

CHAPTER 22

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 Mark 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; Flusser 2001:26; Brown 1966: 1:330)

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 work in Nazareth paints a picture of a remote, insignificant village that would have attracted little attention (Tzaferis and Bagatti 1993:1103–1106; Kopp 1963:49–56).

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

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 *Ναζωραῖος* that is routinely translated Nazarene, and the identification of the prophecy that Matthew claims is fulfilled with the family's settlement in Nazareth (Stendahl 1968:103–104, 198–199).

We will not review the many and varied solutions that have been proposed (see Davies and Allison 1988: 1:277–284). We venture here only two observations about the language of the verse that may

assist towards narrowing Matthew's possible intent. First, the "ω" in the second syllable of *Ναζωραῖος* indicates that the Hebrew word behind our Greek term was נַצְוֹר (*natzor*, i.e. one kept, protected) and not נְצִיר (*netzer*: branch) or נָזִיר (*nazir*: Nazirite). Second, translators of our verse rarely take note that the passive Greek verb (κληθήσεται) can be intended to communicate a divine passive in which God is assumed to be acting (Blass and Debrunner §130.1). 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 *Ναζωραῖος* and *Ναζαρέτ*. Yet, nowhere else in the New Testament does the term *Ναζωραῖος* appear alongside *Ναζαρέτ*. Could it be that Matthew has brought the



The return from Egypt; the boy Jesus in the Temple.

as the Roman census when Quirinius was governor (Lk 2:2; cf. Schwartz 1988:635–646). 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 during the reign of Herod the Great (Smallwood 1981:568–571; Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1973: 1:399–427).

External corroboration is also lacking for Matthew's account of Herod's execution of the young male children in Bethlehem (Smallwood 1981:103–104). Matthew is our only record of the event. Nevertheless, Herod's actions described by Matthew fit the king's paranoid personality sketched by Josephus (Flusser 2001:182–183). 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

elliptical Old Testament prophecy, not because of the name of the Galilean village (Ναζαρέτ), 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 (קראתיך) in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you (אחזקך) 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). Jeremias has 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; Jeremias 1971:53–55; Flusser 2001:40–42).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING FOR THE MINISTRY OF JOHN AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

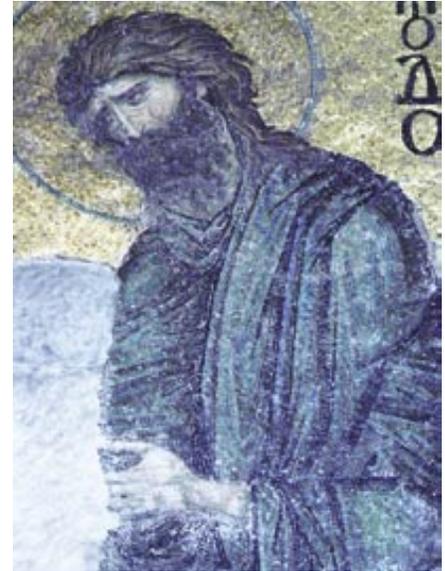
In all of the Gospels the ministry of Jesus begins with his participation in the baptism of John. The geographical setting for John’s ministry varies in the four Gospel accounts. In both Christian tradition and modern scholarship this has resulted in uncertainty regarding the location of John (Kraeling 1951:9–16). 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 (במדבר) 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: ἐν τῆς ἐρήμῳ) 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 (Liddel and Scott 1996:687; Koehler-Baumgartner 2001:547). It may also describe unpopulated, pasturing areas belonging to residents of a nearby city (Nun 1997:37; 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; Taylor 1957:156). 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

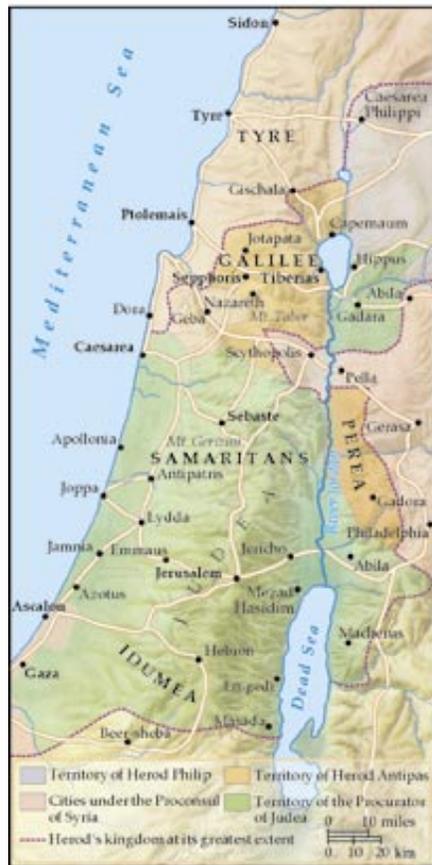


John the Baptist. (Hagia Sophia, Istanbul)

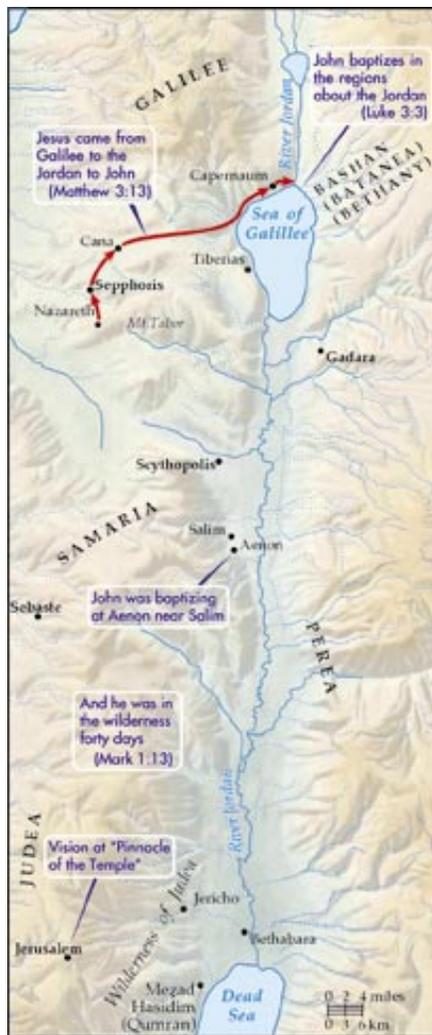
unique geographical details about the location of John’s ministry, before and after its description of John’s baptism of Jesus. At points the Evangelist parallels the Synoptic Gospels, and at other points he presents independent traditions. Of the setting prior to Jesus’ baptism, John’s Gospel records 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 (Βηθανία) 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 (Βηθαβαρά). “Perhaps, Bethabara is intended to substitute a known locality for an unknown” (Dalman 1935:87). 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 Βηθαβαρά prior to Origen is nonexistent. Βηθανία appears in our earliest and best manuscripts of John’s Gospel (Metzger 1994:171). 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” (Avi-Yonah 1954:38–39; Sudilovsky 1999:14–15).

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 (Avi-Yonah 1954:37–38). A second “Aenon near Salim” is depicted on the west side of the Jordan River



The southern Levant in the time of Jesus.



The baptism of Jesus and the sojourn in the wilderness.

not too distant from Scythopolis (i.e. Beth-shean; cf. Avi-Yonah 1954:35–36). This latter site is attested also in Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* 40:1–4 and Egeria’s *Travels* 15:1–4 (Wilkinson 2002:127; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:58). 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 (Brown 1966: 1: 151; 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, more recently Brownlee (1957:166–194) and Riesner (1987:29–63) have revisited a suggestion heard previously from Lightfoot (1859: 1:327–333) and Conder (1875b:72–74; 1877:184–186) that the reference to Βηθανία in John 1:28 is not to a village, but to the region of Bashan (Βάσαν, Βασανίτις, Βατανάια) in the Transjordan. Conder brought attention to the rendering of Bashan in the Aramaic Targums as בתניי (Tg. Neof. Deut 32:14; cf. Tg. Ps.-J. Deut 33:22 ברתניי). He observed

that it is a philological equivalent to the Greek Βηθανία. 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” (πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου: 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; Flusser 2001: 43). 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 mention 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. Flusser observed that Josephus’ parenthetical remarks concerning the fortress of Macherus indicated that the historian did not know where John was executed.

The fact that the Nabatean wife of Antipas escaped to her father through Macherus gave birth to the erroneous second mention of this stronghold (*Ant.* 18:119) as the suggested place of the imprisonment and the execution of the Baptist. (Flusser 2001:278)

Mark’s description that “leading officials of Galilee” (Mk 6:21) were present during the banquet when John was condemned strengthens Flusser’s contention that John was imprisoned and executed in Antipas’ Galilean palace in Tiberias.



The River Jordan. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

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 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” (ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα)—is intended to echo the same words spoken by the Lord to Moses in Numbers 27:17 (בְּצֹאן אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהֶם רֹעֶה) 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 *par.*) is not unlike the Fourth Gospel’s fragmented description of Jesus’ return *beyond the Jordan* (πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου).

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)

FROM NAZARETH TO CAPERNAUM

Prominent east-west valleys (Beth-haccerem, Hannathon, Bêt Neţófa, Turân) that traverse the lower region are one of the topographical features that distinguishes Upper Galilee from Lower Galilee (*War* 3:35; cf. chap. 3, *supra*). The valleys of the Lower Galilee are the result of prehistoric tectonic activity, “the faulting and uplifting of tilted blocks” (Orni and Efrat 1973:74). 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 (Strange 1982:254–255) 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 (Orni and Efrat 1973:74). 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



From Nazareth to Cana and Capernaum.

in the Bêt Neţôfa Valley (Sahl el-Battôf). Its importance was accentuated by its location at the crossroads of the Ptolemais-Taricheae trunk road and the secondary north-south route by way of Simonia to the Jezreel Valley and the international coastal highway (Aharoni 1979:61).

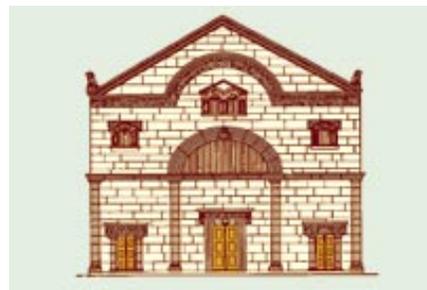
In Matthew 4:13 the Evangelist reports that Jesus traveled from Nazareth to Capernaum. The journey north from Nazareth and east may pass through either the Bêt Neţôfa Valley or the Turân Basin to descend from Nazareth's chalk ridge overlooking the Jezreel Valley to villages on the Sea of Galilee. However, 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; Brown 1996:98). 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 (Robinson and Smith 1856: 3:108; Strange 1992a: 1:827; Mackowski 1979:278-284; Masterman 1914:81-86). 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 (Dalman 1935:101). The Hellenistic-Roman site is currently under excavation and should be distinguished from the medieval Christian pilgrimage site of Kafr Qanah 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 (קנח) of Joshua 19:28. However, this is merely a result of the similarity of the Septuagint's Greek rendering (Κανθαν) of the Hebrew name for the Old Testament village rather than a clear



Capernaum—reconstruction of the synagogue.

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 (Notley and Safrai 2005: xiii). However, it seems that by the late Roman period the identity of either Old Testament Kanah or New Testament Cana was unknown.

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 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 Neţôfa 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 Neţôfa 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 SEA OF GALILEE: DEVELOPMENT OF AN EARLY CHRISTIAN TOPONYM

New Testament scholarship has long recognized that there are toponyms that find no mention outside of the New Testament. Prominent among those are two sites that appear in the Passion narratives of Jesus: Gethsemane, Γεθσημανί (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32) and Golgotha, Γολγοθά (Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Jn 19:17). These terms draw immediate notice, because they appear to transliterate Semitic toponyms. Less attention has been given to another place name of equal rarity: the Sea of Galilee, ἡ θάλασσα τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Mt 4:18, 15:29; Mk 1:16, 3:7, 7:31; Jn 6:1).

