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Isaiah 63: 7-14 Page 1

Psalms 111 Page 2

Galatians 4:4-7 Page 2

Mathew 2:13-23 Page 5

Isaiah chapter 63

7 I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. **8** He said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me'; and so he became their Savior. **9** In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

10 Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. **11** Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people-- where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, **12** who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, **13** who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble;

14 like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name

Psalm chapter 111

New International Version

1 Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. **2** Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. **3** Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. **4** He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

5 He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. **6** He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations. **7** The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. **8** They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.

9 He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever-- holy and awesome is his name. **10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Galatians chapter 4

4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. **6** Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' **7** So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Context Summary

Galatians 4:1–7 paints the picture of the heir of a wealthy son, who remains without freedom himself until he actually receives his inheritance. This corresponds to the customs of the time, when even wealthy children lived under the control of teachers and guardians. Paul insists that the crucial day has already come for all who trust in Christ. We are no longer under the supervision of the law of Moses. Christ has bought us out of slavery and into God's family. In Him, Christians are adopted as full children—we are God's heirs. We are given the Holy Spirit, making it possible to call Him our "Abba," meaning "Father."

Galatians 4:4, NIV: But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

What does Galatians 4:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Verse 4 and 5 summarize the powerful, beautiful gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the good news Paul had preached, and which the Galatians had believed.

In the previous verses, Paul compared life under the law to a child living under the care of a guardian. Though that child is entitled to a grand inheritance, the child's daily life is similar to that of a slave until the predetermined date set by his father arrives. Others determine when and where the child will go and what he will do. He is waiting for the freedom his inheritance will bring.

Now Paul says that date has come for those who were under the law. In fact, the moment has come for all who want to share in the inheritance of Jesus. The date set by God the Father arrived right on schedule. When the "fullness of time" had come, God's Son Jesus was born to a human woman. This woman, Mary, was a virgin (Matthew 1:18), and her pregnancy was a mysterious miracle. She carried the child of God.

Jesus was born into a Jewish family in Israel. As such, He was born "under the law." Jesus was the only human being ever to keep the law perfectly. In doing so, He declared that He had "fulfilled" the law (Matthew 5:17). He satisfied all of its requirements, then died on the cross to pay all of the penalties for the sins of others (Galatians 3:13).

Galatians 4:5, NIV: to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

What does Galatians 4:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Christ has come, and with Him the opportunity to be freed from the curse of the law. In the previous verse, Paul said that God sent His Son at the exact right moment in human history to be born to a human woman.

As fully God and fully human, what was Christ's mission on earth? Paul reports that He came to redeem those under that law. The word translated as "redeem" is from the Greek root word *exagorazo*. This is the same word used to buy a slave out of bondage. That's why Jesus came: to buy those who believe in Him out of our bondage to the requirements of the law, and the out of the curse that comes with the law, because we could not keep the law perfectly. We were literally slaves to our own sinfulness with no hope of escape.

Christ didn't redeem us just to set us free to wander on our own, however. He came to redeem us so that we can be adopted into God's family. Through faith in Christ, we not only escape the need to follow the works of the law endlessly with no hope of ever escaping our sin. We also find a home and family as children of God the Father. We find forgiveness from sin and belonging with God.

Paul will soon ask why the liberated children of God would ever want to go back to living in slavery under the law.

Galatians 4:6, NIV: Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'

What does Galatians 4:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul continues to describe the amazing truth that those who come to Christ by faith are freed from slavery to the law, as well as to our own sinfulness, and are also adopted by God as His own children. Now Paul points to the Holy Spirit as the confirmation of this adoption.

God sends His Spirit to live in the hearts of every one of his adopted sons and daughters. The Holy Spirit is referred to here by Paul as the Spirit of His Son. He moves into our hearts and gives us the right, along with Jesus, to call out to God as a young child calls out to their "daddy." *Abba* means "father" in the Aramaic language. Because it's easy for young children to say, like the English term *dada*, it's what most young children would call their father. Without our own sinfulness and the law standing between us and God, we can live with God as little children do with a trusted father.

This verse helps to show how each member of the Trinity is involved in our salvation. God the Father sent the Son to save us, then sent the Spirit to live in our hearts.

