

Jesus' Rejection In Nazareth

Have you ever met a salesperson who openly confessed that he or she was only interested in your money and did not care if you received a fair price? If you have, I would love to hear about it. Most salesmen promise great deals at a bargain price. Few admit that they are motivated to encourage you to spend more than you should because they benefit from your spending. There are also salesmen who are not interested in your money but in your approval or their ability to control your thinking. They may be politicians, religious people, or lawyers. Many men and women can deceive us into thinking that they are great, charismatic, loving, and gracious - for a while. They are friendly on the outside and hide their real inner person. But as we spend time with them, we discover their real motives, attitudes, and characters. It takes time to discover the real person. After a while we see their "pattern of life." Their "pattern of life" is who they really are.

JESUS IN ACTION. When we come to the gospels, we are able to see Jesus in action. We are able to hear His words, see Him heal others, hear Him preach, see Him care for others, watch Him interact with the disciples, and eventually watch Him die for you and me. We are not able to just hear and see Him on a few occasions; we are able to hear and see Him for about four years. That is, we see enough to discover His patterns of life.

When we come to our study which starts in Luke 4:14-15, we discover that Jesus' pattern of life included several things.

And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and . . . He began teaching in their synagogues . . . (NASB) Luke 4:14-15

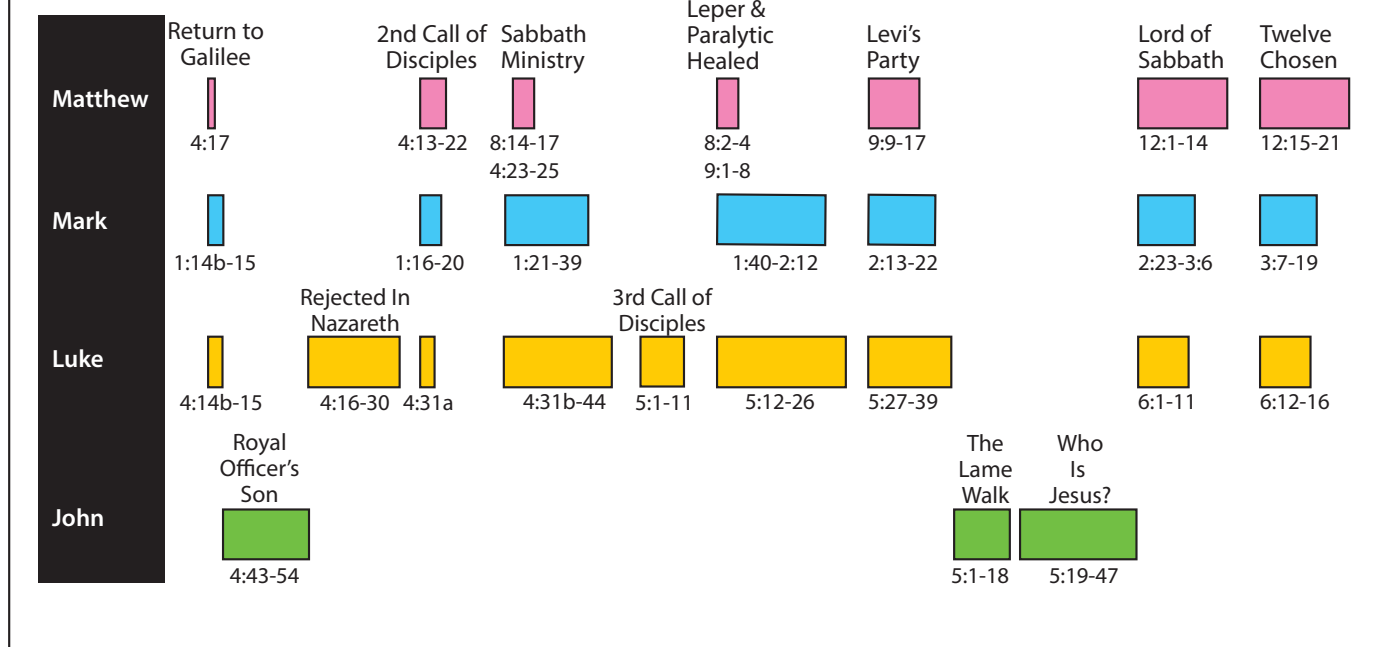
First, we are told that Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. If we look closely at the gospels and the rest of the New Testament, we discover that Jesus was constantly filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit throughout His entire ministry, including His crucifixion (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; Acts 1:2; 2:22; 10:38; Heb. 9:14; Rom 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18). He was under the control of the Holy Spirit in all that He did. That is, Jesus' pattern of life included "being