The uncommon nature of this toponym is indicated in the Fourth Gospel by the Evangelist's need to further define it with an additional genitive more familiar to his readers: "After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee [which is the Sea] of Tiberias" (Jn 6:1). The city of Tiberias, built by Herod Antipas on the lakeshore (Ant. 18:36; War 2:168), appears again at the end of the Gospel to identify the lake (Jn 21:1: τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Τιβεριάδος) without the previous determinant τῆς Γαλιλαίας. The Johannine toponym parallels both Josephus (War 3:57: Τιβεριάδι λίμνης) and the classical authors, Pausanias (Descr. 5.7.4: λίμνην Τιβεριάδα ὀνομαζομένην) and Solinus (Collectanea Rerum

Memorabilium 35.3: *Est et lacus Sara extensus passuum sedecim milibus... Sed lacus Tiberiadis*).

The fourth-century writer, Julius Honorius, likewise employed the city of Tiberias (*Cosmographia* 2: *mare Tiberiadem*), but he alone among the Latin authors uses the term *mare* rather than *lacus* to describe the lake. There is some question whether Julius was a pagan or a Christian (Stern 1984: 3:45). Julius' rare combination of *sea* with *Tiberias* that only occurs elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel suggests that the Roman author may have at least been familiar with the Christian work.

The most numerous and detailed references to the lake are those by Josephus. He consistently calls the body of water λίμνη rather than θάλασσα. His personal familiarity with the lake likely led to his practice of referring to it simply as ἡ λίμνη, without any additional topographical determinant (*Life* 96, 153, 165, 304, 327; *War* 2:635). As previously noted, on two occasions he identifies the lake with Tiberias (*War* 3:57, 4:456). More often, however, he uses the toponym used by the inhabitants of the region: "... the lake, which the native inhabitants call Gennesar" (*War* 3:463; see also 2:573; 3:506; *Ant.* 18:28, 36). The commonplace identification of the lake with Γεννησάρ is further indicated by references to the body of water simply as "the Gennesar" (ἡ Γεννησάρ; *War* 3:515, 516; *Ant.* 5:84 [Γεννησαρίδος]).

The passage cited above by Solinus identified the lake with Tiberias, as well as a place called *Sara*. This is certainly a reference to Gennesar (cf. below Pliny's *Genesara*). In Strabo's *Geography*, he likewise connects the lake with the fertile plain: καλεῖται δ' ἡ λίμνη Γεννησαρίτις, "the lake called Gennesar" (Strabo *Geog.* 16.2.16). Pliny preserves the same identification for the lake: *in lacum se fundit, quem plures Genesaram vocant, "[The river] Jordan [w]idens out into a lake usually called Genesara"* (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 5.71). He continues in his description but confuses Taricheae with Tiberias in identifying the lake: *a meridie Tarichea, quo nomine aliqui et lacum appellant, ab occidente Tiberiade...*, loc cit. "Taricheae on the south, the name of which place some people give to the lake, and Tiberias on the west..." (Stern 1984: 1:478).

It is uncertain precisely when the lake began to be identified with the alluvial plain where Nahal 'Amud empties into the lake. Josephus reports on the advances of the Hasmonean forces there: "Jonathan set out from Galilee from the waters of Gennesar" (*Ant.* 13:158: τῶν ὑδάτων τῶν Γεννησάρων). Josephus' information is derived from 1 Maccabees 11:67: "Jonathan and his army encamped by the waters of Gennesar" (τὸ ὕδωρ τοῦ Γεννησάρ). Not only do the two accounts describe the same campaign, but these are the only two occasions where the term τὸ ὕδωρ is used with Γεννησάρ to identify the lake.

Flusser investigated the origins of the toponym Gennesar (Flusser 2002a:343-344). The meaning of this place name is questioned as early as *Genesis Rabbah* 98:17 (ed. Albeck, 1267): "And why is it called Genosar (גנוסר)? The Sages say [it means] 'the Gardens of the Princes' (גני השרים)." While the etymology of the toponym is addressed, the identity of the *Sarim* (שרים) is not. Flusser traced the use of שר during the days of the Hasmoneans and their consolidation of political rule in the second century BCE. In 1 Maccabees we read the acclamation in Jerusalem regarding Simon: "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader (ἡγούμενον) and



The Sea of Galilee at sunset. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise" (1 Macc 14:41; cf. 13:42; 13:53; 14:35).

Flusser has suggested that the linguistic equivalent for the Greek term is the Hebrew שר. This is supported by the supposed Hebrew title for the First Book of Maccabees, ספר בית שר בני אל (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.2; Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1986: 3:182-183), which presents the history of the Hasmoneans until the death of John Hyrcanus in 104 BCE. As Josephus reports, the son of Hyrcanus, Aristobulus I (104-103 BCE), was the first of the Hasmoneans to "assume the diadem" (*War* 1:70). Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE) followed his brother's example and minted coins with a bilingual inscription: יהונתן המלך / ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ, "Yohanathan the King / King Alexander" (Meshorer 1997:32; cf. *Ant.* 13:320). Thus, it appears that among the Hasmonean rulers the title שר was applied for only a brief period, until the time of Aristobulus I. Flusser concluded that agricultural lands on the fertile plain belonging to Simon or John Hyrcanus (השרים) became the source for the toponym Γεννησάρ (גני שר). Subsequently, the region gave its name to the lake that adjoined it.

Among the Evangelists, Luke alone employs the toponym for the lake that Josephus states was used by those living in the region: "While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret" (τὴν λίμνην Γεννησαρέτ; Lk 5:1; Fitzmyer 1981: 1:565). While the form of Luke's Greek genitive determinant displays secondary characteristics (Bauer 2000:194; cf. Γεννησάρ in 1 Macc 11:67 and Bezae of Mt 14:34, Mk 6:53), Luke studiously avoids the application of the term θάλασσα used by Matthew, Mark and John for the lake. The Greek term θάλασσα (like its Latin equivalent *mare*) typically describes sea water; whereas, λίμνη (and the Latin *lacus*) is routinely applied to fresh water (Bauer 2000:442, 596; Clare 1982:995, 1078-1079). Thus, we have witnessed the consistent use of λίμνη and *lacus* by the classical writers in connection with the Lake of Gennesar.

Matthew (14:22-33, 15:29, 17:27) and Mark (6:45-52, 7:31) use θάλασσα for the lake when there are no parallel passages in Luke. More often, however, we witness triple tradition narratives (Mt 4:18-22/Mk 1:16-20=Lk 5:1-11; Mt 8:23-27/Mk 4:35-41=Lk 8:22-25; Mt 8:28-34/Mk 5:1-20=Lk 8:26-39; Mt 13:1/Mk 4:1=Lk 8:4; cf. Mk 2:13=Lk 5:27; Mk 3:7=Lk 6:17) in which Luke's omission of θάλασσα and/or the correct use of λίμνη suggests Lukan independence. Luke shows no reluctance to use the term θάλασσα at other times (Lk 17:2, 17:6, 21:25; Acts 4:2, 7:46 *et passim*). Whether Luke corrects Mark and Matthew on these occasions or draws his information from elsewhere, what is clear is that Luke presents a more informed picture of the physical nature of the lake.

We are still left with the unusual application of the term θάλασσα by Matthew, Mark and John to the Lake of Gennesar, and the related question of the origins for the Christian toponym ἡ θάλασσα τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Mt 4: 18, 15:29; Mk 1:16, 7:31; Jn 6:1). The name ἡ θάλασσα (Sea of Chinnereth) for the lake occurs three times in the Hebrew Scriptures (Num 34:11; Josh 12:3, 13:27) and is rendered by the Septuagint θάλασσα Χεβερεθ (or Χεναρα). Clearly, the translators have employed θάλασσα under the influence of the Hebrew ἡ θάλασσα that can designate either lake or sea (Köhler-Baumgartner 2001: 1:413-414; cf. *Arist. Mete.* 1.13; Black 1967:133). The Aramaic Targums render the three biblical occurrences of ἡ θάλασσα with the toponym ἡ θάλασσα. On two additional occasions where the Lake of Gennesar is understood but the toponym ἡ θάλασσα is lacking in the Hebrew texts, the Targums supply ἡ θάλασσα. In Deuteronomy 33:23, ἡ θάλασσα ("the lake and the south") is rendered ἡ θάλασσα ("the lake and again ἡ θάλασσα" ("east of the sea") in Ezekiel 39:11 is understood ἡ θάλασσα.

Some scholars suggest that Matthew, Mark and John have derived their use of θάλασσα directly from the Septuagint translation of ἡ θάλασσα (Fitzmyer 1981: 1:565). Yet, this is not certain. Why would the Evangelists not also have preserved the equally important Septuagintal delimiters Χεβερεθ or Χεναρα? Moreover, the Septuagint's rendering of ἡ θάλασσα provides no explanation for the New Testament use of Γαλιλαία with θάλασσα.

Instead, the genesis for the Christian toponym may be indicated by Matthew's scriptural citation immediately prior to his first use of the *Sea of Galilee*.

He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. (Mt 4:12b-16)

Matthew cites Isaiah 9:1 (HMT 8:23) to interpret Jesus' movement in Galilee from Nazareth to Capernaum as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Stendahl 1968:104-106).

Before we address Matthew's use of Isaiah, a few comments on the Hebrew passage are necessary. Rainey is correct that גליל in Isaiah 9:1 should not be read "Galilee" but "region" (Rainey 1981:146-151; Köhler-Baumgartner 2002: 1:193). The name גליל הגויים (*Gelil-ha-goiim*) designates the same area as Harosheth-ha-goiim (הרשת הגויים) in the Book of Judges: "from Harosheth-ha-goiim to the river Kishon" (Judg 4:13; cf. 4:2, 4:16). In other words, Gelil-ha-goiim refers to the arable lands (likely in the possession of non-Israelites) in the southern portions of the Jezreel Valley.

The tripartite topographical combination by Isaiah—“Way to the Sea,” “Gelil-ha-goiim” and “Beyond the Jordan”—was intended by the prophet to define the frontiers of Israelite settlement in the north that stood in imminent danger before the Assyrian threat. Accordingly, the lands in the north marked the eastern frontier in the Transjordan, and גליל הגויים the southern boundaries of these northern settlements. In this context, Rainey is correct that Isaiah did not intend to identify דָּמָשְׁקִי with the international route from Egypt to Damascus, but the northern trunk route from Tyre to the region near the biblical city of Dan, i.e. Paneas (Banias).

Isaiah’s intentions notwithstanding, Matthew took advantage of the Septuagint’s rendering of the common noun גליל to read Galilee. Further, the Evangelist collapsed three widely divergent points of geographical reference to a single topos—the region around Capernaum that served as the locus for Jesus’ ministry. So compelling was the early Christian exegesis preserved in Matthew’s Gospel that it gave rise in subsequent centuries to the mistaken notion that the “Way to the Sea” traversed the region of Galilee near Capernaum.

Matthew’s creative combination of geographical sites to define the locus of Jesus’ ministry is clear. What is not so immediately recognizable is that this same creative exegesis is responsible for the Christian toponym, ἡ θάλασσα τῆς Γαλιλαίας. In the entirety of Hebrew Scripture only in Isaiah 9:1 do we witness the collocation of the Hebrew terms גַּלְיָל and גַּלְיָלָה. It seems that Matthew’s citation was also intended to serve in the creation of a distinctive toponym within the early Christian community. Drawing upon the Septuagintal vocabulary of Isaiah 9:1 (Θάλασσα and Γαλιλαία), the early Church created a new toponym that provided an elliptical allusion to Isaiah’s prophecy and underscored the biblical significance of the locus of Jesus’ ministry. If our observation is correct, we can now understand how the term Θάλασσα—which in the Septuagint’s translation of Isaiah initially spoke of the Mediterranean Sea—was transferred to another body of water, namely the Lake of Gennesar.

Mark embraced this Christian toponym (Mk 1:16, 3:7). Yet, he may provide some hint that he was also familiar with the location of Isaiah’s earlier topographical points of reference. In Mark’s account of Jesus’ journey to the north he records, “Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis” (Mk 7: 39). At a later point we will address more fully Mark’s confused geography in this verse, as well as his problematic use of Δεκάπολις (Chancey 2002: 130–132). For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that Mark’s description of the beginning and end of Jesus’ northern journey necessarily placed him on Isaiah’s original דָּמָשְׁקִי, the trunk route from Tyre to Dan-Paneas-Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27; Mt 16:13). Moreover, it is only fitting that the destination of this journey according to Mark was the Sea of Galilee, whose very name was derived from the same Isaianic verse.

