

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Damascus, with its fertile water-meadows that drain the river Chrysorrhoe, Philadelphia, Raphana (all these three withdrawn towards Arabia), Scythopolis (formerly Nysa, after Father Liber's nurse, whom he buried there), Gadara, past which flows the river Yarmuk; Hippus mentioned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, Gadora, 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 Hippus, Pella and Gadara" (*Eus. Onom.* 80:16). Eusebius does not define the nature

of the Decapolis. However, his description that it "surrounds" (κειμένη 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 Hippus 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.

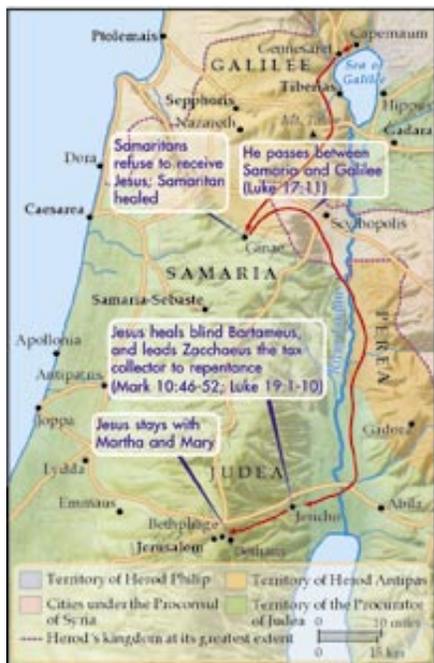
## THE LAST DAYS OF JESUS

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.] *Tezavev* (51b); *Ant.* 4:203–204; Safrai 1975:325; Safrai 1976b: 2:898–904).



Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem.



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.

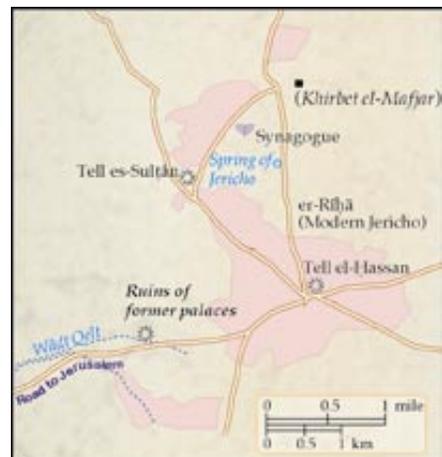
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pilgrimage from the Galilee led him through the region of Perea in the Transjordan and along the Roman road from Jericho (cf. Lk 10: 30) that followed near the biblical Ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7; Dalman 1935:233–239). That route would have taken 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 (בית פאגי) 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” (הר הזיתים; Zech 14:4) was also determined from local produce.

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



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).

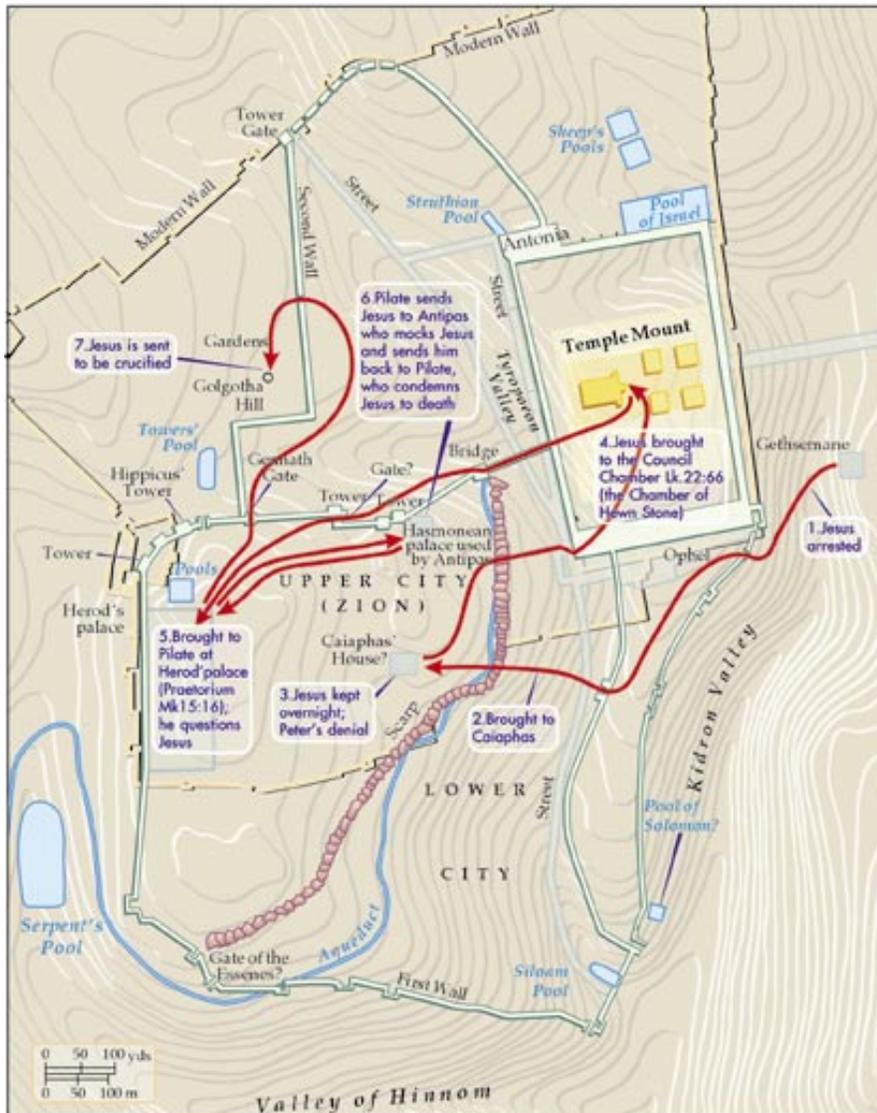
The cause for Jesus’ protest is not explicitly stated. A recent study of this episode in light of contemporary Jewish sources suggests that Jesus—like others of his contemporaries—objected to the House of Annas’ evasion of personal tithes to the Lord and oppressive measures (*Buth and Kvasnica* 2005). 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’ra* 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” (πρωτουτας 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. *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 ἀνάγειον). 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’ra* 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 (ὃ 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 (τὸ 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: בְּיָדְךָ אֶפְקֶד רִיחִי ("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)