

## Numbers Chapter 6 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is the single word "separation". This chapter deals with the issue of how one becomes separate for God's use. What does that mean? Is this something Christians should strive for, or are we already separated? In the first verse of this chapter, it says that any man or woman among the Israelites are welcome to separate themselves for God.
  - a) Let me explain further. This chapter uses a term called the "Nazirite Vow". That term is a way of saying that one is separating themselves for God's use for a specified time period. A short time after reading this, you will probably forget most of the details of how one becomes and stays a Nazirite. The important point for us to think about is the concept of how and why we separate ourselves for use by God. Remember that this is not about salvation, but about specifically doing things for God in our lives.
  - b) What caught my attention about this chapter was the lack of "why's": This chapter goes into a lot of details about how one is separated for God. It explains how one starts and how one ends this vow of separation. It also focuses on what happens if one fails in the middle of one's vow of separation.
    - i) However, there is a big lack of "What do I do while I am separated for God?" The chapter talks about how one looks and acts when making this vow, but not about what one does when taking this vow. Therefore, since I am always fascinated by the "why" question more than the "how" question, I am going to talk about people listed elsewhere in the bible who have blatantly or by implication taken this vow of separation and what they have done with their lives.
      - a) In other words, if we can't learn the "why" from this chapter, we should look through the rest of the bible to understand why one should separate themselves for God's use.
      - ii) But John, if the chapter focuses on "how" as opposed to "why", shouldn't we focus on the "how" question? My answer is of course we should. I am going to talk a lot about the significance of each of the "how" statements and how they should apply to our lives as Christians.
  - c) In summary, this chapter teaches us that if we are called to live the Christian life, God wants us to separate ourselves from nonbelievers. The big question of course is what does that mean practically? Do we avoid our relatives? Of course not. Do we never talk to non-believers? Of course not, or no one new would ever be a believer. My point is by the end of the lesson, I want all of you to understand practically, what it means and what it does not mean to be separated for use by God and why this is a good thing to do.
    - i) Let me give you a clue: All of the "how" issues brought up in this chapter are there to teach us about how we are to separate ourselves for God as well as being literal for those Israelites living in the desert. The idea for them is, they have read so far in this book how they are to camp and march. They all knew how the Levites are called to be priests. The remaining question is how does anyone else be of service to God if one is not a Levite? That is the issue of "separation" to be discussed here.
2. The last part of the lesson ends with a blessing by the top priest for all of the Israelites. What bothered me as I read this lesson is "why a blessing here and now?" Most of the chapter focuses on making a special effort by an individual to dedicate part of their life to God. Then we get a short speech by the high priest in effect saying, "Bless everyone"? What is the blessing here?
  - a) It is to show that God loves everyone who makes an effort to draw close to Him. With that said, there is a special blessing given to anyone or everyone who makes the effort in life to draw close to Him. We'll discover why that is so, in this lesson.
  - b) With that speech out of my system, let's start the text.

3. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.
- a) The chapter starts by saying that any man or woman who wants to separate themselves to be used by God may do so. As I stated in the introduction, the big emphasis here is on the "how" issue. The first thing one must do is not drink wine or other alcoholic drinks. It is saying in effect that if anyone wants to be separated from God, they must have nothing that is even remotely associated with alcohol including the products used to make it. I would say that this paragraph is going to require some explanations, so bear with me.
  - b) Let's start with the word Nazirite itself. This is a Hebrew word that is transliterated. Essentially it just means to be separated for God for a period of time. If I had to think of the Christian equivalent of a Nazirite, a monk living in a monastery is probably the closest I can come to describing someone that has totally separated from God on a full time basis.
    - i) Are you saying for us to become close to God, we have to go move to the nearest monastery? Hardly. A simpler equivalent is when we feel lead to take on some sort of special project for God. When we dedicate the time and trouble to do a project that in some way is beneficial to others, that can be like this type of vow.
  - c) I should probably back up at this moment, and go back to the Israelites to explain further.
    - i) Remember that in order to be a Jewish priest, one had to be born into a specific group of people. To repeat my overused joke, "Dad, I don't want to be a priest, I want to sell camels for a living. Too bad son, you were born in the tribe that are all priests, so off you go to seminary. A different Jewish kid says, father, I want to be a priest. Too bad son, you were not born into the specific tribe that was called to be priests, so welcome to the family camel business."
    - ii) OK, I promise not to repeat that joke again for a good while. My point here is that if a person who has a desire to serve God, but they are not a Levite, is more than welcome to take this vow of being a Nazirite. This vow and commitment was a way for any Israelite to say in effect, I too, can do something special for God.
