

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 6:1-4

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we're going to read Numbers chapter 6. Today we'll read verses 1-4.

In the Book of Numbers, the opening chapters record God's instructions to Moses in preparation for Israel's journey into the wilderness. From the order of God's commands, we see that God is a God of order, and He desires His people to be orderly both when they journey and when they camp. At the same time, we see the remarkable precision of God's logic—from the outward to the inward, from the arrangement of physical matters to the preservation of human relationships, from numerical details to the revelation of God's heart.

God first commanded that the twelve tribes be divided into four camps surrounding the tabernacle. Next, He instructed the three major Levitical clans to camp between the military camps and the tabernacle, stationed respectively on the south, west, and north sides. The east side of the tabernacle, facing the sunrise and serving as the entrance to the sanctuary, was entrusted to Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons.

After arranging the people, God commanded Moses to remove from the camp anyone with leprosy, anyone who had a bodily discharge, and anyone who had touched a dead body, lest they defile the entire congregation of Israel. Then God instructed them how to deal with cases in which Israelites had wronged one another, so that harmony might be preserved among the people. Finally, He established the ordinance of the grain offering for jealousy, removing suspicion and jealousy between husband and wife and restoring intimacy within the marriage relationship.

We see that God's administration is meticulous, leaving no detail unattended. For New Testament believers, this serves as an excellent pattern for how we should live the church life. How greatly God delights in a church where brothers and sisters love

one another, and where every family within the church is filled with harmony and peace.

From the perspective of typology, when the church becomes holy and without blemish, Christ will return to receive His bride. How eagerly Christ longs for His bride to be clothed in fine linen, clean and bright, so that His return may be brought near. Yet when believers love the world, how deeply His heart is grieved. For this reason, Paul, on behalf of Christ, offered the spiritual equivalent of the grain offering for jealousy for the believers in Corinth, praying that God would expose the hidden motives of every believer's heart so that they would no longer be deceived by the crafty serpent.

We have now completed the first five chapters. In chapter six, God reveals the vow of the Nazirite. Under God's original arrangement in the Old Testament, only the males of Aaron's family within the tribe of Levi could serve God as priests. However, the Nazirite vow in chapter six opened what we might call a "back door," providing a way for anyone who truly desired to serve God to do so. What marvelous grace this was! Throughout Israel's history in the Old Testament, whenever the priests became corrupt, the people of Israel fell into distress. At such times, God used the Nazirite vow to raise up willing servants from other tribes. They could rise up to function as priests and deliver Israel.

In Judges 13, Samson of the tribe of Dan became a Nazirite through the vow made by his mother. Judges 13:7 says, "And he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" Later, during the days when Eli served as high priest, his two sons acted wickedly. God therefore raised up Hannah, a woman from the tribe of Ephraim, who made a vow to the Lord. 1 Samuel 1:11 records her prayer, "O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

Samuel indeed fulfilled the Nazirite vow and succeeded Eli as priest. Moreover, he brought the period of the judges to an end and ushered in the era of the kings, becoming the instrument God used to transition Israel into a new age. The Nazirite vow truly changed the course of Israel's history. Therefore, this vow is of great significance.

For New Testament believers, our service to God is, in principle, patterned after the Nazirite vow. Consequently, it is all the more important for us to understand how this vow should be applied today.

Verses 1–2: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, '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..."'"

The Israelites had been organized into an army and were ready to set out. Before their departure, God gave Moses one final revelation concerning His highest desire—the vow of the Nazirite. The Hebrew word for Nazirite is *nazir*, which literally means one who is separated unto God. In Genesis 49:26, Jacob blessed Joseph, saying that every blessing would "...be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers." The word translated "separate" is the same Hebrew word, *nazir*. It shows that Joseph was one who had been separated from his brothers. He sought God's highest will and distinguished himself from his brothers in the way he lived and conducted himself. In the end, he became the means of salvation for them.

At that time, God had not yet instituted the Nazirite vow. Yet Joseph became a forerunner. We may even regard him as a prototype of the Nazirite. Because Joseph sought God's highest will, he also became a type of Christ.

This passage tells us that both men and women among the Israelites could make a special vow—the Nazirite vow. Since it was a vow, it was not an obligation but a privilege. God did not require everyone to make this vow. But once a person did so, throughout the period of the vow he or she had to be wholly separated, leaving

behind worldly concerns in order to belong entirely to the Lord. God never compelled anyone to become a Nazirite. Rather, the vow was made willingly and voluntarily. Because they knew God and loved Him, they desired to separate themselves from worldly things and dedicate themselves wholly to Him.

Everyone had the privilege of making this vow. Men and women alike could become Nazirites. This stands in striking contrast to other Old Testament offices. Those eligible to be numbered for Israel's army had to be males. Those who served in the tabernacle among the Levites also had to be males. Those born into Aaron's family who could serve as priests likewise had to be males. But to become a Nazirite, either a man or a woman could make the vow.

In the following verses we will see that the requirements imposed upon a Nazirite were even stricter than those placed upon a priest. In other words, Nazirites embraced the highest level of consecration, and therefore they could also bear the highest level of responsibility. The extent of that responsibility depended upon the duration of the vow. God prescribed no fixed length of time. Each individual could determine the duration according to the desire of his or her heart. It might last several weeks, several months, one year, several years, or even an entire lifetime. Samuel's mother vowed that Samuel would belong to the Lord all the days of his life. Samuel himself remained faithful to God, and consequently God used him as the vessel through whom an entire age was transformed.

