

February 26

Deuteronomy 23, Numbers 6, Leviticus 27

Today I want to focus on two topics – The Nazarite vow and the vows of dedication.

Numbers 6 introduces us to the custom of Nazarite vows. Anyone in Israel who wanted to take a Nazarite vow could do so. It was a voluntary thing - no one was asked to do it - and you could make such a vow for a specific period of time or for a lifetime (though that would be very rare.) Samson apparently was a Nazarite for life, albeit a somewhat unusual one, and probably so was Samuel. Many scholars believe that John the Baptist was also a Nazarite, but of this we have no certain evidence. It would appear that Paul's vow mentioned in Acts 18:18 was a Nazarite vow.

If you wanted to take a Nazarite vow to show gratitude for God's goodness to you, or to foster a closer relationship with Him, there were three conditions to be met. 1) First, you had to vow to abstain from wine or strong drink, in fact from everything that was related to the vine. 2) Second, you had to stop cutting your hair for the length of time of the vow and 3) finally, you had to not touch any dead bodies which would make you unclean - even if it was your immediate family member. And if someone died, even if they were in your immediate family, you were not allowed to mourn them.

Now the name "Nazarite" has nothing to do with Nazareth nor does it point in any special way to Jesus. It is just the English transliteration of the Hebrew word "nazir" which means, "to set apart."

Once a Nazarite vow had been taken, it had to be completed. If for any reason it was broken, by contamination from touching a dead body for example, the person who made the vow would have to start over again. They could not simply be released from their vow.

God did not require anyone to take a Nazarite vow, but if they did, He took the vow very seriously. There is a very important set of verses in Ecclesiastes chapter 5. Here is what they say, "*When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools, fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.*"

So here is my challenge question for today... Have you ever made a vow to God...maybe in a time of desperation...that you are not keeping? Only fools make vows to God they do not keep! Make good on your vow today! God remembers your vow, and you should too.

Leviticus 27 –Vows of Dedication

The last chapter in the Book of Leviticus is related to the practice of making vows to the Lord. Four kinds of things are discussed in this chapter: (1) A vow could involve a person, in which case service to God, often in the Tabernacle or Temple, was promised. Such a vow could involve yourself, as in the case of one making a Nazarite vow. Paul made such a vow in the Book of Acts and traveled to Jerusalem to fulfill it. Alternatively, a parent might make such a vow on behalf of a child. Hannah's dedication of Samuel to serve God in the Tabernacle is an example of this kind of vow. (2) Next, a person might offer an animal. This was probably the most common kind of vow and we have already read instructions pertaining to such offerings in the Book of Leviticus. (3) Property could also be dedicated to the Lord and in such a case the actual value of the property would become the perpetual property of the priests if it had been devoted by its original owner, or when, if it had been acquired by a new owner before its dedication, it would revert to the original owner. (4) Finally, a vow might involve the giving of produce to the Lord.

In any case, vows were voluntary promises made to God. These vows were "self-imposed and often made in the context of self-discipline, with a view to accomplishing certain goals in one's relationship with God" (Schultz; p. 135).

It was possible under certain circumstances, however, to redeem or buy back that which is vowed. This process is described in Chapter 27. It involved having the priests set a monetary value upon that which has been given and then paying that amount plus a 20% redemption fee into the treasury.

The practice of giving vows, of course, presupposed the expected discipline of tithing. One-tenth of the flocks and herds and harvests already belonged to the Lord and had to be brought to the priests. Vows were over and above the normal tithes and were brought in the same spirit in which we bring our "offerings" today.

Today, it is not unheard of for a person to commit them self to the service of the LORD for their life. It is very uncommon to dedicate a child in such a way. However, there are many people, normally people of means, who not only give a tenth of income to the church, but also will give land, property, stocks and other gifts in kind. While there are some great tax advantages to this, people generally do it out of a heart for service to the LORD. Their full dedication and sacrifice moves to a whole different because of God's blessing on them.

I pray Gods deep blessings on you, even as you read through the challenging passages in Leviticus, numbers and Deuteronomy.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."