

# OpenTheo

## April 13th: Numbers 6 & Mark 9:1-29

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The Nazirite. The Transfiguration.

Some passages referenced:

Numbers 5:2-3 (the holiness of the camp); Leviticus 27 (vows); 2 Samuel 11:6-13, 1 Samuel 21:4-6, Deuteronomy 23:9-14 (consecration and wartime); Leviticus 25:5, 11 (untrimmed hair and unpruned vines); Leviticus 10:9 (the priests and wine); Leviticus 21:10-12 (the high priest and dead bodies); Judges 13:3-5, 1 Samuel 1:11, Luke 1:13-15, Acts 18:18 (Nazirites and vows in Scripture); Leviticus 8:22-29 (priestly ordination); Leviticus 4:32 (a ewe lamb for a commoner's sacrifice); 1 Chronicles 23:13 (the Aaronic priesthood and blessing); Psalm 67, 121 (allusions to the blessing).

2 Peter 1:16-18 (Peter refers to the Transfiguration); Exodus 24:16-18 (six days before ascending the mountain); Deuteronomy 32:5, 20 (faithless generation).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Numbers chapter 6 even the seeds or the skins. All the days of his vow of separation no

razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy.

He shall let the locks of his hair of his head grow long. All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall not go near a dead body, not even for his father or for his mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he is holy to the Lord.

And if any man dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day he shall shave it, on the eighth day he shall bring two turtle doves or two pigeons to the priest to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned by reason of the dead body. And he shall consecrate his head that same day, and separate himself to the Lord for the days of his separation, and bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering, but the previous period shall be void, because his separation was defiled. And this is the law for the Nazarite, when the time of his separation has been completed.

He shall be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and he shall bring his gift to the Lord, one male lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish as a sin offering, and one ram without blemish as a peace offering, and a basket of unleavened bread, loaves of fine flour mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and their grain offering, and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring them before the Lord, and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering, and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of peace offering to the Lord, with the basket of unleavened bread. The priest shall offer also its grain offering and its drink offering.

And the Nazarite shall shape his consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head, and put it on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offering. And the priest shall take the shoulder of the ram, when it is boiled, and one unleavened loaf out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them on the hands of the Nazarite, after he has shaped the head of his consecration. And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the Lord.

They are a holy portion for the priest, together with the breast that is waved, and the thigh that is contributed. And after that the Nazarite may drink wine. This is the law of the Nazarite.

But if he vows an offering to the Lord above his Nazarite vow, as he can afford, in exact accordance with the vow that he takes, then he shall do in addition to the law of the Nazarite. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his son, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel. You shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.

Numbers chapter 6 describes a special vow, not entirely dissimilar to becoming a temporary monk or nun perhaps. The person taking a Nazarite vow would be offering themselves and their service to the Lord in a voluntary vow. Vows were common in the life of Israel.

Someone for instance could vow something to the Lord, often in response to or in hope of a blessing. And the Nazarite vow is more of a special vow. The nation is holy to the Lord, set apart from the other nations.

But the greatest weight of holiness falls upon the shoulders of the priests. But the Nazarite is someone who takes on voluntarily a greater degree of holiness, commits themselves to a life of separateness in a more special way. One could imagine persons who had taken such a vow forming model communities or being examples within their specific communities of a more dedicated form of life.

The earlier part of the book of Numbers is concerned with a number of these sorts of dedicated persons, particularly with the Levites. But also in the beginning of Numbers chapter 5 we see the concern that everyone maintain a certain degree of cleanness within the camp. "...Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead.

You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell." In the case of people who are presenting a vow to the Lord, if they were presenting a person in a special vow, in this Nazirite vow for instance, some ransom or tribute would have to be offered, as Leviticus chapter 27 dictates. Coming before the Lord brought the person to the Lord's attention and required a ransom or tribute to ensure that that attention was not for judgement. Now in many ways Nazirites are temporary priests and we'll see many of the similarities between the Nazirite and the priest and even the high priest as we go through this.

We can also see other characters that were temporarily set apart in a more holy way. People going to war seem to have to pay some sort of muster tax for the census and also to have a temporary holy status, as we see in the way that David talks about the men who are with him in 1 Samuel chapter 21 or the way that Uriah the Hittite will not go back to his home and sleep with his wife in 2 Samuel chapter 11 verses 6 to 13. Priests and Levites were a sort of standing army but the army when it was mustered and going out to war had to keep a certain degree of holiness.

Deuteronomy chapter 23 verses 9 to 14 describes this. When you are encamped against

your enemies then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing. If any man among you becomes unclean because of a nocturnal omission then he shall go outside the camp.

