

## 28 – Naso – Outline

### Naso Summary

- “Naso” = “lift up:”
  - “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take a census [lift up the heads] of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' houses and by their clans...” (Numbers 4:21-22)
- longest portion due to chapter 7, where each tribal gift for the inauguration of the Tabernacle is described separately, though each brought the same gifts
- topics:
  - census and commissioning of Gershon and Merari
  - Israel puts the unclean outside the camp
  - laws regarding how to make restitution when we see we’ve sinned
  - the Sotah
  - the Nazirite
  - the priestly blessing
  - the installation offerings of the tribal leaders
  - the manner in which God spoke with Moses in the Tabernacle

### Placing Naso

- we’re seeing here in Naso and in Bamidbar how God is helping Israel to make final preparations before beginning the 40-year journey (they “set out” in the next portion)
  - it’s a momentous time, the beginning of a 40-year dying, and the 40 years of walking in God’s voice, 40 years of God entrusting more and more authority to Israel so that they can follow Him in faith
    - they haven’t stumbled yet, but we know what’s about to happen
  - there are lessons here for all who have just been given more authority and responsibility – new parents, the one just promoted at work, etc.
  - there are also lessons here for all of us walking these spiritual seasons together
    - we, like Israel, are preparing to leave Sinai as we bid goodbye to Shavuot, the giving of the Torah
      - a case where the readings and the calendar are particularly aligned
    - what changes is God making in the nation? what messages is He sending in these portions? what do these messages have to do with entering the phase of adolescence, our point of development in the calendar?
      - Bamidbar lessons for one stepping up to a new journey:
        - census: God lifts each head and says, “You count; you’re important; you belong here; you are necessary.”
        - ordering of the camp:
          - practical order for living at the next level
          - each member has a place for which they are designed within the body of Israel – accept your place; appreciate it; don’t compare

- R’Trugman from R’Ginsburgh: “In order to enjoy Shabbat to its fullest, a person needs to be SATISFIED with who they are.” Do this work in preparation for Shabbat.  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQLhiun9BHw> 22:30m)
  - the deep waters within us will manifest in the quiet of Shabbat, whether they be troubled or calm
- Naso lessons for one stepping up to a new journey:
  - starts again with the lifting of the head – everyone counts
  - Gershonites beginning a portion says, “Those given secondary honor matter as much as those given first honor.”
  - 3 topics connected to cleansing (unclean put out of camp, making restitution for sin, the Sotah) say to the teen: “You have sin lurking within in your flesh and it’s about to awaken with a new power. When it does, don’t coddle it. Don’t accept it. To the degree you are able, put it out of the camp. When sin leads you to fall, do what you can to make it right with God and your fellow man. And know that sin is adultery and that it will be found out, and it leads to death.”
  - Nazirite vow lessons:
    - “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow...to separate himself to the LORD...”
      - separating oneself to the Lord for a special purpose
    - the haftarah and Brit Chadashah readings give us two example of God setting aside Nazirites from birth:
      - Samson – set aside to begin delivering Israel from the Philistines
      - John the Baptist – set aside to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah
    - why take such a vow upon oneself?
      - R’Trugman: the one who takes a Nazirite vow is thought to be one who is struggling to control his or her desires and passions and wants to do something to reach out to God for healing, for subduing the flesh  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96kCAqD1-eQ> 14:30m)
        - symbolized by wine
    - a powerful vow
      - humility – shaving the head, everyone knows

- knowing that God is a jealous God, and what is dedicated to Him cannot be taken back – much power to walk uprightly during the vow
- Kehot Chumash: “...the institution of naziritehood teaches us that we can rise so high in sanctity that our physical bodies become holy objects.”
- Nazirite vow in the flow of the topics:
  - this vow, like the previous topics, is also connected to cleansing, cleansing for the one struggling to overcome the flesh
  - messages to the adolescent: 1) understand the great power of sin to wreck a life; 2) know that God is vastly bigger than our sin, and He has made the way for healing
- 3 topics connected to connection:
  - priestly blessing
  - Tabernacle inauguration gifts from the people
  - how Moses spoke with God in the Tabernacle
  - message to adolescent/one starting a higher journey: “Your destiny is a good one; it is blessing, unity in service, and intimacy with God.”

