

NUMBERS

Chapter 6

The Nazirite Vow

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, 3 he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. 4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. 5 “All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long. 6 “All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body. 7 Not even for his father or for his mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head. 8 All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD. 9 “And if any man dies very suddenly beside him and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. 10 On the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two pigeons to the priest to the entrance of the tent of meeting, 11 and the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned by reason of the dead body. And he shall consecrate his head that same day 12 and separate himself to the LORD for the days of his separation and bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering. But the previous period shall be void, because his separation was defiled. 13 “And this is the law for the Nazirite, when the time of his separation has been completed: he shall be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting, 14 and he shall bring his gift to the LORD, one male lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish as a sin offering, and one ram without blemish as a peace offering, 15 and a basket of unleavened bread, loaves of fine flour mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and their grain offering and their drink offerings. 16 And the priest shall bring them before the LORD and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering, 17 and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread. The priest shall offer also its grain offering and its drink offering. 18 And the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offering. 19 And the priest shall take the shoulder of the ram, when it is boiled, and one unleavened loaf out of the basket and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them on the hands of the Nazirite, after he has shaved the hair of his consecration, 20 and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. They are a holy portion for the priest, together with the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed. And after that the Nazirite may drink wine. 21 “This is the law of the Nazirite. But if he vows an offering to the LORD above his Nazirite vow, as he can afford, in exact accordance with the vow that he takes, then he shall do in addition to the law of the Nazirite.”

6:2 *man or woman.* See ch. 30 for the differences between the vows of men and women. (CSB)

vow ... *Nazirite.* Involved separation or consecration for a specific period of special devotion to God—on occasion even for life. Attention is usually given to the prohibitions for the Nazirite; more important to the Lord is the positive separation (see v. 8). This was not just a vow of personal self-discipline; it was an act of total devotion to the Lord. (CSB)

To separate, consecrate.” For unspecified reasons, voluntarily and for a certain period of time, a person could make a special pledge of dedication to the Lord above the normal requirements of holiness. The vow and its consecration gave the person a special, holy status (i.e., status of a priest or Levite). This vow of separation included three elements: abstention from all products of the grapevine, fermented and unfermented (vv 3–4; cf Lv 10:9; Am 2:11); letting his hair grow (v 5); and avoidance of all contact with the dead (vv 6–12; see the priestly regulation in Lv 21:1–4) *Nazirite*. Cf 1Sm 1:28; Lk 1:15; Ac 18:18. “The Nazirites did not make their vows with the same opinion of the monks, which we condemn. The rite of the Nazirites was an exercise or a declaration of faith before the people. It did not merit the forgiveness of sins before God and did not justify before God. Further, just as circumcision or slaying victims would not be a service of God now, so the rite of the Nazirites should not be presented now as a service” (Ap XXVII 58). (TLSB)

6:3 Wine was associated with joy (cf Ps 104:15), and vows typically involved serious matters. (TLSB)

6:4 *days of his separation*. Specific times are not designated. Some vows were lifelong (Jgs 13:3–5; 1Sm 1:28). However, cf Ac 18:18. (TLSB)

nothing that is produced by grapevine. Not only was the fermented beverage forbidden, but even the seed and skin of the grape. During the period of a Nazirite’s vow, three areas of his (or her) life were governed: (1) diet, (2) appearance and (3) associations. Every Israelite was regulated in these areas, but for the Nazirite each regulation was heightened. An analogy may be the practice of some Christians to forgo certain (good) foods during the period of Lent to enhance spiritual devotion to Christ in the special period of remembering his sufferings. (CSB)

6:5 *no razor*. See Jdg 13:5. The unusually long hair of a Nazirite would become a physical mark of his (or her) vow of special devotion to the Lord. Cf. Lev 21:5. (CSB)

Razors were typically used for cutting hair. Uncut hair created a visual testimony of the vow. Cf Lv 21:1–5; Ezk 27:31. (TLSB)

6:6–7 Funerals typically involved ritual uncleanness and shaving off the hair as a sign of mourning. (TLSB)

6:6 *dead body*. For the Nazirite, the prohibition of contact with dead bodies extended even to the deceased within his (or her) own family (v. 7; contrast Lev 21:1–3). (CSB)

6:9–12 The provisions of the Nazirite vow concerned areas where he (or she) was able to make conscious decisions. This section deals with the unexpected and the unplanned events of daily living. (CSB)

6:11 *he sinned*. Became unclean, even though it was accidental. (TLSB)

6:12 *previous period shall be void*. Vowed period of consecration would have to start over. (TLSB)

