

What is Nazarene Judaism?

By

James Scott Trimm

*Thus says YHWH, "Stand by the ways
and see and ask for the ancient paths,
Where the good way is, and walk in it:
And you shall find rest for your souls...."
(Jer. 6:16)*

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Who were the Nazarenes?

The first believers in Yeshua were a Jewish sect known as "Nazarenes" or in Hebrew "Netzarim" (Acts 11:19; 24:5). The "church father" Jerome (4th Cent.) described these Nazarenes as those "...who accept Messiah in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old Law." (Jerome; On. Is. 8:14). Elsewhere he writes:

Today there still exists among the Jews in all the synagogues of the East a heresy which is called that of the Minæans, and which is still condemned by the Pharisees; [its followers] are ordinarily called 'Nazarenes'; they believe that Messiah, the son of God, was born of the Virgin Miriam, and they hold him to be the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate and ascended to heaven, and in whom we also believe."
(Jerome; Letter 75 Jerome to Augustine)

The fourth century "church father" Epiphanius gives a more detailed description:

But these sectarians... did not call themselves Christians--but "Nazarenes," ... However they are simply complete Jews. They use not only the New Testament but the Old Testament as well, as the Jews do... They have no different ideas, but confess everything exactly as the Law proclaims it and in the Jewish fashion-- except for their belief in Messiah, if you please! For they acknowledge both the resurrection of the dead and the divine creation of all things, and declare that G-d is one, and that his son is Yeshua the Messiah. They are trained to a nicety in Hebrew. For among them the entire Law, the Prophets, and the... Writings... are read in Hebrew, as they surely are by the Jews. They are different from the Jews, and different from Christians, only in the following. They disagree with Jews because they have come to faith in Messiah; but since they are

still fettered by the Law--circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest-- they are not in accord with Christians.... they are nothing but Jews.... They have the Goodnews according to Matthew in its entirety in Hebrew. For it is clear that they still preserve this, in the Hebrew alphabet, as it was originally written. (Epiphanius; Panarion 29)

Nazarene Judaism maintains a belief in Yeshua as the Messiah. We do not leave the Jewish identity, heritage and culture to "convert" to a new or foreign religion. To some the concept of Jews believing in Yeshua and practicing Judaism to a contradiction in terms. The common wisdom is that on the one side you have Jews and Judaism, and on the other you have Gentiles and Christianity. However in the first century there were literally hundreds of thousands of Jewish followers of Yeshua (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31; 21:20) they were zealous for the Torah (Acts 15:19-21; 21:17-27) and met in synagogues (James 1:1, 2:2). The big question then was, had Yeshua come for the Gentiles as well (Acts 10; Acts 15). The greatest paradox in history eventually occurred, for today people question how one can follow Yeshua and remain Jewish.

Today we are seeking to put Yeshua back into the context of first century Judaism. Nazarene Judaism is a spiritual renaissance, a revival, a return to the pure faith of first century Nazarenes. A return to the Tanak and to the root of the olive tree (Rom. 11).

As the prophet Jeremiah tells us:

Thus says YHWH, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it: And you shall find rest for your souls...."
(Jer. 6:16)

Nazarenes refrain from calling themselves Christians. The first use of the term Christian was in Antioch, among the first Gentile followers of Yeshua (Acts 11:26) to describe the Gentile followers of Yeshua. Nazarenes are Yahwists and do not feel compelled to completely censor the use of the Name (Jer. 23:27). They were in some cases martyred for publicly reciting a drash of Ps.110:1-2 in which the Name was used while connecting Yeshua to the right hand of YHWH.

Nazarenes recognize the seventh day-- Friday evening to Saturday evening-- as being the Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; 32:12-17). We still observe the rite of circumcision for Israelites. We observe the Holy Days described in Lev. 23 which are to be "celebrated as a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places... forever" (Lev. 23:14; 21; 31; 41).

Yochanan and the Essenes

A careful reading of the Gospels will show that John the Baptist had his own "disciples" (Jn. 1:35) who continued on as such, apart from the Yeshua movement even after John and Yeshua had died (Acts 19:1-3). The flavor of John chapter one also indicates that John did not live alone in the wilderness, but lived with a community of followers near Bethabara (Jn. 1:28) a town just eight miles from Qumran.

