

Chapter 5 - Joseph, the Carpenter

Joseph's Age

The Roman Catholic Church adopts the story of the apocryphal books in seemingly the fourth century History of Joseph the Carpenter which said Mary was twelve years old when she was betrothed and Joseph was a widower of ninety years with a full grown family. How ridiculous to think this 90 year old would still be a working carpenter, traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem (90 miles on foot), then fleeing on foot to Egypt and back again to Nazareth, re-establishing his carpentry shop, and traveling year by year to the Passover in Jerusalem until at least Jesus' 12th year. That would have made him 112 years old on that last journey!

No, Joseph was probably not an old man. And why would a 12 year old consent to marry him anyway? He was certainly older than Mary, perhaps in his late twenties or even late thirties, but not ninety. The passages in question give no hint of Mary continuing to be a virgin, else it would have been extremely important for the authors to clarify that these "brothers and sisters" were not really siblings.

The Roman Catholic Church alleges that these were either Joseph's step-children from a previous marriage, or cousins. The step-children theory would be plausible enough, but why would not the gospel writers clarify the point if indeed Mary's perpetual virginity might be maligned? As to being his cousins, the theory is that Cleopas was Joseph's brother who took charge of the family upon Joseph's death.

This theory is also full of difficulties. Jesus also had other cousins who were not called "brothers". Why? If Cleopas is another name for Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15) then Jesus' cousins and disciples were James and Thaddeus. (Matthew 27:26) Are these the same James and Joseph of Jesus' family mentioned in Mark 6:3? Then why is that not clarified? This view was first expressed by Jerome in an attempt to argue for the perpetual virginity of Mary, but he did not staunchly nor consistently defend it. (Zondervan Vol. 3, p.394)

A Carpenter by Trade

Matthew 13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

Two New Testament references to the occupation of Joseph and Jesus lead us to believe that during the 18 silent years of Jesus' boyhood and early manhood he was employed as a carpenter. There would have been little to engage a carpenter in the tiny village of

Nazareth, but the city of Sepphoris was only a 4 mile walk and was the center of renovations and architecture sponsored by Herod the Great's son, Antipas. After the destruction of Sepphoris in 4 BC it was rebuilt during the early life of Jesus, about the time he would have been a carpenter. Though Nazareth was small, probably not more than 25 families living there during Jesus' time, Sepphoris was large, prosperous and offering plenty of work for carpenters. It is only speculation to assume that Jesus would have at least occasionally worked and visited in Sepphoris.

Was Jesus a Carpenter?

The term used for carpenter was "tekton," which means a skilled craftsman and could involve metal, stone, or wood. Jesus himself is only called a carpenter once, in Mark 6:3. Matthew 13:55 describes him as the son of a carpenter. A carpenter was a worth occupation and much in demand especially in the bustling city of Sepphoris, the second largest city in Israel. There would have been plenty of work for good carpenters. We must assume that Jesus was not lazy but industrious. He is the example for us all. He then would have naturally followed in his father's footsteps taking on the trade of carpenter until he entered his full time ministry. Should we think of him as a effeminate man, loafing about while others worked for a living? I doubt it.

Recent attempts to rediscover Jesus and turn him into a well-to-do, successful builder have not basis in fact. Jesus' family remained a humble one. Thus it was with derogatory intent that the Jews of Nazareth derided him as the "son of a carpenter." We know for a fact that his parents were not well off. At his dedication they offered the poor man's sacrifice - a pair of doves and two young pigeons - (Luke 2.22-24 & Leviticus 12.2,6,8). Some may argue that with the gifts of the Wise Men perhaps Joseph and thus Jesus were able to improve their economic plight. Perhaps, but still we see Jesus even in his ministry as humble in origins, and lacking in worldly goods.

Origen Denies It

Indeed, the early 3rd century church writer Origen(23)writes against Celsus' assertion that Jesus was a mere carpenter, that "in none of the Gospels current in the churches is Jesus Himself ever described as being a carpenter".(24) This is still a widely debated topic(25), however Geza Vermes(26) highlights an Aramaic use of the term carpenter/craftsman (naggār) to metaphorically describe a 'scholar' or 'learned man'. Nevertheless, the majority of wandering rabbis had a trade to support their learning and teaching and there is no reason to doubt that carpentry may have been that of Jesus.