### 3 Progressions Teach Us How God Thinks and Arranges the Word and the World

- 1<sup>st</sup> progression: 3 Dwellers in the Tabernacle
  - grows from Grant’s Parsha Seasonings video: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgfCXIITHAo> 25m)
  - 3 Dwellers:
    - Exodus: **God** comes to indwell it
    - Leviticus: the **priests** come to indwell it
    - Numbers: the **people** come to indwell it
  - high, middle, low – God thinks this way and has set up His Word and world this way
- 2<sup>nd</sup> progression: 3 Levite Clans
  - 3 Clans:
    - Kohath: “assembly”
    - Gershon: “exile”
    - Merari: “bitter”
  - “assembly” implies connection, unity, the spiritual world
    - Kohath responsible for holiest objects
  - “exile” is what a spirit undergoes to come to earth
    - Gershon responsible for soft parts (middle holiness)
    - implies movement, from one place to another
  - “bitterness” is connected to the constraints of physicality; the physical world is a place of bitterness
    - Merari responsible for the “bones”

- note: the 3 boys got their three names before they did anything in this world – God had chosen roles for them and their descendants before they were born, each with a differing degree of honor
  - it's useless to fight against the station He gives us
- 3<sup>rd</sup> progression: a Salvation Pattern reading of the Priestly Blessing (Birkat Kohanim); look for the progression of salvation and also the progression of human development
  - “bless” - general, undifferentiated, like the generic seed of the blessing
  - “keep,” “shamar” - what a parent does with a child: watching over, protecting, guarding
    - like childhood
  - “cause His face to shine upon you” - speaks of imparting the light of truth
    - like the receiving of the Torah
    - adolescence (bar/bat mitzvah)
  - “be gracious to you” - speaks of forgiveness when we fail to live up to that Torah truth
    - grace is needed after one stumbles (as with the stumbling of the 3 Weeks)
  - “turn His face toward you” is connection, the re-connection that follows forgiveness
    - consummation of marriage, cohabitation, adulthood
  - “give you peace” - the end goal, shalom, the full coming together of heaven and earth into an echad
    - the deep intimacy of old age
  - “so they will put My Name on them”
    - what is the Name He puts on them? Salvation! It is “Yeshua.”

## Yeshua

- the “way” to healing that is called the “Nazirite vow” is a reference to the One Who comes from Nazareth
  - “Southeast Church of the Nazarene” is named for Him, the One Whose life echoes throughout all space and time
    - there is great power, indeed, in the Nazirite, Yeshua, as there is great power in the Nazirite vow
- connection to the name “Merari”
  - connected to the bitterness of the lowest realm
  - why Yeshua’s mother named “Mary,” “Bitter”?
    - we’re being told that YESHUA FULLY ENTERED INTO THE CONTEXT OF THIS PHYSICAL WORLD
      - not born into a theologian’s cave or a king’s tower – removed from the common
      - born into a particularly fractious, bitter time of dissensions
      - at birth, placed in a feeding trough in probably a cave, raised in Egypt and the Galilee (more physical side of Israel)
      - Yeshua knows what we’re going through, fully
      - Yeshua is the full antidote to the bitterness of the world

## 28 - Naso – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and this Spiritual Seasons series. In this group of teachings, we are diving into how each Torah portion fits into its place in the yearly calendar according to the annual pattern of salvation, God’s yearly curriculum. This week, we are in parsha Naso, from the middle of Numbers chapter 4 through the end of chapter 7.

### Naso Summary

Naso means “lift up,” and is from the first topic of the parsha and a verse where God tells Moses to lift up the heads of the Gershonite clan of the Levites to count them. As we mentioned previously, “lifting the head” is a Hebrew idiom for taking a census, so the parsha begins with God telling Moses to count the Gershonite clan. Naso is the longest portion in the Torah because one of the chapters in Naso is a whopping 89 verses, the chapter detailing how each of the leaders of the 12 tribes presents gifts for the inauguration of the Tabernacle – wagons, oxen, silver plates and bowls, gold dishes filled with incense, various animals. Though each of the 12 brought the same gifts when the Tabernacle was inaugurated, each tribe’s gift is repeated independently, 12 times, which is what makes chapter 7 of Bamidbar so long.

These inauguration gifts come near the end of the parsha. As I just mentioned, the portion begins with the census and commissioning of the Gershonites, when they are counted and told what their specific responsibilities will be in regards to transporting and setting up the Tabernacle. If you remember, last week’s portion ended with the counting and commissioning of the Kohathite Levites, and so it strikes us as a bit strange that the two clans of Gershon and Merari are separated from Kohath by the parsha break. We’ll talk about this a bit later.

