

Gospel of the Nazarenes

The **Gospel of the Nazarenes** (also *Nazareans*, *Nazaraeans*, *Nazoreans*, or *Nazoraean*s) is the traditional but hypothetical name given by some scholars to distinguish some of the references to, or citations of, non-canonical Jewish-Christian Gospels extant in patristic writings from other citations believed to derive from different Gospels.

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Collation into *Gospel of the Nazarenes*

Most scholars in the 20th century identified the Gospel of the Nazarenes as distinct from the Gospel of the Hebrews and Gospel of the Ebionites.^[1]

Text editions of *Gospel of the Nazarenes*

The current standard critical edition of the text is found in Schneemelcher's *New Testament Apocrypha*, where 36 verses, GN 1 to GN 36, are collated.^[2] GN 1 to GN 23 are mainly from Jerome, GN 24 to GN 36 are from medieval sources. This classification is now traditional.^[3] Though Craig A. Evans (2005) suggests that "If we have little confidence in the traditional identification of the three Jewish gospels (Nazarenes, Ebionites, and Hebrews), then perhaps we should work with the sources we have: (1) the Jewish gospel known to Origen, (2) the Jewish gospel known to Epiphanius, and (3) the Jewish gospel known to Jerome.^[4]

The name *Gospel of the Nazarenes*

The name *Gospel of the Nazarenes* was first used in Latin by Paschasius Radbertus (790-865), and around the same time by Haimo, though it is a natural progression from what Jerome writes.^[5] The descriptions "*evangelium Nazarenorum*", dative and ablative "*in evangelio Nazarenorum*", etc. become commonplace in later discussion.^[6]

The hypothetical name refers to a possible identification with the Nazarene community of Roman period Palestine.^[7] It is a hypothetical gospel, which may or may not be the same as, or derived from, the Gospel of the Hebrews or the canonical Gospel of Matthew.^{[8][9]} The title, *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, is a neologism as it was not mentioned in the Catalogues of the Early Church nor

by any of the Church Fathers.^[10] Today, all that remains of its original text are notations, quotations, and commentaries from various Church Fathers including Hegesippus, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome.^[8]

The *Gospel of the Nazarenes* has been the subject of many critical discussions and surmises throughout the course of the last century. Recent discussions in a growing body of literature have thrown considerable light upon the problems connected with this gospel. Its sole literary witnesses are brief citations found in patristic literature and quotations by the Church Fathers. (Jerome, *Commentary on Micah*, 7) This bears great significance because higher criticism argues that the canonical *Gospel of Matthew* is not a literal reproduction of Matthew's original autograph, but was rather the production of an unknown redactor, composed in Greek posthumously to Matthew.^[11] This aligns with Jerome's assessment, in which he stated, "Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforetime publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek, though by what author is uncertain." (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Chapter 3) (See: Two-source hypothesis and Four Document Hypothesis)

Background - Nazarenes

The term Nazarene was applied to Jesus of Nazareth (*Gospel of Matthew* 2:23). Mention of a "sect of the Nazarenes" (plural) occurs first with Tertullus (Acts 24:5). After Tertullus the name does not appear again, apart from an unclear reference in Eusebius' Onomasticon, until a similar name, 'Nazoreans', is distinguished by Epiphanius in his *Panarion* in the 4th Century.^[12]

It was the term used to identify the predominantly Jewish sect that believed Jesus was the Messiah. When this sect branched into the Gentile world, they became known as Christians.^[13]

By the 4th century, Nazarenes are generally accepted as being the first Christians that adhered to the Mosaic law who were led by James the Just, the brother of Jesus. Traditionally he led the Church from Jerusalem and according to 1 Corinthians (15:7) had a special appearance of the resurrected Jesus and only "then to all the apostles".^[14]

Primary sources - Patristic testimony

Concerning its origin, Jerome relates that the Nazarenes believed that the Hebrew Gospel he received while at Chalcis was written by Matthew the Evangelist. In his work *On Illustrious Men*, Jerome explains that Matthew, also called Levi, composed a gospel of Christ, which was first published in Judea in Hebrew script for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed (*On Illustrious Men*, 2) Meanwhile, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, Jerome refers to the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.

Epiphanius is of the same opinion; he states in his *Panarion* that Matthew alone expounded and declared the gospel in Hebrew among the New Testament writers: "For in truth, Matthew alone of the New Testament writers expounded and declared the Gospel in Hebrew using Hebrew script." (*Panarion* 30.3.7)

Origen adds to this by stating that, among the four gospels, Matthew, the one-time tax collector who later became an apostle of Jesus Christ, first composed the gospel for the converts from Judaism, published in the Hebrew language. (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.25)

Scholarly positions

There exist two views concerning the relationship of the surviving citations from the "Gospel of the Nazarenes":

Gospel of the Nazarenes dependent on Canonical Matthew

Due to contradictions in the account of the baptism of Jesus, and other reasons, most biblical scholars consider that the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, *Gospel of the Hebrews*, and *Gospel of the Ebionites* are three separate Gospels, even though Jerome linked the Nazarenes to the Ebionites in their use of the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.^[15]

Philipp Vielhauer writes of the Greek/Latin fragments collected as the Gospel of the Nazarenes that "Its literary character shows the GN secondary as compared with the canonical Mt; again, from the point of view of form-criticism and the history of tradition, as well as from that of language, it presents no proto-Matthew but a development of the Greek Gospel of Matthew (against Waitz). 'It is scarcely to be assumed that in it we are dealing with an independent development of older Aramaic traditions; this assumption is already prohibited by the close relationship with Mt.^[16] Likewise, as regards the Syriac fragments, Vielhauer writes "the Aramaic (Syriac) GN cannot be explained as a retroversion of the Greek Mt; the novelistic expansions, new formations, abbreviations and corrections forbid that. In literary terms the GN may best be characterised as a targum-like rendering of the canonical Matthew."^[17] From this view the GN fragments are linked to the canonical version of Matthew, with minor differences. For example, GN replaces "daily bread" with "bread for tomorrow" in the Lord's Prayer (GN 5), states that the man whose hand was withered (GN 10, compare Matthew 12:10-13) was a stonemason, and narrates there having been two rich men addressed by Jesus in Matthew 19:16-22 instead of one (GN 16).

