

Where Have All the Nazirites Gone?  
The Pacification of Judeo-Christian Holiness as  
Illuminated by Naziritic Motifs in the Bible

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A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Theological Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Theological Studies) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2007

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*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-34618-1*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-34618-1*

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## ABSTRACT

### Where Have All the Nazirites Gone? The Pacification of Judeo-Christian Holiness as Illuminated by Naziritic Motifs in the Bible

K. Gandhar Chakravarty

This thesis compares biblical naziritic behaviour. Through the various, often diametrically opposed characterizations of *nāzîrs*, we can trace the reasons for which conceptions of holiness gradually became pacifistic in the context of Judeo-Christianity (ca. 1250 BCE-150 CE). Two distinct models of biblical naziritism can be posited: the tribal and the cultic *nāzîr*. The tribal *nāzîr* is a lifelong warrior of Yahweh who is consecrated in the womb and must never cut his or her hair or drink wine. The cultic *nāzîr*, however, engages in a temporary vow in which a priest consecrates him or her and, furthermore, the cultic *nāzîr* must also swear off contact from dead bodies during the period of consecration. These classifications, however, serve as no more than signposts to mark the limits of possibility. Often opposing traits and inconsistencies coexist within the characterization of a given naziritic figure. We can make sense of these contradictory representations as follows: when Israel was no more than a warring tribe (ca. 1250-1000 BCE) in Caanan eking out an existence in the promised land, religious heroes had to be warriors of some kind, but as the circumstances of Israel and Judah evolved over centuries, so that the Israelites and Judahites were increasingly subject to the rule of foreign powers, the Jewish priestly ruling class had to make amendments to presuppositions of holiness in order to discourage violent behaviour. The movement away from holy warrior continues to shift further until the incarnation of the holy person in early Christianity is far from militaristic.

For Anna Natalia Waclawek

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## Abbreviations

### Journals

<i>ABR</i>	<i>American Benedictine Review</i>
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Illustrator</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Bible Today</i>
<i>BV</i>	<i>Biblical Viewpoint</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Studia missionalia</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

### Series

AB	The Anchor Bible
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
CSB	Collection sciences bibliques
ICC	International Critical Commentary
WBC	World Biblical Commentary

### Other

HB	Hebrew Bible
LXX	Septuagint
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

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## Chapter 1: Statement of the Question

A noticeable shift occurs in the perception of holiness in its Ancient Near Eastern, Judeo-Christian context. In a span of about one thousand years, the image of frontier heroes battling enemies in the desert gives way to solitary spiritual soldiers. In both instances, however, these diametrically opposed models of holiness are also associated with naziritic motifs. By undertaking this study, an overview of biblical-naziritic literature, a corollary theory has emerged, independent of the study's intent. This thesis will reveal the underlying socio-political reasons for why holiness ideals become pacified in the context of Ancient Near Eastern biblical societies.

### 1.1 Defining Nazirites: Naziritic Behaviour, Naziritic Literature, Naziritic Texts, Naziritic Tradition, and Naziritism

Before embarking on any arguments concerning the various contradictions and dilemmas in the study of Nazirites in the Bible, it is imperative to lay out what the term signifies. The Hebrew term נזיר, transliterated *nāzîr*, refers to an evolving tradition of Ancient Near Eastern holiness<sup>1</sup> rooted in history, legend, and myth<sup>2</sup> whose direct

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<sup>1</sup> *Nāzîr* as a noun, which is typically defined as one consecrated or separated, could also be described as one in a state of holiness; of course, the degree of one's holiness is usually defined by who has set the standards. Although the English words holiness and holy are derived from the Old English words *hālig* and *hālignes*, respectively, this thesis will employ the words holiness and holy in the sense of their modern English definitions as found in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, Katherine Barber (ed.), (Don Mills, O.N.: Oxford University, 2004), pp. 724a, 725a: holiness as an adjective meaning "sanctity, the state of being holy," and holy as an adjective meaning "1) morally and spiritually excellent or perfect, and to be revered. 2) belonging to, devoted to, or empowered by, God. 3) consecrated, sacred." These terms are all relevant as applied to the personhood of Nazirites. Although representations of nazirites differ, the definition as stands, in a broad sense, adequately reflects a common trait of naziritic figures—namely, that at whatever stage of their development, nazirites were, in some sense, seen as models of holiness. In our best judgment, we must concede that however complex the historical conceptions of nazirites are, their existence is somehow interpreted as a function of holiness. Also, Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 215 points out that as "defined in Numbers 6, a *nāzîr* was a person who had pledged under terms of a vow to restrict his behavior in several areas so as to attain a greater measure of holiness in his life." Furthermore, according to *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 12, G. Johannes Betterweek, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (eds.), David E. Green (trans.), (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), p. 522

references<sup>3</sup> and allusions<sup>4</sup> span from pre-monarchic tribal traditions<sup>5</sup> and their pre- to post-exilic documentation<sup>6</sup> (Judg 5:2, 13:5, 7, 16:17; 1 Sam 1:11, 12; 2 Sam 14:25-6, 15:8; Gen 49:26; Deut 33:16b; Am 2:11-12; Lam 4:7-8; Num 6:2, 13, 18-21; 1 Macc 3:49) to New Testament stories of some of the holy men of early Christianity, including John the Baptist (Lk 1:15)<sup>7</sup>, Jesus of Nazareth (Mk 14:25//Mt 26:29//Lk 22:18, Mk 15:23, Mt 2:23)<sup>8</sup>, and Paul (Acts 18:18, 21:23-7a)<sup>9</sup>.

Because the literature involving nazirites exhibits severely contrasting portraits, this thesis presents a set of terminology to acknowledge the distinctions and provide a working vocabulary in order to facilitate discussion. We can use Num 6:1-21 as a guide for naziritic behaviour, since it is the only biblical passage that offers a legislative code on how to become a nazirite. Num 6:1-21 is the scriptural fulcrum on which this study rests.

Below is the introduction of some terms that will aid us: Naziritic Behaviour, Nazirite Literature, Naziritic Text, Naziritic Tradition, and Naziritism.

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nazirites are additionally identified by the Hebrew word *qodesh* (Num 6:5, 8), which means holy. See also *Theological Dictionary* 9, p. 308 for an elaboration on the difference between the use of *nāzîr* to identify a function versus a more general characterization of holiness.

<sup>2</sup> For distinctions between history, legend, and myth see J. Alberto Soggin, "Myth, Legend, and History", *Introduction to the Old Testament: From Its Origins to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon* (London: SCM, 1976), pp. 46-56.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Chepey, *Nazirites in Late Second Temple Judaism: A Survey of Ancient Jewish Writings, the New Testament, Archaeological Evidence, and Other Writings from Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 19-146 provides an analysis of all existent manuscripts and archeological evidence that contain the word *nāzîr* or its equivalents. See section 4.2.1 for an elucidation on equivalents, particularly from Hebrew to Greek.

<sup>4</sup> Allusions refer to any one of the three types of naziritic behaviour as defined in this section.

<sup>5</sup> Such as found in the Song of Deborah (see section 3.1) and the story of Samson (see section 4.2).

<sup>6</sup> Because of the differing opinions of scholars on the matter it is not possible to date the relevant passages from Judges exactly, but the exact dates are not important to the textual chronology being established. What matters is that the processes of editing and redacting are discernable. For more information on the redaction of Judg 3-9, see Guillaume, "The Book of Saviours Rediscovered: Judges 3-9," in *Waiting*, pp. 5-74 and for specific information on the Song of Deborah, see pp. 30-41.

<sup>7</sup> See section 7.1.

<sup>8</sup> See section 7.2.

<sup>9</sup> See section 7.3.

- **Naziritic Behaviour** refers to any one or combination of the three basic forms of abstinence that a *nāzîr* might practice: from approaching dead bodies (Num 6:6-7a), drinking wine, strong drink, or vinegar or consuming grape by-products (Num 6:3-4), and cutting one's hair (Num 6:5). In 6:6-7a, the Hebrew word *nepesh* is often translated as corpse, which would signify a specifically dead human body. As we shall see, the meaning of *nepesh* is fluid enough to include animal bodies as well. These concerns are however secondary to the work at hand. For 6:3-4 the biblical emphasis is on wine, strong drink, and intoxicants. Finally, hair growth, while an Ancient Israelite tribal image of holiness, was also ironically worked into older traditions by D/Dtr and P, but by the time of the kingdom of Judah, nazirites had literally shifted to cutting their hair to signal the termination of a temporary vow. Hair growth is possibly the most ancient Hebrew holiness motif, the cutting of it for sacrifice a much later development. While these behaviours may or may not be connected to a personal vow, they must all fall under the general auspices of consecration or holy separation in order to qualify as naziritic behaviour.

- **Naziritic Literature** is any text that mentions or makes reference to one or more of the three behaviours that a nazirite might exhibit, whether or not the term *nāzîr* or its equivalents<sup>10</sup> are employed.
- A **Naziritic Text** makes explicit use of the Hebrew term *nāzîr* or its equivalents in relation to a character.
- **Naziritic Tradition** refers to any past incarnation of naziritic behaviour in literature or history as described in the Bible.
- Finally, **Naziritism** will be used to mean the phenomena associated with some combination of naziritic behaviour as found throughout literature, tradition, and history, while taking current trends into account<sup>11</sup>.

The *nāzîr*, as found in Ancient Israel's literature, is a status of holiness that was ascribed to people in various walks of life, including priests, prophets, judges, laity, and nobility.<sup>12</sup>

According to most scholarship, the *nāzîr* rites were a common practice in the religious climate of Second Temple Judaism,<sup>13</sup> but evidence of ancient precursors is sparse.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 22-39 for a synopsis on how Hebrew naziritic manuscripts were translated into Greek. When analyzing English translations of scripture, we must consider both nazirite and nazirite as equivalents to *nāzîr*.

<sup>11</sup> A possible Ph.D. topic could be centered around the Church of Nazirites founded in 1912 by South African Zulu prophetic figure Isaiah Shembe around the doctrine of Num 6:1-21.

<sup>12</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 199: "Nazirites were known from all walks of Jewish life, whether man, woman or child, possibly slave as well as free, rich or poor, common as well as the socially elite, the *Am-ha'arets* as well as the *Hakamin*, irrespective of belief beyond the simple desire to express personal devotion to the God of Israel."

<sup>13</sup> G. Buchanan Gray, "The Nazirite", *JTS* 1 (1900), p. 203: "It appears to have been a common act of benevolence or generosity to defray the cost of the offerings required of persons bound by a vow of Naziriteship [...] it appears that temporary Naziriteship was common in later Jewish history; and that the vow, very generally taken for thirty days, was lightly made, frequently almost assuming the character of a bet." Although Gray's article is over 100 years old, it has set the precedent for much scholarship on the study of biblical naziritic tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Biblically, the only pre-monarchic examples of naziritism we can look at are the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:2) and the stories of Samson (Judg 13:57, 16:17), Samuel (1 Sam 1:11, 22), Absalom (2 Sam 14:25-27;

## 1.2 Differing Models of Holiness: Tribal *Nāzîr* versus Cultic *Nāzîr*

As the history of Israel and Judah unfolds from the pre-monarchic era through the time of Jesus Christ and the first Gospels, the surviving canonical representations of naziritic behaviour that occur within this transformative era vary in a number of peculiar ways. First, the earlier naziritic-biblical traditions that utilize such figures as Samson (Judg 13-16) and Samuel (1 Sam 1-25:1a) provide a portrait of the *nāzîr* as a holy person who is pre-determined and set apart to a life-long obligation by some combination of external factors including parents and angels. In neither case do these holy persons themselves actively take part in the decision to become a *nāzîr*. The responsibility is thrust upon them whilst in the womb. While in both instances the life-long aspect of the divine status is made clear (Judg 13:7b, 1 Sam 1:11b, 22b, 28b), in the case of Samson, the only naziritic behaviour that is explicitly ascribed to Samson by the angel of God is that “No razor is to come on his head” (Judg 13:5a), while the directives to “drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean” (Judg 13:7b, 14b) are only given to Samson’s mother.

Samson’s mother’s behaviour, however, does not qualify as naziritic. She is neither named, which in Hebrew manuscripts takes the emphasis off of a character, nor specifically consecrated as a nazirite, whereas her son is. Some scholars view the directive to Samson’s mother to abstain from wine and eat nothing unclean (Judg 13:7) as implicitly applying to Samson,<sup>15</sup> while others remain sceptical.<sup>16</sup> Because the focal point

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15:8), and Joseph (Gen 49:26; Duet 33:16b), although, as we shall see, calling these figures *nāzîrs* without qualification presents its own set of problems.

<sup>15</sup> J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (vols. 3-4; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1949), esp. p. 264; J. Milgrom, *Numbers = [Ba-midbar]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 356.

of the story is clearly on Samson, we can best interpret the angel's directives to Samson's mother as in preparation for Samson's naziritism.

Whatever the exact circumstances or implications, there is no debate that the tradition of Samson that has been handed down to us clearly qualifies as both a naziritic text and naziritic literature. In this analysis of biblical-naziritic literature and texts, Samson is the only biblical character to be consistently named a Nazirite (Judg 13:5, 7; 16:17) throughout biblical manuscripts. The instruction to "eat nothing unclean" can be viewed in connection to the larger context of Judaic dietary laws and not specifically with naziritic behaviour, although the proscription can be especially presumed for a nazirite as they would be implicitly assumed for all Jewish people.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Samuel, it is his mother Hannah, not an angel, who declares that he "shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head" (1 Sam 1:11b), thus identifying two of the three naziritic behaviours found in the guidelines for naziritism in Numbers 6:1-21. The third precept found in Num 6:6-7 is the avoidance of contamination through proximity to dead bodies, although no reference to this naziritic behaviour can be found in naziritic texts or literature that pre-date Numbers.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Deborah, Samson, and Samuel share warrior-like characteristics, killing enemies; thus, as we shall see, coming into contact with dead bodies can be interpreted as part of their divine purpose.

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<sup>16</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 5: "some scholars have reasoned that these stipulations applied to Samson as well, but there is no evidence supporting this notion."

<sup>17</sup> This expectation can be considered in much the same manner in modern times, as we tend to expect model behaviour from the populace in general, but we are particularly demanding of it from our world leaders and public figures.

<sup>18</sup> See Table 2 for dating.

The post-exilic<sup>19</sup> legislative tradition of Num 6:1-21 presents a set of rules regarding naziritic commitment that starkly contrasts the conditions found in the older narratives in several other ways. First, the vows as decreed in Num 6:1-21 are clearly temporary (Num 6:5, 6, 8, 12b, 13a, 18, 19b, 20b). Next, Numbers contains a number of purification clauses that involve cutting hair (Num 6:5, 9, 11b, 18, 19b) to signify the termination of a temporary vow, as opposed to the perpetual implications of the older traditions during which no razor is ever to come into contact with the consecrated head. Gray provides a succinct presentation of this problem:

The growth of the hair is common to both forms of Naziriteship; it plays a conspicuous part in the Samson stories; it is the subject of one of the regulations in the law [...] It would almost appear from Judg. xvi 17 that it was at one time the only essential characteristic of the Nazirite. The growth of the hair is the most certainly permanent feature of the Nazirite from the earliest to the latest times. And yet [...] a most significant difference emerges. The hair of a temporary Nazirite becomes at the close of the period of the vow a *hair offering* (Num. vi 18); but this is precisely what the hair of the life-long Nazirite never was and never could be.<sup>20</sup>

Numbers also explicitly outlaws the consumption of grape by-products, including skins and seeds (Num 6:4), as opposed to only wine or strong drink. This regulation, however, only applies to the period of the vow, upon the completion of which the vow-taker may, indeed, must again drink wine (Num 6:20b). Chepey provides a succinct working definition for the term *nāzîr* as it applies to holy persons in the temporary sense:<sup>21</sup> “In the religious technical sense [...] a [...] ‘Nazirite’ refers to a person dedicated or consecrated

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<sup>19</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 5: “As part of the so-called Priestly Code in the Pentateuch, the law for the temporary Nazirite vow, so the theory suggests, originated sometime prior to the establishment of the Second Temple during the period of return and religious reformation under the hereditary priesthood.”

<sup>20</sup> Gray, “The Nazirite,” p. 204.

<sup>21</sup> According to *Theological Dictionary* 9, pp. 306-8 *nāzîr* can also be used to denote a diadem or, as in the case of Joseph, the *nāzîr* also “lent itself to characterizing heroic figures, since its definition reflected their holiness rather than their function [...] in Gen. 49:26 and Dt. 33:16 [...] the word characterizes Joseph’s special relationship to God that sets him apart from his brothers”, although Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 133-7 through an analysis of *Sifre* to Dt. 33.16 and the *Genesis Rabbah* argues that Joseph was indeed an example of an earlier nazirite.

to God [...] via certain behavioral proscriptions.”<sup>22</sup> A further refinement of this definition could read as follows: a nazirite is a person in a state of holiness (consecration) that is defined by abstinence from one or more of the following: a) wine/intoxication (or grape by-products), b) cutting of hair, and c) touching the dead. While this definition sufficiently covers all of the diverse biblical representations of cultic *nāzîrs*, it is important to remember a distinction in the use of the word *nāzîr* as it spans the centuries of the Hebrew Bible<sup>23</sup>. The use of the word *nāzîr* gradually evolves over time initially signifying a holy person in a generic sense, while the use of *nāzîr* in terms of votive conditionals is a later development.<sup>24</sup> What we can conclude then is that we can only consider naziritism under the tribal model as a type of calling or destiny, but the advent of Num 6:1-21 “applies to a later development of the institution, when its character had become a basic asceticism practised in the context of cultic regulation,”<sup>25</sup> although at best, it can only be termed a type of “temporary asceticism”<sup>26</sup> at this stage.

Rabbinic literature such as the Mishnah<sup>27</sup>, the Tosefta<sup>28</sup>, Midrashic texts<sup>29</sup>, *Genesis Rabbah*<sup>30</sup>, the Targumim<sup>31</sup>, and the Talmud<sup>32</sup> further expound upon and legislate

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<sup>22</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Out of respect for the Jewish Tradition, this thesis will employ the expression Hebrew Bible for the canon that Christians refer to as the Old Testament, but for the sake of this thesis, we include in this classification the deuterocanonical books.

<sup>24</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 5; *Theological Dictionary* 9, pp. 306-8.

<sup>25</sup> James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 52.

<sup>26</sup> Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist: A New Quest of the Historical John* (London: SCM, 1964), p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 72: “The Mishnah [is] a collection of oral tradition finally redacted at the turn of third century AD.” For more information on the Mishnah, see Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 72-121; Fraade, “The Nazirite,” pp. 215-7.

<sup>28</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 121: “The Tosefta is a collection of rabbinic halakah compiled and redacted sometime shortly after the Mishnah (ca. 220-250 AD).” For more information on the Tosefta, see Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 121-7; Fraade, “The Nazirite,” pp. 217-8.

<sup>29</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 127-8: “In the period following the redactions of the Mishnah and the Tosefta, a series of exegetical works attributed to rabbis of the Tannaitic period was compiled and redacted sometime in the latter half of the third century AD.” For more information on the Midrash, see Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 127-35; Fraade, “The Nazirite,” pp. 218-9.



naziritic practice, presenting other sets of varying conditions, particularly in relation to the number of days of the vow<sup>33</sup>, but these are not the focus of this thesis. Of relevance to this study is the mere fact that a later documentary tradition has turned a calling into a temporary vow, adding further stipulations to the set of regulations found in Num 6.

As if there was not already enough diversity in the varying characterizations of naziritic behaviours in the Bible at large, the problems broached by this study are compounded by the fact that the birth narratives of the two most distinguishable naziritic figures of the HB, Samson and Samuel, display one clear distinction. Although divine intervention plays a key role in the births of both, Samuel's birth is a consequence of his mother's prayer initiative, while in the case of Samson, it is an angel who is the prime mover. For the purposes of this study, however, solving this particular puzzle is not essential. Numbers 6:1-21 draws a clear line in the characterizations of nazirites that separate them from their biblical antecedents: the acts of becoming a nazirite move away from the realm of being a calling and, instead, becomes more of a personal choice.

Because of these facts, this thesis must differentiate between two distinct forms of naziritism: the **Tribal *Nāzîr*** and the **Cultic *Nāzîr***. The following chart represents a synopsis of the information already presented in this section.

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<sup>30</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 135: "*Genesis Rabbah* is an exegetical commentary on the book of Genesis compiled and redacted sometime after the turn of the fifth century AD." For more information on *Genesis Rabbah*, see Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 135-7.

<sup>31</sup> See Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 138-9 for details regarding the complexities of dating the Targumim. For more information on the Targumim, see Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 138-43.

<sup>32</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 143: "In contrast to the later rabbinic sources examined thus far, Talmudic literature (the Jerusalem Talmud [ca. AD 375] and the Babylonian Talmud [ca. AD 500]) proves generally inconsequential to the purposes of the present study in that it is not only chronologically late in origin, but its genre precludes its general relevance." For more information on the Talmud, see Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 143-6; Fraade, "The Nazirite," pp. 219-23.

<sup>33</sup> See Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 72-146 for an overview of the specific implications of each of the aforementioned Rabbinical texts and their relation to naziritism.

