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# Nazareth Attested in Caesarea Fragments

DURING the 1962 archeological campaign at Caesarea Maritima,<sup>1</sup> two gray marble fragments of a significant Hebrew inscription were found.

The first of these fragments, which was discovered within the vicinity of the remains of a late third or early fourth century A.D. synagogue, contains parts of four lines of the inscription inscribed in square Hebrew characters. It reads, ". . . Mamliah . . . Nazareth . . . Akhlah . . . Migdal [Magdala]" (see figure 1).

The second fragment, which was discovered (along with a fragment of a synagogue chancel screen) in the remains of the marble pavement of a late Byzantine structure, contains parts of three lines inscribed in identical square Hebrew characters. It reads, ". . . priestly course . . . priestly course . . . priestly course . . ." (see figure 2).

Some years ago another fragment, also containing parts of three lines inscribed in comparable square Hebrew characters, was picked up on the surface soil at Caesarea. It reads, "The fifteenth priestly course . . . The sixteenth priestly course . . . The seventeenth priestly course . . ."

It is clear that these three fragments are part of a synagogue inscription that listed the twenty-four priestly courses and their Galilean settlements (after the fall of Jerusalem [A.D. 70], or, more probably, after the fall of Beth-Ther [A.D. 135]).<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of these three fragments, and with the help of another (comparable to the third fragment mentioned above) found in archeological excava-

tions at Ascalon,<sup>3</sup> and previous research based on Jewish liturgical hymns and the Talmud, Prof. M. Avi-Yonah of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, has reconstructed the entire inscription (see figure 3).<sup>4</sup>

Three of the reconstructed lines, to which I make reference later, read, "The eighth priestly course, Abijah, [at] Kefar 'Uzziah'" (line 8); "The eighteenth priestly course, Hapizzez, [at] Nazareth" (line 18); and "The twentieth priestly course, Jehezkel, [at] Migdal Nunaiya [Magdala]" (line 20).

## Significance of Fragments

At this juncture, the question may rightly be asked, What are the significances of these fragments and this reconstruction for readers of this column? Since I assume that my readers are interested in both the Old and the New Testaments, the birth and growth of the early Christian church, and the ongoing dialog between early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, I would like to suggest three items of special significance:

First, they provide additional concrete evidence for the continuation of a liturgical practice (viz. the organization of the priesthood into twenty-four courses) within rabbinic Judaism (even after the destruction of the second temple) that according to 1 Chronicles 24: 1-19 was established during David's reign, and that, according to Luke 1:5,

JAMES J. C. COX

*Figure 1: Fragment 1. The names of the Galilean villages Nazareth (nšrt) and Migdal ([m]gd) Nunaiya (Magdala) appear in lines 2 and 4 respectively.*



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**Figure 2: Fragment 2.** The beginnings of three lines of the inscription, each beginning with the term *m[šmrt]* ("priestly course"), appear on the left side of the fragment.

was operative during the rule of Herod the Great.<sup>5</sup>

Second, they provide further tangible evidence for the continuing significance (for Jews as well as Christians) of Migdal Nunaiya (Magdala), the city which, according to Mark 8:10 and Matthew 15:39, Jesus visited after "the feeding of the four thousand." This was also, as implied by her name, the home of Mary Magdalene (Mary, the one from Magdala).<sup>6</sup>

Third, and perhaps most important, these fragments provide new empirical evidence for the continuing significance of Nazareth (for Judaism as well as Christianity), a village which, according to Luke 1:26 ff., was the home of Joseph and Mary at the time of the Annunciation, and according to all four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) was the scene of Jesus' childhood and youth.<sup>7</sup>

