

NAZARETH

THE LOCATION

Nazareth is located on the mountains of Southern Galilee, just north of the Jezreel Valley, slightly northwest of Megiddo. While archeologists are certain that the modern city is the site of the ancient city, the “village” of Nazareth likely had no more than about 400 people at the time of Jesus.

BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The meaning of the name *Nazareth* is difficult to trace. Many trace it to the Hebrew *nazer*, meaning *branch*. This is doctrinally convenient but far from verifiable, and other options exist. Frankly, the city has very little Biblical significance until it is introduced as **a city of Galilee called Nazareth** (Lk. 1:26), the home of Mary and Joseph. Jesus taught at the synagogue in Nazareth, but was quickly expelled, having claimed to be the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies (Lk 4:16-29). The village was not held in high esteem during the Biblical period (Jn. 1:46).

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

Because very little (virtually nothing) from the first century village remains, the city of Nazareth is not a place most Christian tourists spend much time in. The **brow of the hill whereupon their city was built** (Lk. 4:29) provides wonderful views of Jezreel, looking toward the south, and is often the first-place Christian tourists walk in the steps of Jesus.

The modern city also contains the *Church of the Annunciation*, a Roman Catholic basilica that is beautiful in architecture, built over the remains of several previous churches of the Christian era, and is the largest Christian place of worship in the Middle East. Catholic groups often stop here to observe Mass, but non-Catholic groups rarely stop.

The *Nazareth Village* is a “hands on” experience of First Century life in Nazareth operated by the Nazareth Trust, which started a Christian missionary hospital to the Muslim population in 1861. Some Christian groups stop here and enjoy the experience. However, there are so many historic sites to see in Israel that this is not a priority with most groups.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

As mentioned, the village of Nazareth was very small in the time of Jesus. However, remains of First Century Jewish homes have been discovered by archaeologists. The city has minor significance through the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine eras, with growing significance in the Crusades and beyond.

MODERN SIGNIFICANCE OF NAZARETH

Today the city is the largest Arab city in Israel, with a population of almost 100,000. Almost no Jews live in the city. The Arabs are full citizens of Israel, with all rights and freedoms granted under the Israeli constitution. Arab populations have elected representatives in the Knesset, but do not serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (I.D.F).



TIBERIAS

THE LOCATION

Tiberias is located at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, and is 318 feet below sea level.

BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The city has only minor importance in the Scriptures, chiefly due to the fact that it was established in A.D. 17, and thus was a very young (yet prominent) city in the time of Jesus’ ministry. It was started by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, and named after Caesar Tiberius. Note that the city is spelled Tiberias and

the person is Tiberius. This spelling difference is related to Hebrew grammar and is not a mistake. The Roman Centurion of Luke 7:1-10 likely lived in Tiberias. The fourth Gospel calls the Sea of Galilee the Sea of Tiberius (Jn. 6:1, 23, 21:1), likely for the benefit of non-Jewish readers.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

Many Christian tour groups stay in one of Tiberias' many hotels. Most groups, however, do not spend a lot of time in the city itself. For those who do, a stroll along the Sea of Galilee is always enjoyable. In addition, the city has ancient hot springs which can be enjoyed. In addition, there are famous gravesites, including that of Rabbi Akiva and the prominent Jewish sage Maimonides.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Tiberias became the center for Jewish thought after the destruction of Jerusalem, and almost always had some degree of Jewish presence, if not a majority. Because of this, famous Jewish sages lived and taught in Tiberias, and many are buried in the city. The city had a prominent role in the *Mishna*, the first written version of the oral law, and thus is important in rabbinical Judaism. Tiberias has played a prominent governmental role in almost all eras of Jewish history since its founding.

MODERN SIGNIFICANCE OF TIBERIUS

The city has a population of nearly 50,000, almost entirely Jewish. The local population is observant (religious) Jews, and thus is almost entirely closed on the Sabbath. The modern city is built on a hillside and offers beautiful views of the sea.

MT. ARBEL

THE LOCATION

Mt. Arbel is slightly northwest of Tiberias and is notable for its tall cliffs dropping down to the Sea of Galilee. If looking at the mountain from the middle of the sea, Tiberias would be on the left and the "Valley of the Doves" on the right. This valley leads to Nazareth and is where Jesus would have arrived at the sea after being expelled from His hometown. At the bottom of Arbel is Migdal, home of Mary Magdalene.

BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Mt. Arbel is not mentioned in the Bible. Some traditions contend that Mt. Arbel is the place where Jesus spoke the words of His "Great Commission" to His apostles in Matthew 28:19-20.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

In addition to being a spectacular sight from the Sea of Galilee, Mt. Arbel has a relatively easy trail system from the opposite side of the mountain. The short hike is well worth the effort on a clear day. Looking north, the views of Galilee, the Golan heights, and Mt. Hermon are spectacular from the top. Looking south, the "Horns of Hittin" can be seen just a few miles from the mountain.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The caves on the side of Arbel often served as hiding places for Jews during times of war. During the First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66-70), the Roman army built significant structures at the top of the mountain to lower soldiers down the side of the cliff to battle these Jews. During this same war, a great sea battle took place on Galilee, turning this portion of the sea red with blood.

In the time of the Crusades, the "Battle of Hittin" was fought near Arbel. In this battle, the Crusaders lost the Holy Land to Saladin.