

## *The Nazirite and the Aaronic Blessing*

### Good morning, saints!

This is the 7<sup>th</sup> presentation on the Book of Numbers. As we saw earlier, the Hebrew name of the book is *B'Midbar* – which means “*In the Wilderness*”. We pick the story up as the Israelites are still at Mt. Sinai. They'll soon start out for what they all expected would be two–three week stroll in the park to the Promised Land.

Today, the text touches upon two topics that we've probably heard about in our Christian lives but with which we are not really familiar – the Law of the Nazirite and the Aaronic Blessing. Both are contained in Numbers Chapter 6. Let's start by reading the Law of the Nazirite:

➤ READ: NUMBERS CHAPTER 6

### THE NAZIRITE<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 6 of the Book of Numbers is the only place in the Torah (the five books of Moses) where the Nazirite is referenced; however, we come across the Nazirite in a number of other places in Scripture. We find people who have taken the Nazirite vow in the New Testament era, such as the Apostle Paul, who participates in Nazirite ritual at the suggestion of James (brother of Jesus) as proof to other Jews that Paul approves of, honors, and obeys the Torah even though he believes Jesus is the Messiah.

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes spelled “Nazarite”

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Here are the individuals in Scripture usually cited as being Nazirites – whether permanently or for just a period of time:

- Sampson ((Judges 13:4–5) was definitely a Nazirite
- Samuel *may* have been a Nazirite.<sup>2</sup>
- John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) *may* have been a Nazirite but this is not entirely certain, as we shall see... and
- The Apostle Paul (Acts 18:18)

Church history also has James the Just, the brother of Jesus, as a probable Nazirite. He was called ‘the Just’ by everyone from the Lord’s time to ours, since there were many James in the New Testament. *“He was consecrated from his mother’s womb. He drank no wine or liquor and ate no meat. No razor came near his head, he did not anoint himself with oil, and took no baths.”*<sup>3</sup>

A person became a Nazirite by taking a vow consecrating himself/herself “unto ADONAI” (verse 2). The law seems to imply that the practice had already been in operation during the time of Moses, and he further defined and regulated it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel’s mother Hannah vows that “a razor shall never come on [Samuel’s] head” (1 Sam 1.11). Commentators typically take that to mean that, like Samson, Samuel would be a Nazirite from birth. But a Nazirite had two additional requirements -- abstinence from wine, beer, grape juice, grapes and raisins (Nm 6.4) and no contact with dead people (Nm 6.6ff), and there is no indication that Samuel kept these requirements.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius: The Church History. A New Translation with Commentary, trans. By Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publ. 1999), 2.23.3, p. 81

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, (Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Mi, 1976, ), p. 370

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**Q: Was Jesus a Nazirite?** Some mistakenly believe that Jesus was a Nazirite, but that is doubtful. The main reason Jesus is sometimes called a Nazirite is caused when people assume that a **NAZIRITE** and a **NAZARENE** are the same thing. Jesus IS called a Nazarene, because that's what people who lived in Nazareth – his hometown – was called. However, the Town of Nazareth had nothing directly to do with Nazirites.

To become a Nazirite, you took a vow, and both men AND women could become Nazirites. There were two basic kinds of Nazirites: the temporary Nazirite and the Nazirite for Life.

- 1) **Temporary** referred to a Nazirite who took a vow for a specified period of time, and when the time was up, he/she was no longer a Nazirite. The length of the vow is not specified – it looks like the shortest time period was for 30 days...
- 2) **“Nazirite For Life”**: the person was born as a Nazirite and would die as a Nazirite – meaning that it was his MOTHER that made him a Nazirite while still in the womb.

The peculiar thing about the office of *“Nazirite For Life”* is that there is no such instruction in the Scriptures that establishes that practice. We read about it, but that only means that the practice *existed*, not that it was a God-ordained practice. The Mishnah<sup>5</sup> distinguishes between an ordinary *'perpetual Nazirite'* and a *'Samson-Nazirite'* – both were 'for life,' but the perpetual Nazirite was allowed occasionally to shorten his

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<sup>5</sup> A collection of oral laws compiled about 200 AD that forms the basic part of the Talmud.