Once again it should be noted that Luke, while familiar with current redemptive notions attached to Isaiah 9:1 (e.g. Lk 1:79; cf. Marshall 1978:95), betrays no knowledge of this Christian toponymic invention. We have already witnessed that he avoids the other Evangelists’

use of θάλασσα, preferring instead the more correct λίμνη. Luke’s preference to apply λίμνη to the Lake of Gennesar is also contrary to his often-assumed (Turner 1976: 4:45–62) stylistic penchant to imitate the Septuagint, where λίμνη appears infrequently (only five times in comparison to 432 occurrences of θάλασσα) and never for the Lake of Gennesar. His further omission of the Christian toponym strengthens the impression that he is relying here on other independent sources. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain how Luke could be drawing the topographical framework for his narrative from Mark or Matthew, while consistently and inexplicably omitting their key terminology.

What we witness in the Gospel traditions is the development of an early Christian toponym. The impetus for this creativity was to define the locus of Jesus’ ministry in the regions of first-century Galilee in light of Isaiah 9:1. On the other hand, Luke’s topographical independence is attested by his exclusive use of λίμνη for the lake and his ignorance of the Christian place name. It may be significant that he likewise betrays no knowledge of the toponyms Γεθσημανί and Γολγοθά. He has instead drawn from sources that do not reflect the topographical creativity of Matthew, Mark or John. While his information possessed an intimate, firsthand knowledge of the physical nature of the lake, it does not reflect the spiritual environment that gave rise to the Christian toponym, *Sea of Galilee*.

THE FIRST-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 on 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

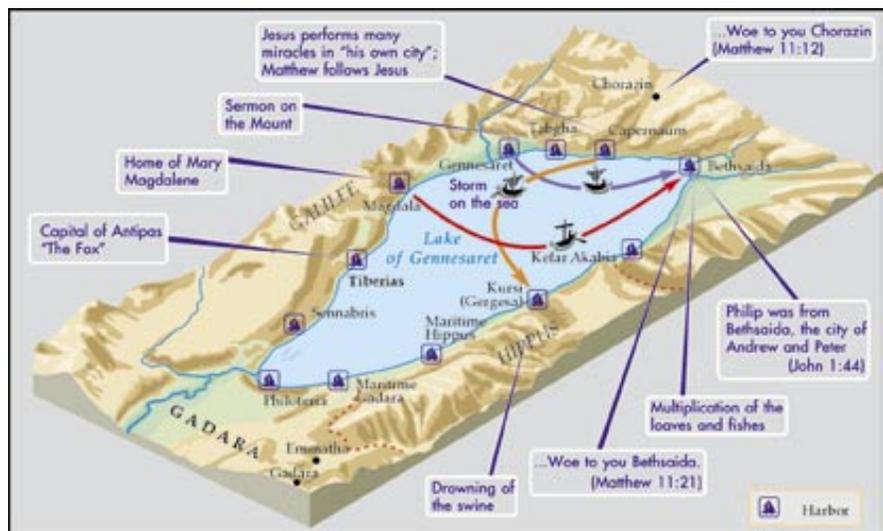
around the Sea of Galilee that find mention in the New Testament.

Tiberias. It is no accident that the New Testament lacks a report of a visit by Jesus to Tiberias (contra Hirschfeld 1991:45). 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 (Nun 1999:64) 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 Galileean, 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)

Avi-Yonah suggested that the city was founded in 18 CE, although the coins of Antipas from Tiberias begin only from 20 CE (Avi-Yonah 1950: 160–169; Aviam 1997:203; Strange 1992d: 6:547). 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 (Ἀμμαθοῦς; 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 (Dothan 1993b:573–577; Herion 1992: 3:37–38). 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 (Hirschfeld, Foerster and Vitto 1993:1464–1573). The only sizeable structure identified by the archaeologists to the time of Antipas is the gate complex located at the southern entrance to Tiberias.



Around the Lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee).

The plan and ornamentation of the gate point to the same date, probably when the city was founded in the second decade of the first century. Soundings conducted east and west of the gate area yielded no remains earlier than the sixth or seventh centuries; it can be assumed that in the Roman period the gate and towers stood isolated and served as a kind of outer gate, with no relationship to the walls in that period. (Hirschfeld, Foerster and Vitto 1993:1471)

Josephus describes both a stadium (*War* 2:618) and a place of prayer, *proseuche* (προσεύχη; *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, μέγιστον οίκημα (*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; Bauer 1957:720; Safrai 1976c:913–914).

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. Flusser suggested that it was 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; cf. Flusser 2001: 278). 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: מגדל נוניא) and Taricheae (“salted fish”; *Life* 188: Ταριχέα) reflect the dominant local industry of the first century (cf. Aviam 1997:399–400). 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 (Μαγαδά; cf. Mk 8:10: Δαλιμανουθά; Metzger 1994:83). 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 (Aviam 1997:399). The only undisputed reference in the New Testament to Magdala is as the home of Mary Magdalene (Μαριάμ ἡ Μαγδαληνή). 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).

A one-room building in the ruins has been the center of debate regarding its use. Corbo (1989:15), who excavated the site, has suggested that it is a small synagogue, while Netzer has pointed to adjacent canals to support his identification of the structure as a springhouse (Aviam 1997:399).

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 (Strange 1992c: 4:464).

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 (εἰς κώμην Κεφαρναοκόν) when he was wounded in 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 (Κεφαρναοκόν); 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 (cf. Robinson and Smith 1856: 3: 350–352). 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). It is partially because of Josephus’ description of the springs of Capernaum that Robinson disagreed with Wilson’s suggestion of Tell Hûm, site of present-day Capernaum, and was compelled to identify



Aerial view of Capernaum. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

Tell Minyeh (Tabgha; cf. Robinson and Smith 1856: 3: 348–358) as first-century Capernaum.

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. In her journey to Galilee, she recounts a visit to Capernaum.

Moreover, in Capernaum the house of the prince of the apostles has been made into a church, with its original walls still standing. It is where the Lord healed the paralytic. There is also the synagogue where the Lord cured a man possessed by the devil. The way in is up many stairs, and it is made of dressed stone. (Wilson 1999:97)

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).

Arculf saw this place (i.e. Capernaum) from a neighboring hill, and observed that it has no walls, but lies on a narrow piece of ground between the mountain and the lake. On the shore, towards the east, it extends a long way, having the mountain on the north and the water on the south. (Wright 1969:9)

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.

And thence they went round the sea, and by the village of Magdalum to the village of Capernaum, where our Lord raised the prince’s daughter. Here was a house and a great wall, which the people of the place told them was the residence of Zebedaeus with his sons John and James. And thence they went to Bethsaida, the residence of Peter and Andrew, where there is now a church on the site of their house. (Wright 1969:16–17)

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 (Corbo 1992: 1:866–867). 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 ecclesiae* (Loffreda 1993: 295). 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, 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 to fifth centuries 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 (Kohl and Watzinger 1973:4–40). 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 R. Issi in the third century CE against the heretics of Capernaum (Koh. Rab. 1.8) 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” (Tzaferis 1993:292).

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-Minim* in its earliest form expressed Jewish antipathy towards nascent Christianity (cf. Flusser 2002b:58–99).

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. 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; cf. Smith 1992a: 1:912).

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 (Tzaferis 1993:303). 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 (ἔρημος) two miles from Capernaum” (Eus. Onom. 174:23; cf. Notley and Safrai 2005:164 n. 973).

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 (Van de Velde 1858:304). Kohl and Watzinger later included the synagogue of Chorazin in their survey of synagogues in Galilee (Kohl and Watzinger 1915:41–58). More recent excavations under the direction of Yeivin have uncovered houses and a ritual bathing installation (Yeivin 1987:22–36). 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. In 1927 a stone seat was discovered south of the synagogue (Ory 1927:51–52). 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* (קְהִירָא דְּמֹשֶׁה; cf. Pesiq. Rab Kah. 7b, ed. Mandelbaum 1962:12). Presumably, from such a seat sermons were delivered in the synagogue (Safrai 1989:8–10; cf. Rahmani 1990: 192–214). If so, Jesus may have had this in mind

in his remark concerning his contemporaries, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat (ἐπὶ τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας)” (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 (ἀνέστη ἀναγνῶναι) from the Torah and the *Haftara*. He then sat [i.e. on the seat of Moses] to expound (ἐκάθισεν . . . ἤρξατο δὲ λέγειν) upon the reading.

The Search for Bethsaida. One of the challenging tasks for archaeologists and biblical historians alike is the identification of sites mentioned in the Bible, some of which were destroyed or disappeared in time without a trace. The first comprehensive attempt to locate these places was that of Eusebius, the fourth-century church historian (c. 260–339 CE). In his *Onomasticon* (Notley and Safrai 2005) Eusebius catalogued most of the cities, sites and regions mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. Supplementing his list when possible, Eusebius provided detailed information concerning the sites’ history and location, including their distances in Roman miles from other well-known metropolitan centers in fourth-century Palestine.

Although the scale of Eusebius’ compilation is impressive, the work’s most glaring failure is his reliance upon the Septuagint, whose translators at times did not fully understand the meaning of the Hebrew terminology in the Old Testament. Eusebius and the Septuagintal text on which he depends occasionally mistake a common noun, adjective or adverb in Hebrew for a place name. By so doing, the *Onomasticon* presents ninety place names—almost ten percent of the total listed—of sites that never existed (e.g. Eus. Onom. 122:23: Λεματτάρρα=ἡρῆμῶς; cf. 1 Sam 20:20; Notley and Safrai 2005:195).

At other times, the brevity of Eusebius’ descriptions—with nothing more than the barest details taken from the biblical text—suggests that the location of the site was already lost by the time of his writing at the beginning of the fourth century. This seems to be the case with Bethsaida, one of the cities mentioned in connection with the ministry of Jesus (Mt 11: 21; Lk 10:13). Eusebius reports: “The city of Andrew and Peter and Philip. It is located in the Galilee next to the lake of Gennesaret.” Eusebius received his information about Bethsaida from the tradition of the Fourth Gospel that it was the home of Philip, Andrew and Peter (Jn 1:44), and “in the Galilee” (Jn 12:21).

He adopted the detail that the village was “next (πρός) to the lake of Gennesaret” *verbatim* from the description of Josephus (*Ant.* 18:28). Elsewhere Eusebius credits Josephus by name (cf. Eus. Onom. 1:2=Ant. 1:92–95; Eus. Onom. 40:9=Ant. 1:118; Eus. Onom. 82:2=Ant. 1:147). Since Eusebius only repeats details about Bethsaida found in well-known first-century sources, and he himself supplies no additional physical description, it is likely that by his own day the hometown of the three apostles had been abandoned and its location forgotten. Other deserted biblical sites—which amounted to little more than visible piles of ruins in the fourth century—are described as such by Eusebius (cf. Chorazin: Eus. Onom. 174:23). The absence of physical detail concerning Bethsaida seems to indicate that our New Testament city had disappeared entirely.



The “Seat (Cathedra) of Moses” from Chorazin. (NEAEHL)

Bethsaida was lost for centuries, and its location the subject of speculation by pilgrims and map-makers (McCown 1929:32–58). With the advent of geographical exploration of the Holy Land in the nineteenth century, the search intensified in the northern regions of the Sea of Galilee. Two theories put forward during that time still dominate the debate today. Edward Robinson (1838) was the first to suggest that et-Tell—the location of the present-day Bethsaida Excavations Project—was the site of ancient Bethsaida-Julias (Robinson and Smith 1856: 2:413). Later, a German explorer, Gottlieb Schumacher, citing the problem of et-Tell’s distance from the lake, proposed an alternative site at el-Araj—today located on lands maintained by the Israel Nature Reserves Authority (Schumacher 1888).

Although never excavated, el-Araj is still proposed by Mendel Nun of Kibbutz ‘En Gev as the possible site of Bethsaida (Nun 1998: [54] 12–31). His identification is bolstered by a survey of el-Araj in 1991 under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority that found Roman period surface remains.