Synagogue In Capernaum

Life and Heart of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (Mid A.D. 31)



filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus' second pattern of life was His Sabbath day attendance in a synagogue. The Greek language reveals that Jesus was constantly doing this. Jesus' pattern of life should also be our pattern. He set the example. Today some claim that they can worship God on the golf course or out in the wilderness. If one really wants to worship God, why go to the golf course and ignore the preaching of the Bible, which He wrote? The truth is - people go to golf courses to golf and not to worship! Jesus set the example by going to “church” or synagogue even though the synagogues were undoubtedly not all that they should have been.

Both patterns of life should also be true for us too! Galatians 5:16-23 and Ephesians 3:16; 5:17-18 command us to walk or to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That is, we are supposed to allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives throughout the day. God did not encourage us to be filled with the Holy Spirit in these passages, nor did He ask us to be filled. He commanded us to be filled with the Holy Spirit, just as He has also commanded us to gather on the first day of the week to worship with other Christians (1Cor. 16:2; Heb.

10:24-25). Jesus set the pattern and we are supposed to follow.

JESUS VISITS NAZARETH. So when we come to the next verse in our study, we find Jesus continuing in His pattern of life.

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. (NASB) Luke 4:16

Earlier Jesus was in Cana of Galilee where He had healed the son of a royal official to King Herod. If you recall, the father had traveled to Cana and left his son in Capernaum. Jesus did not travel to Capernaum but healed his son from a distance of 16 miles (26 Km). It was a stunning miracle, and the rumor of the miracle would have spread in that small region and quickly reached Nazareth, which was only 5 miles (8 Km) south of Cana and about 21 miles (34 Km) from Capernaum. According to John 2:12, Jesus had been in Capernaum before. The results of His ministry would also have reached Nazareth by now. We are not told what He taught or what miracles, if any, that he did in Capernaum.

But we will see shortly that the people in Nazareth had already heard about His ministry before His return home. They had probably also heard about His miracles and teachings in Jerusalem since the gospel of John has already told us that,

... when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. (NASB) John 4:45

Now Jesus has come back to His childhood home of Nazareth. So how did the people in Nazareth respond to Him? How did they respond to this famous person, the One who did miracles? Many of the people would have known Him when He was a young boy. They

would have known His mother too! So some of the people were probably very excited when they saw Him and rushed to tell others. Women might have run after Him to ask how He was doing, or to ask about His mother, brothers, and sisters.

