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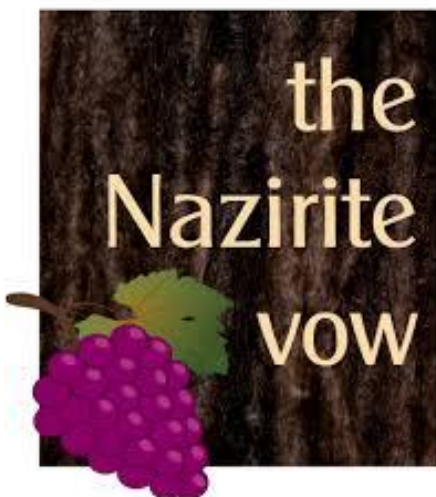
The Nazarite Vow

6: 1-21

The Nazarite vow DIG: Why was one of the main characteristics of a Nazirite the growth of his or her hair? What did it symbolize? Why do you think that the LORD required a Nazirite to abstain from specific things? What similarities are there between the Nazirites and the priesthood? In what ways were Nazarites like priests? In what way did Yeshua Messiah become a Nazirite?

REFLECT: Why do you think a person would become a Nazirite? Why do you think a Nazirite was required to bring a sin offering at the conclusion of his or her vow? Can a Nazirite Vow be taken in today's world? What aspect of it cannot be fulfilled today? Have you ever felt the need to take time apart to be with the Lord in a special way? What was it that brought you to that place in your life?

The Nazirites were lay people within the community, who had been set apart as especially holy and dedicated to ADONAI.



The Hebrew word for **Nazirite** is *nazir*. It is from the verb *nazar*, meaning *to separate*. From its usage in the Torah, it would seem that *nazir* means *a separated one*. **The Nazirites** were under an unusual **vow** of separation, who were lay people within the community who had

been set apart as especially holy and dedicated to **ADONAI**. Such dedications to special service to **YHVH** were made either by **their** parents or by **the Nazirites themselves**. The three most famous **Nazirites** of the Bible were **Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist**. Yet these three were exceptional because **they** were all set apart as **Nazirites** prior to birth. The normal **Nazirite vow** was for a short term, from only one month to several years. **Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist** were all conceived in otherwise barren wombs, and were therefore dedicated by their grateful mothers into lives of separation under **the Nazarite vow**. But according to Torah, the life of **the Nazir** was open to any and all who desired it.

According to the Oral Law (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Ei - The Oral Law](#)**), there were two components to undertaking the Nazarite vow. There was an oral declaration and a statement of duration. The oral declaration was regarded as binding even if it was stated in less than explicit language. Thus, one who said, "I will abstain from haircuts," or "I will abstain from grape seeds," or "I will be like Samson" are all regarded as having formally taken a Nazirite vow (M.Nazir 1:1-2). It is also said, "If they filled a cup [of wine] for him and he said, 'I will be an abstainer (Nazir) from it' then he becomes a Naziri (M.Nazir 2:2). The Master's words: **I tell you the truth, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine**, are formulated as a statement of vow. In addition to the oral declaration, a statement of duration was necessary. Thirty days was the minimum duration of the vow. One who did not state the length of his or her vow was bound to at least thirty days (M.Nazir 1:3-7). The Master stated the duration of His vow at the outset. He would **not drink of the fruit of the vine again: until that day when I drink it again with you in My Father's Kingdom**.