**Table 1: Tribal versus Cultic *Nāzîr***

<b>TRIBAL <i>Nāzîr</i></b>	<b>CULTIC <i>Nāzîr</i></b>
<b>Lifelong</b> Commitment	<b>Temporary</b> Vow
Consecration by <b>God/Angel</b> : A Divine Calling	Consecration by <b>Priest</b> : A Personal Decision
<b>Hair Growth</b>	<b>Cutting Hair</b> Signifies the Termination of a Temporary Vow
<b>No Consumption</b> of Wine or Strong Drink (Intoxication)	<b>Consumption</b> of Wine Signifies the Termination of a Temporary Vow [No Consumption of Wine, Strong Drink, or Vinegar (and other grape by-products) until Termination of Temporary Vow]
<b>Warrior Figure</b>	<b>Avoids the Dead</b>

These terms respectively correspond to what Gray identifies as “pre-exilic” and “post-exilic” nazirites<sup>34</sup> and what Chepey distinguishes as the “generic” and “religious technical”<sup>35</sup> use of *nāzîr*, respectively a general appellation of holiness versus a denotation used to refer to one who has specifically taken on the votive conditions of naziritism as laid out in Num 6:1-21.<sup>36</sup> We must draw these distinctions in order to account for the diametrically opposed representations of nazirites in the Bible.

To sum up, the tribal *nāzîr* is a life-long status portrayed by such characters as Samson and Samuel with possible roots in the Yahwistic tribes as evidenced in Judg 5:2 and the cultic *nāzîr* is characterized first and foremost by his or her temporary status. Amos’ cry that Israel corrupted the Nazirites by making them drink wine (Am 2:12) is most likely an allusion to a process of naziritic corruption that finally takes an official legislative form in Num 6:1-21. Furthermore, the additional precept concerning the avoidance of dead corpses (Num 6:6-7) ultimately results in a fundamental philosophical shift in the formulation of holiness; namely, that the tribal *nāzîr* was willing to engage in

<sup>34</sup> See Gray, “The Nazirite”, pp. 202-3.

<sup>35</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 6 also refers to the office of cultic *nāzîrs* as “the institution of the temporary Nazirate.”

<sup>36</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 2-3.

self-sacrifice as a soldier of a god, willing to fight on the physical plane, while the cultic *nāzîr*'s cutting of hair, consumption of wine, and avoidance of dead bodies can be seen as an attempt to pacify holiness away from the idea of the holy warrior, resulting in a more spiritual battle for the naziritic figures of early Christianity and the majority of holy figures that emerged from them.

### *1.2.1 A Brief Note on a Logical Possibility*

This thesis provides an argument that naziritism, as applied to holy heroes of the past, loses its association with violence over the course of Ancient Jewish history. Based on the evidence, we can readily perceive a situation in which cultic *nāzîrs* are asked to keep away from dead bodies as a regulation to deter warring behaviour; however, since the vow is also temporary, we can also logically conceive of a circumstance in which nazirites continued to be some sort of militaristic manifestation of the yahwistic warriors, or the tribal *nāzîrs* alluded to in Deborah's song, and the temporary vow functioned as an institutional instrument to help cleanse warriors of their sins before returning them to war once again. As the evidence clearly does not lead us in this direction, the argument must be abandoned. The overview of texts which describe nazirites reveals that there were both male and female nazirites, and also that some nazirites came from poor backgrounds, while others came from wealthy backgrounds; i.e. nazirites came from all walks of life. The particular professions of these later devotees were of little import to the priests. Furthermore, in 1 Macc 3:49, we read that the nazirities who had completed their days were being rounded up in preparation for war. The context of the passage makes it clear that the nazirites are serving a sacerdotal, or symbolic, purpose.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, as will be

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<sup>37</sup> see section 6.1

further explored in this thesis, we shall see that during the Persian era, when the naziritic legislation took its final form, the state would not have been interested in going to war as Judah became a political body within a larger empire. We see no evidence of Judahite military behaviour at this time. Jewish military history begins again during the Hellenistic era, centuries later by which time the idea of a *nāzîr* being necessarily militaristic had long ago faded away. Ultimately, by using past legendary figures to promote the practice of naziritism, one which in time came to be more and more painstakingly organized as Dtr passes the torch to P, *nāzîr* rites were one way to insure that the priests would maintain their holy seats, allowing the individuals of their community to feel heroic, without the commitment. As we shall see, the consequences of these legislations on the hearts of those who followed reverberated in Jesus Christ and spun a bi-polar archetypes of holiness.

### **1.3 The Nazirite as Ascetic**

As discussed, the Bible provides starkly contrasting portraits of *nāzîrs*. This section explores how the study of naziritism stands in relation to asceticism. Like many of the central concerns of this study, much is contingent on how we interpret various translation of Hebrew to Greek. Conroy outlines the perspectives regarding comparative studies of HB holiness behaviours and early-Christian asceticism:

Old Testament data finds a place in discussions on monasticism in two main overlapping areas: the phenomenological approach which studies all known monastic and paramonastic institutions in world religions, and the more theological approach which investigates the literary influence of the O.T. on later Christian monasticism. A survey of some studies in both these fields has shown that the same themes tend to recur, namely, the question of a nomadic or desert ideal in ancient Israel and the existence of

persons and groups that bear some resemblance to forms of eremitical or coenobitical life in other religions.<sup>38</sup>

As asceticism is not a word that is usually associated with the world of the HB, we must be extremely cautious that when we apply the term to nazirites we are only making a link through an abstract concept of holiness and the practices associated with them; we are not suggesting in any way that early Christian ascetics were necessarily militaristic.

### 1.3.1 Defining Ascetic

In order to come to an understanding of how nazirites stand in relation to the study of asceticism, it would first be useful to look to the roots of the word. Oddly enough, even though the term is derived from Greek, “there is no word in Greek for ‘asceticism.’”<sup>39</sup>

Pinsent provides an etymology for asceticism as follows:

The word ἄσκησις, the abstract noun from ἄσκέω, means “practice” in the two senses of that word; the practice of an art, craft or profession... or the process by which this former is acquired and improved.<sup>40</sup>

Although the definitions for asceticism are as varied as the figures that are identified as ascetic,<sup>41</sup> we must also bear in mind that this work is not a study in asceticism. We must only regard asceticism in so far as it relates to naziritism. For this reason, for the purposes of this work, we must look at asceticism in relation to the pursuit of holiness and not in

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Conroy, “The Old Testament and Monasticism”, *SM* 28 (1979), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Pinsent, “Ascetic Moods”, p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> John Pinsent, “Ascetic Moods in Greek and Latin Literature”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> J. Giles Milhaven, “Asceticism and the Moral Good: A Tale of Two Pleasures”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 376: “In the actual use of the word ‘asceticism,’ the practice so designated differs as much as does the fine self, the virtuous or excellent person, at whom it is aimed. The asceticism of Marcus Aurelius differs from that of a Cynic contemporary, that of Jerome the younger from the older. The asceticism of Benedict differs from that of the desert fathers, that of Ignatius of Loyola from that of Francis of Assisi. One speaks even of the asceticism of the artist, the scientist, and the athlete; or the asceticism of the impoverished single parent.”

regard to philosophical ideals related to self-betterment.<sup>42</sup> Asceticism, in this vein, can best be described as a “set of practices through which one comes closer to holiness.”<sup>43</sup> It is important to point out that these practices are subject to change as reflections of historical cultures; that is, “there is no essential asceticism.”<sup>44</sup> Without going too much into ascetic-theory and the differences between the various historical manifestations of positive and negative forms of asceticism,<sup>45</sup> suffice it to say that the nazirites are ascetic in so much that certain self-disciplinary behaviours are expected of them at any given stage of their historical development, but some precepts of asceticism apply to both tribal and cultic *nāzîrs*—for example tribal *nāzîrs* are ascetic in that they are lifelong holy persons, but they entered the role as the result of predetermined divine intervention, not personal commitment; yet cultic *nāzîrs* are ascetic in that they take on a vow, but there is

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<sup>42</sup> For more information on the philosophical strains of asceticism, see Samuel Rubenson, “Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 49-57; Bernard McGinn, “Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 58-74; John M. Dillon, “Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonist Asceticism”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 80-7; Pinsent, “Ascetic Moods”, pp. 211-9; Patricia Cox Miller, “Dreaming the Body: An Aesthetics of Asceticism”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 281; Milhaven, “Asceticism and the Moral Good”, pp. 375-94.

<sup>43</sup> A synthesis of the definitions and ideas from Kallistos Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 3: “Asceticism [...] leads us to self-mastery and enables us to fulfill the purpose that we have set for ourselves, whatever that may be;” Pinsent, “Ascetic Moods”, p. 218: “Christian asceticism is to be regarded [...] as a means to an end, a help on the way to, or in, the religious life, whether active or contemplative—possibly even a necessary means, but not an end in itself;” J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Primitive Christianity as an Ascetic Movement”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 88: “asceticism is training for righteousness without despising material return;” and Richard Valantasis, “A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 544-52; Milhaven, “Asceticism and the Moral Good”, p. 376: “to practice, exercise and train so as to make oneself fine or beautiful in a specific way.”

<sup>44</sup> Gail P. Corrington-Streete, “Trajectories of Ascetic Behavior”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 119.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on the varying classifications of negative and positive forms of asceticism see Ware, “The Way”, pp. 3-15; Dillon, “Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body”, pp. 80-7; Bruce J. Malina, “Pain, Power, and Personhood: Ascetic Behavior in the Ancient Mediterranean”, in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 162-77; John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow (Pratum Spirituale)*, John Wortley (trans.), (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1992).

no assumption of lifelong commitment. As mentioned, the set of practices that come to define biblical naziritism are codified in Numbers 6.<sup>46</sup> Due to these logical hurdles, for the purposes of this work, we can safely side with Fraade, who simply approaches the subject of nazirites in terms of the “ascetic tensions”<sup>47</sup> that run through the various manifestations.

### *1.3.2 Nazirites as Ascetics*

Much debate has transpired on the issue of whether or not we can consider the *nāzîr* a type of ascetic,<sup>48</sup> not only since their representations in scripture are so diverse, but also because they are at odds with some basic assumptions about asceticism. Cartledge cautions that although “the relatively ascetic behaviour required of a Nazirite is reminiscent of our current concept of a monastic vow, biblical students have tended to associate the two and apply modern motivations to an ancient action.”<sup>49</sup> While Gray firmly holds that we have “no ground for thinking that the permanent Nazirites of ancient Israel were ascetics,”<sup>50</sup> Scobie, on the other hand, writes that “the Nazirite vow usually seems to have implied only a temporary asceticism,”<sup>51</sup> although, in regard to naziritism, this statement fails to take tribal *nāzîrs* into consideration. Another assumption of asceticism is that the selected practices are undertaken as a lifetime commitment—at least from a given point onwards, but here again we run into an obstacle since tribal *nāzîrs* were committed to their stations for life, as mentioned, by another than themselves, while

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<sup>46</sup> For a description of how this codification relates to asceticism in regard to holiness see quotation from Levine in footnote 1.

<sup>47</sup> Fraade, “The Nazirite”, p. 213.

<sup>48</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*. pp. 6, 10-1, 199; Steven D. Fraade, “The Nazirite in Ancient Judaism (Selected Texts)”, in Vincent L. Wimbush (ed.), *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), pp. 214-5.

<sup>49</sup> Tony W. Cartledge, “Were Nazirite Vows Unconditional?”, *CBQ* 51 (1989), pp. 409-10.

<sup>50</sup> Gray, “The Nazirite”, p. 204.

<sup>51</sup> Scobie, *John the Baptist*, p. 135.

cultic *nāzîrs* were consecrated through their own vows, but only for a limited period of time—not for the rest of their lives as would be the expectation with, for example, early Christian ascetics. If an ascetic breaks his or her vow, he or she can no longer be considered ascetic. Asceticism is not a whimsical undertaking, but rather a prolonged devotion. We tend not to refer to failed ascetics when studying asceticism; the celebrated ascetics of early Christianity all follow this latter model.

Apart from their identification with asceticism, a plethora of other terms have been used to describe nazirites. Chepey provides a synthesis of some late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century works on nazirites from Smith (1901), Gray (1899), as well as more recent works that include Bockmuehl (1998), Koet (1996), as well as Fraade (1995). Chepey's extensive analysis of primary sources of naziritic literature, from both scripture, and both early and contemporary historians, lead to the following synthesis regarding the meaning of the status of nazirite as it would have been interpreted by the ancient audiences of the Bible:

In terms of the role of the Nazirite, though scholars have offered a variety of perspectives respecting other primary interests, there is no need to justify one characterization of the Nazirite over another. In essence, the differing opinions of scholars are more or less all correct. "Lay-priest," "ascetic," "hair-offerer," [...] all accurately describe Nazirites given the variety of thought and behavior respecting these figures in sources of this period. "Religious devotee," however, in my opinion best pinpoints the precise role of the Nazirite in the available sources, considering the comprehensive nature and scope of the evidence examined.<sup>52</sup>

The precise meaning of *nāzîr* is clearly a slippery one. If we apply Chepey's definition of "religious devotee," to cultic *nāzîrs* we once again encounter a logistical problem: how devoted can one be if the very nature of the commitment is temporary? Based on the diverse naziritic literature that scatters the HB and the NT, the best overarching definition

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<sup>52</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 199.



one can provide for the term *nāzîr* as found in Judges is simply “holy person.” They are similar to ascetics in this and this alone. The fundamental shifts in formulation, for example, between the representations of nazirites in literary traditions as diverse as locks growing long in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:2)<sup>53</sup> and Paul’s shearing of his hair (Acts 18:18)<sup>54</sup>, stand as easily identifiable markers for the diversity in naziritic practice; in both cases, however, the individuals who are portrayed as engaging in naziritic behaviour are depicted as holy, even if for a short while.

### 1.3.3 *The Wilderness Tradition*

Tribal *nāzîrs*, however, share with the early Christian ascetics an association with the wilderness tradition. Jesus’ 40-day trial in the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan (Lk 4:1-3//Mt 4:1-2) is sometimes seen as a source of inspiration for early Christian ascetics.<sup>55</sup> The wilderness tradition is yet another aspect that associates Jesus and John the Baptist with a naziritic form of holiness.<sup>56</sup> Abstention from wine and hair cutting and various other forms of self-denial have often been interpreted as nostalgia for the holy gone-by days of the wilderness:

Perhaps the most common feature in discussions of the relation between the O.T. and monasticism is a reference to the Israelites’ attitude to the desert and the nomadic life. It has been said that the history of the chosen people is marked by a constant orientation of its better elements towards the desert which becomes almost the “ideal type of relation with God”.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For more details see section 3.1.

<sup>54</sup> For more details see section 7.3.

<sup>55</sup> Saldarini, Anthony J., “Asceticism and the Gospel of Matthew” in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 20, 22; Eisenbaum, Pamela, “Suffering, Discipline, and Perfection in Hebrews” in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), p. 337.

<sup>56</sup> Other naziritic motifs associated with Jesus will be explored in section 7.2.

<sup>57</sup> Conroy, “OT and Monasticism”, p. 2.

This idealization of the desert life finds its way into all the biblical uses of naziritic motifs in one way or another.

Some scholars, for example Hammershaimb, have also interpreted the behaviour as a link to the Rechabites:

their abstention from wine reminds us of the Rechabites, whose founder Jonadab son of Rechab lived at the time of Jehu (2 Kgs. 10.15). Jeremiah makes special mention of them as a shining example to the people (Jer. 35). From his mention of them it appears that they not only rejected the use of wine, but were in reaction against the whole cultural life of Canaan, and sought to get back to the simpler life and customs of the past, when men did not live in houses or till the soil.<sup>58</sup>

Burney also connects “the Nazirites with the Rechabites (Jer. 35), with whom they were probably also associated in enthusiasm for purer and simpler form of Yahweh-worship.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, Desprez also comments on the Rechabites:

These fervent Yahwists still guarded at the time of Jeremiah the customs of their ancestor Yonadab (ninth century BC): they never drank wine, never sowed crops, built buildings, planted vines, owned property; they lived in tents. We should not see this as a holdover from the Exodus as much as a reaction against settled life and the dangers of syncretism.<sup>60</sup>

A similar reaction is exhibited by Amos in relation to the corruption of naziritism.<sup>61</sup>

Long hair also continues to a link people to the wilderness motifs through even older forms of Ancient Israelite holiness. In the wilderness, one does not have access to all the refinements of urban life, such as Moses and his people in the desert. As Chepey reveals, “those observing the vow may not have combed their hair but likely allowed it to grow wild and unkempt.”<sup>62</sup> The theme of long knotty hair reoccurs throughout the

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<sup>58</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, (New York: Schocken, 1970), p. 53.

<sup>59</sup> Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. 343.

<sup>60</sup> Vincent Desprez, “The Roots of Christian Monasticism: The Jewish Bible and Ancient Religions”, *ABR* 41 (1990), p. 366.

<sup>61</sup> see section 4.1.

<sup>62</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 191.

spectrum of naziritic literature, but only when the nazirite is in a state of consecration.

Pilch elucidates the following regarding naziritic hair:

Hair continues to grow after a person's death and symbolizes life in many cultures. The Nazirite refuses to cut head hair as a sign of total dedication of life to God. There is no interest in trimming head hair in order to make oneself attractive to other humans or to abide by cultural, hence, temporal and unpredictable custom.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, by the time of the manifestations of cultic *nāzîrs*, the association with the long hair of the wilderness is no more than a symbolic one.

Also, by incorporating a dialogue on asceticism into this thesis, it is imperative to bear in mind a distinction with the way that the desert was idealized by both the HB and the early-Christian ascetics:

Desert life [...] in its physical reality was in no way seen as an ideal in the O.T.

When reference is made to the "desert ideal", however, what is usually meant is the period of the time spent by the Moses-group in the wilderness between their exodus from Egypt and their entry into the land of Canaan. The desert here is taken in its temporal connotation; interest is centred not on the physical reality of the place but on the people's experience during their trek through the desert. This period is said to have been the ideal period in Israel's relations with God, to which later generations of Israelites looked back with nostalgia and which the prophets held up as an ideal to be realized again in the future by a new intervention of Yahweh.<sup>64</sup>

In this sense, the early-Christian ascetics in their harsh lives of denial, as compared to temporary nazirites, were also emulating the ideal of desert perseverance, albeit in a much more permanent manner. The topic of asceticism and the wilderness tradition, however, will serve as no more than an undercurrent to this study as it has already fared throughout scholarship on naziritism. Certain conceptual predecessors to early-Christian

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<sup>63</sup> John J. Pilch, "The Meaning of Hair", *BT* 35 (1997), p. 233.

<sup>64</sup> Conroy, "OT and Monasticism", p. 6.

asceticism are definitely recognizable in HB holiness motifs, but no structured parallel doctrine(s) can be postulated with any efficacy.

#### 1.4 Legislation versus Legend: Softening the *Nāzîr* for Foreign Powers

Throughout the history of Judeo-Christianity, many diverse standards of holiness have emerged. Scholars continue to be intrigued by this plethora of devotional behaviour. From the patriarchal stories—for example, the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-9) and Moses' many conversations with God (Ex 3); the withdrawal and resistance of the Maccabees;<sup>65</sup> the rigid community rules of the Essenes;<sup>66</sup> the contemplative lives of the Therapeutae;<sup>67</sup> and the militant Zealots;<sup>68</sup> to John the Baptist with his diet of locusts and honey (Mt 3:4//Mk 1:6); Paul and his attitudes towards the body (1 Cor 7);<sup>69</sup> early forms of Christian asceticism that fluctuated from moderation to self-mortification;<sup>70</sup> and the advent of monasticism: Judeo-Christian holiness has taken many faces. Of course, how holy one is depends on who sets the standards.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Goldstein, Jonathan A., *I Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964).

<sup>66</sup> See Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, John the Baptist, and Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 139-210.

<sup>67</sup> See Philo of Alexandria, *The Contemplative Life*, in David Winston (trans.), *The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections* (New York: Paulist, 1981), pp. 39-57.

<sup>68</sup> See Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.*, David Smith (trans.), (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989); Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins* (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1985), pp. 72, 97-101.

<sup>69</sup> See Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Disciplines of Difference: Asceticism and History in Paul", in Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism and the New Testament* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp.171-85; Daniel Boyarin, "Body Politic among the Brides of Christ: Paul and the Origins of Christian Sexual Renunciation", in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.) *Asceticism*, (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 459-78.

<sup>70</sup> See John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow (Pratum Spirituale)*, John Wortley (trans.), (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1992); William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997); Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?" in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 3-15.

<sup>71</sup> A brief contemplation of the rhetoric being used on either side of the holy war in Iraq exemplifies this conditionality.

Yet, despite the prevalence of standards of holiness in history, a significant shortcoming exists in the continuum of research on the pursuit of holiness:

Despite the considerable, admittedly complex evidence that types of ascetic and worldly renunciatory behaviors can be argued to have defined the development of that part of Early Christianity that the New Testament texts illuminate, the ascetic dimension has historically for the most part been excluded from Western mainstream academic-scholarly-ecclesiastical-canonical exegetics and analytics and reconstructions of Christian origins, and thereby raises serious academic-political and ecclesiastical-political questions and suspicions.<sup>72</sup>

If we view the two categories of *nāzîrs*, namely tribal and cultic, as combating models of holiness, and possible predecessors of early Christian asceticism in the general sense of holiness, the same accusation does not hold true. In the case of the nazirites, we have a form of holiness that imbibes some relative ascetic behaviours in the form of abstinence that is actually being authorized and celebrated by the political powers of Judah and glorified in the context of Ancient Israel.

