

Reformation Fellowship Notes • August 26, 2018

Teacher: David Crabtree

Handout #3

Numbers 5 & 6

I. Introduction

- A. The last two weeks we have talked about the censuses that were taken at Mount Sinai.
 - 1. One was the military census taken to organize the army.
 - 2. Second was a census of the Levites to organize them for their duties.
 - 3. A third census was also of the Levites to designate them as substitutes for the first-born.
- B. At this point there is a break in the text.
 - 1. First major break
 - 2. The next two chapters contain four commandments and a prayer.
 - a) Each begins with “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying . . .”
 - b) The commandments are each a further development of specific commandments already listed in Leviticus (except the Nazirite vow).
 - (1) Wording similar to Leviticus is used.
 - 3. Why are these items here, as opposed to someplace else?
 - a) We will talk about this at the end.

II. Numbers 5:1-4

- A. Case—Religiously unclean people in camp
 - 1. Physical separation from that which is holy (Tabernacle)
 - a) Unclean must be sent out of camp.
 - (1) Lepers (skin disease)
 - (2) Discharge (chronic discharge from genitalia)
 - (3) Anyone who has touched a dead person
 - 2. Male and female
 - 3. Leviticus 13 and 15 go into much greater detail describing how the priest is to determine who is a leper or who has a discharge.
 - 4. Their presence in the camp would defile the camp.
 - a) That they need to stay out of the camp is made more explicit here than in Leviticus.
 - b) Under certain circumstances uncleanness is communicable.

III. Numbers 5:5-10

- A. Case—Fraud
 - 1. What is the crime?

- a) This same crime is described in greater detail in Leviticus 6:1-7.
 - (1) The wording in Numbers appears to be an abbreviated reference to Leviticus.
 - (a) This is done several times in these two chapters of Numbers.
 - (2) “Acting unfaithfully against the LORD”
 - (a) Either this person swore to God that he had not defrauded,
 - (b) Or defrauding is ultimately a crime against God.
- 2. What the guilty person needs to do to make it right:
 - a) Confess.
 - b) Make full restitution.
 - (1) The full amount plus 20%
 - (a) Give it to the one wronged
 - c) If there are no kin, restitution goes to the LORD for the priest.
 - (1) The amount to the priest is in addition to the ram for an atonement sacrifice.
- 3. Everything given to the priests is for the priests to use.

IV. Numbers 5:11-15

- A. Case—A man who suspects his wife of adultery
 - 1. Adultery in the Ancient Near East
 - a) Adultery was seen throughout the area as a sin against one’s spouse as well as a sin against God.
 - 2. There are no witnesses and no evidence.
 - a) She may be guilty.
 - b) She may be innocent.
 - 3. If this man is suspicious
 - a) Take her to the priest.
 - b) Take an offering of barley meal.
 - (1) Without any oil or frankincense
 - (a) Because it is a reminder of iniquity
 - (b) Oil and frankincense are associated with joy (Milgrom, p. 38).

V. Numbers 5:16-22

- A. I don’t know the symbolism related to some of these acts.
 - 1. I hope to figure this out when I study Leviticus.
 - 2. The symbolism is quite intricate.
- B. Procedure for woman suspected of adultery:
 - 1. The priest takes her to stand before the Lord.
 - a) The priest takes her into the Tabernacle in front of the altar.
 - 2. The priest holds an earthenware vessel with holy water.
 - 3. The priest takes dirt from the ground and puts it into the water.

- a) Water of bitterness that brings a curse
- 4. Loosen the woman's hair.
 - a) Suggests a state of mourning
- 5. Puts grain in woman's hands
- 6. Woman swears an oath.
 - a) If you have not committed adultery,
 - (1) Be immune to the water of bitterness.
 - b) If you have committed adultery,
 - (1) Lord make you a curse.
 - (a) thigh waste away
 - (b) abdomen swell

VI. Numbers 5:23-28

- A. Priest writes these curses on a scroll.
 - 1. Washes these words off into the water of bitterness
- B. Priest takes the grain offering to the altar.
 - 1. Waves the grain offering
 - 2. One handful is offered as a burnt offering.
- C. Has the woman drink the water
- D. Result
 - 1. If guilty:
 - a) Abdomen swells.
 - b) Thigh wastes away.
 - c) She is a curse among her people.
 - d) She is barren.
 - 2. If innocent:
 - a) No consequences
 - b) She is free.
 - c) She will be able to conceive children.

VII. Numbers 5:29-31

- A. A summary of this law
 - 1. If a man suspects his wife of adultery, but has no evidence, he takes her to stand before the Lord.
 - 2. The priest does what is prescribed here.
 - 3. The man is not held responsible for any guiltiness.
 - 4. The woman incurs guilt, if she is guilty.

- a) If she is innocent, she incurs no guilt.

VIII. Numbers 6:1-12

A. What is a Nazirite?

1. The text assumes that this is a known thing.
 - a) This (or something like it) must have been an accepted practice in the Ancient Near East.
2. Nazirite means one who is dedicated (“to separate oneself”).
3. Historically, we know there were two kinds.
 - a) Permanent Nazirites
 - (1) Samson
 - (2) Samuel?
 - (3) John the Baptist?
 - b) Temporary Nazirites
 - (1) Usually for one year
 - (2) This became common in first-century A.D.
 - (a) The length of time had been reduced to one month.
 - (3) This passage appears to deal with temporary Nazirites.
4. Similar to being a priest
 - a) Additional restrictions
 - b) “Holy to God”
 - c) But anyone could do it (male or female, non-Levite).