Galatians 4:7, NIV: So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

What does Galatians 4:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Prior verses used the analogy of an heir being under the control of other people, until they reached an appointed time. Then, their inheritance would take effect, and they would truly be free. Building on that idea, Paul assures his Galatian readers, and us along with them. For those who have come to God by faith in Christ, their slavery to sin and to the law is over. They have become God's beloved little children. And, as children of God, they are also His heirs. Because they are in Christ, they are entitled to share in all the inheritance that is due to Him from God the Father.

As a result, believers in Christ are completely provided for throughout all of eternity. We are protected and loved and included in the plans and purpose of our God. Without Christ, we would have nothing. Because we are in Him by faith, we have everything a child of God can have.

Matthew chapter 2

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, **23** and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Chapter Context

Chapter 1 established the genealogy and miraculous conception of Jesus Christ.

Sometime after Jesus' birth, a group of wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem. They have been tracking a star that points to the birth of the king of the Jews. They find and worship Jesus, then leave without telling the wicked king, Herod, where to find the boy. Warned by an angel, Joseph flees with Jesus and Mary to Egypt before Herod orders the execution of all the boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger. When notified by an angel again, they return to Israel and settle in Nazareth, in the northern region of Israel known as Galilee. This leads into chapter 3, which leaps forward to Jesus' adulthood, and the ministry of John the Baptist.

Context Summary

Matthew 2:13–15 tells how Joseph, Mary, and Jesus ended up in Egypt. In this context, "Egypt" means the territories beyond Herod's control, such as the Nile Delta. After the wise men leave Bethlehem, an angel of the Lord appears in Joseph's dreams once more with specific instructions. He is ordered to take the family to Egypt. Herod wants the child dead, so they are not to return until Herod dies and the angel gives them further direction. Joseph obeys, leaving in haste to reach territory outside of Herod's control. Matthew connects Jesus' return from Egypt to Hosea 11:1, where the prophet speaks of God calling His son Israel out of Egypt.

Matthew 2:13, NIV: When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape

to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

What does Matthew 2:13 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

It must have been enormously confirming for Mary and Joseph, and perhaps confusing, when wealthy Gentile wise men from the east showed up at their door to worship their child Jesus as a king. Both Mary and Joseph had been visited by angels with messages about Jesus' identity and purpose (Matthew 1:18–20; Luke 1:34–35). Still, the arrival of outsiders who also believed this must have bolstered their faith about what God was doing in their lives.

Mary and Joseph would need faith to carry them through what was coming. After the wise men left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in yet another dream. This time, the news was troubling. Joseph's new mission was to take Jesus and Mary and run away to Egypt. The wicked king wants to destroy their child! Herod had been alerted by the wise men's quest that a "King of the Jews" had been born in Israel. He clearly understood this to be a reference to the promised and long-awaited Messiah who would save Israel and rule over the nation. Instead of welcoming the idea of Israel's savior sent from God, he decided to try to eliminate the threat to his power and throne. The only way to do that was to kill the boy (Matthew 2:16–18).

In this context, "Egypt" means nearby territories such as the Nile Delta, where Herod had no authority. The family is ordered to stay in Egypt until this angel tells them it is safe to return to Israel.

The next verse shows that Joseph's faith held strong. He once again believed and obeyed.

Matthew 2:14, NIV: So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

What does Matthew 2:14 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Joseph has now seen an angel of the Lord in two powerful dreams. In both he was given specific instructions from God. The first time, God told him to go

through with his marriage to Mary even though she was pregnant (Matthew 1:20). Joseph learned that the child she carried was from the Holy Spirit and would save His people from their sins. The boy was Immanuel, "God with us."

Joseph obeyed immediately. Instead of breaking off the betrothal or even waiting for the betrothal time to be finished he took Mary into his home immediately as his wife, though he did not consummate their relationship until after Jesus was born (Matthew 1:24–25). They settled for a time in Bethlehem until one day a group of wise men and a large entourage showed up at their house. The impressive travelling wise men worshiped their son as a king and gave Him expensive gifts (Matthew 2:11–12).

