

### The Life & Crimes of Archelaus; His Banishment to France; Joseph Hesitates to Return to Bethlehem & His Fourth Dream: Go to Galilee, Matt 2:22; the Philology of "Nazareth": Jesus Is the Branch, Isa 11:1; Matt 2:23

Augustus promoted Archelaus to ethnarch and promised to make him king if he earned the title.

Archelaus, like his father, had a violent temper most likely agitated by any challenge to his position of power. His anger was explosive whenever he perceived a threat to his person or office. During his ten-year reign he killed tens of thousands of people.

He assumed the prerogatives of a monarch without the authority to do so which resulted in civil disobedience by the people which he sought to quell with cruel retaliations.

For example, on the Passover following Herod's death, which we have established was on April 8, 1 B.C., there were certain Jews who accumulated at the temple who fomented rebellion in response to Herod's execution of Matthias, the high priest, prior to Herod's death. There were other grievances that these men voiced to Archelaus who responded that he had no authority to address their concerns until Augustus confirmed him as successor of His father. Archelaus then dispatched soldiers to the temple to insure order but the troops were attacked by the Jews bent on rebellion. The end result was that over 3,000 Jews were killed by Archelaus's soldiers.

This was the beginning of a ten-year period of bloodshed by the regime which ended when Augustus got fed up with Archelaus's cruelties and banished him to Vienna in Gaul. Josephus reports on the events that preceded Caesar's decision:

**In the tenth year of Archelaus's government, both his brethren, and the principle men of Judea and Samaria, not being able to bear his barbarous and tyrannical usage of them, accused him before Caesar, and that especially because they knew he had broken the commands of Caesar, which obligated him to behave himself with moderation among them.**

**Whereupon Caesar, when he heard it, was very angry, and called for Archelaus's steward, who took care of his affairs at Rome, and whose name was Archelaus also; and thinking it beneath him to write to Archelaus, he bid him sail away as soon as possible, and bring him to us: so the man made haste in his voyage, and when he came into Judea, he found Archelaus feasting with his friends; so he told him what Caesar had sent him about, and hastened him away. And when he was come to Rome, Caesar, upon hearing what certain accusers of his had to say, and what reply he could make, both banished him, and appointed Vienna, a city of Gaul, to be the place of his habitation, and took his money away from him.<sup>1</sup>**

This Vienna is not the present capital of Austria but rather a small village on the Rhône River that in 1 B.C. was considered a metonymy for banishment. It was in an area populated by the Allobroges \a-lä'-bra-jēz\, a people of Gaul inhabiting the region now known as Savoy and Dauphiné \dō-fē-nā\. Sort of like present-day Detroit, but smaller.

Once back in Palestine and traveling along the Coastal Route, Joseph apparently got wind of Archelaus's initial cruelties to the Jews and hesitated to go to Bethlehem.

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<sup>1</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, nd), 528 (bk.17, chap. 13, par.2).

It was God's desire that Joseph avoid Judea altogether and informed him in a dream to continue on the Coastal Route into Galilee and ultimately back to Nazareth.

The divine response to Joseph is indicated by the aorist passive participle of the verb **χρηματίζω** (*chrēmatizō*). It is actually a business term but came to refer to an answer to a question and could take the form of a response, a petition, advice, or a warning.

Here Joseph is warned through the agency of a dream to avoid Judea and proceed to Galilee. He continued on the Coastal Route to Caesarea where he turned eastward through the Valley of Jezreel and then north up to Nazareth.

**Matthew 2:22** - But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he hesitated to go there. Then after being warned in a dream, probably by Gabriel, he continued on the Coastal Route for the regions of Galilee, (CTL)

**v. 23** - and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, "He shall be called a **Nazarene** [ **Ναζωραῖος, Nazōraios** ]." (NASB)

The quote from "the prophets" refers to those by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, each of whom refer to the Messiah as a Branch. The nation Israel is involved in this metaphor as can be seen in Isaiah:

**Isaiah 11:1** - Then a **shoot** [ חֹטֶר *choter*: root shoot: 1st Advent ] will spring from the **stem** [ גֵּזַע *geza'*: trunk of a tree: Israel in apostasy ] of **Jesse** [ father of David ], and a **branch** [ נֶצֶר *neser*: a branch,<sup>2</sup> one of the titles of Messiah ] from his roots will bear fruit [ 2d Advent ].

It is contended by some theologians that the root word for Nazareth is *neser*, the implication being that Nazareth is prophetic of the Branch or Messiah, i.e., Jesus of Nazareth being interpreted as Jesus of the Branch.

Another approach to this question has to do with the way Matthew introduces the quote.

Only here does Matthew use the plural "prophets": and only here does he omit the Greek equivalent of "saying" and replace it with the conjunction *hoti*, which ... should be rendered "that," making the quotation indirect: "in order to fulfill what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene." This suggests that Matthew had no specific Old Testament quotation in mind; indeed, these words are found nowhere in the Old Testament.

