

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE GOSPELS

The narrative of the New Testament from its beginning to end assumes the reader is familiar with the physical setting that served as a stage for the unfolding drama. In many instances the location and nature of the recorded sites have been lost in time. Modern archaeology together with a careful reading of the ancient witnesses can assist in illuminating our understanding of the persons, places and events reported in the New Testament. On the following pages we will carefully consider significant events that may benefit from a historical and geographical reading of the text.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS AND THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Mark and John open their Gospels with the ministry of John the Baptist, while Matthew and Luke provide details of Jesus' birth. Even though the two birth narratives give different historical perspectives, they both identify the place of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem (Mt 2:1; Lk 2:15)—the ancestral home of King David (1 Sam 17:12). The relationship between Jesus and David is a particular emphasis of Matthew: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1; 12:23 *et passim*).

By contrast, John's Gospel lacks both the title "son of David" and any mention of a Bethlehem birth. When the subject of Jesus' birthplace is raised, the Evangelist leaves unanswered the objection of some:

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" (Jn 7:41-42)

Luke records that Joseph and Mary were residents of Nazareth in Galilee (Lk 1:26, 2:4), and that they traveled to Bethlehem in compliance with a census ordered by Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was governor of Syria (Lk 2:2). Joseph's enrollment at

Bethlehem suggests that he originated from the Judean region south of Jerusalem. Luke does not explain what brought Joseph to Nazareth in the years before Jesus was born.

We also possess scant information outside of the New Testament about this Galilean village (see *Eus. Onom.* 138:14; *Epiph. Adv. haer.* 30.11.10). Josephus makes no mention of Nazareth, and rabbinic tradition reports only that it was a village of priests (*Mishmarot* 18; *Qoh. Rab.* 2:8). The scarcity of its mention is not surprising. Modern archaeological

during the reign of Herod the Great.

External corroboration is also lacking for Matthew's account of Herod's execution of the young male children in Bethlehem. Matthew is our only record of the event. Nevertheless, Herod's actions described by Matthew fit the king's paranoid personality sketched by Josephus. Herod executed members of his own family out of fear that they might attempt to usurp the throne. On one occasion, certain Pharisees prophesied to the wife of Pheroras—the brother of Herod—that, "by God's decree Herod's

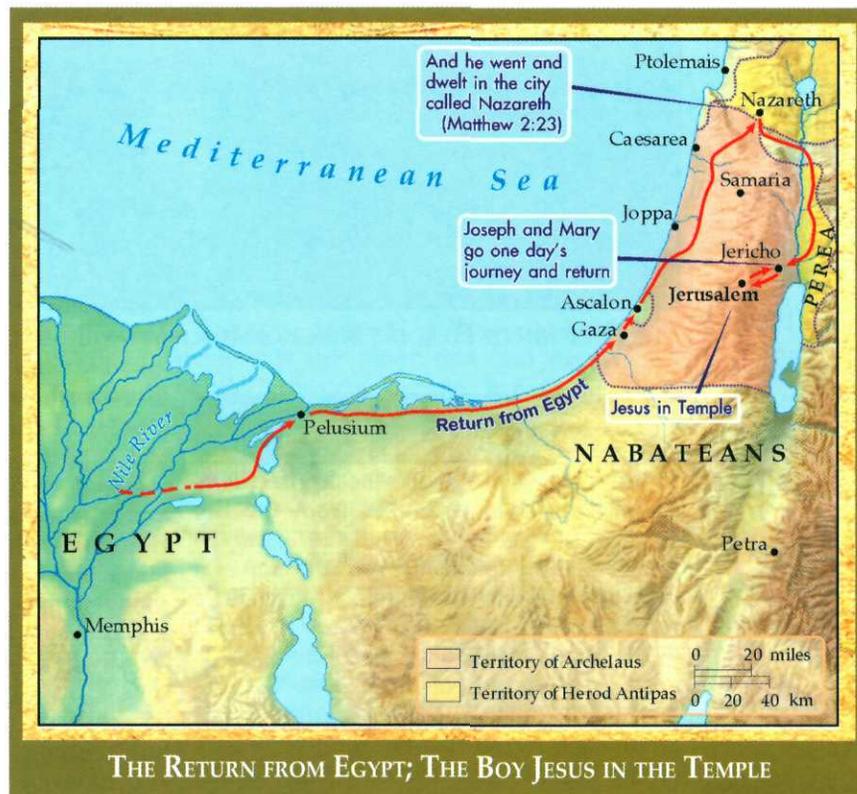
throne would be taken from him, both from himself and his descendants, and the royal power would fall to her and Pheroras and to any children that they might have. . ." (*Ant.* 17:41-45). Herod responded by killing the Pharisees involved and the members of his family who had expressed sympathy with this prophecy.

Matthew 2:13-15 reports that Joseph was warned by an angel to take his family to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous intentions. Only when the king had died was it safe to return to the Land of Israel. In the meantime, Rome had awarded authority in the region of Judea and Samaria to Archelaus, son of Herod (*War* 2:93; *Ant.* 17:317). He followed in his father's cruel footsteps. So, according to Matthew,

Joseph was warned in a dream not to return to the environs of Jerusalem.

And he [Joseph] went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He [Jesus] will be called a Nazarene." (RSV Mt 2:23)

This final verse of Matthew's report concerning Jesus' birth and childhood has challenged Christian readers for centuries. The crux of its interpretation revolves around the meaning of *nazoraioi* that is routinely translated Nazarene, and the identification of the prophecy that Matthew claims is fulfilled with the family's settlement in Nazareth.



work in Nazareth paints a picture of a remote, insignificant village that would have attracted little attention.

Both Matthew and Luke present Jesus' birth during the last years of Herod the Great, who died in 4 BCE (Mt 2:1; Lk 1:5). New Testament scholarship has tried to reconcile Herod's presence in the birth narratives with Luke's report that Jesus was born at the same time as the Roman census when Quirinius was governor (Lk 2:2). Luke and Josephus are familiar with another census that took place in 6 CE (*Acts* 5:37; *War* 7:253), but there is no mention in Jewish or Roman sources of an earlier census under Quirinius



THE SOUTHERN LEVANT IN THE TIME OF JESUS

We will not review the many and varied solutions that have been proposed. We venture here only two observations about the language of the verse that may assist towards narrowing Matthew's possible intent. First, the "o" in the second syllable of *nazoraios* indicates that the Hebrew word behind our Greek term was *natzor*, i.e. one kept, protected, and not *netzer* (branch) or *nazir* (Nazirite). Second, translators of our verse rarely take note that the passive Greek verb can be intended to communicate a divine passive in which God is assumed to be acting. The verse may thus be rendered, "The one whom I have kept (i.e. *natzori*) shall be called (i.e. by God)." Accordingly, Matthew's elliptical allusion is to a prophetic passage that describes one who has been kept, protected and whom the Lord has called.

Scholarship on this verse has focused most of its attention on trying to explain the significance of the collocation of *nazoraios* and *nazaret*. Yet, nowhere else in the New Testament do these terms appear alongside each other. Could it be that Matthew has brought the elliptical Old Testament prophecy, not because of the name of the Galilean village, but because the angelic warning and protective actions of Joseph

were reminiscent of an ancient prophecy?

A cruel son of Herod remained in power in Jerusalem, and it was not yet safe to return there. At the angelic warning, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Nazareth out of concern for their continued safety. Their relocation to the security of this remote Galilean village, where Jesus could grow to adulthood, reminded Matthew of a verse concerning the Isaianic Servant of the Lord:

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the nations. (Isa 42:6)

So, Matthew concludes his abbreviated description of Jesus' infancy with a report that Jesus was taken to a remote village in the Galilee and preserved there by the Lord, until the appointed time for the beginning of his prophetic ministry. We witness a similar literary device by Luke to summarize and conclude his report concerning the childhood of John the Baptist: "And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel" (Lk 1:80).

Of additional value for Matthew, however, the Evangelist uses Isaiah 42:6 to anticipate the next episode in his record of Jesus' life—the heavenly call at his baptism (Mt 3:16–17). Scholars have already demonstrated that according to the Evangelists the heavenly voice drew from the same block of scripture in Isaiah 42 to proclaim the prophetic significance of Jesus' baptism: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him" (Isa 42:1).

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Geographical Setting. In all of the Gospels the ministry of Jesus begins with his participation in the baptism of John. The geographical setting for John's ministry varies in the four Gospel accounts. In both Christian tradition and modern scholarship this has resulted in uncertainty regarding the location of John. All of the accounts cite Isaiah 40:3 to introduce the reason for the Baptist's presence in the wilderness. "A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord." Like the Qumran Congregation (1QS 8:13–14), John believed that preparation for the Lord should take place in the wilderness.

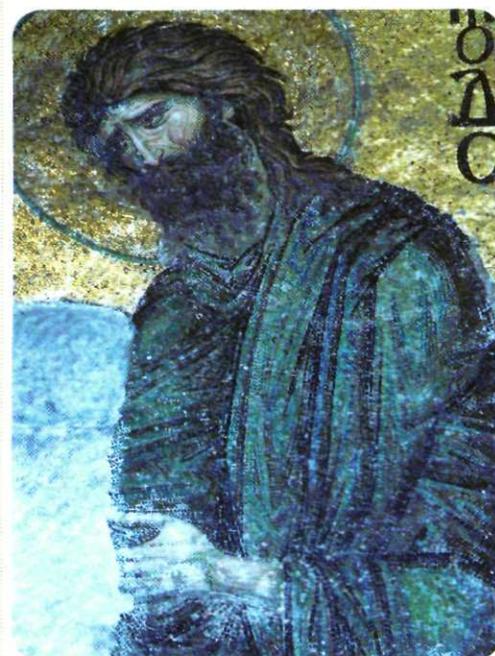
Mark reports that John was "in the wilderness" (Mk 1:4) without any specification where that wilderness lay. The Greek term, similar to its Hebrew counterpart, need not indicate an arid, uninhabitable place, i.e. desert. It may also describe unpopulated, pasturing areas belonging to residents of a nearby city (cf. Lk 8:29). So, we hear of a "wilderness" near Bethsaida (Lk 9:10–12), where Mark describes green grass (Mk 6:39). We find

a similar breadth of usage for the Hebrew term in the Old Testament (Gen 21:14; Joel 2:22; Isa 42:11).

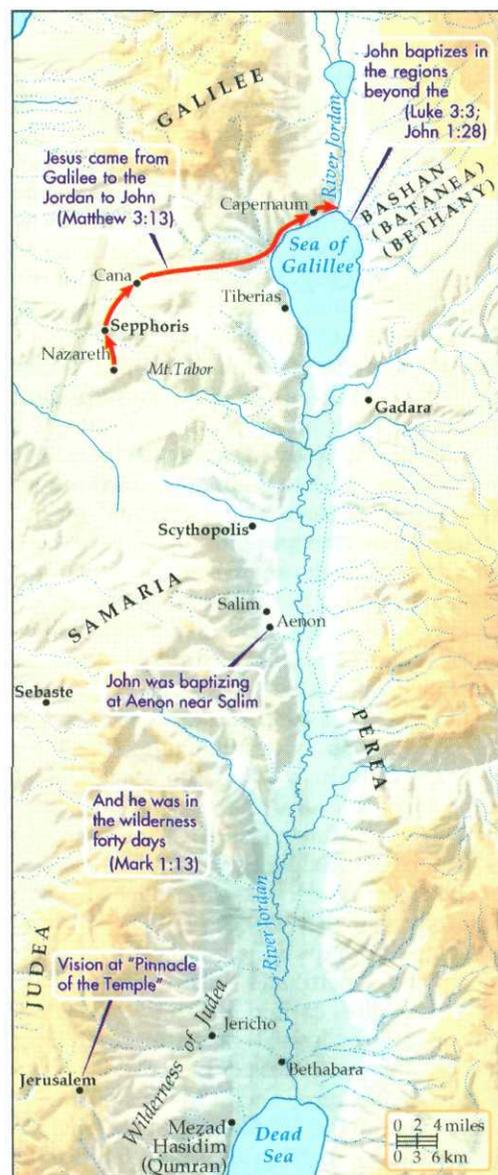
Mark does record that crowds came to John from "all Judea and Jerusalem" (Mk 1:5; cf. Mt 3:5; Jn 1:19), which may or may not imply proximity to the arid regions in the lower Jordan Valley. It is difficult to know how much weight Mark intends for us to give to these geographical details about the crowds. Are they instead the Evangelist's periphrastic style of emphasizing John's role as the Voice of Isaiah 40:3? In the Isaiah passage the Voice is to speak to Jerusalem and the cities of Judea (Isa 40:9).

If Mark is employing here a technique of verbal allusion, it would not be uncommon. For example, elsewhere he omits explicit testimony to the popular notion that the Baptist was Elijah *redivivus* (cf. Mal 4:5 [HMT 3:23]; Mt 11:14; Lk 1:17). Yet, Mark was certainly aware of this opinion, because he describes John's clothing with clear intent to present John in Elijah's attire (Mk 1:6; Mt 3:4; 2 Kgs 1:8). On that occasion, Markan detail is not intended to merely describe John's clothing but to signal to his readers the eschatological importance of John's prophetic role. The challenge for the modern reader remains how to read these Markan details. Matthew on both of these occasions shares Mark's features, but he alone of the Synoptic Gospels—perhaps anticipating the mention of the Jerusalem and Judean crowds or reflecting the earlier Judean wilderness setting of Isaiah 40:3—specifies that John was in "the wilderness of Judea" (Mt 3:1).

