



Welcome to our second week in the Book of Numbers (Wilderness). Now you are probably thinking, “Numbers, really?” I received an email from a lady last week who was 82 years old, has been a follower of Jesus since she was 11 and never heard a sermon on the book of Numbers. This is a new series we called “Lost.” What do you do, where do you go when you feel lost? **We have hope that Jesus came to seek the lost.**

The activist Jesse Jackson tells the story of a visit to the University of Southern Mississippi. While touring the campus with the university president, he noticed a towering male student, six-feet, eight-inches tall, holding hands with a coed barely three-feet tall. His curiosity piqued, Jackson stopped to watch as the young man, dressed in a warm-up suit, tenderly picked up the young lady, kissed her, and sent her off to class.

The president explained that the student was a star basketball player. Both parents had died in his youth, and he made a vow to look after his sister. Many scholarship offers came his way, but only Southern Mississippi offered one to his sister too.

Jackson went over to the basketball star, introduced himself, and said he appreciated him looking out for his sister. The athlete shrugged and said, "Those of us who God makes 6' 8" have to look out for those he makes 3' 3"."

This man made a vow he intended to keep. We live in a lost world where we have lost our sense of commitment, promise, and dedication. Today we look at an important vow in Scriptures. **Are you willing to dedicate your life for the purposes of Christ? Are you willing to make a promise that intend to keep?**

A Pledge of Allegiance [Numbers 6:1-8]

Nazirite: Say What?

So far in Numbers, the Lord has counted all of Israel and given organization to the priests. But what about the **non-priests**? What happens to those not born into the tribe of Levi, can they not serve the Lord faithfully? This is precisely where the Nazirite vow meets the people.

Nazirite literally means to separate. And the word “special vow” means **promise and to do a difficult thing**. It represents ordinary people, man or woman, dedicated to Adonai for a specific purpose and length of

time. **If you feel average, you are precisely the person this passage is speaking!**

Here in Num 6:1-12 the Nazirite commitment is intended as temporary, but could also manifest as a life-long commitment. We have **famous Nazirites** throughout the Holy Scriptures. One of the most famous was **Samson**. An angel of the Lord came to Manoah's wife and told her "you will give birth to a son, you must never cut his hair because the boy will be a Nazirite (Judges 13). Samson had supernatural strength. He tore a lion apart with his bare hands, he collected 300 foxes tied them with torches and sent them through the fields. Ultimately, Samson had his head shaved, the Lord left him, and he ended his life in captivity.

Samuel, Israel's priest who anointed the first king, Saul. Hannah, Samuel's mother was barren and cried out to the Lord. Said, "I prayed for this boy, and since the Lord gave me what I asked for, I now give the boy to the Lord." (1 Sam 1:27).

Recabites in Jer. 35:6. A group of descendants who would not drink wine, build a house, or plant a vineyard.

Who can forget **John the Baptist**. A voice preparing the way for Jesus in the wilderness. He wore camel-hair garments, a leather belt and ate locust and wild honey. It's possible even the **Apostle Paul** took the Nazirite vow regularly (Acts 18:18) and even **James** the brother of Jesus. And the Nazirite vow was very popular during the Second Temple period and the time of Christ. **By the time of Jesus rabbis had reduced the vow to 30 days and made it relatively easy to fulfill.** These are not exceptional people who make **exceptional vows**. Nazirites are people who desire the Lord do exceptional things in their lives. When you give the Lord your all, even for a moment, His Spirit will turn your life upside down.

So if you are ready to take the vow today. What must you do?

1. **Drink** - The first commitment concerns what goes in your mouth. Grapes in three increasing degrees of severity. grapes turned sour. Either wine or beer. Some say the Bible never mentions beer. Hebrew shekhar. The exact cognate in Akkadian means beer. The beer and ale industry is attested in earliest times in the predominantly grain growing countries of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Grapes (fresh and dry) and even the seeds and skin.
2. **Hairdo** - the second commitment is more external and the most visible. Men would regularly shave their heads and woman rarely. Priests were forbidden to shave their heads but compelled to trim it (Ezek. 44:20). **Young adults, next time your parents ask you to get a haircut, remember the Nazirite vow!**
3. **Death** - The avoidance of contact with a dead body parallels a similar restriction put upon the high priest (Lev 21:11). In contrast to the layman who is unclean only by direct contact with a corpse, the Nazirite is contaminated by mere proximity. Maybe this is what Jesus is referring when he taught, **"follow me and let the dead bury their own dead"** (Matt. 8:21).

At the end of the service we will not ask for you to take the Nazirite vow unto the Lord. However, we can all take away deep spiritual truths from this holy Text. Will you commit your life to Jesus Christ? He's worth it!

Nazirite: Now What?

For anyone, when any man or any woman desired. Through this institution, the ordinary Israelite was given a special status resembling the priest, for he too became "holy to the Lord." **You don't have to be born of Levi, in the line of the priest to honor Adonai. You don't have to be called out as a prophet. You can be any man or any woman!** **You don't have to be special to serve the Lord, you are special and treasured (Exod. 19:6) because of Christ.** The Lord does **His most remarkable works through the most unremarkable people.** May we never forget Moses whom Yahweh said go to Pharaoh and his response, "how will Pharaoh listen since I am such a poor speaker (Exod 6:13).

Personal not populous, The Nazirite vow was deeply personal and practical in obligation. Yet, it displays a great truth. **Don't legislate to others your commitment to the Lord.** Was it commanded that the entire nation of Israel abstain from grapes or raisins, by no means? **Personal devotion can become division when we use it against others.** May we never go "beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). I believe we do a disservice to the world when they see us legislating our personal commitments to the Lord. Grapes? Hair? Death? Dancing? Cards? Becoming a Nazirite did not mean that a person ruled society or dropped out of society. **Personal not populous. Humble not haughty.**

Consecration The Nazirite vow challenges us to live different, **separate for the cause of our Savior.** For the most part, we are not personally committed to giving up small joys for the sake of the Kingdom. We rarely desire to give up control of our lives (hair) or separate ourselves from the realm of sin and death. The law of the Nazirite **exposes our hearts** as well as those of ancient Israel. **So we must ask ourselves: am I willing to give up earthy joys for the greatest joys in Christ?** Am I willing to give up control to my life? To declare Jesus as Lord is to say: Jesus you have complete control, and my life is a blank check. Are you truly willing to separate from the realm of death and sin?

Freedom in Christ Frequently, we feel burdened or restrained by the Lord's demands. However, we should be reminded that personal **consecration to the Lord brings restriction, honor, and freedom.** The Nazirite had freedom from the debilitating effects and consequences of alcohol. So yes Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge is good to eat and desirable for obtaining wisdom (Gen 3:6), but it leads to destruction.

Matt. 11:28 "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Lord (Christocentric) **Commitment of the hair without consecration of the heart is futile.** Without trust in the Lord and placing a high value on one's relationship with the One True God, there was nothing worthwhile to be gained from taking the Nazirite vow. **Duty always follows devotion.** Jesus calls people **without heart whitewashed tombs** (Matt. 23:27) and one day those without heart will say I didn't eat grapes in your name, and I didn't cut my hair in your name, and I abstained from death—even my parents- and the Lord will say depart from me for I never knew you (Matt. 7:23). Yet, what a glorious equation when Devotion (Faith) + Duty (works) flow from an overwhelming desire for Jesus Christ.

Head-Heart-Hands

We need a greater Final Nazirite. Even the best Nazirite, after completely their vow faithfully, still needed to offer a sin offering before they could share a covenant meal with the Lord. Even our best efforts fall short (Duguid, 82). The answer to our need is not Samson or Samuel. We don't need a Nazirite we need the one from Nazareth.

Jesus was not consecrated by outward appearance, hair, he changed water into wine and raised Lazarus from the dead. But he was separated from birth. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. **We are set apart as holy with a change of heart (inside) not a haircut**

Are you willing and ready to follow Jesus today?

Are you willing to vow and give your all today? workwb

Notes

- The Nazirite was a perfect picture of what Israel intended to be. They were to be a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (Duguid, 79).
- The prescriptions and descriptions of the Nazirite vow complete the first Sinai cycle of preparation of the Israelite people for the adventurous journey to the Promised Land.
- The priestly and Levitical functions have been outlined, and now the general Israelite population is provided a means for voluntary separation and devotion to a life of holiness.
 - Parallel to the holiness portrayed in the distinctive priestly regulations, here the tribes are bestowed the opportunity to become the "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6).
- The language of the text reflects that Naziritism was an existing institution, in that the concept of a *nāzîr* is assumed as known to the reader, and thus the purpose of this pericope is to delineate the guidelines and regulate the practice.
 - The present text offers no indication of the impetus for entering into the vow other than personal desire for consecration.
 - Yet the biblical and Near Eastern examples evidence an expanded purpose for the Nazirite vow as well as for other classes of vows.
- Vows from the context of the culture of the ancient Near East have been examined by T. Cartledge in *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*.

- Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Ugaritic vows suggest the following pattern: (1) the vow grows out of a situation of need or distress, (2) is made by a human to the gods, (3) generally is conditional in nature, and (4) a responsive votive offering is offered publicly at a shrine at some point during or at the completion of the vow conditions.
- Vows in the Hebrew Bible reflect close parallels in form and general content with those of the Old Testament world.
- The Nazirite vow contexts of the births of Samson and Samuel demonstrate the needs of barren women, the making and fulfilling of vows, and the offering of sacrifices at the conclusion of the vow period when the conditions have been fulfilled. Though the time span of the vows of the parents was limited, both young men were dedicated to the Lord for their whole lives
- The concern of Numbers 6 is with the consecration and maintenance of the vow rather than with the various conditions, settings, or kinds of Nazirite vows that one may enter.
 - Rather than the lifelong type of vows indicated by the Samson and Samuel accounts, Numbers 6 focuses on the restrictions and purification aspects of the vow.
- Scripture records two kinds of Nazirite status: lifelong and temporary, both of which result from a vow. In the case of lifelong, the vow is imposed by others, usually by a pregnant mother, whereas the vow of a temporary Nazirite is self-imposed (JPS, 355).
- Examples of lifelong Nazirites in the Bible: Samson and Samuel were dedicated from the womb and John the Baptist in the NT.
- The laws on Nazirites were included here because they fit the general theme of this part of Numbers: the nation is being organized as the holy people of God (Wenham, 85).
- **Nazirite**- H5687 | S H5139 נָזִיר *nāziyr* 6x n.m. [5693]. Nazirite, with the designated meaning of separation; a class of people dedicated to God; untended vine, dedicated to God in the sabbatical year of rest.
- The restrictions placed on Nazirites suggest that their sanctity exceeded that of ordinary priests and resembled that of the High Priest (Wenham, 87).

Num. 6:1 The LORD instructed Moses: 2 “Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When a man or woman makes a special vow, a Nazirite vow, to consecrate himself to the LORD,

- 6:1–2 The chapter commences with the familiar introductory formula of divine speech, *wayēdabbēr YHWH el-Mōšeh lē`mōr*, which provides continuity with the previous revelatory introductions.
- The repetition of this phrase, one of the key themes of the Book of Numbers, is designed to reinforce the serious nature of maintaining the sanctity and purity of the congregation of the chosen people of God.
- It is more accurate to compare the temporary Nazirite to the priest. Through this institution, the ordinary Israelite was given a status resembling a priest, for he too became “holy to the Lord” (JPS, 355). In his taboos, the Nazirite approximated even more the greater sanctity of the High Priest.

3 he is to abstain from wine and beer. He must not drink vinegar made from wine or from beer. He must not drink any grape juice or eat fresh grapes or raisins. 4 He is not to eat anything produced by the grapevine, from seeds to skin, during the period of his consecration.

- Three areas of restriction for one entering into this special period of service are delineated:
 - (1) abstaining from the vineyard and its products, as well as various intoxicating drinks,
 - (2) refraining from cutting one's hair, and
 - (3) avoiding uncleanness that comes through proximity to a dead body.
 - Only the third restriction, which presumably could happen accidentally in one's household, is addressed in terms of purification ritual to rectify the state of uncleanness. The others would involve voluntary abrogation.
- All forms of intoxicating beverage are off limits at all times to the Nazirite for the duration of the vow.
 - This restriction is more extensive than the prohibition placed upon priests, who are limited from consumption of such drinks only during the period of tabernacle or temple service (Lev 10:9).
 - Yet not only is a Nazirite restricted from consuming wine (*yayin*) and fermented drink (*šēkār*), but that individual also cannot partake of wine vinegar (*ḥōmeš yayin*), vinegar from other fermented liquids (*ḥōmeš šēkār*), unfermented grape juice, grapes, raisins, grape seeds, and hulls, or anything else derived from the vineyard.
 - The reference to seeds and hulls is probably hyperbolic, emphasizing the total abstinence from the vineyard.
 - The vineyard restriction is paralleled by the Rechabite tradition that forbade the planting of vineyards, an indication of a sedentary lifestyle.¹²⁹ Abstaining from the vineyard and related products was a personal and generally private act of special devotion of one's life and mind to the Lord.
- Grapes in three degrees of increasing severity: wine turned sour, grapes themselves, both fresh and dry, and (3) even the seeds and skin.
- Wine is also associated with great zeal and boldness. Great passion is sometimes mistaken for drunkenness, and abstention from wine is arguably not for the purpose of avoiding sin, but rather for making clear to others that the boldness and zeal of those abstaining come from God rather than from wine (Stubbs, 66).
- The vineyard and its produce thus can have an antithetical usage in the Bible.
 - On one hand vineyards are evidence of Yahweh's great blessing upon the land (Isa 5:1–2, 7a; Jer 2:21).
 - A large cluster of grapes was brought back by the team of spies who explored the land of Canaan prior to Israel's rejection of the land (Num 13:23–24).
 - Wine is combined with various elements in the sacrificial system for worshiping God and making atonement (Num 15:5, 7, 10; 28:7–10, 14). Israelites living far from Jerusalem were even encouraged to purchase wine and strong drink along with sheep and cattle with money from their tithes, and then they would eat and drink these in the presence of the Lord with rejoicing (Deut 14:24–27).
 - What is of interest is that even the nonfermented state is prohibited. Behind this abstinence may lie an ancient ban which considered the vine a symbol of the corruption of sedentary life (Noah in Gen 9:20 and Rechabites in Jer. 35:6).

- However, excessive consumption is condemned categorically (Prov 20:1; 23:30–31; 31:4; Isa 28:7). In the New Testament limitations regarding wine consumption are listed among the requirements for overseers and deacons, and drunkenness is the antithesis to being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18; 1 Cor 6:10).
- Beer- Hebrew shekhar. The exact cognate in Akkadian means beer. The beer and ale industry is attested in earliest times in the predominantly grain growing countries of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Num. 6:5 “You must not cut his hair throughout the time of his vow of consecration. He may be holy until the time is completed during which he consecrates himself to the LORD; he is to let the hair of his head grow long.

- Refraining from trimming the hair was the most visible evidence of an individual’s decision to become a Nazirite.
 - Holiness is associated with the length of the hair, the crowning glory of the Nazirite.
 - Milgrom suggests that this characteristic was more important than the other two, since it is the one reason to avoid corpse contamination.
 - Men would regularly trim or shave the hair on their heads, but women were less likely to do so. The priest, forbidden to share his hair, was compelled to trim it (Ezek., 44:20).
 - Allen suggests that the women, who would not regularly cut their hair, may have left their hair unkempt as a sign of their Nazirite consecration.¹³²
 - Special rituals of shaving of the head and the body were performed in pagan cults in contrast to the Nazirite practice. Harrison compares the Nazirite’s life to that of the unpruned vine of the jubilee year left undisturbed to allow the full maturity of the fruit.¹³⁴
- To let your hair grow without human restriction represented giving your life over completely to God’s control. It was a vivid symbol of giving God the reigns of your life (Duguid, 78).

6 He must not go near a dead body during the time he consecrates himself to the LORD. **7** He is not to defile himself for his father or mother, or his brother or sister, when they die, while the mark of consecration to his God is on his head. **8** He is holy to the LORD during the time of consecration.

- The avoidance of contact with a dead body parallels a similar restriction put upon the high priest (Lev 21:11).
 - Both are to avoid a dead body, even that of a member of the immediate family. A corpse carried with it ritual uncleanness that would restrict a priest from service or a Nazirite from maintaining his or her vow.
 - Upon entering into the Nazirite vow, one would not know the potential of a member of one’s family passing away and the subsequent demand upon one’s psyche being unable to go through the grief process.
 - Jesus alludes to this aspect of the dedication of his disciples when he admonished them to “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead” (Matt 8:21–22).
- Near—in contrast to the layman, who is contaminated by a corpse only by direct contact or by being under the same roof, the Nazirite is contaminated merely being its proximity (JPS, 46).

- We must assume the lifelong Nazirite was subject to the same law as the priest, for whom corpse contamination only suspended his priesthood for a prescribed period of impurity but did not cancel it (JPS, 357).
- The popularity of the Nazirite vow at the close of the Second Temple period can be explained by the relative ease in fulfilling it. By then, the rabbis had reduced the term to thirty days (JPS, 358).
- Josephus mentions that these vows were popular in the first century AD. The vows mentioned in Acts 18:18 and 21:23 may have been Nazirite. It has often been suggested that John the B and James the brother of Jesus were Nazirites (Wenham, 89).

Acts 18:18 After staying for some time, Paul said farewell to the brothers and sisters and sailed away to Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. He shaved his head at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.

23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have made a vow. **24** Take these men, purify yourself along with them, and pay for them to get their heads shaved.

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

- For the most part, we are not personally committed to giving up the joy that might legitimately be ours for the sake of the kingdom. Few of us are easily content to give the control of our lives into the hands of God, nor are we ready and eager to separate ourselves from the realm of sin and death (Duguid, 82). The law of the Nazirite exposes our hearts as well as those of ancient Israel.
- Final Nazirite. Even the best Nazirite, after completely their vow faithfully, still needed to offer a sin offering before they could share a covenant meal with the Lord. Even our best efforts fall short (Duguid, 82). The answer to our need is not Samson or Samuel. We don’t need a Nazirite we need the one from Nazareth.
- Three applications to the Nazirite commitment. (1) are you willing to give up earthly joys for Christ? (2) are you willing to give up control of your life? (3) are you willing to separate from the realm of sin and death? (Duguid, 84).
- The Nazirite commitment was deeply personal in desire and obligation.
- With consecration to the Lord comes honor and restriction. However with restrictions come freedom. The Nazirite was free from the debilitating effects and consequences of alcohol (NIV, 537).
- Without trust in the Lord and placing a high value on one’s relationship with Him, there was nothing worthwhile to be gained by sincerely taking a Nazirite vow, the cost of which was above the call of duty (NIV, 538).
- Becoming a Nazirite did not mean dropping out of society.