Now one of the most important similarities between John the Baptist and his disciples, and the Qumran community is quite obviously that of geography. As mentioned, John and his disciples resided "in the wilderness" near a town just eight miles from Qumran. In fact the caves in which the scrolls were found are just five miles from the location along the Jordan at which John was baptizing. Both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament use the phrase "in the wilderness" (drawn from Is. 40:3) almost as a proper noun, to describe this area. One NT passage in particular seemed a mystery until the discovery of the Scrolls. Luke 1:80 states:

...the child [John the Baptist] grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

What would a child be doing "in the wilderness?" Could John have been raised at the Qumran community? An apocryphal tradition once circulated in the Church of the East may offer some insight. The Protevangelion of James, once read in some eastern churches, records a tradition that at the time of the slaughter of the innocents,

Elizabeth took her son and went up unto the mountains, and looked around for a place to hide him; and there was

no secret place to be found. Then she groaned within herself,
and said, O mountain of YHWH,
receive the mother with the child.
For Elizabeth could not climb up. And instantly the mountain
was divided and received them. And there appeared to them
an angel (or messenger) of YHWH, to preserve them."
(Protevangelion 16:3-8)

Could this tradition be preserving an ancient tradition that John and his mother were taken in through an opening in the mountains (a cave) and a "messenger of YHWH" at Qumran took them in. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that Hugh Schonfield has shown that there are a number of parallelisms between DuTillet Hebrew Matthew and the Protevangelion, "which cannot be accidental."¹ Moreover Joesphus tells us that the Essenes commonly raised other peoples children (Josephus; Wars 2:8:3). Thus it would seem that John the Baptist was raised up in the Qumran community.

As a Levite, and descendant of Zadock, John would have held a prominent place in the Qumran community, which favored the priesthood heirs. However, John's normal life at Qumran was interrupted when "the word of Eloah came to Yochanan... in the wilderness" (Lk. 3:2). In a rigid community where everyone had a rank and no one spoke out of turn, John's message may not have been welcome. This would explain why John and his disciples relocated near nearby Bethabara.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that John ate locusts (Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6). Now The Dead Sea Scrolls tell us that the Qumran community also made locusts as part of their diet. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls even tell us how they were to be cooked (Dam. Doc. xii, 11-15).

Both the Qumran community, and John quoted Is. 40:3 as being a prophecy foretelling of their work (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; Jn 1:23; Dam. Doc. viii, 12-14; ix, 20). This verse appears in most New Testaments as:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

¹ An Old Hebrew Text of Matthew's Gospel by Hugh Schonfield; 1927; p. 25-30,40

"Prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

However, the cantor markings in the Masoretic Text give us the understanding:

The voice of one crying
"In the wilderness prepare the way of YHWH;
make straight in the desert a highway for our Elohim."

As a result of their use of this verse, both John and the Qumran community referred to themselves as being "in the wilderness" and both the Qumran community and the early believers in Yeshua called their movement "the way". (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; Jn 1:23; Dam. Doc. viii, 12-14; ix, 20).

As a result of their use of this verse, both John and the Qumran community referred to themselves as being "in the wilderness" and both the Qumran community and the early believers in Yeshua called their movement "the Way".

Another strong parallel between John and the Qumran community is that of the importance given to the practice of water immersion/baptism (Heb: T'vilah). The Torah requires "washing" for "uncleanness" (Lev. 16-18) and "uncleanness" can result from sin (Lev. 18:1ff for example.) King David spoke of this practice in the Psalms (Ps. 51:2, 7). In the Qumran community this practice was given great importance (Man. Disc. 3, 4f; v, 13; Dam. Doc. 10, 10-13) and it was certainly regarded as of high priority to John (Mt. 3:6, 11; Mk. 1:4-5; Lk. 3:2-3, 7; Acts 19:3-4). Both believed that water baptism was only symbolic of a greater cleansing of wickedness performed by the Ruach HaKodesh (Man. Disc. 4, 12-13).

One final similarity between John and the Qumran community was that both stressed that the day of fiery judgment was eminently approaching. Now having discussed the similarities between John the Baptist and the Qumran community, let us note the differences. Essenes always wore white (Josephus; Wars 2:8:3) yet John wore camel's hair (Mt. 3:4). Secondly, the Qumran community only ate food provided by their community yet John foraged for himself (Mt. 3:4).

Finally and most importantly the Qumran community was not even a little bit evangelical. The Manual of Discipline specifically commands its adherents to "bear unremitting hatred towards all men of ill repute... to leave it to them to pursue wealth and mercenary gain... truckling to a depot." (Man. Disc. ix 21-26). But John called these men of ill repute to "Repent, for the Kingdom of Elohim is offered." (Mt. 3:2). This new teaching must have been the "word of Eloah" which John "received in the wilderness" (Lk. 3:2) since it is later echoed by Yeshua (Mt. 4:17) and Yeshua's disciples (Mt. 10:7).

Yeshua, his Talmidim and the Essenes

Yeshua came to be immersed by John in the wilderness at about the age of 30 and was proclaimed by John to be the "lamb" of Isaiah 53:7 (Jn. 1:29). Certain of John's students then became students of Yeshua (Jn. 1:35-51). Yeshua then began to proclaim, as John had proclaimed: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is offered." (Mt. 3:17). Later He sent his twelve students out with the same proclamation (Mt. 10).