6:13–20 The offerings of the Nazirite at the completion of the period of the vow were extensive, expensive and expressive of the spirit of total commitment to the Lord during this time of special devotion. In addition to these several offerings the Nazirite burned his (or her) hair (the sign of the vow). (CSB)

6:13–15 A full complement of offerings made atonement and ended the vow. (TLSB)

6:13 *completed*. A special sacrifice marked the Nazirite's release from the pledge (vv 14–16). (TLSB)

6:21 *This is the law of the Nazirite*. Summary statements such as this not only end a section, but also solemnize its contents. (CSB)

6:1–21 Nazirite vows are made voluntarily before God. The length of vows can vary, but once a vow is made, God requires fulfillment (v 21). Today, we take vows at important times: Baptisms, confirmations, weddings, citizenship, and government service. When you take a vow, honor the Lord by keeping your word. God, who does not take lightly any vow made to Him, faithfully keeps His vows, including that of Gn 3:15, which promised your salvation in Christ. • Lord God, thank You for Your faithfulness. Help me to keep my word to You and to others. In Christ's name. Amen. (TLSB)

Aaron's Blessing

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24 The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. 27 “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

6:22–27 After introducing new regulations for the camp (chs 1–6), the Lord adds a blessing, showing His gracious favor toward the people. The threefold repetition of the divine name (cf Ps 24:8–10; 113:1; 136:1–3) anticipates the threefold name Jesus uses in Mt 28:19, the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. The first clause in each line of the benediction invokes God's movement to His people; the second clause invokes His activities. (TLSB)

6:23 *bless* – The priests expressed God's gracious attitude to the Israelites in a formula Aaron used when he “lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them” (Lv 9:22). The rite in Lv 9 was the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood. The specific occasion for this blessing in Nu 6 is not described. It perhaps concluded the regular services of the tabernacle. Its frequent use is demonstrated by echoes found in Psalms and by an inscription of the blessing on silver amulets found in a burial cave at Ketef Hinnom, Jerusalem. Luther says “I believe Christ used something like this when, ascending into heaven, He blessed His disciples (Luke 24:50-51). (TLSB)

Hebrew *barak*, “To bestow ability for success” (from the greater person to the lesser) or “to praise a person's ability for success” (from the lesser person to the greater). Refers to bending the knees, perhaps to kneel and receive a pronouncement of inheritance with all its wealth (cf Gn 27). “Bless the Lord” has the sense of “greet” and is common in the Psalms, expressing thanks and praise (34:1; 145:1, 10). In faith, praise is the greatest gift we can offer to our Lord. The blessing that came from the temple at Jerusalem now resonates through the Church, brought by pastors, missionaries, teachers, and other Christians who proclaim the Gospel of Christ's sacrifice. (TLSB p. 842)

6:24–26 The Aaronic benediction. The threefold repetition of the divine name Yahweh (“the LORD”) is for emphasis and gives force to the expression in v. 27: “So they will put my name on the Israelites.” Each verse conveys two elements of benediction, and the verses are progressively longer (in the Hebrew text, the first verse has three words, the second has five and the third has seven). (CSB)

6:24 *keep* – Guard and protect. (TLSB)

The first phrase refers especially to the work of God the Father. The blessing from the Father includes all aspects of our life. Wherever we look we can see how the Lord blesses us through the physical, material possessions that He gives us. Luther's explanation to the first Article of the Creed summarizes these blessings very concisely, nothing that the Lord “gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my

members, my mind and all my abilities,” and that He “richly and daily provides clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land cattle and all I own. (PBC)

We need only look about in our homes! Look at the food and furniture, the children and cars, dishes and dresses, the suits and sofas and even the electricity mysteriously present in the wall sockets. Count the many ways in which the Lord blesses us with temporal gifts. Just as surely the Lord blesses us with talents and abilities. With mind and hand we can indeed make a living. With the same mind and hands we can serve Him. (PBC)

Further, our heavenly Father blesses and keeps us as He answers our requests when we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.” How often the Lord keeps us by preventing problems and dangers from overwhelming us! How zealously the Lord works to keep us from going to those places where we will be tempted to sin! Yet, on the other hand, how loving the Lord is when He allows testings to come into our lives, for He promises that He will also make a way of escape and that all things will work together for good to those who love Him. Ultimately the richest way in which the Lord blesses us is that He keeps us faithful to the gospel to the end of our lives. It is also His blessing that He will deliver us from this present evil world into the perfection of His glory in heaven. All these blessings the Lord gladly includes in the benediction: “The Lord bless you and keep you.” (PBC)

