the ditch,” too far. Often we rationalize our not attending by being too liberal with Yeshua’s permission for us. I venture to say that absence from church services and synagogue services, the obvious ominous sign of disunity in Yeshua’s body, is possibly the major stumbling block to revival today. We can’t revive if we’re not both physically and spiritually together. Apparently, they had a similar problem in the 1st century because the writer of Hebrews cautioned: *25 And do not neglect our own meetings, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another—and all the more so as you see the Day approaching.* (Hebrews 10:25 TLV). We see the day fast approaching, and he is especially speaking to Yeshua’s last day’s disciples. As we see the Day of Judgment approaching, it is all the more important that we assemble together. If we want repentance and revival, we must remember that it begins with us. Praying for it is great, but being an example of it, living it, is even better.

You heard the story about the man who told his wife one Sunday morning that he didn’t want to go to church. But she said: “You have to go; you’re the preacher.” I’m the rabbi, and I’m here every *Shabbat*, but I’m not here because I’m the rabbi. It is a pattern that I have followed since I was a child. My parents followed the Scriptures and instilled it in me just as Mary Louise’s parents did for her. Years ago, church attendance and

membership were the norm. And it is Scriptural. The writings of Yeshua's disciples stress not only attendance but also being under authority. We can pray for revival all we want, as the saying says, "til we are blue in the face," but until we commit to return to what G-d has commanded, it will not take place. That's my belief, and I'm sticking to it. Every follower of Yeshua should be in a congregation where they're called and attending service either on Sunday or *Shabbat* every week. Most of our reasons for not being there are not valid. There is a spirit of "Self" which has inhabited Yeshua's body of followers. Yes, most are sincere in their trust in Him but deceived by the permissive and divisive spirit that has come over His whole body. Cast out that foul spirit! And if you're not a part of a congregation, pray and ask where you should be. You will not find one that agrees completely with you, so be satisfied and serve where G-d sends you. And be there each week. Yeshua attended, and *Sha'ul* attended. Shouldn't we? I'm not a perfect example. My feet are also clay and I sin too. Yeshua was our example who showed us the Way. An appointed time of a holy convocation is a command from ADONAI to attend. Don't take it lightly. Revival can take place, but it begins with us. Would you say that to each other right now: "Revival begins with me!" Revival can start right here, right now, with us! Take this message to your friends and acquaintances and tell them to pass it on to their friends. Put it on your Facebook pages and send it to your friends, asking them to send to their friends. It's time for Yeshua's body to stop being self-indulgent and to return to our Biblical roots! Then revival will come! When I was growing up, the "Three Rs" were "Readin, Ritin and Rithmetic. Now, the three Rs are Return, Return, Return! Return to Yeshua, Return to congregational authority and Return to congregational attendance. *Shabbat shalom!*

Revival Begins With Me!

***Return to Yeshua!
Return to Authority!
Return to Attendance!***

Pass it on!