

BIBLE BRIEFING

NUMBERS 5-6

Introduction

People often visit various campgrounds based on the sights within or nearby they might want to visit. Think Yosemite and the waterfalls...

The camp of Israel was not really a vacation destination; it was home to the Jews. But it had quite a draw within it:

“... Their camps in the midst of which I dwell.”

God dwelt among His people, in the very center of their camp, in the Tabernacle. The next two chapters will make more sense if you remember God was dwelling in their midst. Chapter five describes defilements that require folks to go and live outside the camp; chapter six then talks about living separated while remaining within the camp.

In Chapter six God used familiar pictures to teach spiritual truth. He compared sin to disease and defilement, and holiness to health and cleanliness. The word “defiled” is used nine times in Chapter five; three kinds of defilement are described.

Physical defilement is described in verses one through four:

Numbers 5:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 5:2 “Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse.

Numbers 5:3 You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell.”

Numbers 5:4 And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.

“Leprosy” was a broad term that included many infectious and non-infectious skin diseases. Lepers lived outside the camp; they went around shouting out “*Unclean, unclean*”; if anyone touched them,

they were defiled. If the leper was cured, he or she had to go through a lengthy ceremony before being reintroduced to society.

“Discharge” includes natural or unnatural discharges – anything from diarrhea to sexually transmitted diseases.

You were defiled by touching a dead body – either human or animal. Those who prepped bodies for burial were considered unclean for a week and had to undergo a cleansing ritual.

Death and hygiene are involved in these laws; but their main purpose is to picture and illustrate holiness. Leprosy, for example, was called a “walking death,” because your rotting flesh would be literally falling off. It pictured sin; if your sin nature was visible to the eye, it would look like leprosy. Scripture describes you as the living, walking dead; you are “[dead in trespasses and sins](#),” the moment you are conceived.

Sins of the flesh are a spiritual leprosy. If we tolerate sin in the Church... It’s like having leprosy in the camp. It needs to be dealt with because God is dwelling in our midst.

When Jesus was on earth, He touched the lepers; people with discharges touched Him; He touched the dead. He was never defiled, however, because the moment He touched or was touched, *the person was healed!*

Property defilement is described in verses five through ten:

[Numbers 5:5](#) Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

[Numbers 5:6](#) “Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that person is guilty,

[Numbers 5:7](#) then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give *it* to the one he has wronged.

[Numbers 5:8](#) But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong *must go* to the Lord for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him.

[Numbers 5:9](#) Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his.

Numbers 5:10 And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his."

It seems to be implied that you damaged or somehow defiled another person's property. You had to do more than say, "I'm sorry." You had to bring a trespass offering to the priest; and you had to make restitution by paying the person, a relative, or the priest an amount equal to any loss incurred plus a penalty of 20%. The Lord was thus teaching that sin not only hurts others but is costly.

By the way: If you borrow something... Consider yourself responsible for it!

Marital defilement is described in verses eleven through thirty-one:

Numbers 5:11 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
Numbers 5:12 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him,
Numbers 5:13 and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and *there was* no witness against her, nor was she caught -
Numbers 5:14 if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself -
Numbers 5:15 then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it *is* a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.

It wasn't that perhaps the wife committed adultery and didn't "remember" it; it was not for the husband or wife to remember, but for the whole community to remember the terrible nature of either adultery **or** false accusation.

Numbers 5:16 'And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord.
Numbers 5:17 The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put *it* into the water.
Numbers 5:18 Then the priest shall stand the woman before the Lord, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which *is* the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse.
Numbers 5:19 And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness *while* under your husband's *authority*, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse.

Numbers 5:20 But if you have gone astray *while* under your husband's *authority*, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you" -

Numbers 5:21 then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman - "the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your thigh rot and your belly swell;

Numbers 5:22 and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your* belly swell and *your* thigh rot." 'Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it."

Numbers 5:23 'Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water.

Numbers 5:24 And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her *to become* bitter.

Numbers 5:25 Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the Lord, and bring it to the altar;

Numbers 5:26 and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water.

Numbers 5:27 When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her *and become* bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people.

Numbers 5:28 But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

Numbers 5:29 'This *is* the law of jealousy, when a wife, *while* under her husband's *authority*, goes astray and defiles herself,

Numbers 5:30 or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her.

