

Christ in Prophecy

Galilee 2: The Nazareth of Jesus

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: The town of Nazareth in the Galilee of northern Israel is a bustling city of over 60,000 today. But in the time of Jesus it was an insignificant village of only 200 people who were viewed as "country bumpkins." People laughed when Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the promised Messiah. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" they asked. Stay tuned for the answer to that question.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope. I'm Dave Reagan, senior evangelist for Lamb & Lion Ministries, and this is my colleague, Dennis Pollock.

Dennis Pollock: Well last week we introduced you to the area around the Sea of Galilee. This week we are going to focus on Jesus' home town of Nazareth, which is located in the western area of what is called Lower Galilee.

Dr. Reagan: Let me show you a map of the Sea of Galilee. The headquarters of Jesus' ministry was located here at Capernaum on the north shore. Today, the only city located on the shores of the sea is Tiberias, here on the west coast. Although it existed in the time of Jesus, it was a Roman town, and there is no record of Jesus ever visiting it. The area to the north up here is known as the Upper Galilee. It borders Lebanon and Syria. The only place in that area that is significant in the life of Jesus is Caesarea-Philippi, located at the foot of Mount Hermon. This is where Peter made his famous confession of Jesus as the Son of God. Over here to the west is what is called Lower Galilee. And situated here, half way between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, is the town of Nazareth where we are today, it's the town where Jesus grew up. Modern day Nazareth is a busy town of over 60,000 people. It is the largest Arab city in Israel. Until recently, the Arab population was split evenly between Arabs who were Christians and Muslims, but in recent years, it has become two-thirds Muslim. The town is divided into two parts, referred to as upper and lower Nazareth. The lower city, located in a valley, is the site of ancient Nazareth. It is the Arab sector composed of single family dwellings. Upper Nazareth, which began to develop in the late 1950's is a Jewish area composed mainly of high rise condominiums. It has been settled primarily by Jews from Russia.

Dennis Pollock: This facility sits over the site of a natural spring that provided the water supply for ancient Nazareth. In fact, this spring is the only reason a town ever developed in this area.

Dr. Reagan: In 1955, extensive archaeological excavations were carried out here in Nazareth, and the archaeologists concluded that the town at the time of Jesus was composed of only a few dozen families, with a total population of no more than 200. In other words folks, it was nothing but a small, rural village of no consequence.

Dennis Pollock: There is archaeological evidence of human occupation from about 900 B.C. to around 700 B.C. when the area was conquered by the Assyrians. For almost 500 years thereafter the area was abandoned. People didn't start living here again until around 200 B.C. when it is very likely that for some unknown reason a whole clan of the tribe of Judah returned from Babylonian captivity and settled here.

Dr. Reagan: That would explain why Mary and Joseph were living here when the New Testament opens with a census being taken by the Roman government. The census required people to return to their tribal areas for counting. Thus, Mary and Joseph had to make the long trek south from here to Bethlehem, which was the home base of the tribe of Judah. This small park in central Nazareth was made possible thru a gift from Frank Sinatra.

Dennis Pollock: As we sit here in this park in downtown Nazareth, I must admit that it is hard to imagine just how small and insignificant this place was in the time of Jesus.

Dr. Reagan: Brother, you can say that again, Dennis. I tell you folks, to give you an idea of how small and unimportant this village was, I want you to keep in mind that it is not mentioned even once in the Old Testament. Nor is it mentioned by the First Century Jewish historian, Josephus, when he listed 45 towns in the Galilee. Also, it's not mentioned in the Talmud, which contains a listing of 63 towns in the Galilee.

Dennis Pollock: In short, Nazareth in the time of Jesus is what we in Texas would call a "Podunk village" made up of country bumpkins.

Dr. Reagan: And it is, therefore, no wonder that the first reference to Nazareth in the Bible is one that puts down the town as a place of no significance. The occasion was early in Jesus' ministry when He went to a fishing village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and called Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip to be disciples. Philip immediately ran to his friend, Nathaniel, who came from Cana of Galilee, located near here, and he proclaimed, "We have found the one prophesied by Moses!" To which Nathaniel derisively replied, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Dennis Pollock: The Gospel of John records what happened next: "Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him and said of Him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit!' Nathaniel said to Him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathaniel answered Him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!'" Thus, Nathaniel, not Peter, was the first disciple to publicly acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. But he did so after disparaging His own hometown of Nazareth. It was just hard to believe that anyone of significance could come from this tiny, rural village.