Despite the fact that Yeshua's teachings largely agreed with that of the Pharisaic School of Hillel, there were occasions where Yeshua's teachings agreed with the School of Shammai against the School of Hillel. An important example of this is the issue of divorce where Yeshua agreed with Shammai against Hillel (Mt. 5:31-32 & m.Gittin 9:10). There were also occasions when Yeshua's teachings agreed with that of the Essenes against that of the Pharisees. One example is on the issue of oaths (compare Mt. 5:33-37 & Damascus Document-Geniza A; Col. 15; Lines 1-3).

While Yochanan was essentially an Essene, Yeshua did not appear to live the Essene lifestyle, as we read in Mt. 11:18-19:

Yochanan came neither eating nor drinking...
The Son of man came eating and drinking...

Nonetheless there are many important similarities between the teachings of Yeshua and those of the Essenes/Qumran community. Yeshua went out into the wilderness to be tempted (Mt. 4:1f). Yeshua's twelve talmidim (students) remind us of the council of

twelve at Qumran (Manual of Discipline 1QS 8:1). Yeshua's twelve talmidim seemed to be headed by three (Kefa (Peter), James (Ya'akov) and Yochanan (John) and the twelve laymen of Qumran were headed by three priests (1QS 8:1).

In Matthew 10:9-11 Yeshua instructs his Talmidim as follows:

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor lesser coin in your belts.
Pack not for the journey, either two coats, or sandals,
or a staff, for the laborer is worthy of his food.

And into whatever city or town you will enter, enquire who in it is honorable, and there abide until you go out from there. - Some light on this text may be acquired by examining a statement by Josephus concerning the first century Essene sect of Judaism:

...and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own; and they go into such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them. For which reason they carry nothing with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves. Accordingly there is, in every city where they live, one appointed particularly to take care of strangers, and provide garments and other necessaries for them.
(Josephus; Wars 2:8:4)

Yeshua's talmidim had for the most part, come from an Essene background. It would appear that they were therefore able to travel within Essene circles from town to town without having to carry additional supplies.

Also note that Yeshua and his Talmidim traveled armed (Lk. 22:38) Were Yeshua and his Talmidim circulating to some extent within the Essene community network?

Also in Luke 22:24 (see also 9:46):

And there was also strife among them
about who among them was greatest -

What? What kind of prideful, arrogant, self-righteous men had Yeshua chosen as his twelve emissaries? Are they really bickering over which of them is better than the other? The Dead Sea Scrolls offer some insight on what otherwise looks like a childish squabble that should be totally uncharacteristic of the kind of men Yeshua would have chosen as his twelve talmidim and emissaries (see comments to Mt. 10:2). In the *Manual of Discipline* we read:

This is the rule for the session of the general membership, each man being *in his proper place*. The priest shall sit in the first row, the elders in the second, the rest of the people, each in his proper place.... So that each man may state his opinion to the society of the Yahad. None should interrupt the words of his comrade, speaking before his brother finishes what he has to say. Neither should anyone speak before another *of higher rank*.
(*Manual of Discipline* 1QS 6, 8-11)

The Essenes of Qumran were informed of their rank once a year at an annual review as we read elsewhere in the same document:

They shall do as follows annually,...
the priests shall pass in review first,
ranked according to their spiritual excellence,
one after another.
Then the Levites shall follow, and third all the people *by rank*,
one after another, in their thousands and hundreds
and fifties and tens.
*Thus shall each Israelite know his proper
standing in the Yahad of God...*
(*Manual of Discipline* 1QS 2, 19-22)

And regarding the Great Messianic Banquet (see comments to Mt. 26:17-30):

The procedure for the [mee]ting of the men of reputation [when they are called] to *the banquet held by the society of the Yahad, when [God] has fa[th]ered (?) the Messiah* (or, when the Messiah has been revealed) *among them*:

[the Priest,] as head of the entire congregation of Israel, shall enter first, trailed by all [his] brot[hers, the Sons of] Aaron, those priests [appointed] to the banquet of the men of reputation. ***They are to sit before him] by rank.*** Then the [Mess]iah of Israel may en[ter], and the heads of the th[ousands of Israel] ***are to sit before him by rank.*** ... all the heads of the congregation's cl[ans], together with [their] wis[e and knowledgeable men]. ***Shall sit before them by rank.***

[When] they gather [at the] communal [tab]le, [having set out bread and w]ine so the communal table is set [for eating] and [the] wine (poured) for drinking, none [may r]each for the first portion of the bread or [the wine] before the Priest. For [he] shall [bl]ess the first portion of the bread and the wine, [reac]hing for the bread first. Afterw[ard] the Messiah of Israel [shall re]ach for the bread. [Finally,] ea[ch] member of the whole congregation of the Yahad [shall give a bl]essing, ***fin descending order of] rank.***

This procedure shall govern every me[al], provided at least ten me[n are ga]thered together.
(***1Qsa*** 2, 11-22)

