

## **Numbers 6: Habeas Corpus and Covenant**

By Captain Michael Ramsay

We Salvationists have sometimes been compared to the Nazirites of the Old Testament. The Nazirites, like us, are people bound by a covenant to the Lord. One aspect of their oath that obviously parallels our soldiership covenant is the promise to abstain from alcohol. Another parallel is that both Nazirites and Salvationists are easily identified as such. Salvationists have their uniform; Nazirites wore their hair long. A third aspect of the Nazirite vow which I suggest has applications for our soldiership covenant – though less immediately obvious – is their prohibition against contact with dead bodies.

Numbers 6:7 states specifically that the Nazirite is not to come in contact with a dead body, even if the deceased person is the Nazirite's own parent. The Nazirite is not allowed even to attend a funeral ceremony.

Ordinarily, the Israelites have important responsibilities pertaining to the passing of one's parents, even though it would make them ceremonially unclean (Numbers 5:2, 19:11; Leviticus 21:1-3). But a Nazirite is not allowed to be unclean even for the sake of a parent (Leviticus 21:10-12). One had to choose between one's family responsibilities and one's responsibilities to God (see Leviticus 21:10-12; Matthew 10:35, 12:22-48, 19:29; Mark 3:23-35, 10:29-30, 13:1-28; Luke 8:19-21, 14:25-26; John 19:27).

Here, then, is something to consider: God is more important than anyone else in the holy person's life. To the covenanted Nazirite and to the covenanted soldier, to the devoted spouse and to the fully committed Christian, God comes first. What good is it to gain the whole world and yet lose your own soul? (Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36).

It is important to note that there are consequences for not living up to our covenants, even if we transgress them by accident. Number 6: 9-12 are important verses for the Nazirite and, I suggest, equally significant for soldiers in The Salvation Army or anyone else entering into a covenant with the Lord.

If a person dies in the Nazirite's presence, the Nazirite is still guilty of sin. Even though the Nazirite did not mean to

break his vow, it was still broken and he needs to be restored in his covenant relationship.

Numbers 9-12 (NIV): 'If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing—the seventh day. Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.'

However, even though one is guilty of breaking a vow, the covenant remains in place. It is even renewed: the previous days do not count; he or she gets a fresh start. This is important. The covenant remains until it is fulfilled. We are not released from covenants and vows simply for disobeying them. This is very important. The covenantal tie is not broken when we disobey God. Even when we are faithless, God is faithful (Romans 3:3,4). There are consequences for transgressing the covenant. There are natural and logical results of not living up to our vows, our promises, our covenants with or before the Lord – but we are not released from them for simple disobedience. This is one of the very important aspects of covenants that we enter into with and before the Lord.

When we disobey our covenant there are consequences but He is still there for us. Until the successful completion of our covenant (if it has an expiry date) or until our death (if it does not) our covenant remains intact, binding us to the Lord (Romans 7:1-3).

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