Dr. Reagan: Incidentally, folks, that undoubtedly is what motivated the phrasing of the sign that Pilate decided to place on Jesus' cross. The sign, which was nailed above Jesus' head read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." By mentioning Nazareth, Pilate was poking fun at the Jews, for how could a king come from a place like this?

Dennis Pollock: I think we are ready now to visit the five sites in this town that relate to the life of Jesus. The first is the Church of St. Gabriel located next door to Mary's well. It is the Greek Orthodox site for the Annunciation, the occasion when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would be the mother of the Messiah. After our visit there, we will go to the Basilica of the Annunciation, which marks the Roman Catholic site of the same event. Next to it we will

visit the Church of St. Joseph, which marks the traditional site of Joseph's carpentry shop. Not far from these we will stop at the traditional site of the synagogue that existed in this town at the time of Jesus.

Dr. Reagan: The final site that we will visit is a precipice on the edge of the town where Jesus was taken to be executed for blasphemy. But right now let's head to the Church of St. Gabriel. The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Gabriel is 300 years old, but it sits on a site that has been revered since the time of Jesus. Pilgrim accounts going back to the 600's mention visits to this site.

Dennis Pollock: As we pointed out earlier, the Greek Orthodox believe this church marks the site of the Angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary. That's because the church is adjacent to the well that supplied Nazareth with water. Inside the church you can see the spring that supplies the well.

Dr. Reagan: Mary would have come to this site daily to get water for her parent's household. And it could very well be that this is where she encountered the angel. However, that tradition is based on the non-canonical Gospel of James that dates from the 2nd century. The biblical account, contained in the Gospel of Luke, does not specify where the Annunciation occurred except that it took place here in Nazareth.

Every time I visit this site folks, I am reminded of something that happened when I brought a pilgrimage group here in the early 1980's. We had an Israeli guide who was rather cynical, and although this is a very authentic site, he felt compelled to warn the group that it might be fake. Later that evening, my roommate, a gifted poet named Claude Whitcomb, handed me a poem he had written in response to the guide's warning. It read as follows: "Today I journeyed to Mary's well inside the city of Nazareth. And I thought, 'It's a fake!' and the Lord replied, 'So are you! For you have walled me in from this world and painted pictures on those walls that no one knows. I say to you, destroy that fake and let my Spirit waters flow!'"

We are standing in the courtyard of the largest church in the Middle East, the Basilica of the Annunciation. It marks the Roman Catholic site of Gabriel's appearance to Mary. And, like the Greek Orthodox site we just visited, this one has a long and revered history.

Dennis Pollock: Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, ordered the construction of a small church here in 356 AD. In the 6th Century the Byzantines built a church on this site that existed until the time of the crusaders in the 12th Century. The crusaders built what one pilgrim described as a "Large, high church with three altars." And remnants of the crusader church are still visible today.

Dr. Reagan: The reason this site is revered is because it marks the traditional location of the home of Mary where many believe the Annunciation took place.

Dennis Pollock: Before construction started on this church in the mid-1950's, the site was thoroughly excavated, and many structures related to First Century Nazareth were discovered.

Dr. Reagan: The church was dedicated in 1969. During the design stage, before construction began, the Franciscans, who maintain the site, specified that the structure manifest what they called, "Three M's." First, it was to be modern, in the spirit of Vatican II. Second, it was to be multinational. Third, it was to bring expression to the mystery of the Annunciation, illustrating the meeting between the divine and the human.

As you can see, the church is clearly very modern in style, both inside and out. The multinational nature of the church is manifested in the art works that adorn the walls. These come from nations all over the world and show Mary and the Christ child in the nationality of the country represented. The most interesting thing about this church is the way in which the architect decided to illustrate the mystery of the meeting between divine and human. You see, the building actually contains two churches. The lower one, which is very simple in form, is for the use of pilgrim groups, whereas the upper, more elaborate church is for the local congregation. Between the two is a large octagonal opening called the "oculus," or literally, "the eye." The modest lower church represents the human dimension. It includes the ruins of a Byzantine church. And on its north side is a cave where the Annunciation was supposed to have taken place. This cave was probably a basement below the house of Mary's parents. In the ceiling of the lower church is the oculus, or eye, that unites it with the more elaborate church above. The upper church, which is elaborately decorated, expresses the divine dimension. Towering above the sanctuary is the light source: the magnificent dome which blossoms over the oculus like a lily. Behind the altar is a huge mosaic that shows Christ in glory with Peter and Mary beside him. The divine is above. The human is below. And between them is the oculus where the two encounter each other. We'd like to pause for a moment in this beautiful courtyard adjacent to the church to share some thoughts with you about the Annunciation.