As the portion moves past the Levites being called to their areas of service, we can say that we have three topics that rather clearly are about cleaning house, cleansing. The first topic is God’s command that Israel go ahead now and exclude the unclean people from the camp. They had been given laws regarding putting the unclean out of the camp earlier, and here they are told to actually do it. The next two topics related to cleansing are 1) laws for making restitution when one has sinned against God and man and 2) the test for the suspected adulteress, the Sotah. The next topic is laws related to the vow of the Nazirite, the man or woman who specially consecrates himself or herself to God and who must stay clean in special ways. We then have the priestly blessing, which is followed by the inauguration offerings from Israel’s tribal leaders, which we mentioned earlier. At the very end of the portion, we read the description of how God would talk with Moses in the Tabernacle.

### Placing Naso

Let’s do a little work now to place parsha Naso in the flow of the calendar and the portions that come before and after it. We’re seeing here in Naso and in the previous portion, Bamidbar, how God is helping Israel to make final preparations before beginning the 40-year journey. Up to this point, Israel was receiving the Torah and building the mishkan. In the next portion, we will actually see Israel set out from Sinai. They leave to die. (We know that they will stumble and spend 40 years in the wilderness, but they haven’t stumbled yet. It’s coming.) We’re nearing that moment in the text when a

new phase will begin, when they will become something like a nomadic people, a people who must embrace the punishment of having to spend a whole generation in the barren desert.

And so what we're seeing here at the start of this new book of Bamidbar, Numbers, are the final preparations before that 40-year journey begins. We began seeing these final preparations in last week's portion of Bamidbar, and we continue to see these last bits of prep in Naso and in the first half of next week's portion. It's really a momentous time. What do the final preparations look like for a nation of 3 million people to begin 40 years of dying? And it's not just dying, though that's one of the main purposes for the 40 years in the wilderness. It's also 40 years of walking with God in a special way, four decades of walking "bamidbar," in His voice. It's 40 years of every day digging graves over here while new babies are being welcomed into tents over there, cries of anguish literally mixing with cries of joy and relief. It's 40 years of miraculous manna and water from the rock, 40 years of Moses leading, talking face-to-face with God. It's 40 years of God giving more and more authority over to the people, allowing them to more and more walk in faith with Him. That phase of Israel's development is about to begin. In a way, it's an in-between phase like adolescence, and we all know what a fraught journey that can be.

You know, I have trouble leaving places. I'm forever going back to look around to see if I left something. And I'm at my worst when I have to leave my house for a few days. It approaches OCD, if I'm being honest. First I usually run around like a crazy person watering plants outside. Then I get the car loaded up and I go back into the house for a "final check." And this is where the problems start. So I check that the stove burners are off, and the windows are closed, and the doors are locked. And then I wonder, did I check if the burners are off (oh, probably, but I'll check again), and I'll set the thermostat, and I double check that all the faucets are off and the refrigerator is closed, and, hmm, did I check if the burners are off? Let me just check them again. Literally, it's a bit silly. I just don't want to get in the car and an hour later think, "What if the refrigerator is open for 3 days?" There's an art to leaving a place, and I have not mastered it at all. We can learn some lessons here from Israel in how we prepare to launch out at a higher level after we have been given more authority, more responsibility. There are lessons here for new parents, for example, or for those who have been promoted at work. From a different perspective, there are lessons here for all of us walking through these spiritual seasons together.

Because as we read parsha Naso now, we, like Israel, are preparing to leave Mt. Sinai. We have just come through Shavuot, which we honor as the day of the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. And we tarry there now for a bit before we head into the wilderness with Israel in the next Torah portion as the heat of high summer is about to set in. This is a case where the calendar and the portions are particularly aligned. And as we read about how God helps Israel to prepare for the long, long journey ahead, we can be looking for lessons that apply to us now in the calendar as we bid goodbye to Shavuot and head into the long, hot summer. What changes is God making in the nation? What messages is He sending to Israel at this point both in the changes He is making in Israel and in the placement of certain commandments here in these Torah portions? And we can ask another question: "What do these messages at this point have to do with entering the phase of adolescence or becoming engaged?" In the last teaching on Shavuot, we talked about how, in the yearly calendar, after

experiencing a rebirth at Passover, we are now beginning the phase of the calendar we would call “adolescence” and also engagement to God.