Ancient building remains were recorded north and northwest of the hill and sherds were collected from the Early Roman (Herodian lamp and eastern *terra sigillata* bowl) and Late Roman periods. These finds indicate that the continuing identification of the site with Bethsaida cannot be excluded. (Stepansky 1991:87)

Over the previous decade the debate between these two opinions intensified on the pages of scholarly journals. Although Nun is widely considered one of Israel’s leading authorities on the Sea of Galilee (Nun 1977), editors of his article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* excised his identification of Bethsaida at el-Araj (Nun 1999: 18–31, 64; cf. *idem* 1998: [54] 12–31). Less than six months later, the same journal published an article by Rami Arav, director of the Bethsaida Excavations Project, championing the identification of Bethsaida at et-Tell (Arav 2000: 1:44–51, 53–56). Today, for Christian visitors to the Holy Land, the debate seems a foregone conclusion. Et-Tell is identified both on Israel government maps and road signs as “Bethsaida.”

Yet, have over fifteen years of excavations at et-Tell demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that it was the site of ancient Bethsaida? Nagging questions remain. True, it is rare that archaeology can prove with absolute certainty the identity of a particular site. Recent exceptions are Tel Miqne (Ekron) and Tell el-Qādī (Dan), where inscriptions found at those sites identified them as the ancient biblical cities. More often, however, the task of site identification is the complex application of multiple disciplines: history, toponymy, topography and archaeology (Rainey 1984:8–11).

While there are limits to the certainty of conclusions based solely on archaeological excavations, they can serve in another way—to eliminate mistaken identification. If multiple, independent and reliable historical sources indicate human settlement during a particular period, and archaeological investigation on a site finds no corresponding material remains that correlate to that historical period, then the paucity of the evidence brings into question the identification of the site. In this brief survey we want to examine the ancient historical descriptions of Bethsaida and inquire whether the ancient portrait of Bethsaida corresponds to the discoveries of recent excavations at et-Tell.

The oldest historical references to Bethsaida are those found in the New Testament. As we



The northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, looking east. (photo A. Alon)

have noted, it was one of the Galilean cities where Jesus ministered. Here Mark records that Jesus healed a blind man (Mk 8:22). It is also the region where Jesus withdrew on more than one occasion: “On their return the apostles told him what they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart (i.e. by boat: Mk 6:32) to a city called Bethsaida” (Lk 9:10; cf. Mk 6:45).

Apart from the New Testament our most abundant witness for first-century Bethsaida is that of Josephus. He includes the city in his description of the course of the Jordan River that “traverses another hundred and twenty furlongs (i.e. 15 mi./24 km beyond Lake Semechonitis), and after the city of Julias (Bethsaida) cuts across the Lake of Gennesar” (War 3:515). Of Herod Philip’s efforts at Bethsaida Josephus reports, He raised the village of Bethsaida on Lake Gennesaret to the status of city (πόλις) by adding residents and strengthening the fortifications. He named it after Julia, the emperor’s daughter. (Ant. 18:28; War 2:168)

Josephus’ testimony is the only record that Philip renamed the village of Bethsaida as Julias. He is likewise alone in his explanation that the city was named for Julia, the daughter of Augustus (Ant. 18:28; War 2:168). The historian may have confused the identity of Julia. The daughter of Augustus was banished in 2 BCE, while Livia, the second wife of the emperor, was granted Julian *gens* in his will, which was executed at his death in 14 CE. It is doubtful Philip would have begun his initiatives at Bethsaida in the first two years of his rule (4–2 BCE). It is likewise difficult to imagine the tetrarch dedicating the city to Augustus’ daughter after her banishment in 2 BCE. A coin found recently that Strickert suggests was minted by Philip dates to 30/31 CE and is inscribed to Julia Sebaste, IOΥΛΙΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ (cf. Strickert 2002:65–91). It thus seems that the Julia to whom Josephus refers in the renaming of Bethsaida was Livia-Julia, wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius (Grether 1946:222–252).

Josephus reports that Philip died at Bethsaida-Julias. “He died at Julias; and when he was carried to that monument which he had already erected for himself beforehand, he was buried with great pomp” (Ant. 18:106–108). Although it is often assumed that Philip’s mausoleum was at Bethsaida-Julias, this detail is not actually stated by Josephus. The proximity of Josephus’ reference to Philip’s death and his burial need not indicate proximity in location. The death and burial of Philip’s father illustrates this point (cf. War 1:670–673). The location of Philip’s tomb remains unknown.

Early in the Jewish Revolt, the marshy plain near Bethsaida was the location of fighting between Jewish forces led by Josephus and the troops under the command of the Roman Sulla (Life 399). Josephus’ horse stumbled on the marshy land and fell, injuring its rider. He escaped, only to surrender a short time later at Jotapata (War 3:316–339). Without exploring fully Josephus’ topographical details in the skirmishes between his forces and those of Agrippa II, we would agree with Kuhn’s understanding. Josephus’ encampment near the Jordan River and μέγρι τοῦ πεδίου (as far as the plain), “presupposes the plain between et-Tell and the sea, so that the sea at the time of Josephus did not by any means reach as far as et-Tell” (Kuhn and Arav 1991:81).

Finally, a brief comment is warranted concerning the anachronistic toponym, Bethsaida of Galilee (Βηθσαιδα τῆς Γαλιλαίας) in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 12:21). The unfortunate designation has been the genesis of futile searches for a western Bethsaida and even two Bethsaidas (Robinson and Smith 1856: 3:358–359; Pixner 1985:207–216). Yet, the regional qualifier should be read only as a chronological marker for the historical context of the Evangelist. Changes in regional terminology may have resulted from the consolidation of political power by Agrippa I or Agrippa II on both sides of the upper Jordan River, or even more likely from geopolitical changes by the Romans after the Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE).

Subsequent to the Jewish Revolt, Pliny and Ptolemy join the Evangelist in speaking of territory east of the Jordan River as Galilee. The region of Galilee no longer marked the frontiers of political power on the western side of the upper Jordan River. Nonetheless, these late developments in no way reflect the terminological or political realities in the days of Jesus. During the rule of Antipas and Philip, Bethsaida was not in Galilee.

With this short survey of the ancient description of Bethsaida, we can now summarize what is known about the city through the eyes of the ancient records.

- It was a fishing village (בית צייד) that was transformed by Herod Philip into a Greco-Roman *polis* named Julias.
- Philip increased the population and strengthened the fortifications of the city.
- Bethsaida contained both Gentile (Syrian) and Jewish populations (War 3:57; Jn 1:44). Among the latter were those who maintained a religiously observant lifestyle (cf. Acts 11:8).

- Accessible by boat (Mk 6:32), the city lay on the Sea of Galilee (*Ant.* 18:28).
- It was situated about 660 feet (200 m) from the Jordan River that coursed by it and emptied into the Sea of Galilee (*Life* 399).
- It was in lower Gaulanitis, opposite the higher hill country (*War* 2:168).
- The area nearby included a marshy plain (*Life* 403).

The city underwent significant changes during the last two centuries of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. From a small thriving Jewish fishing village to a Greco-Roman *polis*, it increased in prominence and size. We are now left to ask, do the archaeological finds of over fifteen years of excavations at et-Tell correspond to the picture provided by those who knew Bethsaida-Julias firsthand?

The conclusions of the Bethsaida Excavations Project (BEP) are not always easy to assess. Over the years there have been varied and conflicting claims made by the excavators. For example, regarding Bethsaida's destruction and disappearance, Arav wrote in 1997:

In 65–66 the Roman armies of Agrippa II clashed with rebels in a series of battles that failed to result in a clear victory for either side (*Life* 71–73). The archaeological evidence is that the city was destroyed and never rebuilt. (*Arav* 1997: 1:303)

Arav does not provide any archaeological evidence for the destruction of Bethsaida in the Jewish Revolt. Nor is there any evidence of its destruction detailed in the first volume of the excavation report (*Arav and Freund* 1995). Instead, in volume two of the excavation report (*Arav and Freund* 1999) another member of the excavation team—Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn—concludes,

It is certain that Bethsaida-Julias was still settled after the Jewish-Roman war (66 to c. 74 CE). I cannot recognize any evidence either of an archaeological nature or in Josephus' works, that Bethsaida was destroyed in the course of the Jewish-Roman war, or even that the city was abandoned about the year 67 CE. (*Kuhn* 1999:284)

Kuhn's assessment of the archaeological evidence concurs with Freund's study in the first volume that includes numerous references to Bethsaida in early rabbinic literature (*Freund* 1995: 267–303). Together they present a strong argument that the city continued to exist after the Jewish Revolt. To the rabbinic witnesses should be added two pagan writers—Pliny the Elder (*Pliny Nat. Hist.* 5:71) and Ptolemy (*Ptol. Geog.* 5.15.3)—who both attest to the existence of Bethsaida after the Jewish Revolt.

Freund's observation that Bethsaida was not a city familiar to the rabbis after approximately the third century CE, corresponds with Avi-Yonah's discussion of the regional decline of Jewish communities in Roman Palestine in the third century. This occurs because of political and economic crises in the empire.

In the first generation of the crisis (200–230) the numbers of Jewish villages in the Golan and Bashan fell below the number of city communities. In the second generation (230–260) the same process appears among the Jewish communities in the coastal plain. . . . In the Galilee itself a decline can be observed only in the last stages of the crisis (260–290). (*Avi-Yonah* 1976:122)

Avi-Yonah's description explains the disappearance of Bethsaida as part of an overall decline in Jewish communities in Roman Palestine in the third century, beginning in the Golan and Bashan. It also accords with the disappearance of Bethsaida by the time of Eusebius' composition of the *Onomasticon* at the beginning of the fourth century CE.

We now turn our attention to the two problems that run to the heart of the site identification of Bethsaida at et-Tell. The first is the distance of the site from the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Both the New Testament and Josephus describe Bethsaida near the lakeshore. Its very name means "place of fishing," and its reputation in the Tannaic and Amoraic periods remained closely identified with the fishing industry. The location of et-Tell is about 1.8 miles (3 km) from the lake, an unlikely setting for a fishing village. To overcome this challenge, the excavators theorize that et-Tell's current remoteness is the result of geological cataclysms and the silting of the Jordan River. According to a geological study of the area provided in the first (*Shroder and Inbar* 1995:65–98) and second (*Shroder et al.* 1999:115–174) excavation reports, the Bethsaida plain was underwater at some point between 2,700 and 1,800 years ago (*Shroder et al.* 1999:167). Nevertheless, the challenge remains to demonstrate the particular pertinence of this nine-hundred-year span to our narrow window of historical interest in the early Roman period.

Moreover, all of the discussion of possible geological cataclysms has diverted attention from the real problem with the site identification of et-Tell as a first-century fishing village. Even if a catastrophic geological event could be identified which destroyed first-century Bethsaida-Julias, it would not solve et-Tell's topographical impediment to being the first-century fishing village *cum* Greco-Roman *polis*. The elevation at the base of the mound is too high.

Surveys around the Sea of Galilee have provided verifiable and objective data regarding the levels of the lake in the New Testament period. The present lake level averages 690 feet (210.5 m) below sea level. Mendel Nun suggests that its level today is about 3 feet (1 m) higher than in antiquity because of a modern-day dam that has raised the water level. The elevations of breakwaters and piers that belong to the sixteen first-century harbors around the lake support his contention (*Nun* 1991).

Basalt blocks identified by the excavators as Bethsaida's "old dock facility" at the base of the tel are measured at an elevation of –669 feet/–204 meters (*Shroder and Inbar* 1995:86). This is over 22 feet (7 m) higher than the first-century lake levels. If the excavation report is correct and the lake reached what the excavators claim is the docking facility of first-century Bethsaida-Julias, then the lake would have inundated the shoreline promenade at Capernaum (–686.5 ft./–209.25 m), the ports of Tiberias (–686.4 ft./–208.3 m) and Kursi (–686.5 ft./–209.25 m), and every other known first-century settlement around the lake.