In the Old Testament, God revealed His will to His people through the Law. In the New Testament, however, God has given believers spiritual life and has granted every believer the status of a priest. Nevertheless, whether we actually fulfill the function of a priest depends upon whether we are willing to separate ourselves and devote ourselves wholly to God. God desires willing consecration. Therefore, New Testament believers likewise follow the principle embodied in the Nazirite vow by separating themselves from the world and devoting themselves wholeheartedly to God's service. Only in this way can we faithfully fulfill our priestly ministry.

The passage that follows sets forth the regulations governing Nazirites. As we examine each one, we will also consider its application to New Testament believers.

Verses 3–8 list three essential requirements for a Nazirite: Abstaining from everything produced by the grapevine; not cutting one's hair; avoiding contact with dead bodies. Today we will consider only the first requirement.

Verses 3–4: "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. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin."

The first requirement of the Nazirite was to abstain from wine and similar drink. Wine refers to beverages with a lower alcohol content, while similar drink refers to stronger alcoholic beverages. In the land of Israel, wine was made by fermenting grapes, and it became one of the common beverages of daily life. Especially during weddings and festive celebrations, wine was considered indispensable. The very first miracle performed by Jesus Christ was turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. Wine can lift a person's spirits, gladden both host and guests, and add richness and enjoyment to what might otherwise seem an ordinary life. In the eyes of the world, wine is one of the good things of the earth. The famous Chinese poet Li Bai composed many beautiful poems in praise of wine. Yet the very first thing a Nazirite was required to renounce was wine and similar drink. In other words, in order to separate himself unto God, he voluntarily gave up the enjoyment of earthly pleasures.

This standard exceeded even that required of the priests. In Leviticus 10:9, God said: "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations." The Lord instructed Aaron that priests were forbidden to drink wine or intoxicating drink when they entered the tabernacle to minister. However, they were not prohibited from drinking wine during their ordinary family life.

The Nazirite, however, was different. Throughout the entire period of his vow, he was not permitted to drink either wine or similar drink. Nor was that all. Even

vinegar made from fermented wine was forbidden. We know that excessive drinking can intoxicate a person and encourage indulgence of the flesh. Vinegar, however, does not have such an effect, and it is merely a common seasoning used in everyday cooking. Therefore, the prohibition against drinking wine or vinegar was not primarily a moral issue. Rather, it was an expression of one's willingness to surrender earthly enjoyments for God's sake. This surrender was carried to the utmost—even vinegar, a harmless product derived from wine, was included among the things forbidden.

Nor did the restriction end there. The Nazirite was also forbidden to eat grapes, the very source from which wine was produced. Fresh grapes, dried grapes (raisins), grape juice, grape skins, grape seeds, and every product derived from the grapevine were all prohibited. Verse 4 summarizes the matter clearly: "All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin." That is to say, the Nazirite was to separate himself completely from the enjoyment represented by the fruit of the vine. The requirement was remarkably strict—even to the point that, from a human perspective, it might seem unreasonable.

For New Testament believers, the application extends beyond wine, vinegar, or grape products. It points to a willingness to renounce any earthly enjoyment, even those that are entirely legitimate and lawful. The issue is not the nature of these good things themselves, for this is not a question of morality. Rather, whenever such enjoyments hinder our fellowship with God or interfere with our relationship with Him, we should be willing to lay them aside.

The Apostle Paul provides us with the finest example. In Philippians 3:7–8, he writes: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Paul regarded all things as rubbish in comparison with obtaining his greatest treasure—the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Paul clearly understood that no food is inherently unclean. Yet in Romans 14:20–21, he says: "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak." For the sake of not causing his brothers to stumble, Paul was willing to surrender his legitimate rights. He chose not to eat anything that another believer regarded as unclean.

Dear brothers and sisters, voluntarily giving up every earthly pleasure in order to consecrate ourselves wholly to God may seem to some to be asking too much. Nevertheless, I would encourage every believer to have such an experience. That is, for the sake of pursuing God, knowing Him more deeply, and understanding His will and purpose for our lives, we should deliberately set ourselves apart for a period of time. At first, the period need not be long. It may be only a day or a week. Yet for God's sake, we willingly lay aside our ordinary enjoyments, separate ourselves unto Him, and devote ourselves entirely to reading His Word, prayer, spiritual fellowship, and the pursuit of Him.

When we willingly give up our rightful and legitimate enjoyments in order to seek God wholeheartedly, we will surely discover, during that season of consecration, greater light and deeper revelation from His Word. We will come to know Him more intimately and understand His leading in our lives more clearly. God values the desire of our hearts. When we are willing to separate ourselves for the pursuit of Him, even to the point of laying aside earthly pleasures, He will surely bestow greater blessings upon us.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for reminding us that although every believer in the New Testament possesses the status of a priest, in order to fulfill the ministry of a priest we must also embrace the principle of the Nazirite vow. As we desire to know You more deeply and to understand more clearly Your will and calling for our lives, may we be willing to lay aside our earthly enjoyments. Then You will grant us greater light and richer blessings, giving us higher revelations during the seasons in which we separate ourselves wholly unto You. Lord, bless my daily time in Your Word. Help me, during this appointed time, to turn my heart

completely toward You and to be wholly separated unto You. May every time I read the Scriptures bring fresh light and deeper understanding. Bless my daily Bible reading, we pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.