While Luke agrees with Mark's portrayal that John is in the wilderness, he lacks Mark and Matthew's geographical reference to Judean and Jerusalem crowds. Instead, Luke notes only, "[John] went into all the region about the Jordan" (Lk 3:3). The Fourth Gospel contributes unique geographical



John the Baptist, from the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.



THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND THE SOJOURN IN THE WILDERNESS

details about the location of John's ministry, before and after its description of John's baptism of Jesus. At points the Evangelist parallels the Synoptic Gospels, and at other points he presents independent traditions. Of the setting prior to Jesus' baptism, John's Gospel records that the Baptist was at "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (Jn 1:28). Sometime later he is reported at "Aenon near Salim" (Jn 3:23). So, in apparent agreement, John and Luke present the Baptist moving between different venues and not limited to any single location.

The site of Bethany in the Transjordan finds no mention in early literature outside of John's singular reference. Origen reports in c. 200 CE that no such place exists (*Orig. Comm. John VI.24*). In spite of his admission that "[Bethany] is found in almost all of the copies [of John's Gospel]," he proposed a textual emendation for the verse to read Bethabara. Eusebius' *Onomasticon* (58:18) a century later describes Bethabara: "Where John was baptizing, beyond the Jordan.

The place is shown where even today many of the brothers still endeavor to receive a bath." Eusebius embraced this textual solution first heard from Origen, because he makes no mention of Bethany in connection with John's baptism. While these early Christian conjectures exchanged the known for the unknown, manuscript support for Bethabara prior to Origen is nonexistent. Bethany appears in our earliest and best manuscripts of John's Gospel. Confusion in the later Byzantine period is compounded by the Medeba Map, which preserves "Bethabara, the sanctuary of Saint John the Baptist" on the western bank of the Jordan River, not as the New Testament describes Bethany, "beyond (i.e. east of) the Jordan."

John's reference to Aenon shares Bethany's absence in the early sources. The Medeba Map describes an Aenon in the Transjordan and identifies it with the site of Sapsaphas. A second "Aenon near Salim" is depicted on the west side of the Jordan River not too distant from Scythopolis (i.e. Beth-shean). This latter site is attested also in Eusebius' *Onomasticon* 40:1–4 and Egeria's *Travels* 15:1–4. A third suggestion for Aenon, perhaps owing to the fact that mention of Aenon occurs within the Fourth Gospel's narrative about Jesus in Samaria, identifies the Baptist in the interior of the hill country of Samaria. Its location is remembered near the modern-day Arab village of Salim (*Jdt 4:4*). While the toponymic challenge of springs (=Aenon) near Salim may be resolved, it is difficult to understand how the interior of Samaria served as the venue for John's ministry to call Jews to repentance and ritual immersion. Identification of an early Roman location for the springs of Aenon remains uncertain.

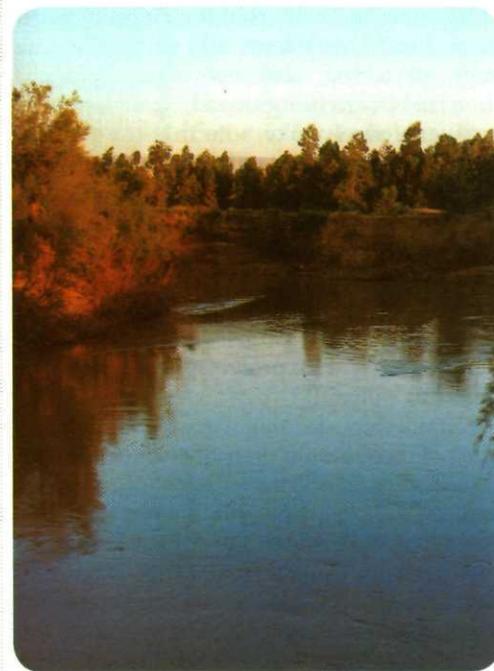
Returning to Bethany, it is suggested that the reference in John 1:28 is not to a village, but to the region of Bashan in the Transjordan. Designation of the region of biblical Bashan—extending from Mount Hermon in the north to the southern boundaries of the Lower Golan—with the term Batanea is also heard by Greek writers from Josephus (*Life 54; Ant. 9:159*) to Eusebius (*Onom. 44:9–11*). Additionally, according to the Septuagint the region of Bashan is demarked like Bethany, "beyond the Jordan" (*Deut 4:47; Josh 9:10*).

If "Bethany beyond the Jordan" does signal the region of ancient Bashan (Batanea), then it indicates that John's ministry reached regions northeast of the Sea of Galilee. A northern setting for John better suits the description that two of his disciples, Andrew and Peter, together with Philip came out from Bethsaida to follow Jesus the day following his baptism (Jn 1:44). The location of John's disciples at Bethsaida on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee is not easily reconciled with the traditional location of Jesus' baptism in the lower Jordan Valley near Jericho.

It may be of some significance that in rabbinic opinion, the waters of the Jordan River above the Sea of Galilee were preferable for ritual immersion. The waters of the Yarmuk and lower Jordan rivers were reckoned unsuitable, since they included "mixed waters" (*m. Para 8:10*). In other words, these rivers south of the Sea of Galilee received tributaries of questionable purity. The rabbinic estimation accords with the lack of any allusion to the practice of Jewish ritual immersion in the lower Jordan River in the days of the Second Temple.

John's ministry in the north seems a more fitting setting for his critique of actions involving the Herodian families, who resided in the Galilee and the north. John's popularity and outspoken critique resulted in his imprisonment by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. Josephus' parenthetical remarks concerning the fortress of Macherus indicated that the historian did not know where John was executed. Mark's description that "leading officials of Galilee" (*Mk 6:21*) were present during the banquet when John was condemned strengthens the contention that John was imprisoned and executed in Antipas' Galilean palace in Tiberias.

John's calling to the crowds to repent and ritually immerse in the regions of the Jordan above the Sea of Galilee may also explain the large crowds (*Ant. 18:118*) that Jesus encountered on the plains near Bethsaida, where he withdrew upon hearing of the Baptist's death (*Mt 14:13*). According to Mark, when Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion for them, "because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (*Mk 6:34*). With these words the Evangelist hints both to the relationship of the crowds with the recently deceased John, and the popular



The River Jordan—traditional site of Jesus' baptism.

notion among some that John was the anticipated prophet-like Moses (Deut 18:18; Jn 1:25; cf. 4Q175 1:5–8). Mark's creative use of the phrase—"sheep without a shepherd"—is intended to echo the same words spoken by the Lord to Moses in Numbers 27:17 to emphasize the need for new leadership after his death.

What we witness, then, with the topographical setting for the Feeding of the Multitudes in the Synoptic Gospels (Lk 9:10–17 *parr.*) is not unlike the Fourth Gospel's fragmented description of Jesus' return beyond the Jordan.

Then Jesus returned beyond the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days (i.e. Batanea/Bashan; Jn 1:28). Here he stayed and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true." And in that place many believed in Jesus. (Jn 10:40–42)

THE TRAVELS OF JESUS

From Nazareth to Capernaum. Prominent east-west valleys (Beth-haccerem, Hannathon, Bêt Neţôfa, Turân) that traverse the lower region are one of the topographical features that distinguishes Lower Galilee from Upper Galilee (War 3:35). The valleys of the Lower Galilee are the result of prehistoric tectonic activity. These geological striations extend from the Mediterranean coast north of Mount Carmel and reach inland to the Sea of Galilee and the upper Jordan Valley.

By contrast the Upper Galilee region lacks the open valley systems that mark the Lower Galilee, and so was not easily traversed. In addition, its mountainous terrain reaches heights that double those of the mountains of the Lower Galilee. The contrasting degree of accessibility left its mark on human settlement and movement in both regions. Archaeological surveys in the Lower Galilee indicate a greater degree of outside contact that is evidenced in the material culture of the populations residing there. In addition, while Josephus attests to the establishment of new urban centers (Sepphoris, Tiberias, Gabara; Life 188) in the Lower Galilee during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, there is no similar evidence for urban centers in the Upper Galilee.

The topographical delineation between Upper and Lower Galilee is the esh-Shaghûr fault that is marked by the Beth-haccerem Valley, the northernmost of the transversal valleys in the Lower Galilee. The accessibility of the Lower Galilee region caused by these valleys had its impact on social development. There was sparse settlement in the interior of the Upper Galilee, while the early capital of the Galilee was Sepphoris, positioned in the Bêt Neţôfa Valley (Sahl el-Baţţôf). Its importance was accentuated by its location at the crossroads



FROM NAZARETH TO CANA AND CAPERNAUM

of the Ptolemais–Taricheae (Magdala) trunk road and the secondary north-south route by way of Simonias to the Jezreel Valley and the international coastal highway.

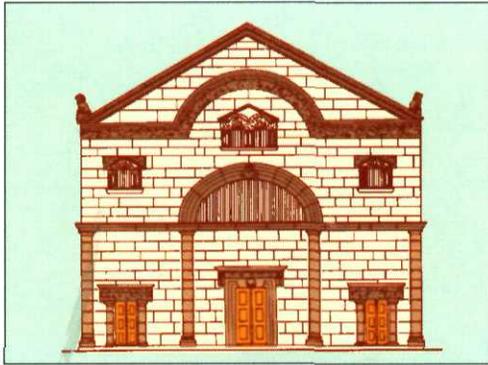
In Matthew 4:13 the Evangelist reports that Jesus traveled from Nazareth to Capernaum. The journey north from Nazareth and east may pass through either the Bêt Neţôfa Valley or the Turân Basin to descend from Nazareth's chalk ridge overlooking the Jezreel Valley to villages along the Sea of Galilee. However, indications of Jesus' presence in the Bêt Neţôfa Valley suggest that he used the Ptolemais–Taricheae trunk road in his movement between his boyhood home and the Sea of Galilee.

In the beginnings of the Fourth Gospel Jesus' first miracle is recorded at Cana (Jn 2:1–11). Immediately following the miracle Jesus is reported to descend to Capernaum (Jn 2:12). According to John, on another occasion Cana and Capernaum are likewise juxtaposed in mention of Jesus' activity (Jn 4:46). It should also be remembered that Cana was the home of one of Jesus' twelve disciples, Nathana-el (Jn 1:45–49, 21:2). Together these verses suggest Jesus' presence in Cana on more than one occasion

and that the village may have been a regular waystation on his route from Nazareth to the Sea of Galilee.

The New Testament site for Cana of the Galilee is likely Khirbet Qanah in the Bêt Neţôfa Valley. It guarded the ascent to Jotapata, the city of Josephus, who reports staying in Cana (Life 86). The fortified village lay on the road from Ptolemais to Taricheae (Magdala). The Hellenistic-Roman site is currently under excavation and should be distinguished from the medieval Christian pilgrimage site of Kafr Kana that from the time of Quaresmius (1620 CE) has been identified as New Testament Cana.

Eusebius (Eus. Onom. 116:4) identifies the New Testament village with the Old Testament Kanah of Joshua 19:28. However, this is merely a result of the similarity of the Septuagint's Greek rendering of the Hebrew name for the Old Testament village rather than a clear identification. The lack of any topographical information by Eusebius other than his biblical citation is patent for sites unknown to him. His knowledge of the Galilee was limited in any event. However, it seems that by the late Roman period the identity of either Old Testament Kanah or New Testament Cana was unknown.



Capernaum—reconstruction of the synagogue.

The journey from Nazareth to Capernaum is almost 30 miles (48 km), too lengthy for a single day's travel. Instead, Cana provided a convenient break in the journey, lying as it did on the Ptolemais–Taricheae (Magdala) road. Accessibility to the Sea of Galilee from Cana is indicated by Josephus' report of an overnight march from Cana to Tiberias in the company of two hundred men (*Life* 86–90). His report demonstrates that the route from Cana to the Sea of Galilee was known and in use. The Johannine account of the nobleman's appeal for Jesus to heal his son (*Jn* 4:46–54) assumes his travel from Capernaum to Cana, where Jesus was staying. While questions may exist concerning certain geographical details in the event, especially in terms of its relationship to its Synoptic counterpart, clearly the author of the Fourth Gospel saw no problem in describing a journey from Cana to Capernaum.

Khirbet Qanah lies a little more than 7 miles (11 km) north of Nazareth. Several ridge routes lead down the northern slopes of the Nazareth ridge into the Bêt Neṭōfa Valley. Travel to Cana likely led near to Sepphoris that lies in the middle of the valley. The route from Cana to Capernaum then courses north and east along the northern edges of the Bêt Neṭōfa Valley until it descends into Wādī Arbel. This serpentine descent winds north of Qarné Hittim through the Arbel Pass. Passing at the foot of the Arbel cliffs the route turns north across the fertile Plain of Gennesaret and follows the shoreline past Magdala and Gennesar to Capernaum.

