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## Head Coverings in the Old and New Testament

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

# Head Coverings in the Old and New Testament.

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## Topics.

- The Nazirite Vow.
- No razor shall come upon Samson's head.
- Gentile woman taken captive in war were to shave their head.
- Hannah and Samuel.
- Head coverings in the New Testament.
- Covered and uncovered heads.
- A woman should have a symbol on her head, because of the angels.
- A woman's long hair is her glory and her covering.
- Elizabeth the Virgin Queen of England (1554).

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## INTRODUCTION

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A great aid in helping to understanding some topics in the New Testament is to look at the same topic in the Old Testament. Understanding a topic in the Old Testament often gives insight into the mind of the writer of the same topic in the New Testament. With this in mind we will look at what a bald head and shaved head meant in the Old Testament, before trying to understand what Paul was saying regarding head coverings in the New Testament.

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## THE NAZIRITE VOW

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- **Numbers 6:1-2:** the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself (or herself) to the LORD.

This verse clearly shows that both a man and woman could make a Nazirite Vow and that the purpose of the vow was to separate themselves to the Lord.

**NOTE:** for simplicity of understanding the (*he*) in the following verses has been changed to (*they*) since the laws of a Nazirite vow apply to whoever makes the vow whether it is a man or a woman.

- **Numbers 6:5:** "All the days of their vow of separation, no razor shall touch their head. Until the time is completed for which they vowed to separate themselves to the LORD, they shall be holy. They shall let the locks of their hair of their head grow long.

From these verses we learn that during the days of the vow no razor was to touch their heads meaning their hair could not be cut in any way until the days of their vow was completed.

- **Numbers 6:6-7:** "All the days that they separate themselves to the LORD they shall not go near a dead body. <sup>7</sup>Not even for their father or for their mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall they make themselves unclean, because their separation to God is on their head. <sup>8</sup>All the days of their separation they are holy to the LORD. <sup>9</sup>"And if anyone dies very suddenly beside them and they defile their consecrated head, then they shall shave their head on the day of their cleansing. <sup>11</sup>and the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because they sinned by

reason of the dead body. And they shall consecrate their head that same day <sup>12</sup>and separate themselves to the LORD for the days of their separation and bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering. But the previous period shall be void, because their separation was defiled. <sup>13</sup>"And this is the law for the Nazirite.

**Consecrate:** comes from the Hebrew word (qadash) and means something set apart, for sacred purposes. To make, pronounce or observe as clean (ceremonial or moral).

No one who had made a Nazirite vow was to touch a dead body even if it was a member of their own family who had died. This is because touching a dead body under the Levitical Law made a person unclean. If they did touch a dead body, they had to cleanse themselves that very day and start the days of the vow again. During the time of a Nazirite vow a person's head was the symbol of their holiness to God or their uncleanness before Him. The head was a symbol of a person being separated to God or separated from God. An unshaved head (a head full of hair) was a symbol of being holy and separated to God while a bald head or shorn head was a symbol of becoming unclean and therefore separated from God.

If a man or woman, who had made a Nazirite vow become unclean during the time of the vow they were to shave their heads on the very day they became unclean and on the same day go to a priest and perform the ceremonial rite of cleansing and then start the days of their vow from the beginning. From these verses we learn that under the law and during a Nazirite Vow an unshaved head (a head full of hair) was a symbol that a person was clean while a shaved head (bald head) was a sign that a person had become unclean.

The only reason a person was required to shave their head bald was because they had become unclean so a shaved head (bald head) was a symbol of uncleanness or at least that the person had become unclean at some moment in time. Whoever saw a person who had made a Nazirite vow with a shaved head knew two things:

1. Sometime during the days of their vow, they had become unclean.
2. They were prepared to sacrifice their hair to begin their vow again.

In the book of Judges, we read that Samson's mother:

- Will conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. (Judges 13:5).

Some people may make a vow for a few days, a week, a year and maybe even a lifetime as Samson's vow was. Taking a razor to the head and shaving the head is not about never cutting the hair, that would mean that Samson as a grown man would have been walking on his hair rather the idea is that they were never to shave their head bald this is what it means to never take a razor to the head.

- **Numbers 6:18:** And the Nazirite shall shave their consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.

This verse clearly shows that shaving the head is about shaving it bald, whoever had become unclean during a vow period was to shave their head bald and then take all their hair and burn it on the fire. This act of putting the hair on the fire (no doubt on the altar) symbolized the judgment, purging and cleansing of God upon the person who had sinned and become unclean.