    - iii) Again, notice that the person who has become a Nazirite can't just serve God any old way they wanted to. This chapter will describe a specific set of rituals. One must commit themselves to a specific diet and a certain "look". It was a way of letting everyone know they were going forth with this Nazirite vow.
  - d) With that said, let me come back to the specific's of these verses.
    - i) The main idea is that the Nazirite must be sober all the time. What is implied here is that God never forbade the Israelites from drinking alcohol. The bible has commands against being drunk. There are specific commands for priests and for kings not to drink when on duty, but that is a separate issue.
    - ii) The point here is a "commoner" could take this vow for a period of time and part of that vow is no drinking was allowed. OK, one can see that. Let's face it, if we are to take a project for God, I can see why we should be sober while we do that. What about no eating of grapes? One cannot get drunk from that no matter how many grapes one puts in their mouth or how much grape juice one drinks.
      - a) The point is grapes are associated with wine. I suspect the idea is that is if one is going to make this vow, one must not even be tempted or eat any product that is even associated with alcoholic beverages.
    - iii) The big question of course is, what is the benefit of doing that? What is the reward for ignoring grape juice? The short answer is the opportunity to do something for God and see the benefit of that action. To explain further, there are some examples of Nazirites in the bible, and I'm going to quickly discuss those in this lesson.

- e) If one knows their bible fairly well, one can think of two Old Testament figures and one New Testament figure that in effect were Nazirites. They are:
- i) Sampson, Samuel and John the Baptist. There is also an unnamed person in the book of Acts who took a Nazirite vow, who Paul helped. I'll discuss him as well.
  - ii) Let's start with Sampson. He is probably the most famous. His vow began when an angel told his parents that Sampson was to be separated from birth in order to be one. The basic requirements as we will read in this chapter are that a Nazirite is not to drink alcohol, they are to grow their hair long and not to touch a dead body.
    - a) If you know the story of Samson, he literally violated two of the three and probably violated all three. Samson killed a lion and later ate honey from the dead lion's guts as bees made a home there. He also fell for a woman named Delilah who eventually had his haircut. As to wine, we don't have any exact record of him drinking, but parties were mentioned and most likely Samson drank at such functions. My point is Samson wasted the gift that God gave him. Sampson is a story of what could have been. His story takes place in Judges Chapters 13 through 16.
  - iii) Next is Samuel. While the word Nazirite is never mentioned in association with Samuel, here was a man, effectively separated from birth in order to serve God. He spent his entire life in effect as a Nazirite. Did Samuel actually obey the specific requirements of this chapter? We don't know. We just know that He dedicated his life to serving God. He was not of the family of priests, but he was used by God in a mighty way. (Much of 1st Samuel deals with his life.)
  - iv) The same applies to John the Baptist in the New Testament. His parents were told to be a witness for God. While I don't know if he had long hair living as he lived in the wilderness, that is a most likely given his chosen lifestyle. I also suspect he never drank alcohol as he considered himself separated for God's use.
  - v) Paul himself in the New Testament may have even taken this vow as it mentions he had a hair cut in Acts 18:18, which is associated with the end of this vow.
  - vi) Finally, there was a young man in the Christian church in Jerusalem who kept this vow for an unspecified period of time. The leaders of that church asked Paul to help pay the man's expenses, as described later in this chapter. My point is simply that Paul agreed to help the man, and honor the concept of a Nazirite vow. (This story is in Acts, Chapter 21, Verses 22-24.)
  - vii) OK John, good for all of them. How does any of this affect me? The idea is that anyone who has committed their lives to serving God, can at any time take on a specific project that God has for them to make a difference for Him.
    - a) But don't we have to follow all of the rituals described in this chapter in order to make that type of commitment? The answer is "yes and no", and I'll need much of the rest of the chapter in order to explain what I mean. Speaking of which, let's get back to the specifics of being a Nazirite and then I can describe how any and all of this affects our lives as believers.
    - b) My point here is that I wanted to establish the examples of a Nazirite vow so I can refer to them as we go through all of the specifics of these verses.
- f) With all of that said, let me come back to the issue of avoiding grape products during this period of a vow. Besides the main reason (staying sober to make a difference for God), making such an effort would become obvious to the community around them.
- i) To put this in practical terms, if someone says to us, do you want to have a beer or a glass of wine with us? Our answer can simply be, "No, not today". We don't even have to brag about being separated for God. One can see from our actions that we are doing something different and probably have a purpose behind it.
  - ii) Meanwhile, it's time to describe the next way one separates themselves for God.

4. 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 the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long. <sup>6</sup> Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD.