Since Passover is the spiritual new year for Israel, it stands to reason that this annual review coincided with Passover. Yeshua's talmidim are sitting down for the Passover Sader, for the acting out of the Messianic Banquet (see comments to Mt. 26:17-30). To their minds they may have even been having the actual Messianic Feast (in light of the comments at Mt. 10:1 & 10:9-11) Yeshua's talmidim, being mostly of Essene background (see comments to Jn. 1:28-51) and sitting down for the Sader were anticipating that Yeshua would be assigning them each a rank so that they would each "know their proper standing". This was not out of arrogance but out of humility. They did not want to be speaking presumptuously ahead of their rank. The statements involved in this dispute were likely not arrogant presumptuous claims of "I am greater [in rank] than you" but rather "_____ is surely greater [in rank] than I".

In Matthew 21:23-27 The Pharisees challenge Yeshua as to where his *s'mikhah*, or authority comes from. Yeshua responds by asking them about where Yochanan's authority came from. Yeshua was not evading their question. Yeshua was raising this point because Yeshua's earthly authority (*s'mikhah*) came from Yochanan (Jn. 1:6-8, 15, 26-27, 29-37) and Yochanan's authority was from an Essenes rather than a Pharisaic source (see comments to Mt. 3:1). Thus Yeshua's *s'mikhah* traced back through Yochanan to the Essene line of *s'mikhah*. Yeshua was putting the Pharisees in the position of either acknowledging Essene Halachic authority or declaring it to be false. It would appear that the Pharisees were hesitant to question the *s'mikhah* of a sect that was known for being even stricter on observance than they were.

Many of Yeshua's halachic teachings parallel those of the Qumran community. Yeshua opposed the taking of oaths (Mt. 5:34) as did the Essenes (Josephus; Wars 2:8:6; Manual of Discipline 1QS 15:1-3). Yeshua's use of Gen. 1:27 to prove his halachic position on divorce is paralleled in the Dead Sea Scrolls:

...they are caught in two traps: fornication, by taking two wives in their lifetimes although the principle of creation is: "male and female He created them." ...they are caught in two traps: (Dam. Doc. Col. 4 line 20 through Col. 5 line 1)

Yeshua's halachah on the issue of "CORBAN" (an offering) being used as an excuse to violate Torah in Matthew 15:1-8 parallels a similar ruling at Qumran (Damascus Document 16:13).

Matthew records a very interesting event involving Yeshua and the Temple Tax:

...they that received tribute came to Kefa (Peter) , and said, Does not your master pay tribute? He said, Yes. And when he came into the house Yeshua prevented him, saying, what do you think, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers? Kefa (Peter) said to him, of strangers. Yeshua said to him, Then the children are free. Notwithstanding, lest we should

offend them, go you to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first comes up; and when you have opened his mouth, you shall find a piece of money: that take, and give to them for me and you.

(Mt. 17:24-27)

Here Kefa indicates the Yeshua pays the Temple tax, but Yeshua indicates that neither himself, nor Kefa nor apparently any of his followers owe the Temple tax. Yeshua does not seem to argue that he does not owe such a tax because he is the Messiah, for he extends the same privilege to Kefa and apparently all of his followers. Is Yeshua teaching against Torah? The answer is no. The Torah does command that a Temple tax must be paid by every male 20 and older (Ex. 30:11-16) but is ambiguous as to how often it must be paid. The Pharisaic Halachah (and apparently the Sadducean Halachah) had the tax being paid annually during the month of Adar (m.Shek. 1:1, 3) However the Qumran community had a different Halachah. They taught:

...concerning the Ransom: the money of the valuation which a man gives as ransom for his life shall be half a shekel in accordance with the shekel of the sanctuary. He shall give it only once in his life.

(4Q159 Frag 1; Col. 2; lines 6-7)

Now if Yeshua held to this Essene Halachah then He would not believe that he or his followers owed the tax, if they had already paid it at least once in their lifetime. This would explain why Kefa said that Yeshua pays the tax, while Yeshua claims that he and his followers don't owe the tax.

Like the Qumran community Yeshua speaks allegorically of "Living Water" coming from a well. . In John chapter four "living water" is symbolically drawn from Jacob's well, and brings salvation and eternal life. In the Manual of Discipline "living water" is the teachings of the community and is symbolically drawn from the well of Num. 21:18 which is identified by the Scroll to be symbolic of the Law. Thus we may conclude that in Jn. 4 Yeshua draws upon a Midrash (allegorical interpretation) which existed in his time (Jn. 4:10 & Dam. Doc. VI, 4-5; VII, 9-VIII, 21).