- An unshaved head (a head full of hair) was a symbol of being holy and separated to God.
- A shorn head (bald head) was a symbol of being unclean and separated from God.

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## NO RAZOR SHALL COME UPON SAMSON'S HEAD

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- **Judges 13:5:** God told Manoah's wife for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son (Samson). No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines" --- NOW GOD TO CHAPTER SIXTEEN VERSE SEVENTEEN --- <sup>17</sup>Samson told her (Deliah his wife) all his heart, and said to her , "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."

**Shaved:** in this verse comes from the Hebrew word (galach) and means to be bald to shave off. This shines a brilliant spotlight on the truth that the words, "No razor shall come upon his head" and the words, a shaved head is not about cutting the hair, but about shaving the head totally bald. If Samson could never cut his hair from the time of his birth to the time, he became an adult man how could he fight in battle since he would not only be tripping over his hair, but he would have looked ridiculous.

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## GENTILE WOMAN TAKEN CAPTIVE IN WAR WERE TO SHAVE THEIR HEAD

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- **Deuteronomy 21:10-14:** "When you (Israel) go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God gives them into your hand and you take them captive, <sup>11</sup>and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her to be your wife, <sup>12</sup>and you bring her home to your house, she shall shave her head and pare her nails. <sup>13</sup>And she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured and shall remain in your house and lament her father and her mother a full month. After that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.

**Shaved:** in this verse comes from the Hebrew word (galach) and means to be bald to shave off. For a Gentile woman to be clean and accepted into Israel she was to shave her head. This symbolised that she was cleansed from her uncleanness and made acceptable to God and the people of Israel.

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## Hannah and Samuel

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- **1 Samuel 1:10-11:** She (Hannah) was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. <sup>11</sup>And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

Hannah makes a vow to God saying if He will give her a son she will never shave his head. Never shave his head in this context, means she will never shave him bald and she will separate the child to God all the days of his life, God gave Hannah a son and she named him Samuel and he faithfully served the LORD all the days of his life.

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## THE NEW TESTAMENT

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## HEAD COVERINGS NT

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To understand this chapter, it helps to know beforehand that at the end of this topic Paul states:

- Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering (1 Cor. 11:13-15).

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## COVERED AND UNCOVERED HEADS

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- **1 Corinthians 11:4-6:** Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head <sup>5</sup>but every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven <sup>6</sup>For if a woman will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.

**NOTE:** The King James Bible uses the word woman in these verses, while in some modern translation's wife is used instead of woman, but since the following principle Paul teaches applies to all women this study will use the word woman rather than wife.

**Covered:** comes from Hebrew word (Kata) and means to cover wholly as with veil, it carries the idea of something being hidden and being godly.

**Uncovered:** comes from the Greek word (akatakalyptos) and carries the idea of being unveiled and uncovered.

**Shaven:** comes from the Greek word (xurao) and means to shave or shear the hair with a razor.

In verse one Paul says:

- I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you (1 Cor. 11:2).

This means that what Paul is saying is not a commandment of God nor does it have any bearing on eternal salvation since it is in the context of church behaviour and custom (i.e., headship, authority, and head coverings etc.). As we progress through the following Scriptures it becomes very clear that the focus is upon hair, (i.e., long hair, shaved hair and a bald head) which means Paul is teaching the custom in the body of Christ concerning men and their hair and the custom concerning woman especially woman whose hair has been shaved or whose head is bald. Paul's statement:

- Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head.

Refers to a man growing his hair long like a woman, naturally what is considered long is going to vary according to the culture of the country and nation that a person is living in, but the general principal carries the idea of a man appearing feminine. The words:

- Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven.

Are in contrast to the man with excessively long hair, (i.e., he dishonours his authority and power), whereas for a woman to have long hair she honours her authority and power. This is the reason Paul says:

- It is disgraceful for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.

This is not a condemnation rather Paul is simply saying that woman who have a bald head can cover their heads while in church to save them embarrassment (and perhaps others from mocking them). Remember during Paul's generation a bald head was not only a sign of uncleanness under the Levitical law, but also considered by many (especially the woman themselves) to be a shameful and embarrassing thing. Even today many women who have cancer fear losing their hair as much as they fear the cancer (the cancer foundation supplies wigs for this reason). The natural covering for a woman's head is her hair we know this because verse fifteen states:

- A woman's long hair is given to her for a covering.

