

# Nazareth, Nazarene, Northern Essene

by

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In the course of making a facsimile of the sign Pilate caused to be placed at Yeshua the Anointed's execution, word variations in bible versions were noted. Of the four gospels about the event, the phrase in John in 19:19-20 is the most informative. It gives the name Yeshua, infers where he was from, gives his scorned title, identifies the three languages in which the phrase was to be written, and the top-down order of those languages.

Most bible translations of John 19:19 have: "of Nazareth." There are variations in the translated spelling and pronunciation of this word (i.e., Natsareth, Nazorean, Notzori, Notsree, etc.). *The Interlinear Bible - Hebrew and Greek*, by J. Green Sr., Hendrickson Publishers, has the literal Greek: 'ho nazoraioi' translated into English as 'the Nazoraen'

## Surprising facts about Nazareth

Little is taught about the place where Yeshua the Anointed was from. The locations where his ministry took place is recorded in the New Testament. But a reader seldom associates the adjacency of the locations within the two geographic regions of Yeshua's ministry. The following facts challenge the usual assumptions about Nazareth:

(a) There is no place called Nazareth in the Old Testament. Neither is the term Nazarene or Nazarenes, found there. This can be easily verified by looking in James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. Not much definitive information was available in books for the various spellings of Nazareth, Nazarene, etc., so the Internet was searched.

We know that present-day Nazareth is located in the region called Galilee in Northern Israel. Galilee is the biblical land given to the tribe of Zebulun in Joshua 19:10-16. In those passages twelve towns and six villages are mentioned, but not Nazareth. This indicates Nazareth did not exist then as a town or village.

(b) Nazareth is not found among in the sixty-three towns of Galilee mentioned in the Talmud which was written much later, about AD 200-300. This might be for a variety of reasons. The Old Testament ends with the death of the last prophet Malachi. It was about 400 years later that the birth of Yeshua occurred. The Rabbinic writers of the Talmud may have not included him or where he was from, because they did not accept him as the prophesied Messiah. They caused Yeshua to be killed by the Roman occupiers.

(c) Nazareth (correctly pronounced 'Nats-a-reth') appears 29 times in the New Testament but only in the Gospels and in Acts. The word 'Nazarene' and 'Nazarenes' appear once. But, most scholars think the first book of the New Testament was not available in Greek until after AD 67.

(d) The Jewish historian Juda Josephus lived after the death of Yeshua from CE 37 to 100. He traveled widely, visiting forty-five cities in the first century. He mentions Yeshua only once in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, but does not mention Nazareth.

(e) Ancient Nazareth has not been identified archeologically. Only a suspected site has been reported in Bible Archeology Review magazine.

All these facts have caused at least one author to conclude that the evidence for a first century city, town, or village called Nazareth, does not exist - not literary, historically, or archeologically.

How do these facts fit with what is commonly understood in the NT?

Where was ancient Nazareth? Who were the Nazarenes? Why were Yeshua the Anointed and his followers called a 'sect' by the religious establishment? Why was it said of Yeshua: "what good can come from a Nazarene? Why did Nazareth not grow and become more well known with the normal increase in population?"

The most succinct answers to these questions were obtained from *The Nazarene Way* website which has an article titled *Nazarene or Nazareth?* What follows is principally from that article.

In the years leading up to Yeshua's birth, there were major and minor Jewish Sects: The major sects were the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and to a lesser extent the Essenes. The best known minor sect were known as Karaites.

The wealthy people and priestly families were generally Sadducees. They tended to be aloof, whereas the common people and many women generally were Pharisees. The latter were noted for being extra meticulous in details of religious observance. Overall, these two sects were similar.

The Karaites were a small group which separated themselves from the Temple because of what they considered to be departures from Yahweh's Law by the Sadducees and Pharisees.

The Essenes, however, were radically different from the Sadducees and Pharisees and openly opposed their theology, doctrines, and spiritual integrity at the Temple. The Bible is silent on the Essenes sect and most people did not know they existed until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Yet, there is information about when they came into prominence, their traditions, deeply rooted convictions, beliefs, writings, and specific locations where they existed.

The word Essene is a collective term. At the time of Yeshua there existed three distinct Essene groups. It is supposed at least one group played a part in his life.

They were: The Therapeutae of Egypt, the Essenes of Qumran, and the Essenes of Mount Carmel.

Josephus and other classic writers tell of the Essenes and their intense appreciation for the inspired Law of Yahweh, and that they: "strove to be like the angels of heaven."