Yeshua's use of the Passover Seder as a sort of Messianic banquet certainly reminds us of the Messianic banquet of the Qumran Essenes (Josephus; Wars 2:8:5; Manual of Discipline 6:3-6 & 1QS Sa. 2, 17-20). The Qumran material even reads "the Messiah of Israel shall reach for the bread" (1QSa. 2:20-21) a phrase which certainly reminds us of the "Last Supper" account of the New Testament. There were however some very important points with which Yeshua greatly disagreed with the Essenes. The Essenes held the strictest rules of resting on the Sabbath than any of the Jews (Josephus; Wars 2:8:9) The Qumran community, with its stricter Halacha likely did not permit healing on the Shabbat at all. They did not allow carrying medicine on the Shabbat nor did they allow using a tool to save a life on the Shabbat (Dam. Document col. 10; lines 14-18). Now Y'shua's Halacha on the issue seems to have been less strict. There is conflict between Yeshua and Qumran on the plucking and rubbing of wheat in Mt. 12:1=Lk. 6:1=Mk. 2:23. The activity described is clearly permitted by the Torah in general, though not necessarily on the Shabbat (Duet. 23:26 (23:25 in non-Jewish editions)). This was forbidden by Qumran halacha which stated:

"A man may not go about in the field to do his desired activity on the Sabbath... A man may not eat anything on the Sabbath except food already prepared."
(Dam. Doc. Col. 10; lines 20-22).

Also Yeshua's teaching that it is permitted to rescue an animal from a pit. (Mt. 12:11 and Lk. 14:3-6) is in direct conflict with Qumran Halacha.(Dam. Doc. col. 10; lines 14-18).

Yeshua's followers had much in common with the Essenes. Both were called "The Way" (Acts 9:2 & 1QS 9,18) and "B'nai Or" (Sons of Light) (Lk. 16:8; Jn. 12:36; Eph. 5:8; 1Thes. 5:5; Man. Of Disc. 1,9; 2, 24; 1QM). Like the Essenes they shared all things in common (Acts 2:44-45; Josephus; Ant. 18:1:5; Wars 2:8:3) and lying about such assets was regarded as a great sin (Acts 5:1-10). Although further study is needed, there may be some good connections between the Qumran hierarchy and that of the Nazarenes. Both groups seemed to have made some use of the Book of Enoch (1Enoch 1:9 is quoted in Jude 1:14-15; seven fragmentary copies of Enoch were

found at Qumran). Like the Qumran community, the Nazarenes also seem to have used Hebrew manuscripts of Tanak books which agreed in places with the text behind the Septuagint. The Nazarene belief in two comings of the Messiah is similar to the Qumran belief in two Messiahs. The Qumran community believed in a priestly Messiah who was a Melchizadek figure whom they termed EL, ELOHIM and YHWH (11Q13), a figure they believed was prophesied of in such passages as Dan. 9:24-27; Is. 52 (and presumably 53) and Is. 61:1. In like manner the Nazarenes saw their Messiah Yeshua as a Melchizadek figure (Hebrews 7) who fulfilled the very same prophecies.

James the Just

Another important figure to the ancient Nazarenes was that of James the Just (Ya'akov HaTzadik). After the death of Yeshua, the Nazarenes recognized his brother James the Just as legal heir to the throne of David. For this reason the Nazarenes recognized James the Just as the Nasi of their Nazarene Sanhedrin (Acts 15).

It is likely that James the Just had students of his own, and that his movement merged into the Yeshua movement after Yeshua's death. This is evident because there is scarcely any mention of James the Just prior to Yeshua's death, however very early on he became leader of the Nazarene movement (Acts 12:17; 15:13-29; 21:18-26 & Gal. 1:19; Eusebius Eccl. Hist. 2:23). According to the Goodnews of Thomas, it was Yeshua himself who named James the Just as their new leader:

The students said to Yeshua: "We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our leader then?" Yeshua said to them: "No matter where you reside, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being."
(Goodnews of Thomas saying 12)

The Goodnews according to the Hebrews relates the following regarding James the Just:

Now the L-rd, when he had given the linen cloth to the servant of the priest, went to James and appeared to him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the L-rd's cup until he should see him rise again from among them that sleep), and again after a little, "Bring you," said the L-rd, a table and bread", and immediately it is added", "He took bread and blessed and broke and gave it to James the Just and said to him: "My brother, eat your bread, for the son of Man is risen from among them that sleep."
(Quoted by Jerome; Of Illustrious Men 2)

This is likely the event Paul refers to in 1Cor. 15:7 and it likely had a profound effect upon James.

