

Was Jesus Nazarene, Essene, or Christian?

Introduction

While answering Tertullus the Apostle Paul was accused of being the leader of the sect of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). During Paul's rebuttal he states,

- *Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the (Elohim) of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: (Acts 24:13-14, AV^{ed})*

Paul used the terms 'the way' and 'Nazarenes' interchangeably as if they were synonyms. 'Nazarenes' and 'the way' both were identified as one of the same and considered as heresy against the temple by many among the priesthood (*vs. 6*). Interestingly, Christian Theologian Charles Buck wrote in his book published in 1810 *A Theological Dictionary Containing Definitions Of All Religious Terms* establishing a connection of the terms 'the way' and 'Nazarenes' derived from the prophetic book of Jeremiah.

Nazarenes — Christians converted from Judaism, whose chief error consisted in defending the necessity or expediency of the works of the law, and who obstinately adhered to the practice of the Jewish ceremonies. The name of Nazarenes, at first, had nothing odious in it, and it was often given to the first Christians. The fathers frequently mention the Gospel of the Nazarenes, which differs nothing from that of St. Matthew, which was either in Hebrew or Syriac, for the use of the first converts, but was afterwards corrupted by the Ebionites. These Nazarenes preserved their first Gospel in its primitive purity [the 'old paths' and 'the good way' as called in Jeremiah 6:16]. Some of them were still in being in the time of St. Jerome, who does not reproach them with any errors. They were very zealous observers of the law of Moses, but held the traditions of the Pharisees in very great contempt. The word Nazarene was given to Jesus Christ and his disciples; and is commonly taken in a sense of derision and contempt in such authors as have written against Christianity.

... (Buck, 1810)

- *Thus saith יהודה, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. (Jer 6:16)*

Discussion

What was the world view of the Nazarenes during the first temple era following centuries? From the ancient Roman Christian historian Epiphanius in *The Panarian of Epiphanius of Salamis¹: Book I (Sects 1-46)* we read about the plight of the Nazoreans.

... these sectarians whom I am now sketching disregarded the name of Jesus, and did not call themselves Jessians², keep the name of Jews, or term themselves Christians – but as "Nazoreans," from the place name, "Nazareth" if you please! However, they are simply complete Jews.

They use not only the New Testament but the Old Testament as well, as the Jews do. For unlike the previous sectarians, they do not repudiate the legislation, the prophets, and the

1 See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphanius_of_Salamis (310-410 CE)

2 The Jessians were a sect based upon their view that *Yeshua* was born of the seed of Jesse rather than professing He was from the seed of David.

books Jews call "Writings". They have no different ideas, but confess everything exactly as the Law proclaims it and in the Jewish fashion – except for their belief in Christ, if you please! For they acknowledge both the resurrection of the dead and divine creation of all things, and declare that God is one, and that his Son is Jesus Christ.

... (Williams, 1987)

Curiously, in the *Gospel of Philip* (Wilson, 1962) it wrote,

"Jesus the Nazorean, the Messiah, that is, Jesus the Nazorean, the Christ. The last name is Christ, the first is Jesus, that in the midst is the Nazarene. Messiah has two meanings, both Christ and the measured. Jesus in Hebrew is the redemption. Nazara is the truth. The Nazarene accordingly is the truth."

[Note: The Gospel of Philip is a Gnostic writing translated to Greek from Coptic³ writings].

Albeit not in the canons of modern bibles many of the verses in this writing allude to scriptural themes and teachings. And once again we see the use of the term Nazarene(s) used to describe the Messiah... a spiritual man whose life was our example of 'the way' and 'truth'.

Previous to the Nazarene movement by the followers of *Yeshua* were a related sect called the Essenes⁴. Certain of their traits were shared by the Nazarenes of which *Yeshua* demonstrated by His frequent references to the scriptures as well as in His behavior. However, some confuse these two separate sects, but the Nazarenes were different.

The Nazarenes and Essenes were closely related Jewish sects of the Second Temple period, with historical and theological sources often identifying the Nazarenes as the northern branch of the Essenes, centered around Mount Carmel. While the broader Essene movement included various groups like the Ossaeans (southern branch, often associated with Qumran and strict legalism or celibacy), the Nazarenes were characterized by a more mystical, marriage-oriented, and ecumenical approach that emphasized the spirit of the law over strict legalism.

... (thewaymissions.org: Nazarenes and Essenes, May 15, 2026)

Says Epiphanius of Salamis, "... the Nazarenes were not like Christians, rather they were not a rude people, were trained to a nicety in Hebrew, and were strong adherents to the Law [Torah] while also deeply involved in studies of the prophets and writings."

It must also be said that early faiths did evolve from one sect to another. This development eventually led to today's faiths. Here we list a summary of that progression.

- The Nazarenes were a branch of the Essenes, differing mainly in marital customs.
- Both shared Essene traits: strict Jewish law, communal living, asceticism, and rejection of the Jerusalem Temple.
- The followers of Jesus became known as Nazarenes, preserving Essene-Jewish traditions while spreading his message.

3 Coptic – is a dormant Afroasiatic language. It is a group of closely related Egyptian dialects.

4 Also see: <https://www.thewaymissions.org/histories/the-religious-times-of-jesus/the-essenes/>

- The Essene-Ebionite-Nazarene connection shows a pattern of continuity from apocalyptic Jewish sects to Judaeo Christianity sects.

So, what may we glean from all this? Was **Yeshua** considered a Nazarene, or Christian? How did He live His life among men? Are we really following the example that He intended we should emulate? If so, just how did **Yeshua** conduct Himself in ‘the way’?

Yeshua Messiah of Nazareth

In the spiritual sense, **Yeshua’s** name might better be represented to the common observer of His era as ‘**Yeshua (the Nazarene) Messiah**’. **Yeshua** did complete all that His Father inspired Him to do. **Yeshua** fulfilled the Law and all the predictions the prophet’s had written about His life among men. His actions recorded in the latter writings demonstrated how to respond in many examples regardless of opposition and situation. **Yeshua** walked among men in service to all that came to Him with grace, knowledge, and powerful insights beyond common human understanding. **Yeshua** was capable of righteous indignation as well when called for, as in the Temple square moneychangers event prior to Passover (*Mat 21:12*).

Yeshua kept all that **Yahweh** had commanded in the Torah: The sabbath, feasts days, health, social, and ritual mitzvah... all the while with the greatest compassion for others, even among those outside the faith. Upon His capture and brief inquisition by the then Sadducean rulers, and after being presented to the Roman official Pilate, **Yeshua** continued to show compassion and even offered Pilate insight into His mission (*John 18:”33-38*).

Yeshua was the ‘son of man’, and of **El Elohim**. Albeit He came out of Nazareth and lived by ‘the way’, **Yeshua** was/is One with the Father and not of any sects or titles of this world. He is **Yahshua/Yeshua** [Yah – shortened name of יהוה, Shua – salvation, redemption].

Summary

Are the chosen ones adhering to **Yeshua’s** desire for them to live as He did? The good news is **Yeshua** was and is still working toward **Yahweh’s** plan for mankind. **Yeshua** knows the hearts of men and how life’s demands can take a toll on one’s development. Mankind was given at least 70 years to learn from His preserved instructions found in the scriptures (*Psa. 90:10*). How do we begin? As Jeremiah advised,

- Thus saith יהוה, “*Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls... (Jer 6:16).*

That would be the ‘the way’ the Nazarene’s took. Are you walking the *old paths*?

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