

# TORAH PORTIONS

## *Parashat Nasso*

THIS WEEK’S TORAH PORTION

## NUMBERS 4:21-7:89

*Parashat Nasso* / פְּרַשְׁת נָסֹה

### In this week’s guide...

Our **COMMENTARY** addresses a topic—or maybe we should say, an “issue”—that many would rather avoid, but everyone engages on a daily basis: SIN. Whether it’s an effort to avoid guilt or to continue practices that benefit us in some way, “sin” is something we might be inclined to gloss over in our Bible reading or studies. But ignoring sin will not make it go away. Neglect is not a solution. But this week’s *parsha* points us to the Answer!.....1

The **NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN** calls us to an unusual, distant place... “outside the camp.” Rather than skim through protocols related to leprosy or coming into contact with a corpse, this article pauses to uncover rich theological insight in this passage. In just a few verses, we discover prophetic signposts pointing to the Lord’s life. And His death. ....2

And our **HEBREW WORD STUDY** complements our Commentary article by analyzing the Hebrew word translators commonly render as “guilt.” This word’s range of meaning sheds a unique theological light on an issue that can easily burden us as we wrestle through the tensions of “spirit” and “flesh.” But take heart! Hope awaits as we jump from the Torah to the Prophets.....3

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### 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.

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### FUSION GLOBAL WITH RABBI JASON

#### Weekly Torah Portion

*Parashat Nasso* / פְּרַשְׁת נָסֹא

**Numbers 4:21-7:89**

#### COMMENTARY

*By Staff Contributor*

This week's *parsha* walks us through a series of communications between *ADONAI* and Moses, which he would then relay to *B'nei Yisrael*. Each of these communications deals with something different but always with giving instruction (the meaning of the word "Torah") to the people of God for a righteous and holy life. It is also interesting to note that *Nasso* covers a wide array of recipients of these instructions, from the Levites to the jealous husband to one taking a Nazirite vow and everyone in between.

But one element stands out rather dramatically as we look through the *parsha*:

*ADONAI* spoke to Moses saying, "Say to *Bnei-Yisrael*: Whenever a man or woman commits any sins against any person, thus breaking faith with *ADONAI*, that soul bears guilt. That person is to confess the sin he has committed, make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it to the one he wronged. But if that person has no close relative to whom to pay the restitution, the restitution belongs to *ADONAI*. It is to be given to the *kohen* along with the ram of atonement with which he is to make atonement for him. —Numbers 5:5-8

In contemporary Western society, there seems to be a complete downplay and disregard for sin or its effects on one's life, relationships, or walk with God. More often than not, it seems that a walk with God is rarely even a consideration for many people. Sadly, this spiritual and relational apathy is also a pertinent issue within the Body of Messiah.

But the Word tells us that when one sins, one incurs guilt. Since *ADONAI's Shechinah* (Presence) cannot dwell amid sin, the essence of guilt is a separation between the guilty and the Lord Himself. When we sin (or, more accurately, break covenant with God), we announce that whatever we are chasing after when sinning is more important to us than He is.

The astonishingly good news is that we serve a God who loves us and cherishes us so much that even when we intentionally erect a barrier of separation between Him and us, He still wants us to come back into His loving arms. He has made the way for us to experience this grandest of reunions: the sacrifice of *Yeshua HaMashiach*. His death on Calvary's cross completely atoned for sin once and for all, thus allowing the *Shechinah* to be in our midst through the power of the *Ruach HaKodesh* dwelling within us!

Repent, therefore, and return—so your sins might be blotted out, so times of relief might come from the presence of *ADONAI* and He might send *Yeshua*, the Messiah appointed for you. —Acts 3:19-20



*Egyptian Torah and Case*

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The other side of this discussion is that our misguided actions not only hinder our relationship with God but can also harm our relationship with others. Hence, Numbers 5 discusses the vital importance of God's children demonstrating the same grace and mercy *HaShem* has shown them. Therefore, we must work for the restoration of relationships with those we've wronged. This project of restoration and restitution is crucial for a healthy community. And this graced *shalom* is a physical expression of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

### NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN

*by Staff Contributor*

The opening section of the fifth chapter of Numbers is equal parts harsh and odd—"harsh" because it calls for the severe quarantine of folks with superficial skin issues and "odd" because it offers no resolution (e.g., "once the rash clears up, they can return"). Granted, other sections of the Torah (*c.f.* Leviticus 15) do offer a process of restoration, but in this *parsha*, the topic concludes with this account: "[This \*Bnei-Yisrael\* did, sending them outside the camp](#)" (Numbers 5:4). What does this passage of Scripture reveal about God and what correlations might it have with the New Testament?