Justin Confirms It

Although Origen dismisses Jesus' role as carpenter, the earlier church writer Justin(27) cites it. He says that "He was considered to be the son of Joseph the carpenter; and He appeared without comeliness, as the Scriptures declared; and He was deemed a carpenter (for He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and

yokes; by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an active life)".
(<http://www.leaderu.com/theology/jesusjew.html>)

Status of a Carpenter

An artisan was a noble occupation. Many of the ancient Jewish scholars were hard working artisans as well. Hillel was a woodcutter, and Shammai was a carpenter, both were renowned leaders of the Jewish religious community. It was considered right and proper for a father to train his son to follow his own profession. In fact, one rabbi stated, "Whoever does not teach his son a trade it is as if he brought him up to be a robber." The Mishna taught that one must "teach son a trade." Without question Jesus was taught by Joseph, his step father, to be a respected carpenter. It was a worthy profession. Edersheim, Sketches, chapter 11 "Trades"

A Carpenter's Tools

Bow saws, hand saws, claw hammers, planes, adzes, wood mallets, chisels, and the lathe and the bow drill were well known tools in Roman times. (See the research paper done for this class last semester.)

The Carpenter's Craft

Joinery was well developed by the time of Christ (mortise, tennon, and dovetail). Objects could be turned on a lathe to make beautiful design work. Carpentry was useful in a wide variety of needs: roofs, doors, frames, tables, beds, cookware utensils, bowls, and cups. Farm implements such as the yoke and plow would have been made by carpenters.

Required Assigned Reading:

- Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, chapter 11 "Trades"
- Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book 2, Chapter 10, "Life in Nazareth"

References/Sources:

- <http://members.tripod.com/timana/Monographs/jesuscarpenter.html>
- http://dioceseoftagbilaran.homestead.com/jjdietzen_003.html
- <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/jesusjew.html>

Flight to Egypt

There are many unsolved mysteries about the "silent childhood years" of Jesus. Though we have no authoritative sources from which to glean information about the life and times of Jesus during those years we do have "apocryphal books" which add to our storehouse of knowledge and speculation. (Particularly the Gospel of Thomas, read it and make comments.) The apocryphal books are not Divinely inspired, nor are they to be relied on as accurate. Many are so foolish as to render them fables or fantasies of medieval minds. Yet there are elements of truth that predate the documents themselves. Such is the case with the time the holy family spent in Egypt.

The Coptic Church, that is the church in Egypt, maintains legends of the Christ family's arrival, travel, and adventures in Egypt. Again it is not authoritative but at best it sheds some historical light on the fact that Jesus' family did spend at least 2 years in Egypt. The Bible declares it. It is even in fulfillment of prophetic word - "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." (Matthew 2:15)(Hosea 11 : 1) "Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will totter at His Presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in the midst of it." (Isaiah 19:1)

This same message concerning the Messiah's sojourn in Egypt was also delivered through Isaiah "Blessed be Egypt, My people " (Isaiah 19:25). It was an anticipation of the coming of St. Mark to the country, where the Gospel took firm root in the first decades of Christianity. For Isaiah goes on to prophecy, "In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt; and a Pillar to the Lord, at its border. And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt." (Isaiah 19:19-20)

Isaiah 19:18-25 18 In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. 19 In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. 20 And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great

one, and he shall deliver them. 21 And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. 22 And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. 23 In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. 24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: 25 Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

We know for certain that "The Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said: "Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young Child's life." (Matthew 2:20) A curious researcher will ask, 'I wonder where that took place in Egypt?' The Coptic Church claims to have the answer on historical evidence that it was "at the very spot where Al-Muharraq Monastery stands." Which the Coptic church calls the "Second Bethlehem."

It would do well for the student of the word and history to at least be familiar with these legends, whose oral traditions date back to the first century.

- Coptic History of Christ in Egypt
<http://www.copticpope.org/theholysfamily/English/1.htm>
- Map of Jesus in Egypt <http://www.copticpope.org/theholysfamily/English/map.htm>
- Tour of Egypt <http://www.touregypt.net/holysfamily7.htm>
- Holy Family dot Com <http://www.holysfamily.com.eg/>

Home in Nazareth

What was it like to grow up in the small town of Nazareth? What was Jesus like when he was growing up? Did he do any miracles? Was he different than other children?

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.... And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus". (Luke, 1st 26-30)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the province of Judea, that is, southern Palestine. After his family fled to Egypt to avoid the wrath of Herod the Great they returned to Joseph's home town of Nazareth in northern Palestine, about 15 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. (see map - seminar3/map.htm) Today it is called the city of En-Nasira. There is a natural spring there where Mary would have gone to fetch water for the family. The town is on a hill overlooking the ancient battleground of the plain of Esdraelon. Mount Hermon can be seen to the north and to the west the Mediterranean Sea. Nazareth is also 60 miles north of Jerusalem

Insignificant Nazareth: Nazareth is so insignificant that it was not mentioned in the Old Testament. The name means "Separated Branch." We are not sure why Luke calls Jesus the Nazarene, perhaps it was a reference to his being the "branch." It is certain that it did not mean he was a Nazarite.