THE 1ST CENTURY ENVIRONS OF THE SEA OF GALILEE

Events recorded in the ministry of Jesus outside of Jerusalem are primarily located in the region around the Sea of Galilee, specifically in the north and northwest area of the lake. The Gospels are an important historical witness for Jewish settlement in this region. Scholarship seldom notes that for many of these settlements, their first mention in the literary witnesses is in the New Testament. After a confrontation in the synagogue in Nazareth, his boyhood home,

Jesus relocated to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee (*Mt* 4:13; *Mk* 1:21; *Lk* 4:31). This village would become the center of his ministry in the region. We now turn our attention to settlements around the Sea of Galilee that find mention in the New Testament.

Tiberias. It is no accident that the New Testament lacks a report of a visit by Jesus to Tiberias. Indeed, the city finds mention only in the Fourth Gospel (*Jn* 6:1, 6:23, 21:1) to designate the lake and to describe boats embarking from its port to bring people to Jesus. As Josephus reports, Herod Antipas founded the new capital of the Galilee but took insufficient care with the placement of the city. He built it on an old cemetery, rendering all who dwelt there ritually defiled (*Ant.* 18:36–38). Josephus' description of those who settled in Tiberias is less than complimentary, and he states that Antipas even had to force some to reside in the new regional capital.

The new settlers were a promiscuous rabble, no small contingent being Galilaean, with such as were drafted from territory subject to [Antipas] and brought forcibly to the new foundation. Some of these were magistrates. Herod accepted as participants even poor men who were brought in to join the others from any and all places of origin. (*Ant.* 18:37)

It is suggested that the city was founded in 18 CE, although the coins of Antipas from Tiberias begin only from 20 CE. In any event, it was not until the second century that Tiberias was purified under the direction of Simeon bar Yohai to render it fit for a religiously observant population (*Gen. Rab.* 79h; *j. Shabb.* 9, 1–38d). In the late Roman and Byzantine periods it became a center of Jewish learning and the location for the compilation of the Jerusalem Talmud.

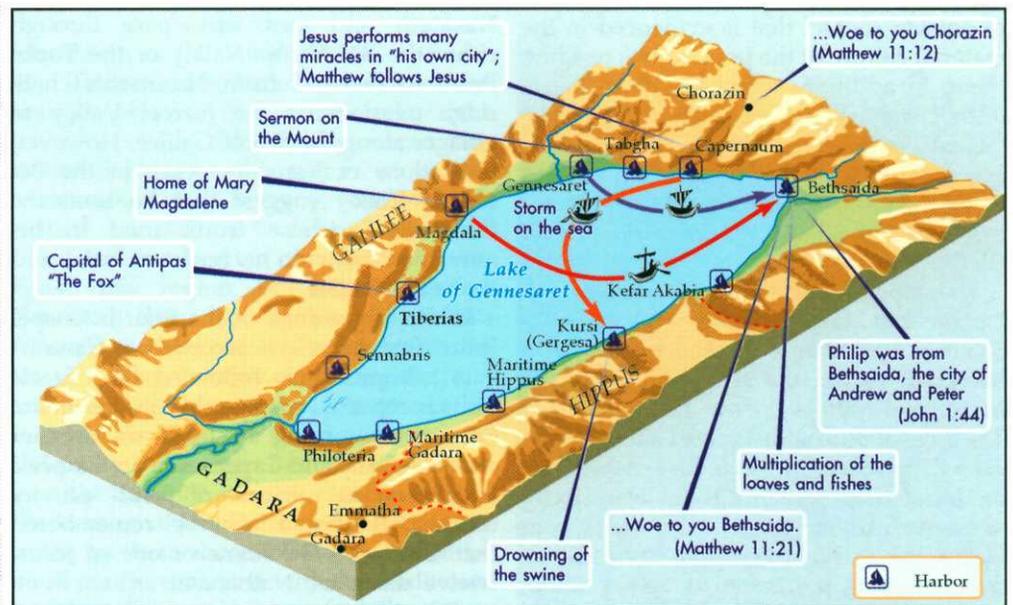
Antipas selected the site because of its location on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It benefited from the economy of the

lake and its accessibility to nearby trade routes. It also is near the warm springs of Hammath (*Ant.* 18:36; *Life* 85; *War* 2:614; cf. *Pliny Nat. Hist.* 5, 71; *Mo'ed Qat.* 18a; *j. Meg.* 2:1–2), a site already settled before Tiberias. For the most part, the ancient remains of Tiberias lie beneath the modern city, and only meager finds from first-century Tiberias have been uncovered. The only sizeable structure identified by the archaeologists to the time of Antipas is the gate complex located at the southern entrance to Tiberias.

Josephus describes both a stadium (*War* 2:618) and a place of prayer, *proseuche* (*Life* 277, 280, 293), in Tiberias. Neither has been discovered. The precise sense of the latter term for Josephus is unclear. Although the historian mentions a large building (*Life* 277) for the location of the *proseuche* where the public gathered in Tiberias, he does not otherwise use the term in such a way that it necessitates the meaning of a fixed structure (*War* 5:388; *Ant.* 14:258). His citation from *Apion* describes prayers at Heliopolis offered in open-air (*Apion* 2:10). The Greek term shares the same breadth of meaning in the New Testament (cf. *Acts* 16:13, 16:16).

Josephus mentions also a palace built by Antipas that was gilded with gold and decorated with "figures of living creatures" (*Life* 65–66). The tetrarch's transgression of Jewish law later contributed to the building's destruction. It may have been at the palace in Tiberias that Antipas gave a banquet on his birthday, "for his courtiers and officers and the leading men of Galilee" (*Mk* 6:21). Events at that banquet led to the Baptist's tragic end.

Magdala-Taricheae. At the foot of the Mount Arbel cliffs, on the road from Tiberias along the lakeshore, lay the settlement of Magdala. Its Hebrew and Greek names, Migdal-Nunia ("fish tower"; cf. *b. Pesah.* 46b) and Taricheae ("salted fish";



AROUND THE LAKE OF GENNESARET (SEA OF GALILEE)

Life 188) reflect the dominant local industry of the first century. According to Strabo, "At the place called Taricheae the lake supplies excellent fish for pickling, and on its banks grow fruit-bearing trees resembling apple trees (*Strabo Geog.* 16.2.45).

Apart from a poorly attested reading of Matthew 11:39, no mention is made of Jesus' presence at Magdala (cf. *Mk 8:10*). We likewise do not hear that any of the disciples come from here. Yet, Jesus' embarkation on a fishing boat from nearby Gennesaret (*Lk 5:1*) would have brought him near to the tower of Magdala, which gave the town its name and where local fish were dried and salted. The only undisputed reference in the New Testament to Magdala is as the home of Mary Magdalene. She was among the women who followed Jesus from Galilee (*Mt 27:56; Jn 19:25*) and also with those who discovered Jesus' empty tomb (*Lk 24:10*).

Travel between Tiberias and Magdala is described both in rabbinic literature and Josephus, who speaks of "a road to Taricheae, which is thirty furlongs [c. 3.5 mi./5 km] distant from Tiberias" (*Life 157*). His description is to be preferred over Pliny's placement of Taricheae, south of the Sea of Galilee, "Taricheae on the south (a name which is by many persons given to the lake itself), and of Tiberias on the west" (*Pliny Nat. Hist.* 5:15).

Josephus presents Taricheae as the center of its own toparchy in 54 CE, when it was awarded by Nero to Agrippa II. Together with the toparchy of Tiberias, Taricheae comprised eastern Galilee (*War 2:252*). The historian, who was given the responsibility for the defense of the Galilee, includes Taricheae in a list of cities of Lower Galilee that he fortified in preparation for the war with Rome (*Life 188; 156*). To the present no walls have been discovered. Nor has there been certain identification of the *proseuche* (*Life 280*) or hippodrome (*War 2:599*). He describes a sea-battle at Taricheae that resulted in a devastating Jewish loss. Residents fled to Tiberias thinking they would not be able to return. It may be that Taricheae was absorbed into Tiberias after the Jewish Revolt.

Capernaum. Our most plentiful literary witness to the village of Capernaum is the New Testament. Jesus moved to Capernaum after his rejection in Nazareth (*Mt 4:13*), and it was subsequently known as "his own city" (*Mt 9:1*). A number of Jesus' disciples were chosen there (*Mt 4:13-22, 8:5-22, 9:1-34; Mk 1:21-34, 2:1-17; Lk 7:1-10*), and he is reported to preach in the synagogue on more than one occasion (*Lk 4:31; Jn 6:59*). Jesus is also found in the house of Peter, which is described in Capernaum (*Lk 4:38*).

The only other first-century witness to Capernaum comes from Josephus. He reports that he was carried to the village of Capernaum when he was wounded in



The Sea of Galilee at sunset.

battle near Bethsaida (*Life 403*). Otherwise, his only reference to the town is in his description of the western region of the Lake of Gennesaret. It is the first-century eyewitness description that challenged nineteenth-century explorers, who desired to rediscover this important city from the Gospels. After describing the fruitfulness of the plain of Gennesar, Josephus continues,

...besides being favored by its genial air, the country is watered by a highly fertilizing spring, called by the inhabitants Capharnaum; some have imagined this is to be a branch of the Nile, from its producing a fish resembling the *coracin* found in the lake of Alexandria. The region [i.e. Gennesar] extends along the border of the lake that bears its name for a length of thirty furlongs and inland to a depth of twenty. Such is the nature of this district.

(*War 3:519-521*)

According to his description, the region that coursed along the northwest edge of the lake was known as Gennesar, and within its limits was an area of springs known by the name Capernaum. The historian makes no mention of a village in his description, perhaps an unconscious omission because his attention was focused on the natural surroundings.

Nevertheless, what early explorers found most puzzling was the mention of the springs of Capernaum. Those familiar with today's setting of Capernaum, recognize that within the vicinity of the site there are no springs. Instead, 3 miles (5 km) to the west are springs known locally as Tabgha, a corruption of its Greek name Heptapegon (i.e. seven springs).

Prior to modern exploration, the first Christian pilgrim to record their visit was Egeria (c. fifth century CE). Her itinerary is preserved in the writings of Peter the Deacon.

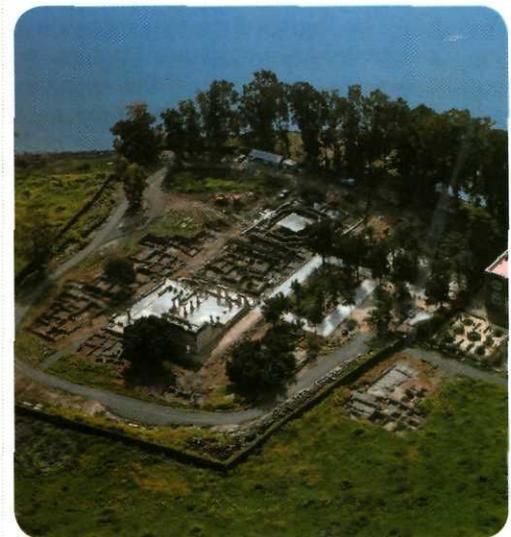
Egeria was followed three centuries later by Bishop Arculf (c. 700 CE). He directed his visit to Capernaum, not a great distance beyond "where the loaves were blessed" (i.e. Tabgha).

Only a few years later (c. 724 CE), he was followed by Willibald, who traveled in the same direction as Egeria and Arculf, leaving north from Tiberias along the shore of the lake. Two details from Willibald's journal are important for our consideration. First, he describes Capernaum with a great wall, while Arculf is explicit that the village had no walls. Further, Willibald relates that in

Capernaum he was shown the house of "Zebedaeus with his sons John and James," while in Bethsaida he saw a church on the place of Peter and Andrew's house. While Willibald may have confused Capernaum for Bethsaida, he is in agreement with Arculf in his omission of a church at Capernaum in his day.

Modern archaeological excavations at Capernaum have uncovered a city laid out with a Hippodamian (orthogonal) street plan. Several insulae-style houses have been uncovered and partially restored. Excavators have determined that resettlement of the city began in the Persian period and grew throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It fell into disrepair and was abandoned during the Islamic invasion in the seventh century CE. This state of affairs fits the description of the eighth-century visitors to Capernaum.

Two structures have drawn considerable attention. As we have noted, Byzantine Christian pilgrims were shown a church built upon the house of Peter. Excavations have uncovered a series of sanctuaries that likely correspond to these testimonies. Archaeologists suggest that the beginnings of veneration for this location began in a *domus ecclesia*. Epiphanius records that Joseph of Tiberias was authorized by the emperor Constantine to build the church in Capernaum (*Epiph. Adv. haer.* 30.4.1). The archaeological evidence suggests that the earlier house was transformed into a church,



Aerial view of Capernaum.

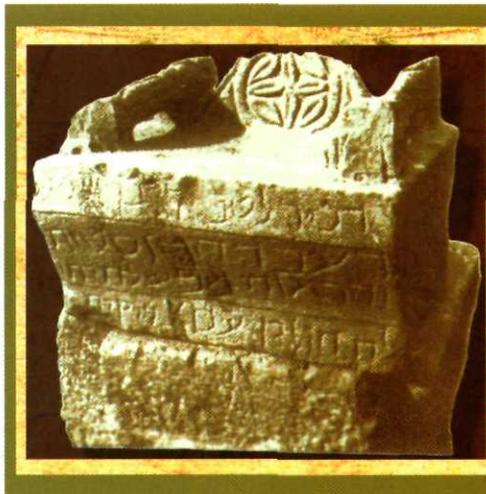
and it is likely this structure is that which Egeria visited in the early fifth century CE. In the second half of the fifth century an octagonal church was erected. As we have noted, the testimony of the eighth-century pilgrimage to Capernaum may indicate that the church no longer existed at this time.

