

## **The Nazirite Vow: Separated Unto God**

### Numbers 6:1-8

*1 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, 3 he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh or dried grapes. 4 'All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from {the} seeds even to {the} skin. 5 'All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long. 6 'All the days of his separation to the LORD he shall not go near to a dead person. 7 'He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. 8 'All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD.*

### **Background & Setting**

Numbers 1:1 informs us that the Israelites are still in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai. In fact it is the first day of the second month of the second year since their exodus from Egypt. According to Numbers 10:11, the Israelites will leave the wilderness of Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year. So, Numbers 1:1 to 10:11 covers a period of 20 days just prior to the departure from Sinai. It is during this time period that Moses is preparing the first generation of Israelites to inherit the Promised Land. This preparation of the old generation occurs prior to their refusal to enter the land at Kadesh Barnea in Numbers 13-14. In Numbers 1-2 Moses organizes the people of Israel around the Tabernacle. In Numbers 3-4 Moses organizes the priests of Israel. Now in Numbers 5-10:10 Moses is teaching regarding the sanctification of Israel. Chapters 5 and 6 specifically deal with the spiritual organization of Israel. Chapter 5 focuses on some of the purity laws for Israel, while chapter 6 moves on to discuss the Nazirite Vow, the primary teaching of which occurs here in verses 1-8.

### **The Prologue of the Nazirite Vow [Numbers 6:1-2]**

Verses 1 and 2 form the prologue of the Nazirite vow. Verse 1 is a grammatical marker indicating the beginning of a new topic of instruction that Moses received from the Lord (cf. Numbers 1:1; 2:1; 3:5, 11, 44; 4:1, 21; 5:1, 5, 11; 6:21 etc...). This new topic is that of the Nazirite Vow, which technically includes all of Numbers 6:1-21. However, we will just focus on the basics of this vow in verses 1-8.

*· As you examine the introduction to the Nazirite vow in verse 2, what do you notice to be of significance about the vow? What characteristics are noticed in verse 2?*

1-Notice that it can be made by either a man or a woman.

2-Notice that it can be made by one's own free choice. It is not commanded but voluntary.

3-Notice that it is a special act not the normal or routine. In fact the Hebrew text uses an unusually strong verb in describing the vow translated, "makes a special vow." The verb [PALA] means, "to

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*make a hard, or difficult vow.*" It is an extraordinary vow or act of devotion.

4-It was an act of extreme devotion to God. It was a vow of a Nazirite to devote Himself to the Lord. The term Nazirite comes from the Hebrew word [NAZIR], which means, "*to separate.*" It describes the person who has marked out a special time of separation or consecration for a specific period of unusual devotion to God. It is a separating of oneself unto God.

### **The Prohibitions of the Nazirite Vow [Numbers 6:3-7]**

At this point the instruction focuses on the specifics of the vow as it emphasizes three direct prohibitions that the Nazirite must follow.

· *According to verses 3-4, what is the first specific prohibition of the Nazirite vow?*

The first prohibition is complete and total abstinence from all produce of the vine. This includes all intoxicants such as wine and strong drink. This includes even the vinegar that results when such products sour. Moreover it includes fresh grape juice, fresh grapes from the vine or even dried grapes (raisins). Verse 4 continues that the Nazirite should not eat anything produced from the vine even from its seeds or skin.

· *What is the significance of this prohibition?*

It is unclear from the text as to why the products of the vine were specifically forbidden to the Nazirite. Some have suggested that it may be that the forbidding of all products of the grapevine is a way of saying that he or she was not to have even a remote association with wine. Some have suggested that it may be that the forbidding of all products of the grapevine gives an example of one who is temperate (self-controlled) not gratifying the desires of the body. Furthermore, it is believed that some products of the vine, such as, raisin cakes while not intoxicating were sought after by those who practiced idolatry. In other words, they were a symbol of the sensual attractions of idolatry and were not fit to be consumed or enjoyed by those who are dedicated and separated to God (cf. Hosea 3:1).

· *According to verse 5, what is the second specific prohibition of the Nazirite vow?*

The second prohibition was the complete abdication from any trimming of the hair. The Nazirite was to allow his hair to grow long and natural. No razor should touch his head. This would include any kind of hair trimming whether the hair on top of the head or of the beard. The women who took the Nazirite vow likely did not put their hair up and allowed it to be unkempt.

· *What is the significance of this prohibition?*

Some have suggested that the free growth of hair, unhindered by the hand of man was a symbol of strength and vitality. They use 2 Samuel 14:25-26 and the passages in Judges regarding Samson as support. However, verse 5 seems to indicate that it was not to be cut as a symbol of holiness. So the unshaven and uncut hair symbolized that the individual was set apart for special service and devotion to God and likely indicated one who was relying on God's strength rather than on his own.

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Even the priests were prohibited from certain types of shaving of the head (cf. Leviticus 21:5). Some pagans practiced certain types of shaving or hair cutting and it may have been closely associated with the practice of idolatry.

· ***According to verses 6-7, what is the third specific prohibition of the Nazirite vow?***

The third prohibition was to avoid all contact with a dead body. In fact this contact is to be avoided to the point that the Nazirite can not even go near a dead body. This includes close family relations such as a mother or father and a brother or a sister.

· ***Why do you suppose the Nazirite was not allowed to come into contact with a dead body?***

A person was considered to be unclean in ancient Israel if they came into contact with a dead body (cf. Numbers 5:2). Processes of decay and disease in the dead flesh were evident to all. Contact with a dead body could have been a source of possible infection and was a sure mark of uncleanness. As a result such a person would be considered unclean until the proper cleansing and purification process had been undergone. Numbers 6:9-12 tells us the process that the Nazirite must undergo in case of accidental contact with a dead body.

### **The Purpose of the Nazirite Vow [Numbers 6:8]**

· ***According to verse 8, what was the purpose of the Nazirite vow?***

The purpose according to verse 8 is to be holy to the Lord. The Hebrew term *Holy* [QADOSH] literally means, "to be holy, set apart, distinct, or separate." It speaks of that which is sacred or set apart as opposed to that which is common or profane. The purpose of the Nazirite vow was to set one apart from the world unto God. The Nazirite vow covered the idea of separation in regards to diet, appearance and associations and emphasizes a holiness in all areas of life. In fact the idea of holiness was to be the practice of the whole congregation of Israel (cf. Leviticus 19:1; 20:7). The Nazirite vow was usually for a specific period of time. However on at least three occasions it was a lifetime vow [In the case of Samson (Judges 13:2-7; 16:17), Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15)]

Now, as we well know this instruction was to Israel not to the church. So it only has direct application to Israel. In other words, as believers in Christ we are not commanded to participate in the Nazirite vow. It is ok for us to partake of the fruit of the vine. It is ok for us to cut or trim our hair. It does not make the believer unclean if they come into contact with a dead body. However, at the same time, it is possible to draw out principles from the Old Testament that can be applied by the believer.

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- *What principle can be drawn out from this passage and how could it apply to the Christian life?*

Clearly the principle of striving for holiness is the one glaring principle that shines forth from this passage. As believers, we are indeed to strive for holiness. According to 1 Peter 1:14-16 we are to be holy in all of our behavior. In other words, to be separated unto God is to be separated from sin. As obedient children of God, we need to not be conformed according to our former lusts, but striving to be set apart in all of our behavior. How can you personally be set apart unto God striving for holiness in your life?

### **Application Questions**

- *Does your life demonstrate that you have been separated unto God?*
- *What are your biggest hurdles to holiness?*
- *What is your plan to pursue holiness?*