The interpretation of this verse has such a long history that it is not possible to list all the major options. We may exclude those that see some word-play connection with an Old Testament Hebrew word but have no obvious connection with Nazareth.

<sup>2</sup> "A branch is the symbol of kings descended from royal ancestors" (Unger, "Branch," in *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 154); "נֶצֶר, *neser*" (of the same root, according to many commentators, as Nazareth), lit. "a little shoot springing from the root" (E. W. G. Masterman, "Branch," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956], 1:513).

This eliminates the popular interpretation that makes Jesus a Nazirite.<sup>3</sup> Also to be eliminated are interpretations that try to find in Matthew's term a reference to some kind of pre-Christian sect. But the evidence for this is feeble.

Matthew certainly uses *Nazōraios* as an adjectival form of *apo Nazaret* ("from Nazareth" or "Nazarene"), even though the more acceptable adjective is *Nazarēnos*. Possibly *Nazōraios* derives from a Galilean Aramaic form. Nazareth was a despised place (John 7:42; 52), even to other Galileans (cf. John 1:46). Here Jesus grew up, not as "Jesus the Bethlehemite," with its Davidic overtones, but as "Jesus the Nazarene," with all the opprobrium of the sneer. When Christians were referred to in Acts as the Nazarene sect (24:5), the expression was meant to hurt. First-century Christian readers of Matthew, who had tasted their share of scorn, would have quickly caught Matthew's point. He is not saying that a particular Old Testament prophet foretold that the Messiah would live in Nazareth; he is saying that the Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be despised (cf. Pss 22:6–8, 13; 69:8, 20–21; Isa 11:1; 49:7; 53:2–3, 8; Dan 9:26). The theme is repeatedly picked up by Matthew (e.g., 8:20; 11:16–19; 15:7–8). In other words Matthew gives us the substances of several Old Testament passages, not a direct quotation (so also Ezra 9:10–12).

It is possible that at the same time there is a discreet allusion to the *neser* ("branch") of Isaiah 11:1, which received a messianic interpretation in the Targums, rabbinic literature, and Dead Sea Scrolls; for here too it is affirmed that David's son would emerge from humble obscurity and low state. Jesus is King Messiah, Son of God, Son of David; but he was a branch from a royal line hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn. Jesus the Messiah did not introduce his kingdom with outward show or present himself with the pomp of an early monarch. In accord with prophecy he came as the despised Servant of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

The contention that Matthew's reference to Jesus as a *Nazōraios* refers to the Messianic concept of His being the Branch from the line of Jesse is corroborated by this excerpt by Larry Walker:

This word is found 4 times (Isa 11:1; 14:19; 60:21; Dan 11:7) and is probably related to the same root that gives us the place name Nazareth, although the city is not mentioned in the Old Testament. This word may be in the background of Matt 2:23, which notes, "What was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'" (p. 148)

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<sup>3</sup> "The root meaning of the word in Hebrew as well as the various Greek translations indicates the Nazirite as "a consecrated one" or "a devotee." In the circumstances of an ordinary vow, men consecrated some material possession, but the Nazirite consecrated himself, and took a vow of separation and self-imposed discipline for the purpose of some special service, and the fact of the vow was indicated by special signs of abstinence. "The conditions of Naziritism entailed: (1) the strictest abstinence from wine and from every product of the vine; (2) the keeping of the hair unshorn and the beard untouched by a razor; (3) the prohibition to touch a dead body; and (4) prohibition of unclean food (Judges 13:5–7; Numbers 6)" [W. M. Christie, "Nazirite," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 3:2124–25].

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1984), 8:97.

In Isa 11:1, *neser* is used in the famous promise: “A shoot (*choter*) will come up from the stump (*geza*) of Jesse; from his roots (*sores*) a Branch (*neser*) will bear fruit.” The term was understood as Messiah by the ancient *Targum*.<sup>5</sup>  
<sup>6</sup> (p. 149)

The important point to note is that Jesus grew up in Nazareth and its environs. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, and the rightful heir to the throne of Israel which He will claim at the Second Advent.

The root word for Nazareth is *neser*, the Branch; the geographic location of the Lord’s boyhood home becomes a paronomasia identifying Him as the Messiah, a fact that seemed to escape almost everyone in Palestine and for many others down to this very day.

**Matthew 2:23** - Joseph came and lived in the city of Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Branch.” (CTL)

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<sup>5</sup> “Targum \tär'-gum\): An ancient Aramaic paraphrase or interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, of a type made from about the 1st century AD when Hebrew was ceasing to be a spoken language” (*The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “Targum”).

<sup>6</sup> Larry Walker, “נֶסֶר,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, gen. ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:148–49).