

Nazirism and Messiah

Credit: First Fruits of Zion: Weekly eDrash

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

James [the brother of Yeshua] drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; 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 ... (Ecclesiastical History 23.4)

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..." (Numbers 6:2)

Numbers 6 relates the laws of the Nazirite. A Nazirite vow is a special vow one might take unto the LORD. The Nazirites were ordinary people who opted, for a period of time, to abstain from the fruit of the vine and from haircuts, and to guard against ritual contamination.

While the Temple still stood, the Nazirite vow was popular among the believers. Yochanon the Immerser was a lifelong Nazirite. The apostle Paul took a Nazirite vow while at Corinth (Acts 18:18) and joined four other believing Nazirites for the completion of a vow. (Acts 21:23-26) According to early church legend, James the brother of the Master also took a lifelong Nazirite vow. Eusebius quotes Hegesippus in his Ecclesiastical History, "James drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head." (Ecclesiastical History 23:4)

Why was the Nazirite vow so popular among the early believers? Perhaps they regarded taking the vow as a mark of imitation of Yeshua.

The Master declared Himself a Nazirite when He said to the Twelve in the language of the Nazirite vow, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:29)

According to the rabbinic law, there are two components to undertaking a Nazirite vow: an oral declaration and a statement of term. The oral declaration is regarded as binding even if it is stated in less than explicit language. Thus one who said, "I will abstain from haircuts," or, "I will abstain from grape-stones and grape-skins," or, "I will be like Samson," are all regarded as having formally taken Nazirite vows. (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 nazirite." (m.Nazir 2:2) The Master's words, "I tell you truth, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine," are formulated as a vow. According to the Mishnah, such a vow should be regarded as a Nazirite vow. In addition to the oral declaration, a statement of term is necessary. The Master states the term of His vow at the outset. He will not drink of the fruit of the vine again "until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."