During the days of the Second Temple, **the Nazirite vow** could only be completed by the specified sacrifices there. However, **Nazirite vows** were regularly practiced long after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Even in the days while the Temple still stood, Jews living outside the land of **Isra'el** practiced **Nazirite vows**. Distance from the Temple prevented them from completing **the vow** according to **prescribed Temple ritual**. But it did not prevent them from otherwise observing **the vow**. **Because a Nazirite vow can only be truly fulfilled at the Temple, the Sages say that one who takes and completes a Nazirite vow outside of the Land must repeat the vow within the land of Isra'el.**⁹⁹

These verses are displayed in a chiastic fashion (see **[Ac - Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Chiasm and introversion](#)**). **The Nazir** who successfully observed these prohibitions underwent the prearranged ritual (**AB-BA**). However, if **his vow** was cut

short by contamination, another ritual was also set **(C), which is the main point**. It explains the placement of this portion of Scripture. After the census of **the Israelites** (see [Ai - The First Census: The Old Generation of Rebellion](#)), the positioning of the people and the Levites, and the detailing of the responsibilities of **the priesthood** in the wilderness march (**Chapters 1-4**), concern is expressed regarding the defilement of the camp both **ritually (5:1-8) and ethically (5:11-31)**. Thus, the possibility of the defilement of the **holy Nazarite** occupies center stage here.¹⁰⁰

An Introduction (6:1-2): ADONAI said to Moshe, “Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘When either a man or a woman makes a special kind of vow, the vow of a Nazir, consecrating himself to ADONAI . . .’” When one thinks of the term **Nazirite**, the name **Samson** may come to mind (see the commentary on [Judges Bt - The Twelfth Cycle: Sampson](#)). But it turns out that **his** situation did not reflect the normal meaning of **the Nazirite vow** (and, as is well known, he didn’t keep **the vows** well at all!). Neither is it generally known that these **vows** of special devotion to **YHVH** could be made by a woman as well as a man. Most simply assume that the religious **vows** of **the Nazir** were intended for **men** only. However, this text expressly begins: when either a **man** or a **woman**. Thus, **women** were not precluded from this **vow**.

The Hebrew text uses an extremely strong verb in describing **the vow** of **the Nazir** in the phrase **makes a special** (Hebrew: *pala*) **kind of vow**. The verb *pala* in the Hiphil means *to make a hard, extraordinary vow*. This verb in the Niphal is used extensively throughout the TaNaKh with **ADONAI** as the subject and is often rendered by words of amazement. Moshe declares in **Exodus 3:20: . . . the wonders that I will perform**, and **Psalms 118:23 . . . it is marvelous in our eyes**. In our passage here in **Numbers**, as in **Leviticus 27:2**, the Hiphil is used as an extraordinary **vow** of a believer of **YHVH**. This **vow**, then, does not describe a routine matter or even an expected act of devotion one might make from time to time. This **vow** was an act of unusual devotion to **God**, based on an intense desire to demonstrate to **the LORD** one’s utter separation to **Him** alone.¹⁰¹

B Prohibitions (6:3-8): While under the term of **the vow**, **the Nazir** was prohibited from consuming any **fruit of the vine**. **He is to abstain from wine and other intoxicating liquor, he is not to drink vinegar from either source, he is not to drink grape juice, and he is not to eat grapes or raisins. As long as he remains a Nazir he is to eat nothing derived from the grapevine, not even the grape-skins or the seeds (6:3-4)**. The significance of abstaining from **the fruit of the vine** and intoxication seems to be a direct connection to **the priesthood**. Just as **the priests** were forbidden from drinking alcohol while on duty in the Temple, **the**

nazarite was forbidden from drinking alcohol while under **his vow**. Yet, **the nazarite's** prohibitions far exceeded those of **the priesthood**. One who undertook a **Nazirite vow** would need to be scrupulously careful to avoid any food made with grape products, even if the amounts were small.¹⁰²

Throughout the period of his vow as a Nazir, he is not to shave his head. Until the end of the time for which he has consecrated himself to ADONAI he is to be holy: he is to let the hair on his head grow long (6:5). The significance of **the hair** is that it indicated the duration of **the vow**. At a minimum, a **Nazirite vow** was thirty days, but there was no upper limit. A **Nazir** could take **the vow** for years. When **the vow** was finally completed, **the Nazir** shaved **his hair** and offered **it** up in the Temple as part of the sacrificial service in the Chamber of **the Nazirites** in the Court of the Women (see the commentary on [Acts Co - Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem](#)). In **Acts**, where we are told that **Paul had his hair cut off**, for **he** was keeping a **vow**. Perhaps **he** was completing (or beginning) a personal **Nazirite vow** in the diaspora with the intention of repeating it in Jerusalem under the authority of **the priesthood**. At any rate, **he** was seen fulfilling a **Nazirite vow** in **Acts 21:20-26**.