He shall not come inside the camp but when evening comes he shall bathe himself in water and as the sun sets he may come inside the camp. You shall have a place outside the camp and you shall go out to it and you shall have a trowel with your tools and when you sit down outside you shall dig a hole with it and turn back and cover up your excrement. Because the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.

The first born sons of Israel also needed to be de-consecrated. They were set apart to the Lord and they had to be redeemed. All of these aspects of consecration and de-consecration are seen in places like Leviticus chapter 27, we see the first born in Exodus chapter 13 and here we see the character of the Nazarite who follows many of these patterns.

The Nazarite is one dedicated or consecrated to the Lord. In Leviticus chapter 25 verses 5 and 11, untrimmed vines are referred to as your Nazarites. There's an analogy between untrimmed hair and unpruned vegetation.

Vegetation is the hair of the earth and in both of these cases there's something dedicated to the Lord. The hair is associated with glory. We also see such terminology applied to the consecrated head, to the royal crown or to the high priest's diadem.

Women could also become Nazarites. The Nazarites didn't perform priestly functions, they didn't get to eat of the priestly food but they were similarly dedicated to the Lord and they had a closeness and a holiness to the Lord that was similar to the priests. Some of the requirements that they had to observe are similar to those that are placed upon the priests.

Leviticus chapter 10 verse 9 for instance referring to the priests, drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die, it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. Now the restrictions on the Nazarites seem to go even further. They're not just avoiding wine, they're avoiding all the fruit of the vine and all products from the vine and they're also avoiding it not just when they go into the house, they're not serving in the temple, they're avoiding it all the time for the period of the duration of their vow.

In Leviticus chapter 21 verses 10 to 12 the requirements of the high priest are interesting here. The priest who is chief among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose nor tear his clothes. He shall not go in to any dead bodies, nor make himself unclean, even for his father or for his mother.

He shall not go out of the sanctuary, lest he profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. I am the Lord. The same requirement to avoid all dead bodies is expected of the Nazarite and indeed if the Nazarite ends up accidentally having contact with a dead body his whole vow to that point is nullified and he has to start over again and the sacrifice that he has to perform at this point with the guilt offering is described within this chapter.

We have a number of examples of Nazarites in scripture. Nazarite vows typically that lasted for the entirety of a person's life. Although these weren't normal, these are the examples that we have most prominently in scripture.

In 1st Samuel chapter 1 verse 11 of Samuel, Of Samson in Judges chapter 13 verses 3-5, Luke chapter 1 verses 13-15 of John the Baptist, We see Paul taking a vow in the book of Acts that may be a Nazarite vow. It certainly seems to have similar features. Acts 18 verse 18, After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brothers, and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

At Sancreia he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. The Nazarite would have to offer a sacrifice for deconsecration, to return to normal life. And as he sacrificed that, he was also offering up the token of his service, the time that he had been dedicated in offering up his hair.

If his vow were broken, part way through touching a dead body for instance, the hair would not be offered and he would have to start again at the beginning. To complete the vow, the Nazarite had to bring a burnt offering, loaves, grain and drink offerings, sin offering and peace offering. It was very costly.

Male lamb a year old, a ewe lamb a year old and a ram. This is quite a significant sum of money that it would cost to get all of these elements. But we should notice the parallels with the sacrifices of Leviticus chapter 8, where the high priest and his sons are being dedicated for their service.

Particularly in Leviticus chapter 8 verses 22-29. Then he presented the other ram, the ram of ordination. We've seen that this is similar to the peace offering, although it's a variation on it for the ordination rite.

And Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram and he killed it. And Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he presented Aaron's sons and Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet.

And Moses drew the blood against the sides of the altar. Then he took the fat and the fat tail and all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two

kidneys with their fat and the right thigh. And out of the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord he took one unleavened loaf and one loaf of bread with oil and one wafer and placed them on the pieces of fat and on the right thigh.

And he put all of these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons and waved them as a wave offering before the Lord. Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord.

And Moses took the breast and waved it for a wave offering before the Lord. It was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination as the Lord commanded Moses. The priest also gets to eat the shoulder of the ram of the peace offering for the Nazarite.

It's a greater degree of the peace offering that's received by the Lord and his servants from the normal peace offering. It's a suggestion that there's a higher degree of consecration of the offerer here. And so more of their offering is being eaten by the Lord and his servants.

The main difference is the substitution of a ewe lamb for the bull of the sin offering. And Leviticus chapter 4 says that a common person had to offer a ewe lamb but the priest offered a bull. The hair of the consecrated head is shaved off and put on the fire of the sacrifice of the peace offering.

The glory of the hair that has grown during that period of dedication to the Lord is being offered to him as a sign of the fulfilment of all of that. And this was one of the ways in which a commoner could draw nearer to the Lord. You didn't have to be a priest to do this.