This third point is of particular interest. It is difficult for many of us who have grown up reading the New Testament with its numerous references to Nazareth to imagine that anyone should have doubted that such a village existed in the time of Jesus. However, in view of the fact that no mention is made of Nazareth in the Old Testament (even though Joshua 19:10-15 lists the towns settled by the tribe of Zebulun and names among them Japhia, which is probably to be identified with Japha, a village located in the hills of Galilee just one and one half miles southwest of Nazareth), in the writings of Josephus (even though he, while respon-

sible for military operations in that area during the Jewish war, settled at Japha [*Life* 52, § 270] and fortified it [*War* II 20, 6, § 573], and used Sepphoris, located about three miles north of Nazareth, as his headquarters [*Life* 12, § 63, etc.], and, in his *Jewish War*, makes reference to some forty-five towns in Galilee), and in the Talmud (even though it makes reference to at least sixty-three Galilean towns), some have concluded that Nazareth did not, in fact, exist in the first third of the first century A.D. For example, A. Powell Davies, in his comparatively recent book, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, 1956), page 117, writes: "Scholars have always had to accept the possibility that at the time of Jesus there was no city called Nazareth."<sup>8</sup>

This silence on the part of the Old Testament, the writings of Josephus, and the Talmud should not be misinterpreted. It implies nothing more than the fact that, as the New Testament itself indicates, Nazareth was, in Jesus' day, a comparatively insignificant village.<sup>9</sup>

### Nazareth Settled Before Jesus' Birth

Archeological research in and around the Church of the Annunciation has convinced scholars that Nazareth was not only settled as an agricultural village several centuries before Jesus was born but also that it was occupied dur-

משמרת ראשונה יהויריב בסרביי כהן  
 משמרת שניה ידעיה עמוק צפורים  
 משמרת שלישית תחרים כפשה  
 משמרת רביעית שערים עיתהלו  
 משמרת חמישית בלכיה בית לחם  
 משמרת ששית בימין יודפת  
 משמרת שביעית הקוזע עלבו  
 משמרת שמינית אביה כפר עזיה  
 משמרת תשיעית ישוע ארבל  
 משמרת עשירית שרניה חבורת כבול  
 משמרת אחת עשרה אלישיבכהן קנה  
 משמרת שתים עשרה יקים פשחור צפת  
 משמרת שלוש עשרה חזופה ביתר מען  
 משמרת ארבע עשרה יבאבא צפת שיח  
 משמרת חמש עשרה בעריה בלגה יזנת  
 משמרת שש עשרה אברך פנברה  
 משמרת שבע עשרה חזיר מעריה  
 משמרת שמונה עשרה הפיען צפת  
 משמרת תשע עשרה פתחאכליה עב  
 משמרת עשרים וואחזאל בן גלגוא  
 משמרת עשרים ואחת כפר יוחנה  
 משמרת עשרים ושתיים גמול ביתחיה  
 משמרת עשרים ושלוש דליה גנתן צמין  
 משמרת עשרים וארבע מעיחזמת ארז

**Figure 3.** A reconstruction of the inscription by M. Avi-Yonah. Fragment 1 is represented on the left, fragment 2 on the right, and fragment 3 is in the center.

ing His lifetime. Numerous grottoes, silos, cisterns, presses, millstones, and other artifacts have been discovered. In the silos some of the pottery found dates as far back as the Iron II (900-539 B.C.) period. Other pottery found dates back to the Hellenistic (332-63 B.C.), Roman (63 B.C.-A.D. 324), and Byzantine (A.D. 324-640) periods.

In addition twenty-three tombs have been investigated. Of these, eighteen are of the *kokim* type, a type that "virtually became the canonical form of the Jewish family grave" between 150 B.C. and A.D. 150; four were sealed with "rolling stones," a type of closure that "seems to have been a characteristic Jewish practice only in the Roman period;"<sup>10</sup> and two contained a variety of objects such as pottery lamps and vases and glass vessels that date from the first to the fourth centuries A.D.

