

CHAPTER 6

In this chapter we have,

I. The law concerning Nazarites,

1. What it was to which the vow of a Nazarite obliged him (v. 1-8).
2. A remedial law in case a Nazarite happened to be polluted by the touch of a dead body (v. 9-12).
3. The solemnity of his discharge when his time was up (v. 13-21).

II. Instructions given to the priests how they should bless the people (v. 22, etc.).

~~006~~ NUMBERS 6:1-21

THE LAW CONCERNING NAZARITES

After the law for the discovery and shame of those that by sin had made themselves vile, fitly follows this for the direction and encouragement of those who by their eminent piety and devotion had made themselves honourable, and distinguished themselves from their neighbours. It is very probable that there were those before the making of this law who went under the character of *Nazarites*, and were celebrated by that title as persons professing greater strictness and zeal in religion than other people; for the vow of a Nazarite is spoken of here as a thing already well known, but the obligation of it is reduced to a greater certainty than hitherto it had been. Joseph is called a Nazarite among his brethren (~~048~~Genesis 49:26), not only because separate from them, but because eminent among them. Observe,

I. The general character of a Nazarite: it is a person *separated unto the Lord*, v. 2. Some were Nazarites for life, either by divine designation, as Samson (~~073~~Judges 13:5), and John Baptist (~~015~~Luke 1:15), or by their parents' vow concerning them, as Samuel, ~~011~~1 Samuel 1:11. Of these this law speaks not. Others were so for a certain time, and by their own voluntary engagement, and concerning them rules are given by this law. A

woman might bind herself with the vow of a Nazarite, under the limitations we find, ^{<4018>}Numbers 30:3, where the vow which the woman is supposed to vow unto the Lord seems to be meant especially of this vow. The Nazarites were,

1. Devoted to the Lord during the time of their Nazariteship, and, it is probable, spent much of their time in the study of the law, in acts of devotion, and instructing others. An air of piety was thereby put upon them, and upon their whole conversation.
2. They were separated from common persons and common things. Those that are consecrated to God must not be conformed to this world. They distinguished themselves, not only from others, but from what they themselves were before and after.
3. They separated themselves by vowing a vow. Every Israelite was bound by the divine law to love God with all his heart, but the Nazarites by their own act and deed bound themselves to some religious observances, as fruits and expressions of that love, which other Israelites were not bound to. Some such there were, whose spirits God stirred up to be in their day the ornaments of the church, the standard-bearers of religion, and patterns of piety. It is spoken of as a great favour to their nation that God *raised up of their young men for Nazarites*, ^{<4021>}Amos 2:11. The Nazarites were known in the streets and respected as *purser than snow, whiter than milk*, ^{<2007>}Lamentations 4:7. Christ was called in reproach a Nazarene, so were his followers: but he was no Nazarite according to this law; he drank wine, and touched dead bodies, yet in his this type had its accomplishment, for in him all purity and perfection met; and every true Christian is a spiritual Nazarite, separated by vow unto the Lord. We find St. Paul, by the persuasion of his friends, in complaisance to the Jews, submitting to this law of the Nazarites; but at the same time it is declared that the Gentiles should *observe no such thing*, ^{<4024>}Acts 21:24, 25. It was looked upon as a great honour to a man to be a Nazarite, and therefore if a man speak of it as a punishment, saying for instance, "I will be a Nazarite rather than do so or so," he is (say the Jews) a wicked man; but he that vows unto the Lord in the way of holiness to be a Nazarite, lo, *the crown of his God is upon his head*.

II. The particular obligations that the Nazarites lay under. That the fancies of superstitious men might not multiply their restraints endlessly, God

himself lays down the law for them, and gives them the rule of their profession.

1. They must have nothing to do with *the fruit of the vine*, v. 3, 4. They must drink no wine nor string drink, nor eat grapes, no, not the kernel nor the husk; they might not so much as eat a raisin. The learned Dr. Lightfoot has a conjecture (Hor. Hebrews in Luc. 1.15), that, as the ceremonial pollutions by leprosy and otherwise represented the sinful state of fallen man, so the institution of the order of Nazarites was designed to represent the pure and perfect state of man in innocency, and that the tree of knowledge, forbidden to Adam, was the vine, and for that reason it was forbidden to the Nazarites, and all the produce of it. Those who gave the Nazarites wine to drink did the tempter's work (^{<3102>}Amos 2:12), persuading them to that forbidden fruit. That it was reckoned a perfection and praise not to drink wine appears from the instance of the Rechabites, ^{<2316>}Jeremiah 35:6. They were to *drink no wine*,

(1.) That they might be examples of temperance and mortification. Those that separate themselves to God and to his honour must not gratify the desires of the body, but keep it under and bring it into subjection. Drinking *a little wine for the stomach's sake* is allowed, to help that, ^{<3103>}1 Timothy 5:23. But drinking much wine for the *palate's sake*, to please that, does by no means become those who profess to walk not *after the flesh, but after the Spirit*.