- a) My first thought reading this is, "If you have a large group out in the middle of the desert, wouldn't long hair be common? After all, there are no barber shops out there. I suspect it was fashionable at that time to keep one's hair short and knives were among the things that the Israelites took with them and men kept their hair fairly short. The point here is that when one took this Nazirite vow, one looked different. One had long hair.
    - i) I'll refrain myself from making any sort of hippie jokes here. The point is simply that when one took this vow, one looked different. What does that mean for us?
      - a) The practical application is simply that if we have taken on a project for God, we too "look different" from the world around us. Think of it this way, if we are busy doing a project for God, as opposed to just focusing on working for a living or raising a family we "look different from others".
      - b) To separate ourselves for God in effect reflects our looks. Remember that Jesus said the way people will know we are Christians is by our love for one another. (See John 13:35.) That simply means we do things for other people especially for other believers to show we care about the lives of others and not just our own lives. My point is we look different when we separate ourselves for God and that is the point here.
  - b) All of this lead to the next issue in these verses: No touching of a dead body. In the literal aspect, it meant that a Jewish person who wanted to be a Nazirite, cannot go near a dead body, including the body of one of their own family members.
    - i) Isn't that cruel? After all, if a close family member dies, wouldn't we want to be around the rest of family as we grieve for them? The issue here has nothing to do with missing one's departed relatives or comforting the grieving. The issue has to do with "life". To state the obvious, death is the opposite of life. To take a vow of a Nazirite, one is to be focused on "life". In effect it means to help others grow in their relationship with God and growing in their "life". If we are helping others deal with grief over death, isn't that being helpful? Of course it is.
    - ii) The issue of these verses is that if one is dedicated to serving God, one is dedicated to helping others grow in their lives. That is why death is to be avoided. So does that mean I have to avoid dead people to serve God? Of course not.
    - iii) It would be helpful here to explain the symbolic idea of what the text means by "life and death". When we do good deeds for God, we are to focus on the "living". Think of the dead as those people who don't care about God at all. Think of the dead who would rather do anything and everything that has nothing to do with the God of the bible. Yes we are to be a witness to all people, but Jesus called on us to "love one another" and the "other" refers to other believers. Therefore, to be separated for God is another way of saying to do good works in order to make a difference for God in this world.
    - iv) So, are we doing this to earn points with God? Hardly. Remember that we serve God because we are committed to serving Him. We do this to please Him, not to earn points with Him. We do good works because it is what we are called to do.
    - v) Therefore, the symbolic idea of avoiding the dead is about focusing on the specific mission that God has called each of us to do. We are to focus on the "living" which is a way of saying we focus on those who are also believers. That just means we dedicate time from our lives in order to help the living seek Him.

- c) At this point, one can be thinking that I have jumped off the deep end here. ☺ Are you saying that to be a Nazirite I have to avoid my family and relatives? Are you saying that I have to grow my hair long or avoid alcohol in order to serve God? If one thinks all of that, one is missing the point of these verses.
- i) The correct idea is that if we are going to make a commitment in our lives to serve God in some way, we should act and look differently from the world around us. While doing this act, we should focus on that act and avoid the "dead things" that can get our focus off of what God has called us to do for that moment.
  - ii) Let me try to give a practical example or two: Let's say one feels called to take on some sort of short term missionary trip. One should during that trip, focus on what one believes God has called one to do during that trip. That means avoiding the "dead things" that are not part of one's mission. One should stay sober in the sense of focusing on what He has called one to do. One should look different in that it becomes obvious to anyone observing you that you are doing this project.
  - iii) Here's another example: What if one is taking on a project while still working for a living, staying at home or still going to school? Can one be a Nazirite in those types of circumstances? Of course one can. For example, God has called me to separate part of my day just for this ministry. It means that during that time period, I have to avoid the "dead things" of my life and focus on what God has called me to do. I should do it soberly and look differently to my family who is aware that I have been called to use this time for His glory. (I am very grateful for having a wife who understands that I am called to use this time accordingly.)
- d) My point here is simply that anyone who believes that Jesus is God and that He has paid the price for our sins can dedicate part of their lives to being fully dedicated to Him. That can include a full time project like being a missionary or even using part of one's day in order to make a difference for Him. The specifics of what God has called us to do, is part of the joy of living the Christian life. It is usually doing what we enjoy doing and using our time to make a difference for Him. That is why the "what we specifically do" issue is not mentioned in this chapter, but only how one does and ending this commitment.
- i) Think about the biblical examples I gave earlier in this lesson. Most of us know the story of Samson and how he had long hair. However, he violated other parts of this vow including the fact he touched (killed) a dead lion. While that was an act of bravery, it also shows he didn't take his vow of separation to God seriously. Sampson was someone who wasted the opportunities God has given him in order to make a difference for Him.