The archeological evidence is clear. Nazareth was undoubtedly an established, though small, Jewish settlement in the first century A.D. as the Gospels indicate.<sup>11</sup>

The three fragments (especially the first) found at Caesarea Maritima and discussed above provide further empirical evidence for a responsible evaluation of the implicit and explicit claims of the authors of the New Testament, and other early Christian literature, concerning the existence of Nazareth in the first and immediately following centuries A.D. Indeed, they provide further persuasive testimony in favor of the historical reliability of those claims.

<sup>1</sup> The campaign was conducted by the Department of Archeology of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, with the assistance of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>2</sup> These three fragments constitute the earliest epigraphic evidence for the existence of such synagogue lists of the priestly courses.

<sup>3</sup> See J. B. Frey, *Corpus inscriptionum judaicarum* II (Rome, 1952), no. 962.

<sup>4</sup> M. Avi-Yonah, "The Caesarea Inscription," in *The Teacher's Yoke*, ed. E. J. Vardaman and J. L. Garrett (Waco, Texas, 1964), pp. 47, 49f.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:5 tells us that John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, was a priest of the course of Abijah, the eighth course.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:56, etc.

<sup>7</sup> The first of these three fragments contains the earliest reference, either literary or epigraphic, to Nazareth in the Hebrew language, and the earliest epigraphic reference to Nazareth in any language. There is an earlier literary reference to Nazareth, in Greek, attributed by Eusebius (*Hist.* I.7.14) to Julius Africanus (A.D. 170-240).

<sup>8</sup> Cf., e.g., the earlier remarks of C. Burridge, *Nazareth and the Beginning of Christianity* (Oxford, 1914), pp. 6f., 27f.; and J. Z. Lauterbach, "Jesus in the Talmud," *Rabbinic Essays* by Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Cincinnati, 1951), p. 483.

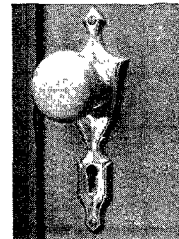
<sup>9</sup> This, no doubt, is one of the significances of Nathaniel's somewhat scornful question, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Compare the remarks of Ellen G. White regarding the status of Nazareth in the early first century A.D.: "An obscure Galilean town, hidden away among the hills" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 164); "the despised village of Nazareth" (*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 185); "a little mountain village" "obscure and despised" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 68).

<sup>10</sup> J. Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginnings of the Early Church* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 185 and 202.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28f.

## Handles

PAUL H. ELDRIDGE



HANDLES ARE for taking hold. They are for gripping objects which would otherwise be difficult or impossible to control. Because they are so ubiquitous, we usually do not give any thought to how much we depend on them every day.

Imagine trying to hold a knife without a handle, or steering a car, or lifting a hot kettle, or opening a door. And when it comes to clumsy items like mattresses or pianos, wise manufacturers build handles right into the original product. From the farmer with his pitchfork to the ping-pong player with his paddle, everyone uses handles every day.

Boyhood memories conjure up pictures of the iceman making his daily deliveries with a horse and wagon. Every time he stopped, a crowd of children gathered, waiting to scrounge the chips that fell as he shaped the fifty- to one hundred-pound cakes from the big blocks of ice. The huge, scissorlike ice tongs always fascinated me. Spreading the handles till he could slip the sharp points over the chunk to be delivered, the iceman would simply take hold of one handle and, as the tongs jabbed into the cake, carry it off with ease to the family icebox. Even blocks of ice are no problem if you have a handle.

And handles are valuable for more than carrying clumsy objects.

A few months ago I received a letter from an old friend who had just been promoted to an important executive position in a large corporation. Describing how he was working on one of his big new problems, he said, "I think I've got a handle on it now."

There's a first-class approach to problem solving—find a handle.

Look for a fresh viewpoint. Pick the right contact. Watch for a propitious moment. Secure more precise information. Invent a more efficient tool. Clarify the objective. Pinpoint the issue. Harmonize the ideal with the possible. Find the right person for advice and assistance.

And remember, the Christian has a special facility pool when it comes to this type of handle. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). "Let him take hold of my strength" (Isa. 27:5).

Handles lighten the load.

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