

Paul Pays His Vow.

Acts 18:18-22.

Sunday morning, June 26, 2011.

I Paul leaves Corinth.

- A. Following the unsuccessful attempt on the part of the Jews to have Paul convicted of preaching a new religion in Corinth, which had not been approved by Rome, Paul continues his ministry in Corinth for yet many days.
- B. Following what would be a total of 18 months of ministry in Corinth the time comes for Paul to take his leave of them and to return first to Jerusalem, and after that to his sending church of Antioch in Syria.

II. The occasion of Paul's leaving Corinth.

We are given insight into this occasion by Luke recording that Paul cut his hair on the occasion of leaving Corinth, and that the reason was that he had taken a vow.

- A. In all likelihood it involved a Nazirite vow here, although there were other religious vows.
 1. Only the Nazirite vow did forbid the cutting of one's hair as long as the vow was in effect.
 2. Only the Nazirite vow required one to go to the temple in Jerusalem to undergo a ceremony of release, which included the burning of the cut hair on the large altar of burnt sacrifice in front of the temple. Paul insists to the Ephesian Jews that he has to go up to Jerusalem when they desire him to stay with them for a while.

III. What is a Nazirite vow?

- A. It is a vow in which a person separates him or herself from certain worldly things for a time, and consecrate themselves to God.
- B. During the period covered in the vow the person would abstain from anything that came from the grapevine; furthermore they would not come in contact with a dead body (and thus become ceremonially unclean). Also they would not cut their hair during this period (this included the beard), and they would consecrate themselves to the Lord.
- C. Observing such a vow was entirely voluntary, and it could be done for any length of time, but it was usually observed in increments of thirty days.
- D. At the end of the observance the person had to present themselves to the priest at the temple in Jerusalem within thirty days for a ceremony of release, which included the burning of the now cut off hair on the altar of burnt offering.
- E. There were no restrictions as to who could be a Nazirite. It could be anybody from any of Israel's tribes; rich or poor; male or female; master or slave; infant or elderly, it did not matter.
- F. Three people are recorded in scripture who were Nazirites from the womb until their death; Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. Their vows were taken for them by their parents.
 1. Samson is out rightly called a Nazirite by the angel who announced to his Parents, before he was born, that he would be a Nazirite from the womb until

- he died. Judges 13:7.
2. Samuel is not called a Nazirite, yet his mother consecrated him to God naming him Samuel (consecrated to God), and by presenting him to God at the age of four to serve Him in the tabernacle, and by vowing that no razor would ever come upon his head. 1 Samuel 1:11.
 3. John the Baptist's refusal to drink wine, Matt 11:18,19 and his lifestyle, Luke 1:15,80 as well as his being set apart to God from the womb, are indications that he too lived the life of a Nazirite.
- G. The purpose of a Nazirite vow was to express gratitude to God for mercies received. Note that the mothers of Samson, of Samuel, and of John the Baptist, were all barren women, and that all three consecrated their children to God.
- H. What was it about Paul that might have moved him to take a Nazirite vow in Corinth?
1. We can only speculate, reading between the lines. Paul was persecuted and mistreated from one city to the next until he comes to Corinth. He is now weak and fearful, experiencing much trembling. 1 Cor 2:3.
 2. Then the Lord appears to him in a night vision saying "Fear not, but speak, and do not keep silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack to hurt you, for I have many people in this city."
 3. So the Lord provides encouragement for His servant, and renews his courage and strength.
 4. Paul may well have responded here out of a grateful heart, for the mercies received, by taking on himself a Nazirite vow, visibly showing, especially to the Jews, as long as he was in Corinth, that he was set apart to God.
 5. That the vow was something peculiar to Paul's stay in Corinth is evident from the fact that he cuts his hair the minute he leaves Cenchrea, Corinth's Eastern port, and heads to Jerusalem "to pay his vow."

Applications:

1. We see from this observance of Paul taking the Nazirite vow how we as Christians continue to have liberty to use Old Covenant forms to give expression to New covenant grace, although we are under no obligation to use these forms. Ultimately New Covenant grace can not be contained in Old covenant wineskins. A special application of this would be the use of exclusive Psalmody in some churches vs. the hymnody of the New covenant Church.
2. How does the Nazirite vow testify of Christ, and how does the Lord Jesus fulfill it? It would appear that He does so especially in His priestly work. Both when He offers Himself up as our substitute on the cross, and when He ascends into the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest. When embarking upon this work, the night when He was betrayed, during the closing prayer that evening, He said: "For their sakes I sanctify Myself...(set Myself apart as Priest). Earlier that night he had told His disciples: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." Matt. 26:29. When He was offered sour wine by the soldiers during the crucifixion He refused it. Our High Priest is ministering till this very day, not under the influence of intoxicating spirits, but filled with the Spirit of God, as was becoming of earthly Nazirites.