The synagogue of Capernaum that dates to the fourth or fifth century is built in an early Galilean style and is the largest synagogue discovered in the Land of Israel. It was first partially excavated by Kohl and Watzinger. Their efforts were later followed by the Franciscan custody of the Holy Land. Two synagogues have been identified on the same location. The later limestone synagogue is the one visited by Egeria, who describes its many steps and cut stones. Forming the foundation of the Byzantine synagogue are the remains of walls from what is proposed to be an earlier synagogue, perhaps dating to the first century CE. This structure would then be the synagogue mentioned in the Gospels in which Jesus taught.

Finally, a malediction by Rabbi Issi in the third century CE against the heretics of Capernaum indicates that Judeo-Christians lived among the Jewish community of Capernaum in the late Roman period. Indeed, Epiphanius testifies that still in the fourth century CE among the Jewish communities of "Tiberias, Diocaesarea, also called Sepphoris, Nazareth, and Capernaum they take care to have no foreigners living among them" (*Epiph. Adv. haer.* 30.11.10). The continuance of an observant Jewish community in the Byzantine period in Capernaum may also be indicated by the discovery of a sixth-century CE Aramaic inscription in the floor of the synagogue at Hammath Gader, which mentions a donor named Yosse bar Dosti of Capernaum.

The historical and material witness of the community at Capernaum serves as a caution against the premature imposition by scholars of "the parting of the ways" upon Judaism and Christianity uniformly at an early period. At Capernaum and elsewhere in Roman-Byzantine Palestine, the archaeological evidence points to coexistence. At a minimum, the evidence adds further challenge to the erroneous assumption that the *Birkhat ha-Minnim* in its earliest form expressed Jewish antipathy towards nascent Christianity.

Chorazin. Of the three Galilean cities (Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida) Jesus mentions as places in which he performed miracles (*Mt* 11:21; *Lk* 10:13), only Chorazin is not located on the Sea of Galilee. It is about 2 miles (3 km) north of Capernaum on the basalt slopes of the Rosh Pinna sill and near the Ptolemais-Bethsaida road that crosses the Jordan River. According to Jewish sources, the wheat from this town (*t. Mak.* 3:8) was of exceptional quality (*b. Menah.*



In 1927 a stone seat was discovered south of the synagogue at Chorazin. This stone chair and others like it found at Hammath Tiberias and in a synagogue on the Greek isle of Delos have been suggested to represent what is sometimes referred to as "the seat of Moses." Presumably, from such a seat sermons were delivered in the synagogue. If so, Jesus may have had this in mind in his remark concerning his contemporaries, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat" (*Mt* 23:2). Likewise, Luke's description of Jesus' actions in the synagogue of Nazareth accords with this presentation (cf. *Lk* 4:16-30). Jesus stood to read from the Torah and the Haftara. He then sat [i.e. on the seat of Moses] to expound upon the reading.

85a). Chorazin flourished in the second century CE, likely as a result of the increase of the Jewish population in the Galilee in the aftermath of the Bar Kochba rebellion (132-135 CE).

The archaeological evidence indicates that the town suffered a devastating earthquake in the early fourth century CE, but was rebuilt and continued to exist into the Byzantine period. This stands at odds with Eusebius' description at the beginning of the fourth century CE that Chorazin was already an abandoned village. "Chorazin. A village in the Galilee. Christ cursed it according to the Gospel. Now it is a deserted place two miles from Capernaum" (*Eus. Onom.* 174:23).

A Dutch officer, C. W. M. Van de Velde, who traveled in the Near East in the mid-nineteenth century, first identified the site of Khirbet Karazze with Chorazin. Kohl and Watzinger later included the synagogue of Chorazin in their survey of synagogues in Galilee. More recent excavations have uncovered houses and a ritual bathing installation. Nevertheless, only a small portion of the site has been excavated, and first-century Chorazin has yet to be identified.

Chorazin's late Roman period synagogue is in early Galilean style, similar to those at Capernaum and Bar'am. Excavators have also found ornamental fragments belonging to the synagogue's Torah ark, where the congregation's scrolls were kept, and the platform (*bema*) on which the Torah would have been read on the Sabbath and other appointed days.

Gergesa. The reader of the Gospels is faced with a complex textual and topographical challenge in identifying the location of Jesus' encounter with the demoniac "on the other side opposite Galilee" (*Mt* 8:28-34; *Mk* 5:1-17; *Lk* 8:26-37).

In spite of the strong textual witnesses for either Gadara or Gerasa, geographers struggle with these settings because of the topographical problems they present. According to all of the accounts, Jesus' encounter followed a boat ride from

Capernaum, during which there was a sudden and violent storm (*Mt* 8:23-27; *Mk* 7:35-41; *Lk* 8:22-25). Afterwards, Jesus and his disciples arrived to their destination, which is additionally described by Mark and Matthew as "the other side [of the sea]" (*Mt* 8:28; *Mk* 5:1). Typically in the New Testament "the other side" describes the northeast side of the lake opposite Capernaum and Gennesaret. In fact, on one occasion, Mark uses this same language and further specifies, "the other side, to Bethsaida" (*Mk* 6:45). Matthew and Mark's identification of the region corresponds to Luke's regional description, "opposite Galilee" (*Lk* 8:26).

Quite simply, neither Gadara nor Gerasa fit the description presented by the Gospels for the destination of Jesus' journey. Gadara (=Umm Qeis), the capital of a toparchy, was about six miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, Gerasa (=Jerash, a city of Perea) about thirty-three miles. At such remote distances from the lake, these cities are not suitable candidates for the point of destination of a crossing of the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum.

It should be quickly added that the region of Gadara may likely have reached the southern shores of the lake. Coins of Gadara in the Roman period depict naval battles, suggesting that the district of Gadara extended to the lakeshore, where theatrical sea battles called "Naumachia" were held (e.g. *Dio Cass.* 43.23; *Suet. Jul.* 39; *Suet. Aug.* 43; *Tac. Ann.* 12.56, 14.15). During a drought in the 1980s, the low water level of the Sea of Galilee allowed investigation along the shoreline, which had been inundated in modern times because of a modern dam. Sixteen first-century harbors were identified around the lake, including that of Gadara near Tell Samara on the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The discovery of Gadara's harbor supports the statement of Josephus that the region of Gadara extended along the southern shores of the Sea of Galilee to the point where the Jordan River exited the lake on its southwestern end. The Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee and its

southern exit from the lake were points of demarcation for the eastern frontier of the region of Galilee: “[Justus] went out, and set the villages that belonged to Gadara and Hippus on fire; *which villages were situated on the borders of Tiberias, and of the region of Scythopolis*” (Life 42).

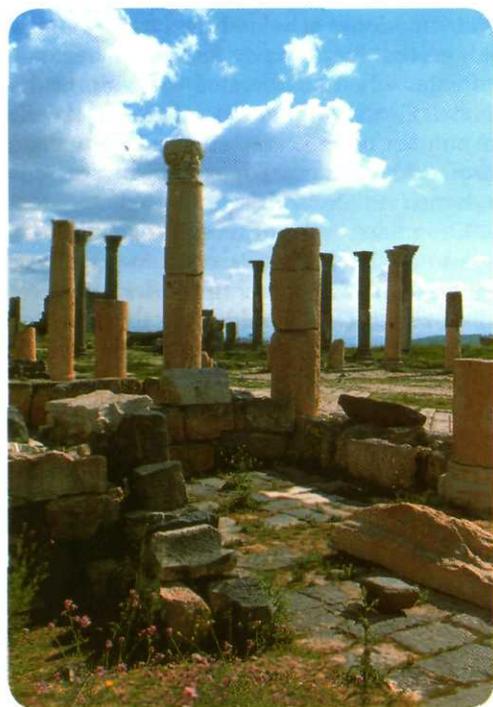
Mention of Tiberias should not be read “lake of Tiberias” (i.e. War 3:57) but the capital of Galilee, as it appears in the following lines of Josephus’ narrative (Life 43). The appearance of the city, similar to the mention of Scythopolis, is intended to signal the region about the city, in this instance Galilee. The historian’s use of the region of Gadara to mark the limits of Galilee parallels a similar use of Gadara in his description of the borders of Galilee:

On the south the country is bounded by Samaria and the territory of Scythopolis up to the waters of Jordan; on the east by the territory of Hippus, Gadara and Gaulanitis, the frontier-line of Agrippa’s kingdom. (War 3:37)

Nevertheless, while the toparchy of Gadara extended to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, its position was too far south for the event described in the Gospels.

In the investigation of the harbor of Gadara a large tower on the shoreline was discovered, which may have marked the northern frontiers of the city’s territory. The limits of Gadara’s shoreline are important, because there are no nearby slopes reaching the lake included in the region of Gadara that would fit the topographical description portrayed in the Gospel accounts: “The herd (of swine) rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned” (Lk 8:33; cf. Mt 8:32; Mk 5:13).

Already at the beginning of the third century CE, Origen recognized the topographical problems of Gerasa and Gadara



Roman remains at Gadara (Umm Qeis).



View of the ancient church remains at el-Kursi (Gergesa), looking northwest toward the Sea of Galilee.

for our account. He offered a suggestion based on the topographical setting and local traditions: Gergesa, “an ancient city ... by the lake now called Tiberias, by which is a cliff overhanging the lake, from which they show that the swine were cast down by the devils” (Origen Comm. on John 6:41). The site of this ancient village lies in the Wādī Samekh delta just north of the only point at which the overlooking heights of Gaulanitis descend to the lake. “Gergesa” does appear in some Greek manuscripts for our account. However, the manuscripts in question antedate Origen and may reflect the influence of the church father’s ingenuity, rather than witness to an early textual tradition.

While the textual witnesses to Gergesa antedate Origen, the tradition is undoubtedly pre-Origenian. Those who transcribed our manuscripts of the Gospels may have been familiar with Origen’s writings, but that does not preclude the existence of Gergesa in the New Testament period, nor does it exclude the environs of the village from being a candidate for the destination of Jesus and his disciples.

Origen’s description of Gergesa as an “ancient city” likely suggests that by his day, the village was in ruins. It also points to local traditions that are heard in Jewish and Christian sources. A century after Origen, Eusebius identified the location of “the border of Geshur” (Josh 13:11; Deut 3:14) north and east of the Sea of Galilee with Gergash beyond the Jordan, reflecting the Septuagintal reading (LXX Deut 3:14). He also mentions Gadara and Gerasa.

Gergash. A city beyond the Jordan located near Gilead (Josh 13:11), which the tribe of Manasseh took (Deut 3:14). This is said to be Gerasa, the famous polis in Arabia. Some say it is Gadara. The Gospel also mentions the (land of) Gerasenes. (Eus. Onom. 64:1)

Yet, in a subsequent entry Eusebius once again demonstrates his familiarity with the village of Gergesa and local traditions connected to it.

Gergesa. There the Lord healed the demoniacs. A village is now shown on the hill next to the Lake of Tiberias into which also the swine were cast down. (Eus. Onom. 74:13)

The church father’s pre-Byzantine testimony to a village on the eastern shores of the

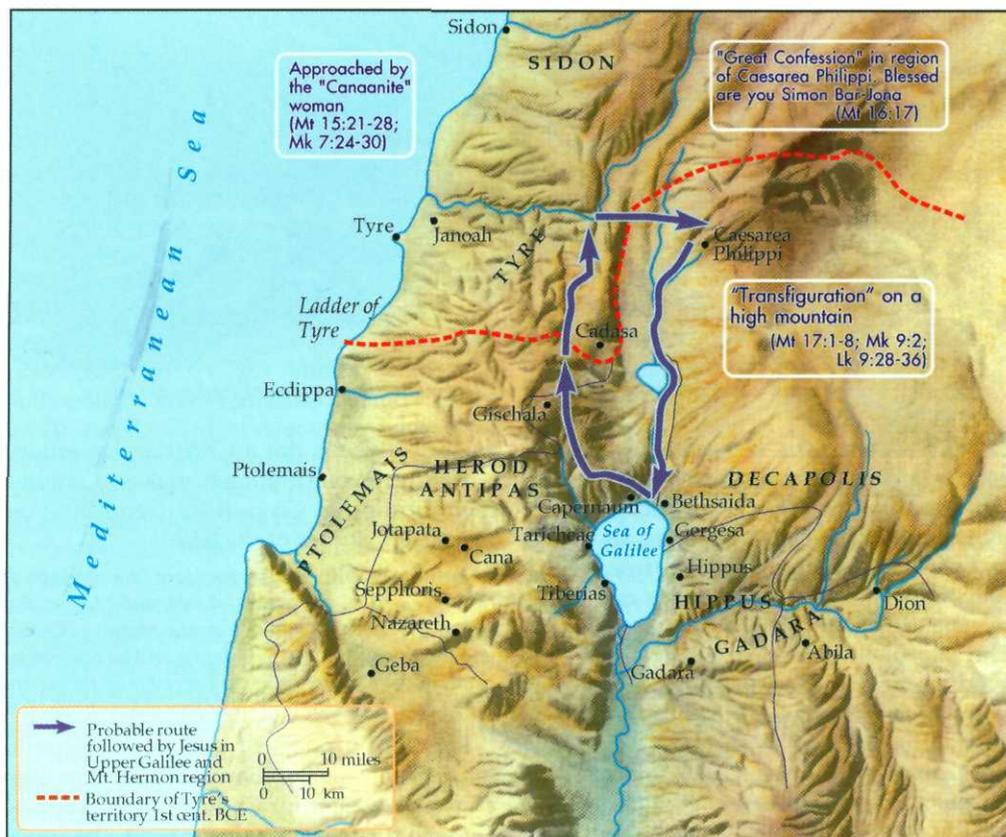
Sea of Galilee is not a Christian invention. An early Jewish midrash makes a similar identification of Gergash [or Gergeshta] on the eastern shores of the lake.