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hair if it became burdensome, after which he brought the three sacrifices for his defilement. He could also be defiled by the dead, in which case he had to undergo the prescribed purification and then continue his vow. However, the *Samson-Nazirite* was not allowed under any circumstances to cut his hair (like Samson); just as Samson obviously came into contact with dead bodies (he was a major cause of the dead bodies), the *Samson-Nazirite* was allowed to come into contact with death without afterwards undergoing any ceremonial (Judges 14:8, 15:15).

So, the “*Nazirite For Life*” was not a scripturally ordained office. What we just read in Numbers 6 is the requirements for the *temporary* Nazirite, which means that this person is a Nazirite only for a designated period of time and usually for a specific purpose.

#### WHY BECOME A NAZIRITE

A good question might be, “*why would someone want to become a Nazirite in the first place?*” The Scriptures don't specifically say why the practice was established and then formalized in Scripture. The primary motivation apparently was to fulfill a vow made to God that if He would grant some kind of special favor to them (e.g.; cure of a disease, restore their wealth, or (if a woman) the birth of a son, then in return the person promised to turn their lives over to God for a specified time.

Now, having a Nazirite in your community was very beneficial – when you see a person walking around with that wild hair, you knew

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that it was in response to God fulfilling a prayer. In other words, the person was a walking billboard stating that **God does answer prayer**. The prophet Amos describes the desire to become a Nazirite was as a gift from God – but Amos also observed that the community had degenerated to the point that they corrupted Nazirites and made them drink wine (Amos 2:12).

As Amos observed, the practice of offering to become a Nazirite became as casual as making it part of a bet. For instance: *"If that my wife doesn't make better matzos than that lady, I'll be a Nazirite"*. Also, people began to become Nazirites from Pharisaical motives and to be publically noticed as pious people. We learn from Jewish records that sometimes priests would preside over the sacrificial offerings of *hundreds* of Nazirites at a time. In fact, one high priest – Simeon the Just – uniformly refused, except in one instance, to partake of the trespass-offering of Nazirites, since such vows were so often made rashly, and the sacrifice was afterwards offered reluctantly, not with pious intent.<sup>6</sup>

#### PAUL AND NAZIRITE VOWS

We see the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament Book of Acts, joining with four men who must have in some way violated their Nazirite vows, and so they had to be purified.

➤ **READ: ACTS 21:20–28**

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<sup>6</sup> Edersheim, p.370.

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This is obviously talking about four Nazirites who have been somehow defiled during the period of their Nazirite vow. We know this because what we see them doing is entering the required seven-day purification period that involves purchasing the proper sacrifices AND having one's head shaved. While shaving one's head was also the procedure at the END of the Nazirite vow, a seven-day period of purification was NOT required so far as we know. We're told that Paul also had *his* head shaved and went through the purification procedures right along with these men.

- This can only mean one thing: that Paul himself was under the vow of a Nazirite at that time.

It was *not* permitted that someone should join others in purification rituals just to show sympathy or as some act of unity (e.g.; *shaving head when friend has cancer*). This ceremony involved God's instructions and thus was serious business. Paul wasn't putting on an act – he had taken a Nazirite vow and was voluntarily ending it with the realization that he had to start it all over again – essentially extending the period of time when he had to observe the restrictions.

Paul went thru this ritual at the request of the Apostle James, who was concerned that unconverted Jews thought that being a Christian meant that you have to oppose the Laws of Moses. By shaving his head, Paul would be walking around Jerusalem indicating he had undergone a Nazirite ritual and thus an indication that Paul respected the Laws of Moses.

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And this is not the only time Paul took a Nazirite vow. In Acts 18:18, we read

“And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his haircut, for he was keeping a vow.”

We're not entirely sure what the situation was here. The Nazirite vow was supposed to end at the Temple, and the hair itself was to be offered as a sacrifice and burned. However, Scripture says that Paul had his hair cut in Cenchrea, not Jerusalem. Now, possibly when he finished his vow, he had his hair trimmed a bit (somewhat similar to how the perpetual Nazirite could trim his hair), and then later he went to Jerusalem when he had his head shaved. Or, perhaps at this time in history during the diaspora, a person was allowed to shave his head at some location other than Jerusalem and then bring it to the Temple. We just don't know.

#### SET APART

'Nazirite' comes from the Hebrew word 'nazar', meaning "set apart."<sup>7</sup> Taking a Nazirite vow was a voluntary action. Unlike Levites – both priests<sup>8</sup> and ordinary Levites – who were born into lifelong service to God, a Nazirite was just any ordinary Israelite who made a personal

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<sup>7</sup> Strong's Concordance, 5144

<sup>8</sup> A priest was also from the Tribe of Levi but from the bloodline of Aaron

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choice to dedicate themselves wholly to God and to His service for a specified time period.