Equally challenging is the near total absence of material remains from the early Roman (New Testament) period. Archaeological evidence indicates that et-Tell was a significant fortified city in the Iron Age. The archaeologists suggest it belonged to the kingdom of Gesur (2 Sam 3:3). A monumental gate complex faced east and was discovered together with cultic stelae and a basalt basin adjacent to the gate. The city was probably destroyed during the Assyrian invasion in the eighth century BCE. There is evidence of renewed settlement during the Persian period with a continuity of occupation into the Hellenistic period. The material remains from the earlier occupation stand in stark

contrast to the Roman period. According to Fortner in her report on Hellenistic and Roman fineware from et-Tell (*Fortner* 1995:99–126),

The general time span for dating [fineware at et-Tell] ranges from 200 BCE to 100 BCE, and rarely to the first century BCE. . . . A decline in the number of fineware from the first century CE is obvious. The main evidence for fineware dates from the second and beginning of the first centuries BCE. (*Fortner* 1995:106–107)

Fortner's observations are consistent with the ceramic typology given in the second volume of the excavation report (*Arav* 1999:31–83). The totals from the detailed tables of ceramic finds taken from areas A and B are as follows: 296 vessels from the Iron Age, 71 Hellenistic and 53 Roman. The decline is even more severe if one removes from consideration the remains from area A that we are told are comprised entirely of a pit filled with composite pottery. The distribution then is 294 vessels from the Iron Age, 51 Hellenistic and 13 Roman.

Arie Kindler's report about coins found at et-Tell is likewise compelling and points us in the same direction as the ceramic evidence (*Kindler* 1999:250–268). According to Kindler there were 105 coins found minted in the Hellenistic period (333–63 BCE); 9 Herodian (Herod I [1]; Antipas [1]; Archelaus [1]; Philip [3]; Agrippa I [1]; Agrippa II [2]); 16 Middle to Late Roman; 4 Byzantine; 64 Islamic (Umayyad, 19th century).

The distribution of fineware is consistent with the pottery, coins and structural remains and indicates a visible decline in the early Roman period. So, while two large Hellenistic private homes are prominently displayed, only one small, poorly attested Roman period house is presented in the excavation reports. This poor state of affairs in the Roman period at et-Tell stands in irreconcilable conflict with the historical picture of first-century Bethsaida-Julias, when it is reported at its zenith in size and prominence.

It is precisely at this point in history that Josephus records that Herod Philip transformed the Jewish fishing village of Bethsaida into a Greco-Roman *polis*. To date there exists little if any evidence of the fortifications attributed by Josephus to Philip's enhancement of the city. Neither is there any identifiable structure from what one would expect of a Roman *polis* (cf. *Tcherikover* 1972b:33–39; 1975:90–116). The awarding of *polis* status upon a city was intended to introduce elements of Greco-Roman culture into Near Eastern societies. One would have expected to see some evidence of a theater (Tiberias, Sepphoris), gymnasium (Bethshean), hippodrome (Sebaste, Caesarea), or other elements of Roman life introduced into Bethsaida-Julias.

We should quickly qualify these comments to say that hesitation by scholars who think that Josephus has exaggerated the extent of Philip's efforts may be correct. In their estimation, Julius never was a real *polis* (cf. *Smallwood* 1981: 116 n. 45). These questions notwithstanding, even if Josephus had exaggerated the size and significance of Bethsaida-Julias, this does not mitigate nor explain the near absence of material remains at et-Tell during Philip's rule. After over fifteen years of excavations, the only structure of any significance that the excavators can point to is the foundation of what some—but not all—of the excavators suggest is a Roman temple.

According to the excavation report the evidence for its identification as a temple is:



Gadara (Umm Qeis)—remains of the Roman baths. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

(1) the relative thickness of the walls in comparison to the average thickness of other structures at the site; (2) the “rough” east-west orientation of the rectangular structure; (3) a column foundation; (4) a porch *in antae* in both its east and west ends; (5) rooms that the excavators identify as the possible *pronaos* and *cella* (Arav 1999:18–24). In addition to these structural identifications, nearby were discovered an incense shovel and a clay female figurine.

Some of the excavators have suggested that these two items were associated with the proposed temple and local imperial cult of Julia (Arav 1999:18). Strickert goes so far as to claim, “The discovery of the incense shovel leaves no doubt that the relatively small settlement was a place where the imperial cult was practiced and, at least for a time, played a dominant role” (Strickert 1998:105). Yet, as Freund acknowledges, there simply is not enough information to determine the shovel’s date or to know whether it belonged to Jews or pagans (Freund 1999:413–460). It certainly does not provide conclusive evidence of the presence of the imperial cult at et-Tell (cf. Rutgers 1999:177–198). Since there is no evidence of the shovel’s actual usage, even less should it be used in an attempt to identify the nearby structure as a Roman temple.

In our consideration of the proposed temple at et-Tell, it is important to keep in mind Meyers’ cautious observation on the tenuous nature of the dating by the excavators.

The architectural units (such as the “*bit hilani*” palace, Roman temple, Roman houses, Iron Age walls) seem to be dated by accumulated fills and not by the material in sealed loci under surfaces. If so, the dates suggested for the structures would be problematic, as would the hypotheses about their identity. (Meyers 2002:85)

Supporting evidence for the identification of the structure as a Roman temple is likewise inconclusive. It lacks any of the fine work one would have expected of a temple dedicated to Julia. A small threshold stone is “the single dressed stone that was found at the site close to the *in situ* position” (Arav 1999:21). However, the excavators admit that even this stone is too small for “a main entrance.”

Ball’s survey of Roman temples in Rome in the Near East (2001) illustrates that et-Tell’s putative temple is the only one of such rough and meager construction. The excavators acknowledge the humble state of affairs in their comparison between their structure and Roman temples in

the Hauran and in northern Syria. “Most are built of fine dressed stones and resemble very vaguely the building at Bethsaida” (Arav 1999:22). They continue, “if this is the temple built by Philip the Tetrarch . . . for the cult of Livia-Julia, then it was indeed a very modest temple in comparison with the structures that Philip’s father had built at Samaria and Caesarea Maritima” (Arav 1999:24). The recent discovery of a nearby Roman period temple in the territory of Philip only heightens the qualitative disparity between the structure at et-Tell and other recognized Roman temples in the region (Overman 2003: 2:40–49, 67).

Arav, Freund and Shroder have theorized that the reason we only find the temple’s foundations and no dressed stones is because the stones were taken and re-used in the synagogue of Chorazin (Arav 2000: 1:56). They provide only two pieces of evidence to support this fantastic claim. First, the width of the Chorazin synagogue approximates that of their proposed Roman temple at et-Tell. Second, the excavators suggest that an eagle in a frieze from the Chorazin synagogue is evidence that it originally belonged to a Roman structure, since the eagle was the symbol for Rome.

Their line of reasoning fails on both accounts. The width of the Chorazin synagogue is consistent with other undisputed Roman-Byzantine synagogues in the region. Thus, there is no necessary connection with the dimensions of the building foundations at et-Tell. Second, as Hachlili illustrates, the eagle was a common motif found in the ornamentation of regional synagogues in late antiquity (Hachlili 1988:332–335). Indeed, Herod already included the eagle in the decorations of the Jerusalem temple (War 1:650–656; Ant. 17:149–163). There simply is no compelling evidence to support the excavators’ suggestion that the missing temple of Bethsaida-Julias is to be found in the stones of the Chorazin synagogue. Further, the incongruity of the structure at et-Tell and other Roman temples in the region raises serious doubts whether the public building found at et-Tell was indeed a Roman temple to Livia-Julia.

Our survey of the ancient eyewitnesses and recent archaeological results from the Bethsaida Excavations Project leaves many unresolved questions. The evidence of over fifteen years of excavations is far from conclusive in bolstering the claim that et-Tell is first-century Bethsaida-Julias. The site’s remoteness from the lake, together with the inexplicable absence of first-

century remains, challenges the identification of et-Tell with the lost city of Philip, Andrew and Peter. Certainly more investigation is needed. Perhaps future excavations at et-Tell or elsewhere in the vicinity will prove conclusive for the site identification of this important New Testament city, but for the time being, the location of ancient Bethsaida remains in question.

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).

The healing of the demoniacs is recounted by all three Synoptic Gospels, and in each account there are three principal variant readings referring to the place at which the miracle occurred: Γαδερηνών, Γερασηνών, and Γεργεσηνών. (Metzger 1994:23)

According to the opinion of the editorial committee of the United Bible Society’s Greek New Testament, in Matthew’s Gospel Gadara is the preferable toponym, based on the strength of the textual witnesses [(\aleph^*) B C^{txt} (Δ) Θ sy^r⁶.p.^b]. They concluded that the appearance of Gerasa in some manuscripts was “a scribal assimilation to the prevailing text of Mark (5:1) and/or Luke (8:26, 37)” (Metzger 1994:24). Indeed, in Mark [(\aleph^*) B D it vg cop^{sa}] and Luke [p⁷⁵ B D it vg cop^{sa}], “superior external evidence (early representatives of both the Alexandrian and Western types of text)” favor the reading of Gerasa in these two Gospels’ setting for the event (Metzger 1994:85, 145).

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]” (τὸ πέραν [τῆς θαλάσσης]: Mt 8:28; Mk 5:1). Typically in the New Testament τὸ πέραν 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” (ἀντιπέρα τῆς Γαλιλαίας: 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 south-east of the Sea of Galilee, Gerasa (=Jerash, a city of Perea) about thirty-three miles” (Davies and Allison 1997: 2:79). 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 (Nun 1996:16–17; 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 (Nun 1999:18–31, 64), including that of Gadara near Tell Samara on the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The central breakwater [of Gadara's harbor] is 250 meters long, and its base five meters wide. The promenade was 200 meters long, built with fine paneled stones. . . . The basin is 50 meters wide, and covered an area of 3 acres. (Nun 1996:21–22)

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. Τιβεριάδα λίμνης: War 3:57; contra Metzger 1994:23) 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.

. . . the district of Gadara is not "across to the other side" from Capernaum but rather at the other, or southern end of the Sea of Galilee, and the distance from Capernaum in the north to the southern end is about 16 kilometers. Fishermen, cautious by nature, were not in the habit of sailing such distances, particularly in the dangerous winter season. (Nun 1996:10)

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 (κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ) 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 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 [Mt: α̅ C^{mg} K L W β^3 cop^{bo}; Mk: κ̅ L Δ Θ β^3 syr^{s,hmg} cop^{bo}; Lk: κ̅ L X Θ β^3 cop^{bo}]. However, the editorial committee rejected these witnesses, since 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 (Fitzmyer 1979:737). 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 (גְּשׁוּר) (Josh 13:11; Deut 3:14) north and east of the Sea of Galilee with Gergash (Γεργασεί) beyond the Jordan, reflecting the Septuagintal reading of Γεργασί (LXX Deut 3:14). He also mentions Gadara and Gerasa.

Gergash (Γεργασεί). 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 (Γερασά), the famous polis in Arabia. Some say it is Gadara (Γάδαρα). The Gospel also mentions the (land of) Gerasenes. (Eus. *Onom.* 64:1; Notley and Safrai 2005:63)

Yet, in a subsequent entry Eusebius once again demonstrates his familiarity with the village of Gergesa and local traditions connected to it. "Gergesa [Γεργεσά]. 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; Notley and Safrai 2005:73–74).

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 (Notley and Safrai 2005: 63 n. 304). Nevertheless, later Christian tradition strengthened the identification of Gergesa (el-Kursi), and a church was built to commemorate the Gospel event (Tzaferis 1993:77–79).

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 (McRay 1992b: 2:991–992). 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, as Safrai remarks, the dilemma of Gergesa belongs to a well-known pattern. "We have an illustration of a well-documented philological tendency: in the copying of ancient texts, an unknown name will almost always be 'corrected' to a known name" (Safrai 1996:19). So, it seems that in spite of its location as the place of Jesus' encounter with the demoniac, at a very early stage the name of the lesser-known village of Gergesa was exchanged for one of the two renowned cities of the Decapolis: Gadara and Gergesa (cf. Dalman 1935:178; Davies and Allison 1991:79).

LITERARY AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTOURS OF "THE GREAT OMISSION"

The two-source (Mark and Q) theory of source criticism for the Synoptic Gospels with the assumption of Luke's use of Mark for common narrative material has difficulty explaining Luke's omission of Mark 6:45–8:26 (Hawkins 1911: 61–75). The section contains the types of accounts that Luke elsewhere seems to emphasize in his Gospel (women, Gentiles, etc.). There is no obvious reason why he would have omitted these stories.

Scholarship has been divided as to whether Luke's omission was intentional or accidental. Bussman suggested that Luke here relied upon an earlier, shorter form of Mark, a proto-Mark (Bussmann 1925), while Streeter and Bultmann theorized that Luke used a defective manuscript of Mark (cf. Bultmann 1963:362 n. 2). In either event, Luke's omission resulted because the Evangelist simply did not see canonical Mark. On the other hand, Taylor suggested that Luke knew Mark, but he intentionally omitted this section (Taylor 1957).