Nazareth was too small to be noted in the list of settlements of the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:10-16) which mentions twelve towns and six villages. Neither is its name

included in the 45 cities of the Galilee mentioned by Josephus, the historian. Its name is also missing from the 63 towns of Galilee mentioned in the Talmud. It was not expected that a prophet, a king, or priest ever would come out of Nazareth. We suspect that in Biblical times Nazareth was a small agricultural town settled by not more than a few dozen families.

And from this we understand the reason that Pontius Pilate decorates the cross with the sign "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19) - meaning that the "King of the Jews" is from "nowhere." The early name "Nazarenes" given to the Christians might have been a derogatory nickname that the people of Judea gave to the followers of Jesus (Matthew 26:71, Acts 6:38). Jesus was known throughout the Galilee as "Jesus of Nazareth" (Matthew 21:11, Mark 14:67) - but for those not from the Galilee, this name had no meaning for them. In order to explain where Nazareth was located, the Galileans had to explain that the village was near Gat-Hyefer (Jonah's hometown, Kings II 14:25), which could be seen from Nazareth. ¹ <http://www.inisrael.com/tour/nazareth/history.htm>

This prompted Nathaniel to ask the question in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was isolated in ancient times because no trade routes ran through the city. Therefore it had no economical value.

Agricultural Nazareth:

The farm land around Nazareth was of shallow soil which was terraced for agriculture. This would suggest that vines were the primary crop intended for cultivation on such terraces. However, certain terraces were deep enough to raise olive trees and many still survive on these terraced slopes today. Typical crops of the dry farm would have been olives, grapes, figs, almonds, wheat and barley. Observable structures on the site: wine-press, base of watchtower, pools with channels, agricultural terraces and stone quarry; one column drum-type crushing stone.

Town of Sepphoris

Nazareth was overshadowed by the much larger town of Sepphoris located 4 miles northwest. All trade routes were to the north of Nazareth intersecting in the town of Sepphoris, known as Zippori in Hebrew.

Sepphoris was the nearest large metropolitan area to Nazareth. It is an interesting study. It is not mentioned in Scripture, therefore has not historically been associated with the life of Christ. Yet it stood just 5 miles from Jesus' hometown and was on the busy thoroughfare of intersecting trade routes. (The two major ancient roads are, the north/south Via Maris and the east/west Acre-Tiberias road) ²

It was the capital city of Galilee throughout many periods. For a time, Herod Antipas made it his capital after inheriting the territory at his father's (Herod the Great) death in 4 B.C. *³

The city expanded and its acropolis was rebuilt. Josephus describes this city as the "ornament of all Galilee." ⁴

From ancient literary notices we know that Sepphoris had a theater (4,000-seat theater), ten synagogues, several churches, a Council Chamber, an Archive, two market places, temples, a city wall, a mint (Sepphoris minted its own coins), an extensive aqueduct system, and a cemetery, a bathing establishment, and an enormous market building or basilica with beautiful mosaics. ⁵

Sepphoris was a center of talmudic study. Many academies were located there. Also its location on or near major trade routes in the lower Galilee made it a prime market for traders of all commodities.

The rabbinical scholars who helped compile the Talmud and Mishna frequently earned their living by working in what seems to be most humble occupations - carpenters, shoemakers, potters and smiths among them.

Joseph's Death

<https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/saint-joseph>

The circumstances of Joseph's death are not known, but it is likely that he died before Jesus's ministry began, and it is implied that he was dead before the Crucifixion (John 19:26-27).

Readings:

(These are required for this lesson)

- Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, chapter 6 "Jewish Homes"
- Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, chapter 7 "Raising Children"
- Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book II, Chapter 6 - Child's Life in Nazareth.

Sources:

- ¹ History of Nazareth <http://www.inisrael.com/tour/nazareth/history.htm>
- ² Century One - Sepphoris <http://www.centuryone.org/sepphoris.html>
- ³ Glass From Sepphoris <http://www.colby.edu/rel/Glass.html>
- ⁴ Biblical Archeology - Sepphoris <http://www.bib-arch.org/barja00/sepphoris2.html>
- ⁵ PBS - Sepphoris <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/arch/sepphoris.html>

Sources and Recommended Reading:

(It is not necessary to buy these books.)

- Philip Schaff - History of the Christian Church, Book1, chapter 2
- Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1, 3, 4 Merrill C. Tenney, editor, Zondervan, 1975
- Fausset, Andrew. R. , Bible Encyclopedia and Dictionary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids,
- NIV Study Bible,
- Edersheim, Alfred, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Hendrickson Pub., 1993.
- Edersheim, Alfred, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Pub., 1994.
- The New Bible Dictionary, Douglas, J.D. editor, Eerdmans Pub. Grand Rapids, 1962