

PARASHAT NASSO

FUSION
WITH RABBI JASON



with
Rabbi Jason Sobel

5786 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

TORAH PORTIONS
Parashat Nasso



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

NUMBERS 4:21-7:89

Parashat Nasso / פרשת נשא

In this weeks guide...

COMMENTARY..... 1

Parashat Nasso explores what it means for a community to live responsibly in the presence of a holy God. Through themes of service, restitution, consecration, blessing, and generosity, the parasha shows that holiness is not confined to worship rituals but extends into relationships, justice, and communal responsibility. Ultimately, the goal of covenant life is to create a community where the presence and voice of God dwell in the midst of the camp.

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

The New Testament tie-in wrestles honestly with the difficult passage of the sotah ritual, encouraging readers not to avoid challenging sections of Scripture. Rather than reducing the text to an outdated cultural practice, the tie-in frames it within the broader biblical theme of covenant relationship, highlighting God's holy jealousy and His desire for the faithful devotion of His people. This theme ultimately finds fulfillment in the relationship between the Messiah and His bride.

HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

The Hebrew word *mikseh* highlights the biblical theme of covering as protection, preservation, and holiness. From Noah's ark to the coverings of the Mishkan, Scripture presents coverings as a means by which God guards life and creates sacred boundaries around His presence. Ultimately, mikseh reminds believers that God's covering is not meant to restrict but to preserve, protect, and draw His people into relationship with Him.



OVERVIEW

For those who enjoy technical details, this week's portion—Parashat Nasso—contains the most 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 Aaronic or Priestly Blessing, which puts God's name upon the people, and the twelve days of ceremonies surrounding the consecration of the Tabernacle.

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Parashat Nasso / פרשת נשא | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

COMMENTARY

Parashat Nasso is the longest parasha in the Torah, and at first glance, it feels like a collection of unrelated material. We move from census instructions for the Levites, to laws about purity in the camp, to the strange ritual of the *sotah*, to the vow of the Nazirite, to the priestly blessing, and finally to the lengthy description of the tribal offerings that dedicate the Mishkan.

But when you step back, a single thread begins to emerge: what does it look like for a community to live responsibly in the presence of a holy God? The parasha begins with another census, this time focusing on the Levite clans responsible for transporting the Mishkan. Each family receives a distinct task.

The Gershonites carry the curtains and coverings. The Merarites handle the frames, bars, and pillars. The Kohathites transport the most sacred vessels. Everyone has a role, and the Mishkan only functions properly when each part of the community fulfills its responsibility.

But the Torah quickly moves from sacred logistics to moral responsibility within the camp. If someone commits a wrong against another person, the text says they must confess and make restitution, adding a fifth to what was taken. Sin here is not treated as a private matter between the individual and God. It damages the community.

Living near the Mishkan means learning that holiness affects how we treat one another.

Then comes the difficult passage about the *sotah*, the woman suspected of adultery. The ritual is uncomfortable for modern readers, but within its ancient context, it served as a safeguard. Instead of a husband taking matters into his own hands or responding with violence, the situation was brought before God and mediated through priestly authority. The point again is that unresolved suspicion and broken trust cannot simply linger in a community that lives in God's presence.

Next, we encounter the Nazirite vow, a voluntary act of dedication in which a person abstains from wine, avoids contact with the dead, and allows their hair to grow as a visible sign of consecration. What's striking is that holiness here is not limited to priests or Levites. An ordinary Israelite could step forward and say, in essence, "For a season, I want to set myself apart for the Lord." The Torah leaves room for moments of intensified devotion within the life of the community.

Then we arrive at one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture: the Birkat Kohanim/Priestly Blessing. (Num 6:22-27 TLV)

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!

These words were not meant to be poetic decoration. They were spoken over the people regularly, placing the Name of God upon Israel. Amid laws, responsibilities, and rituals, the Torah reminds us that the ultimate goal of covenant life is blessing: God's protective care, God's gracious presence, and the gift of *shalom*.