The possibility is rarely entertained that Luke may have worked independently of Mark. If Mark was composing his Gospel with a written source that was shared by Luke and he added a narrative journey described in Mark 6:45–8:26, but unknown to Luke, the current shape of our Gospels would result. Luke's omission, therefore, would be a product of Markan literary creativity and Lukan independence. Luke simply was not aware of Mark's insertion. While in theory this explanation appears feasible, the question remains whether there is incidental evidence in Mark 6:45–8:26 of Mark's editorial hand.

In Streeter's estimation, "In fact, the style and vocabulary of this section (Mk 6:45–8:26) are, if anything, more Markan than Mark" (Streeter 1924:174). The content of the stories is likewise uncommon. It is in this Markan section that we have a concentration of Hellenistic-style, thaumaturgic miracles by Jesus (Mk 6:56, 7: 31–37, 8:22–26; cf. Bonner 1927:171–181). Similar-styled healings are unknown in the Third Gospel. If the Evangelist had known them, why would Luke,



The topography of the “Great Omission” (Mk 6:45 to 8:26).

the Gentile, have omitted these Hellenistic-style healing stories?

We will focus our attention on the topographical aspects of the narrative. We shall consider three points of particular interest. First, it is noteworthy that Jesus’ circuitous journey in Mark 6:45–8:26 is the only report of Jesus’ ministry outside of the borders of the Land of Israel. Elsewhere Mark and Luke agree that people came from Tyre and Sidon to hear Jesus and to be healed by him (Mk 3:8–9; Lk 6:17). However, Mark omits the lament over the Galilean cities that repeats mention of the Phoenician cities, “If the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon” (Mt 11:21; Lk 10:13–14). The lament implies that “mighty works” were not done in Tyre and Sidon, whereas Mark describes Jesus continuing his ministry of healing during his journey to the Phoenician cities (Mk 7:25–30; Mt 15:21–28).

Further, Mark’s description of Jesus’ itinerary north begins with a topographical about-face that may signal the Evangelist’s break from his source and the insertion of a block of narrative tradition. According to the Second Gospel, Jesus instructed his disciples, “to get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida”

(Mk 6:45). The description of the destination on “the other side” (τὸ πέραν), defined to be Bethsaida on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, assumes the disciples embarked from the western side of the lake.

All three Synoptic Gospels present the withdrawal soon after mention of the Baptist’s death (Mt 14:1–12; Mk 6:14–29; Lk 9:7–9). Jesus leaves the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas and travels to Bethsaida, which was under the rule of Herod Philip. While Matthew (14:13–21) and Mark (6:32–44) record the feeding of the multitude before they set sail, Luke reports the feeding after they sailed to the region near Bethsaida (Lk 9:10b–17). All three Gospels agree concerning the direction in which the disciples embark. It is during the crossing of the Sea of Galilee that the literary gap, “the Great Omission,” begins.

While in Luke’s Gospel Jesus and his disciples arrive at the intended destination, such is not the case with Mark and Matthew. These Evangelists give us no hint that they are aware of a change of direction. However, in their accounts the boat arrives on the same side of the lake from which it left, “And when they had crossed over (διαπεράσαντες), they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore” (Mk 6:53).

If we follow Mark’s topographical indicators, then Jesus walked onto the water to join his disciples, and then they returned to their point of departure. This is not Luke’s account of the events, nor is it consistent with the description of Mark’s verb διαπεράω, “to cross over” (cf. Liddel and Scott 1996:406).

It seems more than coincidence that the literary disjuncture between Mark and Luke coincides with a corresponding geographical parting of the ways. Commentators have excused Mark, suggesting that perhaps the wind prevented the crossing (e.g. Taylor 1957:332; Lane 1974:240). Two chapters later in Mark, the two Gospels rejoin precisely at the point where the differing itineraries of Jesus join. At last, according to Mark, Jesus arrives at Bethsaida. In light of the Markan U-turn on the lake, if Luke is relying upon Mark for the structure of his Gospel, he has uncannily nuanced the geographical lapse of Mark and eliminated the circuitous route to Bethsaida. Most scholars would hardly allow such sophisticated knowledge of the land by Luke.

Mark makes a final mention of Tyre and Sidon in a geographical note that is unique to his Gospel. “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). The Evangelist has reproduced the biblical sequence in the coupling of the two Phoenician cities, “Tyre and Sidon” (LXX Jer 47:4; Joel 3:4; Zech 9:2; Τύρος καὶ Σιδῶν; Ant. 9:138; 12:331, 15:95; War 1:361, 2:504; cf. Σιδῶνος καὶ Τύρου; Ant. 8:320, 14:197).

He records Jesus’ departure from the region of Tyre towards the Sea of Galilee (εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας) that lies south and east of Tyre. According to Mark, however, Jesus inexplicably sets off north “through Sidon,” rather than south through the Ladder of Tyre, or east on the trunk route to Caesarea Philippi. It may be that the Evangelist had been unduly influenced by the typically biblical order of these cities, i.e. Tyre (then) Sidon. He thus unconsciously sends Jesus in the opposite direction for an intended journey to the Sea of Galilee. In addition, according to the Evangelist Jesus travels unnecessarily out of his way to arrive at the Sea of Galilee by way of “the region of the Decapolis.” Travel from Phoenicia to the Sea of Galilee through the Hauran makes little geographical sense.

Even though Mark’s hand is clearly in evidence in his narrative insertion, the reader would be amiss to conclude that the anomalies in the structure of Jesus’ itinerary are a product of the Evangelist’s ignorance of the terrain. In Hebrew narrative and the historiography of later Jewish writings, particularly those included within the genre of rewritten Bible, the mention of place names can be intended also to communicate secondary messages of sacred or secular meaning. It seems that this is precisely Mark’s intention in Jesus’ circuitous journey.

We have demonstrated that 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



Putative travels in the districts of Tyre and Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus' unusual 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 (Rainey 1981:146–151)—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. As we have observed 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 Δεκαπόλις (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 (Chancey 2002:130–143; Coquais 1992; Parker 1997; Millar 1993:408–414; Parker 1975:437–441). 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, Capitoliias, Edrei, Gadara, and Samulis (cf. Strabo *Geog.* 5.14–22). Yet, as Parker has noted, 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 (Parker 1975:438).

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" (κευμένη ἀμφί) 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" (אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים, 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” (Ferguson 1998: 90–91). 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 (Brown 1994: 35–93; Taylor 1972:3–38). 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 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; Safrai 1975:325; Safrai 1976b: 2:898–904).



Remains of Herodian palace at Jericho. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

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; Taylor 1957: 537–538).

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 (later) Roman road from Jericho (cf. Lk 10:30) that followed near the biblical Ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7; Dalman 1935:233–239). 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 (Avi-Yonah 2002:103). 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 (*contra* Conzelmann 1960:68–69) and can hardly be deemed evidence of Luke’s “geographical ineptitude” (*contra* Fitzmyer 1985:1153).

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; Dalman 1935: 209–220). 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; Safrai 1976b: 2:901; Dalman 1935:221–232). However, we have no mention of this route in connection with Jesus’ pilgrimages to the Holy City.

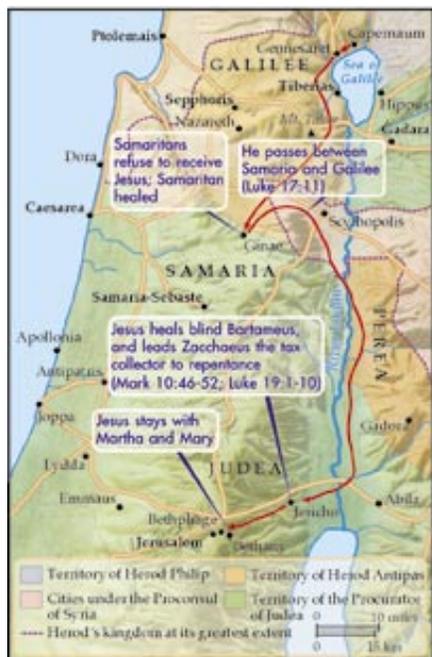
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pilgrimage from the Galilee led him through the region of Perea in the Transjordan and along the Roman road from Jericho (cf. Lk 10: 30) that followed near the biblical Ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7; Dalman 1935:233–239). That route would have taken 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).

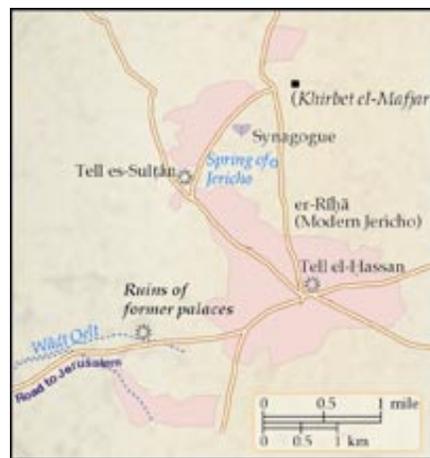
Only Luke relates that Jesus told the parable as they passed out of Jericho, and likewise only in the Third Gospel does Jesus use the story of the Herodian scion as the narrative structure for his parabolic creativity. The collocation of the parable with strong historical allusions to the son of Herod 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 (Netzer 2001b:354 n. 60; cf. Schultz 2005) long before scholarship assumes that Luke wrote his Gospel (cf. Fitzmyer 1979: 1:53–57). 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 (בֵּית פִּזְיָה) was derived from the Semitic word for unripened figs (see Neubauer 1868:147ff.; *Eus. Onom.* 58:13; Abel 1938:2; Dalman 1935:252–255) and may indicate agricultural activity in the vicinity (Mk 11:20). In the same vein, the toponym “Mount of Olives” (הַר הַזַּיִת; Zech 14:4) was also determined from local produce.

The New Testament records that Jesus stayed in Bethany (Mt 21:17; Mk 11:1), perhaps in the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha (Lk



Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem.



Jericho area: modern town, ancient tel and ruins of early Roman period structures.

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 (*Jeremias* 1974:43–44).

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). Mazar has suggested that the first of these locations is to be identified with the broad platform atop the steps to the Huldah Gates (Mazar 1976:30).

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 (e.g. Davies and Alison 1997: 3:137). 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 (καὶ εἰσελθὼν + finite verb; Moulton 1990: 2:452–453) 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; Netzer 2001a:128–130) in the southern portion of the Temple Mount (Safrai 1976b: 2:978–980). In an apocryphal story from 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 (ἀγνευτήριον) itself and walked about in the temple” (P. Oxy 840; cf. Stoker 1989:22; cf. ἀγνίζειν in Jn 11:55; Acts 21:24, 26).