After they left, the angel returned to Joseph in a dream with new instructions: Run to Egypt. Herod wants to kill the child. Alerted by the wise men, Herod saw Jesus as a potential threat to his throne. To protect his power, he would kill the boy.

Again, Joseph demonstrates his faith by obeying immediately. He packed up Jesus and Mary and left for Egypt by night. Travelling by night not only provided the cover of darkness to the young family, it also shows how urgent Joseph was to obey God and protect his family. It's likely the gifts of the wise men helped pay for this unexpected journey. Joseph and Mary likely saw this as another evidence that God was providing for and protecting them.

In that era, Bethlehem was around a one- or two-day trip from the borders of Herod's authority. Crossing that boundary to the south would put the family in Egypt. Going further would take them to the Nile Delta, where there was a large Jewish community. So an emergency escape into Egypt was a logical choice. It was still a Roman province, but it was outside of Herod's control. Many Jewish people lived in Egypt.

This experience of fleeing to Egypt for safety echoed the experience of the early Israelites who fled to Egypt from famine on several occasions (Genesis 12:10; 42:1–2), eventually becoming slaves to the Egyptians (Exodus 1:8–11).

Matthew 2:15, NIV: where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

What does Matthew 2:15 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Herod, the king of Israel under the authority of Rome, wanted to kill the baby Jesus. He knew nothing of Jesus, personally. Nor did he know how His parents were. All Herod knew was that he wanted to kill the one the wise men called the newly born "king of the Jews," the promised Messiah of Israel. Herod received this news not as a reason to celebrate, but as a threat to His own power (Matthew 2:3– 8).

Warned by an angel in a dream (Matthew 2:13), Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt until Herod died. At that time, the Roman provinces of Egypt were around two day's journey from Bethlehem. This was outside of Herod's reach. Further into Roman-controlled Egypt was the Nile Delta, which had a large population of Jewish people.

Matthew cites Hosea 11:1, where God says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." God called Jesus out of Egypt in the sense that Joseph waited to receive a message from the Lord that it was safe to return (Matthew 2:19–20). Matthew presents this as a fulfillment of Hosea's words about God calling Israel out of Egypt. This further deepens the connection between Jesus and God's people, Israel, as Christ's life on earth echoes the nation's historical path.

Context Summary

Matthew 2:16–18 describes Herod's slaughter of all boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger. Herod was furious when he learned the wise men left without telling him where the Christ child was. Not knowing the Messiah's family has already fled, Herod kills all the young boys that could have been born since the star of the king of the Jews appeared in the sky. In a smaller town like Bethlehem, this would have been well within his power. Herod hopes to keep anyone from taking the throne from his family. Matthew connects the grieving of Bethlehem to Jeremiah 31:15, where the mother of Israel, Rachel, weeps for her lost children

Matthew 2:16, NIV: When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

What does Matthew 2:16 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

The wise men, or "Magi," had travelled a great distance to arrive in Jerusalem with startling news: The "king of the Jews," the long-foretold Messiah, had been born. Learning from Israel's religious leaders that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, King Herod had sent the wise men there to find Him with one instruction: "As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him" (Matthew 2:1–8).

Herod, of course, did not wish to worship, but to kill Jesus and eliminate the threat to his own power. God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod, after all. They took another way out of Israel (Matthew 2:12). Joseph, also warned about Herod in a dream, took Jesus and Mary away to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath (Matthew 2:13).

Only then did Herod realize that he had been "tricked" or "outwitted" by the wise men leaving the country without talking to him first. By leaving without even telling him, and by taking another path, they eliminated any chance Herod would be able to trace the location of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. The fact that Herod had set out to trick them probably contributed to his anger.

Herod might have been vicious and cruel, but he wasn't stupid. Possibly as a back-up plan, Herod had already asked the wise men when they'd seen the star arise in the sky (Matthew 2:7). The wise men's answer gave him an estimate of when the baby may have been born based on when the star they were tracking first appeared in the sky. To be cautious, Herod had all the male children in and around Bethlehem, who were two years old and under, killed.

