

God's Blessing is for This Life

Parashat Naso



Parashat Naso

This week's Torah portion is particularly long and dense and deals with a wide variety of subjects. It begins with the building of the camp and the organization of the tribes. Later on, it discusses how a husband should deal with his wife when he is suspicious of unfaithfulness.

It also touches on the bitter water test, the laws of the Nazirite, as well as the well-known Priestly Blessing.

The Priestly Blessing

The Priestly Blessing is a special blessing that is recited daily in every synagogue in Israel. It is typically recited during the return of the public emissary towards the end of the Amidah prayer during the morning prayer time.

Outside of Israel, however, it is customary to say the Priestly Blessing only during the holidays.

Archaeological excavations in the Valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem discovered two silver amulets on which the Priestly Blessing was engraved. These amulets are dated around the year 600 BC, which was the time of the First Temple.

Today more and more Messianic communities have begun to use this blessing, especially during international conferences, it seals the event and blesses the participants. In our congregation we also bless those gathered, most importantly the children.

As a child, when I went with my father to the neighborhood synagogue, the Priestly Blessing was one of the most impressive experiences.

The priests would take off their shoes, cover themselves completely with their prayer shawls, and step forward reverently, standing in front of the holy ark and loudly reciting the Priestly Blessing.

Due to the fact that many Messianic congregations greet their audiences with this blessing, I would like to analyze its structure and meaning.

It Comes From God, Not From Man

The scripture did not only state a blessing, but it also provided the precise phrasing, and the preceding verse emphasizes this to the priests:

*“... This is how you are to bless the Israelites...” – Numbers 6:23b
[NIV]*

We have here an exact determination of the phrasing of the blessing. This emphasizes the divine source of the blessing, and illustrates the perception that the priests are only the conduit for it.

From the words of God at the end of the blessing one can understand that indeed, the priests are the ones who actually say the blessing, but God is the only one that can truly bless.

“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” – Numbers 6:27 [NIV]

The term “I” emphasizes the source of the blessings: “I” and not the one who is called on my behalf to minister, meaning that the blessing is from God.

A Unique Structure

At the outset we face a challenge that is not simple, the challenge of language.

Many commentaries on this blessing are based on the Hebrew; whether it be the syntactic structure of the blessing, the number of letters, the verbs, and the location of each word.

In Hebrew, this blessing is divided into three parts. Each of the blessings has two verbs in the future tense, and found between these two verbs we have the explicit name of God.

“The Lord bless you and keep you;” – Numbers 6:24 [NIV]

“the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;” – Numbers 6:25 [NIV]

“the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” – Numbers 6:26 [NIV]

What attracts the eye is the intensifying structure. In the Hebrew text of the first blessing, we have three words. In the second, we have five words, and in the third, seven words.

Again, in the Hebrew text, there is an increase in the number of letters: 15 in the first blessing, 20 in the second, and 25 in the third.

A Physical Blessing

Many commentators point to this and ask, “Is this a coincidence, or is there an intensification also in the content of the blessing?”

A common understanding finds an intensification in the content as well:

The first blessing is a material and earthly blessing, the second blessing is a spiritual and intellectual blessing, and the third blessing is a blessing for the next life.

“The Lord bless you and keep you;” – Numbers 6:24 [NIV]

“Bless” is a reference to wealth and assets, and the idea that “without bread, there is no Torah.” “Keep,” refers to any negative influence or harm caused by people, enemies, or those who are against you.

The idea is that if a person does not have enough to live on, he cannot serve God wholeheartedly, because of an empty, rumbling, stomach.

However, if the house is full of all good things, and the physical and material side is sorted out, a person can devote himself wholeheartedly to the service of God and the studying of His Word.

This is not about a reward or prize, but rather it is a step towards what is good and spiritual.

The Blessing of Delayed Gratification

In almost every religion, it is acceptable for a someone to live a life of celibacy and poverty in order to achieve transcendence. This can be seen with monks, for example.

Sometimes this ideology has substance. Chapter 6 in our parasha speaks about the laws of the Nazirite.

The Apostle Paul also encourages us in the New Testament to take a certain amount of time for abstinence, prayer, and fasting.

At the same time, however, Paul also asks that abstinence be for only a short period of time, because very quickly we can lose balance, and instead of ascending above, we will smash lustfully into the mud below. The key point here is balance.

Ultimately, delaying gratification is meant to give us a better life. That, in the end, things will be better, not worse.

A Spiritual Blessing

*“the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;” –
Numbers 6:25 [NIV]*

This blessing is interpreted as being a way to give wisdom and knowledge to better understand the Word of God, to learn what one’s place in the world is, and to learn the path to the next life.

It is actually a request that we continue to be vessels in the hands of God that He will use us for His glory.

The goal is for the leadership of God in the world to focus on us, and at the same time, not distance us from others, but on the contrary:

“that all those with feelings and thoughts around us will see in us the foundation and the answer to their existence.” – Rabbi Hirsch

This is a very interesting commentary from Rabbi Hirsch, and I dare say that this is Yeshua’s idea towards us as his disciples. Our goal should be that people around us will see the light and the life that we produce, and they will want to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven because of it.

This idea of being a light, be it a personal light towards our neighbors, or on a national level, as a people or a movement that is a light to the world, repeats itself over and over in the interpretation of Scripture.

The simple reason for this is that it is one of the many foundations of Scripture. This is one of the main requirements of Yeshua the Messiah. That from our lives, from our faith, we must produce light.

God’s Blessing is for This Life

*“the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” –
Numbers 6:26 [NIV]*

Traditional interpretation sees this blessing as a benediction for the next life, that God will turn His face towards us and give us eternal peace.

Personally, I believe that the vast majority of scriptures focus on this world, blessing us now, our relationship with God and with others in this world.

Therefore, I see this blessing as being directed to this world, as a blessing of peace, for this is what we strive towards.

In fact, this is the name of our capital, Jerusalem – the City of Peace.

Golda Meir, one of the prime ministers of Israel, described this aspiration with a deep understanding:

“We can forgive the Arabs for the killing of our children. We cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill their children. We will have peace with the Arabs only when they love their children more than they hate us.” – Golda Meir

We wait and pray for this day in which love will triumph, for this moment when the concern for the future of their children will defeat their hatred towards us.

Though we must keep in mind that this hatred is a hatred that originates in religion. It is not a hatred between people, rather a hatred of progress, of understanding, and of openness.

This religious war can only be won by Yeshua with the truth and with love.

We understand that the Word of God is directed primarily towards the life in this world, that this life will be a blessing. This world is not just a dark corridor to life in the world to come; our goal is not to send our children to commit suicide and take others with them to the next life.

The goal is to live in the present times. God gave us the Torah to read and observe for our present lifetimes. This is the truth only found in Yeshua the Messiah.

The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context*

LEARN MORE AT:



NETIVYAH.ORG