So, did becoming a Nazirite mean that person had become – albeit temporarily – a priest or Levite? No. In fact, some believe that the Levites were *excluded* from taking the Nazirite vow. This is implied by the opening statement in verse 1, which is "...Tell the people of Israel..."

- Remember: Levites were no longer spoken about or counted as among "the people of Israel" – there were the twelve tribes of Israel and then there was the Tribe of Levi. God set aside the Levites for Himself; they had just gone through an entirely separate census<sup>9</sup>, and later we'll find they don't even get their own large portion of territory in the Promised Land<sup>10</sup>.

So, as of this point in Jewish history (Numbers Chapter 6), if the Levites were to be allowed to take part in the Office of Nazirite, God would have normally said... "...*tell the people of Israel, and tell the sons of Aaron...*" – or something like that.

Now we do find implications later on in the Bible that some Levites DID take on the vow of a Nazirite. Why they would do that is a mystery. It may be that ordinary Levites were permitted by the rabbis to make Nazirite vows to be more priest-like.

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<sup>9</sup> Numbers chapter 3

<sup>10</sup> Numbers chapter 35



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#### VOW REQUIREMENTS

As we read in verses 1–6, men and women may become Nazirite. In taking the vow, they agreed to do the following:

- 1) Abstain from anything coming from the grapevine (e.g.; wine). Grapes, in any form, were off limits.
- 2) Cannot cut their hair (or beard) during the time of their vow. This was a way of outwardly demonstrating to the world that this man or woman was under a special vow. And...
- 3) They are prohibited from approaching a dead body<sup>11</sup> – even that of a close relative – during the vow of a Nazirite. Separation from death – the effect of sin – was essential during the period of the vow. Death only came about because of disobedience to God in the Garden.

The Nazirite, by means of the vow to follow these three basic and straightforward requirements, is given a set-apart status with personal restrictions as stringent even *more* than a priest. For example:

- A priest most certainly CAN drink wine and in fact does during some of the rituals, although he is prohibited from drinking wine during the period just before he comes on duty or as he approaches the sanctuary. A Nazirite cannot drink wine at all, nor even sample the source of wine, grapes.

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<sup>11</sup> Not just that the Nazirite cannot *touch* a dead body but he/she cannot even *go near* a dead body.

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- Priests also could not touch dead bodies, but they could tend to their deceased parents, grandparents, spouses and children. Nazirites were not come near a corpse under any circumstance and this included his/her close family.

In some ways, the requirements upon the Nazirite even approached that of the High Priest. A Nazirite's hair is called 'nazar'. The Hebrew word 'nezer'<sup>12</sup>, from the same root word, means "consecrated" and is inscribed on the holy crown worn by the High Priest [Exodus 29:6; Leviticus 8:9]; it is also the term used for the "crown" of the holy anointing oil used to sanctify people and objects to Yahweh [Leviticus 21:12]. However, while in some ways they were similar, Nazirites and priests were also different: priests were *not* allowed to have long hair while Nazirites were not allowed to even comb their hair less by accident some hair is pulled out. So the office of Nazirite was unique.

But, as usually occurred over time, manmade rules and doctrines entered the scene. Sometimes requirements were added to these three basic requirements, and sometimes some Nazirite prohibitions lifted by the rabbis.

#### WHY PROHIBITION AGAINST EATING GRAPES?

Why was the Nazirite prohibited from eating grapes? We're not directly told, but Jewish scholars have a theory. It begins with the fact that Israel is often symbolized by the grapevine and that God established what is called the Sabbath year rest. As soon as the Jews

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<sup>12</sup> Strong's Concordance, 5145

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settled in the Holy Land, they began to count and observe seven-year cycles. Every cycle would culminate in a Sabbatical year, known as 'Shemittah', which literally means "to release":

"Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. Your harvest's after growth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year." Leviticus 25:3-5

