

Was Jesus Really from Nazareth?

Jesus' Hometown Discovered?

On December 21st, 2009, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced an archaeological discovery that may cause red faces for those who have doubted the New Testament's historical accuracy. For the first time in history, archaeologists cite evidence of the 1st century town of Nazareth, the reputed hometown of Jesus.

Moreover, this discovery has the backing of scientists; Archaeologist Stephen Pfann, president of the University of The Holy Land, states: "It's the only witness that we have from that area that shows us what the walls and floors were like inside Nazareth in the first century." [1]

Although Nazareth exists today as a thriving Arab city of 65,000 in northern Israel, some scholars have believed it didn't exist during Jesus' lifetime. For example, the Encyclopedia Biblica in 1899 stated, "It is very doubtful whether the beautiful mountain village of Nazareth was really the dwelling-place of Jesus." [2]

In 2006, American Atheist Press published a book by Rene Salm entitled, *The Myth of Nazareth*. The author summarized his argument before this recent discovery. He writes, "What must matter to all Christians, however, is the inescapable fact that the evangelists invented this basic element in the story of cosmic redemption. The proof is now at hand that 'Jesus of Nazareth,' a long-standing icon of Western civilization, is bogus." [3]

In the face of this new discovery, Salm still defends the conclusions in his book. However, 1st century clay shards discovered in the Nazareth location seem to undermine his theory that Jesus' hometown was mythical.

Archaeologists have also discovered other relics in recent times that confirm the existence of New Testament characters such as Pilate and Caiaphas (see "Was Jesus a real person?" at <http://y-jesus.com/wwrj/1-jesus-real-person>).

What's So Important About Nazareth?

So what's the big deal about Nazareth, you might ask? According to a recent article by Frank Zindler on *American Atheists'* website, the question of whether or not the town existed during the first century is a huge deal.

In reviewing *The Myth of Nazareth*, Zindler explains the reason why to his largely atheistic audience. Zindler makes his point clear, writing:

"If it could be shown conclusively that 'Nazareth' did not exist at the time that Jesus and his family are supposed to have lived there... You get my intended point." He further cites, "archaeological excavations of Jesus' home town make it absolutely certain—or at least as certain as any scientific argument can be—that the place now called Nazareth was not inhabited from around 730 BCE until sometime after 70 CE. This nasty fact is more than a mere inconvenience for those who seek historical facts in the Gospels." [4]

Salm also argues its importance by writing, "If the tradition invented his hometown, then who can place faith in other aspects of the Jesus story, such as his virgin birth, miracles, crucifixion, or resurrection? Were these also invented? What, in other words, is left in the gospels of which the average Christian can be sure? What is left of his or her faith?"

Salm concludes his article in *American Atheists'* article with these provocative words: Celebrate, freethinkers... Christianity as we know it may be finally coming to an end!" [5]

In other words, if Nazareth didn't exist in the 1st century, as the New Testament gospels state, then how do we

know whether anything in the gospels is historically accurate? (See “Are the gospels true?” at <http://y-jesus.com/wwrj/4-are-gospels-true/>)

But this coin has two sides to it. If indeed archaeologists have discovered 1st century Nazareth, what does that say about the reliability of the gospel accounts of Jesus? Christians see the discovery as an affirmation of their beliefs.

All of this points to an even bigger question: Who was the real Jesus of Nazareth? Certainly there are many opinions. Some say that he was simply a great moral teacher. Others believe he was a man who was made a legend by his followers. Historians tell us that he has changed the world more than any other person.

Christians believe that God actually visited us in the form of a man. A man unlike any other who has ever lived. But what did Jesus claim for himself, and what does the evidence tell us? To find out, see: “Is Jesus God?” at <http://y-jesus.com/wwrj/3-is-jesus-god/>.

Endnotes

1. Associated Press: First Jesus-era house discovered in Nazareth, December 22, 2009.
2. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-12-21-jesus-house-nazareth_N.htm]
3. T. Cheyne, *Encyclopedia Biblica*, “Nazareth”, 1899.
4. Rene Salm, American Atheist.org, “The Myth of Nazareth, Does it Really Matter?”, December 22, 2009,
5. [http://www.atheists.org/The_Myth_of_Nazareth,_Does_it_Really_Matter%3F]
6. [From the Probing Mind column, “Why the Truth About Nazareth is Important,” *American Atheist magazine* (Nov-Dec. 2006).]— Frank R. Zindler, Author, *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*, editor *American Atheist magazine*.
7. Salm, “The Myth of Nazareth, Does it Really Matter?”

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