    - a) As to Samuel and John the Baptist, neither of these people ever stated they were Nazirites. However, both dedicated their lives to serving God and both went down in history as making a difference for God with their lives.
    - b) One will probably forget in time the specifics of what aspect of the vow one has kept and one has not kept. However, history itself and God will judge of whether or not we have lived our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - ii) Here is another way to think about this: What will matter for all of eternity? How much money we made or how much of a difference for God we have made with our lives? If one thinks of our lives in terms of making an eternal difference, that concept changes our priorities in life. Yes we still have to earn a living and help support those around us. If we have the opportunity to become successful in life, that is not a bad thing. The issue is "priorities". Is our priority in life to make a difference for God with our lives or only to better ourselves? The issue is are we using the resources that God has given us in order to make a difference for Him?
- e) Now that I have scared all of us into doing something for God with our lives, it is time to get back to the literal aspects of these verses.

5. Verse 9: " `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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup> He must dedicate himself to the LORD 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.
- a) In these verses, we get into the issue of what do we do when something goes wrong.
    - i) Before I get into the specific's of these verses, I want all of us to think in terms of doing some project for God and then something goes wrong. Practically what do we do in that situation? Do we give up or keep moving forward? Do we just confess our sin and move on, or do we have to make up for what we did? That issue is in effect the question of these verses.
    - ii) At this point, let me discuss the specific's and then I'll come back to you and me.
  - b) The verses say in effect that if a person has dedicated himself or herself to serving God and then someone dies next to them, that person must shave his head on the seventh day after he or she has made contact with this dead person. Then on the eighth day, that person is to bring two birds (doves or pigeons) to the tabernacle to offer as a sacrifice. Then that same person must also bring a lamb as a "guilt" offering. Finally, Verse 12 says in effect that the previous commitment to God doesn't count and they have to start over.
    - i) If you are positive what all of that means, you are excused from reading through the next two pages of this lesson. If you are confused, welcome to the club. ☺
    - ii) Let me attempt to explain this passage by discussing it in "bite size" pieces. I'll do that while still trying to keep it in context of the surrounding text.
  - c) With that said, let's start with a "7th day and 8th day" discussion. Verse 9 states that if one comes in contact with a dead body, on the seventh day one has to go to the priest, and say in effect, I have sinned and here are some animals and birds to sacrifice for my sins.
    - i) My first thought here, is how did one sin? Assuming we didn't kill someone and assuming that someone accidentally died near us, how is it our fault that we need to confess that sin and go through this ritual, as stated in these verses? To put this in other words, why make such a big deal about touching a dead body?
      - a) The answer is to think of this in terms of making a difference for God and avoiding what is dead in that process. Remember how I talked about doing some sort of project for God, either full time or part time? Suppose in the middle of that project, one takes the time that one has dedicated to serving God and use that time for some other thing. In such cases, we have robbed Him because we promised to use that time for His service.
      - b) John, if that is true, why doesn't the text say that blatantly? Why all of this talk about contact with the dead? The answer is because when we focus on things that have no eternal bearing, we are focusing on "dead" things.
      - c) Bear with me through this section, and come to your own conclusion then.
    - ii) With that disclaimer out of my system, let's get back to "7th and 8th day". The idea of the "7th day" is a complete period of time. God "rested" on the seventh day from creating the world. Therefore, the "7th day" is associated with a complete period of time. The idea is touching the dead body, (i.e., sinning from not using the time God wanted us to use for Him) is now ended as that period is over.
    - iii) The "8th day" is associated with a new beginning. In fact, Jesus Himself is tied to the concept of a new beginning as He forgives us for our sins. If you take any or all of the names and titles for Jesus in the original Greek, the numerical value of the Greek letters all are evenly divisible by "eight". Interesting coincidence. ☺

- d) Coming back to the idea of asking forgiveness of sins, if "seven days" are associated with a complete period of time, God in effect is saying, "Tomorrow is a new day and we will start again". It is a way of saying, if you seek forgiveness, we are not totally rejected from God, but He does reject our "dead works" which is symbolic of touching a dead body.
- i) If I've lost you so far, just remember that this whole section is an Old Testament ritual that ties to the idea of seeking forgiveness for our failure to be dedicated to God the way we have voluntarily committed ourselves to be. This ritual is about how to restore our relationship with God after we have sinned. Know that Jesus is associated with a new beginning because God the Father forgives all of our sins through Him, so these rituals point to the idea of forgiveness and starting again.
  - ii) Meanwhile, back to the rituals themselves.