Dennis Pollock: Here is what the angel Gabriel said to Mary when he appeared to her here in Nazareth: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end."

Dr. Reagan: Now, I want you to note that this passage contains eight prophecies. First, Mary will conceive a child. Second, she will bear a son. Third, His name will be Jesus. Fourth, He will be great. Five, He will be the Son of God. Number six, He will be given the throne of David. Number seven, He will reign over the house of Jacob. And number eight, His kingdom will last forever. Now, please notice that five of these prophecies have been literally fulfilled in history. Mary did conceive a child. She did give birth to a son. The son's name was Jesus. He became greater than any man who has ever lived. And He was the Son of God. So, what about the last three prophecies? Have they been fulfilled? Is Jesus on the throne of David? Is He reigning over the house of Jacob? Has He established a kingdom that will last forever? Some argue that these three prophecies have been fulfilled spiritually rather than literally. They assert that Jesus is on the throne of David now, reigning over His eternal kingdom, the Church. But let me ask you something. Why would the first five prophecies be fulfilled literally and the last three spiritually? I tell you folks, it doesn't make any sense to me. I believe the last three will be fulfilled literally, just like the first five, and I believe that will happen at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Dennis Pollock: Jesus is not on the throne of David now. He is sitting next to His Father on His Father's throne. The throne of David is in Jerusalem, and not Heaven. And Jesus is not reigning over the house of Jacob. The Jewish people are still in rebellion against Him. To spiritualize the house of Jacob into the Church is to render the words meaningless. And finally, the Church kingdom is not going to last forever. It is about to come to a very sudden end when the Rapture takes the Church out of this world.

Dr. Reagan: All the promises that Gabriel made to Mary were literal. Some were fulfilled at the First Coming. The rest will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to this earth to reign in glory and majesty from Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Dennis Pollock: Okay, folks, let's take a quick look now at the church next door.

Dr. Reagan: The Church of St. Joseph is located adjacent to the Church of the Annunciation. This church marks the traditional site of the carpentry shop of Joseph. At the entrance to the church is a very famous painting of Jesus in his father's carpentry shop. The church is traditional in design. And the interior is dark in comparison to the Basilica of the Annunciation. Beneath the church are archaeological remains that date back to the time of Jesus.

Dennis Pollock: The Bible doesn't tell us much about Joseph except that he was a carpenter and "a righteous man." In short, he was a hard-working, Godly man. The only other thing we know is that God spoke to him four times in dreams through angels, giving him instructions concerning his family. And each time he was completely obedient to the Lord's commands. He truly was a righteous man.

Dr. Reagan: Before we proceed to our next stop let's pause for a song about this glorious land which is referred to in the Bible as the Holy Land. The song is entitled, "Eretz Israel" and it is song by Tommy Williams.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Just around the corner from where we are standing here, at the church of St. Joseph, is the traditional site of the synagogue in the time of Jesus. To get to it, we must walk through the city's market place. Let's head that way.

Well, here we are at the entrance to the room located on the traditional site of the Nazareth synagogue in the time of Jesus. Now Dennis, how about explaining to us how the concept of the synagogue got started. After all, you know, there is no mention of it in the Old Testament.

Dennis Pollock: Well, that's a good point Dave. You know folks, synagogues came into existence after the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Up to that point, the Temple was the focus of spiritual life among the Jews. It was the place of ceremony, worship, and instruction. And after it was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed, they turned to former priests like Ezekiel and asked them to teach the Word of God. These gatherings for instruction in the Word became known as synagogues.

Dr. Reagan: And folks, when the Jews returned from captivity, they continued to meet in synagogues wherever ten males could be found. The temple was rebuilt, and it became once again the center of ceremony, ritual, and sacrifices. But the synagogues continued as the houses of instruction.

Dennis Pollock: And one of the many traditions that developed was the requirement that all men must cover their heads before entering. So, Dave, why don't we do that?

Dr. Reagan: Well, I tell you what, instead of wearing these baseball caps, let's wear a yarmulke.

Dennis Pollock: All right, let's do that.

Dr. Reagan: That'll be more tradition in nature. There we go. I'm excited about this; let's go inside.

Dennis Pollock: All right, let's check it out.

Dr. Reagan: The synagogue in the time of Jesus would have been no larger than this small room. Keep in mind that Nazareth at that time was a very tiny village.

Dennis Pollock: And keep in mind also that because the village was so small, it was like an extended family. Everybody knew everybody.