Yet, what remains common to both the evolution of the nazirites and the early Christian ascetics is the question of control. Although holy persons have consistently raised serious theological questions, the topic has rarely been assessed from a political standpoint or as significant factor in the development of tradition. A holy person is, after all, one who seeks union with or is in close contact with the divine; the battle of the gods as played out in the drama of history has always had an influence on the pillars of the institutions that define civilization.

The following quotation helps to account for the lack of spiritual dialogue in political forums: “citizens who can neither be threatened nor bribed are a threat—to any known polity. Small wonder asceticism, whatever its degree of achievement, remains

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<sup>72</sup> Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush, “Introduction”, in Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism and the New Testament* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.

unpopular.”<sup>73</sup> If asceticism tends to make political authorities uncomfortable, then what are we to make of relative ascetic behaviour before the advent of centralized political leadership as it slides into the realm of religious legislation? Also, what does the conversation on asceticism lend to the discussion of tribal *nāzîrs* in relation to their connection to holiness?

In order to answer these questions, we can turn to the nazirites as a case-study, an experiment in the evolution of Ancient Near Eastern holiness. Throughout the phenomena of naziritism we conversely have a form of asceticism that is sanctioned and celebrated by religious-political leaders. We might then intuit that asceticism is only a threat to political authority when it does not contribute to that legislative body’s mandate; in the case of the nazirites, they contributed to political progress via themselves as literal tools of war at their early stages, while they continued to donate in a more material and metaphorical fashion as their institution evolved into a more colloquial occasion. We shall see that as the government of Israel becomes centralized, the need to flex the concept of holy persons became eminent for a similar set of fears as voiced by Vaage and Wimbush in relation to early Christian ascetics,<sup>74</sup> understanding the caveat involved in this process. Naziritic legislation comes to fruition as a response to the need to control holy persons, confining them through the use of a set of canonical stipulations. Rabbinic sources are further evidence of this occurrence, but the point can actually be made by focusing on the Bible. As we shall see, however, the distance between two schools of holiness may be closer than originally imaged; John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul were Jews, after all, and the NT, as a continuation of the Hebrew Bible, is tied to it with

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<sup>73</sup> Derrett, “Primitive Christianity”, p. 98.

<sup>74</sup> see page 21.

<sup>76</sup> Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 164.

several fundamental literary-naziritic functions: birth narratives, linguistics, diets, and the presence of vows.

Let us, then, recap the main points from this chapter: the oldest stories (Samson and Samuel) that explicitly involve naziritic behaviour, are rooted in folktales that ought to have transpired during the pre-monarchic era and perhaps had little or nothing to do with the formalized votive practice of naziritism, but as they are composed by the Deuteronomist(s)<sup>76</sup> in conjunction with Numbers 6:1-21<sup>77</sup> in an ever-increasing climate of legislation and bureaucracy, by the time the practices are codified in the Bible, the nature of the Nazirite fluctuates from life-long to temporary and from warrior to avoider of dead bodies. Chepey offers an insightful explanation for these evolving phenomena, worthy of a lengthy citation:

The precise relationship between these rather disparate pieces of evidence has been the subject of much discussion among biblical scholars. A majority see in these passages glimpses of the Nazirite custom as it developed over a thousand year period or more: the final stage of the development being marked not by the text in Amos, but by the Numbers legislation. As part of the so-called Priestly Code in the Pentateuch, the law for the temporary Nazirite vow, so the theory suggests, originated sometime prior to the establishment of the Second Temple during the period of return and religious reformation under the hereditary priesthood. Nazirites, in other words, were not always individuals who made vows of consecration. Based on the early Hebrew narrative in Judges, Nazirites first appeared as God-ordained charismatics who, in the period of the conquest, functioned primarily as longhaired warriors for the cause of YHWH. Up until the eight-century BC, the custom retained its charismatic element as evidenced in the figures of Samuel and those described in the text of Amos; however, already in the case of Samuel an association with a vow began to be present. By the time of return from Babylonian exile, the priesthood then brought the already existing custom under its control by: (1) creating the institution of the temporary Nazirate, into which anyone could enter by means of a vow; (2) adding stipulations that formed the Nazirite into a priest-like ascetic; and (3) adding sacrificial

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<sup>77</sup> Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 164.

requirements as part of the vow for the purpose of drawing in for the priests a substantial income.<sup>78</sup>

Chepey, thus, provides a clear response to some of the main quandaries posed by the overview of texts that make explicit reference to nazirites. Chepey shows us why the pre- to post-exilic texts, in stark contrast to the pre-monarchic tradition, characterize the naziritic vow as a temporal occupation, rather than a life-long obligation, and why the earlier traditions of Samson and Samuel that represent nazirites as warriors are usurped by a portrait of nazirites that prevents them from coming into contact with the dead. The vow becomes a personal one, the interference of the divine finger shifting from angel to priest. By studying the Nazirite over a period of approximately 1000-1300 years, we will see how the assumptions of holiness evolve: the battle against evil, for the ascetic, moves from the physical to the spiritual plane, while the concepts of bodily impurity lead to practices that set a presage for both the positive and negative practices of asceticism<sup>79</sup> evidenced in early Christianity.

The question that has been consistently missed in the continuum of scholarship on Nazirites is why the D/Dtr and P traditions would want to legislate an association with holiness in this particular manner. The answer has not been satisfactorily stated. As the Judahites come increasingly under control of foreign powers over the course of their history, there arose a distinct need to pacify holy people so as not to rouse the anger of imperial overlords. In this sense, the pacification of a specific practice of holiness is directly related to a political agenda to remain on amicable terms with foreign powers. The earliest evidence of such corruption can be seen in the book of Amos when the

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<sup>78</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>79</sup> For more on the distinctions between affirmative and negative forms of asceticism, see Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?" in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 3-15.



nazirites are forced to drink wine (Am 2:12). Although both Israel and Judah were at the peak of their opulence during this era, Amos reflects the prohibition of prophets and the neutralizing of nazirites as “[c]rimes against humanity.”<sup>80</sup> Naziritism was just another Yahwistic motif that becomes institutionlized.

In tandem with the temporary aspect of the vow, so too grew an association of holiness and pacifism, or inner spiritual struggle, one that gets amplified in the early Christian ascetics after Jesus. Because the depictions of nazirites and their vows span periods that come both before and after priestly hegemony, through this study, we will be able to determine how the legislation of a particular type of ascetic behaviour, or at the very least, an identification with holiness, is able to distort the very function of that practice or classification. Models of holiness have very rarely been looked at in tandem, but the case of the Nazirite helps us connect the personification of the holy person as it moves through Ancient Israelite folklore and scriptural redaction. As we shall see, several naziritic motifs were borrowed by NT writers to convey the holiness of their heroes. This thesis will not only demonstrate why the *nāzîr* had to change from warrior to pacifist, but also how the reformulated, legislated version of holiness in tandem with what was and continues to be commonly interpreted as Jesus’ message of peace and universal love, can also be seen as a precursor to early Christian asceticism. This overview of modern canonical-scholarly biblical naziritic literature will demonstrate how holiness, in terms of its Judeo-Christian context, was pacified.

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<sup>80</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 20.

## Chapter 2: A Thematic Tradition of History Approach

This thesis will examine all biblical naziritic literature and texts from a thematic history of tradition approach. The arguments will be built upon the work of exegetes and historians. Where there is a discrepancy in opinion, the thesis will side with the most prevalent attitude. In cases where the differing positions on a given issue have no direct relevance to the case, for example the dating of D/Dtr, the study benefits from the fact that such points do not alter the argumentative flow being established, in so far as an order of priority can be established—the argument is contingent on the discernable evolution of the practice. Naziritism in the HB and the NT will be regarded as a literary motif that not only sheds light on the theological implications of the narrative, but also elements of Judeo-Christian history.

### 2.1 Biblical-Naziritic Passages

In order to accomplish the task of determining how and why naziritism became a legislated votive conditional, this study will present analyses of all biblical naziritic literature and texts in the generally accepted order of their composition, with the possible exception of the NT passages due to the relative proximity of their composition and the historical events they portray. In cases where the final form of the text is a product of centuries of redaction and editing, as is the case in most HB instances, we will take the date of the specific naziritic passages into consideration against the larger history of the tradition. In instances where a passage has been agreed upon as intact from its roots in oral tradition, as is the case in Judg 5:2,<sup>81</sup> we will take the accepted date of the oral

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<sup>81</sup> Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), p. 117: “In its finished form the Song is a carefully structured unity, showing few traces of early or late liturgical adaptation.”

tradition as the period of composition. In the instances of Amos 2:11-12 and Lam 4:7-8, we have two texts which were transcribed very close to the historical dates that they represent, so they not only fall into the chart<sup>82</sup> accordingly, but they also provide the most historically accurate representations of the state of naziritism contemporary to each. In regard to the other HB passages under study (Judg 13:4-5, 7, 16:17; 1 Sam 1:11, 22; 2 Sam 14:25-6, 15:8; Gen 49:26; Deut 33:16), they follow a historical order for the most part, since most scholars agree that the final versions are a synthesis of the work of D/Dtr and P. The only exception to the order in these passages is Joseph, who is not only a minor player on the naziritic spectrum, but also since the argument about the naziritic passages concerning Joseph will make more sense in light of the previous sections on Samson, Samuel, and Absalom. Trying to figure out exactly when these amendments were made to these texts is not only impossible, but also of little consequence to this thesis. They can be set apart of the basis of their distinguishability. Finally, as is the case with the NT figures, while the composition dates of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts has been generally accepted as Mark (65-70 CE)<sup>83</sup>, Luke (60-95 CE)<sup>84</sup>, Acts (85-95 CE)<sup>85</sup>, and Matthew (90-110 CE)<sup>86</sup>, we will revert to a historical order in respect to the figures involved, since the amount of years between the composition date of these texts is not only blurred, but also negligible, at least for the scope of this study.

As you will see, by acknowledging the naziritic motifs that run through the literature under study, a line can be drawn from Deborah's Song to Paul. While many of

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<sup>82</sup> Table 2

<sup>83</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Michael D. Coogan et al. (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), p. 57NT.

<sup>84</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 94NT.

<sup>85</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 184NT.

<sup>86</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 8NT.

the dates are still disputed, we can, through the work of exegetes, garner a clear chronological order for the texts and the events with which they correspond. The texts we have chosen to discuss are presented below, in accordance with their generally accepted period of composition, keeping certain historical contexts in mind:

**Table 2: Biblical-Naziritic Passages**

Reference	Passages	Historical Setting	Period of Composition
The Song of Deborah	Judg 5:2	Pre-Monarchic: 12 <sup>th</sup> Century BCE <sup>87</sup>	Pre-Monarchic: 12 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> Centuries BCE <sup>88</sup>
Amos	Am 2:11-2	Divided Kingdom: Mid-8 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>89</sup>	Divided Kingdom/ Assyrian Conquest: Mid- to Late-8 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>90</sup>
Samson	Judg 13:4-5, 7; 16:17	Pre-Monarchic Tribal: 12 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>91</sup>	Pre- to Post-Exilic: 6 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> (BCE). <sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Boling, *Judges*, pp. 116-7.

<sup>88</sup> Deborah's Song is commonly viewed as the oldest original biblical tradition. Some scholars argue that the work dates back to a collection of hero/saviour stories that were composed centuries prior to the Deuteronomistic Historiography. According to Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 5-128: In the pre-monarchic era, judges were seen as saviour figures. Most scholars agree that the Deuteronomist had at his disposal a collection of stories referred to by scholars as a Book of Saviours. The Deuteronomist used this Book of Saviours, along with a list of Judges, to compose the book of Judges, or what is now commonly referred to as Judges 3-9. Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. xl: "the Song of Deborah, *ch.* 5, is obviously much older than the accompanying prose narrative, *ch.* 4, though both appear to belong to E [...] and the inference that the former was excerpted from an ancient written source [...] is confirmed by the fact that the prefixed statement as to the occasion on which the song was composed, seems to have been excerpted with it from an old source."

<sup>89</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 19: "we may look [...] at the decade during which [Uzziah and Jeroboam II] were both in full power as the best location for the activities of Amos, say 765-755." Hubbard, "Amos", p. 90: "For Amos' ministry [...] a date between 760 and 755 BC seems to have gained almost unanimous support among scholars." Mays, *Amos*, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 11: "the book itself (or something very close to it) comes from Amos himself, representing a comprehensive synthesis and testament prepared either by him or by an immediate disciple." Mays, *Amos*, p. 12: "Most of the sayings and the five autobiographical narratives fit into a coherent picture of his prophetic activity in Israel just before the turn of the eighth century." Hubbard, "Amos", p. 99: "1:3-2:16—may have occurred shortly after Amos was banished from Bethel."

<sup>91</sup> Boling, *Judges*, p. 224: "The tradition, to be sure, was preoccupied with matters which frustrate our passion for dating. Since the Philistine occupation of towns such as Ashdod is datable on archaeological evidence to the second quarter of the twelfth century, whereas the northward migration of Dan belongs probably to the early eleventh century, Samson's precise dates are not surely known. We must be content, therefore, to place him somewhere within the span between c. 1160-1100."

<sup>92</sup> The oral tradition of the Samson legend most probably existed prior to the Deuteronomist, but has been largely reworked by the Deuteronomist and then by the Priestly writers to include naziritic content. We see

Samuel	1 Sam 1:11, 22	Pre-Monarchic: 11 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>93</sup>	Pre- to Post-Exilic: 6 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>94</sup>
Absalom	2 Sam 14:25-6; 15:8	United Kingdom: 9 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>95</sup>	Pre- to Post-Exilic: 6 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>96</sup>

no evidence of naziritic codification until Num 6:1-21 whose dates are much more traceable and the portrayals of tibal *nāzīrs* as warriors clearly fails to coincide with Num 6:6-7a. Whatever a nazirite had been, if indeed such a term existed in the pre-monarchic era, had changed. Even if Burney is correct in dating Judg 13 to the tenth century BCE, a theory that is widely refuted, the fact that naziritism was a later insertion into the Samson narrative holds true, but would point to an earlier development of the cultic *nāzīr*; once again, however, the fluidity of interpretation lends the analysis of this document independent of exact dates. More recent scholars trace the passages to a much later time than J. Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 162, for example, argues that the period of the judges refers to the period “after 720 BCE.” Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), p. 42, however, had already posited: “For his account of the ‘judges’ period up to Samuel, Dtr. used and combined two basic traditions. The first was a series of stories about various tribal heroes and their victories, which came from different sources [...] but were probably collected together before Dtr. They still lacked thematic unity and so Dtr. had to supply them with connecting material.” The naziritic motifs that connect Samson and Samuel can be understood as examples of such connecting material. Furthermore, Richard A. Gabriel, *The Military History of Ancient Israel* (London: Praeger, 2003), p. 29: “The accounts of the Judges remained an oral tradition until around 600 B.C.E. when, along with much of the Old Testament, they were finally compiled in written form. Probably for reasons of ethnic identity and national pride the compilers endowed chronology that turned the oral tradition into a great national saga of a people attempting to preserve their national identity and culture against foreign cultural and military influences.” If Gabriel’s general view towards the redaction history of these stories is correct, that places Judges squarely between D and P, as confirmed by the majority of scholars. Also, Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), p. 7: “The deuteronomistic edition of Joshua-Kings [...] received its fixed form in the first half of the sixth century.” Due to the vast number of contradictions between the Samson narrative and the proscriptions of naziritism laid out in Num 6:1-21, it is safe to conclude that the historical Samson was an ancient hero, whose feats became legendary, but for whom the status of nazirite was bestowed by the later traditions of D and P due to the ongoing popularity of the narrative. The popularity of the Samson narrative even endures into ST times. F.W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), p. 92: “Jesus is, according to the writer of [Matthew 1:21], a second Samson, who comes to play the role of ‘judge’ or deliverer.” However we attempt to deconstruct Judg 13-16, we are left with the sense that later editors added to a heroic story that had little or nothing to do with cultic naziritism. That the themes of hair growth and abstinence from wine are present reveal more general conceptualizations of Yahwistic holiness norms, both of which are ultimately also associated with naziritism, but whose longevity is overturned by its cultic manifestation. It is quite possible that if Samson was indeed a hero of the tribal period who was expected to execute great feats for his people, the expectations of tribal holiness would also be expected of him. That these same two behaviours were expected of cultic *nāzīrs*, even if the vows were temporary, is more than coincidental.

<sup>93</sup> The context of the story makes its historical climate evident. The Lord commissions Samuel to anoint Saul, Israel’s first king (1 Sam 9:15-6). McCarter, *1 Samuel*, p. 63: “Samuel’s career was regarded as a watershed in the sacred history, separating the days of the judges from the days of the kings, and the portentous story of his birth in the form it has come down to us leaves no doubt that something significant has occurred.”

<sup>94</sup> The story of Samuel probably initially belonged to the Saul cycle, which is also pre-Deuteronomistic, but has been reworked by both the Deuteronomistic and Priestly writers. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, pp. 53-6 argues that both verses are secondary. *New Oxford*, p. 398 HB: “Most scholars view 1-2 Samuel as part of a larger original composition called the Deuteronomistic History [...] The Deuteronomistic History was composed by one or more nameless ‘Deuteronomists,’ probably in the exile (after 586 BCE), though some scholars date its initial edition to the reign of Josiah.”

<sup>95</sup> Once again, the context of the story makes its historical climate evident. Absalom is David’s son (2 Sam 13:1).

Joseph	Gen 49:26; Deut 33:16b	Patriarchal: Mid-17 <sup>th</sup> to Mid-15 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>97</sup>	Pre- to Post-Exilic: 6 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>98</sup>
Lamentations	Lam 4:7-8	The capture of Jerusalem by Babylon from 597- 587 (BCE) <sup>99</sup>	Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 (BCE) <sup>100</sup>
Numbers	Num 6:1-21	Moses, Wilderness: 15 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>101</sup>	Exilic/Post-Exilic: 6 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> (BCE) <sup>102</sup>
Maccabees	1 Macc 3:49	Hellenistic: Mid-2 <sup>nd</sup> (BCE) <sup>103</sup>	Hellenistic: Late 2 <sup>nd</sup> to Mid-1 <sup>st</sup> (BCE) <sup>104</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Although the story contains older source material, the naziritic passages are a product of the Deuteronomistic Historiographer(s). Most scholars agree that both 1 and 2 Sam were originally part of the same work, so the dating information in footnote 92 also applies to these passages.

<sup>97</sup> Historical dates remain uncertain, but the historical Joseph is far enough removed from D and P that even an allowance of a few centuries on either end does not pose a serious problem for the argument.

<sup>98</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 369 provides a strong case for why this passage stands out in the greater context of the poem: "The reading is hopeless on more counts than one: (1) the poetic meter is suddenly abandoned; (2) the prosaic content is even more disturbing; (3) emphasis shifts abruptly from boons to beneficiaries; (4) the term for 'progenitors' (literally 'conceivers') is without parallel in biblical Heb., the only form otherwise known being in the feminine singular (Hos ii 7; Song of Sol iii 4), and having the natural sense of 'mother': (5) the attested term for 'parents' is 'ābōt; (6) the connection with the next clause is disrupted; (7) above all, the parallel text in Deut xxxiii 15 gives *hrry qdm* 'the ancient hills,' which is paralleled in turn by *hrry 'd* (same meaning) Hab iii 6, the obvious prototype of the present *h(w)ry 'd*. The only difference is the graphically slight change of *r/w* (in the 'square' script); but the misreading was sufficient to throw the rest of the verse completely out of balance." Furthermore, *New Oxford*, p. 78HB argues that the narrative is designed to "legitimate rule for Judah and—by extension—the Davidic dynasty." The links to Deut 33:16 and the glorification of Judah over Israel point to the hand of the D/Dtr.

<sup>99</sup> Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), p. xviii.

<sup>100</sup> Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. xviii. See section 4.5 for details.

<sup>101</sup> Although, according to Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 81, "there is no element which allows us to assert that the attribution of the Pentateuch to Moses was known before the fourth century BC," the material itself, as framed in its final version, attempts to present the material in Numbers as a set of divine laws handed to Moses from the Lord.

<sup>102</sup> Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993), pp. 27 and 35: "It is widely agreed that the main editorial work [of Numbers] was put in hand by priests and scribes during the exile in Babylon, and probably completed during the postexilic period [...] the editing of Numbers, along with the rest of the priestly work, was put in hand during the exile in the sixth century and completed in around the fifth century BCE, when Judah was a fief of Persia." According to Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 49: "A debate persists, even among the proponents of source criticism, regarding the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the priestly authors, their own historical situation as it is reflected in their characterization of the wilderness period. Some regard P as an essentially pre-exilic collection while others see it as a younger, later source, preceded historically by JE and D." Even if the P material starts to be compiled in the pre-exilic era, this possibility would not affect the general tenor of the research. By either point in the history of the Hebrew people, their kings had long ago understood the importance of foreign relations, even if there was more stability in the Persian Era.