B. Why did one take a Nazirite vow?

1. Dedicate oneself to a specific task?
 - a) Could be a military task?
2. Out of a sense of duty?
3. A demonstration of one’s willingness to serve God?

C. Rules for the Nazirite

1. Takes a vow dedicating himself to God
2. Eat no products of the vine
 - a) No wine
 - b) No grape juice
 - c) No grapes or raisins
 - d) No seeds or skins
3. Don’t cut hair.
4. Don’t go near a dead person.
 - a) If he accidentally comes across a dead person:
 - (1) Shave head on 7th day.
 - (2) Bring two pigeons to the Tabernacle on 8th day.
 - (a) One for sin offering
 - (b) One for burnt offering

- (c) Priest will make atonement for his sin (coming across a dead person).
- (3) Consecrate his head
 - (a) Male lamb for guilt offering
- (4) The clock starts over on the designated period of time.

IX. Numbers 6:13-21

- A. When the time of the vow is up
 - 1. Male lamb as a burnt offering
 - 2. Ewe lamb as a sin offering
 - 3. Ram as peace offering
 - 4. Unleavened bread
- B. Priest offers it all to the LORD.
- C. Nazirite shaves head.
 - 1. Throws hair on the fire under the peace offering
- D. Nazirite and priest eat boiled ram's shoulder and one unleavened bread.
- E. Then the Nazirite is freed from his vow.
 - 1. He can drink wine.
- F. These offerings are the minimum.

X. Numbers 6:22-27

- A. Priestly prayer
 - 1. Used frequently in Israel today
- B. Priests were instructed to bless the Israelites with this prayer.
 - 1. May God bless you and protect you.
 - 2. May God be merciful to you.
 - 3. May God bestow his favor on you.
 - 4. May God give you shalom.
- C. Why is this prayer placed here?

“However, a satisfactory explanation of the occurrence of the Priestly Benediction in its present setting has yet to be found.” (Milgrom, p. 51)

XI. Conclusion

- A. Why these laws and why here?
 - 1. Chapters 1-10 are about getting organized for the rest of the journey to the Promised Land.

- a) Chapters 1-2 were about getting organized militarily.
 - b) Chapters 3-4 were about the Levites getting organized to transport the Tabernacle.
 - c) Chapter 7 describes that parade of gifts given by the leaders of Israel to the service of the Tabernacle.
 - d) Chapter 8 describes the consecration of the Levites.
 - e) Chapter 9 describes the celebration of the second Passover.
2. I don't know why these laws and why here.
- a) Milgrom says Chapters 1-10 are establishing purity in Israel so that God will be able to remain in their midst.
 - (1) These laws are clarifying what the people of Israel need to do in order to be pure.
 - (a) They all describe activities that involve the Tabernacle and the priests.
 - b) My best guess:
 - (1) These laws are representative.
 - (a) Almost any laws could have been listed.
 - (i) But in the context of the Levites, Priests, and Tabernacle, laws that somehow related to these were better than others.
 - (b) They represent the law-giving activity of God.
 - (2) They are leaving Sinai as an ordered people.
 - (a) They are not the mob that left Egypt.
 - (b) They are organized, disciplined, lawful, and God-centered.
- B. Why didn't God give all the laws at once?
- 1. Surely, he didn't forget some.
 - 2. The giving of the Law was intended to be an on-going process.
 - a) It was not a once-and-for-all event.
 - b) They will be elaborated on and filled out over time.
- C. Why is there only provision for a woman suspected of adultery and not a man?
- 1. The ancient world had a different understanding of marriage.
 - a) The main purpose of marriage was the production of legitimate offspring.
 - (1) It was important that each child be known to be the offspring of his or her mother and father.
 - b) "Maternity is always known, paternity is always in doubt."
 - (1) This is just a biological reality.
 - (2) The paternity of a child is known only on the word of the mother.
 - (a) So, the absolute faithfulness of the mother is critical to determining legitimacy.
 - (3) The faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the father does not call into question the legitimacy of the children.

- c) So, assuring the faithfulness of wives was of paramount importance.
- D. The provision of a law for a wife suspected of adultery improved conditions for women.
 - 1. How such women were treated in other parts of the ancient world:
 - a) Trial by ordeal in the ancient world
 - (1) Common in ancient world

“This method was ‘an appeal to divine judgment to decide otherwise insoluble cases that cannot be allowed to remain unresolved.’” (Ashley, p. 123)

- (2) Trial by ordeal elsewhere:
 - (a) Subjected the accused to ordeals that were inherently harmful
 - (i) Innocent had to survive the ordeal, therefore accused was guilty until proven innocent.
 - (b) Punishment was pronounced separately from the ordeal.
 - (c) Outcome was immediate. (In Numbers it is not indicated how long it will take for the result to be apparent.)
- 2. How does this law improve things?
 - a) This “ordeal” is not harmful to the innocent.
 - b) There was no additional punishment outside the “ordeal.”
 - (1) In Leviticus 20:10, the punishment for adultery is death.
 - (2) Even the guilty are not put to death.
 - (3) In this case, the punishment is left entirely up to God.
 - (4) No human being is authorized to carry out any punishment on this woman.
- 3. This is consistent with the “Nudge” that Sacks used to explain why God did not do away with slavery in the law.
 - a) God did not give a law code that would institute a utopia.
 - b) God just sprinkled the law with relatively minor improvements.
 - (1) The “Nudge”
 - (2) God wanted people to have the experience of discovering and implementing further improvements along the same lines.
 - (a) The law planted the seeds of future change.