

JESUS: ETHNIC HEALER

Open

Leader Note	Beginning with an “approach” question helps people ease into the discussion. A good opening question introduces a theme from the Scripture passage, captures the attention of the group members, and draws them into the discussion.
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The histories of our peoples, including immigration stories, ethnic or racial heritage, power and privilege, enslavement, forced removal, intra-ethnic conflict, and more, shape how we view ourselves and each other, positively or negatively.

- How might your cultural and ethnic background shape how you view yourself and others?

Context

Leader Note	In Jesus’ time, Nazareth was a small, conservative Jewish town and home to one of Israel’s twenty-four priestly divisions (1 Chron. 24:15; cf. Neh. 12:10-22). Nazareth’s priests periodically traveled to the temple in Jerusalem to perform their sacred duties. See “ LISTEN: What do we know about Nazareth in Jesus’ time? An archaeologist explains. ”
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The people of Nazareth, a small Jewish village, carried deep scars in their ethnic stories. After Assyria’s invasion around 732 B.C., the surrounding region became known as the “Galilee of the Gentiles [non-Jews].”¹ Resentful of the centuries-long foreign domination, many Jewish Galileans were fierce nationalists.² Revolt seethed continuously, mostly underground.

Read [Luke 4:14-30 \(NIV\)](#)

¹ See 2 Kgs. 15:29; 17:23; Isa. 9:1; Mt. 4:15.

² In 6 A.D., Judas and Saddok led Zealot resistance, resulting in 2,000 Jewish men being crucified. Gamaliel called Judas a failed revolutionist (Acts 5:36), and Josephus noted the strength and warlike nature of Galilean freedom fighters (Josephus War 3:41 f.).

Discuss

1. What stands out about Jesus’ mission (vv. 17-19)? Who is he prioritizing?
2. Jesus’ mission statement omits portions that the townspeople used to support their nationalist agenda (vv. 4:17-19; cf. Isa. 61:1-7). For example, Jesus does not mention God’s vengeance (Isa. 61:2), which they applied to their enemies.

What are some of the ways the villagers respond, and why? As one of the villagers, how might you have responded?

Leader Note	<p>After reading Scripture, Jesus sits down to teach, following the custom of Israel’s advanced teachers (Lk. 4:20-21). The townspeople were initially skeptical of Jesus’ claims, evidenced by their scoffing question, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” and their overall distrust. Jesus acknowledges their skepticism, pointing out that they want him to prove himself by performing miracles in his hometown as he has elsewhere.</p> <p>In the NIV and most other translations, the Greek verb <i>martureo</i> is translated positively as “they spoke well of” (4:22) to describe the synagogue crowd’s first reactions. However, several translations translate <i>martureo</i> in Luke 4:22 neutrally as “bore/bear him witness” (KJV, ASV, YLT) and “bore testimony to him (JUB). <i>Martureo</i> means to “testify” or “bear witness,” but whether positively or negatively depends on context. (See Mt. 23:31 for the negative sense.) The synagogue audience probably bore witness negatively, expressing their dismayed skepticism in verse 22.</p> <p>See Daniel Hoffman’s Exegetical Note: Luke 4:22 and Kenneth Bailey’s comments on Luke 4:22 in <i>Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes</i>, IVP, 2008, 150-151.</p>
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3. Why does Jesus’ hometown crowd become outraged when Jesus mentions two examples of God favoring other people? What might Jesus be trying to expose?

Leader Note	Jesus essentially accused them of being like their faithless ancestors who spurned God’s messengers. By referencing a particularly unfaithful generation, Jesus implied they had forfeited divine blessings bestowed upon Gentiles (1 Kgs. 17:1-24; 2 Kgs. 5:1-17). The Roman historian Tacitus noted a
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	similar sentiment, stating that Jews "regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies" (Historics, 5.5).
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4. God sends messengers to heal and bless Israel's ethnic enemies. What does that tell us about God's priorities?

Reflect



Mount Precipice, standing on the outskirts of Nazareth, is the traditional site where the angry mob tried to push Jesus over a cliff. – Picture used by permission; [BiblePlaces.com](https://www.bibleplaces.com)

Like those in first-century Nazareth, we and the communities we belong to too often define ourselves by our scars—the things that have been done, said, and not done to and by us.

Leader Note	Carefully distinguish between the questions below that are safe for everyone to answer and brave (more direct and personal) questions that people in your group may or may not feel ready to discuss. As the leader, consider discussing the more personal, brave questions yourself. Others will be more likely to share if you share first.
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- Where might you place yourself in this story?
 - Are you in your hometown within the crowd? What are your thoughts as you listen to Jesus?

— Do you see yourself as the “prophet”? How might Jesus being on the receiving end of anger and violence influence your view of him and the world? What are the risks of recognizing and confronting bias in others or a system? Have you ever experienced resistance when trying to serve the underserved, advocate for equity, or challenge injustice?

- How might God's grace for all people, including those we disagree with or fight against, challenge our interests and agendas?
- How might Jesus want to confront any racist history or racism in our hometowns, neighborhoods, or even families?

Pray

Invite the Holy Spirit to speak and respond with gratitude, anguish, confession, or praise. Pray for courage to follow Jesus' mission, strength against resistance, and compassion to serve the poor, sick, and unseen with justice and grace.