

Ezekiel 44:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads.

Analysis

Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads—this regulation prohibited both extremes of hair length. Shaving the head (*galach*, נָלַח) was associated with pagan mourning rites and foreign religious practices (Leviticus 21:5, Deuteronomy 14:1). Allowing hair to grow long (*shalach*, נָלַשׁ, "send forth" or "let loose") characterized Nazirite vows (Numbers 6:5) or wild disorder.

They shall only poll their heads (*kasem yikasemu*, קָסֵם יִקְאַסְמָוּ) —the verb means "trim" or "cut short," requiring neat, moderate appearance. This middle way avoided both pagan customs and the appearance of Nazirite separation (which was temporary and individual, not for perpetual priestly service). The principle: God's ministers should be distinct from worldly culture yet orderly and dignified, not slovenly or ostentatious (1 Timothy 2:9-10, 3:2, Titus 2:7-8).

Historical Context

In ancient Near Eastern cultures, hair practices carried religious significance. Egyptian priests shaved their heads completely; Canaanite mourners cut their hair in ritual grief; Nazarites grew hair long during vows. Israelite priests were called to distinctiveness without adopting pagan practices or creating confusion with temporary vow-takers. This tension between separation from worldly culture and clarity about priestly identity shaped many Old Testament regulations. For Christians, the principle applies spiritually: we are "in the world but not of it" (John

17:14-18), called to holiness without pharisaical externalism (1 Peter 1:14-16, Romans 12:2).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the command to avoid both extremes (shaved or long hair) illustrate the principle of distinctiveness without ostentation in Christian living?
2. What contemporary appearance or behavior choices might confuse our witness by either conforming to worldly culture or creating unnecessary offense?

Interlinear Text

ל	א	בָּאשִׁיקָם:	לֹא	יַגְלֵל	חֹזֶה	לֹא	יַפְעַל	בְּעֵד	לֹא	יַעֲשֵׂה	בָּאשִׁיקָם:
their heads	H3808	Neither shall they shave				nor suffer their locks	H3808				
H7218			H1548			H6545					
to grow long	H7971	poll	H3697	poll	H853	their heads	H7218				

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 11:14 (Parallel theme): Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?

Deuteronomy 14:1 (Parallel theme): Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.

Numbers 6:5 (Parallel theme): All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

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