R. Nehemiah said: “When the Holy One, blessed is he, shows Israel the graves of Gog and Magog, the feet of the Shechinah will be on the Mount of Olives and the graves of Gog and Magog will be open from south of the Kidron Valley to Gergeshta on the eastern side of Lake Tiberias. (Shir ha-Shirim Zuta 1.4 [p. 11])

For the purposes of our study, what is important is the familiarity of both Eusebius and the Jewish midrash with the location of Gergash/Gergeshta/Gergesa on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. These local traditions were important, because Origen’s description of Gergesa as an “ancient city” may indicate that by his own day the village already lay in ruins. Nevertheless, later Christian tradition strengthened the identification of Gergesa (el-Kursi), and a church was built to commemorate the Gospel event.

There is little question that on the basis of topography, the region surrounding the ancient village of Gergesa (el-Kursi) better suits the details presented by the Evangelists. Its location fits Matthew and Mark’s description of Jesus’ destination “on the other side” and Luke’s “opposite Galilee.” The village does not possess the problems of distance from the northern portions of the Sea of Galilee inherent in the location of Gadara, or even more acutely with Gerasa. Moreover, only in the vicinity of Gergesa do the slopes of the heights descend steeply to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Evidence for the village’s existence in antiquity is heard in rabbinical literature and the pre-Byzantine Christian writings of Origen and Eusebius. Both of the Christian writers also attest to local pre-Byzantine Christian traditions that identified Gergesa with the Gospel event.

Gergesa’s only obstacle is its non-appearance in pre-Origenian manuscripts of the Gospel account. Yet the dilemma of Gergesa belongs to a well-known pattern: in the copying of ancient texts, an unknown name will almost always be “corrected” to a known name. So, it seems that in spite of its location as the place of Jesus’ encounter with the demoniac, at a very early stage



PUTATIVE TRAVELS IN THE DISTRICTS OF TYRE AND CAESAREA PHILIPPI

the name of the lesser-known village of Gergesa was exchanged for one of the two renowned cities of the Decapolis: Gadara and Gergesa.

The Decapolis. The toponym, Sea of Galilee, is the product of a creative Christian interpretation of Isaiah, “but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations” (Isa 9:1b [HMT 8:23b]). Mark’s use of the Christian name for the lake (Mk 1:16, 7:31) signals his embrace of this contemporary homily. It seems that the same Isaianic passage provided the narrative structure for Mark’s presentation of Jesus’ northern journey: “Then [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis” (Mk 7:31).

According to Mark, Jesus returned from Phoenicia on Isaiah’s way of the sea—the trunk road from Tyre to the region of Caesarea Philippi—and then continued to the Transjordanian heights of the Hauran, which Mark identified with the region of the Decapolis. Jesus’ circuitous journey concluded on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. There is little geographical logic in a route from Phoenicia to the Sea of Galilee through the Hauran. However, Mark’s presentation uncannily follows the order of the topographical points in Isaiah’s passage: the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. So, it seems that once again we witness Mark writing in his distinctive paraphrastic style to

present Jesus’ fulfillment of Isaiah’s ancient prophecy.

The first historical witness to the place name Decapolis is Mark and Matthew’s Gospels (Mk 5:20, 7:31; Mt 4:25). The history of this toponym has been the subject of renewed discussion. Josephus mentions “the Decapolis of Syria” in connection with a complaint brought to Vespasian by these cities against Jewish insurgents (*Life* 341, 410). He also describes Scythopolis as the largest city in the Decapolis (*War* 3:446). However, the historian does not provide any additional information about the nature of the designation (geographical or political), its origins or which cities were included.

Pliny (79 CE) provides the most detailed first-century description of the Decapolis.

Adjoining Judaea on the side of Syria is the region of the Decapolis, so called from the number of its towns, though not all writers keep to the same list; most, however, include Damascus, with its fertile water-meadows that drain the river Chrysorrhoe, Philadelphia, Raphana (all these three withdrawn towards Arabia), Scythopolis (formerly Nysa, after Father Liber’s nurse, whom he buried there), Gadara, past which flows the river Yarmuk; Hippius mentioned already, Dion, Pella rich with its waters, Galasa [i.e. Gerasa], Canatha. (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 5.16)

Pliny is the only writer to list *ten cities* included in the Decapolis. However, as he indicates, this list is not certain, and he acknowledges that there is disagreement among writers. His statement suggests that he is not writing from personal knowledge of the Decapolis. Instead, he is relying upon the conflicting reports of others.

The disagreement among historical

witnesses is heard again in Ptolemy’s *Geography*. Writing in the second century (c. 150 CE), Ptolemy includes eighteen cities in the Decapolis. His list contains nine of Pliny’s cities (omitting Raphana) and adds nine more: Heliopolis, Abila, Saana, Hina, Abila Lysanias, Capitolias, Edrei, Gadara, and Samulis (cf. Strabo *Geog.* 5.14–22). Yet what is most remarkable is that we have no mention of the Decapolis by the first-century geographer, Strabo.

Strabo describes both Syria and Palestine at some length, and even names several of the Decapolis cities: Damascus, Gadara, Philadelphia, and Scythopolis. His silence is even more curious when we recall Strabo’s interest in the Lycian League, a federation of twenty-three cities in western Asia Minor organized and supervised by the Romans.

The next significant literary witness to the Decapolis is Eusebius, who reports at the beginning of the fourth century CE, “Decapolis. In the Gospels. This is (the region) in Perea that surrounds Hippius, Pella and Gadara” (*Eus. Onom.* 80:16). Eusebius does not define the nature of the Decapolis. However, his description that it “surrounds” three cities suggests that Eusebius understood it to designate a geographical region, rather than a mere political league. Jerome’s Latin translation of the *Onomasticon* specifies what may be implied in Eusebius’ Greek, *regio decem urbium* (a region of ten cities). Jerome’s use of *regio* to define the Decapolis echoes the earlier terminology by which Pliny described the Decapolis.

Nothing in the historical descriptions speaks of a political confederation. The only joint political effort in the Jewish Revolt is the complaint to Vespasian. These cities are not even mentioned to have sent soldiers to assist the Romans in the Jewish Revolt. Yet, modern scholarship has generally suggested that Pompey founded the league of cities when he liberated the region from Hasmonean domination in 63 BCE. While a number of the cities adopted Pompeian eras, others did not. For example, Damascus retained its Alexandrian era.

Of greater significance, no mention is made of the Decapolis on coins for these cities, or in any first-century inscriptions yet discovered. One would have thought that with the political upheaval in the region during the first century, these cities would have proudly publicized their allegiance to the Roman Empire with mention of their membership in a political league founded by the great Roman general, Pompey. Further questions are raised about the early existence of a Roman league of cities by Augustus’ assignment of Hippius and Gadara to Herod in 30 BCE (*Ant.* 15:217; *War* 1:396). It is unlikely that the emperor would have transferred these cities to a Jewish king, if they belonged to a Roman league.

It may be of some significance that apart

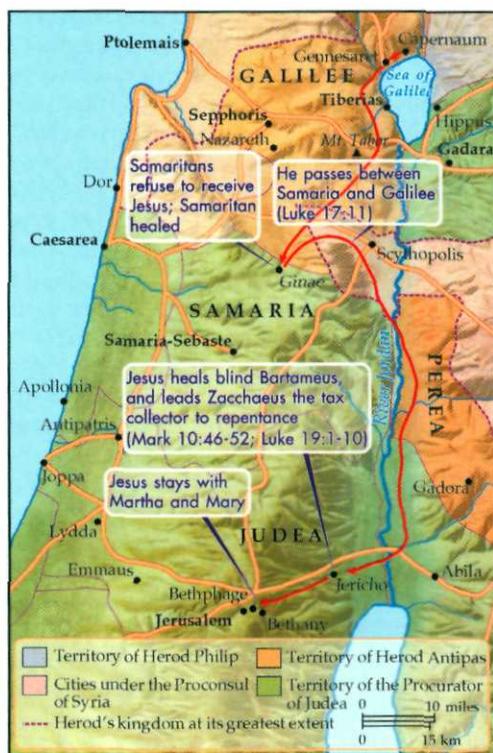
from the references in Mark and Matthew, all of our historical references to the Decapolis occur in writings after the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE. In the complete absence of any historical or epigraphical evidence to the contrary, it seems that Mark and Matthew’s Decapolis—similar to the Fourth Gospel’s “Bethsaida in Galilee” (Jn 12:21)—is an anachronistic toponym. The tumultuous events surrounding the Jewish Revolt brought significant geopolitical changes to the region. These are reflected in changing, evolving regional toponyms.

We simply do not know what the genesis was for the origins of the Decapolis. It may have stemmed from the desire of these cities to define themselves in contradistinction to the neighboring regions heavily populated with Jews, who had recently rebelled against Rome. Use of the term in the Gospels may reflect the period in which the individual writings were composed (i.e. post-70 CE), because there is no corroborating evidence to suggest that the Decapolis was known in the days of Jesus. Those familiar with the history of the Land of Israel in an earlier age will recognize the same phenomenon in the Hebrew Scriptures’ use of an anachronistic toponym to designate the coastal plain as “the land of the Philistines” (Gen 21:32) in the time of Abraham—centuries before the actual arrival of the Philistines. In both instances, they tell us more about the toponymic usage at the time of the composition than place names in the period described.

THE LAST DAYS OF JESUS

All of the Gospels agree that the Romans crucified Jesus outside of Jerusalem. Roman responsibility for the death of Jesus is also recounted in one of the earliest Christian baptismal creeds: “[he] suffered under [the Roman prefect] Pontius Pilate.” Yet, the topographical and historical details surrounding Jesus’ execution vary in the reports of the New Testament. It is not possible to engage here the complex issues of the literary relationship of the four Gospels as historical sources for the Passion narratives. Much is written about the subject elsewhere. Our interest is more narrowly focused to determine what can be known of the physical setting of Jerusalem, and what that setting can inform us about the historical events that unfolded on it.

One hundred years of archaeological activity in Jerusalem, begun at the end of the nineteenth century, have helped to illuminate the physical setting of Jerusalem during the New Testament period. Questions still remain, but new data have provided fresh insights. The results have sometimes challenged long-held traditions attached to sacred sites. Nevertheless, a clearer picture has emerged about those



JESUS’ LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

fateful days. We shall attempt to sketch the historical framework for the events of that week, with particular attention given to their topographical setting.

Jesus approached Jerusalem in the days leading up to Passover (Jn 11:55). His pilgrimage continued a family practice. During the days of the Second Temple, it was not a necessary requirement to travel to Jerusalem three times a year as obligated at Sinai: “Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God” (Ex 23:17; cf. 30:23). The impracticality of traveling long distances thrice yearly—particularly difficult from the remoteness of the Jewish dispersion—necessitated a figurative interpretation of the injunction, “to appear before the Lord” (Tob 1:6–10; Midr. Tanh. [Buber ed.] Tezave (51b); Ant. 4:203–204).

Nevertheless, Luke records the piety of Jesus’ family—“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover” (Lk 2:41). Jesus’ familiarity with the setting of Jerusalem indicates he was accustomed to—and perhaps a familiar figure in—the city at the time of Passover, “The Teacher says, ‘Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?’” (Mk 14:14; Lk 22:7–13).

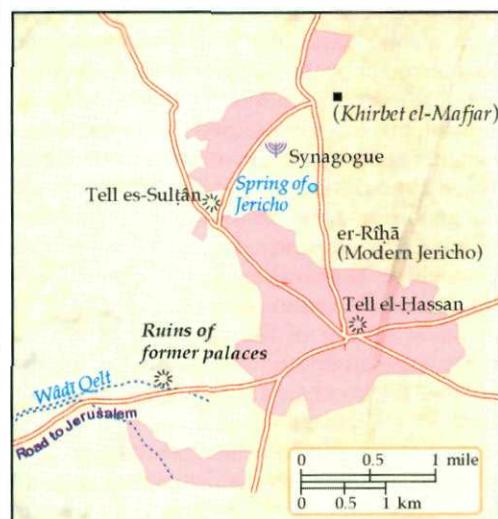
The northern ford across the Jordan River, which would have been used by a pilgrim who desired to travel to Jerusalem through the Transjordan, lay within the territory of Scythopolis (cf. Ant. 12:348). This independent Greek city was situated between the geopolitical regions of Galilee and Samaria. The city and its territory belonged to the province of Syria and were not part of the lands granted to Herod’s sons upon his death. As a statement of the geographical

and political realities that existed in the days of Jesus, Luke’s description that Jesus “passed between Samaria and Galilee” in Luke 17:11 is correct and can hardly be deemed evidence of Luke’s “geographical ineptitude.”