The parasha closes with the dedication of the Mishkan, where each tribe brings identical offerings over twelve days. The repetition in the text is intentional. Every tribe brings the same gift. No tribe gives more. No tribe gives less. Before God, the tribes stand in equal dignity as partners in the covenant.

And then the final verse offers a quiet but powerful moment. Moses enters the Tent of Meeting and hears the voice of God speaking to him from above the Ark, from between the cherubim. That is the destination of everything in this parasha. Organization, justice, dedication, blessing, and generosity; all of it creates a community where God's voice can be heard.

Because when a people takes holiness seriously—not just in worship, but in relationships, responsibility, and devotion—the Presence of God is not distant. It speaks in the midst of the camp.

New Testament Tie-In

Occasionally, our reading plan brings us to passages that are ... unsettling. This is the hidden blessing of staying on a course of Bible engagement (like Torah portions) that brings you through all the texts: you have to deal with the uncomfortable sections. And we should note that glossing over the hard texts is a way of dealing with them; it's just not a fruitful way of doing so.

So, let's consider the jealous husband and the water of the curses of bitterness.

In Numbers 5:11–31, we see an elaborate ceremony involving a married couple that has stirred up some controversy in certain circles. Jewish scholar, Robert Alter, provides some helpful background: *This troubling and also fascinating ritual is the only clear-cut instance of trial by ordeal in the Bible. It became the basis for a whole tractate of the Talmud, Sotah ("the straying woman"), and with the concern of the status of women in recent scholarship, it has been the subject of voluminous discussion and debate.... The ordeal, moreover, is based on a kind of archaic magic, however one seeks to square it with loftier versions of monotheism.*¹

When people hold Scripture accountable to contemporary cultural presumptions, this is the sort of thinking that often emerges. In an effort to make God look "respectable," modern scholarship reduces the inspired Scripture to "archaic magic," probably inspired by adjacent pagan cultures. Don't blame God for this—blame Hammurabi!

How can we understand passages like this faithfully?

Well, if the Torah (and the Hebrew Bible, for that matter) was written "for the sake of the Messiah," one could argue that the **ultimate** purpose of these texts is not their immediate application but their prophetic significance. More pointedly, all marriages—including the one described in Numbers 5—point to the relationship of *Yeshua* and His church (see Ephesians 5). More than a literal ritual for ancient Hebrews—which we can assume it was—this passage reveals the Lord's covenantal relationship with His people.

The keyword for us might be "jealousy." First of all, we know that this is describing a scenario in which there is no proof that the wife in question actually committed adultery. Rather, "a spirit of jealousy" comes over the husband. What did the husband do? Nothing. There is a ruach *qin'ah* that initiates the proceedings (not evidence or eye witness accounts). The Hebrew word *qin'ah* appears in Exodus 20:5 as the Almighty prohibits idolatry (i.e., spiritual adultery), "For I, *ADONAI* your God, am a jealous [*qanna/אנן*] God."

One might say, "Isn't it bad to link God to a jealous husband? Jealousy is not a virtue!"

Not so fast. Not all jealousy is created equal. When it's an expression of control, which is typically based on fear (of loss), jealousy certainly is not a virtuous quality. But God doesn't control anything (that way) because He is sovereign. His rulership is secure, one might say "eternal" even. Furthermore, God does not experience fear because fear is the very thing that love drives out, and God is love (see 1 John 4:8, 18).

But the Hebrew term *qin'ah* suggests zeal and the longing for that which is rightfully yours, which contrasts with envy, the desire for that which belongs to someone else. What if we understood the spirit of jealousy this way: as the heart of God, zealously longing for the full devotion of the bride He has purchased with His own blood? Perhaps the difficulty of Numbers 5 finds resolution in James 4:4–5, "You adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that in vain the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit which He made to dwell in us"?