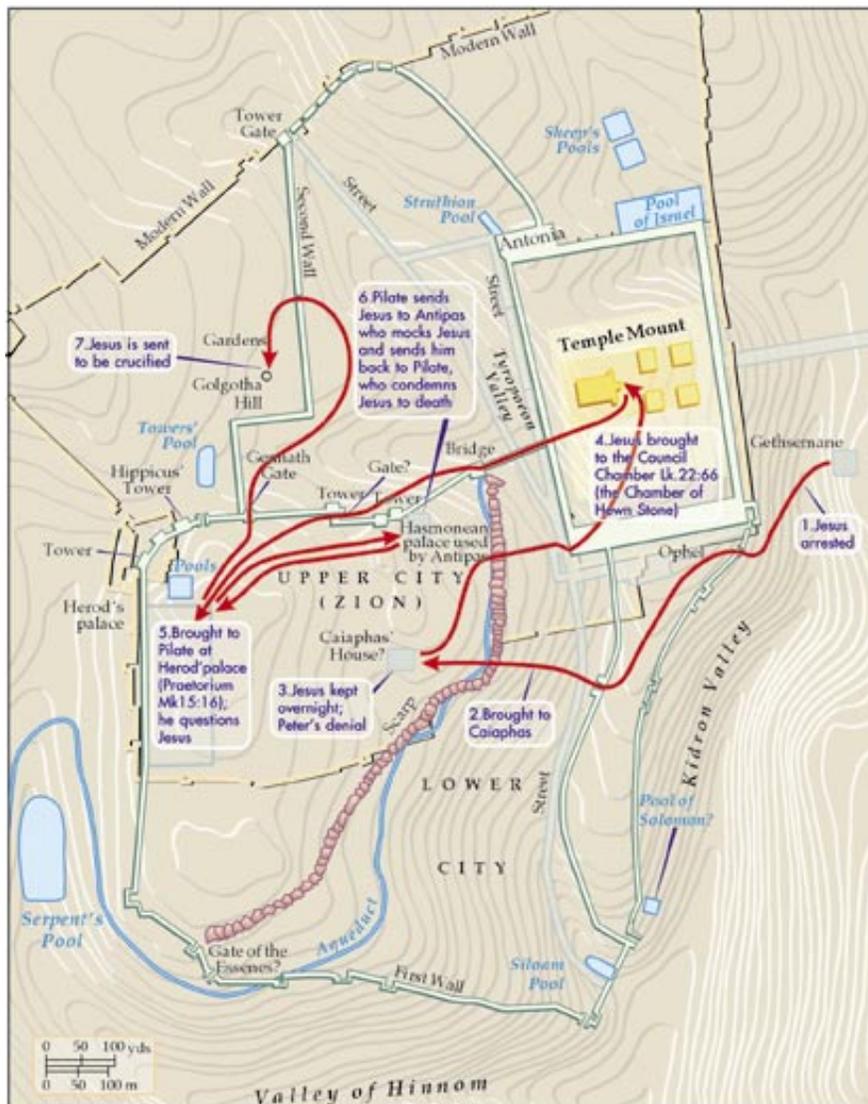
The cause for Jesus’ protest is not explicitly stated. A recent study of this episode in light of contemporary Jewish sources suggests that Jesus—like others of his contemporaries—objected to the House of Annas’ evasion of personal tithes to the Lord and oppressive measures (Buth and Kvasnica 2005). 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 Hanan [=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*, Hammer 1986:152; Finkelstein 1983–91:165; cf. j. *Pe’u* 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” (–πλωστῶνας in 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; Safrai 1976b: 2:891–892; *idem* 1998: 4). 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.



The arrest, interrogation and execution of Jesus.

Pilgrims to Jerusalem ascended to the Temple and offered the sacrificial lambs—the *Pesach* (τὸ πάσχα: 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; Taylor 1957:538). 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” (τὸ ἀνάγαιον). 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; Safrai 1976a: 2:809) 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 (Flusser 2001:142). 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. Safrai has suggested that 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 (Flusser 2001:144 n. 26; 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; see Flusser 2001:195–206).

Christian tradition has located the high priest’s house on the southern portions of the western hill (Broshi 1976:57–60). 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 (Avigad 1983:120–139). 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)



Stone weight from the “Burnt House” in the Jewish Quarter inscribed, “(belonging) to Bar Kathros.” (photo Leen Ritmeyer)

Three features from this talmudic witness are important for our concerns. First, the complaint of treachery against these families is coupled with mention of their control over 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. Freedman notes their “whisperings” indicate “secret conclaves to devise oppressive measures” (ed. Freedman 1967: 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 (Avigad 1989:70). “The residents of this house must have been a particularly notable and wealthy family, and the exceptional number of mikvehs may indicate that they were a family of high priests” (Avigad 1993a:733).

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 τὸ συνέδριον 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 (Liddell 1996:1704), the Chamber of Hewn Stone (לשכת הגזית) mentioned in the Jewish sources (m. *Pe’u* 2:6; m. *Sanh.* 11:2; m. *Mid.* 5:4; j. *Sanh.* 19c; Winter 1974:27–43). Reading Luke’s τὸ συνέδριον as 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; Flusser and Barag 1986: 39–44) and those close to them were present in the Chamber of Hewn Stone (i.e. τὸ συνέδριον) 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; cf. Milikowsky ed. 1981: 458). 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, Flusser brought attention to a piece of evidence that 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” (Flusser 2001:147).

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 (Smallwood 1981:145–147). 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; Netzer 2001a:123–124). 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 (Benoit 1976:87–89).

Instead, Benoit has argued convincingly that Pilate was staying in the palace of Herod the Great on the western hill (Benoit 1973: 1:167–188; Smallwood 1961:301; Netzer 2001a:125–128). Both Philo



The Pontius Pilate inscription from Caesarea. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

(*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 (ὁ ἐστὶν πραιτώριον)" (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 (τό πραιτώριον τοῦ Ἡρώδου: 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; *Smallwood* 1961:301). Its location has not been confirmed, but it may have been north of the neighborhood of the priestly homes previously mentioned (*Netzer* 2001a: 125). 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; *Marshall* 1978:857; *Hoehner* 1972:241–242).

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).

Flusser brought attention to 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 (*Flusser* 2001:155–162). 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 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 Benoit and modern scholarship are 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. Avigad's excavations directed south of the Muristan in the Old City of Jerusalem discovered portions of the First Wall of Jerusalem described by Josephus (*Avigad and Geva* 1993:724–729). More important for our present interests Avigad believed that they discovered the remains of a first-century gate (*Avigad and Geva*

1993:725). Josephus 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). Avigad concluded that he had discovered remains from the Gennath Gate mentioned by Josephus.

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 (*Patrich* 1993:102).

The quarry became a garden or orchard, where cereals, fig trees, carob trees and olive trees grew. . . . At this same time (first century BCE), the quarry-garden also became a cemetery. At least four tombs from this period have been found. (*Bahat* 1986:28)

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: כְּיָדְךָ אֶפְקֹד רוּחִי ("Into your hand, I commit my spirit"; cf. *Flusser* 2001:172–173 n. 79; *Acts of Pilate* 11 [ed. *James* 1924:104]). 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



Tiberius, emperor at the time of Jesus' death. (photo R. S. Notley)



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

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 (מִתְּמַנְהוּ; 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. Git. 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 (Flusser 2001:148).

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 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).

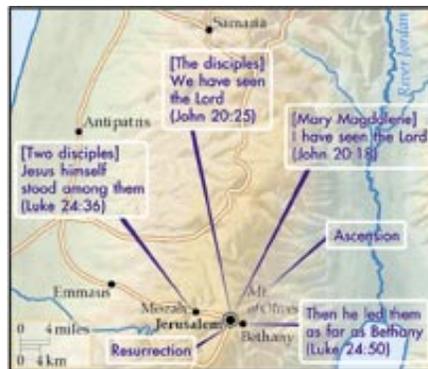
The report of an individual appearance to Simon Peter, as distinguished from the other followers of Jesus, is not preserved in Mark and Matthew, but it may be the genesis for Mark's specific mention of Peter in the instruction to the women at the empty tomb, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that 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 (cf. Taylor 1957:610–614). 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 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 (cf. Brown 1970: 1055–1061), 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



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Jewish Midrash, Targums and intertestamental literature that presents the Bible creatively re-written (e.g. Jubilees, Genesis Apocryphon, etc.; cf. Kugel 1998:1–41).

For example, we have already noted that Mark's familiarity with traditions with reference to Tyre and Sidon (cf. Mt 11:21–22; Lk 10:13–14) became the genesis for the Evangelist's report (Mk 7:24; cf. Mt 15:21) of Jesus' journey to the Phoenician coast. We have tried to show that topographical anomalies in Mark's account betray his editorial hand. Likewise in the arrest of Jesus, Luke's singular mention of the Sanhedrin (τὸ συνέδριον; 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 (ὅλον τὸ συνέδριον; 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 (cf. Strange



Remains of the Roman road leading from Jerusalem to Emmaus. (photo R. S. Notley)

1992b: 2:497–498). 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 (ⲛ ⲕ* Ⲑ Ⲡ syr^{pal} arm) 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; Notley and Safrai 2005:88). 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 (A B D p⁷⁵) (Metzger 1994:158). 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 (Ἀμμαούσις), distant thirty stadia (3.5 miles) from Jerusalem” (*War* 7:217; מוציא: m. *Sukkah* 4:5; j. *Sukkah* 54b; קלויימא: b. *Sukkah* 45a; cf. Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1973: 1:512–513 n. 142; Abel 1938: 2:314–316). 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.

EXCURSUS 22.1 JESUS AND THE MYTH OF AN ESSENE QUARTER IN JERUSALEM

Fifty years of scholarship concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls have brought clearer understanding concerning a fascinating stream of Jewish piety that existed during the final days of the Second Temple. These writings belong to the interwoven fabric of thought that is so important as a background to our reading of the New Testament. Some scholars have attempted to discern whether there existed direct contact between the Qumran Congregation and figures in the New Testament. In particular, similarities between John the Baptist and the Qumran Congregation regarding their baptisms, their self-identification with Isaiah 40: 3 and their apocalyptic rhetoric, have drawn some to conclude that John may have at one time had direct contact with the Essenes.

While similarities between the Qumran writings and the Baptist do exist, the parallels with Jesus are by contrast lacking. Nevertheless, there are still those who seek to establish a direct link between Jesus and the Essenes. One of the more popular notions is that Jesus abandoned the appointed day for Passover in the Temple and embraced the Essene solar calendar to observe the feast two days early. Jaubert (1972: 62–75) first suggested this novel idea in an attempt to reconcile the chronologies of the Synoptic Gospels and John. The former presents Jesus’ death on the first day of Passover, while John implies that the Jewish feast had not yet begun (Jn 19:14). Instead, according to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus’ death coincided with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb on the eve of the holiday (cf. Jn 19:35; LXX Ex 12:46: ὁστούν οὐ συντρίψετε [συντριβήσεται] ὄπ’ αὐτοῦ).

Those familiar with the complex literary relationships between the Gospels recognize that Jaubert’s solution does not really resolve the differences but merely jettisons the historical framework of the Synoptic Gospels in lieu of John’s creative theological presentation of Christ as the paschal lamb (cf. 1 Cor 5:7; *Mek. on Ex.* 12:3; Horowitz and Rabin ed. 1970:24–25). Nevertheless, Pixner, Riesner and others have built upon Jaubert’s thesis to advance the notion that Jesus ate the Last Supper in a first-century Essene Quarter on today’s Mount Zion (Pixner 1976: 245–285; Riesner 1992a:198–234).

The Myth of the Essene Quarter. Quite simply, there exists today not a single piece of archaeological evidence to demonstrate that an Essene Quarter existed in Jerusalem in Jesus’ day. Much of the conjecture stems from Bliss’ discovery of a gate on the southern edge of the western hill (Bliss and Dickie 1895:9–25). The Roman period gate may be the one mentioned by Josephus.

Beginning at the same point [i.e. Hippicus Tower] in the other direction, westward, [the wall] descended past the place called Bethso [τοῦ Βησοῦ] to the Gate of the Essenes, then turned southwards above the fountain of Siloam; thence it again inclined to the east towards Solomon’s pool, and after passing a spot which they call Ophlas [i.e. the Ophel], finally joined the eastern portico of the temple. (War 5:145)

Notwithstanding Bliss’ identification of the Essene Gate, there is nothing to suggest that this gate was named after an Essene Quarter inside of the city. Instead, the gates of Jerusalem are sometimes named for points of destination outside of the city. The Hebrew names for today’s Jaffa Gate and Damascus Gate are modern examples of this phenomenon. In antiquity, the eastern gate of Jerusalem exiting the precincts of the Temple was identified by its direction towards Susa (שׁוּשַׁן), the capital of Persia (*m. Mid.* 1:3;

cf. *m. Kel.* 17:9). Likewise, Josephus reports that the only gate in the northern section of the First Wall was called the Gennath (Garden) Gate (*War* 5:146: Γεννάθ: גֵּנְיָהּ), apparently because it led to the outskirts of the city, where there were orchards and gardens.

If we follow the nomenclature of these other first-century gates, it seems more likely that the epithet “Gate of the Essenes” indicated that the gate faced an Essene settlement outside of Jerusalem. Qumran-style shaft tombs recently discovered at Beit Şafafa south of Jerusalem may have belonged to the kind of settlement towards which the Gate of the Essenes was oriented (Zissu 1999:50–55, 62). Unfortunately, we do not have more information about the community that used these tombs. Likewise, we have no information how the Gate of the Essenes acquired its name. Lacking further evidence, there is no compelling reason to assume that the Gate of the Essenes signifies an Essene Quarter within the walled city of Jerusalem.