As we think about these portions in terms of preparations for the 40-year journey, let’s first think back to parsha Bamidbar, last week’s portion, which was the first in a new book, Numbers, or “Bamidbar” in Hebrew. Bamidbar begins with a census. As they set out on a new journey, as they enter adolescence, God lifts each head, looks them in the eye, and says, “You are part of Israel, and you count. You are necessary. You have a place here, and we need you.” And how vital is it for us to hear this as we enter into the period of our lives when we can become absolutely consumed with comparing ourselves to others. Clearly we shouldn’t be doing this kind of comparing, but teens are prone to this.

Next in Bamidbar, God arranges the tribes into groups for camping and marching. On the one hand, He’s bringing a kind of practical order that will make the next phase possible in a practical sense. Someone has to go first as Israel travels a sometimes narrow path in the wilderness through canyons, along caravan routes, across passes, and over plains, following God into places both known and unknown. And someone has to go second and third. And so there is a ranking that God gives them.

One message that comes out of the organization of the camp is that each member of Israel has a special place within the body, a place for which they and only they are created to fit, a place of service to the body that only they can do. And isn’t this also a vital message to speak to a young teen? “You are designed for a special place of service that no one else is able to do exactly like you. Start to seek out that place of service now. God will help you.” Such a message to a teen helps them to accept how they are made. You might not be as good-looking as that person over there, and you may not be as athletic as that person over there, and you may not be as smart as that person over there, but you are made exactly as you are because you are made to fit into a certain place. Accept the way He made you. Appreciate the way He made you. And thank Him for it. Again, we’re not talking about accepting sin here. We’re just talking about the skills and genes God gave us, and the context He put us in uniquely – our family, our friends, our place, our time. You are made for your family, for your place, for your time because you have what’s needed to be God’s eyes and hands and feet in exactly that place.

If we have not accepted who God made us to be, we can never experience real peace. Rabbi Avraham Trugman made this connection in a recent teaching. He says that a simple statement from Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh had a profound effect on his experience of Shabbat. R’Ginsburgh said, “In order to enjoy the Shabbat to its fullest, a person needs to be satisfied with who they are”

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQLhiun9BHw> 22:30m). You want to really enjoy Shabbat? Take a moment to be fully satisfied with who God has made you to be. Do this bit of work on yourself as Shabbat is coming in, and it will open the doorway to experiencing Shabbat in its fullness. And I think this is because knowing who we are in God and in the body and appreciating that, being satisfied with that, is vital for putting ourselves in a constant state of inward rest and peace. And it is this deep foundation that is going to resonate with the rest and peace of Shabbat. Whatever we are harboring down there deep within is going to manifest in the quiet of Shabbat, whether that be troubled waters or calm waters. Make a habit of calming the waters. We can do this at any time. And it’s particularly important that we do so as Shabbat is coming in.

Moving forward with messages we are getting at this time in preparation for a new phase, we come to the current portion, Naso. In fact, we see a connection to Bamidbar right off the bat with the census, the counting of the Gershonites. Again, the message “Everyone counts” is a dominant theme running through these chapters, the lifting of the head.

I want to return to the question now of why this commissioning of the Levite clans is split across the two portions. Since Naso is such a long portion, it would have maybe even been more natural to extend Bamidbar a bit longer to include the census and commissioning of the other two Levite clans. The idea the rabbis discuss here is partly that breaking the text between the Kohathites and the Gershonites places the Gershonites at the beginning of a portion, and this is honoring to them. They might be second in terms of the holy objects they carry and tend to. But in portion Naso, they are first. They might be part of the lower body rather than the head, but the lower body is powerful and is vital for enabling the spirit to act in this world. Again, even in the break between the Torah portions, we’re seeing the idea that everyone counts; everyone’s vital, even.

The next several topics, as I pointed out earlier, deal with cleansing in various ways: the separation of the unclean from the camp, laws regarding making restitution for sin against God and man, the Sotah, which is the testing of the woman suspected of adultery. Cleansing always follows stepping higher with the Lord. What is the message here to the adolescent embarking on a new journey? The message is you have sin lurking within in your flesh and it’s about to awaken with a new power. When it does, don’t coddle it. Don’t accept it. To the degree you are able, put it out of the camp. When sin leads you to fall, do what you can to make it right with God and your fellow man. And know that sin is adultery and that it will be found out, and it leads to death. Be about the work of cleansing your vessel so that you can be strong to follow the leading of the Lord and do His work in the world. God requires a holy vessel. Be that holy vessel. You can do it.