This could be something that anyone could take up. With the presence of Nazarites among the people, people taking either temporary vows or longer term vows and maybe living in communities of those who had taken such vows, there would be a testimony to the status of Israel as holy to the Lord. Not just the priests but something that was more common to the general people.

This chapter ends with the threefold blessing of Aaron. God desires to bless his people and especially significantly he wants his people to bear his name. This was one of the great tasks of the Aaronic priesthood.

In 1 Chronicles 23 verse 13 we read, This blessing has a poetic form. There are three, then five, then seven words in each line. And there are 15, 20 and 25 letters in these words.

This blessing was a particularly significant one in Israel's history, a particularly prominent one and we see it being alluded to in places like Psalm 67 and Psalm 121. It calls for the Lord to bless, to make the person prosper while preserving them from evil, maybe

preserving them from the temptations that can come with blessing. The Lord make you know the warmth of his presence and kindness, his face shining upon you and be gracious to you.

You feel the goodness of God and you feel the warmth of his favour. The Lord turn his attention to you and grant you wholeness and rest. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

It's as if God gives you eye contact, that God looks at your particular situation. He's not just giving you the warmth of his general benevolence to his people, he's giving you more particular favour and attention. And the importance of all of this is that God wants to put his name upon his people.

He wants his people to bear his name, to be identified as his people and for him to be identified as their God. When we talk about bearing the name of the Lord, this is part of what we have in mind. We are people who are blessed by the name of the Lord.

We are people who have the name of the Lord placed upon us. We are identified with him and he is identified with us. And we should never act in a way that treats that as an empty or a light thing.

That would be bearing the name of the Lord in vain. A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which we could learn from the institution of the Nazarite today? Mark chapter 9 verses 1 to 29 And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power. And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good that we are here.

Let us make three tents, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is my beloved son, listen to him.

And suddenly looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

And they asked him, Why did the scribes say that first Elijah must come? And he said to them, Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah

has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him. And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.

And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, What are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute, and whenever it seizes him it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.

And he answered them, O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me. And they brought the boy to him, and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, How long has this been happening to him? And he said, From childhood, and it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him.

But if you can, do anything. Have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief. When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, He is dead.

But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. Mark chapter 9 is a turning point in the narrative.

If the baptism of Christ initiated the first phase of Jesus' ministry, the transfiguration initiates the second. In the first phase, Jesus announced the kingdom, and in the second phase he announces his coming death. And a great shadow will come over the story at this point.

Our passage begins with a strange statement about people not tasting death until they've seen the Son of Man coming in his glory. In each of the synoptic gospels, the transfiguration comes after such a statement. The transfiguration seems to be an anticipation of the later coming of Christ.

Daniel 7 and the glory of the Son of Man, for instance, it anticipates that. It previews the glory of the resurrected Christ and also the glory of his later coming. In 2 Peter chapter 1



verses 16 to 18, Peter describes this.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this very voice, born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

In this passage, Peter is arguing that even though people are saying that Christ may not be coming after all, that the disciples and the apostles are dying out and Christ still hasn't shown up, that they saw his glory on the holy mountain and they know that Christ will reveal his glory in his coming, which I believe refers in that context to the judgement upon Jerusalem in AD 70 and the end of the old covenant leading to the establishment of the new covenant on a new level. It happens after six days and this chronological detail is strange here. I mean, what is it being dated from? Is it really something that tells us anything of any significance? Maybe it's connected to the Sabbath.

After six days is the seventh day, it's the Sabbath. It could also, I think, more likely be associated with Exodus chapter 24 verses 16 to 18. The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it six days.

And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain.

Jesus brings with him Peter, James and John. These are the three key disciples, the ones that he chooses in particular to be with him on specific occasions. They're the ones that see Jairus' daughter being healed, raised from the dead.

They're the ones that go with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. And so they have a particular close access to him. Peter will be the lead disciple in the ministry of the early church.

And James and John also have pivotal roles to perform. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is transfigured. His glory is seen.

This is not just a reflected glory. This is the glory of Christ himself, a glory from within. And he's accompanied by Moses and Elijah.

Some have seen this as a reference to the law and the prophets. They also have similarities. They're great witnesses.

They're wilderness forerunners. They go before Joshua who enters into the land and Elisha who performs great miracles within the land. And both of them seem to be

connected to the character of John the Baptist who is a forerunner of Christ.

John the Baptist is the one who's in the wilderness. He's associated with Moses in some ways there. He's also one who dresses like Elijah, who has conflicts with Herod and Herodias that are similar to the conflicts that Elijah had with Ahab and Jezebel.

Beyond this, both are associated with Theophanies at Horeb or Sinai. Moses goes up on the mountain and he sees God's glory at the top of Mount Sinai. And Elijah meets with God at Mount Horeb as well and sees the glory of God.

