

# The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi

## Session 2: Nazareth

Recommended Reading: Chapters 7-8 and 10

### Opening Discussion

- Please share something you learned about scripture, or yourself, over the past week.
- What images, feelings, or thoughts come to mind when you hear the word Nazareth?

### Watch Video

- What caught your attention most as you viewed the video?
- The Rabbi suggests that Jesus may have been more of a stone mason than carpenter. How does this change your image of Jesus' early life?
- A parallel is drawn between the miracles of Moses and Jesus involving water. What differences do you see between them in the Rabbi's analogy?

### Read Mark 6:1-3 as a group

- What can we discern about the early life of Jesus, in Nazareth, from this short passage?
- What significance do you think there is in the revelation that Jesus had siblings?
- Why do you think the names of his sisters were not mentioned?

### Read John 2:1-11 as a group

- What might it look like to experience the abundant life of the kingdom here and now?

### Closing Discussion

Nazareth today is a hustling and bustling city, no longer the quaint out of the way town it once was. It is likely, not finding a great deal of work to sustain a family, Joseph would have worked in the regional capital of Sepphoris, just 5 miles away, where Herod Antipas was rebuilding after the city had been devastated by fire. If Jesus worked with his father, he most likely traveled to this city as well. When reflecting on Jesus' early childhood, and the work he did before beginning his earthly ministry, what would you expect to find during a visit to the area where Jesus presumably grew up and began his ministry?

### Staying Connected

Day 1: Read Luke 4:1-13

- Jesus responds to the devil's temptations using scripture. How might you use his responses to reject your own temptations? Write down a verse or truth from Scripture that you want to take to heart, as well as the temptation you are rejecting.

Day 2: Reflection

- Has God led you into a desert experience to be tested? What helped you get through it?

Day 3: Read Matthew 16:18 and 21:42

- In their context, what do you think Jesus was intending to teach in each about Rock and Stone?

Day 4: Reflection

- What is the rock/stone that grounds you in life and in faith?

Day 5: Read John 2:11

- What event in your life might reveal God's glory through you?

Day 6: Prayer

- Spend some time in prayer today, reflecting on what you have learned from scripture and about yourself. Ask God to help you discern what role you may have in helping others to know what you have learned.

Day 7: A Day of rest.

## SEPPHORIS – THE FORGOTTEN CITY

Like our modern cities today, ancient cities needed artisans to build them and the almost forgotten city of Sepphoris was no different, with one critical exception—Joseph and his famous son Jesus probably helped Herod Antipas build it!

Jesus is traditionally known as a woodworker (the Greek word used for carpenter is tekton, a generic term for “a builder who worked with his hands”), but with wood scarce and stone so prevalent in Israel, He was most likely a stonemason. Nazareth was only a few miles away and Joseph would have been a natural hire for Antipas’ Sepphoris rebuild (following the death of Herod the Great the Jewish takeover was squashed by Rome, and the original city burned).

Josephus called Sepphoris “The Jewel of Galilee,” and although it is sometimes overlooked today for the more famous sites like Nazareth and Cana, in 4 B.C. Herod’s son selected it as the provincial capital for his government in Galilee. It sat near two major highways (Via Maris and Acre-Tiberias) and the rebuild would have been a busy hub that employed lots of people in Jesus’ day, sparking an economic boom for the entire Galilee area.

Sepphoris is “perched like a bird” on a 400 foot hill that overlooks the Bet Netofa Valley and helps to explain its other Hebrew name, Zippori (bird). From this panoramic view of Lower Galilee one can survey Nazareth and Cana as Antipas did, and even imagine Jesus walking to work with His father every day. Perhaps it even inspired Matthew 5:14 when He said, “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Excavations have revealed a cosmopolitan city of great affluence with a Roman theater built into the eastern side of the hill that held over 4,000 people. Today the magnificent ruins include such highlights as Herod’s palace, an upper city and a lower city, a fortified city wall for protection, multiple synagogues, bathhouses, churches, aqueducts, a massive reservoir, a marketplace, and residential areas alongside a colonnaded stone-paved street...with wagon wheel grooves still etched in them!

Also known as the Mosaic City, some of the best mosaics in all of Israel are in Sepphoris and are reason enough to visit the ruins. More than 40 mosaic floors in nearby buildings depict the bustling life of a Roman city, but especially impressive is the Nile Mosaic in the Nile House.

The Nile Mosaic shows Egyptian festivities when the Nile River peaked according to the “Nilometer” (a pillar with the number 17 on it shows the flood’s height), complete with crocodiles and other exotic wildlife, and the Pharos Lighthouse in Alexandria...one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

The next mosaic is the “Mona Lisa Mosaic” in the Dionysus House (named for the Greek god of wine and revelry) that still captivates her visitors with the beauty of Venus. There is a 15-panel carpet of mosaics honoring Dionysus in this Roman mansion, as well as Hercules and Pan, but the “Mona Lisa of the Galilee” holds center court as a priceless piece of art. Her artist is unidentified, but the craftsmanship stands up even today.

One of the best mosaics was discovered here in 1993 when a parking lot construction revealed exquisite mosaic floors in an ancient synagogue with seven separate sections. They depict Sarah’s angelic visit, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, twin lions, menorahs with first century Temple artifacts, an elaborate Zodiac wheel, aspects of the Temple worship in Jerusalem,

offerings to the Tabernacle and Temple, and Aaron officiating in his priestly robes with animal sacrifices. The artistry and scope are truly astounding.

If Jesus worked on the theater or other parts of the city, then He would have been exposed to the Greek and Roman culture of “hypocrites,” the Greek word we get “actor” from today (hypokritai). Far from growing up as a country bumpkin, Jesus would have been working in a suburb of the leading cultural center of His day, prepping Him for His ministry later on.

Even after Herod moved his capital and residence to Tiberias in 19 A.D., Sepphoris remained a cosmopolitan city that even survived the Jewish Revolt of 66 A.D. by siding with, and surrendering to, the Roman Vespasian. After the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., Sepphoris became a seat of rabbinic learning when the Sanhedrin fled here and continued as such with 18 synagogues in operation until an earthquake hit in 363.

Tradition says that Mary’s parents, Joachim and Anna, lived here and would have been another reason for Joseph to visit the city beyond just employment opportunities. Later on, the Crusaders build the Church of St Anne on the site believed to be their home. Imagine if Sepphoris is where Joseph first met Mary! What an unforgettable moment that would have been, and an unforgettable city to see during your trip to Israel.

• Matthew 6:1-18, 7:24, 13:55; Mark 6:3, 12:10; 1 Corinthians 10:4

[www.land-of-the-bible.com/Sepphoris\\_The\\_Forgotten\\_City](http://www.land-of-the-bible.com/Sepphoris_The_Forgotten_City)