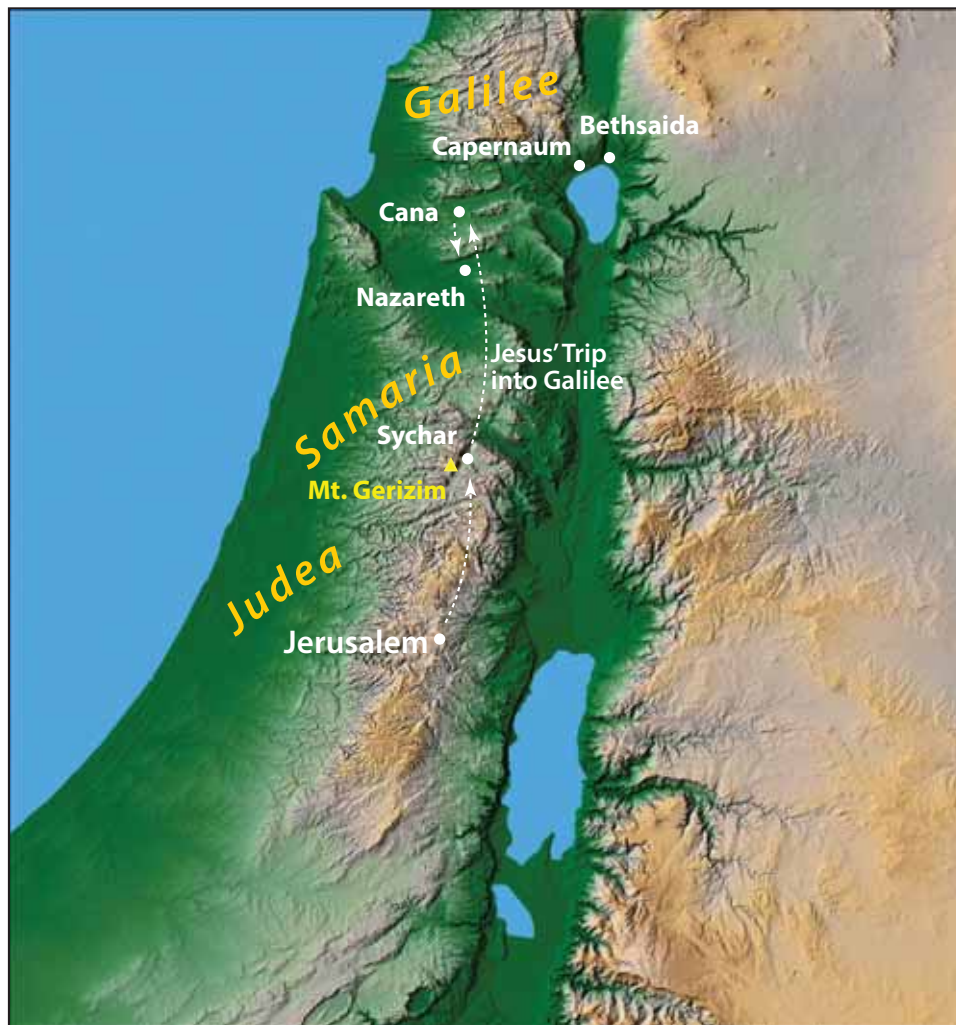
Jesus would not have been able to keep His presence a secret. People would have been eager to talk with Him, if for no other reason than to ask if the reports about Him

were true. Did any of Jesus' childhood friends find Him and speak with Him? What did the old house in which He once lived look like?

We do not know if Jesus arrived early in the week or the day before the Sabbath. But we do know that He was there on Saturday, the Sabbath. What was it like for Jesus to wake up that Sabbath morning and walk to the synagogue that He once knew so well? We have no answers to our questions,

only thoughts. But it must have been an emotional time for Him and others.

When Jesus arrived at the synagogue and stepped inside, He probably found it filled with people who were eager to see and speak with Him. The elders would have been seated in the front, with the men and women on different sides of the room. We



will soon discover that the chief ruler, who was responsible for the service, had asked Jesus to read and preach that morning. It appears that they wanted to hear this famous rabbi, or teacher, speak. Were the rumors about His eloquence correct?

THE MESSAGE. The ancient worship service of the synagogue of Jesus' day was structured. From the best information that we have, it appears that the worship service started

with thanksgiving, and was followed by a prayer, seven short public readings from the Pentateuch (Genesis - Deuteronomy), a reading from the Prophets, a sermon, and then a benediction. The benediction was from Numbers 6:24-26,

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (NASB) Numbers 6:24-26

When it was time for Jesus to stand and read from the Prophets, the attendant or the minister of the synagogue took the scroll that had been selected for the morning, removed it from its cloth covering, and handed it to Him.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." (NASB) Luke 4:17-19

Jesus unrolled the scroll and read only a portion of Isa. 61:1-2. The passage was about Him. As we have already discovered, the Spirit of the Lord was constantly upon Him for ministry. This was the pattern of His life (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14). He had been called to preach to the poor and helpless, and He did so throughout His ministry (Luke 4:43). He came proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matt. 4:17). Their freedom from sin was near. He healed many and set free those who were oppressed by demon possession and disease. Jesus did all of these things, and they had heard the amazing reports, which claimed that He did.

