

He Will be Called a Nazarene

Matthew 2:19-23 and Luke 2:39

DIG: What relocation options did Joseph face? How did God use prophecy, dreams, faith and circumstances to guide him? What was Luke trying to show believers today?

REFLECT: How long would it take you to say, "Yes," if God asked you to move on with Him? Would there be any delay? Why or why not?

Although Jesus would face more persecution in His adult years, Herod's death granted Him a time of relative reprieve until His public ministry began. While Matthew mentions Herod's murder of the children once, he notes Herod's death three times - indicating the LORD alone holds the ultimate power of life and death. To oppressed believers, whether persecuted for their faith (Matthew 10:22; First Peter 4:13-14) or repressed for other unjust reasons (Mattityahu 5:39-41; James 5:1-7), this reminder of the oppressors' mortality is a reminder that all trials are temporary and that their loving Father is in total control of the time and place of their passing (Matthew 10:28-31; First Peter 5:10).¹⁸⁰

After Herod died, an angel of ADONAI once again appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said: **Get up, take the Child and his mother and go to the land of Isra'el (Mattityahu 2:19-20a).** What does the B'rit Chadashah call the Holy Land? Not Palestine but Eretz-Israel, or the Land of Israel. Similarly, the regions north and south of Jerusalem are not called the West Bank but **Y'hudah and Shomron, for Judah and Samaria (Acts 1:8).** The New Covenant, like the Israelis of today, uses the names the Hebrew Bible uses, not those employed by the Romans or other conquerors.¹⁸¹

For those who were trying to take the child's life are dead (Matthew 2:20b). The angelic direction to return to Eretz-Israel would clearly point to the exodus. Now ADONAI said to Moshe in Midian, **"Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead" (Exodus 4:19).** Any Jew remotely familiar with the story of Moses' story would have recognized the reference; like Moses, Jesus had outlived His persecutor and would lead His people to salvation (Mattityahu 1:21; Acts 7:35). Herod was probably nearing the end of his life when Joseph and Miryam fled with their Child to Egypt, but we have no way of knowing how long they stayed there. Estimates range from a couple of weeks to a couple of years. So any guess would be mere speculation.

But we do know **Herod died** a horrible death. **He** had sought relief for a little while in the mineral baths of Callirhoe. There **he** attempted suicide but was prevented. Josephus reported that **Herod's** colon was ulcerated, and a transparent fluid had settled itself about **his** feet and at the bottom of **his** belly, which was putrefied and filled with maggots. When **he** sat upright, **he** had difficulty breathing and also had convulsions in all parts of **his** body (**Josephus, Antiquities, ch 17 6. 5**). An appropriate end, I suppose, for one who caused so much misery to others during **his** lifetime. Not so appropriate, however, was the funeral that **his** eldest son and successor, **Archelaus**, arranged in **his** honor - seeing that just five days beforehand, **Herod**, by permission from Rome, murdered another son, Antipater, because of a supposed plot against **his father**. Needless to say, **they** had issues.

When **Yosef** and **his** family fled to **Egypt** they left from Bethlehem, the town where they apparently had chosen to settle in after **Yeshua** was born, perhaps keeping in mind the prophecy of **Micah 5:2**. While **Micah 5:2** *did* prophesy that **the Messiah** would be born in Beit-Lechem, it *never* prophesied that **He** would also be raised there. When **Jesus** was two years old **He** was taken to **Egypt** and lived there for an unknown period of time.