<sup>103</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 201 A: "Set in the tumultuous years of 175-143 BCE, 1 Maccabees narrates the history of the revolt against Seleucid rule in Judea led by Judas Maccabeus and his brothers."

<sup>104</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 202 A: "The work was written between the rule of John Hyrcanus I, introduced at the end of the book (134-102 BCE), and Pompey's conquest of Rome in 63 BCE. Josephus used it as a source

John the Baptist	Lk 1:15	Roman Empire: Early 1 <sup>st</sup> (CE)	Roman Empire: Mid- to Late-1 <sup>st</sup> (CE) <sup>105</sup>
Jesus of Nazareth	Mk 14:25//Mt 26:29//Lk 22:18, Mk 15:23, Mt 2:23	Roman Empire: Early 1 <sup>st</sup> (CE)	Roman Empire: Mid 1 <sup>st</sup> -Early 2 <sup>nd</sup> (CE) <sup>106</sup>
Paul	Acts 18:18, 21:23-7	Roman Empire: Mid- to Late-1 <sup>st</sup> (CE) <sup>107</sup>	Roman Empire: Mid- to Late-1 <sup>st</sup> (CE) <sup>108</sup>

As you can see, the period of composition is often centuries removed from the historical setting of the events themselves. These types of discrepancies help reveal the various authors' theological intentions.

## 2.2 Validation for the Choice of Passages

Let us then discuss why the above passages have been chosen. First, we will explore the issue of how Deborah's Song stands in the pantheon of naziritic literature. Chepey does not include an analysis of the Song of Deborah in his work as his research was confined to naziritic texts, but scholars such as Blenkinsopp and Miller see the

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when he began his *Jewish Antiquities* in about 75 CE. The earliest extant manuscripts are from the fourth and fifth centuries CE in Greek and Latin. Scholars since the time of Jerome have noticed that the Greek of 1 Maccabees reads like a translation from Hebrew, almost certainly the book's original language."

<sup>105</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 94 NT: "The typical suggestion of scholars that Luke wrote around 85 CE is plausible, though the Gospel could have been completed five to fifteen years earlier or even five to ten years later. The available evidence from antiquity does not make precision possible in either locating or dating the origin of Luke's narrative."

<sup>106</sup> For dating of Luke see footnote 103; *New Oxford*, p. 57NT: "Mark is by far the shortest of the four canonical Gospels and is generally thought to be the earliest, and to have been used in the composition of both Matthew and Luke. Because of the vague and indefinite references to the destruction of Jerusalem in Mark 13 [...], the Gospel is thought to have been composed just prior to the widespread Jewish popular revolt that began in 66 CE and the Roman conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE;" *New Oxford* p. 8 New Testament: "Matthew was written following the first Jewish revolt against Rome and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE by the Roman general and eventual emperor, Titus. This monumental historical event is most likely referred to in 21.43-44 and 22.7. In terms of Roman political history the Gospel belongs to the end of the Flavian dynasty or shortly thereafter. In terms of the social and religious developments in Israel, Matthew belongs to that fluid and uncertain period between the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 and the emergence of rabbinic Judaism as the decisive force and voice in the land between 135 and 200. Matthew's Gospel then dates from the last decade of the first century to the early second century."

<sup>107</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 183-4NT

<sup>108</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 183NT.

double-use wordplay of the Hebrew term פֶּרֶעַ, or *perā*, as evidence for a group of tribal long-haired warriors called nazirites.<sup>109</sup> Many literary parallels exist that also connect the word with hair.<sup>110</sup>

A larger section on the corruption of tribal naziritism occurs after this glimpse into a very distant past. We will look at Amos' cry and how it reveals the presence of some form of cultic naziritism.<sup>111</sup> In Amos, we see the first historical allusion to nazirite corruption. Next, we will look at the stories of Samson and Samuel in tandem to see how earlier *nāzîrs* should and should not behave. Samson is the Nazirite gone astray, while Samuel is a positive example of ancient holiness. Next, two short nazirite passages will be explored in relation to their relevance to the worlds of tribal and cultic naziritism. The additions<sup>112</sup> to the story of Joseph in Gen 49:26 and Deut 33:16 reveal a process whereby the appellation *nāzîr* was being applied to holy men of the past to help validate a religious ritual involving an exchange of wealth in return for God's favour. In Lamentations, the nazirites are used as a motif to convey how far into nazirite corruption God's people had slid. These sins are framed as reasons for which Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians.<sup>113</sup> By the book of Numbers, because the circumstances of the wealthy priestly class had diminished as a result of the exile, the nazirite votives were if not invented, at least codified, to help keep the population pacified. The nazirite legislation of Numbers is an indication of the types of doctrines the priestly class had to support so that they could maintain their positions of privilege as allowed by the Persian emperors. Naziritism was one means through which they could help fund their operations. The

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<sup>109</sup> see section 3.1.

<sup>110</sup> see section 3.1, footnote 115.

<sup>111</sup> see section 4.1.

<sup>112</sup> see section 2.1, footnote 96.

<sup>113</sup> see section 4.5.



resistance to the priestly class came in the form of civil war during the Hellenistic Era. By the time of the Maccabean Revolt, as recorded in the deuterocanonical writings, we can see that even though the priests had been using the stories of legendary warriors as examples as nazirites, those who paid for their ritual could come from virtually any professional background,<sup>114</sup> thus inspiring a potential crossover between nazirites and warriors, but not a necessary one.<sup>115</sup> Finally, in regard to the NT passages, naziritic motifs are employed to depict both John the Baptist and Jesus, while Paul is often interpreted as having taken the “Nazirate” vow. It is conceivable that both John and Jesus took part in a temporary nazirite vow as a rite of passage as subject to the cultural norms around them, but the writers of the Gospels draw on the centuries old use of the word to convey charismatic holiness. There is no evidence to suggest that either John or Jesus were permanent nazirites; there are at best very ambiguous suggestions that either historical figure may have abstained from the temporary nazirite vow as a form of spiritual rebellion. They were certainly perceived and recorded as personages who were close to God, but their naziritism is far removed from militancy.

### **Chapter 3: Tribal Naziritism**

Compositional circumstances must be regarded when attempting to construct an accurate portrait of Ancient Israel. Albertz provides a synopsis of the problem when looking at tribal traditions as modified by cultic leaders:

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<sup>114</sup> see section 1.1, footnotes 12 and 13.

<sup>115</sup> The same principle of heroic displacement can be observed in the modern phenomenon of karaoke. The Judahite, just like the teenager, will probably never attain the same heights as their idols, in the first case figures like Samson, Samuel, and Joseph, but through the temporary experience of being either a *nāzîr*, or a “singer” in the case of the adolescent, they will at least be able to experience some of the glory.

[n]ew insights of Pentateuchal criticism make it clear that the conception of the early period of Israel propagated in the Pentateuch derives in its present form only from the early post-exilic period; in other words, there is a period of a good 800 years between it and the real historical course of events. It rests on the theological conception that the time of Israel's salvation was the wilderness period, and that with the settlement in Canaan apostasy from Yahweh began which finally led to exile. But this conception is attested with relative certainty only after the time of the prophet Hosea, i.e. at the end of the eighth century, and is then broadly developed by the Deuteronomistic reform theologians of the seventh century. Their interest was clear: by constructing an ideal early period before the settlement and the formation of the state they wanted to deprive contemporary cultic, cultural, and political features of their religious legitimation, demonstrate them to be a false development and create the basis for a new religious identity, separating Israel from its cultural and political environment [...] This is the reason for the existing accumulation of material in the Pentateuch, which in this form quite certainly does not offer an accurate picture of the historical development.<sup>116</sup>

This criticism is applicable to all HB naziritic literature apart from Deborah who scholars argue is relatively intact from its oral tradition, and Amos and Lamentations, whose writings are more historically accurate. By juxtaposing the two, we might even catch a glimpse of the elusive tribal *nāzîr*.

### 3.1 The Song of Deborah as Evidence of Tribal Naziritic Tradition (Judg 5:2)

*When locks are long in Israel,<sup>117</sup>  
when the people offer themselves willingly—  
bless the Lord! (Judg 5:2)*

Brown describes Deborah as “the feminine counterpart to the greatest prophet in Israel’s history, Moses himself.”<sup>118</sup> Obviously, Deborah’s holiness is not in question. The

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<sup>116</sup> Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 1, John Bowden (trns.), (Louisville, K.Y.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 23-4.

<sup>117</sup> The exact meaning of the Hebrew in this passage continues to be debated. Although Boling, *Judges*, p. 107 attempts to justify his translation as “When they cast of restraint in Israel,” this thesis will opt for the more familiar reading, especially if we compare the usages of the juxtaposed infinitive and noun here to other comparable usages in the FT. See also *Theological Dictionary* 12, pp. 98-100 for examples of other biblical passages that use the term to signify hair.

Song of Deborah (Judg 5) arguably represents the oldest literary tradition of the Bible.<sup>119</sup> In it we have perhaps the earliest canonical mythology that associates long hair and self-sacrifice with holiness (Judg 5:2). Much can be made from a feminist viewpoint on the significance this simple fact might have on the entire perception of Judeo-Christianity, but allow this moment to reiterate the idea that cultic *nāzîrs* could be male or female.<sup>120</sup> In this sense, The Song of Deborah is possibly the earliest biblical documentation of naziritism, in this case a form of holiness that embodies hair growth and the willingness to fight in a holy war for Yahweh's chosen people. Although admitting that this reading lends itself to a relative degree of uncertainty, Levine states, "allowing the hair to grow long, if this is what *biprô'a perā 'ôt* means, is associated with dedication, a theme conveyed by the verb *hittnaddeb*<sup>121</sup>, there used in the heroic rather than the cultic sense."<sup>122</sup> Chepey, however, does not acknowledge the Song of Deborah (Judg 5) as part of the naziritic canon since it is not a naziritic text, although Blenkinsopp and Miller do, since it embodies certain naziritic motifs. Blenkinsopp writes: "fanatical in their devotion to the tribal war god were the Nazirites (*nezirim*), whose presence in the peasant army may be alluded to in Deborah's song"<sup>123</sup> and Miller also classifies the Song of Deborah as naziritic literature.<sup>124</sup> Miller determines that the Hebrew term *perā* can only make sense of as a reference to long hair:

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<sup>118</sup> Cheryl Anne Brown, "Deborah", *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women: Studies in Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities and Josephus's Jewish Antiquities* (Louisville, K. Y.: Westminster/John Knox Press, p. 82.

<sup>119</sup> Mark A. Vincent, "The Song of Deborah: A Structural and Literary Consideration", *JSOT* 91 (2000), p. 61; Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 30-41; *New Oxford*, p. 362.

<sup>120</sup> See Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 91-2 regarding female nazirites in the rabbinic tradition.

<sup>121</sup> To volunteer for war

<sup>122</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 232.

<sup>123</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, p. 136.

<sup>124</sup> Patrick D. Miller, "Judges 5", *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 87-9.

The hanging loose of locks may refer to the wearing of the hair unshorn as a vow and a sign of holiness according to the custom of the Nazirite vow. The law of the Nazirite in Numbers 6:5 makes it clear that wearing the locks (*perā*<sup>125</sup>) of hair long is to sanctify oneself, to separate oneself as holy to Yahweh. This is the only context in which specific reference to the hair in Judges 5:2 makes sense. The reference must be to the long hair of a type or group of warriors who constructed themselves to fight the holy wars of Yahweh. If so, Judges 5:2 contains the earliest reference to this custom and would seem to point to the fact that the Nazirite vow may have originated in the ritual of holy war or at least have been closely associated with that ritual at the beginning, although by the time of the presentation of the Nazirite law in Numbers 6 (P) that association had been lost.<sup>125</sup>

In this sense, Judges 5 may be the oldest biblical tradition to outline basic precepts for some type of tribal asceticism—namely hair growth and the willingness to engage in self-sacrifice for a divine cause. All we can say with any certainty in regard to what Judg 5:2 reveals about tribal naziritism is that hair growth and self-sacrifice are the two oldest biblical-naziritic markers of holiness.

#### **Chapter 4: The Corruption of Tribal Naziritism**

In the following passages, we will see how regardless of exactly what point the naziritic conditions came to be codified, apart from Amos and Lamentations which are very likely composed close to the historical events depicted, the overwhelming nature of the evidence demonstrates that the institutionalized form of naziritism—cultic—was augmented into the Numbers tradition for the purpose of gaining wealth from devotees, but also to help maintain societal order.

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<sup>125</sup> Miller, “Judges 5”, p. 88.

#### 4.1 Amos' Cry Against Naziritic Corruption (Am 2:11-12)

*And I raised up some of your children to be prophets  
and some of your youths to be nazirites.  
Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?  
says the Lord.*

*But you made the nazirites drink wine,  
and commanded the prophets,  
saying, "You shall not prophesy." (Am 2:11-12)*

Amos shows us without a doubt that the institution of the nazirite existed in some form during the time of the Divided Kingdom. Whether or not Amos is speaking about permanent or temporary nazirites is, however, unclear, suggesting a pivotal time in the evolution of biblical naziritism. What is clear by the context of the passage though is that the association of holiness and wine would be reprehensible to a religious purist of Amos' time. Although the historical Amos would have been speaking at the peak of prosperity of the both Northern and Southern Kingdoms, his message is one of deep scorn against the licentiousness of Israel at that time; his rebuke against Israel is based on a romanticization of the past: "Amos' stress on the Nazirites can be understood as a protest against the sophisticated and degenerate life of his time, in particular as it appeared in the large cities."<sup>126</sup> As Mays elucidates: "to fill the gap between the Conquest and the present, and to bring the sequence of Yahweh's acts for Israel to a contemporary climax, Amos adds to the classical sequence of Exodus, Wilderness, and Conquest, the calling of prophets and Nazirites."<sup>127</sup> Hence, there is a deliberate attempt in this text to connect the office of nazirite to a more ancient past, when nazirites supposedly never consumed intoxicants. Amos is alerting his audience to the basic contradiction found in the legislation of naziritism, as ultimately evidenced in Numbers; namely, that naziritism

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<sup>126</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 53.

<sup>127</sup> Mays, *Amos*, p. 51.

was originally defined as a life-long calling, from birth to death. In this case, we have one type of holy person making reference to the mistreatment of another: “One need not be a Nazirite to condemn the persecution of Nazirites.”<sup>128</sup> Like many prophets, Amos’ vision was not sympathetic to the priestly ruling class. According to Snaith, nazirites “held by an ancient desert tradition and had as little as possible to do with Canaanite manners and customs.”<sup>129</sup> This corroborates the following claim made by Hubbard: “These acts of austerity symbolized special devotion to God and may have been intended to keep alive the special memories of the wilderness years.”<sup>130</sup> Most scholars also agree that the juxtaposition of the offices of nazirites and prophets demonstrates the degree of respect a nazirite would garner from society: “the comparison of *nāzîr* and *nābi*’ ‘prophet’ in Amos 2:11-12 suggests a high status for the *nāzîr*.”<sup>131</sup> It is important to remember, however, that “in the accompanying line (2:11) the Nazirite vocation is represented as a gift of God.”<sup>132</sup> In this sense, one can readily understand Amos’ outrage at the breaking of ancient naziritic codes of conduct. Samson, for better or for worse, was, after all, decreed as a nazirite from the womb, by an angel, the direct representative of God; as was Samuel. In light of this ancient literary tradition, Amos’ contempt for the Jewish bureaucracy makes perfect sense. Who were they to modify God’s decrees? In reference to the redaction history of Amos, Anderson and Freedman state the following about verses 11 and 12:

The mention of nazirites is completely non-Deuteronomic. The only occurrences of *nzyrm* in Deuteronomic literature, Deuteronomy 33 and

<sup>128</sup> James M. Ward, *Amos and Isaiah*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1969), p. 135.

<sup>129</sup> Norman H. Snaith, “Amos”, *Amos, Hosea and Micah* (London: Epworth, 1956), p. 19.

<sup>130</sup> David Allan Hubbard, “Amos”, *Joel and Amos* (Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity, 1989), p. 144. In this sense, we can compare Amos to a religious fundamentalist who keeps referring to the past circumstances of the nation as an immutable ideal.

<sup>131</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 235.

<sup>132</sup> Ward, *Amos and Isaiah*, p. 135.

Judges 15-16, are independent of the Deuteronomic editor. The only extended discussion of nazirites is in P, but there is no literary link between Amos and Numbers.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, the story of Amos can only be referring to the tribal *nāzîr* style of naziritism as a superior model of holiness. All other HB references to tribal *nāzîrs*, apart from Judg 5:2 and Lam 4:7-8 are work of the Deuteronomist. Although Dtr was clearly not sensitive to Amos' reproach, what this passage in Amos demonstrates is that the process of the pacification of holiness started even before the time of Dtr. For Amos, the "Israelites could not have behaved worse than they did, because they compelled the Nazirites to break their vows of abstention from wine."<sup>134</sup> Surely, the codification of this practice several centuries later in Numbers 6:20b, for Amos, would have been a further unthinkable outrage. What the mention of nazirites in Amos demonstrates is that there was some type of conception of naziritism in place at this time that was being corrupted. We can be certain that some type of naziritic ideals existed during the Monarchic Period.

#### **4.2 A Comparative Analysis of Samson and Samuel: the Legend of the *Nāzîr* Gone Astray versus the Atoning *Nāzîr***

In this section, we will examine Samson as a nazirite gone astray as juxtaposed against Samuel, an exemplary naziritic model. According to Fred Blumenthal's article, "Samson and Samuel: Two Styles of Leadership," the representation of Samuel within the context of naziritic vows exists for a specific theological purpose:

[By] drawing our attention to the similarity of the births of Samson and Samuel, both of which occurred after so many years of frustration for their mothers, the biblical text compares their respective leadership. It is unquestionably Samuel, the one who succeeds in bringing about the kingdom of David, for whom greater approval is expressed.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 331.

<sup>134</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 53.

<sup>135</sup> Fred Blumenthal, "Samson and Samuel: Two Styles of Leadership", *JBQ* 33.2 (2005), p. 112.

As we shall discover in the following two sections, in addition to the above mentioned contradistinction, exegetical scholarship reveals that Samson and Samuel's statuses as nazirites were but retroactive appellations that were applied to both of them for the specific theological purpose of justifying the naziritic legislation that finds its home in Numbers 6:1-21.

#### 4.2.1 Samson as Nāzîr (Judg 13:4-5, 7; 16:17)

*"Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring; I did not ask him where he came from, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, 'You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'" (Judg 13:4-7)*

*So he told her his whole secret, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me; I would become weak, and be like anyone else." (Judg 16:17)*

The Book of Judges continues the narrative of the Israelites from the death of Joshua up to the events preceding the birth of Samuel, presenting "a sweep of history from the days of the settlement [in Canaan after the Exodus] until the advent of the monarchy under Saul."<sup>136</sup> The Israelite people are traditionally characterized during this period as belonging to loose groups of neighbouring tribes that would often band together, forming clans, in order to defend themselves against a common enemy. In the absence of a king, the Lord would raise a "judge" in order to organize the rally among the

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<sup>136</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 2.



neighbouring Israelite tribes against the Canaanites.<sup>137</sup> The word “judge” appears in quotations since the meaning of the original Hebrew word carries a wider set of connotations than the later Greek, Latin, and English renditions. Moore provides a useful breakdown on the evolution of the term:

The verb *shâphat* is not only *judicare*, but *vindicare*, both in the sense of “defend, deliver,” and in that of “avenge, punish.” The participle *shophet* is not only *judex*, but *vindex*, and is not infrequently synonymous with “deliverer.” Again, as the administration of justice was, in times of peace, the most important function of the chieftan... the noun is sometimes equivalent to “ruler,” and the verb signifies, “rule, govern.”<sup>138</sup>

In light of this distinction, scholarly interpretations of Samson have been problematic. Not only does Samson’s tale stray from the cyclic template found in the structure of the other five major judges<sup>139</sup> of the “cycles” section, he also never seems to have an official “rule” over his people, never organizing any “full-scale military activity against his country’s oppressors as did the other deliverer figures in the earlier part of the book,”<sup>140</sup> while the deliverance he ultimately provides seems ironic at best, as it involves his own death.

As we shall discover, everything about the Samson story makes him not only an anomaly as a judge, but also a conundrum as a nazirite. Chepey gives us an indication of how Late-Second Temple Jews would have perceived Samson’s naziritism:

Of the two literary editions, LXX<sup>B</sup> concerns the study at hand where it differs from both MT and LXX<sup>A</sup> in one, albeit highly significant, respect. Whereas LXX<sup>A</sup> parallels MT by referring to the figure Samson as a “Nazirite” in 13.5, 7 and 16.17 using Greek transliteration ναζιραιος (in

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<sup>137</sup> According to Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 11, although the theory of amphictyony has been debated by scholars and sometimes replaced with the concept “tribal confederacy.” For the purposes of Samson, however, the actual organization of the Israelite tribes is irrelevant, as Samson functions as a solitary hero.

<sup>138</sup> George F. Moore, *A Critical Commentary on Judges* (The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. xi. The definition is corroborated by Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. xxxiii.

