

§12: THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS AT NAZARETH

Matt. 2:22–23; Luke 2:39b–40

Matt. 2:22–23	Luke 2:39b–40
<p>22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee,</p> <p>23 and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He shall be called a Nazarene.</p>	<p>39b they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.</p> <p>40 And the Child grew and became strong, becoming full with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.</p>

Notes

1. **Archelaus (Mt. 2:22).** Herod appointed him ethnarch (lit. “ruler of a people”) of Judea, Samaria and Idumea (a province just south of Judea). He ruled from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6. Joseph had reason to be afraid of Archelaus; he was nearly as brutal as his father Herod. Shortly before Herod’s death, two Jewish teachers moved some of their students to tear down a golden eagle which Herod had fixed upon the great gate of the temple. The teachers were put to death, then Herod died. The next Passover a rebellion broke out on account of the execution of the two teachers. Archelaus killed about 3,000 people, including some pilgrims at the Feast, in order to stop the rebellion. Rome eventually deposed Archelaus because of his continued cruelty. The rule of the region was then placed in the hands of “governors.”

2. **Galilee (Mt. 2:22).** Upon Herod’s death, Galilee and Perea were placed under the control of Herod Antipas, another son of Herod the Great, from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. Even in Isaiah 9:1 it was known as a land of foreigners (see Mt. 4:15, “Galilee of the Gentiles”). Josephus reports that there were 204 (240?) cities in Galilee in the 1st century A.D. (*Life*, 45). During the time of Jesus, Galilee was not only composed of small farming villages in pastoral settings, as it is often portrayed. Galilee was also one of the most active business centers of Palestine. There were two important administrative cities in Galilee: Sepphoris, about 3 miles northwest of Nazareth (called by Josephus “the greatest city in all Galilee”, *Life*, 45), and Tiberias, founded in A.D. 18 by Herod Antipas on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to replace Sepphoris as capital. The Jews that lived in Galilee would have been subject to Greek influence, both in culture and in language. It is very likely that many Jews of Galilee, including Jesus, were at least bilingual (Jewish-Palestinian-Aramaic and Greek), if not trilingual for the more educated (Hebrew). Because of Greek and other worldly influences, Galilee was not particularly well thought of by Judean Jews (see John 7:52; Lk. 13:1–2). Judean Jews could also detect the Galilean dialect or “accent” (Mk. 14:70; Mt. 26:73). Nonetheless, Jesus spent most of His childhood and public ministry in Galilee and the surrounding areas.

3. **Nazareth (Mt. 2:23).** It is estimated that Nazareth had a population of only 1,600 to 2,000 at the time of Jesus, a rather insignificant village, but not far from the major trade route, the Via Maris (“Way of the Sea”), connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia. It was also not far from the Roman administrative capital of Galilee, the city of Sepphoris (see note 2 above). Judean Jews regarded Nazareth with scorn (John 1:46).

4. **Nazarene (Mt. 2:23),** means simply, an inhabitant of Nazareth. Although linguistically unrelated, there is a similarity in sound between the word for “Nazarene” (Gk. nazoraios, Hebr. notsri) and the word for “branch” in Isa. 11:1 (Hebr. netser), but the latter word occurs in the O.T. only 4x (Isa. 11:1; 14:19; 60:21;

Dn. 11:7). It is nearly synonymous with a more common Hebrew word for branch (tsemach) which occurs in Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12 (and 7 other times). What do the prophets say in regard to the “branch”? There is likely no relationship between “Nazarene” and “Nazirite” of Num. 6.