This verse shines a brilliant spotlight on the truth that when Paul was talking about a woman's head being uncovered, he had in mind a woman with a bald head or her hair shaved or shorn extremely short. Paul is simply teaching what the custom was for the churches he had visited regarding woman who for whatever reason had a bald head. The words:

- It is the same as if her head were shaven.

Simply mean the same rules and principals that he has just taught concerning a bald head also apply to a head that is shaven (i.e., the hair is extremely short). It is not about short hair on a woman, but hair that is shaved extremely short (i.e. shorn). A shaved head means the same as shorn head, i.e., shorn suggests extremely short hair and an uncovered head would be no hair at all, a woman with her head uncovered (bald) is considered the same as a woman with her head shaven since shaven simply means cut extremely short (i.e., almost bald). Paul realises that many women feel that a bald or shorn head is a shame and are embarrassed when in a public assembly (this would especially apply to women in Paul's time) thus verse five could read:

- But every woman that prays or prophesies with a bald head dishonours her head: it is the same as a woman that prays or prophesies that has had her head shaved or shorn extremely short.

It would naturally be an embarrassment for a woman with a bald head or a head with extremely short hair (i.e., shaved) to enter a church to worship without covering her head. Because of this verse six could read:

- If a woman does not want to have long hair then she should at least wear her hair short because it is a disgrace for a woman to be bald or have her hair shaved.

In this verse Paul is saying that a woman who does not want to grow her hair long should at least keep it short in contrast to shaving it almost bald. During Paul's generation many woman would have worked in the dusty fields and vineyards (especially those who worked as servants) perhaps many of these woman for practical purposes chose to cut their hair extremely short since long hair would be very impractical, as it would need washing every day and they did not have hot and cold running water as we do therefore some working woman may have preferred to wear their hair excessively short for practical purposes. We know woman worked because the book of proverbs states:

- An excellent wife is far more precious than jewels she seeks wool and flax, works with her own hands and brings her food from afar, she rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and considers a field and buys it and with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard (Proverbs 31:10-16).

There are many other reasons a woman may have had excessively short hair or even been bald, (i.e., illness or previous involvement in pagan faiths where it was a custom to shave the head) added to these it was the custom to shame a woman who society considered immoral by shaving her hair.

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## LATER IN HISTORY

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In later years the church in power at the time of the inquisition continued the practice of shaving a woman's hair not only on those they considered immoral, but also those who they considered a heretic (meaning those who had an opinion or belief that contradicted the churches established religious teaching) thus a bald head on a woman or one whose hair was shaved or shorn extremely short was used as a practise to embarrass shame and disgrace woman. This idea also fits in with what nature itself teaches since it appears that there is a natural law in the nature of woman



that greatly affects and hurts them when they lose their hair. I have known women who had long hair who were challenged to have it shaved off to raise money for a particular charity. These women were happy to give money to help others, but having their hair cut off was for most too high a price to pay they could not do it no-matter how much money it might raise. Added to this the cancer society has councillors and volunteers to supply wigs and hats to help woman through the emotional shock of losing their hair as they begin their chemotherapy and radioactive treatment since the overwhelming trauma and anxiety of being in public with a bald head is an embarrassment for most woman, thus the reason a woman naturally covers her shaved or baldhead when she goes out shopping or is going to be seen in public.

This is because a woman's hair is a symbol of her femininity and her glory (meaning her beauty). Paul is basically saying to woman of all ages, "Hey if you feel embarrassed to come to church and worship the Lord with a bald head simply put some sort of covering on." It is OK with all the churches and is the custom and tradition I teach to them.

- **1 Corinthians 11:7-12:** For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>Man was not made from woman, but woman from man <sup>9</sup>Man was not created for woman, but woman for man <sup>10</sup>That is why a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels <sup>12</sup>for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

The words, "A man ought not to cover his head" in the context of this chapter means men should not grow their hair long like a woman and the words, "Since he is the image and glory of God" most likely carries the idea that he is masculine and should not appear feminine by growing his hair like a woman while the words, "The woman is the glory of man" carry the idea that the woman's femininity, her beauty and her long hair glorifies the man she is with (i.e., enhances his appearance) which in simple terms means both the man's masculinity and the woman's femininity complement each other.

