**The Purity of the Camp and The Nazarite**

Our new neighbors arrived from Michigan last week. They are a young couple, both recent graduates from veterinary school and they seem quite nice. They have committed a slight breach of protocol by failing to observe the quarantine period normally required for northerners. They really need an adjustment period after their arrival to learn proper social etiquette before they venture out among the locals. It generally takes a few weeks to rid themselves of the superior “we didn’t do it that way up there” attitude. Even those who are only visiting are often offensive. Michele had a great idea a few years ago. Northern families wishing to vacation in South Carolina could be issued temporary visas that would allow them to only visit certain areas in close proximity to the interstates. Businesses that serve them would be staffed with people who were fired from the highway department for being too rude and thus able to nip any unacceptable behavior in the bud. Unfortunately this program never gained traction and we still allow unfettered access to our lovely state. In our study of Numbers chapters 5 & 6, we see 2 different types of quarantine being employed by God.

Chapter 5 begins with God telling Moses that people who had any sort of infection or discharge or were ceremonially unclean were to be sent into quarantine outside the camp. Next God addresses spiritual uncleanliness by requiring restitution to be paid by those who sinned against another person. This would appear to address theft or swindle that could be quantified since full restitution plus 20 percent had to be paid to the victim.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to an elaborate test for a wife suspected of being unfaithful. In the event of real or imagined infidelity, the woman was to be taken to the priest who would require the woman to swear an oath of innocence after which she would drink water mixed with ink from curses written on a scroll. The woman’s guilt or innocence would be determined by her physical reaction to the drink.

Chapter 6 is almost exclusively comprised of God’s instructions for people who would take a vow as a Nazarite. It was described as a vow of separation to the Lord. The person making the vow could not eat or drink anything that was sourced from grapes. There was a prescribed time frame although it is not specifically noted. If the person became ceremonially unclean during the vow period, an offering had to be made to the priest after which the vow period would start over from the beginning. At the end of the vow period the person’s hair was cut and placed in the fire along with sacrifices noting the end of the period. These vows were voluntary and often came as a result of thanksgiving for God’s blessings. Samson and John the Baptist were placed under Nazarite vows prior to their births (see Judges 13:5 and Luke 1:15). There are 2 accounts of Paul making a Nazarite vow (see Acts: 18:18 and 21:24). The chapter ends with a blessing from God to the Israelites.

Last week we discussed how the tabernacle was located in the center of the camp with the tribes on all 4 sides. Since the tabernacle was God’s dwelling, He was in the middle of the camp. The infirmities that we suffer as humans, including those described in the beginning of chapter 5, are all a result of original sin so we can view those afflictions as symbolic of sin. Since God can not allow sin in His presence, He required separation or quarantine from the camp. The Nazarites were also separated or set apart by their vow (v. 2) but we can view their separation from the physical (eating and drinking) as symbolic of their spiritual dedication to God.

One of the conditions requiring removal from the camp was leprosy which was considered an infectious disease. Quarantining a person with leprosy would be a measure to prevent contagion. Have you ever considered that sin can be contagious? Often people who succumb to sin do so as a result of associating with the wrong people. Our bodies resist various illnesses with natural immunity, however we have no natural immunity to sin, in fact we are predisposed to it (see Rom. 5:12). The sanctification process that begins with accepting Jesus as Savior is our best way to avoid sin.