



May 6, 2026

# MESSENGER

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Sundays at 1 PM

942 Altadena Dr.

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## Contact Information:

Due to the fires, our mail has been forwarded. Please send mail to PO Box 91055, Pasadena, CA 91109. You may still call the church phone at 626-797-8970;

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## THE NAZIRITE AND THE NAZARENE

People who read the Bible in English often think a *Nazirite* and a *Nazarene* are the same. Actually, if they were reading in Hebrew, they wouldn't confuse the two, because the "z" in the two words transliterate two different Hebrew consonants. The first has the sound of an English z, but the second would be better represented by the letters ts; like the difference between biz and bits.

The way these two proper nouns are used in the Bible is also radically different. A *Nazarite* is a person who is living a very rigorous lifestyle because he has taken an oath to live by a narrow set of rules. The root meaning of the Hebrew word is "to separate," and a Nazirite is a separated person. Nazarite vows are introduced in the Old Testament Book of Numbers, chapter 6. They involve three particular kinds of abstinence: (1) from wine, grapes or any other part of the plant that bears them; (2) from cutting hair from the head, beard or elsewhere on the body; (3) from any contact with the dead body of an animal or human, even a close relative who has died. There are three famous Biblical characters who lived under Nazirite vows: Samson, the famous strong man (Judges 13:4-7), Samuel, the revered prophet (1 Samuel 1:11) and John the Baptist, Jesus' second cousin (Luke 1:15).<sup>1</sup>

It's often been noted that there is no vow of celibacy as part of the Nazirite commitment. Though John the Baptist appears to have remained single, both Samson and Samuel were married. The omission of a celibacy vow is particularly striking because sexual abstinence became a major theme in Christian vows from the early emergence of the monastic movement, and throughout Church history celibacy has been seen as the primary evidence of consecrated living. If you go back and look at the origin of the vow in the Book of Numbers, just previous to it there is a grave warning about unfaithfulness in marriage, but there's no indication that sexual union itself is defiling; if it was, we would expect it to be forbidden in these strict Nazirite vows.

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**Nazareth**, by contrast, is a place, an obscure rural village located about 70 miles due north (90 driving miles) of Jerusalem. It isn't mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, and it wouldn't be important at all, except that Jesus spent his boyhood and young adult years there. In fact, it's mentioned as Jesus' hometown in a derogatory way, as a put-down:

*"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).*

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What happens when a **Nazirite** meets a **Nazarene**? Well, the Nazirite baptized the Nazarene and pronounced him to be the "Lamb of God that will take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Luke records Jesus' later reflection on the ironic contrast:

*"John the Baptist [the Nazirite] has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man [himself, the Nazarene] has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' " (Luke 7:33-34).*

In a sense, John represents **separation** (Hebrew root meaning of Nazirite), while Jesus represents **connection** ("branch," Hebrew root meaning of Nazarene). Jesus is saying, "John separates from you, and you say he's **not human enough**; I connect with you on every level, and you say I'm **too human!**" He adds this succinct prediction:

*"Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children." (verse 35)*

Significantly, right after this Nazirite/Nazarene discussion, the very next episode recorded in the Gospel account is an interaction in which Jesus fully accepts a woman "who was a sinner" and is sharply criticized by a "Pharisee" who points out "who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him" (Luke

7:39). The Pharisee (the Nazirite) **separates** himself from the "unclean" woman; Jesus (the Nazarene) **connects** with and embraces her.

**Nazarites and Nazarenes** live in every age and culture. I believe God chose me to be a Nazarene.

Pastor George Van Alstine

<sup>1</sup> The Numbers passage indicates the oath could be taken by women as well as men. Though all three Biblical examples followed the vows as a lifelong commitment, resulting from an act of dedication by their parents at birth, it was also possible for an individual to make a temporary Nazirite commitment and return to normal living after a certain time period. There are other New Testament examples that indicate the practice was still followed by some in Jesus' day: Acts 18:18, 23:12-14.