The Nazarene historian Hegesippus (c. 180 C.E.) is quoted by Eusebius (4th century) as describing James the Just this way:

But James, the brother of the L-rd, who, as there were many of his name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our L-rd until now, received the government of the assembly with the emissaries. This emissary was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor fermented liquors, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed with oil, and never used a bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary. He never wore woolen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the Temple alone, and was often found upon his bent knees, and interceding for forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camel's. in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before G-d. And indeed, on account of his exceeding great piety, he was called the Just, and Oblias (or Tzadik and Ozleam) which signifies justice and protection of the people; as the prophets declare concerning him. (Hegesippus in the fifth book of his [lost] commentaries, quoted by Eusebius; Eccl. Hist. 2:23)

James the Just was very popular with the Jewish community in general. Under his influence the Nazarene movement grew until his death in 63 C.E, as Hegesippus goes on to say:

Some of the seven sects, therefore, of the people, mentioned by me above in my commentaries, asked him what was the door to Yeshua? and he answered: "That he was the Saviour." From which, some believed that Yeshua is the Messiah. But the aforementioned heresies did not believe either a resurrection, or that he was coming to give to every one according to his works; as many however, as did believe, did so on account of James. As there were many therefore of the rulers that believed, there arose a tumult among the Jews, Scribes and Pharisees, saying that there was danger, that the people would now expect Yeshua as the Messiah. They came therefore together, and said to James: "We entreat you, restrain the people, who are led astray after Yeshua, as if he were the Messiah. We entreat you to persuade all that are coming to the feast of the Passover rightly concerning Yeshua; for we all have confidence in you. For we and all the people hear the testimony that you are just, and you respect not persons. Persuade therefore the people not to be led astray by Yeshua, for we and all the people have great confidence in you. Stand therefore upon a wing of the Temple, that you may be conspicuous on high, and your words may be easily heard by all the people; for all the tribes have come together on account of the Passover, with some of the Gentiles also. The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees, therefore, placed James upon a wing of the Temple, and cried out to him: "Oh you just man, whom we ought all to believe, since the people are led astray after Yeshua that was crucified, declare to us what is the door to Yeshua that was crucified." And he answered with a loud voice, "Why do you ask me respecting Yeshua the Son of Man? He is now sitting in the heavens, on the right hand of Great Power, and is about to come on the clouds of heaven." (Ps. 110:1 & Dan. 7:13). And as many were confirmed, and glorified in this testimony of James, and said, Hosanna to the son of David, these same priests and Pharisees said to one another: "We have done badly in affording such testimony to Yeshua, but let us go up and cast him down, that they may dread to believe in him." And they cried out: "Oh, oh, the Just himself is deceived," and they fulfilled that which is written in Isaiah: Let us take away the just, because he is offensive to us; wherefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings. (Is. 3:10)

Going up therefore, they cast down the just man, saying to one another: "Let us stone James the Just." And they began to stone him, as he did not die immediately when cast down; but turning round, he knelt down saying, "I entreat you, O L-rd G-d and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Thus they were stoning him, when one of the priests of the sons of Recheb, a son of the Rechabites, spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out saying: "Cease, what are you doing? Justus is praying for you." And one of them, a fuller, beat out the brains of Justus with the club that he used to beat out clothes. Thus he suffered martyrdom, and they buried him on the spot where his tombstone is still remaining, by the Temple. He became a faithful witness, both to the Jews and the Greeks, that Yeshua is the Messiah. Immediately after this, Vespian invaded and took Judea.

(Hegesippus as quoted by Eusebius Eccl. Hist. 2:23)

Josephus also records the death of James the Just this way:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus the High Priest] assembled the sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Yeshua, who was called Messiah, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions;] and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done.

(Josephus; Antiquities 20:9:1)

According to Eusebius, his version of Josephus's works contained the following in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E.:

These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was brother of him that is called the Messiah, and whom the Jews had slain, notwithstanding his pre-eminant justice. (Josephus quoted by Eusebius; Eccl. Hist. 2:23)

Paul the Pharisee

Another important figure to the early Nazarenes was Paul. Paul was a ringleader of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). Paul was of Pharisaic background (Acts. 23:6) and had been a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) the grandson of Hillel. Paul was at first an enemy of the Nazarene movement, however after his vision on the road to Damascus, he became a ringleader of the movement.

Peter tells us that Paul's writings are "hard to understand" (2Pt. 3:15-16). Paul knew that his teachings were being twisted and that he was misunderstood as teaching against the Torah (Rom. 3:8; 6:1-2, 15). Paul went to great lengths to prove that this was not true (Acts 21:20-26).

70 C.E. The Coalition Divides

70 C.E. was a very important year to the Nazarenes. In this year the Romans laid seige to Jerusalem and after five months, invaded the city. This event had many profound effects on the Nazarenes.

When the city was brought under siege, the Nazarenes remembered the words of Yeshua:

And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains...

- Luke 21:20-21a

The Nazarenes heeded these words and fled to Pella, mostlikely dwelling in the caves of the wilderness outside of Pella. It is likely that the Pharisees and other Jews resented the Nazarene flight to Pella as an act of cowardice.

The flight to Pella itself also had a profound effect on the Nazarenes. A great deal of confusion resulted and the coalition fell appart. It was at Pella that the Ebionites first emerged as a seperate sect.

