

## Laws and Regulations

Numbers 5 - 9

January 29, 2012

### What does the Bible Mean?

Read. Numbers 5:1-4

The entire camp of the Israelites is treated as sacred. The holiness of God's presence at the tabernacle demands that it be kept sacred. The regulations deal with those who are leprous ("those with skin diseases"), those with genital discharges and those who have come in contact with a corpse. These must be kept outside the camp.

The regulations were both religious and hygienic. Leprosy in the Old Testament is often a sign of God's displeasure. The basic principle is that the excluded person may have some supernatural influence that could infect others. Exclusion for contact with the dead enforces this. The word "corpse" was thought to be attended for some time by the disembodied spirit - the word used for corpse.

Compare this exclusion of lepers as well as those with discharges and corpses with Jesus dealings with the same conditions. Jesus touched the leper when he healed him in Luke 5:13. He healed the woman who touched the hem of his garment. He (and Elijah) brought the dead to life. Thankfully today we have compassion on the sick. They are no longer outcasts.

Read. Numbers 5:5-10

This passage deals with the procedures of restoring injury. The matter is also discussed in Leviticus 6:1-7, but this section is a supplement to it. The sin is against both God and the injured party. Restitution is in the amount of injury plus 20 percent and a ram of atonement for when one wrongs a neighbor and seeks forgiveness. If the wronged party has no relative, the reimbursement plus 20 percent and the ram go to the priest.

An essential part of restoration is confession. Today the church still mentions confession but restoration is seemingly left to society and civil authorities.

The remainder of Chapter 5 deals with actual or accused adultery by a woman even if the alleged violation is only a matter of jealousy or false accusation by the husband.

The passage is again supplemental to the law in Leviticus. There both guilty parties - man and woman - receive the death penalty if the act is proved.

Here the woman is subjected to humiliation even if the accusations are false. There is no penalty for the man and no reciprocal rights for the wife. The passage is disturbing to anyone who values mutual fairness in marriage.

When adultery is not proved, but only suspected the root of the accusation is often jealousy. Jealousy can drive people to extreme and cruel actions. Take the biblical relationship between Saul and David. In I Samuel 18, the people praised David over Saul. Saul was jealous, "And from that day forward...." Saul sought to kill David.

Jealousy is a range of attitudes from intense hatred to envy and even to possessive single-minded zeal. Zeal and jealousy are both derived from the same Greek word. The Hebrew for jealousy is "to become red in the face." Some allied terms for jealousy are *envy*, *zeal*, *passion* and *fury*.

In the Old Testament jealousy produces hatred and envy.

Jealousy can be positive. For example, we can be so jealous in our devotion that our zeal leads to total selflessness.

Read. Numbers 6:1-8

Chapter 6:1-21 deals with regulations for Nazarites. The Nazarite was consecrated, devoted and separated. He or she marked their special sanctity or vow of self-discipline by letting their hair grow and by abstaining from wine and strong drink. In fact, they had total abstinence from the vine and could not eat grapes or raisins or even grape skins. Likewise they could not drink vinegar made from the grape.

The vow to be a Nazarite could come from a personal vow or by mysterious divine endowment or by a vow by one's mother. The commitment was lifelong or could be for a set time period.

References to Nazarites are throughout the Old Testament and into the early Christian period. In Old Testament times these holy men (or women) were under the power of the Spirit of the Lord. Ecstasy and enthusiasm characterized the Nazarite rather than ethical qualities. Saul and his prophets were Nazarites. Sampson was a Nazarite. Amos mentioned prophets and Nazarites together - God had called them both. Samuel was Nazarite, but also a priest. As we can see, Nazarites were often warriors.

Read. Numbers 6:22-27

How familiar this blessing or benediction is! We have heard it pronounced as a benediction to worship services. Many of us used it to end our then MYF meetings.

The blessing has three sections. Each begins with, "The Lord...." The three sections each have two parts which emphasize *us*.

- The Lord *blesses* us. He provides all things that make human life possible and full.
- The Lord *keeps* us. He guards and protects us from evil.
- The Lord *makes his face to shine upon us*. He is present. He warms, brightens and provides life-giving energy to us and all creation.
- The Lord is *gracious* to us. He doesn't deal with us according to our sins but with love and compassion.

- The Lord *lifts his countenance or turns his face* upon or toward us. He actively accepts and blesses *me* and *you* in a gesture of undeserved reconciliation. How wonderful it must have been to the Israelites that God turns his face toward them when they believed that God hid his face and to see it was to die!
- The Lord *gives us peace*. He gives us positive peace, peace of heart and mind through himself - the Prince of Peace.

This blessing or benediction is used in many Jewish and Christian traditions. It is ancient. The inscription has been found on two silver cylinders in Jerusalem dating to 600 BC. They represent the earliest known fragments of any biblical text.

Read. Numbers 7:1-11

Chapter 7 tells the thankful response of an obedient people to God for establishing the priesthood and blessing the people. The offerings of oxen and wagons for the Levites enable them to transport the altar and the tent on the march to the promised land.

Read. Numbers 7:12-17

When the oxen and carts were offered, the people also offered gifts for the sacrificial worship at the tabernacle. God said that each of the tribes should bring their gifts, one a day for twelve days. They brought almost identical gifts - a silver basin, a silver plate, a gold dish (or spoon) and several animals each a year old.

Read. Numbers 8:1-4

God instructs Aaron how to set up the lamp stand to give light into the north side of the holy place. The seven lamps represent the sun and moon and five planets as a constant symbol of God's creative power. These lamps were lights on the altar - God's light to the world. We need to remember that we are also lights on the world (Matthew 5:14).

The lamp stand became the menorah, an important symbol in the celebration of Hanukkah. The celebration recalls the purification and dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it had been desecrated. Revelation tells of the lamp stand and branches as part of the vision of the heavenly Temple.

The remainder of Chapter 8 deals with the purification and presentation of the Levites. They served from age 25 to 50. After "retirement" they could minister but "do no service".

Read. Numbers 9:1-6

God called Moses to lead the people to celebrate Passover.

The passage to Verse 14 deals with people who are unclean and couldn't celebrate. God instructed Moses that they could celebrate a week later.

The chapter ends with the description of God's presence as a cloud over the tabernacle by day and a

pillar of fire by night. When the cloud or pillar moved, the people packed and moved with it. When it stopped, the people stopped. It could move or stay put for long or very short periods of time.

What does the Bible mean to me?

- How important is group and family harmony to one's own relationship with God?
- How does jealousy affect our personal worship?
- Have you ever made a special vow to God? Perhaps for Lent?...or the New Year?...or a healing?
- The Nazarite made his/her vow public. Would there be an advantage to you do do so?
- Has any element in the Lord's blessing been evident in your life recently?

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

- What kind of gifts do you give to God in time, money or kind? What motivates you to give these gifts?
- The Levites were isolated from the real world. Are there dangers in such isolation?
- Are we and/or our church too *firm* about matters of faith and worship? Does this hinder our relationship with God?
- God led the Israelites with a cloud and pillar of fire. How does God guide spiritual leaders today?