All opposed slavery, and most but not all, opposed the sacrificing of animals and the eating of flesh. Their highest aim was to become fit temples of the set-apart spirit as in 1 Cor.6:19, to be healers and perform cures, especially spiritual cures.

There is evidence that Yeshua the Anointed had regional exposure to the Essenes of Mount Carmel in Northern Israel. It is clearly the area where Yeshua lived and studied.

Certainly, the Northern Essenes had ongoing contact with their brethren in the South, but Yeshua was not raised and trained at Qumran as some in the modern Essene movement want to believe. A map provides conformation of this point.

The location of Nazareth is near the foot of Mount Carmel and not far from Lake Galilee, whereas the location of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Qumran is in southern Israel. Further, the travels of Yosef, Miriam, and Yeshua is reasonably well documented:

- (a) Prior to the birth of Yeshua, Yosef and Miriam are said to have lived in Nazareth which is in Northern Israel. It must have been a small, little known, settlement. If it had been a city, town, or even a large village surely its presence would have been recorded.
- (b) At the end of a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the Feast Days (Atonement, Trumpets, Tabernacles, Great Last Day) in the autumn, Miriam gave birth to Yeshua. Rome utilized these holy convocations, which occurred after the harvest, as an occasion to collect taxes. But that year Rome also required a registry of allegiance to the Emperor by those with lineage to the royal family. Miriam was of the house of David.
- (c) Being warned that Herod was going to kill baby Yeshua, Yosef took Miriam and fled southwest into Egypt. Specifically where they went is not recorded in the scriptures.
- (d) After the death of Herod, the family returned to Nazareth.
- (e) Yeshua apparently grew up in Nazareth but scripture records he visited the Temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old.
- (f) Yeshua launched his public ministry in Capernaum near Lake Galilee in northern Israel.
- (g) As a grown man, Yeshua journeyed to southern Israel to a place not far from Qumran where he was immersed in the Jordan River by John the Baptist.
- (h) After his baptism, Yeshua returned to northern Israel. There, in the region between Lake Galilee and Mount Carmel, he conducted his ministry.
- (i) Yahshua again journeyed to southern Israel when he knew the time had come for a confrontation with the authorities in Jerusalem, and for him to give up his life for the sins of mankind.

It is a long journey, nearly the entire length of the nation of Israel, to travel on foot from Lake Galilee to the Salt Sea. There were no paved roads, the climate was hot half of the year, and the elevation varied. All things considered, a journey from northern to southern Israel for religious observance was no easy thing two thousand years ago. It must have been especially difficult for a pregnant woman.

It is not commonly realized, but nearly every major event recorded in New Testament about the life of Yeshua the Anointed - except for his birth, baptism, and death, occurred in northern Israel, in the region between Mount Carmel and Lake Galilee.

Some of these major events of Yeshua's ministry are: (a) The miraculous feeding of 5,000 people; (b) the sermon on the Mount (Carmel); (c) the wedding at Cana where he turned water into wine; (d) the anointing with oil by Mary Magdalene; (e) the calling of Andrew and Peter; (f) the healing of the leper; (g) the healing of the man with palsy; (h) the calling of Matthew; (i) the calling of Phillip; (j) the calling of Nathaniel; (k) the sending forth of the twelve; (l) the sending of the seventy-two disciples; (m) the teaching of the prayer to the Father to the Apostles; (n) the healing of Jairus' daughter, (o) the dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well; (p) the miraculous walk on the water; (q) the time he commanded the storm to be calm and it obeyed him; (s) where the vast majority of verbal teachings during his life occurred, etc.

The scriptures show that Yeshua the Anointed lived most of his known life in northern Israel. Yet the scriptures do not give a specific link with the Essenes of Mount Carmel. Likewise there is an important fact which shows Yeshua was not a Qumran Essene.

That fact is: John the Baptist did not recognize Yeshua. This non-recognition by John has been widely pondered because Yeshua was John's cousin. It is commonly assumed their families had fellowship, and surely fellowship would have occurred at the feast days. But it seems not so.

There is near unanimity amongst scholars that John the Baptist was an Essene from Qumran. Why would they conclude this?

Scholars point out that the Essenes at Qumran often raised or adopted orphaned male children. The New Testament informs us that after Herod had John the Baptist's father, Zachariah, murdered, John "went to live in the desert." Obviously, a small child could not survive alone in the desert, so it is concluded that John was raised by the Essenes at Qumran.

The Essenes at Qumran choose to be a cloister because of their religious differences with the Sadducees and Pharisees. After a certain date, it is likely the community did not participate in the affairs at the Temple.

