

# Rejected in Nazareth

*Matthew 4:13-17, Matthew 13:54-58, Luke 4:14-32, John 4:3-54*

by Wilma McLaughlin

## Teaching aid:

Recommend using an oversized map of Palestine to follow Christ's life and ministry (could be laminated). Would be especially helpful to children and youth classes – could even make a comparable map of Illinois to illustrate size and distance.

Tracing the geographic travel of Jesus is important to understanding his ministry and its momentous growth. I envision having a figure of Jesus and move it from place to place as he traveled during his ministry. For example:

- Baptism at Bethabara
- Wilderness of Judea (temptation and triumph)
- Calling of disciples in Galilee
- Water to Wine at Cana
- Nicodemus at night in Jerusalem
- Declares himself Messiah to Samaritan woman at Sychar
- Second healing at Cana
- Proclaims himself “Jubilee” at Nazareth and is rejected by his hometown
- Preaching ministry begins

## Background to story:

Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist as ‘the Lamb of God’ while John was baptizing in the Jordan River, at Bethabara. After his baptism, Jesus was ‘led of the spirit’ to the wilderness, meaning the wilderness of Judah, which lies south of Bethabara, just west of the Dead Sea where the Jordan River ends. Perhaps Jesus was transported by angels to the wilderness, but just as possible is that he traveled along the Jordan River valley to get to the wilderness, adding prophetic ring to the 23 Psalm, ‘yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil’ nor the evil one whom he was about to engage in spiritual warfare. From the moment of Jesus’ baptism, his ministry began to expand along with his identification as the Messiah. In the temptation Jesus defended himself against Satan’s insidious attacks, after which Jesus began an offensive attack against the prince of this world - declaring Himself the Messiah, comforting, doing miracles and preaching.

**Galilee** – was one of the three provinces of Palestine, the others being Samaria (just south of Galilee and inhabited by gentiles and ‘mongrels’ - believing Jews whose ancestry was mixed with Gentiles); and Judea, southern most province and where numerous significant cities were located including Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Emmaus.

The **Galileans** were largely illiterate, had a distinct dialect, and were considered by the Jews of Judea, particularly those in Jerusalem, as unsophisticated ‘country bumpkins’.

Of the twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, was the only disciple who was not a Galilean. Judas was from Judea.
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**Cana** – means ‘a place of reeds’; a humble village, smaller and northwest of Nazareth; site of the first miracle of Jesus; approximately 15 miles west from Capernaum and 8 miles from northwest of Nazareth.

**Nazareth** – means verdant (or lush/green) offshoot; this was Jesus’ boyhood home, where he had been raised by Joseph and Mary. Nazareth was the head city of the province of Galilee. Jesus was well known to townspeople and held in favor, much as ‘local boy makes good’ - that is until the event of our story.

**Capernaum** – was a Roman military post along a highway that stretched from Damascus through Galilee to Jerusalem; means ‘village of consolation’; situated on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was in Capernaum that Jesus proclaimed himself to be ‘the bread of life’ and which he adopted as ‘his own city’ after being rejected in Nazareth. Approximately 25 miles northeast of Nazareth.

The story of the curing of the nobleman’s son is recorded only in the book of John.

Jesus arrived at Cana after having journeyed from Judea, coming by way of Samaria. Many Jews avoided Samaria, so great was their pious disdain for its gentile and ‘mongrel’ inhabitants. Jesus often chose to travel through Samaria to Galilee, where our story begins. Traveling by way of Samaria, he stopped at Sychar to keep an appointment with a Samaritan woman at a well. To this Samaritan woman, Jesus declared himself as the Messiah.

### ***Healing at Cana:***

After two days, Jesus returned to the province of Galilee having come by way of Samaria. Jesus was warmly received at Cana, having performed his first miracle there some months earlier, and news of his whereabouts/teachings closely followed by many people.