- e) On the eighth day after touching the dead body, the guilty person must bring two birds to be sacrificed. The reason for the birds is that is the least expensive offering that one could bring in the Old Testament for the forgiveness of sins. It is God's way of saying in effect, "If you can't afford to bring an expensive animal to sacrifice for your sins, I (God) am so willing to restore My relationship with you (us), that I'll even accept a couple of birds that you have caught in order to start all over again.
- i) So why two birds? The idea is one to show our commitment to serving Him. This is also known as the burnt offering and the other offering as a "sin" offering, which says in effect, we have done wrong and we are admitting our sin before God.
  - ii) Does that mean when I sin I have to go find two birds to take to church? Of course not. In fact, even in Judaism today, since they don't have an official temple, when one sins, one focuses on confessing it before God. In Christianity, yes we too, are to confess our sins to God and restate our dedication to serving Him, but we also realize that Jesus Himself paid the price so we don't have to sacrifice animals.
  - iii) My point is simply, the "Christian equivalent" of this ritual is to admit our sin of turning of failing to dedicate the time or commitment we have made to God and in effect start over by admitting our mistake and our trust in Him. This whole ritual is set up in effect to show us that God is more than willing to forgive us when we do turn from Him and there is a remedy for us to deal with sin.
- f) The final step in this process (outside of admitting one's guilt to God) is to offer a one year old lamb as a "guilt" offering. This offering says in effect, "We are guilty before God and we have sinned". The difference between a guilt offering and a sin offering is that a sin offering says, "I have sinned before God and here is what I did wrong". A "guilt offering" says in effect, "I am not a perfect person and without God's help working through my life, I don't have the power to be pleasing to Him in the first place".
- i) OK, if I could turn from my sin with something as "cheap" as two birds, why was a one year old lamb necessary for a guilt offering? For the knowledgeable Christian, the picture is Jesus as our sacrificial lamb for the forgiveness of sins. In fact in the book of Revelation (5:6), Jesus is described as our sacrificial lamb.
  - ii) So why is the lamb one year old? (Verse 12). Think of sacrificing a one year old child. The idea is that child died "innocently". The picture is that God is taking something innocent as a substitute for the sins that we are guilty of.
  - iii) If you have read the book of Acts, there is story in Acts 22 where Paul financially helps someone going through this vow. What Paul does in effect is pay for the lamb for that sacrifice. My point is if someone makes that vow and can't afford the lamb for the sacrifice, other people can help the "separated" person restore their relationship with God and pay for the physical cost to restore that relationship.
    - a) Think of it in terms of helping someone restore their relationship with God. One thing we do as believers is help people grow in their relationship with Him and therefore it is ok, to provide the materials for all of us.

- g) OK, I've now been going on for two pages on restoring our relationship with God. The point here for us is not about avoiding touching literal dead bodies, but about restoring our relationship with God after we have committed our time and our resources in order to serve Him. If we have committed our lives to serving Him, all that we own in effect belongs to Him. We are not being forced to make our commitment but we choose to live our lives to make a difference for Him. Of course we still need to eat, sleep and live our lives. However, if we do choose to separate some time and resources to make a difference for Him, God expects us to keep that commitment.
- i) When we fail to do or finish what God calls us to do, it is not too late for us. We are always allowed to start again. That is why the "8th day" is symbolic not only of Jesus Himself, but of a new day. It is God's way of saying to us, "Did you mess up? Confess your sin and admit one's guilt before Me. I am more than willing to forgive you (us) of one's sins and be willing to start again. That is separation for God and that is the key point of this lesson.
6. Verse 13: " 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. <sup>14</sup> There he is to present his offerings to the LORD: 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, <sup>15</sup> 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.
- a) Now that I've beaten to death what to do when someone messes up their commitment to being separated from God, the next question is how does one end this commitment?
- i) If one has taken on a specific project for God, when does it end, and what do I have to do to end that project? Obviously, there is meaning being each of the rituals tied to ending a project for God and my job is to explain these rituals.
- ii) If one thinks, "I am done when I am done" and I don't care about these rituals, then one is missing the point. The idea is again, if we say God is in charge of our lives, then we have to care about our commitment and "separation" for Him and there is meaning behind these rituals to end that commitment. Let me explain.
- b) Let's start by summarizing what these rituals say: When the period of separation is over, the person who made the commitment is to go to the entrance of the tabernacle. He or she (Verse 1 said a male or female can make this commitment) is to bring a one year old male lamb (with no defects) for a burnt offering, a separate female lamb for a sin offering and a ram with no defects for a "fellowship" offering. This person must also bring some food and drink and an unleavened (no yeast) basket of bread made with fine flour (i.e., the best available flour) mixed with oil. All of this stuff must be brought to the high priest at the tabernacle in order to end the ritual of being dedicated to God.