Numbers 5:31 Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt."

Marriage is the foundation of society; marital fidelity is the strength of marriage. Adultery was a capital offense; if proven guilty, **both** parties were subject to stoning.

Some complain this was unfair to women... But think about it for a moment. There was always a partner in adultery – the man – who would also be discovered if the wife was guilty. And, although it seems unfair, a woman who was innocent but whose husband was jealous could demand the ceremony to prove her innocence.

For the most part, the Mosaic law is case law - not meant to anticipate each particular situation, but to give examples that will set precedence for other cases. It is at least possible that the same

ceremony could be practiced if a wife became suspicious of a husband's adultery.

Then, too, consider that there is a picture here. God is sometimes portrayed as husband to Israel; Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom to the Church. In those cases, only the bride is ever at fault!

This law was given partly to deter wives from adulterous practices, and partly to secure wives against the rage of their hard-hearted husbands, who otherwise might upon mere suspicions destroy them, or at least put them away.

How did the ceremony work? Certainly, there was some supernatural element involved; drinking dusty and inky water won't cause internal disease in only those guilty of adultery. But as well, the mental stress of knowing you are guilty and openly proclaiming the rightness of judgment upon the guilty, cannot be good for one's health!

The word "**bitter**" – used five times in this passage - refers not so much to the water as to its effect on the body if the woman was guilty. She would endure bitter suffering that would reveal her guilt.

There are many perplexing questions raised by this odd procedure. Let's not forget its basis – fidelity in marriage. There are always bitter consequences to infidelity.

Chapter six describes the concept of separation. Some people were put outside the camp; but even if you remained within, you must be separate from the surrounding nations.

Separation is described in verses one through eight:

Numbers 6:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 6:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord,

Numbers 6:3 he shall separate himself from wine and *similar* drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from *similar* drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins.

Numbers 6:4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

Numbers 6:5 'All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. *Then* he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

Numbers 6:6 All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall not go near a dead body.

Numbers 6:7 He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God *is* on his head.

Numbers 6:8 All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the Lord.

Jesus was from Nazareth, and was sometimes called “Nazarene”; He was not, however, a Nazirite. “Nazirite” comes from a Hebrew word meaning *to separate, to dedicate*. Jesus touched dead bodies; and He drank products made from grapes. Not sure about His hairstyle!

Nazirites were Jewish men and women who dedicated themselves to the Lord to fulfill the vow of total separation. There were several remarkable Nazirites, or those taking a Nazirite vow, in the Bible: Samson (Judges 13:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and Paul (Acts 18:18); the vow was certainly open to women, but we have no Biblical example of a woman taking the vow, except for Manoah’s wife during her pregnancy with Samson (Judges 13:4).

In the KJV of this chapter, the words “[separate](#)” or “[separation](#)” are used sixteen times. The Nazirite did not isolate himself from society, but was a witness to others of devotion to the Lord. The vow could be lifelong; but often it was for a specific period of time.

I have my own feelings about drinking. Listen to these words, from J. Vernon McGee:

“This has nothing to do with the question of whether it is right or wrong to drink wine. May I say this, and I want to say it carefully and I want you to hear me carefully. The Christian standard is not a standard of right or wrong. The question is this: What is your *purpose* in doing what you are doing? Are you doing it to please Christ? Do you want to be a Nazarite? Do you want to live for Him? That is the question. People will ask me whether it is right for a Christian to drink wine. My friend, I won’t argue that point. I won’t argue right or wrong with you. I want to know whether you really want to please Christ. Wine, in the Scriptures, is a symbol of earthly joy; it is to cheer the heart. The whole point here is that the Nazarite was to find his joy in the Lord... Where do you find joy, friend? I ask you that very personally. Do you need the stimulants of this world in order to enjoy “Christian” things? Can you really get joy out of studying the Word of God? Does

prayer turn you off or turn you on? My, how many of us today think we are being really Christian and really spiritual when all we have been doing is bringing the world into our activities!”

