

TORAHSCOPE: Naso (Take)

by Mark Huey posted 21 May, 2010 www.outreachisrael.net

Numbers 4:21-7:89
Judges 13:2-25

“Blessings and Shalom”

The most striking feature in this week’s Torah portion, *Naso*, is the reciting of what has become known as the Aaronic Benediction. While a standard feature of the Jewish liturgical tradition and of the weekly *Shabbat* service, Christians are certainly familiar with this blessing as well:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, “Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The LORD bless you, and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.” So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I *then* will bless them” (Numbers 6:22-27).

Naso, of course, includes much more information than just its record of the Aaronic Benediction. *Naso* is a rather interesting Torah reading because it gives meticulous instruction about a wide variety of topics. Initially, as Numbers 4 concludes, the *parashah* begins by summarizing additional details about the priestly functions of two of the Levitical families numbered and responsible for specific duties concerning the Tabernacle and the altar. The Gershonites and the Merarites are explicitly selected for transporting and constructing the Tabernacle.¹ What is interesting to note, just as we saw in *Bamidbar* last week, is how the Lord is very concerned about each individual and the task that is assigned to them: “Assign to each man the specific things he is to carry” (Numbers 4:32b, NIV). This level of detail allows one to understand more clearly why the God of Israel is not some remote or distant Deity, but is instead a very personal God who is intimately involved in the details of life.

In Numbers 5, after describing some conditions that require removal from the camp,² the narrative shifts to an instructional overview of the law of jealousy and how Israelite men were to handle perceived or real jealousy with their wives.³ In Numbers 6, the ritual of the Nazirite vow is explained,⁴ culminating with what has been traditionally labeled the instruction for declaring forth the Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:22-27). Finally in Numbers 7, our selection then moves ahead in time to the events that occurred when the Tabernacle was first built and its dedication was celebrated by the tribes of Israel.⁵ The final crescendo for our *parashah* this week comes when Moses is given the privilege of hearing the voice of God:

“Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him” (Numbers 7:89).

With this wide range of instruction and information seen in *Naso*, it is normal for us to ask God about what He is trying to communicate. From the minute detail regarding which individuals will handle specific implements, to the dedication of the Tabernacle and the presence of the Lord in the camp, much is covered. As each piece of instruction is recorded, one might begin to remember how one of the great challenges of Ancient Israel’s departure from Egypt was their transition into becoming of a nation of priests *from among a population of slaves*. Many of *Naso’s* instructions were designed to bring an increasing degree of order into the assembly of these people.

¹ Numbers 4:21-49.

² Numbers 5:1-4.

³ Numbers 5:5-31.

⁴ Numbers 6:1-21.

⁵ Numbers 7:1-89.

As I meditated upon the wide variety of instructions, the significance of the Aaronic Benediction seemed to come to mind the most often—because we do certainly hear it at every *Shabbat* service. Here, in the midst of discussing a variety of ways to bring a semblance of order into the emerging nation of Israel, the Lord instructed Moses on how to have Aaron and his sons bless the people. Have you ever considered the blessing of having this prayer spoken over you? Let us look at the text.

The Power of the Name

The Aaronic Benediction, appearing in Numbers 6:22-27, states,

*Y'varekh'kha ADONAI v'yishmerekha.
Ya'er ADONAI panav eleikha vichunekha.
Yissa ADONAI panav eleikha v'yasem
l'kha shalom.*

יְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ
יֵאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיְחַנֵּךְ
יֵשֶׁא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיָּשֶׂם
לְךָ שְׁלוֹמִים

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus shall you bless the Israelites. Say to them: May the LORD bless you and guard you. May the LORD light up His face to you and grant grace to you; may the LORD lift up His face to you and give you peace.’ And they shall set My name over the Israelites, and I Myself shall bless them” (Numbers 6:22-27, Alter).

God instructed Moses in a very succinct way on how Aaron and his sons were to bless the people of Israel. If you dig a little bit closer into some of the terms used in this blessing, you might begin to understand how significant it was for them to be spoken over the Israelites. We certainly do see how the Hebrew text is clear about the proper use of the Divine Name of God, and how powerful it can be. The priests were to tell the people that the Lord would: keep them, shine upon them, be gracious to them, lift His countenance upon them, and give them peace. When thinking about this, we might consider the vision of the Prophet Isaiah being taken up into Heaven, seeing the Holy One high and lifted up upon His throne:

“In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke” (Isaiah 6:1-4).

Recognize that when the Scriptures employ the same word three times—like *qadosh qadosh qadosh* (קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ) in Isaiah 6:3—it is probably time for a Bible reader to pay close attention. *The Lord is trying to show us something very significant.*

In the Aaronic Benediction, the most holy name of God Himself, YHWH (יהוה), is spoken over Israel **three times**—with some tremendous blessings attached. If you read the summary verse at the end of Numbers ch. 6 you are reminded of a great blessing: “Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27, NJPS). Here in this final verse of the prayer (which in the traditional liturgy is often not considered to be a part of the prayer, but only the narrative of Numbers), God describes the fact that His Divine Name will be placed upon the people of Israel.