As God rested on the seventh day and people must rest on the Sabbath<sup>13</sup>, people in Israel must "rest" from the work of cultivating their fields and give-up personal ownership of their fields; whatever produce grows on its own is considered communal property, free for anyone to take.<sup>14</sup> In every Sabbath year (every 7th year), the land of Israel is consecrated to the Lord, and vineyards are not to be tended. Not only must grapes be left on the vines to rot, even the much necessary twice-yearly pruning of the grapevines was suspended. **The land was set-apart and set-aside for God.** So just as the Nazirite set-apart for God for a certain time and thus symbolized the basic purpose of Israel: holy and set apart for Yehoveh. Just as the grapevines are not to be touched, so Nazirites are not to touch or eat grapes during the term of their vow. In fact, the word 'nazir' (from which we get the word Nazirite) came to be used as the term to be used for *pruning grapevines!*

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<sup>13</sup> In Numbers 15:32-36, a man was caught collecting sticks on the Sabbath and subsequently was stoned to death.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/562077/jewish/What-Is-Shemittah.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/562077/jewish/What-Is-Shemittah.htm)

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#### MISTAKEN IMPRESSIONS

There are some mistaken impressions about Nazirites:

- Nazirites were *not* some kind of hermits or people who went off to lead an aesthetic lifestyle in the desert and eat only locusts and honey as John the Baptist did. IF John *was* a Nazirite, the locusts and honey he ate, and the generally solitary life he led, were no part of the Nazirite requirement. Other than abstaining from anything coming from the grapevine, Nazirites had no special food restrictions<sup>15</sup>.
- During the period of their vow, they could marry, so celibacy was not a part of it.
- Nazirites dressed normally. They generally held normal jobs and worked at everyday crafts.
- What marked them as different, more than anything else, was **the wild hair**. During the period of their vow, a Nazirite not only did not cut his/her hair, they didn't even *comb their hair* in order to avoid possibility that some hair would be pulled out, thus seeming to cut the hair and invalidate the vow.

Otherwise, Nazirites remained fully part of normal Israeli society.

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, they still had to eat Kosher, as did all Hebrews

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#### JOHN THE BAPTIST

John has been often called a Nazirite, but Scripture does not specifically identify him as such. The assumption that he was a Nazirite comes from two factors:

- The angel who appeared to his John's father Zechariah said that John must never drink wine or strong (yayin or shekar).<sup>16</sup>
- Jesus noted that John did not drink wine.<sup>17</sup>

Scripture does not say that John did not cut his hair. He did wear a shirt made of camel hair and his appearance was evidently shocking for some<sup>18</sup>; from this, and the fact that he lived in the desert, people assume that his hair was long and disheveled.

The fact that John obtained from strong drink, led an ascetic lifestyle and *may* have long and wild hair, however, is not *necessarily* an indication that he was a Nazirite because Nazirites weren't the only Jews in that era to have wild or long hair, or to abstain from wine or strong drink. One well-known group who did the same thing was the Rechabites. The prophet Jeremiah takes some Rechabites to the

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<sup>16</sup> "He must never drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth." Luke 1:15

<sup>17</sup> "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil." Luke 7:33

<sup>18</sup> "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? Look, those who wear fancy clothes are in the homes of kings!" Matthew 11:7-8

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Temple and offers them wine to drink but they decline on account of their family tradition that they supposedly descended from Moses' father-in-law.<sup>19</sup> As part of their tradition included not growing grapes or even planting seeds of any kind and that they must live in tents. So, while they abstained from grapes, it was simply family tradition stemming from an apparently unknown reason. Essentially they determined to live like the Bedouin and other extra-biblical records indicate that they allowed their hair to grow long.

By John the Baptist's day, many groups and individuals were critiquing the corrupt priesthood, and it led to many kinds of strange cults and reactions. John, by all accounts, was an ascetic. He lived out in the wilderness, and was apparently quite a strong-willed individual. He ate very restricted diet and wore sackcloth and never cut his hair. However, we would have found hundreds of individuals who were must like John in their appearance, for such was the guise of many of those who chose the ascetic lifestyle.

Another reason to doubt that John the Baptist may not have been a Nazirite is that he was already a Levite by ancestry. As previously noted, a strict reading of Numbers 6 would indicate that the office of Nazirite was not for Levites. Now, it may well be that a *modified* Nazirite vow was employed in different eras. For example, Sampson drank wine and was in the presence of dead bodies, but he didn't cut his hair.