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## A WOMAN SHOULD HAVE A SYMBOL ON HER HEAD, BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS

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**Symbol:** (Power in KJV) in this context carries the following two thoughts:

1. The idea of ability and being right or lawful in public.
2. The idea of holding a delegated and privileged place of influence and authority (note authority here has the same meaning as power).

**Angels:** means messenger, it can refer to a supernatural angel or a human messenger (i.e., a prophet, man of God, a pastor or minister etc).

The words, "A woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels" refers to her long hair we know this because verse fifteen says, "A woman's long hair is her glory and her covering" meaning her beauty and a natural covering for her head. Since angels can refer to God's angels or human messengers the woman's hair as a symbol of authority (or power) can refer to the following two things: -

1. Her hair as a covering of her head gives her the authority and power (meaning the right) to stand before God in prayer, whereas if a woman for whatever reason happened to be bald or has had her hair cut extremely short then the custom of the churches was for her to cover her head when she enters God's holy presence as a sign of respect toward God.
2. A woman has the authority and power (meaning the right) to join the congregation in worship and prayer because of her head covering (i.e., her hair).

**An earthly example:** the symbol of authority in this context is like a soldier in an army who is promoted to lieutenant of the squad, and as such is given officers strips to wear on the shoulder pads of his uniform which symbolises the authority he has been given. Now he has full right (i.e. power and authority) to enter the officers' quarters and no-one can question his right to be there in a similar fashion Paul is saying a woman's hair covers her head and gives her full rights (power and authority) to go before God in prayer and enter into His Holy presence and join the assembly of brothers and sister in worship and prayer. The words:

- All things are from God.

In this context primarily means both man and women are from God and by extension the entire human race is from a man and a woman. Paul begins to bring this topic of man being the head over the woman to a beautiful and brilliant end by firstly saying:

- Man was not made from woman, but woman from man (v8).

Referring to Adam the earthly father of us all and then stating that:

- Man is born of woman (v12).

This means that neither the man nor the woman can boast that one is greater than the other since both men and women are from God. Paul by stating that a woman is not independent of a man, but neither is a man independent of a woman since without one or the other mankind would not exist is now making both the man and the woman equal. He appears to be making sure that men do not misunderstand what he has said regarding headship and use it to dominate and control woman (especially their wives) by showing us all that neither the man nor the woman can claim greater importance over each other since we need both the man and the woman for the human race to exist. Headship is not about dominate control, but carrying the responsibility and the emotional pressure and stress of life, it is about protecting and watching out for the wellbeing of those you have headship over.

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## A WOMAN'S LONG HAIR IS HER GLORY AND HER COVERING

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- **1 Corinthians 11:13-16:** Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him <sup>15</sup>but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering <sup>16</sup>If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God

Paul is saying that long hair (like a woman's) on a man is a disgrace, but even nature teaches that a woman's long hair is her glory (meaning her beauty), then he clearly states that a woman's hair is also her covering thus the context of head coverings is about a woman's long hair being her covering and her glory meaning her beauty contrasted to a woman with a bald head or her hair shaved extremely short (almost bald) (see v14-15). The words:

- If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God" (v16)

Means if anyone is inclined to argue that it is right and decent for a woman with no hair to pray to God without covering it, neither Paul, nor those with him or the churches of God have any other custom other than the custom he has been teaching concerning this matter.

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## VARIOUS REASONS WOMAN MAY HAVE HAD SHAVED OR BALD HEADS

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- There may have been certain Jewish woman who had taken vows who after shaving their hair had become converted to Christ.
- Many women, who worked in the dusty fields and vineyards most likely chose to wear their hair excessively short since they did not have running hot and cold water as we do today
- Women's head were shaved to shame those who had been caught in some form of immorality or because they were considered heretics by the religious leaders of the time.
- Some who had belonged to pagan faiths would have shaved their heads especially if they had been priestess.
- It is certain some lost their hair through serious illnesses and bad diets.

Paul in this discourse is teaching what the custom of the churches was for woman in these circumstances he is basically saying to these women there is no shame if your head is shorn or even worse bald, but to show respect to God and save embarrassment to yourself and the assembly simply cover it. Paul is teaching what the custom and tradition of the churches was so that the women in these circumstances would know what to do when they attended a church meeting or prayed before God.