Throughout the period for which he has consecrated himself to ADONAI, he is not to approach a corpse. He is not to make himself unclean for his father, mother, brother or sister when they die, since his consecration to God is on his head. Throughout the time of his being a Nazir he is holy to the LORD (6:6-8). In respect to the prohibition of coming into contact with **the dead**, **the Nazir** resembles **the High Priest**, who was also forbidden to contaminate **himself** attending the burial rites of the members of **his** immediate **family** (**Leviticus 21:11**).

C Defilement (6:9-12): **If someone next to him died very suddenly, so that he defiles his consecrated head, then he is to shave his head on the day of his purification; he is to shave it on the seventh day. On the eighth day he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tabernacle. The priest is to prepare one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering and thus make atonement for him, inasmuch as he sinned because of the dead body. That same day he is to re-dedicate his head; he is to consecrate to ADONAI the full period of his being a nazir by bringing a male lamb in its first year as a guilt offering. The previous days will not be counted, because his dedication became defiled.**

When **the Nazirite** period ended because of **corpse** contamination it needed to

start all over again. During Temple times, a **Nazir** that came into contact with a **dead body** was required to go through a seven-day **purification** via the waters of **the red heifer** (see [Da - The Red Heifer](#)). In this respect, the demands on **the Nazir** were more stringent than the **corpse-contaminated priest**, who, as in the case of a **layman**, underwent a seven-day purification, but did not have to bring any sacrifices. While **the Nazir** had to bring the sacrifices as seen below.¹⁰³

B Completion (6:13-20): This is the mitzvah for the Nazir when his period of dedication to ADONAI is over: he is to be brought to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where he will present his offering to ADONAI - one male lamb in its first year without defect as a burnt offering, one female lamb in its first year without defect as a sin offering, one ram without defect as peace offerings, a basket of matzah, loaves made of fine flour mixed with olive oil, unleavened wafers spread with olive oil, their grain offering and their drink offerings. The priest is to bring them before ADONAI, offer his purification offering (see the commentary on [Leviticus Ai - The Purification Offering: Purified by Blood](#)), his burnt offering (see [Ai - The Burnt Offering: Accepted by God](#)), and his ram as a sacrifice of peace offerings to ADONAI, with the basket of matzah. The priest will also offer the grain offering and drink offering that go with the peace offering. The Nazir will shave his dedicated head at the entrance to the Tabernacle, take the hair removed from his dedicated head and put it on the fire under the sacrifice of peace offerings (see [Leviticus Ak - The Peace Offerings: At Peace with God](#)). These sacrifices resemble the sacrifices offered by the priesthood on their day of ordination. When the ram has been boiled, the priest is to take its shoulder, one loaf of matzah from the basket and one unleavened wafer, and place them in the hands of the Nazir, after he has shaved his dedicated head. The priest is to wave them as a wave offering before ADONAI; this is set aside for the priest, along with the breast for waving and the raised-up thigh. Following that, the Nazir may drink wine.

This is the primary aspect of **the Nazirite vow** that cannot be kept today. Without a Temple, **the Nazirite vow** can never be properly completed. Therefore, one who understands **the Nazirite** prohibitions is never able to fully resolve his or her **vow**.