Advocates of the conclusion that John was exposed to the Qumran community mention: (a) Qumran is not far from where the Jordan River connects with the Salt (Dead) Sea, (b) where tradition tells us John performed his baptisms near this location, (c) that John lived in the desert southwest of the Jordan where Qumran is located, (d) that John's dress and diet was plain (he is alleged to have been a vegetarian).

The 'locust' he ate are said to have been the pulp of carob pods, not the insect; (others say the insect is eaten but only the thorax), (e) that his method of baptism (immersion) was similar to the Qumran Essene's ritual bathing several times a day, (f) that those Essenes were called 'Baptists,' and (g), that John's prophetic theology matches what is known of the Essenes at Qumran.

The conclusion becomes even more firm when one considers the following evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the 'Community Rule' of the Essenes of Qumran, their goal is described as: "To prepare the way for the Messiah in the desert wilderness... to prepare a people to meet the Master."

Similarly, in the New Testament, John the Baptist declares in John 1:23 "I am a voice crying out in the desert wilderness, make straight the way of Yahweh."

### Parallels between Elijah and John the Baptist

Isaiah, who lived hundreds of years before John and Yeshua, prophesied that before the 'Messiah of Peace' would manifest himself to Israel, two things had to occur:

- (a) A group of people must "prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah; make a straight path for the Master in the wilderness: prepare a people to meet the Master.
- (b) Elijah must return to earth to prepare the way and announce the coming of the Messiah.

An astute reader of the New Testament is aware that Yeshua the Anointed declared that John the Baptist is the returned Elijah.

But even an astute reader is probably unaware of the following fact: the place on the east bank of the Jordan River where it empties into the Salt Sea and where John performed his baptisms, is the same place where, about 800 years previous, Elijah ascended into heaven in a 'chariot of fire.' Elijah is also said to have worn a camel hair robe and was unshaven.

If indeed John the Baptist was raised in the cloistered monastery at Qumran, isolated for years from family members, it could explain why he did not recognize his cousin Yeshua. This would not have been the case if Yeshua had ever stayed at the Essene community at Qumran.

### But what about the Northern Essenes of Mount Carmel?

Whereas the Essenes at Qumran were a strict monastic commune for celibate males, other Essene Communities - such as at the foot of Mount Carmel and the settlement at Nazareth, consisted of families. Essenes were ecumenical and naturally had different rules.

It would be logical to conclude that Yosef and Miriam would have been influenced by the Northern Essenes at Mount Carmel, therefore it would be expected that the life and teachings of Yeshua would be similar. Being from Nazareth and in an area inhabited by Northern Essenes can explain why Yeshua would be called a 'Nazarene.'

Before further considering Nazareth, the Essene community at Mount Carmel, and the name given those from there, one must be aware of other related information.

It is known from the writings of Philo, a Jewish Philosopher who lived about 2000 years ago, there was an Essene community of “Theraputae” or “healers” at Lake Mareotis in Egypt. It is thought almost certainly this community provided a sanctuary for Yosef, Miriam and baby Yeshua when they fled Southwest into Egypt. Yosef surely would have known about the Theraputae. It would have been the logical place to go because it was a commune with like-type Essene beliefs, and because it was beyond Herod’s jurisdiction.

After Herod died, the family returned to Northern Israel and settled again in Nazareth. According to *The Armageddon Script* the word ‘Nazarene’ came to be applied to Northern Essenes in general and to those from that area. It is possible that the Northern Essene’s settlement near the foot of Mount Carmel was the Nazareth where Yeshua was from. Perhaps it is where modern-day Nazareth is located.

Thus, a ‘Nazarene’ is a ‘Northern Essene’ associated with Mount Carmel, and Yeshua the Anointed being from Nazareth became known as ‘Yeshua the Nazarene’ in John 19:19-20. In the New Testament book of Acts, the early converts from Judaism are called “the sect of the Nazarenes.”

From the statement in the New Testament: “nothing good comes from Nazareth” the Sadducees and Pharisees in Jerusalem apparently held Nazarenes in low regard. This may have been because they were collectively grouped with the Essenes who had refused to make animal sacrifices at the Temple.

Or, it may have been because Nazarenes were from a remote rural area

Or, because they tended to be independent of the dictates of the religious establishment in Jerusalem who prohibited the using the name of the Father Yahweh in prayer, which Yeshua his Anointed son, did.