One phrase at the end of verse three is essential if we hope to answer the first question: "the camp where I am dwelling among them." In this context, the emphasis is not on community health but God's purity and holiness. God directed the Children of Israel to remove the "defiled" individual "[so that they do not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst](#)" (Numbers 5:3b NASB, *emphasis added*). The physical issues listed are all evidence of the brokenness and futility of creation due to The Fall in Genesis 3. God didn't create humans to die, much less suffer with "leprosy." We know that "[the wages of sin is death](#)" (Romans 6:23 NIV). On a certain level, contact with a corpse represented interaction with the sin that brought death into the world. With the directives in Numbers 5, the holy God who cast Adam and Eve out of the garden similarly removed defiled individuals from Israel's camp.

Three specific "conditions" are listed in Numbers 5: leprosy, bodily discharge, and physical contact with a corpse. While it's true that these all have symbolic, theological implications, there is also a literal dimension to understanding them. This detail is significant in light of the life and ministry of *Yeshua*. British Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham points out that although "the New Testament upholds the moral side of these uncleanness regulations, it abolished each of the symbolic physical distinctions" mentioned here. Jesus touched the leprosy victim, was himself touched by the distraught haemorrhage [sic] sufferer and gave life to the dead through a transforming touch. In these ways he declared that those conditions which for centuries had separated even the elect people of God from God no longer mattered.<sup>21</sup> Isn't this incredible? Each person Israel needed to put out of their camp foreshadowed one of *Yeshua*'s miracles!



*Christ Healing the Leper*  
by Hans Schäufelein (1517)

Of course, this prophetic insight wouldn't have been particularly comforting to an individual suffering outside the camp. Hearing that "One day, the Messiah will touch and restore people like you" might not "make it all better," as they say. But what if there was an even deeper level of meaning here?

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site often called "Protestant Golgotha"  
(Jerusalem)

Our Messiah didn't just transform these prohibitions; He participated in the suffering of those who suffered exile. We read in Hebrews 13:12 that "*Yeshua also suffered outside the gate.*" He didn't just touch a corpse—He became a corpse. Last month we celebrated the fact that on the other side of His death and burial was resurrection. It is with this hopeful reality in view that the writer of Hebrews would go on to say (some scholars suggest this epistle was a sermon!), "*So let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing His disgrace. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come*" (Hebrews 13:13-14).

Israel's journey to the Promised Land required those suffering from certain infections to go outside the camp. On our journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, we join *Yeshua* outside the camp, empowered to bear any shame because we "*hold fast the unwavering confession of hope, for He who promised is faithful*" (Hebrews 10:23).

### HEBREW WORD STUDY: *asham* ("guilt") / אָשָׁם

by Staff Contributor

There is a verse in this week's parsha that addresses a foundational theological topic: guilt. In Numbers 5:6 we read, "*Whenever a man or woman commits any sins against any person, thus breaking faith with ADONAI, that soul bears guilt.*" The English word "guilt" is a translation of the Hebrew word *asham* (אָשָׁם). Its tri-consonantal root is:

- Aleph / א (1)
- Shin / ש (300)
- Mem / מ (40)

This word appears in Leviticus 4-6, typically in relation to "sin offerings." Consider: "*if the anointed kohen sins so as to bring guilt on [le'ashmat] the people—then let him offer for his sin which he has committed, a young bull without blemish to ADONAI for a sin offering*" (Leviticus 4:3, *emphasis added*). In *Parashat Nasso*, the context for *asham* is social ethics, specifically relating to issues such as theft. In [Judges 21:22](#), *asham* refers to breaking an oath. This sort of guilt is most intense in Israel's unfaithfulness to *ADONAI*, as described in Hosea 10:2,



Their heart became smooth.  
Now they will bear their guilt [*ye'shamu*].  
He will break down their altars.  
He will destroy their sacred pillars.