Summary (6:21): The Torah goes on to suggest that a **Nazir** completing **his vow** may well want to bring more than these minimum sacrifices. **This is the mitzvah for the Nazir who makes a vow and for his offering to ADONAI for his being a Nazir. He should at least bring these in addition to anything more for which he has sufficient means. In keeping with whatever vow he makes, he must do it according to the mitzvah for**

the Nazir. It seems that most **Nazirites** could not even afford the minimum though. In **Acts 21, Jacob (James)** had four **Nazirite** believers in the community who could not pay their own expenses to complete their **vow**. So it was suggested that **Paul** pay for their expenses, and go with them to Jerusalem and complete **his** own **vow** (see the commentary on **Acts Cn - Paul's Advice from Jacob and the Elders at Tziyon**).

Priests and Nazirites: But why would anyone want to be a **Nazir**? What was the allure of Nazirite life? What did it mean to be under a **Nazarite vow**? One cannot help but notice that the mitzvot of **the Nazir** bear a striking resemblance to several of the mitzvot of **the priesthood**. Just as **the priesthood** was forbidden to drink **wine** or any fermented drink when serving in the Tabernacle or Temple, so too **the Nazir** was forbidden any **wine** or fermented drink. Just as **the priesthood** was commanded to avoid ritual contamination through a human **corpse**, so **the Nazir** was forbidden. In fact, **the Nazirite** prohibition from **corpse** contact extended further than that of **the average priest**. The average **priest** was allowed to become unclean for close relatives. Only **the high priest** was under purity restrictions as severe as **the Nazirites (Leviticus 21:11; Numbers 6:7)**.

The parallels go even further. **The priests** were not allowed to uncover **their** heads or use a razor on their hair, but **they** were to trim it (**Leviticus 10:6; Ezekiel 44:20**). **The Nazirites** were not allowed to use a razor or even trim **their hair** while under **the vow**. Obviously **the priesthood** and **Nazirites** share a similar status. The Torah even explicitly states that **the high priest** has been separated (*nezer*) by virtue of the anointing oil poured on **his** head (**Leviticus 21:10-12**). The Torah uses almost identical language to explain **the Nazirite's** high level of purity (**Numbers 6:6-7**). Notice the identical construction of **the Nazirite** passage and **the high priest** passage. By virtue of their construction and content, the two passages clearly point to each other. Therefore, **the Ruach Ha'Kodeah** means for us to make a comparison between a priest and **Nazir**. Both **high priest** and **the Nazir** enjoy a status of separation called *nezer* which is **theirs** by virtue of a ritual marking on **their heads**. For **the high priest**, it is the anointing oil poured out on **his head** that grants **him** the *nezer* status. For **the Nazir**, it is **the hair** on **his head** that grants **him** the *nezer* status.

The Torah gives us another connection between **the Nazirite** and **the priesthood** and things on **their heads**. The engraved plate which **the high priest** wore was part of the **priestly** clothing. The words: **Holy to the LORD** were inscribed on it (see the commentary on **Exodus Gc - Make an Engraved Plate: Holy to the LORD**). During the period of **his** **vow**, **the Nazirite** is **holy to the LORD (6:8)**. This is the same status attributed to **the priesthood**, especially **the high priest**.

A further parallel between **priests** and **Nazirites** is obvious in the list of sacrifices both are to present to **ADONAI**. The sacrifices **the priests** were to bring for **their ordination** are listed in **Exodus 29** and **Leviticus 8**. They include **a purification offering, a burnt offering, and a peace offering** for ordination along with a basket of **unleavened bread, cakes mixed with oil and wafers spread with oil**. The sacrifices **the Nazirite** needed to bring at the termination of **his vow** included the same combinations.

Three would-be priests: What was the connection the Torah is emphasizing between **the priest** and **the Nazir**. Perhaps **the Nazirite vow** was **the laymen's** response to **the priesthood**. To the average Israelite, the priesthood was inaccessible, because according to the Torah, only the descendants of **Aaron** qualified for **the priesthood**. Therefore, a Reubenite or a Simeonite found himself excluded from position among **the priests** of **ADONAI**. Perhaps **the Nazirite vow** was the next best thing, a sort of quasi-**priestly** status which could be attained by anyone who was willing to make **the vow**.

