

The Strongest Man is Not from Nazareth



As children, we heard bible stories that described Samson as the “strongest man who ever lived.” Movies like Cecil B. DeMille’s 1949 classic, *Samson and Delilah*, captured the imagination of millions and glorified Samson’s long hair as the secret of his superhuman strength.

However, the book of Judges reveals that there is more to Samson’s strength than the movie depicts. Samson was dedicated from birth to be a Nazirite [נזיר–nazir] as it says, “the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb” (Judges 13:5). The status of Nazirite elevates a person by “separating” the Nazirite from worldly pleasures and trivialities.

Although Samson may be the most well-known Nazirite, this week’s Torah portion, *Naso* (Numbers 4:21–7:89), explains that any Jewish man or woman can become a Nazirite. They do this by committing, for a prescribed time, to abstain from wine, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with the dead (Numbers 6:1-8).

In doing so, the Nazirite demonstrates a desire to transcend material pursuits and focus on a spiritual dedication to God. In Samson’s case, this extraordinary commitment to God was the source of his incredible strength.

A Nazirite is more than an ascetic who practices self-denial. Instead, he is the paradigm of someone who undertakes a spiritual “detox program,” dedicating himself to God by taking extraordinary steps to control compulsive impulses.

There is much more to the nazir than the movie depicts.

The Nazirite’s lifestyle promotes self-control in three areas: Abstinence from wine controls immorality, not cutting one’s hair prevents ego and self-glorification, and avoiding contact with death discourages violence and murder. The accumulative effect of these acts fosters humility, which is a precursor to a deeper spiritual connection to God.

While taking a Nazirite vow is not a requirement, everyone can apply the Nazirite’s example of impulse control to live a moral, meaningful, and spiritual life.

This lesson is especially relevant today, when the internet provides a constant flow of stimulation that influences people to act impulsively. Although the internet provides countless opportunities for growth, the dark side of the net objectifies women, promotes drug use, and glorifies violence.

The rise of violence in society today is correctly attributed to mental health issues, the use of methamphetamines, and a lack of parental role models. Studies by York University and the U.S. National Center for Health have shown that obsessive playing of violent video games can increase aggressive thoughts and behaviors. Furthermore, a lack of impulse control also contributes to violence among young adults.

The Jewish sage, Ben Zoma, addressed this issue when he taught, “Who is strong? He who subdues his [evil] inclination” (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1). Ben Zoma did not glorify bodybuilders or warriors; instead, he said true strength is in the person who overcomes his impulses, as it says, “Slowness to anger is better than a mighty person” (Proverbs 16:32).

Significantly, the Nazirite is defined by his behavior, not by where he lives. This fact is particularly relevant in responding to missionaries who claim that Jesus fulfilled a prophecy when he moved to the city of Nazareth, as it says, “He went and lived in a town called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene” (Matthew 2:23).

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Matthew’s claim immediately raises a red flag to anyone knowledgeable of the Jewish bible. Nowhere in the Jewish bible does it say that someone would be called a Nazarene [from Nazareth]. Moreover, this would be impossible since the city of Nazareth did not exist in the time of Jewish scriptures.

A likely explanation for this contradiction is that the authors of the New Testament fabricated this “prophecy” in an attempt to “prove” that Jesus fulfilled a biblical messianic requirement.

Some missionaries desperately attempt to explain this contradiction by claiming that Matthew is referring to the biblical prophecy “He will be a Nazirite to God from the womb” (Judges 13:5).

However, as we have noted, this verse is referring to Samson, who was a Nazirite [נזיר–nazir], which has nothing to do with where a person is born or lives. Although the words Nazirite [נזיר] and Nazareth [נצרת] may sound alike in English, that is all they have in common. They have different meanings and are spelled differently in Hebrew, one with the letter [ז–zayin] and the other with the letter [צ–tzadik].

May the Jewish people be blessed with the moral strength and impulse control of a Nazirite to withstand the temptations to pursue other religions and instead serve God wholeheartedly by pursuing the truth of Torah and Judaism.

Shabbat Shalom,

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