

# O S S A N

FUSION  
WITH RABBI JASON



*with*  
**Rabbi Jason Sobel**

5784 - A YEAR OF OPEN DOORS

TORAH PORTIONS  
**Parashat Nasso**



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

# NUMBERS 4:21-7:89

*Parashat Nasso* / פרשת נשא

In this weeks guide...

### COMMENTARY..... 1

As we learn in this article, the titles for each week's portion typically come from a relatively insignificant word that appears at the beginning of the readings for a given week. One could argue that this *parsha*, in contrast, derives its title from one of the most beautiful, gracious prayers in all of Scripture. Let's journey deeper!

### NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

What's in a name? One of the highlights of an in-person ministry event featuring Rabbi Jason is when he prays the *Birkat Kohanim*, commonly known as the "Aaronic Blessing." But why did the Lord direct Aaron to perform this blessing? What effect would it have on the Children of Israel? What connection could any of this have to the Age to Come?

### HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

Few topics elevate the heart rate (or provoke an eye roll) like "SIN." Some preachers can't stop talking about it and others wouldn't dare bring it up for fear of offending folks. For centuries the dread of being damned for unforgiven sin has been an issue in Western Christianity. But what did the biblical writers mean when they referred to "sin"? Let's dig in and find out!



## OVER VIEW

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.



# Fusion Global

Weekly Torah Portion – *Parashat Nasso* / פרשת נשא | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

## COMMENTARY

*Parashat Nasso* commences with a census. One of the fundamental meanings of the word *Nasso* (נשא) is “lift up.” The heads of the children of Gershon were to be lifted up to be counted so that Moses knew just how many Levites of this family, and it eventually included the other families, were of the age to serve. This theme of “lifting up” is not just a physical act but a spiritual one, resonating throughout the text and inviting us to

This word appears frequently (in various Hebrew forms) throughout this *parsha*, often in connection with “burdens.” In Numbers 4:24, we read that the Gershonites’ job concerned “carrying burdens” (נחשא/*massah*). Specifically, they were to “lift up” particular items of the Tabernacle when the camp moved to their next place of settlement. It’s worth noting that *massah* is connected to the concept of “oracle,” as we see in Nahum 1:1, “The oracle [*massah*] concerning Nineveh—the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.”

We also find this word (*nasah*, the basis of *Nasso*) in the account of a man suspecting his wife of being unfaithful. If the woman were indeed with another man, she would “bear her guilt” (*v’ha’ishah ha’hi tisah et avonah* / see Numbers 5:31). Guilt is a burden one carries. After “Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle,” along with all the anointing and consecrating of its various parts, “the princes of Israel, heads of their ancestral houses,” came and “gave offerings” (see Numbers 7:1-2). Princes were themselves “lifted up”—men of elevated positions and prominence.

Going back a bit in the chronology of this *parsha*, we find an astounding use of this word relating to God Himself. In what has become known as the priestly blessing or the Aaronic benediction, God commanded Aaron and his sons to bless His people by saying, “*ADONAI turn His face toward you and grant you shalom!*” (Numbers 6:26). The phrase, “*ADONAI turn His face toward you*” in Hebrew is “*yisah ADONAI panav eilecha*.” There is a blessing when God looks upon someone. We should note that other English translations render that line, “*The Lord lift up His face to you*” (*NASB emphasis added*). To juxtapose this idiom, when we read in Genesis that Cain is angry because God didn’t accept his offering, his face “falls.” He became downtrodden and didn’t want to see God’s face. The blessing comes when God reveals His face to His people. His face shines light upon us; therefore, we have peace.

*Parashat Nasso* has incredible content. Delving into the Hebrew language reveals a deeper level of intrigue and insight. While a *parashat* typically derives its name from a less-commonly used word at its outset, one could argue that *Nasso* points us to that most powerful and transformative moment when God lifts His face toward His people.

### One parting thought...

There is another example of King David lifting up heads (i.e., taking a census, see 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21), but it did not go well. God certainly did not lift up His face upon David at that moment. When God lifts His face toward us—seeing us and shining His light in the darkness of this world—that is the only thing that matters, whether we are many or few.

# 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 4:17-20

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. Undoubtedly, this blessing leads to the experiences it calls for, such as grace and shalom. But it would seem that **the ultimate purpose for experiencing these blessings was 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. The contemporary Jewish scholar and Bible translator Robert Alter 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.<sup>1</sup>

Wow! This blessing established God as the “owner” of sorts over Israel, a detail that suggests He will act on their behalf. 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? Could it have been in His seven “I AM” (*egō eimi* in Greek) statements that students of Scripture have identified in John's Gospel? This detail harkens back to Moses' encounter at the burning bush (cf. Exodus 3) and 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.” The Aaronic Blessing prophetically foreshadows the scene John the Revelator beheld:

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the city, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, **and His name shall be on their foreheads.** Night shall be no more, and people will have no need for lamplight or sunlight—for *ADONAI Elohim* will shine on them. And they shall reign forever and ever! --Revelation 22:3-5 (*emphasis added*)



# Hebrew Word Study

## *chata* ("sin") / חָטָא

In Numbers 5:5-7, we read,

*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."