- i) Again, if one already understands what each of these items mean, first of all, you are ahead of me, and you are welcome to skip this section.
- ii) The important part here is we as Christians understand the symbolism. We don't have to literally do all of this, but understanding it's meaning why each of these rituals and items are listed is the important thing to remember.
- c) To explain, let's start with "going to the tabernacle". In other words, why can't I just say, "I'm done"? What is the big deal about going to God's presence? The answer in effect is to show that even though we have finished whatever specific task we have set out to do, we are still willing to serve God and be obedient to Him.
- i) To put it another way, we can't say in life, "OK, I finished my missionary trip (or whatever), now God please leave me alone and let me go do whatever I want". This is about showing our lifetime commitment to Him and whatever service we have performed as a Christian is simply an example of how He wants us to live.
- ii) OK, if you think that thought is condemning, I'm just getting warmed up here. ☺



- d) The next step in order to end this Nazirite vow, the person who committed to this vow must end the time period by bringing three specific animals to sacrifice:
- i) Verse 14 says he or she must bring a one year old male lamb for a burnt offering.
  - ii) Also, he or she must bring a one year old (no defect) female lamb for a sin offering.
  - iii) Third, this person must bring a no-defect ram for a fellowship offering.
  - iv) There is more, but I'll just focus on these three for the moment.
- e) Let's start with the male lamb. I've already discussed the fact that an innocent one-year-old lamb is symbolic of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, so I won't go there again. Think of it this way: That particular offering is saying in effect that even though our specific vow of service is completed, we are still fully (key word) dedicated to serving God with our lives.
- i) That is why this lamb is a "burnt" offering. It is symbolic of completely dedicating one's life to serving God. Does that mean I have to go do another project for God immediately? The answer is, if we belong to Him, we desire to do His will for our lives. That is why we should regularly read our bible, spend time in prayer and with other believers in order to find ways to be dedicated to Him.
- f) The next thing offered is a female lamb for a sin offering. This ritual is saying in effect, I know I have dedicated part of my life to serving God, but I realize that I am not a perfect person. Even though I did this good thing, there are still sins in my life I am aware of, and probably others I am not aware of. Therefore, here is this sin offering.
- i) Why is a female lamb sacrificed here? In that "male-dominant" culture, one has to understand the symbolism of the male lamb is greater than the female one.
  - ii) To say it another way, the male lamb for the burnt offering means I am trusting in living the way God desires to me. I give a "male lamb" to show my trust in Him. I give a female lamb to show that I am less than perfect and still sin in my life. To put it another way, it is a way of saying, "God is perfect and we are not". That is why the greater sacrifice is for the burnt offering of our complete devotion to Him and the "lower" offering is to show how we are still sinful people.
  - iii) Again, as a Christian, we are not literally required to go through this ritual, but it does show how we should look to Him in terms of complete dedication in life.
- g) Finally a ram is offered for a "fellowship offering". As I stated earlier in the lesson, a ram was associated in the bible as a substitute. In Genesis Chapter 22 when Abraham was to offer his son as a sacrifice, God provided a ram to offer instead of his son. My point is that God was pleased with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for Him. A reason God required this sacrifice was that it was common practice in those days for people of other religions to offer one of their children to show their devotion to their gods. This is God's way of saying, "Do you trust me as much as pagan's are trusting in their deities?"
- i) This leads back to the finished Nazirite commitment. This man or woman has shown their complete dedication to God by giving this burnt offering and has also shown they acknowledge they are still sinful in nature by the second goat. At this point we can have "fellowship" with God. That is why this third animal is offered.
    - a) To put this in our vocabulary, once we show our complete willingness to trust God to guide our lives, and once we realize that we are imperfect people and do sin despite that dedication, we are now ready to be lead by Him. That is the concept of having "fellowship" with God.
- h) Sometimes the Nazirite could not afford to buy all of these animals. It was common for other Jewish people to help pay for this ending ritual. The biblical example is in Acts 22, when Paul was asked to pay the expense of an unnamed person to complete this Nazirite vow ritual. My point is simply that if a person who is making this vow couldn't afford the animals to finish the ritual, others would help.
- i) Think of this in terms of financially helping others in their commitment to serving God with their lives.

- i) Meanwhile, we still haven't finished this part of the ritual. There is still more stuff for the Nazirite to do to finish the vow. Verse 15 says this person is to bring "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."
  - i) I said in the introduction to this lesson, that in a short time, one is going to forget the details of this ritual. Therefore, let me focus on the symbolism behind these items and how they apply to us: The important idea is now that the Nazirite can enjoy "fellowship" time with God, these items are used symbolically to show that the Nazirite can now show his or her gratitude for that commitment.