Apart from the Gate of the Essenes, the only material remains offered to suggest an Essene Quarter are the ritual baths (*miqva’ot*) discovered in the vicinity of the gate (Riesner 1992b: 2:619). Pixner ascribed particular significance to the parapet dividing the stairs leading into the baths (Pixner 1976:271). While the ritual baths at Qumran do have this feature (Magness 2002:144–145), Pixner was mistaken to conclude that the parapet and *miqva’ot* on Mount Zion indicate that they belonged to an Essene community. The parapet was a common feature in ritual baths to prevent physical contact between the ritually defiled person entering the mikveh and the ritually purified individual leaving the mikveh (Sanders 1994:225; cf. *m. Mid.* 2:2; *Let. Aris.* 160).

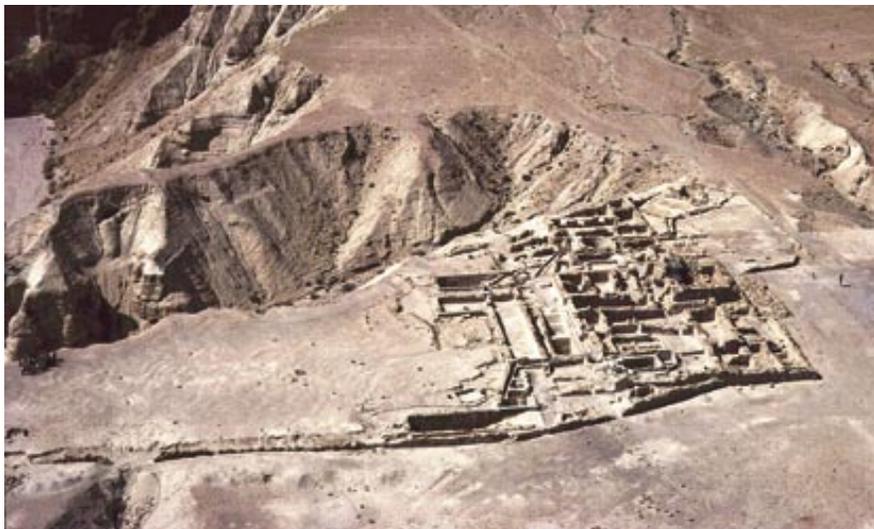
Immersion baths with a parapet were not limited to Qumran and Mount Zion. They can still be seen among the numerous *miqva’ot* below the southern wall of the Temple Mount (Ben-Dov 1982:150–153). These were intended for Jewish pilgrims to purify themselves before entering the temple precincts (e.g. Acts 21:26; *P. Oxy.* 840). On the other hand, the Qumran Congregation considered the current priestly leadership of the Temple illegitimate and their service in the Temple defiled (cf. CD [abbrev. for what?] 6:11–13; 4:15–18; 5:6–7). According to Josephus, the Essenes ceased active participation in the temple service (*Ant.* 18:19). It would be highly improbable to find first-century Essene ritual baths in Jerusalem intended for purification and participation in the temple services.

A final instance of archaeological evidence cited by Pixner actually indicates that the *miqva’ot* in the vicinity of the Gate of the Essenes did not belong to an Essene Quarter. He mentions that some of the stepped pools also had an adjoining collection pool (Pixner 1976:272). As Sanders has noted, the small adjoining pool (*otzar*) is a Pharisaic custom (*m. Miqva.* 6:8). Other pious groups adopted the Pharisaic practice, but Sanders specifies “not Qumranians” (Sanders 1994:226). In other words, while we cannot be certain who used the ritual baths on Mount Zion, on the basis of the archaeological evidence at Qumran we can exclude those who followed the ritual practices of the Qumran Congregation.

Josephus’ reference to Bethso (τοῦ Βησοῦ) in the passage where he mentions the Gate of the Essenes has been associated by some to the instructions for the Congregation living in eschatological Jerusalem.

You are to build them a precinct for latrines outside the city. They shall go out there, on the northwest of the city: roofed outhouses with pits inside, into which the excrement will descend so as not to be visible. The outhouses must be three thousand cubits from any part of the city. (11QTemple 46:13–16)

It is interesting that the direction of the latrines in the Temple Scroll northwest of the eschatological city is in the general direction of Josephus’ Bethso near the Hippicus Tower. Even before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus’ enigmatic term was thought to represent בית צואה (latrine). Nevertheless, the portrayal of latrines northwest of eschatological Jerusalem—even if this is the meaning for Bethso near Hippicus Tower—is not evidence for an



Remains of the Essene community at Khirbet Qumran. (photo A. Alon)

Essene Quarter on Mount Zion. The description of the Essene latrines in the Temple Scroll is not near Mount Zion, and Josephus makes no mention that Bethso possessed any special connection with the Essenes. Finally, Yadin is correct that the philological relationship between *השוח* in the Copper Scroll and Josephus' Bethso is at best tenuous (Yadin 1983:302–303). In the end, we are left with disparate passages whose relationship is in question and individually provide little tangible evidence for an Essene presence in first-century Jerusalem.

Jesus and the Essene Passover. Is there internal evidence within the Gospel narratives that can assist us to discern whether Jesus adopted the Essene preference of the solar calendar over the lunar calendar used in the Temple? Did he likewise share their estimation that the first-century Temple was defiled? Obviously, Jesus' pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Passover makes no sense, if he shared the Essene rejection of the current Temple. Celebration of Passover was permitted for Jews outside of Jerusalem. Pilgrimage to the Holy City at the time of the biblical feast served solely to make possible participation in the Temple and to observe the Passover meal within the city walls.

During the week before Passover, Jesus stayed in Bethany (Mk 11:11). As the feast approached he arranged for a room within the walls of the city to celebrate the Passover meal. The setting for the Last Supper within the walled city of Jerusalem is one of the most compelling arguments that the Last Supper was indeed a Passover meal. According to rabbinical prescriptions, it was required that those who shared in the lamb sacrificed in the Temple on the eve of Passover (the 14th of Nisan) ate it that very evening (Ex 12:10; *m. Zebah*, 5:8; *m. Pesah*, 10:9; cf. *m. Ber.* 1:1) and within the walls of Jerusalem (*m. Pesah*, 7:9, 12, 10:3).

The provision to eat the Passover lamb within the city walls was a practical accommodation to the spatial limits of the temple precincts. The sheer number of pilgrims did not allow the continuation of the earlier requirement to eat the meal within the precincts of the Temple. The relaxing of this limitation by Israel's Sages is not the opinion shared by the Book of Jubilees, a work that belonged to the Qumran library:

And in the days when the house has been built in the name of the Lord in the land of their inheritance, they shall go there and slay the passover in the evening, at sunset, at the third part of the day. And they shall offer its blood on the threshold of the altar, and shall place its fat on the fire that is upon the altar, and they shall eat its

flesh roasted with fire in the court of the house that has been sanctified in the name of the Lord. (Jub 49:19–20)

We have noted that the Essenes withdrew from participation in the temple sacrifices. According to Jubilees, however, even if they had participated in the Passover sacrifice in the Temple they would have eaten the festive meal within the temple precincts and not on Mount Zion.

What is unrecorded but presumed—because it was so commonplace as not to be considered worthy of mention by the New Testament writers—is the fact that shortly before the Passover meal, Jesus and those who accompanied him from Galilee ascended to the Temple and sacrificed the paschal lamb. This was the only offering that was sacrificed by the people themselves and not the priests.

The special feature of Passover in the Temple was the slaughter of the paschal lamb by all worshippers, inhabitants of Jerusalem and pilgrims alike. Those who wished to offer a sacrifice formed groups, each of which slaughtered one paschal lamb. There were even some who thought that the paschal lamb could not be slaughtered by an individual, and that a quorum of ten was required. In any event, they formed groups which generally consisted of at least ten men.

(Safrai 1976b:891–892; cf. *m. Pesah*, 8:7; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Ex 12:4; *War* 6:423–433; *t. Pesah*, 4:3)

While a portion of the victim would have been left for the sacrifice (Lev 3:3–4; *m. Pesah*, 5:10) most of the lamb was taken by the people and served at the festive meal.

Indication that the paschal lamb was part of the Last Supper is attested in the words of Jesus, "I have earnestly desired to eat this *paschal lamb* (or *Passover*: τὸ πάσχα) with you..." (Lk 22:15). Christian readers seldom recognize the idiomatic Hebraism in Luke's Greek. The name for the holiday (Passover) is likewise the term for the sacrificial offering served at the meal (i.e. the lamb). So, translators render the identical Greek word in the Apostle Paul's declaration, "For Christ, our *Passover lamb* (τὸ πάσχα) has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7).

If the Passover lamb was a part of the Last Supper, then it is impossible that the meal coincided with the Essene Passover. The paschal lamb could be sacrificed only in the Temple and *only* on the 14th of Nisan in accordance with the lunar calendar adopted by the Temple (Ex 12:6; *m. Pesah*, 5:3, 5). The Essene Passover meal occurred that year two days earlier. The very fact that a sacrificial lamb was included in the meal of Jesus, excludes his participation with the Essenes at Passover. The Qumran writings and the testimony

of Josephus both indicate that the Essenes, because of their rejection of the current Temple, had abandoned active participation in the temple sacrifices—including the Passover. In other words, unlike the Passover celebrated by Jesus, there would have been no Passover lamb at the Tuesday-evening Passover of the Essenes.

Two additional details from the New Testament account of the Last Supper strengthen our reading that the Passover of Jesus was not an Essene meal. Jesus and those who celebrated the biblical feast with him are portrayed *reclining at the table* (Mt 26:20; Mk 14:18). Even the Gospel of John, whose Passion chronology is assumed to suggest that the Last Supper coincided with the Essene Passover, describes Jesus and those at the table *reclining* (Jn 13:23, 28; cf. 12:2). This description, of course, reflects the Jewish practice to *recline* at the Passover. According to Josephus, however, the Essene custom was to dine while *sitting* (*War* 2:130: καθισάντων). The archaeologists found no benches that would have been used for dining couches at Khirbet Qumran (Magness 2002:126). This appears to agree with Josephus' testimony that the Essenes did not recline but sat at their meals. It further suggests that Jesus did not follow the Essene custom of dining at the Last Supper.

Finally, Marc Turnage has brought to my attention the significance of Magness' observation about the dishes at Khirbet Qumran and another variation between the custom of the Qumran Congregation and Jesus at the Last Supper. Magness explained the need for the hundreds of dishes discovered in the ruins.

In ancient Palestine, light meals typically consisted of bread dipped in a wine-based vinegar, while the main meal was usually a lentil or vegetable stew served in a large bowl and sopped up with bread. Josephus' account and the large number of individual cups, bowls, and plates at Qumran indicate that the inhabitants did not follow the usual custom of eating out of common dishes. This practice undoubtedly stems from their belief that impurity could be transmitted through food and drink. (Magness 2002:116–117)

The scrupulous concern by the Essenes for matters of ritual purity prevented the members of the Qumran Congregation from sharing a common dish. The large number of dishes is consistent with Josephus' description of their meals: "The cook sets before each one plate (ἕν ἀγγεῖον) with a single course" (*War* 2:130).

Yet, the Essene practice was not the custom of Jesus at the Last Supper. He used the act of dipping in a common dish to identify his betrayer. "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, will betray me" (Mt 26:23; Mk 14:20; cf. Jn 13:26). Likewise, the Gospels attest to a common cup for the *Qiddush*. "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide among yourselves'" (Lk 22:17). Jesus' actions would not have been permitted in an Essene setting.

While Jesus shared the Pharisaic critique of the first-century Sadducean priestly dynasty—the House of Hanan (Lk 3:2; Acts 4:6; *b. Pes.* 57a; *t. Men.* 13:21)—he gives no hint that he shared the Essene rejection of the sanctity of the temple service. Jesus' followers continued to frequent the Temple, even after the Cross (Lk 24:53; Acts 2:46). The vicinity of the Temple is also likely the setting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Even the Apostle Paul had no qualms about submitting to ritual immersion and ascending to the Temple to offer sacrifices (Acts 21:17–26). These are hardly actions by a movement that saw the Temple as spiritually irrelevant. Consequently, the picture presented by modern archaeology and the New Testament is consistent. There is nothing in the material or historical record to suggest that Jesus abandoned the Jerusalem Temple or shared his final Passover meal in an Essene Quarter on Mount Zion.