

PROOFTEXT THAT ELKANAH RATHER THAN HANNAH CONSECRATED SAMUEL AS A NAZIRITE

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And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to consecrate himself unto the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink . . . All the days of his Naziriteship shall he eat nothing that is made of the grape-vine, from the pressed grapes even to the grape-stone. All the days of his vow of Naziriteship no razor [ta'ar] shall come upon his head; until the days be fulfilled, in which he consecrateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long (Num. 6:1-5).

The Book of Samuel relates the story of childless Hannah who, at the tabernacle in Shiloh, cries bitterly and prays to the Lord. *And she made this vow: 'O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life; and no razor [morah] shall ever touch his head' (I Sam. 1:11).* The Mishnah in *Nazir* (9:5) debates whether or not Samuel was a Nazirite. Those that say he was a Nazirite derive it from the use of the word *morah* (razor), as in the case of Samson: *For you are going to conceive and bear a son; let no razor [morah] touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazirite to God from the womb on (Judg. 13:5).* Others state that the meaning of *morah* is "fear", indicating that Samuel will fear Heaven and not fear man (see Rashi, quoting *Targum Jonathan*). While Malbim brings both opinions, *Metzudat Tziyyon* translates *morah* as "razor" and both *Metzudat David* and Maimonides (*Hilkhot Nezirut* 3:16) indicate that Samuel was a Nazirite.

The first question is: How could Hannah consecrate a yet unborn male child as a Nazirite? Generally, there is no legal mechanism to consecrate something that does not yet exist. Commentators indicate that when Eli the Priest says, *'Then go in peace . . . and may the God of Israel grant you what*

you have asked of Him' (I Sam. 1:17), his blessing satisfies this requirement of something that already exists.

However, there is another problem: according to the Mishnah (*Nazir* 4:6), only a father can consecrate a minor male as a Nazirite, not the mother. Indeed, Radak (I Sam. 1:11) raises this question. He cannot find anything in the text to show that Elkanah made the consecration, and is astounded that the rabbis never dealt with the solution to this problem in the Talmud. Although there were commentators who suggested that Samuel was in the category of a Samson-type Nazirite,¹ and that the law prohibiting a mother from consecrating a male child was accordingly not in force (see *Tosefot Yom Tov* on the Mishnah; Responsa *Or ha-Meir*, section 30; *Sefer Marganita de-Rabbi Meir* on the Talmud, *Nazir* 66a), the consensus follows Maimonides (*Hilkhot Nezirot* 3:16), declaring that Samuel was a regular *nazir*. I therefore suggest that the prooftext that it was indeed Elkanah who consecrated Samuel as a Nazirite is found in I Samuel 1:23: *Her husband Elkanah said to her: 'Do as you think best. Stay home until you have weaned him. May the Lord fulfill His word.'* TB *Nazir* 20b indicates that if the wife says to her husband, "I am a *nezirah* and so are you", and her husband responds by saying "Amen", he too becomes a Nazirite as a result of his consent to her vow. On this basis we can understand that Hannah told Elkanah that the child would be a Nazirite and that Elkanah said "Amen" to her oath, thus consecrating the child. Indeed, both Sforno and Gersonides (Ralbag) on I Samuel 1:23 indicate that Elkanah made the consecration official by using the phrase *May the Lord fulfill His word*. Likewise, *Tiferet Yisrael*, a commentary on the Mishnah (*Nazir* 9:5), indicates that Elkanah acquiesced in Hannah's vow, thus validating it. In this way the legal requirements for consecrating Samuel as a Nazirite were fulfilled.

NOTE

1. A Samson-type Nazirite may exceptionally trim his hair once a year and have contact with dead bodies (Mishnah *Nazir* 1:2).