And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (NASB) Luke 4:20-21

Their eyes were fixed on Him. The Greek language says that the people were "staring" at Him. Their eyes were "glued to Him." Everyone was watching to see what He would do or say next. Jesus must have sensed that He had their attention when He said, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled . . ." The message was simple. He was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1. He was the promised One - the Messiah!



As we will discover in a minute, the men and women in that synagogue were thrilled with His eloquence but not His message. He was a wonderful preacher. They had responded emotionally. They were like many down through time that are more interested in an emotional religious experience than in really knowing God. As a pattern of life, they looked for eloquence in their speakers. The early church father Origen writes these words,

When Jesus read this passage, He rolled up “the scroll, gave it to the servant, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.” Now too, if you want it, your eyes can be fixed on the Savior . . . When you direct the principle power of seeing in your heart . . . to contemplating God’s Only-Begotten, your eyes gaze on Jesus . . . I wish that the eyes of all . . . not the eyes of the body but the eyes of the soul - would gaze upon Jesus. (Homilies on the Gospel of Luke. 32.6 from Ancient Christian Commentary edited by Arthur Just).

Are you seeking after Jesus or an emotional experience? The prophet Jeremiah records these words from our God.

Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you . . . (NASB) Jer. 29:12-14a

If you really want to know God, then you need to constantly seek Him with all your heart. Only then will God reveal Himself to you.

THE RESPONSE. The men and women in that synagogue discovered that Jesus was indeed a powerful and wonderful teacher, for the next verse tells us,

And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” (NASB) Luke 4:22

This verse is poorly translated in most English Bibles. Every major Greek scholar agrees that they were not “speaking well of Him” but that they were simply “bearing witness”

of Him. That is, they were talking among themselves about His sermon. Have you ever left a worship service and talked about the preacher and his sermon? That is exactly what they were doing. If we had been there, we might have heard one of them say, “The reports about Him are true. He was a great speaker!” But all we are told is that they thought that His words were gracious. Those were the positive comments.

There were also some negative comments. The major one was that He was just the “son of Joseph.” We can hear someone say, “There is nothing special about Jesus. He is just one of us. He was once just a carpenter. He has not done any miracles here in Nazareth like the ones we have heard about in Capernaum. All we received this morning was gracious words and claims.”

They understood Jesus’ sermon, and Jesus understood them. They had rejected Jesus’ message because they knew Him as a boy. This verse strongly suggests that Jesus had not performed any public miracles as a boy. They did not know that Jesus could do miracles or that He was a great teacher. The familiar got in the way of their believing in Him. No wonder they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” So Jesus responded.

And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. (NASB) Luke 4:23-24

The proverb “Physician, heal yourself!” reveals their hearts. Jesus publicly said what was in their thoughts. They were not interested in receiving anything from Him. “Don’t heal us, heal yourself! Oh, those miracles that you supposedly did in Capernaum, how about doing some here in Nazareth?” The comment reveals that Jesus had not performed any miracles in their city during this visit. They had not seen Jesus do any miracles as a boy or during His visit. They could not believe that the reports were true. The familiar had gotten in the way. The crowd that had wanted to hear their “town boy” speak had turned against Him. They did not believe.

It is amazing how we reject those whom we know, and

yet so quickly accept those whom we do not know at all. This occurs all the time. For example, consider a man who is rejected because he has confronted sin in the leadership team, but a casual complaint by a visitor is quickly accepted. Or, how about the rejection of the statements of a layman while the same ones made by a famous preacher are accepted. We honor the unknown. The proverb “Physician, heal yourself!” is true. The familiar is marginalized in favor of the unknown. It is a common pattern of life.

The proverb “no prophet is welcome in his hometown” is also true. It happened to Jesus! Sometimes a Christian who has been denied meaningful ministry in one church is given a significant opportunity to serve the Lord in another church. Such ones become leaders, small group study leaders, Sunday school teachers, or evangelists. Some have been rejected because of jealousy. This is a common problem - a pattern of life - among leaders and pastors who fear being “upstaged.” But our hearts’ desire should be to step aside for someone else who can better serve the Lord than we can. Were some of the leaders at the synagogue in Nazareth jealous of Jesus?