<sup>139</sup> Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah

<sup>140</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 151.

correspondence with the Hebrew term נזיר in MT), LXX<sup>B</sup> utilizes a form of the transliteration in 13.5 (ναζιρ), while substituting ἅγιος for נזיר in 13.7 and 16.17. In this manner LXX<sup>B</sup> not only depicts Samson as a Nazirite, but also appears to define what a Nazirite like Samson is—ἅγιος, a “holy person.”<sup>141</sup>

We will explore Samson on the bases of his placement as a judge in the book of Judges, his un-nazirite behaviour, and, finally, the ultimate purpose of the fashioning of the ancient Samson legend into the tale of a morally ambiguous nazirite. The analysis will demonstrate that whether viewed historically or mythically,<sup>142</sup> the story of Samson serves as a didactic fable that provides “the literary climax and moral nadir of the ‘cycles’ section,”<sup>143</sup> while characterizing Yahweh as the supreme God whose chosen method of deliverance sometimes runs counter-intuitively. Furthermore, and of most relevance to

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<sup>141</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 32-3.

<sup>142</sup> As Guillaume, *Waiting*, p. 165 points out: “one wonders whether Samson is not a pure Deuteronomistic creature.” Albright, “Prolegomenon”, p. 23 writes that “fifty years of archaeological research” have made it “unlikely that Samson was a mythical figure” since “the story of Samson is faithful to actual conditions in or about the late twelfth century B.C.[E.] in the Shepelah and adjacent Philistine plains,” he grants that the name Samson is a kenning. Other scholars have picked up on the meaning of the names in the story and classified the story as a solar-mythology. The answer, most likely, lies somewhere in between. According to C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes and Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (New York: KTAV, 1970), pp. 391-2, the “name Samson or Simson, connected as it doubtless is with [the Hebrew] Semes ‘sun’... has of course been adduced as an argument for the theory of the solar myth,” but one of his sources, K. Budde, “maintains on the contrary that the derivation ‘tells rather against than in favour of this view, for it is not the way with nature-myth to borrow or even derive the name of its hero from the cosmological object which it describes.” Rather, Burney accredits the kenning as “in origin honorific of the sun,” reflecting the prevalence of “sun-worship in the locality—a fact which is indeed attested by the place-name Beth-shemesh, ‘Temple of the Sun,’ in the immediate neighbourhood of the scene of [Samson’s] exploits.” The modern equivalent would be naming one’s child after a music idol, movie star, famous political figure, or anyone else we might “worship” or pay reverence to today. The solar-mythologists, however, provide a convincing argument for their side. In addition to the linguistic link between Samson and sun, Samson’s locks, while suggesting a link to nazirite vows for the amasser of the Samson stories, also suggests a link to solar mythology in relation to the literary precepts of Ancient Near Eastern tradition. According to James D. Martin, *The Book of Judges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975), p. 158, “The sun’s rays in primitive art and in ancient literature are always depicted as flowing locks of hair. Samson’s hair is symbolic of his strength just as the rays of the sun are symbolic of its strength and life-giving power. When Samson’s hair is cut he loses his strength, and this state is symbolic of winter when the sun’s rays are lacking in power and effectiveness.” Considering the figure Samson as a symbol for the sun makes certain incidents in the narrative more readily explainable, including the bees in the carcass of the lion, the carrying of the gates at Gaza, and the foxes burning the corn. For more information on the specifics of sun-mythology in relation to these particular narrative details see Burney, *The Book of Judges*, pp. 358-94 and Martin, *The Book of Judges*, pp. 165-74.

<sup>143</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 354HB.

this study, Samson, as a tribal *nāzîr* serves as both a legendary figure head to help promote naziritic ceremonies, but as an icon for the practice of cultic naziritism his tale cautions against breaking one's naziritic vows. The nature of Samson's character lends itself both to awe and criticism, but apart from the legendary story behind the practice of cultic naziritism, the reality for post-exilic Judahites was that their vow would certainly be a less demanding way to purify oneself for the Lord, the normal course of life resuming itself upon termination of the vow.

Like many stories in the Hebrew Bible, certain parallels can be ascertained in several of the Judges literature. The basic literary structure of the Major Judges stories consists of the following reoccurring components: a) "Israel does evil in the eyes of the Lord,"<sup>144</sup> the evil usually designated as the "abandonment of the worship of their own God and turning to the worship of other gods,"<sup>145</sup> sometimes in the form of idolatry; b) "punishment by God by means of subjection to oppression by foreign neighbours;"<sup>146</sup> c) "Israel serves the oppressor for x years,"<sup>147</sup> d) Israel cries to the Lord for help; e) the Lord responds by providing Israel with a deliverer; f) the deliverer subdues the oppressor with the aid of the spirit of the Lord<sup>148</sup>; g) "the land has "rest" for x years"<sup>149</sup> under the judges' command. The current biblical narrative seems to make an attempt to fit Samson into the general cycle. 13:1 seems to satisfy conditions 1, 2, and 3 of the cycle, while 15:20 and 16:31 attempt to gratify the seventh element by ascribing to Samson a twenty-year period of judgment of which we have no indication regarding the impact of his

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<sup>144</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 354 HB.

<sup>145</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 2.

<sup>147</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 354 HB.

<sup>148</sup> items d-f are a synthesis between the structures provided in Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 2 and *New Oxford*, p. 354HB.

<sup>149</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 354 HB.

actions on the Hebrew community which he continually travels away from. Also, Israel never actually calls out to the Lord for a deliverer in the Samson cycle, yet the nameless angel of the Lord appears regardless. Furthermore, the aforementioned verses are subject to a style of documentation that more closely resembles Deuteronomy, contrasting the folk-tale style by which the remainder of the story is transmitted. In gauging Samson's role as judge, we must remember that such structuring verses are usually attributed to the deuteronomistic editor, who, as Moore writes, "wrote in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., separated from the times of the judges by as many centuries as lie between us and the crusades, and the much older sources from which the stories of the judges themselves are derived."<sup>150</sup> While it is possible that the story of Samson that existed in oral tradition was first transmitted during the tribal period of Israel's history in order to "collect Danite traditions and local folk-tales before they disappeared completely in the course of the tribal migration,"<sup>151</sup> centuries later, like many other Biblical texts, they were framed by the Deuteronomistic Historiographer, in this case adding naziritic glosses.

Although we associate Samson with elevated prowess, Samson's story is undeniably the one of the nazirite corrupted. Samson breaks every condition of naziritic behavior found in Num 6. We can intuit that Samson drank wine at his first wedding ceremony since the Hebrew word for feast literally means a "drinking-bout"<sup>152</sup> or "drinking session"<sup>153</sup> and Samson is described as behaving in a manner as young men were accustomed to do, implying that he took an active part in these festivities. In addition to the negative connotations regarding drunkenness, the "vine was seen as the

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<sup>150</sup> Moore, *Judges*, p. v-vi.

<sup>151</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 155.

<sup>152</sup> Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. 344.

<sup>153</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 165.

symbol of the culture of Canaan, contamination from which was regarded as the root cause of all Israel's apostasy and infidelity to her God."<sup>154</sup> Killing the various Philistines (Judg 14:19; 15:15,16:30) violates the third condition found in Numbers, while allowing Delilah to cut his locks completes his disregard for his status as nazirite, initiating his downfall. All these devices are used for a very specific purpose.

Samson's adventures and ultimate fate demonstrate that even a demi-god can fall when the grace of Yahweh leaves him. If we compare Samson's life to the three naziritic behaviours laid out Num 6:1-21, the narrative seems purposefully designed to depict a heroic character bent on breaking them all. Samson kills, most probably drinks wine, and finally allows<sup>155</sup> his hair to be cut. In addition, if we look to the other tangential connotation of holiness, celibacy and avoiding contact with dead animals, we can see that Samson goes the whole way, but his special divinely decreed status ensures that he fulfills his Yahwistic purpose. Samson reveals that the idealized pre-exilic perceptions of Israelite tribal naziritism are long hair, abstention from intoxicants, and militancy; these aspects endure into cultic naziritism, but they are more thematic. Samson needs to be interpreted from a more global perspective in order to make complete sense of the irony of this tale.

Every time Samson meets a Philistine woman, he is placed in peril. With the possible exception of the prostitute in Gaza, Samson is weakened by every sexual encounter. In the context of the narrative as it would be received by a post-exilic audience, his loyalty, as a nazirite, should be with Yahweh, not women or Philistines, and especially not women Philistines. Furthermore, since Samson is identified as a warrior,

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<sup>154</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 157.

<sup>155</sup> Delilah implores Samson four times before he gives away his secret (Judg 16:6, 10, 13, 15-6).

an expectation of sexual abstinence<sup>156</sup> could also be understood in the same implicational sense as the conditions given to his mother could also apply to him. Another theme in the story is the nagging of the foreign women. The *isha* from Timnath finally berates Samson into disclosing the answer to his riddle, forcing him to kill thirty men, once again forsaking his status as nazirite by coming into contact with the dead. Burney writes, “[Budde] comments on the uncommon use of *isha* here... instead of [*naara*] ‘maiden,’ the ordinary term for an unmarried girl. He suggests that the ‘woman’ may have been a widow or divorced wife, or else that the term may be used with a shade of contempt. The latter suggestion is the more probable.”<sup>157</sup> The word “*issa*” also designates people from Hamitic origins. Ham’s most notorious son is, of course, Canaan. Here we have another possible reason why Samson was chosen to be the first distinguishably tribal example of biblical naziritism; the story readily ties together anti-Canaanite and pro-wilderness messages. In addition to these negative traits regarding the installment, the wedding is most probably of the *sadika* type, or one

in which the custom was that the bride remained with her own people, the children of the marriage belonging to the mother’s, and not the father’s clan, and the marriage-contract being frequently for a limited period merely.<sup>158</sup>

Because this acquiescence runs contrary to the patriarchal values instilled in Yahwistic culture, we can label Samson’s case heroic mockery.

In becoming enamoured with Delilah, Samson strays even further from Yahweh. By studying the implications of her name, we come closer to understanding Yahweh’s

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<sup>156</sup> According to Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 332, the rationale for sexual abstinence comes from the warrior’s deidcation (1 Sam 21:5-6; 2 Sam 11:11) and the function and identification of tribal *nāzîrs* as warriors.

<sup>157</sup> Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. 356.

<sup>158</sup> Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. 355.

enemies. Based on an etymological analysis of her name, Delilah was most likely “connected with the cult of the fertility goddess [Astarte], possibly as a sacred prostitute.”<sup>159</sup> Someone in this profession, one would intuit, would have no trouble accepting eleven hundred shekels of silver for the simple task of uncovering Samson’s secret, the “trials” all bearing sado-masochistic overtones, as Samson is continually bound by his dominatrix. As a representative of Astarte, Baal’s counterpart, we see the gods of the heathens combating Yahweh’s deliverer through underhanded means, all in opposition to the teachings of the purist Yahwists.

Samson’s penchant for the daughters of the uncircumcised Philistines works as a didactic lesson not only in favour of following holiness behaviours, but also as a caution against Philistine women, who are characterized as “naggers” in both the woman from Timnath and Delilah story. The slur “uncircumcised Philistines” (Judg 14:3) refers to the finding that the Philistines “appear to have been the only race known to the Israelites in early times who did not practice circumcision,”<sup>160</sup> a flagrant defiance of Yahweh’s law. Samson’s three encounters with women serve to not only warn the reader against associating with whores, or women who will accept money over love, like Delilah, but by specifically designating the women as “Philistine,” the cultural bias is clear. Women are dangerous and Philistine women are even worse.

The Samson text does allow for the possibility, however, that Samson’s transgressions fall into Yahweh’s greater design. The angel of Lord states that Samson “shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (Judg 13:5), as if the future has already been determined. The angel does not state that Samson *will* deliver Israel.

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<sup>159</sup> Martin, *The Book of Judges*, p. 177.

<sup>160</sup> Burney, *The Book of Judges*, p. 356.

When Samson causes the collapse of the palace upon himself and the Philistine lords and the people who were in it, he fulfils the prophecy of the angel. By killing more at his death than he had during his life (Judg 16:30b), we can interpret the beginning of Israel's deliverance as a world with that many less Philistines.

We must accept that within our era, the truth of Samson can never be fully understood; unless we can go back in time. What remains of Samson's legacy will continually be scattered into the ether, further dissolving away from its essence and original implications. Perhaps the dichotomy between mythology and reality will never be mended. Perhaps the issue is a mute point, as Burney states:

If we could grant the historical character of the whole Samson-narrative, Samson would still not be the initiator or furtherer of any movement, religious or political, in the history of Israel which would invest his figure with the slightest historical significance. The real value of the narrative lies in its local setting, which bears intrinsic evidence of being very true to life, and in its preservation of a mythical tradition, akin to that of other Semitic races, of the existence of which in Israel we should otherwise be ignorant. (340)

The types of details included in this story are indicative of the sorts of interactions and perceptions that attracted and repelled neighbouring peoples subject to two conflicting systems of faith. In this vein, here lies the solid historical value of the tales. If one abandons the banality of dualism in the true or false question, the alternative is to simply read Samson as somewhere between divine and real—an Aesop's fable for Yahwists. The story of Samson is the fable of the Nazirite who breaks his vows. If we look at the chronology of Samson's story in league with the conditions set out in Numbers 6, we can interpret his haircut as the end of his time of his consecration, the result of which is to "begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judg 13:5b) in the form of kamikaze suicide. The naziritic vows and resulting sacrifices for the immediate readers of



Numbers during the eras of Dtr and P would be a much more appealing life option. Compared to Samson, the Second Temple nazirite had it easy. When a crowd is familiar with the conditions attached to a motif, as the audience of Num 6:1-21 would have been, all a storyteller needs to do is conjure it in order to convey its multitude of associations.

#### 4.2.2 Samuel as Nāzîr (1 Sam 1:11, 22)

*She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head. (1 Sam 1:11)*

*But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time. (1 Sam 1:22)*

If the story of Samson is meant to demonstrate how a *nāzîr* can go astray, the story of Samuel, who is also characterized as a nazirite, presents the other side of the coin. Although most surviving Hebrew and Greek versions of 1 Sam 1:11, 22 do not explicitly denote Samuel as a *nāzîr*, we find an intriguing passage in 4QSam<sup>a</sup> that fills the lacunae:

- v. 11 ...of men and I will give him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. And he will drink no wine or strong drink and a razor will not pass over his head
- v. 22 ...and I will give him as a Nazirite forever.<sup>161</sup>

This characterization also occurs in the Septuagint.<sup>162</sup> McCarter accredits the omission of this element in the Hebrew Bible version of the story to parablepsis or homoeoteleuton.<sup>163</sup>

Several modern translations include like renditions to parallel this discovery, explicitly

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<sup>161</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 20. Furthermore, although they fall outside the direct scope of this study, all of the following also refer to Samuel as a nazirite: Josephus, *Antiquities* 5:347, Wisdom of Sirach 46:13, and Mishnah *Nazir* 9:5.

<sup>162</sup> William H.C. Propp, "Was Samuel a Nazirite?", *BR* 14.4 (August 1998), p. 2.

<sup>163</sup> McCarter, *1 Samuel*, pp. 49-50, 53-4, 56.

citing Samuel as a nazirite. All in all, when assessing the overview of 1 Sam, Chepey makes a strong case that although all but one of the surviving manuscripts of 1 Sam do not explicitly call Samuel a *nāzîr*, the text of 4QSam<sup>a</sup>, through its undeniable double use of the term *nāzîr*, makes it clear that for the audience of the text “in this period [50-25 B.C.E.]... the status of Samuel as a perpetual Nazirite was indubitable.”<sup>164</sup> Furthermore the use of the “no razor” motif closely parallels the naziritic parameters set out in the story of Samson as do the types of preparatory behaviours performed by each of their mothers (Judg 13:14; 1 Sam 1:15). Another document which supports Samuel’s status as nazirite is the Hebrew version of Ben Sira in which “Samuel is directly referred to as a נזיר”.<sup>165</sup> The redactors of both 4QSam<sup>a</sup> 1:22 and Sir 46:13 (Heb.)

clearly find this term an appropriate expression of the status and close relationship with God (cf. Jer. 15:1; Ps. 99:6) enjoyed by Samuel, whom tradition calls a priest, sometimes a judge, and sometimes a prophet. The term *nazir* thus lent itself to characterizing heroic figures, since its definition reflected their holiness rather than their function.”<sup>166</sup>

Remembering that the definition of nazirite without qualification comes closest to “holy person,” the reason why later biblical interpreters characterize Samuel as a nazirite is rather obvious. Not only does his birth narrative contain solid parallels to Samson’s, linking the two through the common motif of divine birth, but Samuel was also much more instrumental in defining Israel as a nation. Thus, in “addition to his role as judge, prophet, priest, and king-maker, Samuel also bore the characteristic marks of an early Nazirite,”<sup>167</sup> that is to say, a holy person.

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<sup>164</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 21-2.

<sup>165</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 40.

<sup>166</sup> *Theological Dictionary* 9, p. 308.

<sup>167</sup> Cartledge, “Were Nazirite Vows Unconditional”, p. 412.

Some scholars, however, argue that the birth narrative of Samuel originally applied to the character of Saul.<sup>168</sup> The purpose of the transposition of the birth narrative was once again to emphasize the superiority of Samuel over Saul. Saul, in the Saul-cycle was originally portrayed in a favourable way, so it is quite possible that Saul was originally considered a perpetual nazirite. As Dtr redacted these stories, however, certain elements were changed in order to portray the Davidic Dynasty in a more positive light. Thus, the heroic military acts of Samuel, probably originally belonged to Saul. Even if the hypothetical Saul as nazirite tradition was the one that was handed down to us, with the omission of the Davidic favouring, the behaviour of the bad nazirite Samson would still stand in contrast with the more favourable character of Saul. Some view Saul as the last true judge, since he never had an administration. In this sense, even Saul is more effective than Samson as both a judge and a nazirite. Nonetheless, since this study focuses on the tradition as handed down to us, we will continue to consider Samuel as the nazirite. Either Samuel or Saul as nazirite lead us to the same conclusions regarding the evolution of Ancient Near Eastern naziritism.

#### *4.2.3 Synopsis of Samson and Samuel's Naziritic Functions*

Based on the evidence that the naziritic passages in Judg and 1 Sam were redacted in the post-exilic era, centuries after the events allegedly transpired in the tribal era of Israel and that the placement of the Book of Numbers ahead of the stories of the Judges, we can view the ordering of the texts themselves as proof that the first readers of the P version would have been aware of the three codes of naziritism present in their contemporary societal fabric. In this sense, the insertions of naziritic-contextual material

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<sup>168</sup> Dion, Marie-France, "Saül et les ânesses égarées", *À l'origine du concept d'élection divine* (Montreal: Médiaspaul, 2006), p. 71-3.

to the story of Samson and Samuel/Saul that specifically ties them to the naziritic tradition serves only as a reminder of those passages that come before, namely Numbers 6:1-21. Whether or not these figures were indeed called *nâzîr* is somewhat secondary to the point. In this vein, we are regarding the Bible in its canonical form. What is certain, however, is that the ancient heroes of Yahwism would never have had the opportunity to engage in a Naziritic vow in its Second Temple context, as this doctrine simply did not exist.

Guillaume states the following regarding Deuteronomistic redaction and Samson's status as nazirite:

Judges 13 is often considered secondary to the rest of the Samson story, it is for an obvious reason: the nazirite theme is central to ch. 13 but plays practically no role in the others, if one excepts a very short passage in Judg. 16.17a $\alpha$  where Samson confides to Delilah.... This note could have been added at the same time than ch. 13.”<sup>169</sup>

McCarter states that in the case of 1 Samuel 1:11 the “insertion of *nzyr*, though entirely appropriate, is probably secondary, under the influence of v 22” and “shows the influence of Judg 13:7.”<sup>170</sup> McCarter also considers 1 Sam 1:22 to be “a secondary expansion,”<sup>171</sup> lending support to the notion that in the figures of Samson and Samuel we have two ancient holy figures that are redefined as nazirites and played off against each other to support the nazirite legislation of Number 6:1-21. If Samson remained the only ancient model for naziritism, Judah would be run amuck in chaos; Samuel's naziritism helps temper the mythology for practical use. The originally intended readers of Samson the Nazirite would have been aware that Samson was breaking all the rules and, thus, they

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<sup>169</sup> Guillaume, *Waiting*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>170</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary* (The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), p. 54.

<sup>171</sup> McCarter, *1 Samuel*, p. 56.

learn a moral from the fable. Although, if we continue this line of argumentation, we must wonder what the readers during the time of Numbers would have thought about the contradiction between the proscriptions found in Num 6:6-7 regarding dead bodies and the fact that the two most notable naziritic figures from the *Torah* had killing as part of their divine mission. The fact could always have been dismissed as the necessities of the tribal past, which would stand in contrast with the comfort of the Persian era. Once again, the cultic *nāzîr* has a rather minimal sacrifice to make compared to the nazirites of lore.