(2.) That they might be qualified to employ themselves in the service of God. They must not drink, lest they should *forget the law* (^{<3106>}Proverbs 31:5), lest they should *err through wine*, ^{<2307>}Isaiah 28:7. Let all Christians oblige themselves to be very moderate in the use of wine and strong drink; for, if the love of these once gets the mastery of a man, he becomes a very easy prey to Satan. It is observable that because they were to drink no wine (which was the thing mainly intended) they were to eat nothing that came of the vine, to teach us with the utmost care and caution to avoid sin and every thing that borders upon it and leads to it, or may be a temptation to us. *Abstain from all appearance of evil*, ^{<3152>}1 Thessalonians 5:22.

2. They must not *cut their hair*, v. 5. They must neither poll their heads nor shave their beards; this was that mark of Samson's Nazariteship which we often read of in his story. Now,

(1.) This signified a noble neglect of the body and the ease and ornament of it, which became those who, being separated to God, ought to be wholly taken up with their souls, to secure their peace and beauty. It signified that they had, for the present, renounced all sorts of sensual pleasures and delights, and resolved to live a life of self-denial and mortification.

Mephibosheth in sorrow *trimmed not his beard*, ~~102~~2 Samuel 19:24.

(2.) Some observe that long hair is spoken of as a badge of subjection (~~415~~1 Corinthians 11:5, etc.); so that the long hair of the Nazarites denoted their subjection to God, and their putting themselves under his dominion.

(3.) By this they were known to all that met them to be Nazarites, and so it commanded respect. It made them look great without art; it was nature's crown to the head, and a testimony for them that they had preserved their purity. For, if they had been defiled, their hair must have been cut, v. 9. See ~~209~~Jeremiah 7:29.

3. They must not come near any dead body, v. 6, 7. Others might touch dead bodies, and contracted only a ceremonial pollution by it for some time; some must do it, else the dead must be unburied; but the Nazarites must not do it, upon pain of forfeiting all the honour of their Nazariteship. They must not attend the funeral of any relation, no, not father nor mother, any more than the high priest himself, because *the consecration of his God is upon his head*. Those that separate themselves to God must learn,

(1.) To distinguish themselves, and do more than others.

(2.) To keep their consciences pure from dead works, and not to touch the unclean thing. The greater profession of religion we make, and the more eminent we appear, the greater care we must take to avoid all sin, for we have so much the more honour to lose by it.

(3.) To moderate their affections even to their near relations, so as not to let their sorrow for the loss of them break in upon their joy in God and submission to his will. See ~~402~~Matthew 8:21, 22.

4. All *the days of their separation* they must be *holy to the Lord*, v. 8. This was the meaning of those external observances, and without this they were of no account. The Nazarites must be devoted to God, employed for him, and their minds intent upon him; they must keep themselves pure in heart and life, and be in every thing conformable to the divine image and will; this is to be holy, this is to be a Nazarite indeed.

III. The provision that was made for the cleansing of a Nazarite, if he happened unavoidably to contract a ceremonial pollution by the touch of a dead body. No penalty is ordered by this law for the wilful breach of the foregoing laws; for it was not supposed that a man who had so much religion as to make that vow could have so little as to break it presumptuously: nor could it be supposed that he should drink wine, or have his hair cut, but by his own fault; but purely by the providence of God, without any fault of his own, he might be near a dead body, and that is the case put (v. 9): *If a man die very suddenly by him, he has defiled the head of his consecration.* Note, Death sometimes takes men away very suddenly, and without any previous warning. A man might be well and dead in so little a time that the most careful Nazarite could not avoid being polluted by the dead body; so short a step is it sometimes, and so soon taken, from time to eternity. God prepare us for sudden death! In this case,

1. He must be purified from the ceremonial pollution he had contracted, as others must, upon the seventh day, v. 9. Nay, more was required for the purifying of the Nazarite than of any other person that had touched a dead body; he must bring a sin-offering and a burnt-offering, and an atonement must be *made for him*, v. 10, 11. This teaches us that sins of infirmity, and the faults we are overtaken in by surprise, must be seriously repented of, and that an application must be made of the virtue of Christ's sacrifice to our souls for the forgiveness of them every day, ~~1~~ 1 John 2:1, 2. It teaches us also that, if those who make an eminent profession of religion do any thing to sully the reputation of their profession, more is expected from them than others, for the retrieving both of their peace and of their credit.