Let’s touch on the laws of the Nazirite vow now, which is the next topic in Naso. How does this fit? Let me read just the beginning of this part to remind us what this is about: ““Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink...” (Numbers 6:2-3). And it goes on from there. It’s a vow of separation, someone separating himself or herself to the LORD. “Separate” here is “nazar,” from which we get the word “Nazirite.” One taking this vow is to refrain from consuming anything that derives from any part of the grape. He is to shave his head at the beginning of the vow and again at the end and is to avoid contact with a dead body during the vow.

What does it mean that one sets himself or herself apart for God? Well, the haftarah and the Brit Chadashah readings for Naso give us two cases where God, Himself, sets apart people as Nazirites from birth, so we can start trying to understand by looking there. God selects these two and sets them aside for special purposes, but they are quite different purposes. The haftarah is the story of the birth of Samson, who was set apart to God for the purpose of beginning to deliver Israel from the Philistines, who were a perennial thorn in Israel’s side. The story in the Brit Chadashah is of the conception of John the Baptist, who God set apart for the special purpose of preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. In both cases, the angels say before their birth that they are not to drink wine. Samson’s mother is actually told that Samson will be a Nazirite from birth. God fills both of them with a special

gifting to achieve the purposes for which they were set aside by God. So in these two examples that are so different from each other, we see that there can be diverse reasons for one to be set aside as a Nazirite.

But why would someone set THEMSELVES aside for God? R'Trugman brings what is thought to be the primary reason for the Nazirite vow, and it's a bit surprising (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96kCAqD1-eQ> 14:30m). The Jewish tradition is very valuable here because the Torah doesn't explain why one would be separating himself or herself for God in this way. R'Trugman says that according to the Jewish understanding, the one who takes a Nazirite vow is thought to be one who is struggling to control his or her desires and passions and wants to do something to reach out to God for healing, for subduing the flesh. This could be an addiction of some kind - whether addiction to a substance or a behavior - and this is especially symbolized here as wine. Drunkenness and alcohol addiction was a problem then as now, and the prophets and Proverbs in particular are full of warnings and even accusations regarding widespread overindulgence in wine. The prohibition on wine is so severe for the Nazirite that he or she is not to consume even products made from the skin or seeds of the grapes— just don't go near it or anything related to it, absolute avoidance. There's a lesson there in how we should approach those areas of the flesh that hold such dominance over us.

People could spot a Nazirite by their shaved head. So if most of these vows were taken for the sake of this kind of battle with the flesh, the first step is to humble yourself and be willing to admit publicly that you're struggling with something severe and that your heart's desire is for purity and relationship with God. That's another lesson for us.

You can imagine the power that is here. This action of shaving the head is not only the point of making your vow public, but it's also a way to say, "All that has grown out of my life up to this point, all that I have accomplished and put out into the world whether good or bad, is gone. This is a new start." The Nazirite is dedicating himself or herself to the Lord as holy, set apart, knowing how very, very seriously God takes such a vow, knowing how breaking such a vow would open one to dire consequences because our God is a jealous God. What is dedicated to Him cannot be withdrawn. There's a lot of motivation there and power there to cease the behavior so as to not become impure while in this set apart state. The Kehot Chumash says the following, which I think speaks to the great power of this vow: "...the institution of naziritehood teaches us that we can rise so high in sanctity that our physical bodies become holy objects." And interestingly, at the end of the Nazirite vow, the man or woman brings a sin offering, which seems to fit the explanation of the sages, though the reason for this sin offering is somewhat debated (it's said that in having to take such a drastic action, the Nazirite actually misses the mark the other way, on the side of asceticism, but this extreme refraining from the physical world is needed in this case - for a time - to bring correction; nonetheless, God created this physical world partly for our pleasure and also so that each of its facets can be elevated, and when we do not engage with it, when we eschew any aspect of the world, we are not getting pleasure from it, and we are not elevating it for holy purposes, which is a form of missing the mark, which is sin).

With that background, we can see many ways that this topic of the Nazirite fits into the flow we've been talking about. First, we can see a connection to cleansing here in that many who took this vow were trying to overcoming a besetting sin. We can also see here a couple of messages to the

adolescent or the nation about to head off into the midbar: 1) understand the great power of sin to wreck your life, and 2) know that as much as sin can come to dominate a life, as huge as that giant can grow, God is vastly bigger still, and there is healing. It takes humility, and it takes courage, and it takes persistence, but He has provided a pathway for salvation.