90 C.E. Cast out of the Synagogues

In 90 C.E. Samuel the Lesser was commissioned to add what came to be called the Birkat haMinim to the Eighteen Benedictions of the Amidah. The Talmud records the event this way:

Our Rabbis taught: Simeon ha-Pakuli arranged the eighteen benedictions in order before Rabban Gamaliel in Jabneh. Said Rabban Gamaliel to the Sages: "Can any one among you frame a benediction relating to the Minim?" Samuel the Lesser arose and composed it.
(b.Berakot 29a)

The Birkat haMinim as it appears today reads:

And for slanderers let there be no hope, and let all wickedness perish as in a moment; let all thine enemies be speedily cut off, and the dominion of arrogance do you uproot and crush, cast down and humble speedily in our days. Blessed are you, O L-rd, who breakest the enemies and humbles the arrogant.

However an old copy of the Birkat haMinim found at the Cairo Genizah reads:

For the renegades let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarenes and the Minim perish as in a moment and be blotted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed are you, O L-rd, who humbles the arrogant.

This benediction was in the form of a curse on the Nazarenes which would have the effect of casting them out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) since Nazarenes who attended would be expected to recite a curse upon themselves. As Epiphanius records in the fourth century:

Not only do Jewish people have a hatred of them; they even stand up at dawn, at midday, and toward evening, three times a day when they recite their prayers in the synagogues, and curse and anathemize them. Three times a day they say, "G-d curse

the Nazarenes." For they harbor an extra grudge against them, if you please, because despite their Jewishness, they proclaim that Yeshua is Messiah...
(Epiphanius Panarion 29)

98 C.E. The Ignatious Conspiracy

Many people have been misled into believing that Constantine was responsible for the corruption and Gentilization of Christianity. While Constantine certainly added to the apostasy of early Christianity, he was not the first. It was in fact Ignatius of Antioch who rebelled against the Jerusalem Council, usurped their authority, seceded from Judaism, declared the Torah to have been abolished, replaced the Seventh Day Sabbath with Sunday worship and founded a new, non-Jewish religion which he named "Christianity".

Paul said to the Ephesians on his last visit to them:

Watch, therefore, over your nefeshot
and over the flock which the Ruach HaKodesh
has appointed you overseers [bishops]
that you feed the assembly of Messiah,
which he purchased by his blood.

I know that after I am gone
fierce wolves will enter in among you
without mercy upon the flock.

And also from among you there will rise up men speaking
perverse things, so that they might turn away the talmidim
to follow after them.

(Acts 20:28-30)

Paul seems to indicate that after his death leaders would begin to rise up from the overseers [Bishops] in his stead that would draw people to follow themselves and draw them away from Torah. In fact Paul died in 66 C.E. and the first overseer (Bishop) of Antioch to take office after his death was Ignatius in 98 C.E.. Ignatius fulfilled Paul's words precisely. After taking the office of Bishop over Antioch Ignatius sent out a series of epistles to other assemblies. His letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallianns,

Romans, Philadelphians and Smyrnaeans as well as a personal letter to Polycarp overseer of Smyrnaea have survived to us.

The Ancient Nazarene Historian and commentator Hegesippus (c. 180 CE) writes of the time immediately following the death of Shim'on, who succeeded Ya'akov HaTzadik as Nasi of the Nazarene Sanhedrin and who died in 98 CE:

Up to that period (98 CE) the Assembly had remained like a virgin pure and uncorrupted: for, if there were any persons who were disposed to tamper with the wholesome rule of the proclaiming of salvation, they still lurked in some dark place of concealment or other. But, when the sacred band of Emissaries had in various ways closed their lives, and that generation of men to whom it had been vouchsafed to listen to the inspired Wisdom with their own ears had passed away, then did the confederacy of godless error take its rise through the treachery of false teachers, who, seeing that none of the emissaries any longer survived, at length attempted with bare and uplifted head to oppose the proclaiming of the truth by proclaiming "knowledge falsely so called."

(Hegesippus the Nazarene; c. 185 CE; quoted by Eusebius in Eccl. Hist. 3:32)

Hegisippus indicates the apostasy began the very same year that Ignatius became bishop of Antioch!

