

† Ναζαρηνός, † Ναζωραῖος

Jesus is always called Ναζαρηνός in Mk.: [1:24](#); [10:47](#) (vl. Ναζωραῖος); [14:67](#); [16:6](#), also in [Lk. 4:3](#) (based on [Mk. 1:24](#)) and [24:19](#) (vl. Ναζωραίου). The more common form Ναζωραῖος is found in [Mt. 2:23](#); [26:69](#) (vl. Γαλιλαῖος); [26:71](#); [Lk. 18:37](#) (vl. Ναζαρηνός); [Jn. 18:5](#) (vl. Ναζαρηνός); [18:7](#); [19:19](#); [Ac. 2:22](#); [3:6](#); [4:10](#); [6:14](#); [22:8](#); [26:9](#). Christians are given the same name in [Ac. 24:5](#); the accuser Tertullus calls Paul πρωτοστάτης τῆς τῶν Ναζωραίων αἰρέσεως. Lk. took Ναζαρηνός from an older tradition but prefers Ναζωραῖος, though the two forms mean the same for him. Their connection with Ναζαρέθ (Ναζαρέτ, also Ναζαρά, [Mt. 4:13](#); [Lk. 4:16](#)), the home-town of Jesus in Galilee (πατρίς, [Mk. 6:1](#); [Lk. 4:23](#); [Mt. 13:54](#)), where His mother and brethren lived and where He grew up, is presupposed in Mk., Lk. and Jn. (cf. ὁ ἀπὸ Ναζαρέθ, [Mt. 21:11](#); [Ac. 10:38](#); [Jn. 1:45](#)) and is openly stated, in connection with a prophecy, in [Mt. 2:23](#): τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται. A comparison of [Mt. 26:69](#) and [26:71](#) shows that Ναζωραῖος and Γαλιλαῖος mean much the same. The disciples of Jesus are Γαλιλαῖοι in [Ac. 1:11](#). The passages adduced show that the two terms are not self-designations on the part of Jesus and His disciples, but that they were called this by the world around. In [Ac. 24:5](#) Ναζωραῖος is used by the Jews to denote members of the original community in Jerusalem. It indicates their place of origin and has a derogatory nuance, cf. [Jn. 1:46](#).

Paul uses neither of the two terms, nor does any later Christian author in Greek. The reason for this is that in Gentile Christian churches the name Χριστιανοί (Χρηστιανοί), first given to Christians in Antioch ([Ac. 11:26](#)), was generally accepted. Ναζαρηνός and Ναζωραῖος were restricted to the Jewish Christian tradition. Their influence on missions to the Syrians and Syriac versions of the NT explains why *nāšrājā* (or more exactly *nāš^erājā*) is the consistent Syr. rendering of both Ναζαρηνός and Ναζωραῖος and is also the name of Syrian Christians, adopted also by the Persians, the Armenians, and later the Arabs. This single rendering of the two words in the whole of the Syr. Gospel tradition (cf. already Syr^{sin} and Syr^{cur}) leads to the conclusion that *nāšrājā* derives directly from the usage of the Aram. speaking disciples of Jesus and the primitive Jerusalem community. In secondary forms we find the Gk. Ναζαρηνός or Ναζωραῖος and the Hebrew *nōšrī* (or *nōš^erī*), as Jesus and the disciples are sometimes called in the Talmud.

But there are several difficulties. 1. In respect of the ending there are parallels elsewhere for the variation between Ναζαρηνός and Ναζωραῖος, cf. the Essene names Ἐσσηνοί and Ἐσσηῖοι, but in view of the difference in the second syllable (the vowels α and ω) they can hardly be treated as identical. 2. The ζ of both forms is in keeping with Ναζαρέθ-Ναζαρά, but does not seem to correspond to the š in ܢܫܪܐ, *nāšrat*... the Syr. rendering of the name, which is confirmed by the Arab name *an-āšira* and also by *nāšrājā* and *nōšrī*. For the Semitic š one would expect the Gk. ζ rather than ξ. 3. It is hard to find an OT prophecy directly corresponding to [Mt. 2:23](#).

Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–).

