

Nazareth

Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. (Matthew 2:22-23)

Nazareth — The Branch Grows

Nazareth is mentioned twelve times in the New Testament. It is not named specifically in the Old, although, the roots of the name of the town are found there. In Hebrew, the word for Nazareth is *Natzeret*. It relates to the Hebrew word used for the Messianic Branch (*Netzer*) in the Book of Isaiah (**Isaiah 11:1**). Nazareth and Branch share the same root, *natzer*, meaning watchman, guardian, and keeper. Jesus was a guardian (**John 17:2**).

Some might think that the words *Natzeret* and *Netzer* are also related to the Nazirite vow in some way (**Numbers 6:1-21**), but this is not so since *Nazirite* (from the Hebrew word *nazir*) is a different word altogether and is spelled using different Hebrew letters. Also, Jesus did not fulfill the requirements of a Nazirite. However, He did fulfill the Messianic prophecies that tell us the Messianic Branch would come from the royal family line of King David and be born in the town of King David's birth, Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2**; see also **1Samuel 16**).

Nazareth — A Location of Prophecy and Rejection

In addition to the words Nazareth and Branch having similar spelling and sound, another clue that Nazareth is connected to the arrival of the Messiah comes again from the Book of Isaiah. God promised that “*later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles*” (**Isaiah 9:1**; see also **Matthew 4:13-16**).

Nazareth is in the southern Galilee, built on the slope of the southwest side of the Jezreel Valley. It is surrounded by several rounded hills. It is sometimes referred to as the “guarded city.”

Because Nazareth is built among mountains, several cliffs or precipices line the landscape, offering the local residents a tempting method of capital punishment for anyone they disagreed with. This was the case when the Jewish men placed a death sentence on Jesus, who travelled through His hometown soon after being anointed by the Spirit to begin His ministry.

One Sabbath, He was called upon in the synagogue to read the portion of Scripture from the prophets. He read that God anointed Him “*TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED*” as prophesied by Isaiah (**Luke 4:16-19**; **Isaiah 11:1-11**).

At first, “*all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips*” But they started asking, “*Is this not Joseph's son?*” (**Luke 4:22**)

Jesus declared that one of His roles was a prophet when He said, *“Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.”* He then pierced their pride by reminding them that God had not sent the prophet Elijah to heal any of the Jews in Israel. Instead, God sent Elijah to heal two Gentiles in Lebanon and Syria (**Luke 4:24-27**). The men in the synagogue were angry at Jesus statements and also that He suggested God loved Gentiles just as much as Jews. They took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town of Nazareth was built, in order to throw Him off the cliff, but He walked through the crowd and escaped (**Luke 4:29-30**).

Nazareth — A Place of Misunderstanding and Acceptance

Jesus began to call on men to follow Him. One of these called men was Philip (**John 1:43**). Philip, in turn, finds a man named Nathanael and tells him that they have found the one of prophecy. Nathaniel responds, *“Can anything good thing come out of Nazareth?”* (**John 1:46**). Why did Nathaniel say such a thing? Nathaniel understood the prophecies about the Messiah and His birth and was expressing his doubts. He knew the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. Jesus knew his sincerity: *“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”* (**John 1:47**). Upon meeting Jesus, Nathanael understood.

There was another with no deceit, like Nathaniel—a blind man sitting on a roadside who heard that Jesus from Nazareth was passing by. The man shouted at the top of his lungs, *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (**Luke 18:38**). This man without physical sight had great spiritual insight. He understood that Jesus from Nazareth was the prophesied *Netzer*, his only hope.

Nazareth — A Current Picture and You

Nazareth, known as “the Arab capital of Israel,” is home to over 70,000 Arabs who are Israeli citizens. There are also the Jews that are residents. Imagine being in the place the Messiah ate, played, studied, and worked until age 30 when He began His ministry. However, just like the Jewish men who drove Jesus out of the synagogue 2,000 years ago, today 99% of the people in Nazareth do not believe Jesus is the Messiah.

It’s easy to forget in the midst of all our petitions and intercessions how much persecution Jesus endured for us and continues to endure as people scorn Him and reject His name, even to this day. Do you truly follow Jesus of Nazareth, the righteous branch, as did Nathanael and the blind man? Or, do you choose not to listen and heed because it is not what you want to hear?