This may help to explain how **Samuel** the prophet rose to the office of **high priest**. **He** was not from **the House of Aaron**. It is likely that **his** formal adoption into the family of **Eli** granted him a position in **Aaron's house** to take on the role of **priest**. But it is also possible that **his** status of being a **Nazirite** since birth allowed **him priestly** privileges which would have otherwise not have been available to him. At any rate, the connection between **the priesthood** and **the Nazir** is again emphasized in the story of **Samuel**.

John the Baptist was another **Nazir** from birth. Unlike **Samuel**, **John** was already from a **priestly** family and was kosher to serve in **the priesthood** by any standard. However, **like the Essene sect of his day, he** opted out of participating in the Temple services with a politically compromised and morally corrupt **priesthood**. When he reached the age of priesthood (that is 30), rather than going to serve as **a priest, he** went to the Jordan River and baptized the multitudes in a "back to **God**" movement. Perhaps his lifelong status as **a Nazir**, was **priesthood** enough for **him**.

A third and particularly tantalizing **Nazirite** account is that of **James the Righteous**, the brother of **the Master**. Eusebius quotes Hegesippus in his ecclesiastical History regarding the martyrdom of **James**. He writes, "**James** drank no **wine** or intoxicating liquor; no razor came near **his head**. **He** alone was permitted to enter the Holy Place, for **his** garments were not of wool but of linen. **He** used to enter the Sanctuary alone, and was often found on **his** knees beseeching forgiveness for the people . . ." This text raises an intriguing problem. We find here a very strong and early tradition about **James** that places **him** inside the Temple Sanctuary, which was forbidden to all except for **the priesthood**. How is it that

James, a **man** descended from the House of David and the tribe of Judah was allowed access to the Sanctuary where only **the priests** were allowed? How is it that we find **James** clothed in linen garments, that is **priestly** garments, praying inside the Temple proper? Is it because **James** was a **Nazir**, and as a **Nazir**, **he** obtained some kind of quasi-**priestly** status? We must either accept it as so, or reject the tradition of Hegesippus altogether. Regardless of which one we choose, we cannot ignore that once again a connection between **priest** and **Nazirite** has been drawn.

The Torah itself goes on to tie **the priesthood** and **the Nazirite** more tightly together by following the passage about **the Nazarites** with the **priestly** benediction (see **Bb - The Aaronic Blessing**). It seems to be an awkward association unless there is some connection between **the Nazirite vow** and **the priesthood**.¹⁰⁴

Nobody is saved by making and keeping a **vow**. Salvation is **the gift** of **ADONAI** to those who believe (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), not a reward to those who behave. However, there are some people who are led by the **Lord** to make special **vows** to **God**; not to get something from **Him** but to give something to **Him**. And as long as those **vows** don't contradict Scripture, they can be **blessed** by **YHVH** (**Psalm 22:25; 50:14; 61:5** and **8, 76:11** and **116:14**). People will make **vows** to **God** just so **He'll** get them out of trouble (**Psalm 66:13-14; Jonah 2:9**), and some of these people will forget their promises when they're safe and comfortable again. But it's a dangerous thing to make promises to **God** and not keep **them** (**Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**).¹⁰⁵

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **You** for being such a wonderful Heavenly **Father**. Thank **You** for the joy of being able to offer back to **You** the spiritual sacrifice of praise. **You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house- a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua (First Peter 2:5). You, God, are so worthy of our praise! Through Yeshua then, let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15). What a privilege it is to have a loving relationship with You as our Heavenly Father and a joy to follow and obey all You say in Your Holy Word. Thank You for being willing to live within those who love You. Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:23). You are awesome and I thank You for letting me, though I may not be a Levite, to offer sacrifices of praise to You! In Yeshua's holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen***