

the woman would experience **bitter suffering**, the exact nature of which is uncertain.⁹⁶ Dropsy and painful miscarriage have been suggested.⁹⁷ The fact that only the guilty would experience the physical effects also stands in contrast to “trial by ordeal “ (5:17) in which one’s innocence must be demonstrated by overcoming a deadly potion or some mortal danger.

5:29-31 Interestingly, there is no biblical record of this **law of jealousy** ever having been utilized. This fact has led some to believe that the procedure was provided only for the wilderness period. If the woman were not guilty, her husband nevertheless was **innocent of any wrongdoing**, i.e., the husband was not to be punished for undue suspicion.⁹⁸ If found guilty, the woman would **bear the consequences of her sin**,⁹⁹ evidently meaning her execution (Lev 20:10).¹⁰⁰

D. NAZIRITE VOW REGULATED (6:1-21)

1. Nazirite Law Stated (6:1-8)

6:1-4 The rules for this special vow of separation unto divine service include (1) the basic requirements of the vow (vv. 1-8), (2) provision for accidental violation of the vow (vv. 9-12), and (3) a com-

⁹⁶The Mishnah reports in horrific fashion, “She has hardly finished to drink when her face turns yellow and her eyes protrude and she is covered with swollen veins. And they say, ‘Take her out! Take her out that she does not defile the Temple Court!’” (*Sotah* 3:4).

⁹⁷Frymer-Kensky explains the condition in terms of a “prolapsed uterus.” She writes, “In this condition, which may occur after multiple pregnancies, the pelvic floor (weakened by the pregnancies) collapses, and the uterus literally falls down [see note 89 above]. It may lodge in the vagina, or it may actually fall out of the body through the vagina. If it does so, it becomes edematous and swells up like a balloon. Conception becomes impossible, and the woman’s procreative life has effectively ended” (“Suspected,” p. 21). Of course, the idea of multiple pregnancies is not behind the curse of the text here. However, the conditions described may be similar.

⁹⁸Brichto interprets this phrase to refer, not to the woman’s husband, but to her adulterous consort (“Case,” p. 63). However, his conclusion is without foundation – ancient or modern.

⁹⁹Levine simply interprets the phrase in reference to divorce (*Numbers*, p. 199).

¹⁰⁰The Mishnah states that the woman will gradually waste away until the day of her death (*Sotah* 3:5). Nothing of execution is stated.

pletion ceremony for public recognition of the vow's fulfillment (vv. 13-21). Although a **woman**¹⁰¹ could legally make a **vow**,¹⁰² a minor daughter's vow required the consent of her father (30:3-5) and a wife's vow required the consent of her husband (30:6-8). The term **Nazirite** (נָזִיר, *nāzîr*) means "one separated,"¹⁰³ i.e., unto God,¹⁰⁴ as is shown by the context and the fuller form "Nazirite to God" (Judg 16:5).¹⁰⁵ The person who thus consecrated himself for divine service was (1) to abstain from all intoxicants and products of the grapevine (vv. 3-4), (2) to permit his hair to grow long (v. 5), and (3) to avoid all contact with the dead (vv. 6-8). The Nazirite vow here regulated was taken by the individual himself for a limited period of time. Samson, divinely proclaimed a Nazirite for life prior to his birth (Judg 16:7),¹⁰⁶ was therefore a special case,¹⁰⁷ for whom some of the regulations did not apply (compare v. 6 with Judg 14:19; 15:8).

¹⁰¹Milgrom considers the inclusion of women to mean that the Nazirite vow was a common ritual in biblical Israel (*Numbers*, p. 44).

¹⁰²Vows were not necessarily viewed with praise, especially when the subject failed to fulfill them (Eccl 5:4; see Levine, *Numbers*, p. 218).

¹⁰³Von Rad sees as the background for the Nazirite an unconditional rebellion from the Canaanite gods, with a turn toward YHWH (*Old Testament Theology*, trans. by D.M.G. Stalker [London: Oliver, 1962], 1:63).

¹⁰⁴Most agree that the root נָזַר (*nzr*) is connected with נָדַר (*ndr*, "vow") in biblical Hebrew as well as in Semitic languages generally (see Levine, *Numbers*, pp. 218-219; *TDOT*, 9:307).