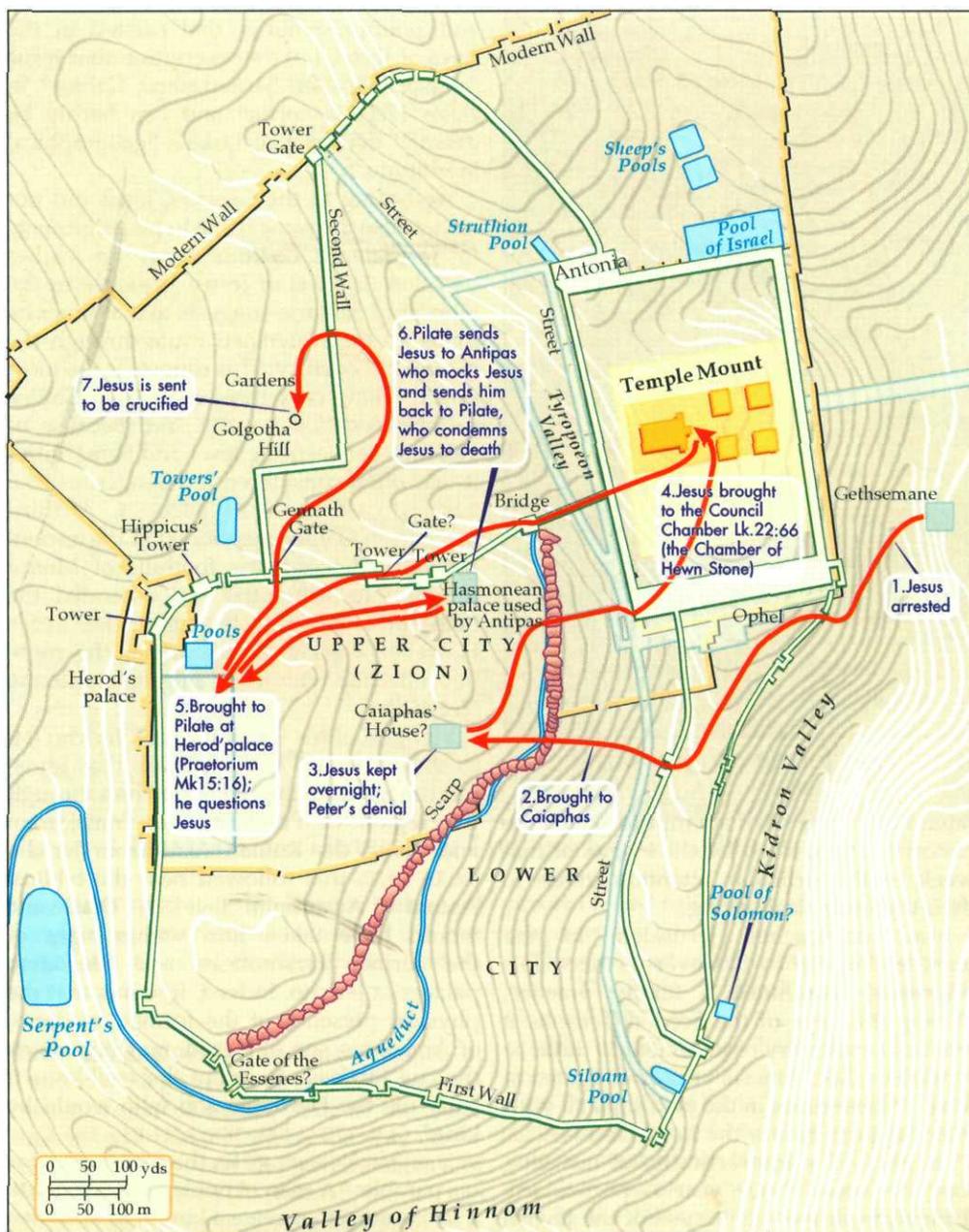
According to the Gospels, Jesus did not always use the same route in his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Testimony on an earlier occasion (Jn 4:4–6) of Jesus’ presence in the interior of Samaria suggests that at times he followed the watershed route through the central hill country. This route was the most direct, taking only three days from Galilee to Jerusalem (Life 268–270). Yet, because of violence between the Jews and Samaritans, it was often considered too dangerous (War 2:232–233; Ant. 20:118; Lk 10:30–37). A third route from Galilee mentioned in the ancient sources led along the foothills of Mount Ephraim to Antipatris and ascended the Beth-horon ridge to Jerusalem (War 2:228). However, we have no mention of this route in connection with Jesus’ pilgrimages to the Holy City.

Mention of his travel through Jericho (Mt 20:29; Mk 10:46; Lk 19:1) indicates that Jesus’ pilgrimage from the Galilee led him through the region of Perea in the Transjordan and along the Roman road from Jericho (cf. Lk 10:30) that followed near the biblical Ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7). That route would have taken him within sight of the former Hasmonean and Herodian palaces at Jericho. Indeed, it seems that the physical presence of the former residence of Archelaus, son of Herod, may have been the cue for Jesus to adopt the well-known story of “the Herodian son who would be king” (Ant. 17:342–343; War 2:111–113; Dio Cass. 55.27.6; Strabo Geog. 2.46) as the inspiration for his parable: “A man of noble birth went into a far country to receive a kingdom and then return” (Lk 19:12).

Only Luke relates that Jesus told the parable as they passed out of Jericho, and likewise only in the Third Gospel does



JERICO AREA (modern town, ancient tel and ruins of early Roman period structures)



THE ARREST, INTERROGATION AND EXECUTION OF JESUS

Jesus uses the story of the Herodian scion as the narrative structure for his parabolic creativity. The collocation of the parable with strong historical allusions to the son of Herod and the magnificently restored residence that symbolized the royalty he sought but never attained, is remarkable. Recent excavations have determined that an earthquake destroyed the palaces in 48 CE, and they were abandoned long before scholarship assumes that Luke wrote his Gospel. It seems the source for Luke's unique combination of the parable and the physical setting of the environs of Jericho must have originated from a time when the palace still stood, or at least its memory was fresh.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem he reached the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. On the outskirts of Jerusalem lay the villages of Bethany (Neh 11:32; Eus. Onom. 58:15) and Bethphage (Lk 19:29). The

latter was positioned between Bethany and Jerusalem and marked the outer limits of the Holy City (m. Men. 11:2; b. Pesah. 63b). Its name was derived from the Semitic word for unripened figs (see Eus. Onom. 58:13) and may indicate agricultural activity in the vicinity (Mk 11:20). In the same vein, the toponym "Mount of Olives" (Zech 14:4) was also determined from local produce.

The New Testament records that Jesus stayed in Bethany (Mt 21:17; Mk 11:11), perhaps in the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38; Jn 11:1). The large influx of visitors (cf. Ant. 18:313) during the pilgrimage feasts meant that many pilgrims had to stay outside of the Holy City (Ant. 17:213–214). Bethany is situated less than 2 miles (3 km) from Jerusalem (Jn 11:18), making it a convenient place for daily access to Jerusalem and the Temple. The Gospels portray Jesus' trips back and forth between Bethany and Jerusalem (Mk 11:

11–12). However, even pilgrims who stayed outside of the city were required to eat within the city walls the offering sacrificed on the Passover eve—14/15 Nisan (m. Pesah. 7:9, 7:12, 10:3). The disciples' efforts to arrange the meal within the city walls of Jerusalem (Lk 22:7–13) are one of the clearest indications that for the Last Supper Jesus followed the rabbinic stipulations regarding the Passover meal.

During the week leading up to Passover, Jesus was teaching daily in the Temple (Lk 19:47). Study of the Scripture within the temple precincts is recorded in Jewish tradition (m. Tamid 5:1; m. Yoma 1:7). It was also a place of study familiar to Jesus from his youth (Lk 2:48–49). The colonnaded porticoes surrounding the Temple likely included these places of study (cf. Acts 5:12). In addition, the platform atop the steps of ascent leading from the south into the Huldah Gates of the Temple Mount was a place where teaching was reported (t. Sanh. 2:2; m. Sanh. 11:2). The Mishnah describes three courts of law, "One used to sit at the gate of the Temple Mount, one used to sit at the gate of the Temple Court, and one used to sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone" (Sanh. 11:2). The first of these locations may be identified near the broad platform atop the steps to the Temple Mount.

It is in the vicinity of the Temple that Jesus challenged financial transactions that came under the responsibility of the Sadducean priesthood (Lk 19:45–46). Scholarship has tried to identify Jesus' actions within the temple courts. The expanded narrative of Mark does imply Jesus' actions were within the temple precincts and even directed against the Temple itself, "and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple" (Mk 11:16; cf. Jn 2:15). On the other hand, Matthew and Luke omit Mark's portrayal that Jesus' actions were aimed at the institution of the Temple, but instead at the priests entrusted with its care. Moreover, Luke's verbal description does not necessarily indicate Jesus' presence already within the temple precincts.

Luke's account is supported by the Jewish sources. The mishnaic tractate Berakhot 9:5 states that one was not even permitted to ascend to the Temple Mount with a purse, let alone that it was the site of a marketplace: "He may not enter into the Temple Mount with his staff or his sandal or his purse." It seems likely that Jesus' actions took place either in the area of shops, recently excavated adjacent to the southern and southwestern walls of the Temple Mount, or the enclosed Royal Portico built by Herod the Great (Ant. 15:411–416) in the southern portion of the Temple Mount. In an apocryphal story of the life of Jesus, we find him mentioned among the ritual baths near the shops south of the Temple Mount: "And [Jesus] took them and brought them into the place of purification itself and walked

about in the temple" (P. Oxy 840; cf. Jn 11:55; Acts 21:24, 26).

The cause for Jesus' protest is not explicitly stated. A recent study of this episode in light of contemporary Jewish sources suggests that Jesus—like others of his contemporaries—objected to the House of Annas' evasion of personal tithes to the Lord and oppressive measures. Jesus was certainly not alone in his assessment that this priestly clan (Lk 3:2; Jn 18:13; Acts 4:6) had misused its position as stewards of the temple finances.

The Sages said: The (produce) stores for the children of Hanin [=Annas] were destroyed three years before the rest of the Land of Israel, because they failed to set aside tithes from their produce, for they interpreted *Thou shalt surely tithe . . . and thou shalt surely eat* as excluding the seller, and *The increase of thy seed* as excluding the buyer. (Sifre; cf. j. Pe'a 1:6)

The description of the House of Annas being both "sellers" and "buyers" in *Sifre* may help to explain Matthew and Mark's expanded description of the targets of Jesus' rebuke. The Evangelists' combination of sellers and buyers is a derivation from an earlier hendiadys. While Luke states that Jesus expelled only "the sellers" (cf. Jn 2:14), the other two Evangelists speak of "those who sold and those who bought." The rabbinic witness suggests that in all of the Gospels Jesus is only concerned with the abuses of the temple hierarchy (see also Tg. Isa. 5:7–10; b. B. Bat. 3b–4a; Ant. 15:260–262, 20:181, 20:205–207).

Jesus' words and actions in the days leading up to Passover were interpreted as a challenge to the Sadducean temple establishment. Yet, his message shared a broad public appeal, and they could not arrest him openly (Lk 19:48). He gave voice to popular discontent (Lk 20:19), and a response by the temple establishment had to wait until a more opportune moment.

On the eve of Passover, preparations were made for the festive meal. While the priests offered other sacrificial offerings, Scripture stipulated that the people themselves were to sacrifice this offering in the Temple (Deut 16:2; m. Pesah. 5:6; Philo Spec. 2.145). The sacrifice could only be performed on the 14th of Nisan, and it was to be eaten that evening (Deut 16:6). The Gospels are silent on the details of preparation leading up to the meal, likely because they were so commonplace as to need no report.

Pilgrims to Jerusalem ascended to the Temple and offered the sacrificial lambs—the *Pesach* (Mk 14:12; Lk 22:15; 1 Cor 5:7)—that were then served as the main course for those celebrating Passover in the Holy City (Deut 16:5–6). We have no clear indication where Jesus shared this meal. Mark (14:15) and Luke (22:12) merely describe that it was in a "room upstairs." Early Christian tradition located this room on the southern slopes of the western hill of Jerusalem, yet corroborating literary or archaeological

evidence is lacking.

What is more clear is that after the hymns of praise were sung (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26; i.e. the *Hallel* of Ps 113–118) that conclude the Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples then retreated to the slopes of the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39; Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). Matthew and Mark further specify that the place was called Gethsemane (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32)—a topographical name unknown in any other first-century source (cf. Eus. Onom. 74:16).