It's a sad commentary on human history that the murder of children could be a forgotten footnote in secular history. As awful as this event is, it would not have been especially noteworthy to people outside of Judea at that time. Scholars suggest this may have included two or three dozen boys, at the very most. Bethlehem was not a large town, and such acts were not unheard of. This act is

reported only in the Bible, but it fits with what is known about Herod from other historical sources. The ruthless king was famous for killing his own wives and even some of his own children to protect his power. Killing all the baby boys in a small town would not have been a stretch for him. Nor would it have been something other historians would have seen as especially important, at the time.

Because of God's intervention and the obedience of the wise men and Joseph, Jesus escaped this slaughter.

Matthew 2:17, NIV: Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

What does Matthew 2:17 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

Matthew has described Herod's brutal act of killing every boy in and around Bethlehem who was two years old and younger. His goal was to eliminate the one son whom wise men had described as a the "king of the Jews." Since Herod did not know which one might be the long-promised Messiah, he killed them all (Matthew 2:16).

Bethlehem was a small town, and scholars suggest the number of boys killed may have been somewhere between 10 and 30. This was not a large city, and there would not have been an extremely large number of families. Most, however, likely had one or two children in this age range. The grieving in Bethlehem would have been intense, and Matthew will quote from Jeremiah 31:15 in the following verse to connect the event to a specific moment in Israel's history.

Matthew 2:18, NIV: A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'

What does Matthew 2:18 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Herod's act of killing all the baby boys, age two and under, in and around Bethlehem was monstrous for two reasons. First, of course, Herod's act was a vicious and cold-blooded massacre. He stole from Bethlehem as many as 30 baby boys, according to scholars. The grieving of those people was intense, and Matthew quotes from Jeremiah 31:15 to connect their tears to another moment of weeping in Israel's history.

Rachel is often cited as a representation of the mothers of Israel. Jeremiah described the nation's weeping and loud crying for the death and departure of Israel's children at the time of the Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC. Some hope is found in the quote from Jeremiah: despite the grieving of that moment, Israel survived. In the same way, Jesus survived the attempt to end His life, amid the weeping in Bethlehem for the babies killed by Herod.

Beyond the atrocity itself, Herod was blatantly attempting to destroy God's chosen Messiah. He seemed to have believed the wise men, on some level, when they said the long-promised "king of the Jews" was born. Herod saw God's provision of a savior as a threat to his own power instead of the answer to Israel's prayer. He attempted to kill the Messiah before the Messiah could take his throne.

Context Summary

Matthew 2:19–23 tells of Jesus' childhood return to Israel after the death of King Herod. Joseph is alerted by an angel in a dream that Herod has died; nobody who wanted Jesus dead is still living. When they return, another message from God warns Joseph not to move back to Bethlehem, in Judea. Rather, he is to settle in his hometown of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. In that way, Jesus grows up as a citizen of Nazareth, fulfilling yet another prophecy.

Matthew 2:19, NIV: After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt

What does Matthew 2:19 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Joseph experiences some of the most direct revelations from God of any character in the Gospels. Each revelation came with specific instructions for what he should do and how he should do it. Each involved the appearance of an angel of the Lord in a dream. This is the third of four such experiences.

This dream came after the death of Herod in Israel. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were living in Egypt, perhaps among one of the Jewish settlements in the region. Judea was a Roman province, ruled by Herod and his family. Egypt, likewise, was Roman territory, under different local governors. God had sent them outside the reach of Herod through the message of an angel in an earlier dream. Though part of the Roman empire, Egypt was far outside of Herod's jurisdiction, and too far for him to discover that someone had survived his massacre of infants (Matthew 2:16).

Matthew 2:20, NIV: and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

What does Matthew 2:20 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

For the third time, an angel of the Lord is appearing to Joseph in a dream. Unlike the other visions, this would have been a message Joseph was expecting. On the last visit from an angel, Joseph had been told to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to protect the child from Herod's murderous rage. The angel said he would let Joseph know when it was safe to come back home to Israel (Matthew 2:13).

Now that time has come, so the angel has returned to Joseph's dreams. Those who wanted Jesus killed are now dead themselves (Matthew 2:19). With Herod gone, and Jesus having escaped the massacre of the infants (Matthew 2:16–18), there is no longer an explicit threat to Jesus' life. The angel commands Joseph to go back to Israel. When he arrives, one more dream will tell Joseph where to settle his family as they continue to raise Jesus (Matthew 2:22–23).