But there are some challenges when one attempts to translate *asham*. The primary issue is that this word "seems to center on guilt, but moves from the act which brings guilt to the condition of guilt to the act of punishment. In any particular passage it is often difficult to determine which thrust the word has."<sup>ii</sup> In other words, *asham* can refer to one's condition upon committing a sin or the punishment for that sin. A prime example of this sort of complexity is found in Psalm 34:21 (NASB),

Evil will bring death to the wicked,  
And those who hate the righteous will suffer for their guilt [*ye'shamu*].



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That entire clause (“suffer for their guilt”) is one word in Hebrew: *asham*. Hebrew scholar G. Herbert Livingston notes, “[*Asham*] may denote acts of sin, responsibility for sin, punishment, and even the aftermath of punishment. Perhaps, one may hold that the *asham* connotes the totality of alienation from God, including its consequences.”<sup>iii</sup> This understanding is of crucial importance. We might be prone to think of guilt as an infraction, an act (or even a series of actions) that violates a code or rule. Minor guilt *results* in demerits or detention. Major guilt *results* in jail time. But in a biblical sense, guilt—*asham*—potentially unites the action and the consequence. And that consequence ultimately leads to one’s utter “alienation from God.”



*Crucifixion* by Peter Paul Rubens (c. 1620)

Lest we fall into despair, the Hebrew prophets (who boldly exposed Israel’s “guilt”) offer us hope. God’s words through Hosea referenced the alienation *asham* brings:

I will go and return to My place  
until they admit their guilt [*ye’shamu*].  
Then they will seek My face.  
In their distress they will seek Me earnestly –Hosea 5:15

But notice the immediate response this declaration elicits in the prophet:

Come, let us return to *ADONAI*.  
For He has torn, but He will heal us.  
He has smitten, but He will bind us up. –Hosea 6:1

**We have hope in the face of our guilt because of *Yeshua*!** The healing and bandaging Hosea spoke of has been fully realized in Him. As we read in one of Isaiah’s most beloved prophecies,

Surely He has borne our griefs  
and carried our pains.  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
struck by God, and afflicted.  
But He was pierced because of our transgressions,  
crushed because of our iniquities.  
The chastisement for our *shalom* was upon Him,  
and by His stripes we are healed. –Isaiah 53:4-5

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

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### Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present **HEBREW WORD STUDY**

אָשַׁם

**אָשַׁם / *asham*: vb. to offend, to become guilty, to be guilty.**  
*The act of causing offense or doing wrong and therefore becoming guilty, or the status of being guilty.*

The verb can refer to the process of becoming guilty or the state of being guilty (e.g., Lev 4:13; 5:17–19; Jer 2:3; Ezek 22:4). It may also refer to the condemnation that results from being guilty, or perhaps being held accountable for the guilt of sin (Psa 34:21–22; Prov 30:10; Hos 10:2) or the punishment or destruction that results from sin guilt (Ezek 6:6; Zech 11:5).

taken from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

[fusionglobal.org](http://fusionglobal.org)

#### **THOUGHTS for REFLECTION**

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

- This week we considered what may be our greatest challenge on the “other side” of sin: **reconciliation**. More specifically, our Commentary highlighted the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the restoration process. How have you experienced the depth of the Father’s (vertical) love in the form of reconciliation? Is there anyone in your life who needs to receive your forgiveness and restoration (horizontal)?
- It’s easy to gang up on the Pharisees. The Gospels don’t present them in the most flattering light. But maybe we should ease up and reflect on our own lives. How do we treat the “unclean”—those sent out of the camp living on the margins of life? Perhaps change in us begins by asking the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to truly see such people throughout our day. If we “go to them,” we just might find ourselves in the company of *Yeshua* (who’s already there).

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**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Beha'alotcha* / פְּרַשַׁת בְּהַעֲלֹתָךְ

**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*

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<sup>i</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 42.

<sup>ii</sup> G. Herbert Livingston, "[180 נאס](#)," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 78.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.