Hebrew Word Study

mikseh [מכסה] / “covering; protection”

The Hebrew word *מכסה* *mikseh*, commonly translated as “covering,” comes from the root *כסה* *kasah*, meaning “to cover,” “conceal,” or “protect.” At its core, *mikseh* describes something placed over another thing for shelter, preservation, or separation. While simple in form, the word carries rich theological significance throughout Scripture.

The first appearance of *mikseh* occurs in Genesis 8:13, when Noah removes the covering of the ark after the floodwaters recede. The covering had served as a protective barrier, preserving life through judgment until the appointed time of emergence. From the beginning, *mikseh* is associated with preservation, protection, and divine timing.

The word appears most prominently in the Torah’s descriptions of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Exodus repeatedly refers to the coverings placed over the Tent of Meeting: “You are to make a covering for the tent out of ram skins dyed red, and a covering of fine leather over it” (Exodus 26:14). These coverings protected the sanctuary and the sacred furnishings within it from exposure, weather, and defilement. What is striking is that the beauty of the Tabernacle was largely hidden beneath layers of coverings. Inside were gold furnishings, the menorah, the ark, and the manifest presence of God. Outside was an ordinary-looking exterior of skins and coverings. Holiness was concealed beneath humility and protection.

This pattern echoes throughout Scripture. God often hides glory beneath simplicity. The wilderness tabernacle was not outwardly impressive compared to Egypt’s monuments, yet it carried the presence of the living God. Likewise, Isaiah prophesied concerning the Messiah: “He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him” (Isaiah 53:2). Divine glory is not always wrapped in outward splendor.

Theologically, *mikseh* also points toward the biblical idea of atonement and mercy. To cover something in Scripture is frequently connected with grace. Sin is “covered” through forgiveness (Psalm 32:1). Shame is covered. Vulnerability is covered. Exposure is not the final word in God’s covenant relationship with His people.

At the same time, coverings in Scripture are not merely about concealment, but about readiness and holiness. In Numbers 4, the priests carefully covered the sacred objects of the Tabernacle before transporting them. The holy things were not to be handled casually or exposed carelessly. The *mikseh* established reverence and boundaries around what belonged to God.

Practically, *mikseh* invites reflection on what we allow to shape and guard our lives. Scripture presents God Himself as a covering and refuge for His people. Psalm 91 speaks of abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, protected beneath His wings. In a world marked by exposure, vulnerability, and instability, we are reminded that God’s covering is not restrictive but preserving.

Ultimately, *mikseh* reminds us that God does not merely reveal His presence; He also guards it. His coverings preserve life, protect holiness, and create space for relationship. Beneath His covering, His people

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HEBREW WORD STUDY

מכסה

מכסה / mikseh n. covering; protection

מִכְסָּה denotes a protective covering, spread, or overlay. In every instance, it shields something holy or precious—from Noah’s ark (Genesis 8:13) to the wilderness tabernacle and its furnishings (Exodus and Numbers). The term conveys shelter, preservation, and separation from defilement.

מִכְסָּה threads through Scripture from flood to wilderness, portraying God’s unwavering commitment to protect His people and His presence. Whether stretched over a timbered ark or a golden altar, the covering proclaims a gospel of shelter under atoning grace, carried forward until Messiah Yeshua Himself is fully revealed.

Taken from Lexical Summary at biblehub.org

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

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

- Parashat Nasso repeatedly emphasizes responsibility within the covenant community. In what ways do your actions, attitudes, and relationships contribute either to the health or strain of the spiritual communities around you? How might God be calling you to greater faithfulness in the roles and responsibilities He has entrusted to you?
- The priestly blessing reminds Israel that the ultimate goal of covenant life is the presence and favor of God. What would it look like for you to live more consciously aware of God’s presence throughout your daily life? How might that awareness shape the way you approach worship, relationships, and personal devotion?

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*.

¹ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 492.