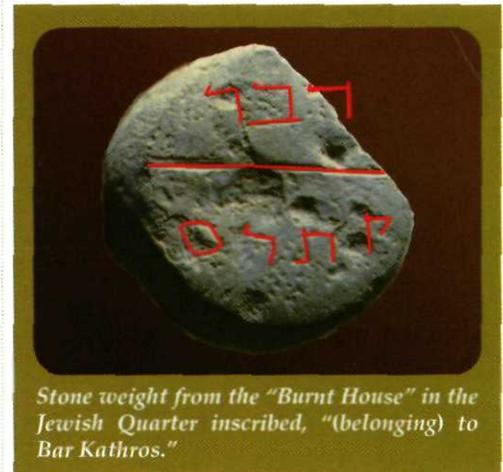
Restrictions on the distance of travel on a holy day would not have allowed Jesus to return to Bethany that evening. The celebrants were required to remain within the boundaries of the city overnight. The Mount of Olives laid within "a sabbath's day journey" (Acts 1:12)—the limits of travel to which an observant Jew was restricted on the holy day. Jesus may have been drawn to a specific site on the Mount of Olives by custom (Lk 22:39) to a focal point of prayer where tradition remembered the place of King David's prayer (j. Ber. 4:8b [based on 2 Sam 15:32]).

After a time of prayer, the Gospels report that one of Jesus' followers—Judas Iscariot—led a contingent of the high priests and their soldiers to arrest him. Judas' role was not to identify Jesus, who was well known to the temple establishment, but to locate Jesus' entourage and to distinguish them from others who were likely encamped on the hillside. Under the cloak of darkness, Jesus was arrested and led away to the house of the high priest, Joseph bar Caiapha (Caiaphas).

Christian tradition has located the high priest's house on the southern portions of the western hill. Nevertheless, recent excavations carried out in today's Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem uncovered an inscribed weight measure from the home of Bar Kathros, another family of high priests. This family is remembered in the Babylonian Talmud in the context of criticisms toward high priestly dynasties from the Roman period. These priests were criticized for their oppression, secrecy and financial misconduct. In a saying remembered by the second-generation *tanna*, Abba Saul b. Batnit:

Woe is me because of the house of Boethus;
Woe is me because of their staves!
Woe is me because of the house of Hanin (=Annas);
Woe is me because of their whisperings!
Woe is me because of the house of Kathros;
Woe is me because of their pens!
Woe is me because of the house of Ishmael the son of Phabi;
Woe is me because of their fists!
For they are High Priests and their sons are [temple] treasurers and their sons-in-law are trustees and their servants beat the people with staves. (b. Pesah. 57a=t. Menah. 13:21)

Three features from this talmudic witness are important for our concerns. First, the complaint against these families of treachery is coupled with mention of their control over



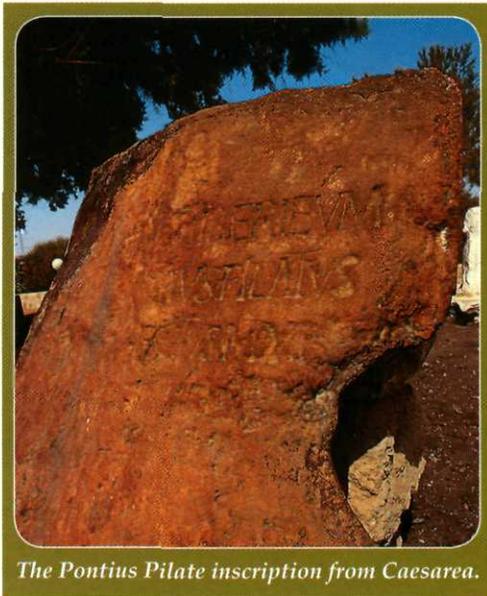
Stone weight from the "Burnt House" in the Jewish Quarter inscribed, "(belonging) to Bar Kathros."

the finances of the Temple. This corresponds to Jesus and the Sages' complaint against the House of Annas (Mk 11:17). Second, we hear a specific charge against the family of Hanin (Annas), which the Gospels describe secretly handed Jesus to the Romans. Their "whisperings" indicate "secret conclaves to devise oppressive measures" (b. Pesah. 57a n. b2; cf. Ant. 20:199, 13:294). Finally, mention of the Bar Kathros family in the inscription and the Talmud assists to identify the vicinity of a family of priests (see Ant. 20:16) whose home in Jerusalem was destroyed during the Roman siege in the summer of 70 CE.

Discovery of monumental homes near the Bar Kathros house has raised the possibility that this area may have been a neighborhood of other high priestly families. One designated by the archaeologists, "the Palatial Mansion," is remarkable for its size and elegance. It was a multi-storied home, over 5,500 square feet [c. 600 sq. m] in size. It contained imported vessels, and its plastered walls were covered with frescoes, newly refashioned to imitate contemporary Roman styles just prior to its destruction. A signature glass pitcher discovered within the ruins was the work of the renowned glass-maker, Ennion of Sidon. The residents of this house must have been a particularly notable and wealthy family, and the exceptional number of *miquva'ot* may indicate that they were a family of high priests.

We have no way of determining whether this home belonged to the family of Annas or Caiaphas. However, the opulence and accumulation of wealth exhibited in "the Palatial Mansion" characterize the economic position of the longest hierocratic dynasty in the first century CE (Ant. 20:198). They were the targets of harsh criticism in their day, as we have heard both from Jesus and Abba Saul b. Batnit.

At daybreak Jesus was brought to "the Sanhedrin" (Lk 22:66; cf. Mt 26:59; Mk 14:55). This is Luke's only use of the term in his Gospel. In Acts (4:15; 5:27, 34; 6:12, 15) he employs the term not to designate the council but the council-chamber, the Chamber of Hewn Stone mentioned in the Jewish sources (m. Pe'a 2:6; m. Sanh. 11:2; m. Mid. 5:4; j. Sanh. 19c).



The Pontius Pilate inscription from Caesarea.

Luke's reading of council-chamber rather than an indication of the participation of the full Sanhedrin in Jesus' condemnation and transfer to the Romans, concurs with testimony about the Sanhedrin's concern to preserve human life and strong reluctance to execute capital punishment.

A Sanhedrin that puts someone to death in a week [i.e. in seven years] is called "destructive." Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah says: "Even one person in seventy years." Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva say: "If we had been members of the Sanhedrin, no one would ever have been put to death." (m. *Maksh.* 1:10)

In addition, the understanding that only the clan of Annas (i.e. Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander; cf. *Acts* 4:6) and those close to them were present in the Chamber of Hewn Stone and questioned Jesus, is more fitting with the subsequent steps taken by Jesus' accusers. Their actions would hardly have gained the required approval of the full Sanhedrin (*Lk* 23:50–51).

To deliver a fellow Jew into the hands of the Romans with the possibility of his execution was considered in Jewish opinion a transgression of such magnitude that it was eternally unforgivable (S. *Olam Rab.* ch. 3 end). With the same overriding concern for a single human life (cf. m. *Sanh.* 4:5), we hear in the Jerusalem Talmud that even if the Romans have surrounded the city:

And they say, "Give us one from among you and we will kill him. And if you do not, we will kill all of you." Even if all of you may be killed, you shall not hand over a single soul from Israel. (j. *Ter.* 8:10)

So, we hear later of the concern by these same Sadducean priests that their clandestine actions might become public knowledge (*Acts* 5:28).

Finally, still another piece of evidence demonstrates that Jesus could not have been condemned to death by the Sanhedrin. According to the mishnaic tractate *Sanhedrin* there were two graves reserved for those executed by order of the supreme council.

They used not to bury [the condemned man] in the

burying-place of his fathers, but two burying-places were kept in readiness by the court, one for them that were beheaded or strangled, and one for them that were stoned or burnt. (m. *Sanh.* 9:6)

The Gospel accounts are unanimous that Jesus was not laid in one of these two tombs (*Mt* 27:60; *Mk* 15:46; *Lk* 23:53; *Jn* 19:41).

After a period of initial inquiry, Jesus was taken to the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, and accused of political sedition (*Lk* 23:2). Normally, Pilate resided in Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea. However, to maintain a show of imperial power before the crowds gathered for Passover, the Gospels record that Pilate came to Jerusalem and resided at the Praetorium (*Mt* 27:27; *Mk* 15:16; *Jn* 18:28).

Christian tradition has identified the site of the Praetorium with the Antonia Fortress, built by Herod the Great and named after his early benefactor, Mark Antony (*War* 5: 238–245). Recent excavations, however, have determined that the *Lithostrotos* (*Jn* 19:13)—the pavement where tradition remembers Pilate condemned Jesus—under the present-day Church of Ecce Homo, dates from the time of Hadrian (c. 135 CE) and not from the New Testament period.

Instead, Pilate was probably staying in the palace of Herod the Great on the western hill. Both Philo (*Legat.* 38:299) and Josephus (*War* 2:31) report that Herod's palace in Jerusalem was the residence of the Roman governor. According to Mark, Herod's palace was also called the Praetorium: "The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace, that is the Praetorium" (*Mk* 15:16a). Later, we read that the Roman governor resided in Herod's seaside palace in Caesarea that is similarly called the Praetorium of Herod (*Acts* 23:35).

Luke reports that Jesus was charged with stirring up the population from Galilee to Jerusalem, encouraging the people not to pay taxes and claiming to be the king Messiah (*Lk* 23:2). When his accusers informed Pilate that he came from Galilee, the prefect sought to pass Jesus off to Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Antipas was staying in the former Hasmonean palace (*Ant.* 20:190). Its location has not been confirmed, but it may have been north of the neighborhood of the priestly homes previously mentioned. In any event, all of these sites were closely situated.

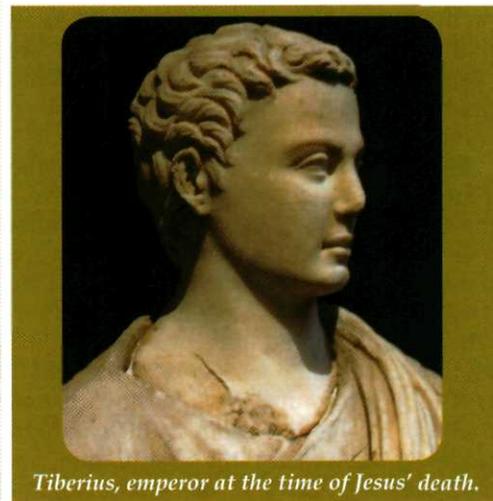
Josephus and the Gospels record that Antipas executed John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus (*Ant.* 18:119; *Mt* 14:3–12; *Mk* 6:17–29). John had openly criticized the marriage of Antipas and his second wife, Herodias. According to Josephus, the Herodian couple had divorced their spouses to legitimize a pre-existing adulterous affair, an action prohibited according to Jewish law (m. *Sotah* 5:1; *Ant.* 18:109–110; *Mt* 14:4; *Mk* 6:18). The popularity of John's movement together with his open rebuke had resulted in his tragic murder. Jesus may have subsequently

taken up his cousin's reprimand (*Lk* 16:18). Antipas had been seeking to meet Jesus face to face (*Lk* 13:31–33, 23:8), but at their encounter Jesus remained silent. It seems the tetrarch did not interpret Jesus as great a threat as his cousin, so he returned the Galilean to Pilate in mocking attire (*Lk* 23: 11–12).

Returned to Herod's palace, Pilate attempted to punish Jesus and release him, but the priestly family who had been the subject of Jesus' public rebuke pressed for his execution. The Roman prefect had a reputation as remembered by Josephus and Philo for his brutality, "a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition," guilty of "venality, violence, robbery, assault, abusive behavior, frequent executions without trial, and endless savage ferocity" (*Philo Legat.* 301–302; cf. 303–305; *Ant.* 18:55–59, 60–62; *War* 2:175–177).

There is an additional facet of Pilate's character. His small temple built in Caesarea in honor of Tiberius is the only known temple built by a Roman official for a living emperor. Pilate's efforts to ingratiate himself with the emperor—who according to Suetonius (*Suet. Tib.* 26) forbade temples dedicated to himself—reveals another aspect of the prefect's complex personality, a personal weakness at the point of persuasion put forward by Jesus' accusers. "If you release [Jesus], you are no friend of Caesar" (*Jn* 19:12). Pilate condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion, and he was summarily led a short distance outside of the city to be executed.

Since the medieval period the *Via Dolorosa* ("the way of suffering") has been traced through the streets of Jerusalem, beginning at the site of the Antonia, east of today's Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Yet, there are early Byzantine traditions that remember the place where Jesus was flogged on Mount Zion (*Bordeaux Pilgrim* 592). These Christian traditions have confusedly combined the event of Jesus' flogging with his brief confinement at the House of Caiaphas. Yet, the Gospels record that it was Pilate's soldiers who flogged Jesus while he



Tiberius, emperor at the time of Jesus' death.

was still in the Praetorium (Mt 27:26; Mk 15:15). With the recent recognition that the Roman prefect was at Herod's former palace on the western hill, the Byzantine tradition may be a vestige of a pre-Byzantine memory concerning the location of Jesus' Roman incarceration, flogging and condemnation to death.