When I read through Numbers 6:27, it made me think about how important our identification with God truly is, and how He uses His name to bring distinctiveness to His people. The *shem* (שֵׁם) of God often relates to “his reputation, fame...esp. as embodying the (revealed)

character of' (BDB)⁶ Him. But as I contemplated this concept, I was reminded of some of the age-old problems associated with the use of the Divine Name of our Creator, and how the enemy has cleverly, *and sometimes frequently*, made it a cause of division.

Many questions arise in some parts of today's broad Messianic community because Judaism has historically not pronounced the Divine Name of God. There is no doubt that it is clearly written in the Hebrew texts of the Tanakh. *Just looking at these verses in Numbers attests to that reality.* The Divine Name of God, YHWH (יהוה), appears 6,828 times in the Hebrew Bible. The authors, compilers, or editors of the Tanakh did not have a difficult time declaring who they received their revelation from or the Creator they wished to specifically identify. However, following the Babylonian Diaspora, the Jewish people began to consider the Divine Name so holy that it was to be reserved only for the high priest to speak on *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement. The Mishnah attests to this tradition:

"And the priests and people standing in the courtyard, when they would hear the Expressed Name [of the Lord] come out of the mouth of the high priest, would kneel and bow down and fall on their faces and say, 'Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom forever and ever'" (m.*Yoma* 6:2).⁷

There was a protocol established in Second Temple times for speaking the Divine Name of God—and those who would speak it out of place could be condemned to death for blasphemy.⁸ When reviewing the text of the Apostolic Scriptures, it is clear that Yeshua and the Apostles adhered to this protocol. In the Gospels, Yeshua actually spends more time calling His Father, "Father" or "Abba"—than actually referring to Him as God or Lord. If Yeshua considered not speaking the name YHWH aloud to be an error of the Second Temple Judaism in which His ministry functioned, then there would be plenty of evidence in the Apostolic Scriptures supporting this, including charges of blasphemy against Him for verbalizing the name YHWH. If anything, though, it was Yeshua's claim of being the "I AM"—to actually be YHWH (Mark 14:63; Matthew 26:64-65; Luke 22:71; cf. Exodus 3:14)⁹—that condemned Him to death.

As Messianic Believers who are trying to return to the theology of the First Century Believers, who operated within the context of Second Temple Judaism, we must recognize that while our Heavenly Father has a proper name, **it was not used by Yeshua and the Apostles.** We must have the same kind of respect for the holiness of the name YHWH that they had. We should not hesitate to use appropriate titles for our Creator such as God or Lord, just as they were employed by Yeshua and the Apostles.

In recent years, some have claimed that the Father is "restoring" the usage of the Divine Name to His people. While this is interesting to consider, in most cases the enemy has gotten into the mix and made the Sacred Name a point of great contention and ultimately division. Messianic Jews want little to do with the Biblical message of the restoration of all Israel, precisely because so many Two-House proponents use the Divine Name without any consideration of ancient protocol. The Sacred Name sub-sector also claims that the English name Jesus errantly derives from "Zeus," even though the Greek transliteration of *Yeshua* (ישוע), *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς), appears throughout the Septuagint—a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible of *Jewish origin*. Having been in Messianic ministry now for well over a decade, I have had to interact with many Sacred Name Only people, and am sad to report that they have brought a great deal of problems into our young and fledgling Messianic faith community.

Should we not be wiser about the wiles of the Devil, and be better prepared and informed to handle the privilege of being called the people of God? Are we ready to really use His

⁶ BDB, 1028.

⁷ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 275.

⁸ Cf. "God, names of," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 259.

⁹ For a further discussion, consult G.M. Burge, "I Am' Sayings," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 354-356.

name? Considering all of the division and disrepute the Sacred Name Onlyists have often brought to the Messianic movement, *if you use the Divine Name regularly*, would it be appropriate to step back for a moment and (re)consider its usage?¹⁰

I believe we all need to more fully comprehend who the Lord is and how great His love for us actually is, so we can be a people who are really called by *and are worthy of* His name. Most importantly, we need to understand Him as our Heavenly Father, and have an intimate relationship with Him. **May this come quickly as we strive to know Him in deeper and more profound ways!**

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

¹⁰ For a further discussion, consult the articles “Sacred Name Concerns” and “Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement” by J.K. McKee.

Some other useful thoughts, to witness how the Sacred Name agenda has caused severe problems with many of today’s Messianic Jews, are seen in Aaron Eby and Toby Janicki, *Hallowed Be Your Name: Sanctifying God’s Sacred Name* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2008).