When the young **Jesus** returned to **the Land**, **He** was brought to **Nazareth**. The people were generous, impulsive, simple in manners, full of intense nationalism, free, and independent of the traditionalism of Judea. **The rabbinic circles of Jerusalem held the Galileans in contempt, because of their manner of speech, colloquialisms, and lack of a certain type of culture characteristic of those who lived in the Holy City.** The Galileans were accused of neglecting **the traditions of the elders** (see **Lw - The Oral Law**), while Judea claimed to be the proud storeroom of orthodoxy and defender of Jewish institutions. The contempt with which the Judeans looked upon **the Galileans** was unjust due in a large part to envy, since their own barren land could not be compared to the fruitful and beautiful country of **Galilee**. It was in the midst of this vigorous, rustic, liberty-loving **Galilean** people that **Jesus** was born.¹⁸²

When **Joseph** and **Mary** had done everything required by the Torah of **ADONAI**, [they] took the child and returned to **Galilee** to their own town of **Natzeret** (**Matthew 2:21; Luke 2:39a**). **Luke** portrayed **Joseph** and **Miryam** as models for **his** readers. **They**, like **Zechariah** and **Elizabeth** (**Luke 1:6**), kept **the Torah** faithfully. This was not a simple historical antidote that had no value to **his** readers. Rather, **Luke** sought to show that this was how **Theophilus** (**Acts 1:1-2**) and other believers should live.¹⁸³

This is the last time we hear of **Joseph** in the Gospels. **He** is really the forgotten man in the story of **Jesus**. We know **he** was a common man who did not add much excitement to the scene, but **he** is a silent hero. **He** was a devout man of simple faith in, and obedience to, **ADONAI**. Scripture does not record a single word from **his** mouth; however, our legacy of **Joseph** is not what **he** said, but in what **he** did. How did **Yosef's** children turn out? Two of **them**, **James** and **Jude**, wrote books of the Bible, and **they** committed **their** lives to service for **their** human brother and spiritual **Lord**, **Jesus**. What a testimony to a faithful father.

Herod the Great was dead. A few days before **his** death, **Archelaus**, **his** son by a Samaritan wife (**Josephus Antiquities 17:20**), was named ruler. But **his** son **Archelaus**, a man even more brutal and erratic than **his** father, reigned in **Judea**. **Joseph** was afraid to go back to Bethlehem, **having been warned** not to in a dream. So **he** withdrew **his** family to the district of **Galilee** and settled in a forgotten little town called **Nazareth** (**Matthew 2:22-23a; Luke 2:39b**). **Natzareth** was about 55 miles north of Jerusalem, in the district of **Galilee**, where the **Holy Spirit** told him to go. It was an elevated basin, about one and a half miles across. Because it had an excellent view of the Valley of Jezreel and was easily defensible, it was a Roman outpost. The Roman soldiers were crude and violent, and the people of **Nazareth** followed their lead. Consequently, the term **Nazarene** became a term of contempt used to portray anyone who was low class, rough and rude.

As hard as it is to comprehend, **Archelaus** was worse than **his** father **Herod**. **He** possessed all of **his** father's vices but none of **his** few redeeming qualities. **He** was so bad that eventually Rome banished **him** to Vienna in Gaul (**Josephus Antiquities 17:342:44**). When **Jesus** returned from **Egypt**, however, **Archelaus** was in charge of **Judea**. **He** was known for **his** tyranny, murder and instability. Hated by the Jews, as soon as **he** came to power, **he** slaughtered 3,000 Jews in the Temple at the Passover. More than likely **he** was insane as a result of close family intermarriages.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, in order to avoid problems with **him** (who may have had the same paranoia as **his** father), **Joseph** was faithful to the messenger in **his** dream and moved **his** family to **Galilee** because it was outside the jurisdiction of **Archelaus**. **Galilee** was under the jurisdiction of **Herod** Antipas, who was also a son of **Herod** the Great, but at least **he** wasn't as paranoid as **his** father.