Also, interpreters have consistently had trouble making sense of the fact that the proscription against wine also laid upon Samson's mother, but not explicitly upon the nazirite himself. Even though Chepey argues that there is no direct evidence to support the notion that the directive to avoid wine applies to Samson directly,<sup>172</sup> in league with the pre-understanding of what it meant to be a nazirite, in terms of Second Temple consciousness, Levine offers an insightful explanation for the deliberate disassociation:

It seems inescapable [...] that abstinence from wine was perceived by the story's author as material to the status of a *nāzîr*. Quite possibly, existing narratives about a hero named Samson were modulated by the specific classification of Samson as a *nāzîr*, a status not originally in the story. All that the hero Samson knew was that his strength was in his hair. As Samson is depicted as a carousing adventurer, reveling in wine, women, and song, it would have strained the credibility of the stories about him to have defined him as an ascetic, holy warrior, abstaining from wine! So the independent author of the annunciation narrative displaced the ban on drinking wine from the hero himself and imposed it on his expectant mother, along with a ritual admonition against eating anything impure.<sup>173</sup>

Hammershaimb makes the following remark about this oddity: "It may be an accident that the examples [of tribal naziritism] we have are both of men who also had the task of

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<sup>172</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 230.

fighting against the enemies of the people.”<sup>174</sup> Finally, the analysis of the two texts in juxtaposition reveals what Blumenthal terms “The Samuel Strategy:”

The Samuel Strategy is quite naturally the one which religion would favour. Samson’s strength was in his body, even when *the spirit of the Lord came upon him* (Jud. 14:19). Samuel, in contrast, taught, judged and prayed, as his mother had done.<sup>175</sup>

The traditions of tribal naziritism are at best tenuous. Because their biblical representation has been shaded by P, we can never understand the full scope of what it meant to be a holy hero of the pre-monarchic era. Some presumptions about holiness in the idealized time of the tribal *nāzîrs* can, however, be ascertained. As Gabriel declares, it is only with “Solomon [that] the Israelites ceased to be a tribal society and became a national entity for the first time in their history.”<sup>176</sup> Thus, it is essential for us to remember that if the word *nāzîr* was being used during pre-monarchic times, if it indeed was being used at all, holiness would definitely have been associated with at least long hair and war prowess as the final outcome of the nation of Israel is the product of a series of military conquests in Palestine. Thus, what Niditch decrees about Samson, can be applied to a variety of pre-civilization Ancient Near Eastern holy persons:

[Samson] is a bridge between what humans have transformed, neatened, shaped, institutionalized, and socialized and what is found in nature, wild and nonsocial. He moves between both worlds, but his source of strength, his unusual and emphasized qualities are in the realm of the raw, the wild, the natural, and the nonsocial; Samson, as wild man, is a permanent challenge to a particular kind of civilization represented by the Philistines.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>175</sup> Blumenthal, “Samson and Samuel”, p. 111.

<sup>176</sup> Gabriel, *The Military History*, p. 37.

<sup>177</sup> Susan Niditch, “Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak”, *CBQ* 52 (1990), p. 619.

Thus, the behaviours of tribal naziritism include hair growth, abstinence from wine (etc.), the ability to fight for Yahweh, and by extension to the warrior code, celibacy. The main purpose of the naziritic passages in Samson and Samuel's stories is to provide a point of reference for the naziritic doctrines of Num 6:1-21.

#### 4.3 The "Naziritism" of Absalom (2 Sam 14:25-6; 15:8)

*Now in all Israel there was no one to be praised so much for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. When he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight. (2 Sam 14:25-6)*

*"For your servant made a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram: If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will worship the Lord in Hebron." (2 Sam 15:8)*

Most scholars, correctly, do not acknowledge Absalom<sup>178</sup> as a naziritic figure because he is never specifically consecrated in the story, but there are two key components of his story that must be assessed in order to gain a more global understanding of the evolution of naziritism: his long hair which he cuts each year (2 Sam 14:25-26) and the vow he wishes to complete in Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:8). It is with the figure of Absalom that we really begin to see the two distinct models of naziritism emerge—tribal and cultic—cannot be viewed as a function of historical dates; the terms are but sides of a spectrum.

Those scholars who have mentioned Absalom and naziritism in the same context tend to gloss over his naziritism by stating that his circumstances are, on the part of rabbinic circles, the mistaken validation for the office of the temporary nazirite as it comes to be.<sup>179</sup> As Gray states, "Permission to cut the hair of the perpetual Nazirite seems

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<sup>178</sup> an alternate transliteration of this name is Abishalom

<sup>179</sup> Z. Weisman, "The Biblical Nazirite, Its Types and Roots," *Trbz* 36 (1967), pp. 207-20.

based on the practice of Absalom [...] who was held to have been a perpetual Nazirite.”<sup>180</sup> Other scholars, such as McCarter, for example, maintain that “the rabbis were probably mistaken in thinking that he was a Nazirite.”<sup>181</sup> However, if we view 2 Sam 14:25-6 as secondary,<sup>182</sup> we can once again see how the Deuteronomists bestowed naziritism on figures of the past, in this case to validate a specific requirement of the temporary nazirite. Perhaps it was not a case of mistaken identity then, but rather an opportunity to further an agenda.

As the case may be, in the figure of Absalom, we once again see how holiness is connected to long hair. As Chepey verifies, Absalom was a heroic figure “whose ruddiness and length of hair was purportedly unparalleled in Israel.”<sup>183</sup> The specific rabbinic text which explicitly ties Absalom to naziritism is *Shirata* 2.64-75 from *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*. Rabbis continue to debate whether Absalom was a permanent or temporary nazirite, but in the context of this study, all that is important is to see how an ancient figure’s behaviour was used to validate temporary naziritism. Once again, the actual degree of real naziritism in Absalom’s actual life is relatively inconsequential. The fact that Absalom dies as a result of getting his long hair caught in the branches of a tree (2 Sam 18:9-18) serves as a cautionary tale about growing one’s hair too long in the context of Second Temple naziritism. By this time in Judahite history, short hair on men was the norm,<sup>184</sup> lending a cultural justification for the practice of cultic naziritism.

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<sup>180</sup> Gray, “The Nazirite”, p. 206.

<sup>181</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), p. 349.

<sup>182</sup> See McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 349: “it has been regarded as secondary by a number of commentators (Klostermann, Budde, Nowack, Dhorme, Schulz, Bressan, van den Born, de Vaux, Caird, Mauchline, Ackroyd).”

<sup>183</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 123.

<sup>184</sup> Pilch, *Hair*, p. 231.



#### 4.4 Insertions in Joseph's story (Gen 49:26; Deut 33:16)

The majority of scholars link Gen 49:26 and Deut 33:16 together, typically assigning the same post-exilic hands as the author of both passages. This section is broken into two segments. The first deals with Gen 49:26 and the second with Deut 33:16. A synopsis of the information follows the analyses on the two passages.

##### 4.4.1 Joseph as Nāzîr in Gen 49:26

*The blessings of your father  
are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains,  
the bounties of the everlasting hills;  
may they be on the head of Joseph,  
on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers. (Gen 49:26)*

Scholars have dated various passages from Genesis 49 from the pre-monarchic to the post-exilic period,<sup>185</sup> and some even go so far as to suggest that the entire chapter is a later insertion.<sup>186</sup> Although debates have raged on the issue of how many editors were involved in the transmission of Gen 49, even a conclusion which posits but one editor brings us to the same conclusion; this/these editor(s) “had a very specific goal in mind, namely legitimizing the supremacy of Judah in Israel.”<sup>187</sup> That much is obvious from the tradition as it has been handed down to us. Speiser corroborates the case that Gen 49:26 fails to fit into the poem as a whole from the point of view of poetic composition.<sup>188</sup> In this sense, the cultic nazirite is formalized as a Judahite motif, its oral sense in the context of tribalism lost through the literature. Thus, the true behaviour of a tribal *nāzîr* can only be intuited in opposition with the deuteronomistic augmentations.

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<sup>185</sup> Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 5-6.

<sup>186</sup> de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>187</sup> de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, p. 579. The rationale for how Joseph evolved from head of his family into a *nāzîr* is clearly explained on pp. 531-8.

<sup>188</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 369-70.

If we look at these passages in relation to Gen 49:22, we can also see how Joseph is being tied to the wilderness tradition. The older translations read: “Joseph is a wild colt,/A wild colt by a spring,/Wild asses on a hillside” while more contemporary translations read: “Joseph is a fruitful bough,/a fruitful bough by a spring;/his branches run over the wall.” Either way, Joseph is portrayed through the use of chaotic natural variables. 26:49a also connects Joseph with nature. Clearly the purpose of Gen 49 is to idealize Joseph against many lesser sons, such as Simeon and Levi (Gen 49:5-7), Issachar (Gen 49:14-5), Dan (Gen 49:17), and Benjamin (Gen 49:27). We can also see how Judah is being idealized over Israel (Gen 49:8-12), which strongly points to the hands of Dtr and P, the scribal elite of the Judahites. Thus, once again the naziritism of a character is a function of his special status to God, but in this case, more specifically, above his brethren.

#### 4.4.2 Joseph as Nāzîr (Deut 33:16b)

*Let these come on the head of Joseph,  
on the brow of the nazirite among his brothers. (Deut 33:16b)*

According to Hammershaimb, *nāzîr* is “used as the prince”<sup>189</sup> in these verses relating to the patriarchal figure Joseph, but most scholars argue against the use of *nāzîr* as prince.<sup>190</sup> The best interpretation of the use of *nāzîr* in the context of Joseph is as “one separated,” or consecrated in the sense of holiness, or one set apart from his brothers, but with a holy significance. Levine offers a construction of how the passage would have been construed by its Second Temple audience:

<sup>189</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 52.

<sup>190</sup> *Theological Dictionary* 9, p. 308: *nāzîr* “characterizes Joseph’s special relationship to God that sets him apart from his brothers; there is no need to invent the meaning ‘prince.’” According to Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel 2* (Religious Institutions. New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), p. 419, we are to take the meaning of *nāzîr* in these passages to denote “a man possessed with God-given charisma.”

the verbal root *n-z-r* connotes separation. If such separation is positively perceived and considered distinctive, the *nāzîr* stands apart as one selected for a holy or otherwise worthwhile purpose. Joseph might have been characterized as *nezîr 'ehâw* because he had received his father Jacob's extraordinary blessing. References to "head" (*rô'sh*) and "pate" (*qodqôd*) are highly suggestive when used in association with the verb *n-z-r*. A more literal rendering of Deut 33:16b would be

May all of these rest on the head of Joseph,  
On the pate of *one whose hair is dedicated* from among his brothers.  
One might even translate "On the pate of one whose hair was untrimmed."<sup>191</sup>

Now that we are more certain that the use of *nāzîr* in this passage designates holiness in a specifically naziritic sense, or Joseph's unique relationship with God as juxtaposed against his brothers' betrayal, we must attempt to place the composition of the work.

According to Tigay, Deut 33 "was composed prior to the exile of the northern tribes ca. 720 B.C.E., possibly during the time of Solomon or (perhaps excepting part of the Levites) earlier in the United Monarchy, or conceivably in the pre-monarchic period,"<sup>192</sup> but like so much biblical literature "the precise date remains uncertain."<sup>193</sup>

Another scholar, Soggin, identifies both Gen 49 and Deut 33 as songs that

presuppose certain political situations which are quite clear and are evidently later than the speaker. The intention is to give an aetiological explanation of these situations. Often the material is old and probably originates in the context of the groups to which it refers [...] While these songs might have originally been secular epics, they certainly are not in their present context.<sup>194</sup>

Millar views Deut 31-4 as a "historical postscript"<sup>195</sup> to the rest of the book. Gen 49:26 and Deut 33:16b are obvious insertions into the very ancient story of Joseph, if not part of

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<sup>191</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 231.

<sup>192</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy = Devarim: the Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), p. 524.

<sup>193</sup> Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12* (Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 844.

<sup>194</sup> Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 69.

<sup>195</sup> J. G. Millar, "Living at the Place of Decision: Time and Place in the Framework of Deuteronomy", in J. G. McConville and J. G. Millar, *Time and Place in Deuteronomy (JSOT)*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), p. 87.

an altogether contemporary poem. This demonstrates that whatever legislation was being built on *nāzîr* rites was being assisted by an ascription of holiness to ancient holy persons. If the ultimate lesson of Deuteronomy, as argued by Millar, is to push “Israel on to obedience in response to the grace of Yahweh [... and] to live in covenant faithfulness to Yahweh,”<sup>196</sup> then the purpose of Joseph in Deut 33:16b is to not only serve as a model of holiness superior to his brothers, but also as a pseudo-historical example of a *nāzîr*. If the Second Temple audience of the Hebrew Bible is to learn faithfulness to Yahweh through Deuteronomy, then the office of naziritism would be but one way to demonstrate one’s piety, even though Joseph’s naziritism is far removed from that of Second Temple period. Joseph is a chosen one of God whose theological purpose is:

an act of hope, asserting the conviction that YHWH’s powerful blessing and providential resolve for goodwill finally overcome every historical circumstance of negation. The poem will concede nothing to the vagaries of history, not even the crises of 587, but affirms that Israel, into all future generations, is to be sustained and prospered by YHWH.<sup>197</sup>

Knowing the history of the personages, if we envision Joseph as a long-haired, sober, fighter, an entirely different image blossoms than if we try to imagine the partaker in a 30-day vow described by Josephus. The cultic *nāzîr* could be you or I, just members of our society going into the temple for purification; the tribal *nāzîr*, in its literary context is a much loftier goal.

#### 4.4.3 *Synthesis of Joseph Evidence*

In Gen 49:26, Dtr employs the word *nāzîr* artfully to not only associate Joseph with naziritism, but also to help seam a narrative. The stylistic conjunctions between it

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<sup>196</sup> Millar, “Living at the Place of Decision”, p. 87.

<sup>197</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville, T.N.: Abingdon, 2001), p. 284.

and Deut 33:16 are overwhelming. If the word *nāzîr* in these passages are intended to denote a specific office of holiness, it is hard to imagine that Joseph would be the only patriarchal example.

#### 4.5 Lamentations (Lam 4:7-8)

*Her nazirites<sup>198</sup> were purer than snow,  
whiter than milk;  
their bodies were more ruddy than coral,  
their hair like sapphire.*

*Now their visage is blacker than soot;  
they are not recognized in the streets.  
Their skin has shriveled on their bones;  
it has become dry as wood. (Lam 4:7-8)*

Lamentations makes theological meaning of Judah's fall to Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>199</sup> especially in light of the previous glorification of Judah as witnessed in the previous section; nazirites are in a rough state. All that was significant to the chosen people of Yahweh, including the city and its walls and towers, sacred objects, the king, the priests, the prophets, and, perhaps most importantly, the land had now fallen under foreign control.<sup>200</sup> The consensus on Lamentations' period of authorship is that it

was written not long after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The memory of the horrors of that event seems to be still fresh in the mind of the author or authors. Moreover, the book at no point testifies to a belief that things would soon change for the better; the kind of hope that appeared in later exilic times had not yet arisen.<sup>201</sup>

It is in this context that we must approach the passage in question. There are three common variances in translation for the above verses. Sometimes in verse 7, lapis lazuli

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<sup>198</sup> As discussed in section 4.2.2, a few scholars, such as Hammershaimb, interpret an additional use of nazirite to signify prince. As discussed, there is no need to add this meaning to *nāzîr*.

<sup>199</sup> Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. xv.

<sup>200</sup> Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. xv.

<sup>201</sup> Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. xvii.

is translated as sapphire, beard as hair, and *nāzîr* as prince. First, the meaning of the Hebrew *gizrātām* is uncertain, however, it is also of little significance to this study; what is important is that the shiny gems are being used as a metaphor for a healthy mane, whether or not this means beard or hair. Finally, in terms of the significance of *nāzîr*, as we have already seen in the section on Joseph's naziritism,<sup>202</sup> there is very little good reason to ever translate *nāzîr* as prince. Even if the author(s) of Lamentations did not specifically use *nāzîr* to represent the formal holy status of Nazirite, the meaning in Lamentations makes most sense if it is regarded as a type of people in a state of consecration, be they laymen, nobility, possibly even a few soldiers:

Commentators have often changed 'Nazirites' to 'youths,' *n<sup>e</sup> 'ārehā*; the change is slight, involving only one letter, but the objections to 'Nazirites' are not compelling. This could be a straightforward reference to Nazirites[...] if not, the term may be used here in the sense 'champion, chief,' as in ancient poems Gen 49:26 and Deut 33:16, where Joseph is called the *nāzîr* of his brethren. In that case the present verse would refer to young nobels.<sup>203</sup>

In a highly religious community, one can think of many needs for a purity rite in the context of the average citizen's colloquial theological needs. In this sense, the verses in Lamentations parallel the lamentations of the prophet Amos. The members of a holy and once prosperous institution are being degraded; the difference is that in the case of Amos, it was the bureaucracy that was the cause of such atrocity; the reason now is bureaucracy in the context of conquest.

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<sup>202</sup> section 4.4

<sup>203</sup> Hillers, *Lamentations*, p. 80.

## Chapter 5: The Codification of *Nāzîrs* in Numbers 6:1-21

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When either man or woman make a special vow, the vow of a nazirite, to separate themselves to the Lord, they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; they shall drink no wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All their days as nazirites they shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.*

*All the days of their nazirite vow no razor shall come upon the head; until the time is completed for which they separate themselves to the Lord, they shall be holy; they shall let the locks of the head grow long.*

*All the days that they separate themselves to the Lord they shall not go near a dead body<sup>204</sup>. Even if their father or mother, brother or sister, should die, they may not defile themselves; because their consecration to God is upon the head. All their days as nazirites they are holy to the Lord.*

*If someone dies very suddenly nearby, defiling the consecrated head, then they shall shave the head on the day of their cleansing; on the seventh day they shall shave it. On the eighth day they shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for them, because they incurred guilt by reason of the dead body. They shall sanctify the head that same day, and separate themselves to the Lord for their days as nazirites, and bring a male lamb a year old as a guilt offering. The former time shall be void, because the consecrated head was defiled. This is the law for the nazirites when the time of their consecration has been completed: they shall be brought to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they shall offer their gift to the Lord, one male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb a year old without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as an offering of well-being, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of choice flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, with their grain offering and their drink offerings. The priest shall present them before the Lord and offer their sin offering and burnt offering, and shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest also shall make the accompanying grain offering and drink offering. Then the nazirites shall shave the consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair from the consecrated head and put it on the fire under the sacrifice of well-being. The priest shall take the shoulder of the ram, when it is boiled, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them in the palms of the nazirites, after they have shaved the consecrated head. Then the priest shall elevate them as an elevation offering before the Lord; they are a holy portion for the priest, together with the breast that is elevated and the thigh that is offered. After that the nazirites may drink wine.*

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<sup>204</sup> Some translators translate dead body as corpse, but the Hebrew words used do not necessitate this specific connotation. The proscription against coming into contact with dead bodies (Num 6:6-7) has seldom been interpreted to include animals; the use of the word *nepesh*, however, includes animals in many parallel Priestly contexts. In keeping with the theory that the final form of the legislative tradition of Num 6:1-21 is a synthesis of Dtr and P, we can find other Deuteronomistic and Priestly uses of the word *nepesh* that include animal life. See *Theological Dictionary* vol. 9, pp.504-8.

*This is the law for the nazirites who take a vow. Their offering to the Lord must be in accordance with the nazirite vow, apart from what else they can afford. In accordance with whatever vow they take, so they shall do, following the law for their consecration.*  
(Num 6:1-21)

Numbers 6:1-21 depicts naziritism as a purification ritual in the religious-cultural context of a group which thought of humanity as the only being in need of purification.

Milgrom comments on the nature of the Levites' perception of sin:

In the ancient world, the entrances to temples were adorned with images of protector gods to ward off demons. In Israel, where the world of the demons has been abolished, the sanctuary remains in danger of defilement by the one creature capable of the demonic: humanity. Sin can pollute the sacred precincts, and physical encroachment upon the sacred precincts can bring divine wrath down upon the entire community.<sup>205</sup>

The Nazirite is an example of one way in which a believer could cleanse their sins. At this point in the history of Judah, it is quite evident that hair was considered one's essence. As Kamsler states:

Thus the nazir, after his vow has been completed, renews his covenant with God by offering up the hair from his time as nazir. By giving his hair, his personality, to God he renews his covenant and is to be treated as an ordinary individual.<sup>206</sup>

So, a parallel is drawn with Samson the tribal *nāzîr* who sacrificed first his hair and ultimately himself for a God who uses Samson as an ironic tool of deliverance, unlike the cultic *nāzîr* who is only required to sacrifice his hair.

Although it is clear that in Numbers 6:1-21 P "adds a prohibition against defilement by a corpse"<sup>207</sup>, what scholarship has continually forgotten to ask is why P would want to make such changes. The nazirite-legislative literature of Numbers was ushered in by the messiah, Cyrus the Great, who allowed the Judaic people to return to

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<sup>205</sup> Jacob Milgrom, "Encroaching on the Sacred: Purity and Polity in Numbers 1-10", *Int* 51 (1997), p. 243.

<sup>206</sup> Harold M. Kamsler, "A Note on the Prohibition of Uttering the Name of God", *JBQ* 31 (2003), p. 264.

