

TORAH PORTIONS

Payago

This Week's Torah Portion

NUMBERS 4:21-7:89

פרשת נְשׂא / Parashat Nasso

In this week's guide...

Our **COMMENTARY** from Rabbi Jason invites us to consider not only the content of this week's Torah portion, but it's context: *Shavuot*. Why is it that we read these verses just before or after the celebration of Pentecost? What is it about the giving of the Law and the Spirit that connects to this particular *parsha*? This powerful teaching invites us to reconsider the whole of life. It's an invitation to renew your commitment to live fully-present to Presence in your daily experience.

known passage in the entire book of Numbers: the Aaronic Blessing. If you've ever attended one of Rabbi Jason's ministry events, you've probably heard hear him pray/sing the words of Numbers 6:24-26—it's powerful! This article studies the Hebrew grammar in Numbers AND Greek phrasing found in John's Gospel.

You will be comforted and challenged.

OVERVIEW

For those who enjoy technical details, this week's portion—*Parashat Nasso*—has the largest number of letters, words, and verses of any of the 54 weekly Torah portions. It addresses priestly duties, camp purification, and restitution for wrongs committed. Three significant passages stand out: the introduction of the Nazirite vow, the giving of the Aaronic or Priestly Blessing in order to put God's name upon the people, and the twelve days of ceremonies surrounding the consecration of the Tabernacle.



def: [n. fem.] commandment, stipulation; teaching. After tôrô (Torah), mişwô (Mitzvah) is the most important word for God's legislation; hence the later Jewish coming-of-age celebration is called bar or bat mitzvah, "son or daughter of the commandment (miṣwô)."

taken from the Lexham Theological Wordb

TORAH PORTIONS

FUSION GLOBAL WITH RABBI JASON

Weekly Torah Portion

פרשת נשא / Parashat Nasso

Numbers 4:21-7:89

COMMENTARY

by Rabbi Jason Sobel

Torah portion *Nasso* is always read either on the *Shabbat* before or after *Shavuot*/ Pentecost. Why is this? What is the connection between *Nasso* and *Shavuot*? According to Jewish tradition, Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil on the sixth day. In Hebrew, the letter *vav* represents the number six and is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.



The first place the letter *vav* occurs is Genesis 1:1, where it functions as the conjunction "and" as in "heavens **and** earth." When humanity sinned in the Garden, we broke the connection between heaven and earth. The number six and the letter *vav* allude to how God would restore that connection.

There is something grammatically unusual in the Hebrew text of Genesis chapter 1 regarding the sixth day, "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Gen 1:31). This day of creation is the only one in which the definite article "the" is used about the day. A definite article always points to something specific. In this case, Jewish tradition holds that the "sixth day" is pointing to the sixth day of the month of Sivan, the day that God gave the Torah on Mount Sinai on the first *Shayuot*.

Rashi, the famous rabbinic commentator, read this verse as follows: "There was evening and morning only because of the sixth day of Sivan, the date the Torah was given as Sinai."

In the Sermon on the Mount, Messiah *Yeshua* underscored the importance of Torah in the context of creation when He said,

Do not think that I came to abolish the *Torah* or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the *Torah* until all things come to pass. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:17-19

But why are the Torah and God's Word in general so foundational to correcting the sin of Adam and Eve? The Torah connects the upper spiritual world of heaven with the lower physical world of earth.

The Torah helps reconnect heaven and earth and restore the direct spiritual relation lost through the Fall. God came down from heaven to earth at Mount Sinai out of a desire to restore the union between Himself and humanity, the spiritual and physical.

Parasna Jasso

The Torah is an embodied spirituality that seeks to infuse physicality with spiritual reality and meaning. For this reason, the Torah speaks about food, clothing, intimate relations between a husband and a wife, holy days, times and season, etc. God wanted Israel to find spiritual purpose in every physical action. Everyday secular activities become sanctified with spiritual meaning when performed unto the Lord in fulfillment of His will.

We don't just study Torah and God's Word for the sake of knowledge and information. It's not merely a quest to be learned and gain intelligence. We study, practice, and obey God's Commandments to infuse our physicality with spirituality. Our physical reality, including our very bodies, becomes imbued with divine life and godliness. As a result, we are increasingly transformed and conformed to the image of God. This concept is alluded to in the name of this week's Torah portion. *Nasso*, the Hebrew name of this Torah Portion, actually means "to elevate" or "lift up." God's commandments and His Word strengthen us in our inner man, raising us to a higher spiritual level and reality.

For example, *Shabbat* sanctifies time, while the Tabernacle and Jerusalem Temple sanctified space. Tithing sanctifies our work, and saying a blessing before we eat (and for Jewish folks, eating Kosher) sanctifies the act of eating and the food itself. Torah infuses meaning into the mundane to elevate it.