As far as not cutting your hair... If it was a lifelong vow, it would make you pretty obvious. But even in a short-term vow, people would notice you wearing your hair differently. This was an outward, visible sign you were separated unto God. People would take notice; they would scrutinize your actions and attitudes. Once you let people know you are a Christian, it's valid for them to scrutinize your life.

As far as not touching the dead: This would be most difficult when a family member died. You were set apart for God and could not grieve as you might. Today we are reminded that our love for the Lord supercedes all other earthly ties.

You might draw a contrast and comparison with Chapter five: Defilement separates you **from** God and fellowship, while devotion separates you **to** God and **for** fellowship.

Separation itself could be defiled, as explained in verses nine through twelve:

Numbers 6:9 'And if anyone 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.

Numbers 6:10 Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting;

Numbers 6:11 and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and *the* other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned in regard to the corpse; and he shall sanctify his head that same day.

Numbers 6:12 He shall consecrate to the Lord the days of his separation, and bring a male lamb in its first year as a trespass offering; but the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

You can make a vow; but you can't control the circumstances of your life. A Nazirite vow could be defiled. If so, this procedure essentially allows you to fulfill it by starting over.

The Christian life is a series of new beginnings after your failures!

Separation fulfilled is described in verses thirteen through twenty-one:

Numbers 6:13 'Now this *is* the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Numbers 6:14 And he shall present his offering to the Lord: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering,

Numbers 6:15 a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings.

Numbers 6:16 'Then the priest shall bring *them* before the Lord and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering;

Numbers 6:17 and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering.

Numbers 6:18 Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.

Numbers 6:19 'And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake from the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and put *them* upon the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his consecrated *hair*,

Numbers 6:20 and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before the Lord; they *are* holy for the priest, together with the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. After that the Nazirite may drink wine.'

Numbers 6:21 "This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to the Lord the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation."

This ceremony marked the successful fulfillment of the vow.

Afterwards you could go about your hairstyling, drinking, and touching the dead as usual!

The whole subject of vows is interesting. If you want to make a vow of some sort, just remember that it's better to *not* vow than to vow and not keep it.

Better still: Let God bless you:

Numbers 6:22 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 6:23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

Numbers 6:24 "The Lord bless you and keep you;

Numbers 6:25 The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
Numbers 6:26 The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.”
Numbers 6:27 “So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will
bless them.”

The priests were always there pronouncing this blessing at the close of the daily morning service in the temple and later in the synagogues. I thus conclude that this is how God wants always to be represented to His people.

The Lord desires to “**ble**ss” you. Circumstances and situations don’t always seem to communicate His blessing... But that’s because we need to learn how He blesses in and through our circumstances as we live above them rather than under them.

We remember also that God’s blessing has always in mind our greatest and highest good; we often expect God’s blessing in our life to mean a world of comfort and ease – but that certainly isn’t for our greatest and highest good. God knows how you need to be blessed, even if you don’t!

The Lord is certainly able to “**keep**” you. You must “**keep yourself in the love of God**” (Jude). It’s not a matter of losing salvation, but of being out of God’s will and in a place where His blessings cannot be realized. You don’t *lose* your salvation; but you can *lose-out* on fellowship.

The Lord’s “**countenance**” towards you is what we might today call body-language. His “**face**” would be expressions. These are both positive – shining and uplifting.

“**Peace**” with God and the peace of God are the benefits of walking with the Lord. It is not the absence of conflict around you, but rather the quietness of heart within you.

The three-fold repetition of “**Lord**” does not prove the Trinity, but it certainly illustrates it:

1. God the Father blesses and keeps His children.

2. God the Son makes God's face to shine on us and brings us grace.
3. God the Holy Spirit communicates God's attention to us, and gives us peace.

God put His Name on them. They represented Him. Think of a NASCAR driver in his outfit. They are covered with advertisements – walking billboards for their sponsors.

Whether or not you wear Christian clothing (stuff with verses and messages on it)... You go about, in a spiritual sense, advertising for God.

The fruit of His Spirit should be evident in your life; that is how you represent Him.

You also present Him to others. Do it according to the blessing we've just read. Let people know God's true heart and desire is to bless them.

Conclusion

The Lord's blessing came upon a camp that was orderly; that was undefiled; and that understood separation.

[Sing it!]