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah 35

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So, while we must be careful in assigning various biblical characters that would come centuries after the law of Numbers 6 with the title of Nazirite, a writer who I greatly respect – Alfred Edersheim – regarded John as a Nazirite.<sup>20</sup>

#### INVALIDATING THE VOW

The primary way that a Nazirite was made ritually unclean was by coming near a corpse. Actually, a Nazirite did not have to actually *touch* the body of a dead person to compromise his vow – simply being in the same room with a dead person was sufficient to contaminate and therefore terminate the period of the Nazirite's vow. This meant that the person had to undergo a seven-day period of purification (like what those four men and Paul went through in Acts 21) and then start the *vow all over again from the beginning!*

**So you can imagine how carefully a Nazirite avoided the dead.**

- You're at the end of a one-year long vow, and you're walking down the road to the temple with your best friend to finalize the vow and – he has a heart attack and dies on the spot. **You have to start all over again!**

To complicate things – as the rabbis often did – they came up with several new defilements that would cause a person to invalidate their vow and cause them to have to repeat the period of their vow all

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<sup>20</sup> Edersheim, p. 376

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over again. To give you an example of this, sometime just after Christ rose, **Queen Helena**, who was the wife of a King who ruled over a city-state up in Mesopotamia, was a gentile who had converted to Judaism. Her son (the prince of her city-state) was about to go off to war and she made a vow that if her son returned safely, she would become a Nazirite for seven years (an unusually long period of time in that era). Her son did come back safe, so she followed through and took the vow of a Nazirite.

After the seven-year period was completed, she went to Jerusalem for the typical ritual to mark the successful ending of the vow; when she arrived, some Rabbi told her that she had not properly observed all the Nazirite requirements and told her she had to start all over again (which she did). But near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> seven-year period, she became impure (there is no record of the cause of the impurity) and so she had to do yet another seven years. So all told, she was a Nazirite for 21 years, but fourteen of those years was due to her actions – at least that was according to the Rabbis.

#### AARONIC BLESSING

The 6th chapter of Numbers, the Lord commands the priests to bless the people by invoking His Name upon them and gives the priests the words by which they are to invoke His blessing.

Note: it is unclear why the Nazirite Vow and the Aaronic Blessing is included in the same chapter of Numbers. I would speculate that perhaps it is because these two topics both involve a



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consecration: the individual Nazirite unto ADONAI and the invoking the Name of the Lord upon the people indicates that they are set-apart or consecrated to ADONAI. However, it could simply be because the translators of the Septuagint just combined what otherwise might be two separate chapters.

**READ:** NUMBERS 6:22–27

GOD spoke to Moses: "Tell Aaron and his sons, This is how you are to bless the People of Israel. Say to them, GOD bless you and keep you, GOD smile on you and gift you, GOD look you full in the face and make you prosper. In so doing, they will place my name on the People of Israel— I will confirm it by blessing them."

The fact that this blessing immediately follows the law concerning the Nazirite has always been a puzzle to scholars. What is clear, though, is that while the laws of the Nazirite are speaking to a select group, the Aaronic Blessing is upon Israel, collectively. Actually this blessing is a very early Hebrew poem.<sup>21</sup>

This blessing was spoken each day immediately following the morning sacrificial offering. One of the primary duties of the priests was to bless Israel; yet this blessing makes it clear that they MUST use Yehovah's words and *not* their own. By this requirement, both the people and the priests know that the priests are *only conduits* from

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<sup>21</sup> Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry, David Noel Freedman, p.229

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God; the priests themselves have no power to bless or curse. They can only *remind* the people of what God promises and what He does.

The benediction is usually translated as 'Lord' or 'Adonai', but the original Hebrew says 'Yehoveh'. Yehoveh bless you, Yehoveh shine His face upon you, Yehoveh give you Shalom. I love this blessing. It sums up God's intention, attitude, and character. Notice who this blessing is specifically aimed at: the people of Israel. This is *not* a blessing for the whole world. It is only for that set-apart group that He calls "My People" – Israel – and those joined to Israel. That has never changed.

Today, a person joins Israel by means of faith in Jesus the Messiah. And that is the requirement if a person wants to partake in God's active blessing today.

#### INTRO TO 'LIVE LONG AND PROSPER'

I want to relate a little known fact about a famous action that uses this blessing as its basis – but most are unaware of it. First, I have to lay the groundwork, and it begins with the Hebrew letter 'shin'.

#### What is the greatest commandment?

"Jesus answered: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6: 4–9:

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"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

This passage is called the Shema by Jews, Shema = hear.

