

Handout: Numbers Lesson 3

Three previous events in Israel’s history led to God’s selection of the Levites as the servants of His chief priests and the lesser ministers of His Sanctuary:

1. God fulfilled Jacob/Israel’s prophetic judgment against his son Levi and his tribe who, along with their descendants, were rejected from participation in the inheritance of the Promised Land because of unjust violence against the people of Shechem (Gen 34:25-31; 49:5-6).
2. The Levites consecrated themselves to God by suppressing the revolt of the Golden Calf, an event that marked a decisive change in Israel’s relationship with Yahweh in the Sinai Covenant (Ex 32:26-29). Consecrated in the blood of the brothers, God became their inheritance (Num 18:20-24).
3. Previously, God claimed every Israelite first-born son and all the male animals redeemed under the “sign” of the blood on the night of the tenth plague when death “passed over” the Israelite first-born (Ex 11:4-7; 12:1-34). But God relinquished His claim to the service of the first-born sons of Israel after the revolt of the Golden Calf. As a reward for the Levites faithfulness and loyalty in suppressing the revolt, God chose the tribe of Levi to serve Him in place of the first-born sons (Ex 32:29; Num 3:11-13; 8:17-19).

Hebrew root word *n-z-r* means “to separate.” The three abstentions of a Nazirite’s vow:

1. Abstention from wine or any fermented liquor, vinegar from fermented liquor, and grapes in general (verses 3-4)
2. Abstention from cutting one’s hair (verse 5)
3. Avoiding contact with a dead person (verse 6-7)

The first abstention from wine or strong drink signified that the Nazirite denied himself a life of ease. Abstention of fermented liquor was also part of the prevention necessary to avoid neglecting God’s Law (Prov 31:4-5). Drinking fermented beverages could impair one’s judgment in discerning what is “clean and unclean” (Lev 10:10).

The Priestly Blessing: Num 6:24-26

24 May Yahweh bless you and keep you.

25 May Yahweh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

26 May Yahweh show you his face and bring you peace.”

Yahweh’s Three Gifts	Yahweh’s Three Actions
Line #1: Bless	Keep/protect (<i>samar</i>)
Line #2: Shine	Be gracious
Line #3: Show/bestow	Bring peace

His blessing results in protection, His shining face results in grace; His favor results in peace. This blessing was recited at the conclusion of the morning and afternoon Tamid liturgical services (*Mishnah: Tamid* 7:2; also see Sir 50:21).