¹⁰⁵Scholars have proposed various understandings of the Samson story since Numbers anticipates a relatively short period of consecration. Some propose that parts of the story have been interpolated (see E. Zuckschwerdt, "Zur literarischen Vorgeschichte des priestlichen Nazir-Gesetzes [Num 6:1-8]," *ZAW* 88 [1976]: 191-205). Others regard the passage to reflect an evolution in the Nazirite ritual (Gray, *Numbers*, p. 60). Still others consider that a distinction was made between a self-imposed Nazirite, and one who is dedicated by another (Cartledge, "Were Nazirite Vows Unconditional?" *CBQ* 51 [1989]: 409-422).

¹⁰⁶The rabbis drew a distinction between a temporary and lifelong Nazirite (see *m. Nazir* 1:2).

¹⁰⁷Diamond asseverates that the dedication responsibilities for the Naziriteship of Samson were shared between his mother and, after his birth, Samson himself ("An Israelite Self-Offering in the Priestly Code," *JQR* 88 [1997]: 8-9). His arguments are drawn from Judges 13:4-5, where Manoah's wife is told to abstain from "wine or fermented drink." However, it should be noted that the prohibition is not extended to all grape products (as is the Numbers passage), and the reason for the command is not necessarily intended to communicate Nazirite responsibilities.

Historical sources indicate that Naziriteship for a limited period of time was somewhat prevalent in later Jewish history.¹⁰⁸ Like priests on duty (Lev 10:9), the Nazirites were prohibited all **wine and other fermented drink**, including **vinegar** which was made from sour intoxicants. Not only from intoxicating beverages, but also from **grape juice . . . grapes or raisins**, i.e., all products of the **grapevine**,¹⁰⁹ was the Nazirite to abstain.¹¹⁰ The Hebrew word for **seeds** (קִרְיָנִים, *harṣanîm*) and **skins** (זֶג, *zāg*) are quite rare and their meaning somewhat uncertain so that the translations vary.¹¹¹

6:5-8 Shaving or cutting the hair¹¹² was prohibited throughout the duration of one's Nazirite vow.¹¹³ Unshorn hair was the visible sign of the Nazirite's consecration of all his powers unto God, i.e., **he must be holy**.¹¹⁴ That this was the primary mark of the Nazirite is seen in the use of the Hebrew term in Leviticus 25:5,11 for an untrimmed vine, in the case of Samson in Judges 16:17, and in the emphasis upon the hair in the present context.¹¹⁵ Like the high priest

¹⁰⁸The Mishnah dedicates an entire tractate to the subject of the Nazirite.

¹⁰⁹According to *Numbers Rabba*, grape products, while not injurious themselves, are forbidden in order to place a sufficient buffer between unfermented wine and alcoholic consumption (quoted in Diamond, "Israelite," p. 6).

¹¹⁰The Mishnah measures the subject's culpability with hairsplitting intensity, discussing the weight of grape juice, and the quantity of seed before one violates the Nazirite legislation (see *Nazir* 6:1-2).

¹¹¹Levine rightly interprets the two terms in merismic fashion, noting that the intention is to warn from eating any part of the grape (*Numbers*, p. 221).

¹¹²The term "be used" (NIV) is better "pass over, upon" (עָבַר, *ābar*). Thus the intended meaning is to cut or trim. The normal term used with "razor" in reference to shaving (גָּלַח, *gālah*) is intentionally avoided here, according to Milgrom. Not only shaving but trimming also is prohibited (*Numbers*, p. 45).

¹¹³Hair was viewed to be a symbol of oneself throughout antiquity, and was regularly left as an offering (see Diamond, "Israelite," pp. 2-3, and the literature there cited).

¹¹⁴In a Babylonian text, "Ritual for the Repair of a Temple," the king is shorn and is required to offer a "poem of appeasement" along with his hair to the three gods Anu, Enlil, and Ea (*ANET*, pp. 339-340).