2. He must begin the days of his separation again; for all that were past before his pollution, though coming ever so near the period of his time set, were lost, and not reckoned to him, v. 12. This obliged them to be very careful not to defile themselves by the dead, for that was the only thing that made them lose their time, and it teaches us that *if a righteous man turn away from his righteousness*, and defile himself with dead works, all his righteousness that he has done shall be lost to him, ~~33~~ Ezekiel 33:13. It is all lost, all in vain, if he do not persevere, ~~3~~ Galatians 3:4. He must begin again, and do his first works.

IV. The law for the solemn discharge of a Nazarite from his vow, when he had completed the time he fixed to himself. Before the expiration of that term he could not be discharged; before he vowed, it was in his own

power, but it was too late after the vow to make enquiry. The Jews say that the time of a Nazarite's vow could not be less than thirty days; and if a man said, "I will be a Nazarite but for two days," yet he was bound for thirty; but it should seem Paul's vow was for only seven days (~~Acts~~ Acts 21:27), or, rather, then he observed the ceremony of finishing that vow of Nazariteship from which, being at a distance from the temple, he had discharged himself some years before at Cenchræ only by the ceremony of cutting his hair, ~~Acts~~ Acts 18:18. When the time of the vowed separation was out, he was to be made free,

1. Publicly, *at the door of the tabernacle* (v. 13), that all might take notice of the finishing of his vow, and none might be offended if they saw him now drink wine, who had so lately refused.

2. It was to be done with sacrifices, v. 14. Lest he should think that by this eminent piece of devotion he had made God a debtor to him, he is appointed, even when he had finished his vow, to bring an offering to God; for, when we have done our utmost in duty to God, still we must own ourselves behind-hand with him. He must bring one of each sort of the instituted offerings.

(1.) A burnt-offering, as an acknowledgment of God's sovereign dominion over him and all he had still, notwithstanding his discharge from this particular vow.

(2.) A sin-offering. This, though mentioned second (v. 14), yet seems to have been offered first (v. 16), for atonement must be made for our sins before any of our sacrifices can be accepted. And it is very observable that even the Nazarite, who in the eye of men was *purèr than snow* and *whiter than milk*, yet durst not appear before the holy God without a sin-offering. Though he had fulfilled the vow of his separation without any pollution, yet he must bring a sacrifice for sin; for there is guilt insensibly contracted by the best of men, even in their best works — some good omitted, some ill admitted, which, if we were dealt with in strict justice, would be our ruin, and in consequence of which it is necessary for us to receive the atonement, and plead it as our righteousness before God.

(3.) A peace-offering, in thankfulness to God who had enabled him to fulfil his vow, and in supplication to God for grace to preserve him from ever doing any thing unbecoming one that had been once a Nazarite,

remembering that, though he was now freed from the bonds of his own vow, he still remained under the bonds of the divine law.

(4.) To these were added the meat-offerings and drink-offerings, according to the manner (v. 15, 17), for these always accompanied the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings: and, besides these, a basket of unleavened cakes, and wafers.

(5.) Part of the peace-offering, with a cake and wafer, was to be waved for a wave-offering (v. 19, 20); and this was a gratuity to the priest, who had it for his pains, after it had been first presented to God.

(6.) Besides all this, he might bring his free-will offerings, *such as his hand shall get*, v. 21. More than this he might bring, but not less. And, to grace the solemnity, it was common upon this occasion to have their friends to be at *charges with them*, ~~(12)~~ Acts 21:24. Lastly, One ceremony more was appointed, which was like the cancelling of the bond when the condition is performed, and that was the *cutting off of his hair*, which had been suffered to grow all the time of his being a Nazarite, and burning it in the fire over which the peace-offerings were boiling, v. 18. This intimated that his full performance of his vow was acceptable to God in Christ the great sacrifice, and not otherwise. Learn hence to *vow and pay to the Lord our God*, for *he has no pleasure in fools*.