So they're both witnesses to the glory of God and they join Christ who is the glory of God. Both furthermore are associated with the last days in various ways. A prophet like Moses who will arise according to Deuteronomy chapter 18.

And then Elijah who was to come as spoken of by Malachi. In Christ we see the glory of the last Adam and of the second man. He's the glorified, radiant son of man.

The one who comes into God's presence, into the presence of the ancient days and inherits all kingdoms. Sinai was associated with a number of key things. It was associated with the Theophany as Moses saw the glory of God on the mountain, the cloud, the fire and all these other things.

It was associated with the tabernacle and the formation of that realm where God would dwell with his people. It was associated also with the gift of the law. We see these different elements here played out in different ways.

Peter wants to build tabernacles. If the purpose of the tabernacle was to be a sort of movable mountain, a portable Sinai, Peter wants to move around the reality of this transfiguration, the reality of this appearance of God's glory and take it with them as they move throughout the land. So the purpose of the tabernacles is to transport this Theophany.

Peter longs to retain the reality of that place. But yet God's own cloud overshadows. God's Theophanic cloud is far more glorious and powerful than any tent would be, any tabernacle would be.

And that is what will lead the way. We also see in Christ he is the high priest with glorious garments. He's dressed like the high priest in his glorious clothes, dazzling white.

And he's the one who will perform atonement for his people, just as the high priest was called to do. Sinai was also the site where God gave the law, his word to his people. And here we see something similar.

It's the one occasion in scripture where God declares directly concerning Christ in his

own words from heaven. His beloved son, listen to him. This is the word of God to humanity.

His son who has been given to us, we must listen to him. So we see themes of tabernacles, see themes of the law, see themes of Theophany and all these things that connect us with Sinai. Going up after the sixth day, all of these things should remind us of what happened there.

Jesus is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, but he is greater than Moses and Elijah. He alone is the one who will remain with them. They're the forerunners.

He is the one who is God's son. He is the one who will lead them into the future. Jesus tells his disciples to keep the vision under wraps until after the resurrection.

There are things that can only properly be known in their own time. And the significance of the transfiguration will only become apparent from the vantage point of the cross and resurrection. However, the cross becomes clearer from the vantage point of the transfiguration.

When you see that Christ is the glorious high priest, the one who is all-powerful, the one who is the beloved son, when he goes to the cross it becomes clear that he's doing that willingly and intentionally. He's not someone who's overtaken by events. He's not someone who fails and is outwitted by his enemies.

He is one who's doing this purposefully to redeem and atone for his people. The disciples puzzle about the resurrection at this point. They don't truly understand what Jesus is talking about.

They also wonder about the meaning of Elijah that was to come. There seems to be conflict between the statement that Elijah will restore all things and that the Son of Man will suffer many things. I mean, if Elijah has restored all things, how can the Son of Man suffer many things? But yet Jesus makes clear that Elijah has come and Elijah clearly in this case is John the Baptist.

But what has happened is he was rejected. He suffered himself. The forerunner suffers the same fate as the one who comes after.

He has prepared a people for the Lord but he has been rejected by the great majority of the people. So he has prepared things, set things right, yet he is ultimately rejected by the people to whom he came. Coming down the mountain, Jesus and his disciples come to a commotion.

I think we would be justified in seeing a parallel between this and Moses and Joshua coming down the mountain to seeing the crowd and the tumult around the golden calf and Aaron. The people are awestruck when they see Jesus come down the mountain.

Again, that's an interesting detail.

The fact that they're awestruck reminds us of the awestruck character of the people in chapter 34 when Moses comes down the mountain with his face shining after seeing God's glory there. Perhaps we're supposed to connect these two things together. Jesus, like Moses, left his disciples and other people under him in control in his absence and he comes back to find that they have failed.

The disciples haven't been able to cast out this demon and in the same way Aaron made the golden calf for the people. Whether we're supposed to stretch the analogies further and see the similarities between the way that the demon casts the child into the fire and into the water and the way that the golden calf was cast into the fire, came out of the fire as the form of the golden calf and was then cast into the water to be drunk, I'm not sure. My suspicion is that this would be too speculative.

Nevertheless, there do seem to be clear connections and the Mosaic themes are strong throughout. Jesus refers back to the words of Moses in places like Deuteronomy 32, verses 5 and 20 when he refers to the people as a faithless generation. They have dealt corruptly with him.

They are no longer his children because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation. And he said, I will hide my face from them.

I will see what their end will be for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. A question to consider. Within the exorcism account and its aftermath with which our passage ends, there is considerable discussion of faith and prayer.

We see the example of the boy's father. We see the example of the disciples and we see their conversation with Christ later in the house. What can we learn about the relationship between faith, prayer and deliverance from reflecting upon these details?