¹¹⁵Diamond contends that the hair is symbolic of the individual, and that the burning of the hair functions as a substitute for the burning of the individual, much in the way the firstborn is to be redeemed (see "Israelite," pp. 1-18). In a similar way Gray applies the symbolic meaning of the hair to the distinction between a lifelong and temporary Nazirite. He states, "A common belief, that the hair is part of the man's vital being, accounts for

(Lev 21:11), a Nazirite was to avoid any ceremonially defiling contact with a **dead body**. Like the anointing oil upon the high priest (Lev 21:12), the consecrated hair of the Nazirite, **the symbol of his separation to God**, placed upon him a ceremonial restriction greater than that of the ordinary priest (Lev 21:1-3).¹¹⁶

2. Accidental Violation Treated (6:9-12)

6:9-12 Though scrupulously observing the regulations, one could not always avoid contact with the dead,¹¹⁷ thus **defiling the hair he has dedicated**.¹¹⁸ In this event, the individual was to undergo a cleansing ceremony, **shave his head** (cf. Lev 14:2,9), offer appropriate sacrifices, and begin his vow anew. According to Jewish tradition, the hair thus defiled was buried.¹¹⁹ The cleansing ceremony is described in 19:11-13, which marks the seventh day as the **day of his cleansing**. The defiled Nazirite was to bring¹²⁰ **two doves** or **pigeons** so that the priest could offer one as a **sin offering**¹²¹ and the other as a **burnt**

both treatments. If the one main object is to keep the man's power of vitality at the full, the hair is never shaven; if the object is to present the deity with part of the man's life, the hair is a suitable means of achieving this" (*Numbers*, p. 69).

¹¹⁶Ashley argues that the common ancient Near Eastern mourning practice of shaving one's head (e.g., Deut 21:2; Jer 7:29; Job 1:20) would be a legitimate temptation to a Nazirite; thus, he is, like the priests (Lev 21:5-6), emphatically warned of the consequences (*Numbers*, p. 143).

¹¹⁷Milgrom argues that אִלָּיָו ('*alāyāw*, "in his presence," NIV) is not limited to direct contact, but even proximity to a corpse serves as a basis for defilement (see *Numbers*, p. 46).

¹¹⁸Milgrom notes the striking comparison between land dedicated to the sanctuary (Lev 27:16) and the Nazirite (*Numbers*, pp. 355-356).

¹¹⁹See *m. Temurah* 7:4.

¹²⁰The Hebrew of verse 13 is ambiguous, both the subject and object being unclear. The NIV translates, "He is to be brought," on the basis that the third person often carries the stative/passive force when the subject is unspecified (see Levine, *Numbers*, p. 224). However, Diamond argues that the Nazirite is to be brought (by the priest) as an offering ("Israelite," pp. 9-10). Thus, the offering offers offerings.

¹²¹The puzzling difficulty, both ancient and modern, concerns the sin offering (חַטָּאת, *hattā'th*) here. What sin could the Nazirite have committed? Furthermore, Paul's apparent participation in the Nazirite sacrifices of the four Jewish men (Acts 21:14) is problematic. Did Paul offer a *sin offering*?

offering¹²² (cf. Lev 5:7-10). The least expensive of animal offerings, these were provided for atonement after cleansing also in Leviticus 12:8; 14:22; 15:14; and 15:29. No offering was required after the cleansing of an ordinary Israelite defiled by contact with a corpse (19:11-22). Although the Nazirite's offense was inadvertent, it yet required atonement (cf. Lev 4:2). Having made his atoning sacrifices, the Nazirite was to **consecrate his head**, i.e., begin his vow anew. The **guilt offering** of a **male lamb** (Lev 5:14-6:7) was required, apparently because the defilement of the consecrated hair nullified its significance and removed that hair from its intended purpose (v. 18).¹²³

3. Termination Ceremony Depicted (6:13-21)

6:13-21 The ceremony here described involved extensive offerings, hence considerable expense. Later centuries saw the development of the custom of another person's performing the pious charity of paying this expense for a Nazirite, to which custom Acts 21:23-24 may allude.¹²⁴ At the entrance to the **Tent of Meeting**, the sanc-

Milgrom would have us believe that the term *ḥaṭṭā'th* is notoriously mistranslated "sin offering." It is better rendered "purification offering" ("Sin-offering or Purification-offering?" *VT* 21 [1971]: 237-239). His conclusions are well founded and are indeed in keeping with Israel's system of sin and sanctuary pollution. However, his attempt to read his rendering into rabbinic sources is stretched.