<sup>207</sup> *Theological Dictionary* 9, p. 309.



their homeland. By the latter half of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, the “whole region had become a colonial dependency of Persia.”<sup>208</sup> As Boadt writes:

The two centuries of Persian rule from 539 to 333 B.C. were a period of relative quiet and stability in the West, and thus left little impression in the Old Testament writings. In fact, the later years of Persian control from 450 to 330 B.C. are some of the least known years in biblical history!<sup>209</sup>

This lack of literature can be interpreted as a time of peace for Israelites; how ironic that it should be under the dominion of a foreign emperor. A people whose ancestry knew only war, defence, and communal survival now experienced a relative peace for the first time. Judah under Persia was, after all, not the first time that the Jewish powers found themselves under foreign rule. The context for Dtr was most likely the Assyrian Period. What better way than wine to pacify a once-warrior. The post-exilic period, however, is the time of P and a much more exact set of rules is put into place.

Douglas provides a solid image of what was happening in Judah during this time:

the people of Israel who had been exiled in Babylon had just returned to their own land and were settling down among those who had never gone away. Clearly the priestly work would have had as its central concern the reform and protection of the cult, but to achieve it the priest's concern would extend to the political scene. Organized religion is always involved with politics. If the priests intended to stay in charge of the definitions of sin and purity, they could not avoid taking a political position.<sup>210</sup>

In keeping with this disposition, P makes a number of alterations to the very meaning of *nāzîr* through the additional legislative guidelines. The vows are no longer described as life-long commitments, but rather set to a pre-determined period of time, and the sin offering of cut hair in case of contamination by corpses firmly contradicts the edict that

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<sup>208</sup> Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, p. 52.

<sup>209</sup> Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist, 1984), p. 50.

<sup>210</sup> Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, pp. 35-6.

“No razor is to come to his head” (Judges 13:5). Furthermore, more regulations are set on grapes and fermented products:

they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; they shall drink no wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All their days as nazirites they shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. (Num 6:2-4)

We must ask ourselves whether this legislation points to an older time in which Samson and Samuel types are exceptions to a common practice or whether the legislation follows as a result of Priestly editing. According to most sources, the latter is true.<sup>211</sup> In relation to the redaction of Numbers during post-exilic times, Douglas states the following:

the priestly families of pre-exilic times had been leading members of a rich temple community. They would remember the far-reaching contacts with wealthy and influential foreigners that they had enjoyed and knew how much the prosperity of Judah depended on friendly interaction [...] politics are the framework for the theological issues of the book of Numbers.<sup>212</sup>

Certainly, the last policy type they would want to implement would be one of militant holiness. How the priests arrived at these final doctrines is another matter:

the codified definition of naziritism presented in Numbers 6 reflects the coalescence or combination of various traditional practices associated with votive dedication. These practices were operative in various contexts—in heroic battle and in cultic sanctification. Both fighting men and priests and prophets could be part of this phenomenology.<sup>213</sup>

As Chepey further illuminates, the idea of the *nāzîr* is quite fluid in antiquity. While, on one hand, “Josephus, the Mishnah, and the Tosefta suggest that women, as well as men, commonly observed the rite.... it was often the case that some explicit rules were bent by

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<sup>211</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 184 HB describes the main source of Num 6 as the Priestly writings.

<sup>212</sup> Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>213</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 235.

vow makers.”<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, “all types of people probably made the vow: the socially elite, as well as the poor, male and female, and perhaps even slaves.”<sup>215</sup> In this sense, Samson also symbolizes the space between model and actuality: even the great Samson falters; so to do we become nazirites. Num 6:1-21 culminates as a bureaucratic amalgamation of legal codes that does no more than refer to an ancient ideal as a justification for a contemporary ritualization of naziritism. Through legislation, the practice became marketable, allowing priests to pad their coffers.<sup>216</sup> As Koet highlights, “the Nazirite is required to offer a complex (and therefore expensive!) set of offerings (Num 6,13-17).”<sup>217</sup> Thus, as Douglas states, the priests of this period were “interested primarily in maintaining their hierarchy and their own place in the community.”<sup>218</sup> In all fairness, however, their people’s survival, or more precisely, their identity as a people depended on how they could continue to enjoy a national identity while under foreign rule. Yet, at the same time, by redefining naziritism as a temporary vow, the priests could be assured of repeat business and their positions of privilege. So, a clear portrait of Second Temple naziritism reads as follows:

Although there were Nazirites of all strata, the picture which emerges [...] is one of an expensive ritual. Therefore we hear on the one hand about rich people who could afford to do such a vow and on the other hand about less rich people who found themselves liable to sacrifices but were unable to bring them because they could not afford them [...]

From the fact that the Nazirite vow was an expensive ritual with quite clear social implications we have to conclude that it is a ‘show off’, a willingness to show one’s lawabidingness.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 185-9.

<sup>215</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 120.

<sup>216</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 6: the Priestly editors added “sacrificial requirements as part of the vow for the purpose of drawing in for the priests a substantial income.”

<sup>217</sup> Koet, “Why did Paul Shave his Hair”, p. 132.

<sup>218</sup> Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, p. 41.

<sup>219</sup> Koet, “Why did Paul Shave his Hair”, p. 135-6.

As Baumgarten mentions, “Helping poor Nazirites bear the expense of these sacrifices was considered one of the high forms of piety in antiquity (Acts 21,23-24).”<sup>220</sup> With these codes in place, one might ask themselves how the priestly class would account for the apparent contradictions between Num 6:1-21 and some of the earlier traditions, for example Samson. After all, it is through the cutting of his hair, the source of Samson’s power, that the great man is placed in the hands of his enemies. Apart from Judg 13:5b, which gives a sense of determinism to Samson’s plight, Baumgarten offers a concise explanation of how these temporary vows would stand in relation with their permanent predecessors:

folklore supplies abundant examples of the belief that loss of hair signified a drastic decrease in power *to well below ordinary levels*<sup>221</sup> [...]

The same situation faced the “ordinary”<sup>222</sup> Nazirite on the great day when he completed his vow. His strength was also attenuated when his hair was cut and presented to the altar. The power in the hair from which he benefited throughout the term of his vow had now been offered, with suitable celebration, to God. As an attempt to restore the balance, to protect the Nazirite from the possibly harmful consequences of the gift he had just made to God, he brought a *hattā’*.<sup>223</sup>

Thus, the importance of the historical Samson pales in comparison to his mythology. Such were the fruits of the legislation that had been put initiated by Dtr and polished by P. In a strange way then, even the priests who were perverting ancient ideals for the sake of promoting peace, by ascribing authorship to Moses and Nazirite status to legendary characters, D and P are also associating *nāzîrs* with the wilderness tradition, but at the same time removing much of the behaviour associated with the wilderness. This is

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<sup>220</sup> Albert I. Baumgarten, “HATTAT Sacrifices”, *RB* 103 (1996), p. 340.

<sup>221</sup> as in the story of Samson: “he became weak, like any other man” (Judg 16:16).

<sup>222</sup> or cultic

<sup>223</sup> Baumgarten, “HATTAT”, pp. 341-2. *Hattā’*, in this context, can best be defined as purification sacrifice. See Christophe Lemardelé, “Le sacrifice de purification: un sacrifice ambigu?”, *VT* 52 (2002), pp. 284-9.

normal, however, since these decisions were taking place in a much more urban context. The priestly classes were adapting an older tradition to new circumstances. Numbers put into doctrine ancient codes of holy conduct; this minimizing of commitment led to a newer detached model of holiness. This detachment from responsibility on the physical plane intensifies with the early Christian ascetics who fight forces largely perceptible to each individual ascetic, but never other humans.

## Chapter 6: Cultic Naziritism

About two centuries pass between the return of Judah to their homeland by Cyrus the Great. As the Hellenes invaded Judah, the Maccabeans retreated into the desert to lead their rebellion. Surely, if nazirites during the Maccabean Period were necessarily warriors, we would see this purpose revealed in 1 Macc 3:49. As discussed in the following section, what Maccabees does reveal to us is that the conception of nazirite during this period had shifted so far away from the conception of warrior, that even when the nazirites were roused during war times, they were brought to the temple as sacerdotal objects. In addition, the vows of the nazirite became quite commonplace.

### 6.1 *Nāzîrs* in the Maccabean Period (1 Macc 3:49): Pacifists among Rebels

*They also brought the vestments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they stirred up the nazirites who had completed their days. (1 Macc 3:49)*

To answer the question of whether or not cultic *nāzîrs* were necessarily engaged in military behaviour,<sup>224</sup> one must turn to 1 Macc 3:49. As mentioned, the temporary vow of the later *nāzîr* can be interpreted in one of two ways: 1) the post-exilic naziritic legislation of Num 6 was an attempt on the part of the hereditary priesthood (P) to pacify

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<sup>224</sup> the logical possibility described in section 1.2.1

its holy persons in order to avoid conflict with dominant foreign powers and their governing representatives, or 2) the status of nazirite continued to carry military connotations during the pre- and post-exilic era and the temporary vow was a way to allow these warriors to feel cleansed of their sins and misdeeds. Although the second option has never been posited in scholarship, I include it simply on the basis of its logical validity. Chepey provides a rationale that demonstrates the precise function of nazirites during the period of the Maccabean revolt (165 BC):

The narrative [...] conveys the notion that for the author it was the intended sacrifices, at least in this particular context, which formed the most important aspect of the temporary Nazirite vow, rather than the consecrated state of the individuals. Like the vestments of the priest-hood, the first-fruits, and tithes, the sacrifices of Nazirites were the elements powerfully catalytic in eliciting God's attention and intervention in a time of distress. This appears to be the overall function of the Nazirites within the narrative as evidenced by the idea that they were "stirred up" (ηγείραν) by the leaders in an effort to add their offerings to the collected goods [...]. If one compares this conception of the role of Nazirites in I Macc. 3.49 to their role as (possibly) revealed in the book of Judg. In the Hebrew Bible, I Macc. provides an ironic twist to the history of Nazirite behavior, particularly in relation to the field of battle. Whereas the consecrated state of the warrior Samson was directly relevant to his ability to inflict God-inspired casualties on the enemies of Israel, here in I Macc. it is the sacrifices offered by Nazirites that attain divine succor. Like Samson, Nazirites in the Maccabaeen era aided Israel in battle, however, in an entirely different manner: not with their *selves* but with their various gifts.<sup>225</sup>

Thus, in accordance with Num 6:20, nazirites who have completed their days are classified as an "elevation offering." In this way, the purpose of the nazirites during the time of the Maccabean Revolt shares a key similarity with the earliest biblical occasion of naziritism in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:1-2), namely, that the later *nāzîrs* of this time were still seen as engaging in sacrificial acts, only the connotation had moved from a literal application in the field of battle to a more spiritual or metaphorical function. What

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<sup>225</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 44-5.

is also clear from the passage in Maccabees is that not only were nazirites in Second Temple Judaism so well-known that they could be mentioned without painstaking clarification,<sup>226</sup> but that they also existed in such abundant numbers that they could readily be rounded up.<sup>227</sup> The latter circumstance is also confirmed by Josephus and several rabbinic texts.<sup>228</sup> We can consider these points to be accurate since scholars consider 1 Macc “the most reliable historical resource for the study of the Maccabean revolt.”<sup>229</sup> Finally, another significant aspect of the nazirites at this point in their history was that

it was the sacrifices offered at the end of an avowed period that formed the most significant feature of the Nazirite vow, as they, rather than the consecrated state of the individual, were the elements able to attract God’s attention in a time of national distress.<sup>230</sup>

It is important to note, however, that at the time of Maccabean rule, “one of the problems was that the Nazirites could not observe the rites which were prescribed for the ending of their vow, since the Temple was profaned (I M 3:49-51).”<sup>231</sup> By the middle of the second century BCE, we have slid to the end of the naziritic slippery slope. The once-warrior has now been pacified to the point where even during a time of revolt and battle, the nazirites are no longer called upon for military service as they may once have been in ancient history; rather, the recollections of the distant past have been so far removed by this

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<sup>226</sup> Koet, “Why did Paul Shave his Hair”, p. 133: “The mentioning of the Nazirites here as a group without further explanation implies that they were well-known;” Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 44-6: “making the Nazirite vow was a known activity at the time I Macc. was composed [...] the author assumed they were a recognizable phenomenon at the time I Macc. was composed.”

<sup>227</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 46: “The very fact that Nazirites are mentioned in the plural, together with the author reckoning they were able to form a significant contribution to the gathering of holy items, indicates that Nazirite vow-making may have been common. By his tacit assumptions, the author reveals that Nazirites were common at least to the degree that they *could* have appeared in large numbers and on a singular occasion.”

<sup>228</sup> For more information see Koet, “Why did Paul Shave his Hair”, p. 132-5; Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 69-70, 72-121.

<sup>229</sup> *New Oxford*, p. 201Ap.

<sup>230</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 46.

<sup>231</sup> de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 466.

point, both through opulence and legislation, that even in a time of war the nazirites can only serve their purpose in battle as understood by their contemporaries—to garner God’s favour through sacrificial acts. Some people who thought of themselves as *nāzîrs* at some point in their lives may have fought in wars during this period; others, perhaps not.

## **Chapter 7: Second Testament Naziritic Motifs**

While in the context of late-Second Temple Judaism, the idea of a Jewish male taking a temporary naziritic vow would have been quite commonplace, this thesis does not wish to argue that either John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, or Paul ever took the naziritic vow. For one, they were trailblazers on a new understanding of spirituality that would ultimately culminate into Christianity, so that they would have intentionally eschewed such a commercial ritual is not inconceivable. Nonetheless, as the term nazirite lends itself a great deal of fluidity, meaning that some devotees would possibly interpret the tradition in their own way and not follow a specific set of dates for votive consecration. In the depiction of these figures in the texts in question, they are certainly being associated at varying instances, with both tribal and cultic naziritic motifs.

### **7.1 John the Baptist (Lk 1:15)**

*for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Lk 1:15)*

John the Baptist’s naziritism has been a long time topic of discussion. John’s angelic directive to drink no wine or liquor has often been interpreted as a passage that supports the claim that John the Baptist was a nazirite. Kraeling asserts that “John’s



abstinence is of a Nazirite type.”<sup>232</sup> Scobie qualifies this position by explaining that John the Baptist’s “parents imposed on him the Nazirite vow.”<sup>233</sup> In Lk 1:15, we have a case where the abstinence was decreed from the womb. This passage, while clearly classifying John’s story as naziritic literature, not only points to the distant literary tradition of an angel announcing the birth of a holy child, yet historically could only have been happening at a time when the naziritism as a set of temporary vows was prevalent. In the story of John the Baptist, both types of naziritism coexist, the tribal naziritism of the literary figure John in sharp contrast with the cultic naziritism of the society in which he lived. Chepey interprets this passage as “evidence for the popularity of the Samson narrative within Second Temple Jewish thought.” This motif is of course present in Jesus’ story too (Mt 1:20-1; Lk 1:26-38). Chepey argues that “Luke does draw on Nazirite imagery for his depiction of John in the infancy narrative, but his use of such imagery is limited.”<sup>234</sup> As discussed, in Jewish scripture, often the line between types of holiness is blurred. Such is the case in John’s depiction. Yet, despite this connection through the motif of abstention from wine and strong drink, no mention is made of the most basic of the three naziritic behaviours: hair growth. Furthermore, if Luke wanted to show that John was indeed a nazirite, he might have made mention of a vow, the common association of naziritism of the time of Luke. Thus, what

appears to be going on in Lk. 1.15 then, is the creation of an association between John and the three elements of prophecy, abstention from alcohol, and holiness, all three of which are found in the Nazirite figures Samuel and Samson. Luke borrows these motifs and places them on John, not to

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<sup>232</sup> C.H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), p. 10.

<sup>233</sup> Scobie, *John the Baptist* (London: SCM, 1964), p. 205.

<sup>234</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 156. The rationale, as found in Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 156-7, is as follows: “The angelic logion in 1.15 rings similar to the requirement for the Nazirite vow in Num. 6.3; “wine and strong drink” (οἶνον καὶ σικερα) is lexically identical with the LXX. Moreover, the birth narrative of John as a whole is modeled largely on the birth stories of Samuel and Samson in the Bible, both of whom represent Nazirites.”

convey the notion that John was a Nazirite, but simply that he was a prophet.<sup>235</sup>

Thus, in Luke's story of John the Baptist, we encounter a moment where various Jewish holiness motifs are borrowed from in order to convey the holiness of a charismatic figure.

In addition to the abstention from wine, there are some other aspects of John that have also been assessed in terms of holiness. Kraeling writes about a problem in the characterization of John the Baptist that continues to endure today. Two irresistible traits are ascribed to John that seem to link him with both naziritism and asceticism: his diet and his dress (Mk 1:6). However, these aspects of John's personality do not necessarily connect him to naziritic behaviour or asceticism, in so much as they imply an association with the wilderness tradition of Judaic holiness. Likewise, John the Baptist is most often depicted with both long and unkempt hair and beard. These elements may express the desire of the tradition to identify John the Baptist with naziritic tradition, thus connecting him to a much more ancient holiness tradition associated with the wilderness. As Chepey points out, many scholars have debated the exact significance of these character traits. Some have argued that John "was no Nazirite, but merely an ascetic." We run into a problem here, however, since we can discern a clear break in the use of nazirite versus ascetic to convey the holiness of a person; i.e. ascetic is a term best reserved for certain holy persons of early Christianity, but not necessarily the forefathers. The word itself,<sup>236</sup> comes out of biblical Greek and, as mentioned, is inapplicable to the holy persons of Jewish history who lived before the Common Era. In those instances, we have words such as nazirite, prophet, priest, and judge to refer to their holy status. Furthermore, what it means to be holy changes as naziritism shifts from a perpetual to a temporary form of

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<sup>235</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 157-8.

<sup>236</sup> as discussed in section 1.3.1

holiness and holiness gets further redefined through the life and times of Jesus and subsequent Gospel stories and their interpretations.

## 7.2 Jesus of Nazareth (Mk 14:25//Mt 26:29//Lk 22:18, Mk 15:23, Mt 2:23)

*“Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God”<sup>237</sup>.* (Mk 14:25//Mt 26:29//Lk 22:18)

*And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it.* (Mk 15:23)

*There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”* (Mt 2:23)

The historiography of Jesus has ascribed numerous titles to Jesus. The character of Jesus of Nazareth has been reformulated to fit the specific needs of each author and subject to his environment and his perception of it. At various periods Jesus has been described in such varying terms as warrior, hippie, and political reformer. Few have even made the direct claim that Jesus was indeed a nazirite, based on no more than the similarity of the words Nazirite and Nazareth and sometimes even less.<sup>238</sup> What can be

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<sup>237</sup> sometimes appears as “Father’s kingdom”

<sup>238</sup> In the case of Otoman Zar-Adust Hanish, *Yehoshua Nāzîr (Jesus the Nazirite): Life of Christ* (Los Angeles: Mazdaznan, 1917), p. 30-6, who published through the new religious movement of Mazdaznan, a twentieth century movement related to Zoroastrianism that also blends elements of Hinduism and Christianity and requires no official membership, Jesus has been identified with almost the entire range of appellations. The only reason to include quotations such as the following is to illustrate, if only, the fascination with the subject area and the malleability that lends itself to the character of Jesus in later gospel traditions. In addition to making the claim that “His guardian father was an Essene, but identified himself with the Pharisees of the milder form”, Zar-Adusht claims that Jesus was or had done all of the following: was given “a seat among the members of the Sanhedrin,” “was intent upon becoming a Nazirite in thot [sic], word and deed, dedicating His life to the sole purpose of redemption,” and, finally, “Althou [sic] well informed and learned in the sciences of His day, He was as yet too young to make a claim as a public teacher, and having found the Egyptian method of healing deficient and not entirely in harmony with His own conscience, He decided to go to India to gather a few more blossoms of wisdom [...] devoting thirty-three months to the study of the Aryan Life of Perfection, growing proficient in the art of healing as well as the philosophy of individual application, and decided to become a Nazirite, making a covenant to liberate mankind from a state of sorrow, giving them a plan whereby they might liberate themselves from the bondage of oppression so that a better day might dawn on their path and the hour of liberty hastened.” No mention is given, however, of the philology of *nāzîr* to nazirite and the intricacies of the word Nazareth against Nazirite, since Nazareth is a historical community. Furthermore, Hanish uses Nazirite without making specific reference to any naziritic vows or behaviours and Nazareth as a district without ever making reference to this linguistic connection. If anything, this book stands as a piece of naziritic text

said about Jesus and his connection to naziritism is that a play-on-words between Nazareth and Nazirite can be ascertained as a further characterization of Jesus' holiness:

within Mark, there appears to be an influence of LXX<sup>B</sup> Judg. on the Jesus tradition. As was suggested [...] Samson is uniquely labeled a "holy one," ἅγιος (13.7; 16.17), where in MT he is simply designated a נזיר, "Nazirite." An influence of the text is noted particularly in the declaration of the demoniac in Mk. 1.24, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth (Ναζαρηνε)?... I know who you are—the Holy One of God (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ)!" Long noted by scholars as the first episode in the Markan Messianic Secret, an association between Jesus and the powerfully anointed Samson is likely given the close proximity of the event within the baptism story in Mk. 1.9-11. Moreover, there is an apparent Markan play-on-words in the saying between Nazareth (Ναζαρηνε), Nazirite (ναζιρ), and holy one (ἅγιος) based on LXX<sup>B</sup> Judg. 13.5, 7. That Jesus was a Nazirite during his earthly ministry is unlikely, for even in Mark, Jesus is accused of eating and drinking (probably wine) with publicans and sinners (Mk. 2.16). However, Nazirite imagery appears to be present within the early Jesus tradition and this may well have made its way into the passion.<sup>239</sup>

While Chepey's linguistic analysis makes logical sense, the grounds on which he dismisses Jesus from actually being a Nazirite are somewhat shaky. As we well know, from our discussion of Amos and Numbers, it is quite possible, even assumed, that nazirites had been drinking wine for several centuries prior to the birth of Jesus, whether appallingly, as in the case of Amos, or systematically, as demonstrated by Numbers. In terms of abstention from wine, we are presented with Mark 15:23. Chepey argues that it is clear from the context of "the earliest tradition, Mark, [that] there is a definite emphasis on Jesus' refusal of the wine concoction when offered, and narrative proximity between

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because it used the word "nazirite," but because none of the three behaviours are explicitly present it cannot even qualify as naziritic literature; therefore, it cannot confirm Jesus as being part of nazirite tradition—being an actual nazirite that is, since through it we do not come any closer to answering the question of whether Jesus was indeed a nazirite. Jesus cannot simply be a nazirite just because someone claims him to be. All the above passages demonstrate is the fascination that writers have with identifying Jesus with a plethora of ascriptions; in the case of Hanish, we have the bulk majority existing simultaneously between two covers. Its title, however, is certainly irresistible: *Jesus the Nazirite*. If merely calling something made it so it would make the scholar's job that much easier.