  - ii) These food rituals come from Leviticus Chapter 4. They state in effect, one is so happy to be serving God, one will spend time with Him by eating with the priests to show how much I enjoy being with God and those who serve Him.
    - a) In other words, the Nazirite now gets to enjoy good tasting food with the priest in order to show His appreciation for how God has guided his life.
    - b) If one gets that, the details about these specific offerings fall in place.
    - c) Meanwhile, it is time to get back to the text itself, as there is more to do.
7. Verse 16: "The priest is to present them before the LORD and make the sin offering and the burnt offering.<sup>17</sup> He is to present the basket of unleavened bread and is to sacrifice the ram as a fellowship offering to the LORD, together with its grain offering and drink offering.
- a) John's loose translation: It was the job of the High Priest to actually make these offerings before God. Therefore the High Priest took all of these animals and offered them on a "barbeque pit" that was within this alter complex. The Nazirite is to give to the priest the food offerings as part of this sacrificial ritual.
  - b) The point for you and me is that God calls specific people into full time service for Him. When anyone willing to do some sort of project for God finishes that project, we should make some sort of effort to show our dedication and gratitude to God. We may even go through our local church to state our appreciation for how He has worked in our lives. Don't think of it as bragging, but think of it as being so happy based on what God has done through me in this or that specific project, let me share that joy with others.
    - i) I recently listened to a speech by one of the elders of my church. He said one of the greatest joys he has as an elder is learning of all the different ways people in our church are making a difference for God. My point is being of service to God is in effect contagious and we should share that joy with others.
8. Verse 18: "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.
- a) If you recall, part of the ritual of being a Nazirite was to grow their hair long. The idea is that a person making this commitment looks different from everyone else. The idea for us is that when we are doing some sort of service for God others should see us as being different from the world around us. In other words, it is not so much about hair, as it is saying things like, "I can't join in that activity now as I believe I am called to do "this".
  - b) Now that the Nazirite has completed the vow, all his or her hair must be shaved and put in the "barbeque pit" that is part of the tabernacle. It is a symbolic way of saying that my time spent for this dedication is completed and what I dedicated to God now belongs to Him. It is a way of saying, "Whatever rewards I get from this, I give back to God".
  - c) This does not mean we have to get a really short hair cut when we finish whatever project we have taken on for God. It does mean that whatever rewards we do receive for this project, we should mentally say, "Since my life is fully dedicated to serving God anyway, whatever rewards I get go back to you." That in effect is what happened in the book of Revelation when the "24 elders" cast their crowns before God in Chapter 4, Verse 10.
  - d) The really good news is we only have a few verses left about the Nazirite vow:

9. Verse 19: " `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.<sup>20</sup> The priest shall then wave them before the LORD 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.
- a) These two verses focus more on the role of the priest during this closing portion of the vow taken by the Nazirite. The priest is to boil the ram in hot water so that the shoulder becomes separated from the meat. (If one ever has boiled meat, one understands how it separates.) The point is this ritual involves the priest taking the shoulder bone of the ram and some of the bread and cake offerings and "wave them before God". Then the priest gets to eat some of this food as a service fee for performing this whole ritual.
    - i) At this point, I need a quick explanation of a "wave" offering. It is a symbolic way of showing that one is spending time with God. Food is waved in front of the altar in the tabernacle to show God's acceptance of this ritual. It is a way of saying that God is pleased with the effort to dedicate one's life to Him, realizing that we are sinners by nature and we still desire that He guide our lives. Once we make that type of confession, we can have "fellowship" with God and that is ritual here.
    - ii) That doesn't mean we have to do this exact ritual. It means that once we realize that God is in complete charge of our lives (no matter how much we mess up) and we realize our imperfect nature before Him and we are willing to live to make a difference for Him then and only then we can draw close to Him.
10. Verse 20, Part 2: After that, the Nazirite may drink wine.
- a) One of the requirements of this vow was no drinking. The text states that when this ritual is done, the person who made that vow may now drink again.
  - b) Does this mean that a Christian should or should not drink wine? That is strictly up to the individual and I don't judge believers on that issue. I do have problems with believers who get drunk and we are not good witnesses for God when we are under it's influence.
  - c) The way I put it is, I drink all the alcohol I want. I don't want a whole lot because the spirit of God within me gives me far more joy than wine can give me. The point is simply that when one has dedicated time for God's use, one should be do it soberly. One is then free to drink once that time is completed. As an example, the Levite priests could not drink on duty or before going on duty, but were free to do so after their shift was over.