¹²²Levine considers the composition of the sin offering and the burnt offering to be of the utmost importance: "The order is highly significant, because it was necessary first to reinstate the Nazirite and to expiate his abrogation of the term of restriction. Once this was done, an 'ōlāh 'burnt offering' served to test God's response" (*Numbers*, p. 222).

¹²³Levine describes the guilt offering in its usual context of misappropriation of property, a *ma'al* (Lev 5:14-16, 20-26; Num 5:5-10; see *Numbers*, p. 223). If this understanding is retained here, the loss of property is none other than the Nazirite himself.

¹²⁴Several accounts exist in antiquity. For example, Josephus records that Agrippa I brought sacrifices for the Nazirites (*Antiquities* 19.6.1). The Jerusalem Talmud speaks of Alexander Jannaeus paying for the sacrifices of 150 Nazirites (*Nazir* 5.5, 54b). *Sifre Zuta* indicates that some took the Nazirite vow so that someone else would pay for their meat at its conclusion (see Diamond, "Israelite," p. 16). This abuse of the sacred position is doubtless the reason why so many rabbis harbored such skepticism toward the rite (cf. *m. Nazir* 5:5-7).

tuary, the Nazirite was to present his **offerings to the LORD**, including a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a fellowship offering, and their appropriate accompaniments. These kinds of offerings are fully treated in Leviticus chapters 1, 4 and 3 respectively. **Grain offerings** of meal and **drink offerings** of oil and wine accompanied burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (15:3-7). This particular fellowship offering had two accompanying grain offerings (v. 17), adding to the ordinary grain offerings **the basket of unleavened bread**, a special accompaniment for the fellowship offering of thanksgiving (Lev 7:12; see also 2:4). Only the fat and the viscera of a fellowship offering were actually burned on the altar (Lev 3:6-11). The bulk of a fellowship offering provided a sacrificial meal for the worshiper and his guests; the **boiled**¹²⁵ **shoulder** was a special additional priestly portion from a Nazirite's fellowship offering.¹²⁶ The shoulder, cake and wafer, symbolically identified with the worshiper (v. 19), were waved before the altar as a **wave offering**¹²⁷ (Exod 29:24; Lev 7:30) and then given to the priest. The **bread** and the **thigh** were the usual priestly portions (Lev 7:31-34). His vow fully satisfied, the individual who had been a Nazirite was released from its restrictions and, beginning with the sacrificial meal, could drink wine. The summary statement suggests that the prescribed offerings were a minimal requirement; one could do more. If a person vowed larger offerings, he was, of course, obligated to perform them.¹²⁸

¹²⁵Levine draws that all sacrifices of the *zebah* type were boiled in pots (1 Sam 2:13-16; *Numbers*, p. 226).

¹²⁶The shoulder is mentioned only one other time as a priestly gift (Deut 18:3), although elsewhere in the ancient Near East, it was hallowed as well (see, e.g., *ANET*, p. 85 [Babylon], p. 348 [Hittite])

¹²⁷Milgrom argues that the term **וַיַּזְבֵּחַ**, (*v'niḥpāh*, traditionally, "wave") should be understood not as a waving, but a simple elevation (see *Levitical Terminology*, pp. 133-138, 139-158). His conclusions have been met with nearly universal acceptance (see NJPS, NRSV).

¹²⁸The Mishnah reports the interesting case of Queen Helene, who vowed to be a Nazirite for seven years. After this period she left "the Land," and her Naziriteship was extended to fourteen years (due to her uncleanness from leaving the sacred land). At the end of this period, she again became unclean, extending her service to twenty-one years (*Nazir* 3:6). No limit is ever placed on the length of one's Naziriteship, although the rabbis stipulate that one must carry out the vow for at least thirty days (i.e., a month; *m. Nazir* 1:3).