<sup>239</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, pp. 148-9.

these events allows for the two episodes: the promise of abstinence in 14.25 and the subsequent refusal to drink in 15.23, to be interpreted relationally.” While Jesus exhibits naziritic behaviour, it does not necessarily mean that he was a nazirite.

However, a parallel can be gleaned in the abstention narratives of Jesus and Joseph. Chepey outlines this link as follows:

the identification of Joseph as a Nazirite by the rabbis was inspired by Joseph’s separation from his brothers; a separation forced upon him when he was sold into slavery in Egypt. According to one rabbinic opinion, Joseph abstained from wine *during* his separation, possibly implying (not unlike one in a state of mourning) that he took upon himself the behaviour of a Nazirite the moment the pains of separation were felt. It was only when reunited with his brothers that Joseph again “drank and was merry” with them.

Given its setting within the general passion narrative and, more specifically, within the immediate setting of the Last Supper, Jesus makes his promise to abstain from wine in a context of mourning. Funerary grief is emphasized throughout the passion, progressing from Gethsemane to Jesus’ final cry of expiration on the cross. Given Jesus’ expectation of death, as expressed in the very words of the promise, it is precisely at the Paschal meal where his grieving begins. Furthermore, Jesus promises to abstain from wine specifically during his separation from his disciples. He promises never to drink of the fruit of the wine, “*until that day* when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (cf. Mt. 26.29 “*until that day* I drink it new *with you* in My Father’s kingdom”).<sup>240</sup>

In addition to this parallel, the use of “fruit of the wine” demonstrates a clear link to Num 6:4.<sup>241</sup> Chepey interprets the Passover promise as an indication that Jesus indeed made a naziritic vow,<sup>242</sup> such a vow would not have been uncommon for Jews of Jesus’ time.

The next consideration we must make in order to assess Jesus’ naziritism is the identification of Jesus as a Nazarene in Mt 2:23. Scholars such as Davies and Allison

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<sup>240</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 150

<sup>241</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 149: “regarding the details of the narrative, Jesus’ description of wine as ‘fruit of the vine’ has no precise parallel in the LXX but does have a parallel within later rabbinic idiom [...] The promise may reflect an early rendition of such an idiom and might also be compared to the proscription against all produce of the vine in Num. 6.4.”

<sup>242</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 151.

have firmly stated that “Mt. 2.23 almost certainly has to do with a play on words on the word *nazir*.”<sup>243</sup> Chepey elucidates the problem with the use of the term to refer to a geographical place:

Etymologically, Ναζωραῖος is problematic. As a place name, the spelling is at odds with known words for Nazareth in the New Testament. In ten occurrences, Nazareth appears as either Ναζαρετ or Ναζαρεθ (Mk. 1.9; Mt. 2.23, 21.11; Lk. 1.26, 2.4, 39, 51; Jn. 1.45, 46; Acts 10.38), and twice it appears as Ναζαρά (Mt. 4.13; Lk. 4.16). The ω in Ναζωραῖος fails to correspond well with the second α in either of the three variations of the name; neither is the τ or θ in Ναζαρετ or Ναζαρεθ represented. A better place name would be the alternate gentilic adjective used for Jesus in the New Testament, and particularly within Matthew’s source Mark, Ναζαρηνοῦς (Mk. 1.24; 10.47; 14.67; 16.6; Lk. 4.34; 24.19). As is, Ναζωραῖος bears a closer resemblance to the designations of known religious groups of the period, such as the Pharisees (Φαρισαῖοι) and Sadducees (Σαδδουκαῖοι).<sup>244</sup>

What Chepey concludes from this passage, however, is that a number of highly creative word associations are being presented by the author:

In utilizing a play on the words “Nazirite,” “Nazareth,” and the words of the prophet Isaiah, “He shall be called holy,” Matthew merely applies the imagery of the Nazirite as a holy person to Jesus, known in pre-Matthean tradition as the “Holy One of God.”<sup>245</sup>

Thus for the ascetic-Nazarenes who were followers of Jesus, Jesus was naziritic in so much that he was charismatically holy, yet his message stands in stark contrast to the warring nature of tribal *nāzîr* and the symbolic function for war of the cultic *nāzîr*.

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<sup>243</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew 1* (International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), p. 276.

<sup>244</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 152.

<sup>245</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 154-5. Also, in relation to Isaiah, Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 154 writes: “There is a precedent in Mark, Matthew’s source, for a play on the words “Nazareth” (Ναζαρηνε) and “holy one” (αγιος) based on this version; and such a wordplay likely influenced Matthew in 2.23. Combining this with Is. 4.3, “He shall be called holy (שׁקֵר—MT; αγιος—LXX),” it is possible that Matthew substituted ναζιρ/ναζιραιοῦς freely for αγιος, resulting in the playful citation, “He shall be called Ναζωραῖος.” Again, there is lack of precise phonological equivalents between the two terms ναζιρ(ι)ραῖος and Ναζ(ω)ραῖος; however, such precision may be unnecessary due to the playful nature of the word association.

Whatever the specifics of Jesus' life were, all we can rightly conclude, in terms of his naziritism, is that he can be considered naziritic in so far that beyond being viewed as charismatically holy, he makes a decision to abstain from wine on at least two separate occasions (Mk 14:25, 15:23), and is most frequently portrayed with long hair and beard, although some of the earlier artistic representations of Jesus also show a more clean-cut persona. Some examples of such images include:

the late-third-century vault mosaic in a small Christian mausoleum not far from Saint Peter's tomb in the Roman cemetery beneath Old Saint Peter's [that] depicts Christ in the guise of a familiar pagan deity, Sol Invictus (in Greek, Helios), the Invincible Sun, driving the sun chariot through the golden heavens [...], Christ as the Good Shepherd, [a] mosaic from the entrance wall of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425 [...], [the] Miracle of the loaves and fishes, [a] mosaic from the top register of the nave wall [...] of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 504 [...], [and the] Suicide of Judas and Crucifixion of Christ, [a] plaque from a casket, ca. 420.<sup>246</sup>

Of course, based on the temporary nature of naziritic vows at Jesus' time, it is possible that Jesus, if under such a vow, could be bearded or not. There remains, however, a large length of time between the aforementioned artistic portraits and the historical Jesus; thus, historically speaking, they are also subject to certain cultural assimilations. Until some breakthrough evidence surfaces, no scholar, with any degree of certainty, can exactly determine what the historical Jesus looked like, but like other holy persons the length of his hair remains an important motif and a concern for anyone attempting a historical image.

The story of Lazarus' raising from the dead also does not help us come any closer to assessing the degree of Jesus' naziritism since Jesus never actually comes into physical contact with the corpse of Lazarus, simply calling to him to prompt resurrection (Jn

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<sup>246</sup> Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J. Mamiya, "Pagans, Christians, and Jews: The Art of Late Antiquity", *Gardner's Arts Through the Ages* 11<sup>th</sup> Edition (Fort Worth, T.X.: Harcourt College, 2001), pp. 313-22.

11:43). Whether or not Jesus was actually a nazirite is somewhat beside the point, however. For the purpose of this study, all we can say for certain is that in the hands of the writers of these manuscripts there lay a consciousness of the association of Jesus with Ancient Judaic holiness. In the case of Jesus, especially if we consider *nāzîr* in its “generic” sense, we then have, in a sense, the ultimate Nazirite, the one who lays down not only his hair, but his life for God, a Second Temple Samson. Of course, by now nazirites were no longer expected to be warriors, as evidenced in 1 Macc 3:49. A new model for holiness is born, through the evolution of naziritism, as passed on to Jesus, with so many other holiness motifs outside the scope of this study.

### **7.3 Paul is Shorn (Acts 18:18, 21:23-7)**

*After staying there for a considerable time, Paul said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut, for he was under a vow. (Acts 18:18)*

*“So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Join these men, go through the rite of purification with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law. But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them. When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd. (Acts 21:23-7)*

Koet, like the majority of scholars on the issue,<sup>247</sup> argues that Luke purposefully depicts Paul as a nazirite:

after the accusations in Acts 18,12-13 about Paul being not lawabiding enough, this vow and the suggestion that it is a Nazirite vow show the

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<sup>247</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 159: “Scholars typically, and in my view correctly, see the vow in v. 18 to be a reference to the Nazirite vow.”



reader that Paul is even more than merely lawabiding: he even takes voluntary commandments upon him.<sup>248</sup>

Admittedly, the interpretation that Paul was indeed engaged in a naziritic vow contains its own set of problems,<sup>249</sup> but Koet provides a well-argued rationale for why Paul's vow ought to be considered naziritic.<sup>250</sup> Although naziritic vows were typically discharged in Jerusalem, Luke "records Paul cutting his hair in Cenchræa, an eastern seaport of Corinth."<sup>251</sup> If the purpose of Acts 18:18 is to depict Paul as a nazirite, then two rationales can be offered to corroborate the identification. First, it is quite possible that "Nazirite hair was allowed to be cut outside Palestine."<sup>252</sup> Second, and more incidentally, we know that even though certain rules regarding the rite had been codified, at this time in both Num 6:1-21 and extra-biblical texts, not everyone who consecrated themselves in this way would strictly adhere to each law.<sup>253</sup> Even though Paul may not have been following the exact regiment of other nazirites of his era, there is no reason to exclude him as a naziritic figure. Furthermore, by this time in the evolution of naziritism, the mere reference to hair shaving was taken as a parallel reference to naziritism..<sup>254</sup> The most significant conclusion regarding why Luke would want to depict Paul in this way is as follows:

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<sup>248</sup> Koet, "Why did Paul Shave his Hair", p. 130.

<sup>249</sup> Koet, "Why did Paul Shave his Hair", p. 130.

<sup>250</sup> For more information see Koet, "Why did Paul Shave his Hair", pp. 136-41.

<sup>251</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 160.

<sup>252</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 161.

<sup>253</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 164-5: "Luke's brief account of Paul's vow in Acts 18:18 [...] provides further evidence that (1) the Nazirate vow was observed in the Diaspora. Furthermore, (2) like Josephus and the Mishnah, Luke provides evidence that legislation for the vow, particularly respecting the treatment of the hair, was observed liberally, or with a certain degree of flexibility [...] (3) an actual case example of an individual coinciding pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a festival because of the termination of his Nazirite vow. Finally, (4) it is possible that one of the foremost figures of early Christianity, the apostle Paul, observed the Nazirite vow at least for a time."

<sup>254</sup> Chepey, *Nazirites*, p. 162: "other sources speak of Nazirites simply by referring to their shaven hair;" Koet, "Why did Paul Shave his Hair", p. 137-8: "'Shaving' can be *pars pro toto* for a Nazirite vow."

By connecting Paul twice with the phenomenon of Naziritism as an answer to critics on his attitude towards the Law, Luke demonstrates the importance of Paul fulfilling even supererogatory rituals to show his lawabidingness.<sup>255</sup>

Nazritic motifs are being used to depict Paul, as well as Jesus and John the Baptist, but they are in many ways a completely turned around version of the holy person, far removed from the prototypes of Israelite holiness discovered in pre-monarchic literary traditions, yet borrowing from the ancient motifs, but to convey an entirely different idea of holiness, one that is characterized by self-committed consecration and passive resistance. While many deconstructionist essays on Paul's asceticism argue that while his preaching was perceived as against the body to some and led to the self-mortification behaviours of certain early Christian ascetic traditions, revised readings on the material point to moderation as a more conceivable Christian ideal in league with Paul's message.<sup>256</sup>

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study of naziritic motifs has been one of associations, not rigidity. Like so many devices in religious literature, a particular term can be adapted time and again to suit the purposes of the contemporary interpreter; earlier motifs get recycled and reformed. This interplay reveals the evolution of various Jews of Antiquity who lived in the parameters of ever-changing tides of foreign threats and conquests, who shared both a sense of ancestry and a fluctuating set of texts. Although the earliest naziritic literature of the Bible, the Song of Deborah and the stories of Samson and Samuel, depict nazirites as

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<sup>255</sup> Koet, "Why did Paul Shave his Hair", p. 141.

<sup>256</sup> see Boyarin, Daniel, "Body Politic among the Brides of Christ: Paul and the Origins of Christian Sexual Renunciation", in Richard Valantasis and Vincent L. Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 459-78.

part of Yahweh's military arm, if we fast-forward to post-exilic times we can see that both Yahweh's people and the institution of the Nazirite have undergone significant changes. As Gray writes, "after the Exile down to the Fall of Jerusalem, temporary Nazirites were numerous, permanent Nazirites probably rare, if known at all, in actual life."<sup>257</sup> Although we can interpret the temporary nazirite as an indication that nazirites were still involved in military endeavours, it is also reasonable to assume that such an expectation would have been outlined in Num 6 along with the other decrees. Based on the timing of biblical naziritic texts and literature and the evolution of holiness they portray, the case that holy persons were systematically pacified in their responsibilities makes better sense as an explanation, especially as we encounter Jesus' message of unconditional love, ones that stand in sharp contrast to those of Ancient Judaic holy persons. By no means is this thesis attempting to argue that naziritism was the only factor in the pacification of holiness; it is, however, a concise indicator.

Furthermore, although the Song of Deborah alludes to an ancient association of long hair and the willingness to sacrifice oneself, the deliberate naming of Samson as a nazirite, after the facts of his life, created a twofold opportunity for the priests of the post-exilic era. Not only could they point to Samson as an example of a *nāzîr* who disobeyed the stipulations of his holiness code, especially since the ancient narrative details of the story so easily lent themselves to such a characterization, but they could also use this hero-of-old as an example of the most extreme type of sacrifice that one could make for God: killing oneself for the greater good of the people. Absalom provided another opportunity to present another nuanced version of naziritism in which the long-hair of the

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<sup>257</sup> Gray, "The Nazirite," p. 204.

<sup>259</sup> *Theological Dictionary* 9, p. 310.

hero ironically causes his downfall, in sharp contradistinction to the literary mechanisms by which Samson is brought to his demise. For the nazirites of the Second Temple, their personal and material sacrifices were of much less difficulty to give, but they could still feel a kinship to the sacrifice made by a heroic figure of their collective history:

It is easy to see that, just as the figure of *nāzîr* was assimilated increasingly to that of the priest, so the institution became incorporated increasingly into the priestly system. If one assumes that the sacrificial regulations drawn upon here go back to the early postexilic period, the *tôrâ* under discussion probably reflects the circumstances of the first half of the fifth century.

This situation did not remain unchanged, however. Later evidence, especially from the last years of the Second Temple, reveals that the vow of naziriteship became the most popular way to express thanksgiving for divine favors like deliverance from sickness or affliction, a safe return from war, or the fulfillment of a wish for a son.<sup>259</sup>

Long gone are the days of Deborah and Samson, although of all three proscriptions associated with naziritism, the “most consistent of the three, in biblical sources on the subject of naziritism, seems to have been the restriction regarding hair.”<sup>260</sup> Hair is perhaps one of the most ancient sacred objects of Judaism. That the Nazis shaved the hair of the Jews during WWII and sold it to furniture companies as pillow stuffing<sup>261</sup> is a further horror to those who are familiar with that dark period of Europe’s history. Gray offers an explanation regarding the sacredness of hair and how both the growing and cutting of it can still fall under the general auspices of holiness:

A common belief, that the hair is part of the man’s vital being, seems to account for 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. Hence its frequency in offerings.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 229.

<sup>261</sup> Holocaust Museum, Auschwitz.

<sup>262</sup> G. Buchanan Gray, *Numbers* (International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), p. 69.

Thus, in the changing forms of naziritic practice, we see a discernable shift from an importance placed on inner strength to cultic sacrifice. Furthermore, based on the evidence that Samson's and Samuel's status as nazirites were most likely secondary additions to the original narrative traditions, we can see that long hair was consistently associated with holiness in Ancient Israel, even if it was not originally thought of as a naziritic vow in the "religious technical sense." Absalom's (2 Sam 14:25-27; 15:8) description testifies to this ancient association, although while some argue that these passages were used to validate the practice of temporary naziritism,<sup>263</sup> it is clear by the context of the vow (2 Sam 15:8) that Absalom's behaviour had to do with something other than naziritism, especially in its later context.<sup>264</sup> As previously defined in section 1.1, in order for activity to qualify as naziritic behaviour, the action must be performed under the general auspices of consecration. Absalom seems only to have been lightening his load on a seasonal basis; the exact naziritic connections are illusive.

In this study of biblical legislation, we can see how in determining who and how one can be a *nāzîr*, the angels of the past are replaced by the priests of the First Temple era. We can say that the actual textual representation of naziritic behaviour throughout the Bible changes the very nature of what a *nāzîr* might ever have been, as alluded to by the older HB traditions. This study demonstrates that whatever a *nāzîr* was or may have been in the pre-monarchic era is occluded by the very biblical contexts in which naziritic allusions and reference appear. We have determined that in a very gradual manner priests began to sell naziritic vows as a commemorative ceremony to the heroes of old, in doing

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<sup>263</sup> Gray, "The Nazirite", p. 206: "Permission to cut the hair of the perpetual Nazirite seems based on the practice of Absalom [...] who was held to have been a perpetual Nazirite."

<sup>264</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 349: "the rabbis were probably mistaken in thinking that [Absalom] was a Nazirite."

so, assuring their own livings, status, and the populace's theological gratification. Death, in ancient Israelite culture, is visualized as darkness and the loss of hair. Flowing locks seem always to have been associated with life, victory, and the sun/son motif. The status of Nazirite in post-exilic Israel was a concoction ascribed to folk heroes as their stories began to be collected in priestly circles. Even if contemporaries of figures such as Deborah, Samson, and Samuel actually used the term *nāzîr* to describe their religious-military leaders, how the term was appropriated by P and their successors is another case entirely. Within the biblical context, tribal naziritism refers to pre-Temple holiness; cultic naziritism to an institutionalized purity ritual.

We can no longer speak of biblical-naziritic behaviour post-Paul, although it is worthwhile to note that naziritism continued to exist in early Common Era rabbinic religiosity and even incarnated itself in certain Zulu circles in South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and perhaps the Rastafarian Movement. These are naziritic topics worthy of lengthier study. Since so much of what it means to be holy is overturned through a progression of time, it is no wonder then, that by the time of Corinthians hair growth on men was deemed completely inappropriate from the Christian perspective: "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory" (1 Cor 11:14). Thus, Hellenism brought with it short hairdos. If naziritism is holiness as understood in the context of the history of Judeo-Christianity, then we clearly have a passage that contradicts the very premises of holiness established in the Samson story, unless, of course, that hair was somehow deterministically tied into his shame. The writers of the New Testament, however, were living in a very different climate than Dtr and P, separated by six to eight hundred years.

Fashions are always in a constant state of flux, even in regard to symbols associated with holiness. The Nazirite, in all its biblical manifestations, is held up as an ideal against which the corruption and impurity of both people internal and external to the scriptural community are held against. Finally, we can determine that the notion of the tribal *nāzîr* as it has been handed down to us does not allow us access to historical accuracy, but rather serves as a literary motif; the reality of the cultic *nāzîr* is much more accessible. What exactly the word *nāzîr* meant for Ancient Israel will forever be lost in literary transmission, unless any new evidence should surface. The paradigm of holiness in the Judeo-Christian context of the Ancient Near Eastern biblical cultures shifts from military to spiritual warrior; the reasons for this evolution are evidenced in these bending naziritic motifs. We can conclude that the word *nāzîr* was used before Amos, but some type of change in naziritic tradition was rendering the status temporary. What the exact significance of the word was to the members of the early centuries of the kingdoms of Israel and then also Judah will remain obscured. In early Christian ascetics, however, we see examples of the same behaviours outlined in Num 6:1-21 intensified with their diversity of implications, practiced as votive lifetime commitments, the major paradigm shift concerning the plane on which one wages war against evil.

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