Beyond these topics that focus on cleansing, we have three topics all about connection: the priestly blessing, the Tabernacle inauguration gifts from the tribes, and the description of how Moses spoke with God in the Tabernacle. I think in these three that focus on imparting life the message to the adolescent on the cusp of a new journey is this: your destiny is a good one; it is blessing, unity in service, and intimacy with God. Your destiny is the blessing of the priests, the unity of bringing gifts to God as a community, the intimacy of speaking with God face-to-face like Moses did. This is where you are headed as you step out onto that dry and barren road. The road might start in the desert, but it doesn't end there. It ends with streams of living water flowing from under the entrance of the Temple.

### **3 Progressions Teach Us How God Thinks and Arranges the Word and the World**

The last teaching point here I want to bring out before moving on to briefly focus directly on Yeshua is to point out a few progressions here that echo the salvation pattern and help us to see how God thinks and organizes this world. It might be useful to check out the notes especially for this topic, as I'm going to move through these rather quickly.

The first progression comes out of Grant's last point in this week's Parsha Seasonings video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgfCXIITHAo> 25m). Grant draws our attention to the fact that this inauguration day of the Tabernacle is mentioned in three consecutive books, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, each time with a different emphasis. The way I'm going to explain that difference in emphasis is to ask, "Who's coming to dwell in the Tabernacle?" In Exodus, God comes to dwell in the Tabernacle as His presence fills it. In Leviticus, the priests are installed in their Tabernacle service. And here in Numbers, the 12 princes representing the people bring their gifts to the priests at the Tabernacle. This progression, then, is God, the priests, and the people – high, middle, and low. God thinks this way. He has set up His Word this way. He sets up His world this way.

The second progression is found in the names of the Levite clans. The first to be counted and given their specific work is Kohath, the second Gershon, and the third Merari. The first group is responsible for the furniture of the Tabernacle, the holiest articles. The second is responsible for the soft parts of the tent, and the third group is given responsibility for the bars and sockets, the bones of the Tabernacle – still very holy, but the least holy of the three. The three names "Kohath," "Gershon," and "Merari," respectively mean "assembly," "exile," and "bitter." So listen again to the meanings of the names and see if you spot a progression: the three names mean 1) assembly, 2) exile, and 3) bitter. You can pause it and think about it. Did you notice that the names move from unity to separation? Unity is a characteristic of the spiritual realm, so the name "Kohath," meaning "assembly," is reflecting a higher spirituality, and we see this reflected in Kohath's service, which is the care of the holiest objects. The names descend from there. Gershon means "exile." When a spirit leaves the spiritual realm to come to earth, this is a kind of exile. Exile is in between here, like the Gershonites and their level of service. Exile implies movement, leaving one place and arriving at another. And lastly, the result of the exile is bitterness, Merari, responsible for the bars and sockets. Bitterness is connected to the squeezing and

confining of the physical realm. Once again then, we have this progression from spiritual to physical, and this progression is connected to the service of each clan.

One point to bring out here is that these three boys got their names before they had done anything good or bad. God inspired these names, as He does for all of us. In other words, God had chosen roles for these boys and their descendants before they were born, each for a different degree of honor. He created everything about each of them to enable them and empower them to fulfill the service for which He created them. And He does the same for us. We are each given work that falls somewhere along the spectrum of emphasizing either the spiritual side or the physical side, and this is the work that we are created to do. We won't be productive if we are looking at someone else and saying, "I want to do more spiritual work like that" or "I want to do work that makes me that kind of money." Growing up in the Lord is understanding that everyone counts, that every place has honor in the end, that all are needed, and that you are created to inhabit a certain place prepared for you.

Lastly here, let's do a quick salvation pattern reading of the priestly blessing, the Birkat Kohanim. We're going to trace the story of salvation here in this God-designed and God-given blessing. One of our ways to see that salvation story is in terms of human development from infancy to adulthood, so listen for that progression as we go.