Up until the time of Ignatius, matters of dispute that arose at Antioch were ultimately referred to the Jerusalem Council (as in Acts 14:26-15:2). Ignatius usurped the authority of the Jerusalem council, declaring himself as the local bishop as the ultimate authority over the assembly of which he was bishop, and likewise declaring the same as true of all other bishops and their local assemblies. Ignatius writes:

...being subject to your bishop...
...run together according to the will of God.
Jesus... is sent by the will of the Father;
As the bishops... are by the will of Jesus Christ.
(Eph. 1:9, 11)

...your bishop...I think you happy who are so joined to him,
as the church is to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is to the
Father... Let us take heed therefore, that we not set ourselves
against the bishop, that we may be subject to God...
We ought to look upon the bishop, even as we would
upon the Lord himself.
(Eph. 2:1-4)

...obey your bishop...
(Mag. 1:7)

Your bishop presiding in the place of God...
...be you united to your bishop...
(Mag. 2:5, 7)

...he... that does anything without the bishop...
is not pure in his conscience...
(Tral. 2:5)

...Do nothing without the bishop.
(Phil. 2:14)

See that you all follow your bishop,
As Jesus Christ, the Father...
(Smy. 3:1)

By exalting the power of the office of bishop (overseer) and
demanding the absolute authority of the bishop over the assembly,
Ignatius was actually making a power grab by thus taking absolute
authority over the assembly at Antioch and encouraging other Gentile
overseers to follow suite.

Moreover Ignatius drew men away from Torah and declared the Torah
to have been abolished, not only at Antioch but at other Gentile
assemblies to which he wrote:

Be not deceived with strange doctrines;
nor with old fables which are unprofitable.
For if we still continue to live according to the Jewish Law,

we do confess ourselves not to have received grace...
(Mag. 3:1)

But if any one shall preach the Jewish law unto you,
hearken not unto him...
(Phil. 2:6)

It is also Ignatius who first replaces the Seventh Day Sabbath with Sunday worship, writing:

...no longer observing sabbaths, but keeping the Lord's day
in which also our life is sprung up by him, and through
his death...
(Magnesians 3:3)

Having seceded from the authority of Jerusalem, declared the Torah abolished and replacing the Sabbath with Sunday, Ignatius had created a new religion. Ignatius coins a new term, never before used, for this new religion which he calls "Christianity" and which he makes clear is new and distinct religion from Judaism. He writes:

let us learn to live according to the rules of Christianity,
for whosoever is called by any other name
besides this, he is not of God....

It is absurd to name Jesus Christ, and to Judaize.
For the Christian religion did not embrace the Jewish.
But the Jewish the Christian...
(Mag. 3:8, 11)

By the end of the first century Ignatius of Antioch had fulfilled Paul's warning. He seceded from Judaism and founded a new religion which he called "Christianity". A religion which rejected the Torah, and replaced the Seventh Day Sabbath with Sunday Worship.

132 C.E. The Bar Kokhba Revolt

In 132 a second Jewish revolt against Rome began. The Emperor Hadrian banned circumcision. In reaction the Jews, Nazarenes and

Pharisees alike, took up arms. During the revolt Akiva, a leading Pharisee Rabbi at the time, decaled the leading Jewish general known as Bar Kosiba to be the Messiah. Bar Kosiba was renamed Bar Kochba (son of the star) and was declared the Messiah based on Num. 24:17. The Nazarenes could not accept Bar Kokhba as the Messiah and so they left the army. From this time forward Nazarenes were labled "meshumed" (traitor). Though the Pharisees later admitted Bar Kokhba was not the Messiah, their resentment toward the Nazarenes for refusing to follow him continued.

After the Romans defeated the Jews around 132 C.E. Y'huda the last of recorded Nazarene Nasi was exiled with the rest of the Jews from Jerusalem. A Gentile Christian named Markus was made Bishop of Jerusalem in his stead.

The Council of Nicea

In 325 C.E. A Pagan Gentile named Constantine conquered Rome and made himself emperor. Constantine , although a Pagan himself, declared Christianity to be the Catholic (Latin: universal) religion, thus making Christianity the enforced state religion of the Roman empire. Constantine, who was an anti-Semite called the council of Nicea in 325 C.E. to standardize Christianity. Nazarenes were excluded from the meeting. Jewish practices were banned. For the first time Gentile Christianity officially labled the Nazarenes as apostates. From this time forward Nazarenes begin to be listed in the catalogs of apostate movements (the first of these to include the Nazarenes was Epiphanius's "Panarion" (around 370 C.E.).

The Assimilation

By the fourth century the Nazarenes had communities in Beorea near Colesyria, in the Decapolis near Pella, and at Bashanitis at the place called Kokhba. (Epiphanius; Pan. 29). However, the Nazarenes by this time were a small sect which Epiphanius described as "small," "like an insect." (ibid)

According to a tradition preserved by the Assyrian Christians known as Nestorians, these Nazarenes escaped the Roman empire into the Parthian Empire to its east. Here they either assimilated into the Nestorian Church of the East, finding fellowship with their fellow Semite Assyrians, or they were wiped out by the rise of Islam.

Today many of us are working to reconstruct the ancient sect of Nazarene Judaism. As the prophet Jeremiah tells us:

Thus says YHWH, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it: And you shall find rest for your souls...."
(Jer. 6:16)

If You'd Like to Know More

More books, DVDs and “at cost” booklets are available at:

<http://www.lulu.com/nazarene>

If you have questions on biblical topics and desire scriptural answers feel free to contact us at:

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