

The Nazarite Vow

By David Pyles

An interesting provision of Old Testament law was the Nazarite vow (Num 6:1-21). This vow could be taken either by man or woman. It entailed three major commitments: The first was total abstinence from strong drink, including even wine. The Nazarite was also to abstain from grapes or anything made from them. While this would include many things, the statute curiously put express prohibition on vinegar (which is commonly made from grapes). The second commitment was that the hair of the head was never to be cut. The third commitment was the avoidance of all dead human bodies. The Nazarite could not exempt himself in this even for the sake of his deceased parents. These commitments could be made for a designated period or for remainder of life. The most famous of all Nazarites was Samson, who was ordered by God to remain under the vow for life.

The motivation for the Nazarite vow would be revealed 1500 years after it was specified in law. This happened when Jesus Christ vowed at the Last Supper, "*But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom,*" (Mt 26:29, Mk 14:25, Lk 22:18). The importance of this statement can be inferred from the fact that all synoptic gospels recorded it. The Nazarite vow was in imitation and honor of the Messiah as He would be from the time of His own vow until the time of His visible return and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:5-9). This includes especially the time of His invisible heavenly reign.

The specific prohibition against vinegar was likely motivated by the fact that Jesus, in keeping with His own vow, refused vinegar when being crucified (Mt 27:34). The avoidance of dead bodies can also be explained by understanding the vow in terms of Jesus Christ. He will put an end to all corpses, and there are no dead bodies in heaven where He now lives and reigns.

All familiar with the story of Samson will know that the uncut hair was a crucial condition of the Nazarite. We need not speculate as to the symbolic meaning of this. Paul explained it in 1Corinthians 11, where he said that long hair is a symbol of allegiance to authority. In the case of the Nazarite vow, it was a symbol of

allegiance to the heavenly Messiah being portended by the vow. This fact will do much to explain the story of Samson. His life will fall far short of our expectations of a Nazarite, and he will seem to show much disregard for his vow, but God will extend him remarkable forbearance and continue to empower him on condition that his hair remain uncut. However, if his hair be cut, that is, if the authority of the Messiah be rejected or betrayed, then dire consequences will follow.

Samson's tragic love affair with Delilah was actually a prophetic allegory wherein Samson represented the nation Israel. Notwithstanding his greatness, Samson was very foolish when it came to women. He even loved women who were actually bent on destroying him. Accordingly, Israel was addicted to the false gods and false religions of its enemies.

Delilah tied Samson three different ways attempting to negate his strength so that the Philistines could subdue him. In all these cases, his strength remained and he broke his bonds. However, in her fourth attempt, Delilah cut off Samson's hair. This left him powerless because he had broken crucial terms of his Nazarite vow. The Philistines then overcame him, humiliated him, put out his eyes and made him do the work of an ox. Accordingly, Israel was brought into bondage by the Assyrians, Babylonians and Greeks, but they were blessed to break these bonds and regain their freedom. But the fourth case proved very different. They were overcome by the Romans and dispersed all over the world. They remained dispersed from their land for a longer time than they had ever occupied it. The reason was that they had cut their hair. They had betrayed their Messiah by crucifying Him and denying Him after His resurrection.

Thankfully, Samson's hair eventually grew back and he regained his strength. This was symbolic of the fact that the Jews will be turned by God to honor their Messiah in the final days of the earth.

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