The settlement in the town of **Nazareth** in **Galilee** would create a stigma for the rest of **His** life. **The rabbis said that if you wanted to get rich go north, but if you want to be wise go south.** To go north meant north to **Galilee**, and to go south meant south to **Judea**. **The rabbis thought that those who were only interested in materialism would go live in Galilee, but those who were really spiritual and interested in divine wisdom would go south to Judea where all the rabbinical schools and academies were found.**

In fact, one day a fellow Pharisee told Nicodemus: **Look into it, and you will find that no prophets come out of Galilee (John 7:52)**. Of course that was not true because there were **prophets** who came out of **Galilee** such as **Jonah, Hosea** and **Elijah**. But not only did Judeans look down on **Galileans**, fellow **Galileans** looked down on those from **Nazareth**. Even a fellow **Galilean** would one day say: **Nazareth! Can anything good come out of Nazareth (Yochanan 1:46)?** While it was true that **Natzeret** was politically insignificant, it certainly was divinely significant.

There are four ways that the New Covenant quotes the TaNaKh and the fourth way is a literal prophecy and the fulfillment as a summary statement: **So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that Yeshua would be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23b)**. The way you spot the fulfillment as a summary statement is by the use of the plural word **prophets**. The first three quotes were singular (**Mattityahu 2:6, 2:15** and **2:18**), yet here the word **prophets** is in the plural.¹⁸⁵

However, the specific quote that **He will be called a Nazarene** is absent from the TaNaKh, or any other contemporary literature. So where could such an idea of **the Messiah** be found by **the prophets**? It was found in the prophecies depicting **Christ** as being **despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalms 22:6-8 and 69:20-21)**. Indeed, the Gospel writers make it quite clear that **He** was scorned and hated (**Mattityahu 27:21-23; Mark 3:22; Luke 23:4-5; John 5:18, 6:66, 9:22** and **29**).

Matthew was not ignorant of the fact that there was no such verse that specifically mentioned **Nazareth**. Nevertheless, any educated Jew would understand the connection between the town of **Natzeret** and **the Messiah**. The town's name is, in fact, derived from the Hebrew word for *branch*, which would call to mind a common term for **the Savior Himself**. **A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His root a Branch will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1)**, and tell him, the **LORD** of heavens angelic armies says: **Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and He will branch out from His place and build the Temple of ADONAI (Zechariah 6:12)**, and **Jeremiah 23:12**, "The days are coming," says **ADONAI**, "When I will raise a righteous Branch for David. He will reign as king and succeed, He will do what is just and right in the Land. In His days Judah will be saved, Isra'el will live in safety, and the name given to Him will be **ADONAI** our righteousness."

What **Matthew** is pointing out is a good play on words that the *Netzer* (**Branch**) is now residing in the city called **Natzeret (Branch)**. In his mind, this is the perfect fulfillment of this *concept* that is indeed mentioned by several writers in the TaNaKh (note the plural **through the prophets** in verse **23**). Instead of being an oversight that there is no specific verse mentioned in the TaNaKh, it actually underscores the messianic qualifications of

Yeshua in a manner that many first-century (and modern) Jews would appreciate. In **Matthew's** mind, **Yeshua** is perfectly qualified to be **Israel's King Messiah**, and **he** no doubt hoped that **his** readers would continue to explore that possibility.¹⁸⁶

Therefore, the prophecy that **He will be called a Nazarene** represents an expectation that **the Messiah** would appear from nowhere and would, as a result, be misunderstood and rejected. Of course, **the prophets** could not speak specifically of **Nazareth**, which did not exist when they wrote. But the suggestion of the **despised** term **Nazarene** as applied to **Jesus** captured just what **the prophets** had predicted - a **Messiah** who came from the wrong place, who did not conform to the expectations of Jewish tradition, and who, as a result, would not be accepted by **His** people. Thus, even the embarrassment of living in a place like **Nazareth** was helpful to **Mattityahu** in constructing a picture of **Jesus** as being **despised and rejected by men**. So this prophecy was fulfilled as a summary statement.¹⁸⁷

It was, therefore, at lowly and **despised Natzeret** that the royal **Son of God**, along with **His** righteous parents, made **their** home for the next thirty some years.¹⁸⁸