In the morning, the first thing observant Jews do is wash their hands, known as *netilat yadayim*, "the raising of hands." Torah is about turning ordinary actions and routines into moments of extraordinary holiness. The Hebrew word for God's commandments is *mitzvot*. *Mitzvot* comes from the root word meaning "to bind," for the Lord intended the biblical commandments to bind us and our will to Him. This bond is vital because anything tied to the Lord is elevated with Him.

Even in the New Testament, God's commandments are crucial. *Yeshua* said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him." (John 14:21). Although Christians are not obligated to keep all the Torah commandments, there is wisdom and revelation in understanding in implementing aspects of them. The Torah is part of the full inheritance of all believers, and even though there is no obligation, there is a divine invitation for participation. May the Lord grant understanding of how to apply both the Old and New in such a way that we become vessels for godliness and holiness that draw people to *Yeshua*.

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN

This week's Torah portion, *Nasso*, contains what may be the most well-known passage in the entire book of Numbers—*Birkat Kohanim*, the Priestly, or Aaronic Blessing (also known as *Nesi'at Kapayim*, the "lifting of the hands").

Again *Adonai* spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons saying: Thus you are to bless *Bnei-Yisrael*, by saying to them:

'Adonai bless you and keep you!

Adonai make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you!

Adonai turn His face toward you and grant you shalom!'

In this way they are to place My Name over *Bnei-Yisrael*, and so I will bless them."

- Numbers 6:22-27





Notice that God explicitly stated the purpose of this famous blessing: to place His name over the Children of Israel. Indeed, this blessing would be a source of comfort and hope to all who received it, but that was not its primary function. There should be no doubt that this blessing leads to the experiences it calls for, such as grace and *shalom*. But it would seem that ultimately experiencing these blessings served to place God's name over Israel.

The grammar of this final sentence is significant, both in the original Hebrew and in its English translation. Robert Alter, the contemporary Jewish scholar and Bible translator, renders the last clause, "...and I Myself shall bless them." He notes:

The device of emphasis—the insertion of the first-person pronoun 'ani before the conjugated verb, which because of its conjugation would normally make the pronoun superfluous—is not reflected in most translations. It is particularly important here because it underscores the idea of God's special relationship with Israel: after the pronouncing of the three-fold blessing, God's name, a kind of proprietorship, will be set over Israel, and God Himself will carry out the blessing.ⁱ

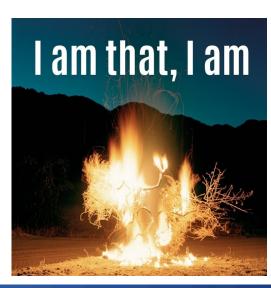
Wow! This blessing established God as the "owner" of sorts over Israel, a detail which suggests that He will consequently act on their behalf *directly*. This blessing is so much more than a "feel good moment"—it evokes God's personal and direct action in the lives of its recipients.

Now let's consider all of this information in light of *Yeshua's* words in His final recorded interaction with His Father, which is commonly called the "High Priestly Prayer" (the reason for this may suddenly become clear in a fresh way):

I have made **Your name** known to the men of this world that You gave Me. They were Yours; You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. - John 17:6 (emphasis added)

In this single verse, we see ownership ("they were Yours...You gave them to me") and an emphasis on giving God's name to the Twelve (disciples, rather than tribes). How did *Yeshua* give God's name? Many students have identified SEVEN "I AM" (*egō eimi* in Greek) statements by the Lord in John's Gospel. This detail cannot be a coincidence.

Friends, God's name is on you. The "Priestly Blessing" realized its fulfillment in our great High Priest, *Yeshua*, who revealed God's name in the flesh. In Him, "God Himself" carried out all of the blessings promised in the Torah. To be "in Messiah" is to experience God's grace, His shalom—His ownership. Hence, the Apostle Paul could say, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19b-20 / ESV).





BY THE NUMBERS

This week's Torah portion contains the Aaronic Benediction, a prayer given to the Priests to proclaim the Lord's name and blessing over the Children of Israel:

Thus you are to bless *Bnei-Yisrael*, by saying to them:

'Adonai bless you and keep you!

Adonai make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you!

Adonai turn His face toward you and grant you shalom!'

In this way they are to place My Name over *Bnei-Yisrael*, and so I will bless them."

- Numbers 6:24-27



Shema inscription on the Knesset Menorah in Jerusalem

This blessing opens with the Hebrew word *Koh*, which means "thus" and has the numerical value of **25**. Twenty-five is a significant biblical number and provides some incredible insight into the concept of blessing. There are 25 letters in the Hebrew words of the *Shema*, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One" (Deut. 6:4). The word "blessing" (*b'racha*) appears 25 times in the Torah. This detail demonstrates that all blessing comes from the Lord alone. As James the brother of *Yeshua* states: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17).