11. Verse 21: " `This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD 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.' "
- a) Here is the final verse on the Nazirite vow. This final verse says in effect, the vow to be a Nazirite is not over until that person has completed all of the requirements stated in this chapter over and above what else that person can afford. As I stated earlier, in the book of Acts. Paul once helped someone pay the expenses of someone completing this vow. Even if we don't do a specific project ourselves, we can always help others do one.
  - b) The bottom line is we are not done with any such vow until we acknowledge God's ruling over our lives, and our complete dedication to Him, even after our service is completed.
12. Verse 22: The LORD said to Moses,<sup>23</sup> "Tell Aaron and his sons, `This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:
- a) Back on Page 1 of this lesson, I pondered the question of why have this blessing here and now? Yes it is a good thing for the head priest to bless the people, but why would the bible include this blessing at this specific point in the book of Numbers?
    - i) I'm so glad you asked that question and stuck through this lesson to this point. ☺ Think of it this way: This chapter is all about how one is separated for God the Father. In effect it is about the call to salvation and the desire of the Christian to want to serve God with our lives. To say it another way, "How do we get blessed by God? It is only by drawing close to Him that we receive that blessing.

- b) Remember that drawing close to God is about realizing He is in charge of our lives, He is perfect, we are sinful (imperfect) people by nature, we need Him to pay the price for our sins as we can't do it based on our own effort. Finally, we need His power in order to live the type of life He desires to live. That is why this specific blessing is given. That is why it follows a big discussion of what "separation" (i.e., being a Nazirite) is all about.
- i) With that said, let's quickly read how we are to be blessed by God.
13. Verse 24: "The LORD bless you and keep you;
- a) This is the first of three blessings given at the end of this chapter.
- b) OK, how does God "bless us"? Think of it as benefits to our lives here and now. It can refer to financial blessings. It can refer to the natural "high's" we can get from serving Him. It can even refer to other blessings we get from being dedicated to Him. One of the great joys I get is the wonderful feedback I get from people reading these studies.
- c) This leads to the expression "keep you". A danger of a great financial blessing or other blessings we get from serving God is that it can do damage to our ego. The idea of "keep you" is about God guiding us so that we keep our focus on Him and not those blessings.
- d) Let me also talk about the word "you" quickly: The idea is "you, and you, and you and you. In other words, is not just a community blessing, but a blessing on all individuals that are willing to let God guide their lives.
14. Verse 25: the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
- a) This is the second of the three blessings here.
- b) This expression about a "face" is a way of saying, may we know what is God's will for our lives. In my life, one of the ways I can tell that God is guiding me is simply because of the amazing ways that He has provided what I need in order to accomplish His will for that moment. Yes we have to do the footwork and watch our lives unfold in order to discover His will. I also know that when I get the desire to do something for God, I know it is His will, by the graciousness that He provides in order to get that will done. Therefore, this blessing is saying may God help us to accomplish what is His desire for our life.
15. Verse 26: the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." '
- a) For the final blessing, Aaron is instructed to remind all of us believers that God will look upon all of us who are sincerely making that effort to seek Him and give us peace.
- b) So what does God's peace mean? Does that mean we will never go to war? Of course not. The idea is we shouldn't have to worry about our eternal destiny, because the price for sin has already been paid. If we accept the idea that God is in charge of our lives, we can have peace knowing that the results of life are His problem and not ours. We should work as hard as we can in life to make a difference for Him by being showing love to those around us and trusting God with the results of our lives. That is how we can have God's peace no matter how difficult the circumstances around us.
16. Verse 27: "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."
- a) This just means the priest should bless the Israelites and I, (God) will follow through with these blessings if any individual is willing to trust Me to bless Him.
- b) That in effect is what faith is all about. It is making the effort to trust in Him and He promises to give us peace through that trust.
- c) That is why this blessing follows the whole Nazirite vow section. It is saying in effect, make the effort to draw close to Me, and I promise to bless your life. One of the great joys of living the Christian life is to watch how He has blessed us when we trust in Him.
- d) Are you saying I have to follow all of these specific Nazirite rituals in order to be blessed by God? No, but they are designed to teach us about being "separated" for God's use and how to draw close to Him. That is the key point of this lesson, separating ourselves in the spiritual sense from nonbelievers in order to make a difference for Him. If we do that, He promises to bless our lives as stated in the last few verses of the chapter.
- e) On that happy note, it is time for the closing prayer.

17. Heavenly Father, Help us to draw close to You. Help us to remember that the most valuable asset we have, our time and our resources, ultimately belong to You. Help us to remember that You have called us as believers to be separated from the world in the sense that You have called us to serve You with our lives. May we draw upon Your power in order to make a difference in this world. Bless us as we trust in You to guide us and may that blessing overflow in our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.