6:25 *make his face shine upon you.* In acceptance and favor. (CSB)

The Lord warned Moses that no man could see His face (Ex 33:20). When God sets His face against His enemies, they are destroyed or put to flight. But here, God’s face beams with gentle kindness so that His people are not harmed but blessed. Through the mercies and promises of the covenant, the people who were terrified by the Lord’s presence now begin to see Him for who He is. (TLSB)

gracious – It is the essence of God’s character. (TLSB)

From the Hebrew *chana*, “to be gracious, generous, compassionate.” An attribute of God celebrated in the Psalms. (TLSB p. 842)

The second phrase of the benediction addresses the fact that human beings are sinful. By birth man is in rebellion against God. The only hope for such rebels lies in the fact that God is gracious to us. How clearly we see God’s love for us in the work of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Using Luther’s explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, we note that God is gracious to us in Jesus, who “has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. All this He did that I should be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.” That is God’s grace – God’s undeserved kindness to us. It is grace in Christ. For in Christ God shows His love to us – a deep, profound love which loves us also when we deserve it least because of our sin. In such love God makes His face shine upon us. Just as the face of a proud, new mother radiates love, so God looks at us, covering all our sins with the perfect redemption that Christ has purchased for us. All these blessings the Lord gladly includes in the benediction: “The make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.” (PBC)

6:26 *lift up His countenance.* Hebrew expression for viewing someone favorably, as a smile turns the corners of the mouth upward. Same Hebrew word used for “face” and for “countenance.” (TLSB)

peace. The Hebrew for this word is *shalom*, here seen in its most expressive fullness—not the absence of war, but a positive state of rightness and well-being. Such peace comes only from the Lord. (CSB)

This is when God’s favor lights up His gaze on us, the result is peace, well-being, wholeness. (TLSB)

In the third phrase of the benediction we see the work of the third person in the Trinity: God the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit. The phrase “turn His face toward you” indicates that the Lord gladly looks upon each of us as individuals. By contrast, how sad it would be if God would turn His back on any of us, ignore us and leave us to the lost that we deserve. How wonderful this work of the Holy Spirit! He turns rebels into His children by leading them to faith in Christ Jesus! He makes the blind to see by leading them to Christ, the Light of the world. As the Giver of life, He gives life to those who are dead in trespasses and sin. Every believer is a miracle of the Holy Spirit! It is He who has “called by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (Luther’s Catechism). In the miracle of conversion the Holy Spirit gives us peace because we know that through Christ we are reconciled to God. We also know with the certainty of faith that as long as we are right with God through Christ, everything in our life will also work out right for us. The believer enjoys a peace that stands up in the fiercest trials – yes even in the face of death. What peace there is to know that whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord’s. Anchored in this faith we can exclaim with St. Paul: “Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Angels proclaimed this peace at the first Christmas Eve: “Peace on earth, good will to man.” Jesus promised the peace from the Holy Spirit when He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you” (John 14:27). Your pastor prays that you may enjoy this peace each time after the sermon when he uses the words: “And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). (PBC)

6:27 *put my name* – More than 20 times since the exodus, Moses recorded the Lord’s claim “I am the Lord your God.” This bond of the covenant-promise, that Israel belongs to God and God to Israel, is made a regular part of the tabernacle services. Israel bears God’s name as a mark of His ownership, blessing, and protection. (TLSB)

What marvelous blessings the Lord gives to every believer! His divine power and love stand behind each of the words in the benediction: “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” The name of God was indeed on the Israelites, for in the name of Israel is the meaning “man of God.” In the NT that name is also on us as we claim the name “Christian,” which really means that we are followers of Christ. Of such believers the Lord gladly says, “I will bless them.” This promise makes the benediction far more than mere words or a pious wish. The Lord stands behind each word. As the triune God He gladly grants these blessings to each of us. To such a benediction believers in all ages have gladly said, “Amen. So be it. (PBC)

6:22–27 The Aaronic benediction is still repeated in Christian worship (e.g., *LSB*, pp 166, 183, 202, 212, 218). Note that the divine name Yahweh is used three times in reference to the triune nature of God. What a blessing it is to know that God the Father blesses all aspects of our lives, that God the Son has redeemed us poor, miserable sinners, and that God the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel. He saves us by His name, applied to us in Holy Baptism (Mt 28:19) and invoked by us throughout our lives. • “I bind unto myself today The strong name of the Trinity By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.” Amen. (*LSB* 604:1) (TLSB)