

Celestial Grace Temple

About The Nazarenes

Who were the Nazarenes:

After Jesus was crucified, died, arose from death and ascended to heaven, many of his followers stayed in Jerusalem and gathered into a closely-knit group that became known as the Nazarenes.

According to (Acts: 1, 13-16), the group initially had about 120 members, including Jesus' apostles, his mother Mary and all of his brothers. The two main leaders were Simon Peter and the oldest brother of Jesus, who was called James the Just.

During an early meeting a man named Matthias was chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot in the inner circle of the twelve primary disciples.

The Nazarenes were the original core group from which Christianity grew and spread. But initially they still considered themselves to be Jews.

They prayed in the temple at Jerusalem, and they followed most of the traditional Jewish religious practices. Other people in the city regarded them as a new Jewish sect.

But the Nazarenes differed from other Jewish sects in a fundamental way, for they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the one and only son of God. They boldly took this message into the streets of Jerusalem and soon began to attract many new converts.

They also spread the message to friends and relatives who lived in other places, and within a few years small groups of believers were established in several other cities.

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At first most of the new converts were other Jews, many of whom were already interested in the prophecies about the Messiah. But then the apostle Paul began to convert many non-Jews (Gentiles).

This led to a controversy when some Nazarenes from Jerusalem visited a community of new believers in Antioch.

While there, they insisted that Gentile converts must be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul, however, strongly disagreed with this, and he made a special trip to Jerusalem to try to resolve the issue.

When he reached Jerusalem, a meeting was held to discuss the matter. Although some of the Nazarenes argued against Paul, Peter apparently took his side. After a lengthy debate, the final decision was that Gentile converts did not have to be circumcised, but would still have to obey the Jewish laws relating to idolatry, sexual morality, and diet.

This important meeting, sometimes called the Council of Jerusalem, is described in (Acts 15:1, 29).

During these early years the converts in other cities regarded the Nazarenes in Jerusalem as the final authority for deciding important issues.

As the years passed, their continued adherence to the old Jewish religious practices left them increasingly out of touch with newer believers, many of whom were Gentiles and came from outside Judaism.

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In 66 A.D. a fierce war broke out in Palestine between the Roman army and a group of Jewish rebels. The casualties were enormous, especially among civilians. Many of the Nazarenes, however, were able to save themselves by abandoning their homes and fleeing from Jerusalem.

According to the church historian Eusebius, they fled to a place called Pella east of the Jordan River. But although most of them escaped, they had suffered a horrendous misfortune.

By then Christianity had begun to separate from Judaism, and the Nazarenes started to lose the influence they once had. There is evidence that many of them never accepted Paul as a true apostle and didn't approve of some of the practices in the churches he established.

Gospel of the Nazarenes

Sometime after Christ's death and ascension, the original twelve Nazarenes, while together wrote an accounting of Jesus' life. They described the events they witnessed evolving Jesus during the time they were with Him, and wrote down all the things Jesus had taught and revealed to them.

The writings in the Nazarenes Gospel are similar to the New Testament Bible accounts from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There is, however, a much greater and more in depth account of Jesus' life.

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The manuscripts that were used to compose The Gospel of the Nazarenes were lost or concealed for hundreds of years. The first of the manuscripts were discovered around 1896 A.D.

Some of the information in these manuscripts is highly controversial and has been suppressed from main-stream Christianity since its discovery.

Having personally read and studied these manuscripts, I believe they reveal a far more precise accounting of Jesus' life then what is stated in the New Testament Bible. There is significant information about Jesus life as a child as well as information on Jesus' activities from the age of 12 to 30.

The majority of the information in the New Testament Bible accounts for Jesus' life from the age of 30 to 33 and there is nothing mentioned about Jesus from the age of 13-29.

I believed the accounts of Jesus life during those 17 years was deliberately left out of the New Testament manuscripts. Primarily because of Jesus' association with various women, and locations outside of the Judean province where Jesus traveled and studied, such as Egypt and India.

The Nazarene Way of Life

During their years in Jerusalem, the Nazarenes sometimes called themselves followers of "The Way." By this, they apparently meant their way of life. According to (Acts 4: 32-33):

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All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything that they had.

In addition to their insistence on sharing, the Nazarenes put a high value on devoutness, non-violence, humility and a very simple lifestyle. It is believed, that these ideas came directly from the teachings of Jesus.

Many biblical scholars have pointed out that the Nazarenes' lifestyle was similar to that of the Essenes. It is, however, unknown if there is a direct connection between the two groups.

The origin of the name, Nazarenes, is somewhat uncertain. This is because Jesus himself was sometimes called the Nazarene, and it has been speculated the name was derived from a village in southern Galilee called Nazareth. However, this is uncertain because ancient writers spelled the name in several different ways, including Nazirenes, Nazaraeans, and Nazoreans.

Persecution of the Nazarenes

Even in the early days, when the Nazarenes were still a small group, they were already being persecuted by the local Jerusalem authorities.

The stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is starkly described in (Acts: 7, 54-60). The threat of further executions caused others in the group to temporarily go into hiding.

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It was during this period that Paul (then known as Saul) got involved in the persecutions, although it isn't clear how big a role he played.

Later, during another flare-up of persecution, James the son of Zebedee was put to death with a sword.

Peter would have probably also been executed, but an angel came during the night and helped him escape from jail.

Apparently, however, he avoided further trouble until his later years, but finally, according to church tradition, was killed in Rome.

James the Just also managed to survive the early persecutions, but was eventually killed in 62 A.D.

The Fate of the Nazarenes

After they fled from Jerusalem, the Nazarenes gradually became isolated from the main Christian movement. Despite this isolation, they still managed to survive for several centuries as an independent sect.

Their survival was mentioned by several later writers, including Saint Jerome, who reported that he visited a community of them in the Syrian desert in about 380 A.D.

Many scholars believe that another group of them survived under the name Ebionites. These Ebionites recognized Jesus as the Messiah but considered him to be of normal human parentage.

They adhered to the old Jewish laws, had their own gospel, and disapproved of the teachings of Paul.

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For these reasons, the fourth-century Bishop Epiphanius declared them to be heretics.

There aren't any reliable reports of what finally happened to either the Nazarenes or the Ebionites.

Quite possibly both groups completely died out soon after the fourth century. However, a few scholars believe that small communities may have survived for a longer period in remote areas.

There has also been speculation that some late survivors were progenitors of medieval heretical groups such as the Cathars, a religious group who appeared in Europe in the eleventh century. However, unless new information is uncovered, the final fate of the Nazarenes will remain a mystery.

Note: According to legend, a modern group of Christians known as the Nazarenes of Malabar (India) was founded by the disciple Thomas in 52 A.D., and thus could be an descendant of the original Nazarenes of Jerusalem. Another modern group, the Nazarenes of Mount Carmel, claims to be a "modern resurrection" of the ancient Nazarenes.

Also, there is a belief that a secretive group of descendants from the original Nazarenes exist today but keep their identity and whereabouts hidden.

May the grace of God be with you always --- Amen

Pastor Andy Andersson

Celestial Grace Ministry