In Luke 4:16 there is mention of Yeshua entering synagogue in Nazareth on the Day of Sabbaths (Weeks, Pentecost). That day would have been the ‘First of the Sabbath,’ now called Sunday. It was the fiftieth day and the morrow, counting inclusively with the day of the Elevated (Wave) Offering made during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Yeshua read from the scroll of Isaiah:

*“The spirit of Yahweh is upon me, because he appointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh...”*

The reading was recognition of the fulfilment of the prophecy in Yeshua the Anointed. But after the reading his ‘chastisement teaching’ caused him to be put out of the synagogue, led out of Nazareth, and almost thrown over the brow of a hill.

## Is it known how long the ‘Nazarenes’ existed?

In the fourth century Epiphanius, the Catholic Bishop of Constantia, wrote a book called *Panarion*. In it he mentions there were then ‘Nazarenes’ related to the ancient order of Essenes, that the followers of Yeshua the Anointed “were known as Nazarenes,” and that “the sect of the Nazarenes” existed prior to Yeshua’s birth.

But rather than admit that the Nazarenes were the true custodians of the teachings of Yeshua, Epiphanius denounced them as heretics because what they taught was not then according to Catholic dogma. The Nazarene remnant seems to have been hunted down and killed.

Thus far it is clear is that Yeshua the Anointed was from Nazareth and was contemporaneous with the Northern Essenes of Mount Carmel. These may be reasons Yeshua was called the ‘Nazarene’.

## What is known of Mount Carmel?

The literal meaning of Carmel in Hebrew is ‘garden paradise.’ In *The Religion of the Semites* by W. Robertson Smith, Mount Carmel was considered so holy that spilling of human or animal blood, or harm to a tree, or to natural life there, was forbidden. These rules applied not only to the Northern Essenes, but also to anyone who climbed the mountain. Permanent dwellings were not permitted on the mountain. Those who lived there are said to have stayed in temporary dwellings or tents.

In *The Life of Pythagoras* written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by Jamblichus, we learn that the young seeker, Pythagoras visited an Essene sanctuary on Mount Carmel:

*“In Phoenicia he [Pythagoras] conversed with the prophets who were descendants of Moses... After gaining all he could from the Phoenician mysteries, he found that they originated from the sacred rites of Egypt. This led him to... Egypt. Following the advice of his teacher Thales, he left... through the agency of some Egyptian sailors, and landed on the coast under Mount Carmel.”*

Pythagoras then climbed Mount Carmel where he evidently received powerful teachings from the Northern Essenes; for when he returned to the ship, the sailors, who had hatched a secret plan to sell young Pythagoras into slavery, were mesmerized by his spiritual luminosity and unable to harm him.

The sailors, according to Jamblichus, believed Pythagoras had become “supernatural.” Pythagoras went on to become an exponent of vegetarianism, reincarnation, fasting, and geometry. Thereafter he and his followers wore only white linen garments, as did the Essenes on Mount Carmel.

As mentioned earlier, the Northern Essenes held to certain religious practices which did not agree with the Sadducees and Pharisees at Jerusalem. What likely most offended other Jews was the steadfast refusal of the Essenes to offer animal sacrifices at the Temple...so adamant were the Essenes on this point it eventually led some to separate themselves and to their establishment of a kind of sanctuary on Mount Carmel.

One of the reasons the Essenes chose Mount Carmel was because of its connection with Elijah the prophet. Many years earlier Elijah had a school for prophets in a cave there. The cave could have been the 'sanctuary' of the Essenes. The location of what is said to have been Elijah's cave is known and can be visited today.

As Elijah was the sole true remnant of Israel, so too did the Essenes believe of themselves as they made their way to Mount Carmel. And, just as Elijah had built the altar on Mount Carmel with twelve stones - one for each tribe of Israel, so the Essenes likewise could hope to restore true worship there.

A few miles from the base of Mount Carmel the Essenes apparently had a settlement of permanent structures for their families, and perhaps it was, or came to be called, Nazareth. It is in the "hill country" where apparently only few choose to live. One of the reasons Nazareth did not grow significantly over centuries is because the only reliable water supply was one small spring, until modern times.

The Catholic monastic order of "White Friars" currently established on Mount Carmel moved there in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They adopted vegetarianism and the white robes of the Essene monks that still survived when the friars arrived. The Catholic "Carmelites" assert that Yeshua was an Essene and he was raised on Mount Carmel. Such information is available from various sources including *The Essene Christ* by Upton Ewing, the Catholic Carmelites' own history books, and the Encyclopedia Britannica, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, vol. 5., pg. 358.

These are explanations for the words in the New Testament related to: Nazareth, Yeshua the Nazarene, and the sect of the Nazarenes.

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