But of course, there is more! The following Hebrew words have the numerical value of 25:

Trust / Boteach And in Goodness / U'vetov And the Gold / V'HaZahav

Faithfully trusting (25) in the Lord alone (25 letters of the *Shema*) leads one to experience His blessing (25 times in the Torah) and goodness (25) both spiritually and materially, as symbolized by gold (25).

But of course, there is even more! The first word of the Bible that adds up to 25 is *VaYehi* ("Let there be"), as in "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). The light of the first day was the divine light that shines from the Face of God since He did not create the sun until day four of creation. This insight is significant because Israel's calling included being "a light to the nations" (Isa. 42:6). It's certainly no coincidence, then, that the Aaronic Benediction mentions the Lord's face shining upon those who are blessed.

As stated above, the words of this blessing begin with *Koh* ("thus"). The Hebrew Prophets used this word in prophetic utterances to admonish Israel for their failure to serve the Lord faithfully. For example, "Thus says the Lord" (*Koh Amar Adonai*). The Prophets called Israel to live up to the true meaning of (those 25 words of) the *Shema*: worship and serve the Lord alone and be a blessing and light to the nations. The Prophets began their warnings with the word *Koh* ("thus") to remind Israel of their mission and the promise of God's blessing that came with it.

This sense of calling is also underscored further by the number 25. God gave Israel a new identity and mission at Mount Sinai, specifically, "a royal priesthood and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). The Hebrew word for "priest" (*Kohen*) begins with these same letters that make up the word *Koh* ("thus"), which adds up to 25. The numeric value of "and a nation" (*VeGoy*) in this

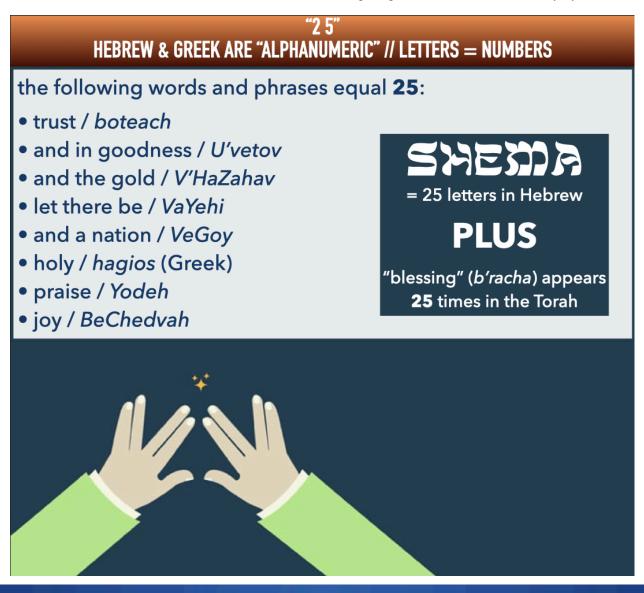
Paragna aggo

verse adds up to 25 in Hebrew as well. This calling and identity include believing Israel and the remnant of the Nations who place their faith in *Yeshua*. Today God's holy priesthood and royal nation are made up of Jewish and Gentile followers of the Messiah. What's astounding is the Greek word *hagios* ("holy") in this verse adds up to 25 as in: "He has saved us and called us with a **holy** calling—not because of our deeds but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Messiah *Yeshua* before time began" (2 Tim 1:9 *emphasis added*).



In addition, the Hebrew word *Yodeh* ("praise) and *BeChedvah* ("joy") also add up to 25. To fully receive the fullness of the Lord's joy (25), blessing (25), and goodness (25), one must fulfill their role as a royal, holy (25) priest who praises (25) the "Lord alone" (25 words of the *Shema*) as part of His nation (25), the Body of Messiah.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.





THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- It's not uncommon for us to "compartmentalize" our lives—living one way on Sunday and another the rest of the week. Have you noticed this? Why do you think we divide life up into "spiritual" and "physical" or "secular" or "natural"? How would life be different if you started to see the most mundane tasks as deeply spiritual? Try washing your hands the first thing in the morning, expressing gratitude for your physical existence and preparing yourself to take responsibility for the Lord's gifts.
- God has placed His name over His people and that includes you! The idea of belonging to God can be deeply comforting when we need protection or provision, but can also be profoundly challenging when we want to direct our lives on our own terms. Where are you right now? Does this reality comfort or challenge you? What are the practical, day-to-day implications of having God's name over your life?

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: Parashat Beha'alotcha / פרשת בָּהַעֵלֹתְּדְּ

TORAH Sunday / Numbers 8:1-14

Monday / Numbers 8:15-26

Tuesday / Numbers 9:1-14

Wednesday / Numbers 9:15-10:10

Thursday / Numbers 10:11-34

Friday / Numbers 10:25-11:29

Saturday / Numbers 11:30-12:16

Prophetic Reading (Haftarah): Zechariah 2:14-4:7

New Covenant Reading: *Matthew 14:14-21*

ⁱ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: a Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 1. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 499.