Although the nobleman had prestige and some degree of propriety, rather than customarily send a servant to Jesus, the nobleman came himself. He was a father more than a nobleman, whose coming as a beggar demonstrated both his desperation and his respect for who Jesus was. The nobleman’s request was that Jesus would come to his home and heal his son. Jesus rebuked the nobleman, stating that he was like others who sought only to witness miracles. But the nobleman was desperate and undeterred. Seeing and hearing this, Jesus had compassion and pronounced his son healed. That his son was healed without the touch or presence of Jesus was witness to Christ’s omnipotence across time and space. The healing that was accomplished was better done ‘in Christ’s way rather than man’s way’ – the nobleman wanted Jesus to come down to Capernaum and heal his son, but Jesus healed his son without coming down. Jesus’ physical presence was not necessary for healing, rather only belief in the person of Christ, in whom is all power.

This was the second miracle performed in Cana, though manifested in Capernaum

## *Rejection at Nazareth:*

Jesus is often found preaching in synagogues, but never reading, except in this instance in the synagogue at Nazareth.

Shortly after Jesus came to Nazareth, it was the Sabbath. As was his usual custom, he went to the synagogue. Attendees participated in the synagogue services, including reading the scripture followed by making appropriate remarks. As Jesus was held in high regard by his fellows and being newly returned to town, it would have been no surprise that he would participate by reading the scriptures. Scripture says he ‘stood up for to read’ as when Ezra (Nehemiah 8:5) opened the book of the law, all the people stood up in reverence.

The synagogue was the place the people worshipped, not like the temple where worship was ceremonial. The synagogue services were places where attention was on moral living, devotion to the reading, expounding and applying the scriptures, to pray and to praise.

In synagogue worship there were seven readers every Sabbath, a priest, a Levite, and five other Israelites of that synagogue.

The synagogue followed a regular order of readings and it can be assumed that this day was no different. The scripture says ‘it was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias’. Jesus, in his foreknowledge, attended synagogue on the very Sabbath that this specific passage was to be read. This passage was a prophecy of the Messianic Age.

The passage declares Christ’s undertaking, and the work He came into the world to do. First, His qualification “The spirit of the Lord is upon me”.

Secondly, His commission “Because he has anointed me” and “sent me”.

Third, His work – to preach.

The passage mentions ‘preach’ three times, identifying to whom he was to preach and what he was to preach:

- Deliverance to the captives
- Recovering of sight to the blind
- The acceptable year of the Lord.

The acceptable year of the Lord alludes to the year of release, or of the *Jubilee*, when servants and debtors were freed and forgiven of what others held against them (**Lev. 25:9, 40**). Jesus is the *Jubilee* of all who believe.

Jesus stopped reading, closed the book and sat down after reading ‘To preach the acceptable year of the Lord’. The passage he read from Isaiah speaks of the Messianic Age and which is divided into two advents, the day of grace and the day of vengeance. Jesus ended his reading at the comma in the middle of Isaiah 61 verse 2. His hearers were listening intently, waiting for Jesus’ remarks/applications of the passage. They were not expecting what he said next.

The acceptable year of the Lord in the passage Jesus read was reference to the first advent of Christ, or day of (dispensation of) grace. In declaring ‘this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears’ Jesus was declaring He (Grace personified!) was ushering in the day of grace, not only to the Jews, but as he goes on to illustrate, to the Gentiles as well.

**Why did Jesus hearers become so angry at what Jesus said?**

1. They were angry that Jesus had the audacity to compare himself to the revered prophets – Elijah and Elisha, after all, they knew Jesus was only Joseph’s son (*No prophet is accepted in his own country*)
2. They were angry that Jesus compared them to the men at the time of the prophets, men who had bowed the knee to Baal. Just as in the days of Elijah and Elisha, because they would not receive him, they would not receive the mighty works of God (*Physician heal thyself, i.e. heal your own – Nazareth*)
3. They were angry that Jesus intimated that God has reserved kindness towards the Gentiles, preferring healing of believing Gentiles over healing unbelieving Jews. This was perhaps the most provoking and distasteful claim to his listeners.

The Jews were ‘filled with wrath’, led him out of the city to kill him but he passed through the midst of them and went his way. The Scripture does not say how Jesus escaped – whether he blinded their eyes, added confusion, or was mystically transported elsewhere. What is known is that it was not time for Jesus to die at the hands of men. Sad to say, the Jews were so propelled by their anger that they failed to notice his departure from their presence.

After his rejection, there is no evidence that Jesus ever returned to Nazareth.

**Bibliography**

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