~~(12)~~ NUMBERS 6:22-27

A FORM OF BENEDICTION APPOINTED

Here,

I. The priests, among other good offices which they were to do, are appointed solemnly to bless the people in the *name of the Lord*, v. 23. It was part of their work, ~~(15)~~ Deuteronomy 21:5. Hereby God put an honour upon the priests, for *the less is blessed of the better*; and hereby he gave great comfort and satisfaction to the people, who looked upon the priest as God's mouth to them. Though the priests of himself could do no more than beg a blessing, yet being an intercessor by office, and doing that in his name who commands the blessing, the prayer carried with it a promise,

and he pronounced it as one having authority with his hands lifted up and his face towards the people. Now,

1. This was a type of Christ's errand into the world, which was to *bless us* (⁴⁰⁸Acts 3:26), as the high priest of our profession. The last thing he did on earth was with uplifted hands to bless his disciples, (⁴²⁸Luke 24:50, 51). The learned bishop Pearson observes it as a tradition of the Jews that the priests blessed the people only at the close of the morning sacrifice, not of the evening sacrifice, to show (says he) that in the last days, the days of the Messiah, which are (as it were) the evening of the world, the benediction of the law should cease, and the blessing of Christ should take place.

2. It was a pattern to gospel ministers, the masters of assemblies, who are in like manner to dismiss their solemn assemblies with a blessing. The same that are God's mouth to his people, to teach and command them, are his mouth likewise to bless them; and those that receive the law shall receive the blessing. The Hebrew doctors warn the people that they say not, "What availeth the blessing of this poor simple priest? "For," say they, "the receiving of the blessing depends, not on the priest, but on the holy blessed God."

II. A form of blessing is here prescribed them. In their other devotions no form was prescribed, but this being God's command concerning benediction, that it might not look like any thing of their own, he puts the very words in their mouths, v. 24-26. Here observe,

1. That the blessing is commanded upon each particular person: *The Lord bless thee*. They must each of them prepare themselves to receive the blessing, and then they should find enough in it to make them every man happy. *Blessed shalt thou be*, (⁶³⁰Deuteronomy 28:3). If we take the law to ourselves, we may take the blessing to ourselves, as if our names were inserted.

2. That the name *Jehovah* is three times repeated in it, and (as the critics observe) each with a different accent in the original; the Jews themselves think there is some mystery in this, and we know what it is, the New Testament having explained it, which directs us to expect the blessing from *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost*, each of which persons is *Jehovah*, and yet they are "not three Lords, but one Lord," (⁴⁷³⁴2 Corinthians 13:14).

3. That the favour of God is all in all in this blessing, for that is the fountain of all good.

(1.) *The Lord bless thee!* Our blessing God is only our speaking well of him; his blessing us is doing well for us; those whom he blesses are blessed indeed.

(2.) *The Lord make his face shine upon thee,* alluding to the shining of the sun upon the earth, to enlighten and comfort it, and to renew the face of it. “The Lord love thee and cause thee to know that he loves thee.” We cannot but be happy if we have God's love; and we cannot but be easy if we know that we have it.

(3.) *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee.* This is to the same purport with the former, and it seems to allude to the smiles of a father upon his child, or of a man upon his friend whom he takes pleasure in. If God give us the assurances of his special favour and his acceptance of us, this will *put gladness into the heart*, ^{<1007>}Psalm 4:7, 8.

4. That the fruits of this favour conveyed by this blessing are protection, pardon, and peace.

(1.) Protection from evil, v. 24. The Lord *keep thee*, for it is he that keeps Israel, and neither *slumbers nor sleeps* (^{<1008>}Psalm 121:4), and all believers are *kept by the power of God*.

(2.) Pardon of sin, v. 25. The Lord be *gracious*, or *merciful*, unto thee.

(3.) Peace (v. 26), including all that good which goes to make up a complete happiness.

III. God here promises to ratify and confirm the blessing: *They shall put my name upon the children of Israel*, v. 27. God gives them leave to make use of his name in blessing the people, and to bless them as his people, called by his name. This included all the blessings they could pronounce upon them, to mark them for God's peculiar, the people of his choice and love. God's name upon them was their honour, their comfort, their safety, their plea. *We are called by thy name, leave us not*. It is added, *and I will bless them*. Note, A divine blessing goes along with divine institutions, and puts virtue and efficacy into them. What Christ says of the peace is true of the blessing, “Peace to this congregation,” if the sons of peace and heirs of blessing be there, the peace, the blessing, shall rest upon them,

◀2015 Luke 10:5, 6. For in *every place where God records his name* he will *meet his people and bless them.*