If modern scholarship is correct, then the starting point for Jesus' way of suffering began on the western hill, today's Mount Zion. He was led from Herod's palace and out the city gates to be crucified. Excavations directed south of the Muristan in the Old City of Jerusalem discovered portions of the First Wall of Jerusalem described by Josephus. More important for our present interests is the discovery of the remains of a first-century gate, thought to be the one described by Josephus. He describes only one gate along the northern line of the First Wall, the Gennath Gate: "The second wall started from the gate in the first wall which they called Gennath (i.e. Garden Gate), and [the second wall] enclosing only the northern district of the town, went up as far as Antonia" (War 5:146).

If Jesus was taken from Herod's palace to the area north of the walled city as Christian tradition remembers, then it seems likely that he would have been taken out of the city through the Gennath Gate. Josephus does not discuss the etymology of the name of the gate, but the Fourth Gospel may assist. It supplies a unique topographical detail on the vicinity where Jesus was executed, "in the place where [Jesus] was crucified there was a garden" (Jn 19:41). John's description of an agricultural area north of the city corresponds to the etymology of the Gennath Gate. The gate opened northward beyond the First Wall of Jerusalem to an area of gardens. It is in this area that Christian tradition marks the place of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Twenty years of excavations as part of restoration work within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher have helped to determine the early history of the site. It was the location of a limestone quarry during the Old Testament period.

Unfortunately, the traditional tomb of Jesus has been severely damaged over the centuries, and visitors can see little of the original hewn stone. Nevertheless, the so-called Tomb of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea nearby is typical of a first-century *kokh* tomb. The topographical question at the center of the claims of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is whether the site was inside or outside the walls of first-century Jerusalem. Since no conclusive evidence has been discovered from Josephus' Second Wall (which would determine the position of the present-day church vis-à-vis the city walls in 30 CE), the presence of Jewish tombs—which were required to be outside the boundary of a city—within the

Church of the Holy Sepulcher may be the best evidence that the traditional site of Golgotha was indeed outside the walls of first-century Jerusalem. The site remains the best candidate for the place of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

FROM THE EMPTY TOMB TO THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

The Gospels are in agreement that Jesus died on a Friday afternoon as the Sabbath approached (Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44; Jn 19:31, 42). According to Luke 23:46, his dying words were uttered from Psalm 31:5 [HMT 31:6], the traditional deathbed prayer of an observant Jew: "Into your hand, I commit my spirit." Those who had accompanied Jesus were concerned that his corpse not remain exposed overnight. Josephus attests to a similar Jewish concern in the wake of Titus' crucifixion of countless innocent victims during the siege of Jerusalem.

[The Romans] actually went so far in their impiety as to cast out the corpses without burial, although the Jews are so careful about funeral rites that even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset.

(War 4:317)

The initiative to provide Jesus with a proper burial (cf. m. Naz. 6:5; 7:1 [Lev 21:1]) was taken by Nicodemus and Joseph from Arimathea (Mt 27:57; Mk 15:43; Lk 23:20; Jn 19:38–42), leading figures in the city. Nicodemus is well known from rabbinic literature and was a wealthy patrician of Jerusalem (Jn 7:50–52; b. Gif. 56a; t. Erub. 3(4):17). The provision of a burial place for one who could not afford his own would have been part of these aristocrats' expected role to dispense charity.

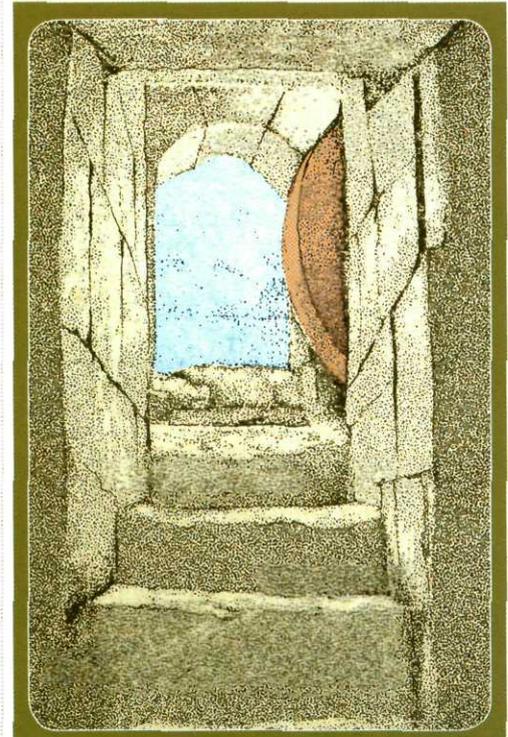
Although there was urgency to assure that Jesus was properly interred before sunset, there was insufficient time to prepare his body. "It was the day of Preparation [for the Sabbath, i.e. Friday], and the Sabbath was beginning" (Lk 23:54). The women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee took the responsibility for the preparation. So, they followed and noted the location of the tomb, determined to return after the Sabbath to complete their task.

Of all the variants in the resurrection accounts, two geographical notes in those reports cannot be overlooked: Jesus' reported resurrection appearance in Galilee and the site identification of Emmaus.

Paul of Tarsus penned the oldest literary witness to the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

(1 Cor 15:3–6)

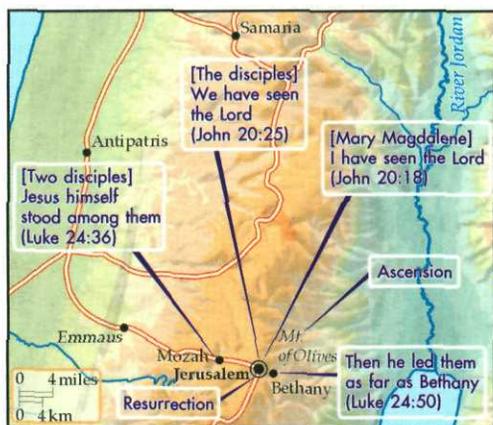


The rolling stone in Herod's family tomb, Jerusalem.

The Apostle mentions several resurrection appearances by Jesus, some of which are not repeated elsewhere in the New Testament. However, he also refers to an individual appearance to Cephas (i.e. Simon Peter; Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 1:12, 3:22, 9:5; Gal 1:18, 2:9) that is included in Luke's story of Jesus' encounter with the two departing Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus. When the two returned that evening to Jerusalem to tell those gathered what had happened, they were told, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (Lk 24:34).

The report of an individual appearance to Simon Peter, as distinguished from the other followers of Jesus, is not preserved in Mark and Matthew, but it may be the genesis for Mark's specific mention of Peter in the instruction to the women at the empty tomb, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you" (Mk 16:7; cf. Mt 28:7). The fragmented endings in the manuscripts of Mark's Gospel present a challenge for text critics. However, the various endings of Mark include neither an individual appearance to Peter nor any appearance of Jesus in the Galilee.

The singling out of Peter in the Markan logion is likely to address the unreconciled breach between Jesus and Peter, which resulted from the disciple's denial of his master (Mt 26:69–75 *parr.*). Although the Fourth Gospel does not preserve Mark's logion and the anticipated encounter, reconciliation between Peter and Jesus is certainly central to the episode recorded in John 21:15–19. In other words, the Johannine account of Peter and Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee is the literary complement to the unfulfilled



THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

expectations raised in Mark's logion at the empty tomb.

Notwithstanding the Evangelists' motives in their concern for Peter, it should be noted that there is no reason to read Paul's statement as a testimony of Jesus' appearance to Peter in Galilee. Indeed, what is striking about the Pauline version of Christianity's most primitive resurrection tradition is the absence of any knowledge of a Galilee appearance by Jesus. Paul seems unaware of the traditions preserved in Matthew 28:16 or John 21:15–19 that Jesus appeared to the eleven in Galilee. Moreover, if recent scholarship is correct, that John 20:30–31 served at an earlier stage of composition to conclude the Fourth Gospel, then John's earliest testimony without the epilogue of chapter 21 agrees with Paul, Luke and the extant endings of Mark, all of which lack a report of Jesus' appearance to his followers in Galilee after the resurrection.

These witnesses concur with Luke's presentation—which is too often easily discarded by New Testament scholarship as the Evangelist's attempt to anticipate the literary structure of his sequel (cf. Acts 1:8)—that the followers of Jesus remained in Jerusalem until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. According to the Third Gospel, Jesus instructed them, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49).

As a brief aside, this type of expanded narrative witnessed in the post-Easter Galilee appearances of Matthew, John (and assumed in the logion of Mark), is seen elsewhere in the Synoptic tradition. The incidental mention of a term or toponym in one Gospel serves as the seed for a developed narrative tradition in a parallel account. This expansive style of storytelling shares affinities with contemporary Jewish Midrash, Targums and intertestamental literature that presents the Bible creatively re-written (e.g. Jubilees, Genesis Apocryphon, etc.).

In the arrest of Jesus, Luke's singular mention of the Sanhedrin (Lk 22:66) to designate the council-chamber, in Mark and Matthew became the historical kernel for the illegal night-meeting of the full Sanhedrin (Mt 26:59; Mk 14:55) and their condemnation of Jesus. This is not to suggest literary dependence, but only access to common sources. Although not of great significance, it should come as no surprise that John's Gospel agrees with Luke in his omission of any participation of the Sanhedrin or a night-trial by the ruling council in Jerusalem.

In the current narrative, Luke preserves a statement by the two angelic men at the empty tomb.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in the Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise. (Lk 24:5b–7)

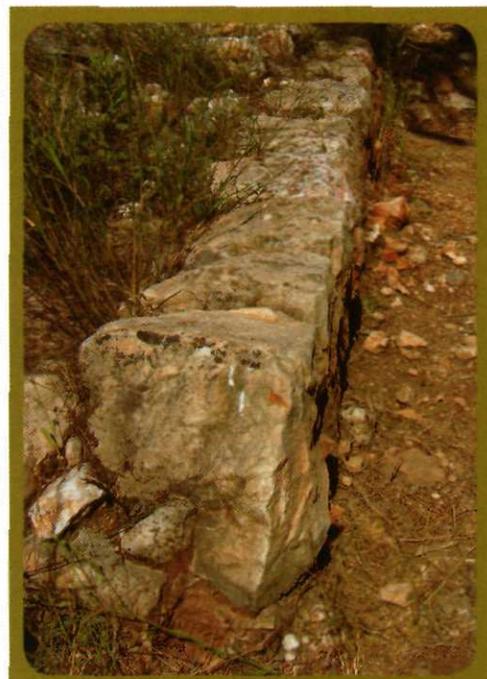
Consider Mark's version of the same statement, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you" (Mk 16:7). While Matthew 28:7 agrees with Mark that the disciples are instructed to go to the Galilee, he does not preserve the notion that Jesus himself informed them of this earlier, concluding instead, "Behold, I have told you." It seems that first-century reports circulated concerning the encounter at the empty tomb with mention of Galilee, and these provided the narrative seeds from which "the Galilee appearance" traditions emerged. Yet, the earliest testimony in the New Testament reported by Paul is silent on the Galilee appearances of the resurrected Jesus.

As we began, mention by Paul of an appearance to Simon Peter is echoed in the report given to the two who returned from Emmaus, already on the eve of the first day of the week. The identification of the destination for those two has been the subject of speculation. Christian tradition since the Byzantine period has uniformly identified New Testament Emmaus with Nicopolis-Imwas. This identification, however, is not without its difficulties. Luke describes the location of Emmaus, "sixty stadia (seven miles) from Jerusalem." The traditional site of Nicopolis-Imwas exceeds that distance, situated approximately 22 miles (35 km) from Jerusalem.

The discrepancy in distance between Luke's description and the Byzantine city is likely the cause for the textual changes in some manuscripts to read "one hundred and sixty stadia" in Luke 24:13. The revised distance brought the location of New Testament Emmaus in line with the Byzantine identification of the site with Nicopolis-Imwas. So, according to Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, "Emmaus: From

whence came Cleopas, who is recorded in the Gospel according to Luke. This is now Nicopolis, the famous polis of Palaestina" (Eus. *Onom.* 90:15). However, the editorial committee of the United Bible Society's Greek New Testament determined that in spite of the difficulties in site identification, the best reading is the shorter distance of "sixty stadia" attested in better manuscripts. Our identification of New Testament Emmaus must fall within the spatial limits imposed by the best manuscript readings, thus excluding Nicopolis-Imwas.

It seems that early Christian tradition exchanged the identity of a lesser-known village by the same name for the Byzantine metropolis. Josephus knew both locations. The site of Emmaus at Nicopolis-Imwas is given as the location for the encampment of attacking foreign forces during the Hasmonean revolt (*Ant.* 12:98, 306; 13:15) and the First Jewish Revolt (*War* 5:42). However, Josephus knew another Emmaus closer to Jerusalem. After the Jewish revolt Vespasian assigned "eight hundred veterans discharged from the army a place for habitation called Emmaus, distant thirty stadia (3.5 miles) from Jerusalem" (*War* 7:217; *m. Sukkah* 4:5; *j. Sukkah* 54b; *b. Sukkah* 45a). The distance is precisely half of the distance (sixty stadia) described in Luke's Gospel, perhaps suggesting that Luke's measurement includes the return distance to Jerusalem. In any event, the description that the two returned that very evening to Jerusalem indicates that the village of Emmaus was nearby to Jerusalem and more likely the place mentioned by Josephus.



Remains of the Roman road leading from Jerusalem to Emmaus.