THE INSULT. Since Jesus’ unbelieving friends had rejected Him, there was no reason to perform miracles. So Jesus “shakes the dust off His feet” (Matt. 10:14) when He says,

But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. (NASB) Luke 4:25-26

He reminds them that during a great draught and a great famine that the prophet Elijah did not help any Jewish widows, but only the Gentile widow of Zarephath in Sidon (1 Kings 17:9-18:1). God ignored the widows of Israel, but not a Gentile widow.

This must have been difficult for the people to accept since they hated Gentiles. To be reminded that God had ignored them in favor of a Gentile was an insult. Then Jesus adds another insulting example,

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. (NASB) Luke 4:27

Elijah’s successor, Elisha, performed this miracle, but not for a Jew. Elisha cured only one leper. His name was Naaman, a Syrian (2 Kings 5:1-14). He was a Gentile too! Why did God ignore the need of Jewish lepers?

Just like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus was not going to perform a miracle in Nazareth. He would perform miracles in other cities, but not here. The ministries of Elijah and Elisha occurred at a time of great sin in the land. God had been rejected and Israel and Judah were being deported from the

land. The men and women in the synagogue did not believe either. They understood Jesus’

message that the other cities would see His miracles but not Nazareth, and they responded in total anger,

And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things . . . (NASB) Luke 4:28

They understood that Jesus had accused them of unbelief. They did not like it and neither would most of us today.

REJECTION OF “PROPHETS.” Christians who stand for truth and righteousness are frequently rejected, just as Jesus and the prophets were rejected. When Jesus pointed out their sin, He used some words that hurt. When the prophets of old rebuked others, it hurt. In Proverbs 27:6, King Solomon wrote that the wounds of a friend are faithful. It is important to note that the word “wounds” implies that the friend’s words hurt. If you lovingly confront people about sin in their lives, it will hurt. How much it hurts depends on their sin and their willingness to deal with it.

When a man or a woman takes a stand for righteousness, it is very common that he or she stands all alone. Sometimes it is against one person, or a crowd, such as happened with Jesus. It is also common for such a person to be verbally and physically persecuted.

Have we forgotten Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount?

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (NASB) Matthew 5:11-13

Rarely do we connect Jesus' words in verse 12 about the persecution of the prophets with salt in verse 13. The prophets were being salt and their rebuke hurt those who heard them. Jeremiah, Micah, and Malachi rebuked the priests or pastors of their day.

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority . . . (NASB) Jer. 5:30-31

Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. (NASB) Mic. 3:11

For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction . . . (NASB) Mal. 2:7-8

Jeremiah was eventually stoned to death for his actions. Many of the prophets suffered because they took a stand. As a result, Hebrews 11 tells us that many suffered. The prophets called sin - sin. They were vocal and they offended people. They were simply obeying God when they stood for right-

eousness. So the next time someone rebukes us for sin, we need to examine ourselves and repent.

CONCLUSION. These "Sunday worshippers" quickly revealed who they really were.

. . . and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. (NASB) Luke 4:29

They wanted to kill Jesus because the pattern of their life had already been set. Their hearts did not become hardened when they heard Jesus that morning. Their hearts were already hardened toward God and any of His messengers. Yes, they were eager to hear a good sermon and to give alms to the poor. They were good synagogue people, or church people, but they were not godly people. The actions of these men and women in Nazareth revealed that their pattern of life was just like the fool and the adulterous woman in the passages below.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel. (NASB) Prov. 12:15

This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done no wrong." (NASB) Prov. 30:20

The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves one who pursues righteousness. (NASB) Prov. 15:9

They justified their evil conduct.

This study has been about patterns of life. We have discovered at least three patterns of life of our Lord. He was filled with the Spirit, went to synagogue, and was a great teacher. We will discover more in the coming studies. The synagogue people had patterns of life too! Their actions revealed their spiritual maturity and their hearts. What are the patterns of your life? What do you do? What do you say? What do you watch? Would you want someone else to mimic your patterns of life? Are your patterns of life patterns that others should follow? We trust that the answer is, "Yes!"