So much of the content we've read in Leviticus (and now in Numbers) addresses the issue of sin. More specifically, we see how the Lord provided the Children of Israel with a sacrificial system that made it possible for His holy presence to dwell amid their inevitable sinfulness. Ironically, so many believers are prone to juxtapose the Torah as "the Law" against the "grace" they perceive in the New Testament when the heart of these texts graciously provides the way for sinful humans to live in relationship with a holy God. Eugene Peterson offers a beautiful overview of Numbers:

The book of Numbers plunges us into the mess of growing up. The pages in this section of the biblical story give us a realistic feel for what is involved in being included in the People of God, which is to say, a human community that honors God, lives out love and justice in daily affairs, learns how to deal with sin in oneself and others, and follows God's commands into a future blessing. And all this without illusions.<sup>2</sup>

The passage we highlighted at the outset perfectly exemplifies what Peterson describes. More specifically, *ADONAI* was instructing Israel "how to deal **with sin** in oneself and others." The Hebrew word for "sins" (v 5, above) is *chattat* (חַטָּאת). It is a cognate of the root word, *chata* (חָטָא), which appears about 580 times in the Hebrew Bible. The tri-consonantal root of *chata* is:

- Chet (ח) / 8
- Tet (ט) / 9
- Aleph (א) / 1

While we might be prone to think of "sins" as the ethical violations we commit, the primary definition of *chata* is "to miss a mark or a way." We see an example of this "poor aim" in the description of soldiers from the Tribe of Benjamin (who had superb aim!) in Judges 20:16, "Out of all these troops there were 700 chosen men that were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss [*yachati*]" (*emphasis added*). Another instance is in Proverbs 8:36, "But whoever fails to find [*vechote'i*] me harms his life— all who hate me love death" (*emphasis added*). Now consider the way other popular translations render this phrase...

"he who sins against me wrongs his own soul" (NKJV)  
 "one who sins against me injures himself" (NASB)

This primary definition of sin/*chata* aligns with the words of *Yeshua's* brother *Ya'akov*, whose epistle at least one biblical scholar has described as "a form of Scriptural interpretation (*Midrash*) based on one or more portions of the Old Testament Scriptures [and] suggested that it was based on Psa 12:1-5." Here is what we see in James 4:17, "Therefore whoever knows the right thing to do and **does not do it**—for him it is **sin**" (*emphasis added*). One should not infer from these details that sin is only a failure to do the right thing. However, if "missing the mark"—often referred to as a "sin of omission"—is the fundamental essence of our sins, we should live with a sensitivity informed by this truth.

# FUSION

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

חטא

**חטא / chatah:** *miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt, forfeit, purify from uncleanness.*

The root occurs about 580 times in the [Hebrew Bible] and is thus its principle word for sin. The basic meaning of the root is to miss a mark or a way. It is used two or three times in Ugaritic to mean "sin."

The verb has the connotation of breach of civil law, i.e. failure to live up to expectations, in Genesis 40:1. Compare the international overtones of II Kings 18:14, and the accusatory thrust of the word, fault, in Exodus 5:7. The Egyptians had failed to supply straw for brick-making. Serious breakdown in personal relationship is highlighted by the verb, negatively in I Samuel 19:4, and 24:12 but by confession of Saul in 26:21.

taken from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

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## THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

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

- Cain is often depicted as a villainous character, and understandably so. Murder is evil and fratricide, in particular, is horrific. But Cain is also a mysterious, tragic figure whose worship God does not accept (for reasons not explained in the text). What might have happened if, rather than letting it fall, Cain "lifted up" his countenance towards the One who covered his parents' shame in the Garden?
- Words are never "merely" words—they are potent! God knew this when He instructed Aaron to bless the Children of Israel and, in doing so, place His name on them. As new creations who have been baptized into *Yeshua's* life, how has having His name on you changed your life? Were ways of thinking about yourself and life's challenges displaced by new perspectives that are anchored in His name being on your life?

# GLOBAL

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Beha'alotcha* / פרשת בהעלתך

## 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*

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

<sup>1</sup>Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 1. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 499.

<sup>2</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *Symphony of Salvation: A 60-Day Devotional Journey through the Books of the Bible* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2021), 15.

<sup>3</sup>G. Herbert Livingston, "638 תטח," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 277.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>James P. Sweeney, "James, Letter of," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).