Shema (Shm'a) Israel; Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad. *"Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."*

The Shema is prayed at least twice a day. Note that the Israelites were to write these words on the doorposts of their homes. Today, that's what the **mezuzah** is all about – scripture parchment inside the mezuzah that is on doorposts of a Jewish home.

Shema (Shm'a) – "hear" – not just hear with ears, but to HEAR, UNDERSTAND and OBEY. Write the words on your hearts!

When Christians today are asked: "what is the greatest commandment", many would start with the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Jesus' statement – "You shall love the LORD..." etc., **we usually omit "Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One"**. Why? Church traditions. Beginning with 2<sup>nd</sup> century with the Emperor Constantine and continuing on today, many church leaders and denominations made a conscious effort to push out anything Jewish because they were afraid that the church would fall back into a works-righteousness.

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**SLIDE:** the first letter of the Shema is the Hebrew letter shin, seen here.

Notice that it has three peaks, symbolizing its original picture as a fence of protection.

**SLIDE:** You can see the letter on the front of the typical box containing the Jewish mezuzah<sup>22</sup> that is attached to the doorposts of orthodox Jewish homes

HERE'S A PERSONAL EXAMPLE: relate the story of JWs asking whether I was Jewish because I have a Mezuzah on my doorpost.

Notice the symbol on the front of the mezuzah: three Hebrew letters pictured as one, and all three are intertwined – Shin, daled, yod

- symbolizing the title 'Shaddai' – All Mighty God

This is a Jewish mezuzah, not Christian modification. The three-peaked symbol symbolizing the first letter of Shaddai and Shema – Three flames, One God – right before their eyes everyday when they enter & leave their houses!

- **Q: OK – what does the three-peaked letter Shin this all have to do with the famous Aaronic Blessing?**

When the high priest gave the Aaronic blessing previously mentioned, he would hold each of his hands in the form of the letter Shin and bring

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<sup>22</sup> The 'Mezuzah' technically is the parchment inside, not the wooden box – symbolic of words hand-written on your heart by God.

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them together and bless the people (demonstrate). The fingers are positioned in a manner which leaves five "windows" through which God's blessings flow to the congregation. The general idea is to separate each hand into three "sections"—leaving spaces on each hand between the thumb and index finger, and between the middle and ring finger. The fifth space is completed by the way the two thumbs are configured together.<sup>23</sup>

The Aaronic blessing gesture was done by Jewish *kohanim* – priests – during the worship service. Even today, descendants of the Kohen (priests) perform the blessing in synagogues on certain holy days.



***shin***

The blessing is done with both arms held horizontally in front, at shoulder level, with hands touching, to form the Hebrew letter "**shin**." The priest would look out at the congregation through these spaces in his hands. It is believed that the spaces allude to verses in Song of Songs (2.8–9).

"My beloved is ... standing behind our wall, he is looking through the windows, he is peering through the lattice."

God peeks through the cracks in the wall and the fence. In other words, **God watches over and protects the Jewish people even when He is hidden from view**.

During the synagogue service, the worshippers are not supposed to look at the kohanim while the blessing is being given. The reason is

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/894583/jewish/The-Blessing.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/894583/jewish/The-Blessing.htm)

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partly superstitious and partially practical – to focus our attention on the words of the prayer itself, rather than on the personalities of the kohanim.

#### LIVE LONG AND PROSPER

- Who recognizes this gesture? (do it).

Who's familiar with Star Trek? What was the phrase and hand gesture used by Mr. Spock? *"Live long and prosper"*. The salute was devised and popularized by Leonard Nimoy, who portrayed the half-Vulcan character Mr. Spock on the original *Star Trek* television series in the late 1960s. When he developed it, he did it to summarize the Aaronic prayer.

In his autobiography I Am Not Spock, Nimoy wrote that he based it on the Priestly Blessing performed by Jewish Kohanim with both hands, thumb to thumb in this same position, representing the Hebrew letter Shin (ש). Nimoy wrote that when he was a child, his grandfather took him to an Orthodox synagogue. There he saw the blessing performed and was very impressed by it. Like most Jewish children, young Leonard Nimoy ignored the prohibition of looking at the priest during the blessing. He writes:

*"The special moment when the Kohanim blessed the assembly moved me deeply, for it possessed a great sense of magic and theatricality... I had heard that this indwelling Spirit of God was too powerful, too beautiful, too awesome for any mortal to look*

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*upon and survive, and so I obediently covered my face with my hands. But of course, I had to peek.*" (From his autobiography, I am Spock.)<sup>24</sup>

Leonard survived his peeking unscathed, and saw the kohanim extending their fingers in the mystical "shin" gesture. That moment remained with him for life, and he drew upon it years later when he invented the Vulcan salute. Nimoy modified this two-handed gesture into one hand held upright to give the blessing/greeting. So, technically, the Vulcan greeting is not the same thing as the ceremonial Jewish blessing. Still, the resemblance is close enough to evoke instant recognition among knowledgeable Jews.

