

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 6:1-21

“A Holy Vow”

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Numbers 6:1-21

Verse 1-4

YHWH said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to YHWH as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.’”

- A Nazirite is a person who resolves to set themselves apart for God's use for a specific period of time. They declare themselves to belong entirely to God for that time. The time may be for a short duration or for a lifetime, but during that time the person is totally yielded to God's purpose for them.
- Both men and women can choose to offer themselves to God in this way.
- When a person makes this kind of vow to God, they must abstain from wine and all other types of fermented beverages. They must also deny themselves any grape products. This is an act of self-discipline to remind them that he or she is bound by oath to God and to set him or her apart from other members of the community as belonging to God.

Verse 5

“During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to YHWH is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long.”

- During the period of the vow, the person must not cut his hair or shave his beard. This, too, is an act of self-discipline, and a reminder to the community that the person is under a vow to God.

Verse 6-12

“Throughout the period of his separation to YHWH he must not go near a dead body. Even if his own father or mother or brother or sister dies, he must not make himself ceremonially unclean on account of them, because the symbol of his separation to God is on his head. Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to YHWH. If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing -- the seventh day. Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. He must dedicate himself to YHWH for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.”

- Contact with a dead body makes one ceremonially unclean. An unclean person may not enter the presence of God until he is cleansed. This cannot occur for seven days following contact with the body. Thus, a person who is under a Nazirite vow cannot come into contact with a dead body, for if he does, he cannot be separated for God's use for seven days after the contact.
- Even if the contact is accidental, the person must shave himself and cut his hair. He must wait the seven days and do the things required for his cleansing. Then he must begin his vow over again. The time previously dedicated to the Lord's service does not count. He must rededicate himself to the Lord and begin his time of service again.

Verse 13-21

“Now this is the law for the Nazirite when the period of his separation is over. He is to be brought to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. There he is to present his offerings to YHWH: 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, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and a basket of bread made without yeast -- cakes made of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers spread with oil. The

priest is to present them before YHWH and make the sin offering and the burnt offering. He is to present the basket of unleavened bread and is to sacrifice the ram as a fellowship offering to YHWH, together with its grain offering and drink offering. Then at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the Nazirite must shave off the hair that he dedicated. He is to take the hair and put it in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering. After the Nazirite has shaved off the hair of his dedication, the priest is to place in his hands a boiled shoulder of the ram, and a cake and a wafer from the basket, both made without yeast. The priest shall then wave them before YHWH 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. This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to YHWH in accordance with his separation, in addition to whatever else he can afford. He must fulfill the vow he has made, according to the law of the Nazirite."

- What is important to grasp here is not the specifics of the rituals but the high cost involved in ending a Nazirite vow. The cost of the sacrifices required is very high. The person taking the vow, needs to be aware of the cost involved from the beginning. The costs of separating oneself for God's use are always high.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *A Holy Vow*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)