

The Book of Numbers

The Nazarite Vow

Text: Numbers 6:1-21

I. Principles Concerning Vows

- A. A vow is a solemn promise.
- B. Here, and most often in the OT, it refers to a voluntary sacrifice made to God.
 - 1. Specific reasons for such vows are not always given.
 - 2. It seems that they were to express thanksgiving and show gratitude to God.
 - 3. Perhaps, they were made to seek the favor of God for a specific request.
- C. Under the OT, vows were voluntary – no one was required to make one (except in a few instances).
- D. However, if a person made a vow, he or she was required to keep it (Deut. 23:21-23).
- E. To fail to keep one's vow was a sin – thus, sacrifices for sin were required.
 - 1. One who made a rash vow – without considering the consequences – and found he could not keep it was required to make a sin offering (Lev. 5:4-6).
 - 2. Some vows could be redeemed by money – the value determined by the priests, plus 20% was placed into the treasury.
- F. There were several things that could be vowed unto the Lord (Lev. 27:1-25).
 - 1. People – either given to the Lord's service (cf. 1 Sam. 1-2) or redeemed with money (vs. 1-8).
 - 2. Animals – clean animals were sacrificed or donated (and not able to be redeemed); unclean animals were given a monetary value (redeemed - + 20%) (vs. 9-13).
 - 3. Houses – the value was assessed by the priests; if given to them it became their inheritance; if redeemed 20% was added to the value and donated (vs. 14-25).
 - 4. Land – valued based upon the number of crops until the Jubilee.
- G. There were certain exceptions – vows that were not binding (cf. Numbers 30:1-16).
- H. There were certain things that could not be vowed (Lev. 27:26-34).
 - 1. Something commanded by God to be offered
 - 2. Something that already belonged to God (e.g. firstlings of the flock)
 - 3. Something devoted to God (cf. Josh. 6:17-19)
 - 4. Something already holy to God (e.g. tithes of their increase)
- I. Thus, for a person to take the vow of the Nazarite was a sober and solemn decision with serious consequences.

II. Rules for Keeping the Nazarite Vow

(Numbers 6:1-12)

- A. The vow was voluntary.
- B. Anyone – male or female – could take the Nazarite Vow.
- C. The word 'Nazarite' means, "Separated one;" thus, this was a vow of separation unto the Lord.
- D. The Nazarite could not eat or drink any product of the grapevine, nor any strong drink.
- E. The Nazarite could not cut the hair of his head at all during the time of his vow.
- F. The Nazarite could not come in contact with a dead body, including his close kin.
- G. The length of time one was under this vow was voluntary, but it was to be kept scrupulously.

The Book of Numbers

H. If the vow was broken accidentally by contact with a corpse, a sacrifice had to be made (sin offering, burnt offering, and trespass offering), his head had to be shaved, and the time of his vow started over.

III. Rules for Ending the Nazarite Vow (Numbers 6:13-21)

- A. When the time of the vow ended, certain steps had to be followed.
- B. At the door of the Tabernacle, certain sacrifices were to be offered.
 - 1. He-lamb of the first year for a burnt offering
 - 2. Ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering
 - 3. Ram without blemish for a peace offering
 - 4. Basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, along with meal and drink offerings
 - 5. Other things he had vowed and could afford (vs. 21)
- C. As the peace offering was made, the Nazarite's head was shaved and the hair was burned in the fire on the altar (under the peace offering).
- D. The broiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake, and one unleavened wafer became a wave offering that was then set apart for the priest.
- E. Thus, the vow was concluded and the man could once again drink wine.

IV. Lessons from the Nazarite Vow

- A. There are 3 men in the Bible who were lifelong Nazarites:
 - 1. Samson (Judges 13:5, 14)
 - 2. Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11)
 - 3. John the Baptist (Luke 1:15)
- B. There was great expense involved in the Nazarite vow; thus, it became a practice for those who were wealthier to help others defray the costs (cf. Acts 21:24).
- C. It is possible that those four men whom Paul helped in Acts 21:23-26 were ending their Nazarite vows (or had become defiled and needed to renew them).
- D. Principles from the Nazarite Vow:
 - 1. Vows or promises are to be taken seriously and kept strictly (cf. James. 5:12).
 - a. Obeying the Gospel
 - b. Marriage vows
 - c. Debts, business agreements, etc.
 - 2. Like the Nazarite, Christians are separated from the world unto the Lord.
 - 3. Like the Nazarite, Christians must practice self-denial.
- E. Though the Old Law is no longer in force, there are many lessons to be learned from its pages.

