

Was There a Historical Jesus of Nazareth?: The Use of Midrash to Create a Biographical Detail in the Gospel Story

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In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is depicted as having been brought up in a city called "Nazareth," a purported biographical detail upon which much speculation has been hung over the centuries as to a "historical" Jewish messiah figure in the gospel story, buried somewhere underneath layers of pious elaboration. In this regard, countless Jesus biographies have been constructed significantly around this purported place of origin that would indicate a historical personage. Indeed, whenever scholars wish to distinguish between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith," they use this designation "Jesus of Nazareth" to depict the former.

Despite all of this speculation, there exists no hard scientific evidence that the polis or "city" of Nazareth as depicted in the New Testament even existed at the time when Christ was supposedly being raised there. Although there exists a centuries-later "historic Nazareth" in Israel, archaeological explorations during the past century have failed to demonstrate any such city of the time in the general vicinity. In reality, it appears that Jesus was made to be "of Nazareth" so that he could be called a "Nazarene" or "Nazoraean/Nazorean," a member of an ancient pre-Christian sect, of which the Old Testament hero Samson was said to have been an adherent as well.



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