

NAZARETH Hebrew: netser 05342: sprout or shoot/branch

Nazareth was part of the area given to the tribe of Zebulun. It sits in an area that was part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which Assyria took in 722 B.C.E. The town lies in the hills of Lower Galilee on the southern range, approximately 1500 feet above sea level. It is on the northern side of the Valley of Jezreel. The Sea of Galilee is fifteen miles to the east and the Mediterranean Sea is twenty miles to the west.

Nazareth was an inconsequential village, sitting on the slope of the hills, containing only one spring of water and a few cisterns. In Jesus' time, the population was probably less than 300. The village was secluded and not on any main highway. It was never mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Midrash or Josephus (an early historian of the period), which shows its minor importance.

When Philip spoke to Nathanael and referred to Jesus as from Nazareth, Nathanael replied: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" (John 1:45-46)? This implies that the village was insignificant, which is supported by the absence of references to it in ancient non-Christian sources." (The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: K-Q)

Nazareth was very near to the ancient Roman city named Sepphoris (also known as Tzipori or Zippori). Herod Antipas chose Sepphoris as the site for his new capital of both Galilee and Peraea. For thirty years from 3 B.C.E. to about 29 C.E., construction was going on in this cosmopolitan Gentile city. Jesus and his family may have possibly worked in Sepphoris as builders and carpenters (Mark 6:3, Matt 13:55). Carpenter in Greek is tekton meaning a worker in wood or stone, a builder, a craftsman. This definition broadens the idea of Jesus and Joseph and his family as more than just the local tradesmen; perhaps they were architects, master builders, stonemasons, etc.

"Very likely 'carpenter' as applied to Jesus meant not simply a worker in wood but one who labored at the building-trade in general..." (Jesus and the Forgotten City, Richard Batey)

Sepphoris might have had as many as 40,000 and it was three miles to the north of Nazareth, only an hour's walk, and sat on a ridge 700 feet above the village. From afar, the lights of the city could be seen by the villagers of Nazareth. "A city set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14).

The recent archeological discoveries in Sepphoris indicate that Jesus may have been exposed to many more urban influences than at first thought. Sepphoris has been revealed as a city with palaces, colonnades, forums, a theater that held up to 5,000 people and elegant villas.

Nazareth is mentioned in the New Testament as the home of Joseph and Mary. Mary received the message from the angel Gabriel (referred to as the Annunciation) in Nazareth (Luke 1:26).

From here, Joseph and Mary set out for Bethlehem to pay their taxes. They returned to Nazareth from Egypt after the death of Herod the Great to raise Jesus (Matt. 2:23; Luke 2:4). Jesus lived in Nazareth with his parents until he left to reside in Capernaum (Luke 2:39, 51; Matt. 13:54; Mark 6:1).

After he began his mission, it is recorded that he returned to Nazareth one more time and spoke in their synagogue, proclaiming himself as the Messiah prophesied in Isaiah (Luke 4:16; Matt 13:54; Mark 6:1)

There is no record of his return to the city after the men in the synagogue attempted to throw him off the brow of the hill (Luke 4:29).

In all four Gospels, Jesus declared that a prophet is without honor in his own home town. Nazareth was unreceptive to Jesus and his mission.

Matt 13:57

A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.

Mark 6:4

But Jesus said unto them, a prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

John 4:44

For Jesus himself testified that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.

Luke 4:24

And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.