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a. The first difficulty explains the attempts to separate Ναζωραῖος materially from Ναζαρέθ. In this ref. is made to what Epiphanius (Haer., 29, 6) tells us about a pre-Christian Jewish sect of Νασσαραῖοι. After earlier fantastic proposals this attempt seemed to have reached its goal when Lidz. pointed to the Gnostic sect of the Mandaeans, which appeared in Southern Babylonia in the Christian era. In their sacred writings, composed in an East Aram. dialect, these call themselves without distinction מנדאנא (mandājē) and מנדאנא. The latter Lidz. transcribed as nāsōrājē, which he equated with Ναζωραῖος (though this leaves us with the second difficulty of the unrelated š and ζ). He took both forms to be Aram. renderings of the Heb. nōšrī attested in the Talmud. This he took to be an adjectival derivation (expressing membership) from nōšēr, “observant” (i.e., of specific cultic usages). He thought he saw here the name of a pre-Christian sect from which Jesus came. As he saw it, this name was transmitted 1. in the Heb. form as a name for Jesus in the Talmud, 2. in the Aram. form nāsōrājā (derived from the part. nāsār), the Syr. for Ναζαρηνός/Ναζωραῖος, 3. in the Aram. form nāsōrājā (derived from a nomen agentis *nāsār), represented by the Gk. Ναζωραῖος and the Mand. nāsōrājā. This explanation is one of the main props of his theory that the Mandaeans belonged to the Jordan area and were directly connected with sectarian movements in Palestinian Judaism at the time of the rise of Christianity. This hypothesis, esp. the assertion that Ναζωραῖος cannot be connected with Ναζαρέθ and its equation with nāsōrājā, has found a good deal of acceptance. But it does not stand up to closer inspection, as we shall see.

The main arguments for a western origin of the Mandaeans were 1. the adoption of West Aram. elements in Mandaean usage, both generally and esp. in the religious sphere; 2. the Mandaean use of “Jordan” (jardnā) for the flowing water used in baptism; Lidz. takes this to imply that the Mandaeans, when they migrated from the Jordan area, took with them the name of their sacred river, in which they had held their lustrations, and 3. the Mandaean self-designation nāsōrājā. Since then it has been shown 1. that the distinction between West and East Aram. arose only in the Christian era when there developed a distinction between the Jewish and Christian dialect of Palestine, which included the Nabatean and Samaritan, and the eastern dialects of the Christian Syrians, the Babylonian Talmud and the Mandaeans. The phenomena which Lidz. asserted to be West Aram. may all be explained as archaisms inherited in Babylonian Aram.; none of them demands a derivation outside Babylon. 2. H. Lietzmann has cogently shown that the Mandaeans borrowed not only their description of the baptismal water as “Jordan” but their whole baptismal ritual from the East Syrian church.

As regards 3. the explanation of מנדאנא cannot be sustained even on purely linguistic grounds. Lidz. himself has shown that the collective abstract noun in ūt...ā for nāsōrajā is not nāsōrūtā, as his thesis would demand, but מנדאנא, and once, in a later text, מנדאנא. All these forms, though Lidz. does not draw this inescapable conclusion, are relevant only if one assumes that the ן in מנדאנא no more denotes a long ō than the ך in מנדאנא a long ā and the ם in מנדאנא a long ī. In all three cases the “full” form in Mandaean orthography has an indifferent shwa vowel between the š and r, and this need not be denoted, as the form מנדאנא shows. Thus on Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–).

Also untenable is the assumption of Lidz. that there are two Aram. forms of what he takes to be the initial *nāsīrī*: 1. *nāsīājā*, derived from the part. *nāsar*, and 2. *nāšorāja*, assimilated to designations of calling in the form *fā'ōl* (like *amōrā'ē*, Amoraean, and *sāb...ōrā'ē*, Saboraean). The objections to this are 1. that such twofold development is inconceivable, 2. that there are no names of religious societies in the form *fā'ōl*, 3. in such a thoroughgoing Aramaicising as construction in *fā'ōl* would presuppose the retention of the non-Aram. *š* (instead of *ṭ*) is inexplicable, and 4. it has to be shown that the Mandaean form does not contain an *o*. Moreover Lidz., if not so firmly as others before him, is led to doubt not only whether Jesus was called after Nazareth but whether there was even a Galilean town of this name in His day. But the assumption which this necessitates, i.e., that the name of the city, or the city itself, belongs to the early Christian period, involves a *reductio ad absurdum*. One has only to think of the pains which Mt. and Lk. had to take to reconcile the fact that Jesus was a native of Nazareth with the birth in Bethlehem demanded by [Micah 5:1](#). It is of little moment that there is no mention of Nazareth in Joseph. or Rabb. writings, and that the first ref. outside the NT is only in the 3rd cent. in Julius Africanus.

