

Jesus – He shall be called a Nazarene – Mat. 2:23 – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D, Ph.D

As in Satan's attacks on the Genesis account of Creation & the Flood, he has continued his attempt to discredit the first book of each testament. After all, if the beginning is error filled why read the rest. In his effort to bring the New Testament into disrepute, the Devil has launched numerous attacks against the first two chapters of Matthew. This onslaught is especially aimed against the very person of the Lord Jesus Christ, His miraculous conception and birth. One such assault is Matthew 2:23:

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Now the supposed "error" in the above lies in the fact that the word "Nazarene" does not occur even once anywhere in the Old Testament. Moreover, neither can one find "Nazarenes" nor "Nazareth" prior to the Gospel of Matthew. The best most conservative Bible scholarship has offered over this conundrum is Isaiah 11:1:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

These put forward that the verse speaks of Messiah as "a rod (*netzer*) out of the stem of Jesse"; thus, it is *probably* the passage to which Matthew 2:23 refers.¹ However, were this connection even correct, it would be remote at best and still completely fail to address or resolve the issue.

The most obvious mistake in this "solution" is that "rod" in Isaiah 11:1 is *not* a translation of the Hebrew word *netzer*! (נֶצֶר) In the above citation, rod is actually translated from נֶזֶר (transliterated *choter*, a singular masculine noun, Strongs #2415), and has nothing to do with *netzer* (Strongs #5342). *Netzer* (another s.m.n.) translates "branch" in the above Isaiah passage, not "rod". They have simply made the wrong connection. Indeed, *netzer* does not even remotely resemble Nazarene.

Yet there is more. Matthew speaks of "prophets" – plural, but Isaiah is obviously singular. He is but one prophet, only one man. Thus, the above solution never resolved the question: "is Matthew 2:23 mistaken – is this an error in the Holy Scriptures?" The answer is straightforward.

Matthew declares that the prophesy wherein Christ would be "called a Nazarene" was only "spoken" by the prophets, not written by them (see: 2 Timothy 3:8 and Jude 14). It was an oral foretelling from the Lord and passed along mouth-to-mouth down to the time of Messiah.² We note that the preceding verse 5 in this same second chapter of Matthew is said to be a "written" prophecy, thereby making a clear distinction between it and verse 23. This contrast should be seen as significant.

True, there are verses that are said to be "spoken" which were also recorded as well (e.g., Mat. 1:22, 27:9 etc.). Still, these do not diminish the fact that Matthew 2:23 is an instance in which God's Word was given orally, yet not memorialized in the Old Testament. Indeed, the prediction was possibly made by un-named prophets who were not chosen to write their God-inspired sayings within the Holy Writ. Finally, Acts 24:5 demonstrates that Christ was indeed "a Nazarene".³

¹ See, for example, footnote 2, p. 994 in *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967 edition) or the Dallas Theological Seminary Faculty's 1985 2nd printing of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (editors Walvoord & Zuck) p. 1056.

² Matthew 27:9-10 is another example. There, the prophesy that Jesus would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver is clearly a direct reference to Zechariah 11:12-13; nevertheless, the Holy Spirit adds in Matthew that, although not led by that same Spirit to record the prediction in the book by his name, Jeremiah also orally proclaimed it.

³ "Nazarene" must not be confused with "Nazirite" (Mat. 26:71). Since Jesus drank wine (Luk. 7:34) and touched a dead body (Luk. 8:54), He obviously was not a Nazirite during His ministry. However the Nazarene did finally *become* a Nazirite. Although not recognized by most, Jesus clearly did take a Nazirite vow at the Lord's Supper when He said: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mat. 26:29). This is why, when first placed on the Cross, He found the offered drink to have wine and refused it (Mat. 27:34; Mk. 15:23). Later, in response to His "I thirst", Jesus "received the vinegar" (John 19:29-30). We therefore understand that He discerned this vinegar was made from cider (apples) or malt (grain) – not wine. We affirm all this because Christ himself declared the entire Old Testament was about Him (John 24:27, 44). On the authority of this, how could one truly expect a topic as significant as that of the Nazirite to not find its ultimate fulfillment in Messiah? (Num. 6:1-21; Judg. 13:5-7; 1 Sam. 1:11) Consequently, we put all this forth and fully expect to see our Lord return with a two-edged sword, His hair in seven locks, and riding on a white horse (Judg. 16:19; Rev. 19:11).