Matthew dependent on Gospel of Nazarenes

James R. Edwards (2009) argues that the canonical Matthew is based on a Hebrew original, and that the citations of the Gospel of the Nazarenes are part of that original.^[18]

Edwards' view is predated by that of Edward Nicholson (1879), Bodley's Librarian. His conclusions were as follows:

1. "We find that there existed among the Nazarenes and Ebionites a Gospel commonly called the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, written in Aramaic, but with Hebrew characters. Its authorship was attributed by some to the Apostles in general, but by very many or most — including clearly the Nazarenes and Ebionites themselves — to Matthew."^[19]
2. "The Fathers of the Church, while the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* was yet extant in its entirety referred to it always with respect, often with reverence: some of them unhesitatingly accepted it as being what tradition affirmed it to be — the work of Matthew — and even those who have not put on record their expression of this opinion have not questioned it. Is such an attitude consistent with the supposition that the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* was a work of heretical tendencies? This applies with tenfold force to Jerome. After copying it, would he, if he had seen heresy in it, have translated it for public dissemination into both Greek and Latin, and have continued to favor the tradition of its Matthaean authorship? And Jerome, be it observed, not only quotes all three of these passages without disapprobation; he actually quotes two of them (Fr 6 and Fr. 8) with approval."^[20]

Nicholson's position that *The Gospel of the Hebrews* was the true Gospel of Matthew is still the subject of heated debate. However most scholars^[21] now agree that the *Gospel of Matthew* found in the Bible was not written by Matthew, but composed posthumously to him.^[11]

The Talmudic evidence for early Christian gospels combined with Papias' reference to the Hebrew "logia" Eusebius, Church History III . 39 . 16^[22] and Jerome's discovery of the *Gospel of the Hebrews* in Aramaic (Jerome, *Against Pelagius* 3.2) have led scholars such as C. C. Torrey (1951) to consider an original Aramaic or Hebrew gospel, meaning the *Gospel of the Hebrews* which the Nazarenes used.^[23]

The *Gospel of the Nazarenes* (Nazoraean) emphasized the Jewishness of Jesus.^{[24][25]} According to multiple early sources, including Jerome (*Against Pelagius* 3) and Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29-30) the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* was synonymous with the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Gospel of the Ebionites*. Ron Cameron considers this a dubious link.^[26]

Time and place of authorship

The time and place of authorship are disputed, but since Clement of Alexandria used the book in the last quarter of the second century, it consequently predates 200 AD. Its place of origin might be Alexandria, Egypt since two of its principal witnesses, Clement and Origen, were Alexandrians. However, the original language of the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* was Hebrew, suggesting that it was written specifically for Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians in Palestine, Syria, and contingencies.

The extant reconstructed text of *Gospel of the Nazarenes* and variances with Canonical Matthew

- Gospel of the Ebionites- 7 fragments preserved by Epiphanius of Salamis.
- Gospel of the Hebrews- 7 fragments preserved by Jerome
- Gospel of Matthew
- Hebrew Gospel of Matthew- 3 medieval rabbinical translations of Greek Matthew into Hebrew
- Jewish-Christian Gospels- overview of the topic
- List of Gospels
- New Testament apocrypha- non-canonical and/or pseudepigraphical Gospels, Acts, and Epistles.
- Synoptic Gospels- Matthew, Mark and Luke

Primary Sources

Wikisource – Gospel of the Nazoraeans

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2. Vielhauer and Strecker *Gospel of the Nazoraeans* in Schneemelcher NT p.160-174 Fragments 1 to 36 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=TDW0PeFSvGEC&pg=PA160&dq=#v=onepage&q&f=false>)
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22. Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* © 1999 Oxford University Press, p.43
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32. In his [Commentary on Matthew](http://patrologia.narod.ru/patrolog/hieronym/comm_mat.htm) (http://patrologia.narod.ru/patrolog/hieronym/comm_mat.htm) Jerome, citing the [Gospel of the Hebrews](#) which the Nazarenes used, writes: "In the so-called *Gospel of the Hebrews* for *bread essential to existence* found MAHAR (<https://books.google.it/books?id=8lOwjFsVvu0C&pg=PA101&lpg=PA101&dq=mahar+meaning&source=web&ots=KE9ak0C4hJ&sig=NqSZxH5-oY61z-uMXn4ce8EIss&hl=en#PA101,M1>), meaning of *tomorrow*. So, the sense is *our bread for tomorrow*, that is, *of the future*, give us this day" Latin: "In Evangelio quod appellatur secundum Hebraeos, pro supersubstantiali pane, reperi MAHAR (μαρ), quod dicitur crastinum; ut sit sensus: Panem nostrum crastinum, id est, futurum da nobis hodie." Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew 6:11*
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External links

Online translations of the [Gospel of Matthew](#):

- [Matthew at WikiSource](#) (KJV)
- [Early Christian Writings](#): texts and introductions.
- [Early Christian Writings](#): *Gospel of the Hebrews*
- [Gospel of the Nazoreans at earlychristianwritings.com](#)
- [Development of the Canon of the New Testament: Gospel of the Hebrews](#)

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