Dr. Reagan: Jesus officially launched his Galilean ministry in this synagogue. When He arrived that day, His hometown must have been in awe. He had already performed His first major miracle in Cana, just a short distance from here, when He turned the water into wine. He had also healed many people. His fame had spread quickly, and crowds were following Him wherever He went. He must have arrived that day as the conquering hero. After all, he was the hometown boy who was making good, and in the process, He was finally getting Nazareth on the map.

Dennis Pollock: It was the custom to honor visitors by asking them to read a portion of the Scriptures in the synagogue service. Jesus was given the honor that day.

Dr. Reagan: Before reading, Jesus would have covered His head with a prayer shawl like this one as a sign of His humility before God and as a symbol of His respect for God's word. And the passage that Jesus selected that day was Isaiah 61, verses one and two. I'd like to ask our Israeli guide and translator, Shai-Shalom Matter, to step up here from behind the cameras and read this portion of Scripture for us in Hebrew.

Shai-Shalom Matter: [Isaiah 61:1-2 in Hebrew]

Dr. Reagan: Thank you, Shai. Shai's name in Hebrew means "an unexpected blessing" and folks, that's just what we received through this reading of this great passage from Isaiah. And now I'd like to ask my colleague Dennis to come up here for a moment and read the same passage in English. Ok?

Dennis Pollock: Ok. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Dr. Reagan: This passage provides a beautiful summary of the mission of the Messiah: bring good news to the poor, announce release for captives, give sight to the blind, and liberate the oppressed.

Dennis Pollock: Yes, Dave, and the verse summarizes all that you just said because it says that the purpose of the Messiah is to "proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." That's a clear reference to the Year of Jubilee which occurred in ancient Israel every 50 years. Slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and all property was returned to its original owners. The Jubilee was a symbol of salvation. And this verse proclaims that the salvation promised by the Jubilee will come with the Messiah.

Dr. Reagan: Well, folks, you would think that after reading those verses from Isaiah, Jesus would have received a standing ovation. But instead, His hometown, His extended family that knew Him so well, attempted to kill him!

Dennis Pollock: Yes, Dave, and the reason they became so incensed is because of what He said when He finished reading the Isaiah passage. Here's how Luke describes it: "And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

Dr. Reagan: In other words, He proclaimed himself to be the Messiah.

Dennis Pollock: That's right, and they considered that to be blasphemy. So they seized Him, dragged Him to the edge of a precipice, and attempted to cast Him over the edge to His death.

Dr. Reagan: In short, the conquering hero was ridden out of town on a rail. Let's go take a look at that precipice. This is the traditional precipice on the edge of Nazareth where the enraged mob dragged Jesus to kill him. As you can see, anyone thrown off that precipice would definitely be killed instantly. Let's see what it looks like from the top. Okay, we are now on top of the precipice. This vantage point provides a great panoramic view of the Valley of Armageddon where the last great battle will be fought between Jesus and the army of the Antichrist. Looking straight down is a rather breathtaking experience. As you can see, this is a very dangerous cliff. It is unlikely that anyone could survive a fall from here.

Dennis Pollock: But Jesus survived because the mob never got an opportunity to push Him over the edge. Luke says in his gospel that Jesus suddenly "passed through their midst and went on His way." It's as if He suddenly became invisible.

Dr. Reagan: The story of Jesus and His hometown of Nazareth is a very sad one. After launching His public ministry with His baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus returned to this village to bless its people, but they rejected Him. And because of that rejection, He decided to move His ministry headquarters to Capernaum. The rejection also prompted Him to say, "A prophet is not without honor except in His home town."

Dennis Pollock: And because of this unbelief the Bible tells us that Jesus could do no mighty miracles here in Nazareth. Now folks, think about that! The unbelief of the people here limited the miracle working power of Jesus!

Dr. Reagan: What about you? Are you limiting the power of God in your life by your unbelief?

Dennis Pollock: This is one of the great paradoxes of the Bible. The Bible teaches that God is all-powerful; and yet, it teaches that you and I, as weak and puny as we are, can limit God's power in our lives by our lack of faith.

Dr. Reagan: Folks, God is a gentleman. He does not force Himself on you. If you want to try to handle your problems on your own, He will let you. And He wants to help you, if only you will reach out to Him in faith.

Dennis Pollock: And this is how Peter expresses it: he says, "Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time. Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

Dr. Reagan: Well, that's our program for this week. We hope it has been a blessing to you, and we hope you will be back with us next week when we will take a look at the miracles of Jesus that

He performed here in the Galilee. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries, saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our Redemption is drawing near!"

End of Program