Did Gene Roddenberry know, at the time of filming, that the Vulcan salute was based on a Jewish ritual? That question remains unanswered. My sense is that he probably didn't, or he would have objected to it, on the grounds of its being too "Judeo-Christian." More likely, he thought it was a weird variation of the peace sign. By the way, "Captain Kirk" (William Shatner) is also Jewish. The phrase "Set your phasers to stun," however, is found nowhere in the Torah.

#### CHRISTIAN COUNTERPART OF THE BLESSING

The name Jehovah or Lord is repeated three times in the Aaronic prayer of blessing. The Jews think there is some mystery; and we know what it is, the New Testament having explained it.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://qz.com/352855/the-secret-history-behind-leonard-nimoys-spock-salute/>

### *The Nazirite and the Aaronic Blessing*

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

2 Corinthians 13:14

Here we are directed to expect the blessing from the grace of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, the love of the **Father**, and the communion of the **Holy Spirit**; each of which Persons is Jehovah, and yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord. Thus the Aaronic blessing carries over to the blessing in 2 Corinthians:

- **The first sentence**, “The Lord bless you and keep you,” may be regarded as *the benediction of the Father*. It is the preservation of love. It is God who has up to now kept you from falling – kept you from dying. We are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”
  - “He will keep the feet of His saints.”
  - “He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”
- **The second sentence** is *the benediction of the Son*, or the joy of Divine Grace—“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

“The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you”—this means the favor of God—may it be given to each one of you! You know where God’s face is. The face of God is the personality of God as he shows it to the world. If you have *seen Me*, you have *seen the Father*...

Incident with Jerome Hines – singing to JW lady standing for son in opera, no headway witnessing, – weeping uncontrollably – it



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wasn't you that was singing, and the words of love went deep into my soul.<sup>25</sup>

- **The third blessing** is surely that of *the Holy Spirit*. "The Lord lift up His Countenance upon you, and give you peace." Here is the fellowship of peace. Then follow the words, "And give you peace". **When a man or woman knows that God approves of them, then they enter into peace. When God is smiling at us, why worry when the world fronds at us?** What matters though all the world should censure if Jehovah approves His servant? A look of approval from God creates a deep, delightful calm within the soul. Brothers and Sisters, may the Holy Comforter work this peace in you all!

In Hebrew, this benediction is in the *singular*. It is not, "The Lord bless you (plural), and keep you (plural)," but, "The Lord bless *you (singular)*, and keep *you*." Why? Because the people of God are one and He views them as one—and so the blessing comes upon the entire Church as a whole. But, also every individual Believer may take the whole of this benediction home to himself.

#### THE DIVINE AMEN.

The Divine Amen is in the last verse of chapter 6:

"And they shall put **My Name** upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them."

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<sup>25</sup> For those who may never have heard of Jerome Hines, here's a video:  
[http://wn.com/Jerome\\_Hines#/videos](http://wn.com/Jerome_Hines#/videos)

*The Nazirite and the Aaronic Blessing*

Remember – Christ our High Priest puts His Name upon us! Just like the priests put the name of God on the people, Christ puts His name on us.<sup>26</sup>

➤ **The Aaronic blessing is an expression of the hope that we have that one day we will see His face.**

- Song: Oh Lord You're Beautiful by Keith Green

Oh Lord, you're beautiful  
Your face is all I seek  
And when your eyes are on this child  
Your grace abounds to me

May He keep you when you are in great temptation that you do not yield!

- May He keep you from your own evil heart of unbelief that you do not turn away!
- May He keep you from the world's traps and bait-and-switch pleasures!
- May He keep you from quitting the Truth of God, even as He keeps His own elect!
- The Lord bless you with all good and keep you from all evil! They are well kept whom God keeps and none are kept besides.

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<sup>26</sup> Revelation 3:12 "The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and **I will also write on them my new name.**"