Matthew 2:21, NIV: So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

What does Matthew 2:21 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Joseph believed and obeyed God repeatedly. It could not have been easy to serve as the earthly father to the Son of God. The circumstances of Jesus' conception were controversial (Matthew 1:19–20). His birth was difficult and dramatic (Luke 2:1–7). The family even had to flee for their lives (Matthew 2:13–14)—all for a child who was not Joseph's own flesh and blood.

Scripture never gives any hint that Joseph hesitated to fulfill the role of protector and provider for Jesus. He immediately obeyed the commands to marry Mary, though she was pregnant. He dutifully packed up and left town immediately to live in foreign Egypt. Now, he returns from Egypt to Israel when commanded to do so by an angel in another dream.

Joseph is rarely given credit for the pivotal role he played in the life of Christ. Part of this, at least, is because he is not mentioned in the gospels after Jesus' youth. More than likely, he was older than Mary and had passed away before Jesus began His active ministry. Still, Joseph was clearly a man of faith and devotion to God's will. He followed the Lord's direction, despite what it cost in terms of his public reputation and lifestyle.

Matthew 2:22, NIV: But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,

What does Matthew 2:22 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

King Herod, known as Herod the Great, has died, and an angel of the Lord has directed Joseph to take Jesus and Mary back to Israel (Matthew 2:19–21). The dire threat has passed. Joseph, though, detects a new threat once he is back in the land. He learns that one of Herod's sons, Archelaus, rules over Judea which is where Bethlehem is located. The thought of living directly under the rule of Herod's son would have made Joseph nervous, for good reasons.

Instead of passing his kingdom over to one son, Herod divided it into three parts. With Rome's approval, he gave one part to each of three of his sons. Archelaus

was given Judea, Samaria, and Idumea to rule on behalf of the Roman Empire. Archelaus was known to be ruthless and cruel, like his late father. Joseph's fear of settling under his reign was validated when he received one last direction from the Lord in a dream: to settle in the northern part of Israel, instead.

Northern Israel, including Galilee and Perea, was ruled by Herod Antipas, while Herod Philip ruled over Iturea, Trachonitis, and other areas. Joseph settled Mary and Jesus in Galilee, where he had lived previously and under the rule of the more reasonable Herod Antipas. In the meantime, Archelaus ruled so badly that he was banished from Israel in AD 6. He was replaced for a time by a procurator rather than one of Herod's sons. Jesus grew up in Galilee, though, under the reign of Antipas.

Matthew 2:23, NIV: and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene

What does Matthew 2:23 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

In obedience to the Lord's direction and out of concern about living under the reign of Herod the Great's ruthless son Archelaus, Joseph settled down in the northern region of Galilee in the town of Nazareth. According to Luke 1:26–27 and Luke 2:39, Joseph and Mary were both from Nazareth, so they were returning to their hometown.

Jesus, then, grew up being known as a Nazarene—meaning someone from Nazareth—rather than as a Bethlehemite. Nazareth was not a big town. Some scholars estimate that the local population would have been between 200 and 1600 people in Jesus' early years. Nazareth did have a low reputation in Israel, however. When first learning of Jesus, the disciple Nathanael famously said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). It would have been considered unimportant, low-class, and backwards to more sophisticated Jews.

Matthew adds that Jesus' being known as a Nazarene was a fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophets. This is an interesting remark, since no known biblical prophecy says Messiah would come from Nazareth. However, many prophecies indicate He will be despised (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 49:7; 53:3). Isaiah 11:1 refers to a "branch" coming from Jesse. The Hebrew term for "branch" is

nē'ser and implies something lowly or common. Perhaps being from the despised town of Nazareth fulfilled those prophecies in Matthew's eyes.

The fact that Jesus was known as being from Nazareth, rather than from Bethlehem, caused some to question how He could claim to be Messiah (John 7:41–42). The designation "Nazarene" causes confusion for a different reason today. Traditional views of Jesus have confused His upbringing as a "Nazarene" with the Old Testament vows of a "Nazarite" (Numbers 6:2–21), who would take vows including not cutting their hair. This confusion inspired the depiction of Jesus with unusually long hair in classical art.