c. As concerns the prophecy in [Mt. 2:23](#) the first point is that the words: ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται, contain the content of the prophecy; it is not necessary that they should be the exact wording. It must be admitted that there is no exact equivalent in either the Heb. or Gk. OT. The usual ref. is to *nēšer*, the shoot from the roots of Jesse, [Is. 11:1](#), though it is hard to see the connection, since *nēšer* was not a name borne by the Messiah. The equivalent “branch” of [Is. 4:2](#); [Jer. 23:5](#); [33:15](#) and esp. [Zech. 3:8](#); [6:12](#) is certainly a name, but in this case the word is *šemah* rather than *nēšer*, and there is no link with Ναζαρέθ, Ναζωραῖος. Billerbeck offers the following solution acc. to the Rabb. rule of interpretation Al-tiqri, which allows a word to be replaced by an equivalent: “Joseph settled in Nazareth in order that there should be fulfilled what was said by the prophet (in the words נָצַר and נְצִיחַ): he shall be called נְצִיחַ, a Nazarene.” But apart from the substitution this does not carry with it any connection of signification, but is a pun which only experts in Rabbinic interpretation can unravel. Mt., however, was trying to make himself understood by Gk. readers. If, then, it is possible to find a serviceable explanation in Gk. or LXX terms, this deserves precedence. Such an explanation is offered by the similarity of Ναζωραῖος and ναζιραῖος (Nazirite), which was familiar to Mt.’s readers from the prophecy concerning Samson in [Ju. 13:5, 7](#) (cf. [16:17](#)): ὅτι ἡγιασμένον ναζιραῖον (ναζιρ B) ἔσται τῷ θεῷ τὸ παιδάριον ἐκ τῆς γαστρὸς A. That there was an old tradition which linked Ναζωραῖος with ναζιραῖος may be seen from Tertullian [Marc., IV, 8](#). The prophets of [Mt. 2:23](#) embrace the former prophets of the Heb. Bible, which include the Book of Judges. Since, as we have shown, an explanation in Gk. is demanded, one cannot consider OT passages where we have *nāsīr* in the Heb. but not ναζιραῖος in the Gk., e.g., the blessing of Joseph in [Gn. 49:26](#); [Dt. 33:16](#) or [Am. 2:11, 12](#).

But this also alleviates the second difficulty (→ [875](#)) regarding the ζ for ς in Ναζαρέθ etc. Similar examples are really adequate to explain this: ἀδωνιζεδεκ קָדְשׁ יְדִנָּה in [Ju. 1:5 ff.](#) (corr. [Jos. 10:1, 3](#)) ΑΣΘ; βαζεις בְּצִיחַ [1 S. 14:4](#) B (βαζεθ G^{LUC}); εζρων יְרִיבָה [Ruth 4:18](#) G^{LUE} (εωρων BA); ωζ יְרִיב, [Gn.](#)

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22:21 G^{LUC} (ωζ A), ους id. [1 Ch. 1:17](#) G^{LUC} (ως B); μαζαρ מַצָּרָה [Gn. 36:42](#); [1 Ch. 1:53](#) B; σωαζ יוֹעָז, [1 Ch. 26:14](#) B (ιωιας A); Ζεβήην καὶ Ζαρμούνην, Jos. [Ant., 5, 228](#) for עֲבָרָה וְצִלְמֵלֶךְ, [Ju. 8:5 ff.](#); ζογορα רַעֲזָה [Gn. 13:10](#); [Jer. 31 \(48\):4](#); ζογορ id. [Jer. 31 \(48\):34](#) (in 8 other OT passages σηγορ); μᾶζα מֵצָה, Jos. [Ant., 5, 219](#). Thus there is ample support for the possibility of ζ for ς in Ναζαρέθ. It is also possible, however, that when the name of Jesus' home town and His own surname were put in Gk. they were from the very first influenced by the ναζιραῖος of the Gk. Bible.

d. Finally, in relation to the pre-Christian Jewish sect of the Nasarenes to which Epiphanius refers in Haer., 18; 29, 6, it may be emphasised that by the form Νασσαραῖοι he distinguishes them plainly from the Jewish Christian Ναζωραῖοι. Hence they have no contribution to make in explanation of the NT Ναζωραῖος. Acc. to Epiphanius the characteristics of this sect are that they keep the Jewish commandments but reject the Torah as a falsification, reject bloody offerings and the eating of flesh and contest εἰμαρμένη and astrology. Materially, then, they have nothing in common with either the Baptist, Jesus, or later Jewish Christianity. The only question is whether they ever existed at all. Epiphanius in the 4th century is the first and only writer to speak of them. In estimating the historical value of his reference the primary question is that of his sources. Following H. Hilgenfeld and A. Schmidtke, W. Bousset has conjectured that the Νασσαραῖοι of Epiphanius come from a list of sects which seems to have been used by Justin and Hegesipp. in the 2nd cent. and Ephraem the Syr. and the Apostolic Constitutions in the 4th. Bousset believes this list was of Jewish origin, and argues that the Νασσαραῖοι were in fact Christians, the word being indeed an exact rendering of the Aram. *nāṣrājē*, "Christians." In the Christian tradition this was no longer understood, and because of a second misunderstanding, namely, that the list dealt with pre-Christian Jewish heresies, the Νασσαραῖοι of Epiphanius came into being. There is much to be said for this explanation.

In sum, it may be said that the understanding of Ναζωραῖος as a rendering of the Aram. *nāṣrājā*, derived from the name of the city Nazareth (Aram. *nāṣrat*), is linguistically and materially unassailable. Neither the self-designation of the Mandaeans as *nāṣrājē*, which derives from the Syr. name for Christians, nor the name of a supposed pre-Christian sect of Νασσαραῖοι, can provide a different and more basic meaning for Ναζωραῖος.

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