The blessing starts with, "May the Lord bless you and keep you." "Bless" is a general word, undifferentiated. It is the SEED WORD of blessing for the entire prayer. It's nice if someone says, "May God bless you," but this is very general. The next idea starts to unpack the seed. Again, the first line is, "May the Lord bless you and KEEP you," v'yishmarecha, from "shamar." "Keep," is what a parent does with a child – watching over, protecting, guarding. This is an action of God that applies especially to a young phase of development. So the first line moves us from the seed through the phase of childhood. The next line is, "the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you." God shining His face upon us is the light of truth. This is a phase of education, like the giving of the Torah, a time of adolescence. Moving forward again, "Be gracious to you" implies that you have STUMBLER with that Torah and are IN NEED of that grace. We have pointed out many times that after we receive the light of the Torah, we are prone to stumbling, as we see in the calendar with the Three Weeks in the summer followed by the judgment of the early fall, the 10 days, which is where we seek His grace. The last line is, "the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace." Turning to face someone is a moment of connection. After God extends His grace through the blood of the Lamb comes a point of re-connection with Him like the consummation of a marriage and the beginning of cohabitation, entering adulthood. And finally, we come to "and give you peace." The end goal of it all is peace, shalom, a deep echad, which is a oneness of multiple parts. Can you get a glimpse of how the priestly blessing designed by God is a precious jewel of a gift to mankind. It has the whole story of salvation in it. It is the story of Yeshua. It is the same story we see in the calendar, and in fact, everywhere in the universe made through Yeshua. And let me point out here lastly that God finishes this passage by saying, "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:27). What is the Name God is putting on us through this blessing? Again, this blessing is the story of salvation, a blessing that we would successfully walk with God through each of the stages of salvation. The Name that God is putting on us through the Birkat Kohanim is "Yeshua," "Salvation."

## Yeshua

Speaking of Yeshua, let's keep our focus on Him now as we close out these thoughts today. I'd like to draw two more quick points of connection between our discussion today and Yeshua. When we discussed the Nazirite vow, we mentioned that it is an encouragement to see that God has made a path of salvation for our enslavement to the flesh, and that way is called the "Nazirite" vow, or we can say the Nazirite path of healing and salvation. Of course, Believers see a deeper reference there. The Nazirite pathway to healing is the One Who comes from Nazareth, Yeshua. The very building I'm sitting in right now is Southeast Church of the Nazarene. In other words, the building I'm sitting in in Tallmadge, Ohio in the year 2023 is named for a poor man Who lived 2,000 years ago in the ancient Middle East. He never wrote a book. He never left His small geographic area. But the power He wielded ripples like shock waves throughout time and space such that this very space I'm sitting in, in this very time, reveals that power, this building where Believers meet, separated from Yeshua's own coming by two millenia. Yeshua is the true way of the Nazirite that the Nazirite vow pictures, and it is He Who is the source of the great power for healing found in this vow.

Lastly, I want to make a connection with the name "Merari," which we connected with the lowest realm, the physical realm, and the lowest service among the three clans of the Levites. We learned earlier that "Merari" means "bitter." The name shares the same root with the name "Mary," or "Miriam" in Hebrew. "Mary" is the name of Yeshua's mother for a reason, and He was surrounded by so many women named "Mary" for a reason. These names are telling us that Yeshua FULLY ENTERED THE CONTEXT OF THIS PHYSICAL WORLD, this place of bitterness. Yeshua was born into the bitterness of the constriction of physicality AS MUCH AS ANY OF US ARE. In fact He was born into a particularly fractious and bitter period of Jewish history, a time of great dissensions. He wasn't born into a theologians cave or a king's tower, removed from the common things of this world. He was born to a woman named "Bitter" and placed in a feeding trough in what was probably a cave, a hole in the earth. He grew up in Egypt and then in the Galilee, which was not considered the spiritual heartland of the nation; the Galilee is located on the more physically robust side of Israel, not the spiritual side, which is the south. The fact that Yeshua came from back water Galilee and not the spiritual heights of Judah was a stumbling block to some. These details are designed to say to us, "Yeshua knows what you're going through. The life He lived in the flesh was lived in a context of physicality that is as deep or even deeper than yours. Yeshua was surrounded by the bitterness of this fallen world." And not only that, but Yeshua is the full antidote to the bitterness of a fallen world. Through Yeshua, the bitter waters are turned sweet.

Well, that's all for today. Thanks again for listening. As I mentioned, there is a link to an outline below. May God bless us to know deeply in our souls that we count. May He bless us to find the place of service for which we are designed. May we never be afraid to humble ourselves so that we can come more fully under the wings of His protection and be healed. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.