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## SUMMARY

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Some churches have taken the obscure verses in this chapter at the expense of the very clear verse (i.e., a woman's hair is her covering) (v15) and taught them almost as a commandment of God Himself, they have made it a law of God in their churches that all woman must wear hats or veils rather than seeing that Paul is giving caring advice for woman who for whatever reason are bald. Paul is simply teaching what the general custom or tradition of the church was in regards to a shaved or bald head of a woman, and this custom was to protect her and others from embarrassment that a bald head represented in the days of Paul. Scripture is so clear that a woman's hair is her covering, it makes it difficult to understand why some religious leaders would dogmatically hold to the obscure verses of this chapter that are difficult to interpret, rather than accept Paul's very clear statement that says, "A women's hair is her covering" (v15).

Sadly, a small number of churches have made head coverings a commanded law of God, this results in younger women of our generation who enter their services feeling like a lessor or rebellious Christian unless they wear a scarf or hat. This is especially sad when one realises Paul was only teaching it as a custom or tradition primarily to save women embarrassment. These churches may be creating a stumbling block to young women of this generation, by imposing on them a tradition or custom that only applied to women who had a bald or shaved head

**NOTE:** this does not mean that women who cover their head with a hat or scarf are sinning, they are doing it in faith as unto the Lord and he will accept and delight in it as such. It only becomes wrong when they judge others as lessor Christians who with a clear conscience do not cover their head with a covering, but If those who find it unnecessary to cover their heads judge those who do as lessor in the faith they themselves then become the one that is sinning before the Lord. As Christian we need to learn to allow each individual to grow and be free to live according to their own conscience before the Lord and not be judged for it. The key to having harmony and unity in the body of Christ is to allow each other to do all things in faith with a pure conscience before the Lord. All things in this context, means all things that are not sinful and are not hurtful to others.

- "If a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering" (1 Corinthians 11:13-15).

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## ELIZABETH THE VIRGIN QUEEN OF ENGLAND (1554)

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The following is a snippet from the movie Elizabeth Queen of England. It is here because it not only shines some light on societies attitude toward woman with a bald and shaved head during her generations, but also beautifully shows the integrity of her faith and the empathy she had for the people she reigned over.

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### ELIZABETH AND MARY

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Elizabeth reigned in an era when Catholics were vehemently against Protestants. Protestants were considered heretics and tortured or put to death if they did not renounce their faith and declare the Catholic Church to be the one true faith to God. Elizabeth was the half-sister to Mary Queen of England. While Mary was Queen her advisers tried to get her to sign a petition that would have Elizabeth put to death before Mary died. They wanted a legal excuse to put Elizabeth to death, because they did not want her to take the throne after Mary's death for fear the Catholic faith would be in danger. Mary died and Elizabeth became Queen of England. She fought various wars during the beginning of her reign and became victorious. During the wars there was so much killing and treachery that it caused Elizabeth to suffer emotionally because of all the innocent bloodshed. She went into a Catholic church and stood before a full-size statue of the Virgin Mary and while standing before it, considering all the men that had been killed in battle because of religion she made the following comments:

- She (referring to the Virgin) Mary has such a hold on men's hearts that they would die for her.

One of her trusted advisers standing next to her said to her:

- They could find nothing to replace her, all men need to look to something greater than themselves; they must be able to touch the divine on earth.

Elizabeth then went to her private room found some scissors and shaved her hair and became known as the Virgin Queen of England.

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### SHAVING THE HEAD

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The Catholic Church considered Protestant women heretics and would shave their heads they also shaved women's heads that were considered whores so that people who looked upon women with a shaved head knew they were either heretics or whores. Shaving the head of women was a common practice used to shame them. Elizabeth had never married and after shaving her hair she came before the people of England and said:

- I am married, I am married to England.

She reigned forty-years and never again saw the one man who really loved her (Dudley), but on her deathbed it is said, she whispered his name. By the time of her death England was the richest and most powerful country in Europe, her reign has been called the Golden Age.

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### THE SPIRITUAL LESSON TO LEARN

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Men who believed in the Virgin Mary not only had passionate emotions accordingly, but were willing to kill, imprison and torture those who refused to believe the same doctrines as they did. The lesson to learn in this is that passion, feelings emotions that a person has toward whoever

they believe to be God are not evidence or proof that they have true Christian faith or are believing in the God of all creation. Only by looking at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and embracing the New Covenant of Grace and the message of the cross can true Christian faith be guaranteed and only acts of love not cruelty testify to it.

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Bible House of Grace