The People of the Parables

Galilee in the Time of Jesus

R. Alan Culpepper

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"It is difficult to take a fresh approach either to the parables of Jesus or to the people of the Synoptic Gospels. Alan Culpepper has done so. One can find books about groups known from the New Testament, Josephus, Philo, and other contemporaries, to which few Galileans belonged (Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, Essenes, and the like). By contrast, Culpepper spends the bulk of his words on common people. Yes, in his parables, Jesus talked about minority elites but also about children, parents, brides, widows, tenants, laborers, farmers, fishermen, shepherds, and merchants. Such ordinary Galileans are the majority in the pages of *The People of the Parables*. As a result, Culpepper gives us a comprehensive view not only of the Galilean populace but also of the culture and social structures by which Galileans guided human interactions and organized their institutions and systems. Familiarity with such things is a strong foundation on which to build interpretations of Jesus' parables. Culpepper's crystal-clear exposition will make a fine textbook for university and seminary classes on the social world of Jesus, particularly for teachers who want to show students how scholars build arguments. But it is also for anyone, from pastor to layperson to nonspecialist in the Gospels, who aims to understand the world in which Jesus ministered and in which his teachings take on meaning."

—James R. Strange, Charles Jackson Granade and Elizabeth Donald Granade Professor in New Testament, Howard College of Arts and Sciences, Samford University

"Alan Culpepper's *The People of the Parables* is brilliant and fascinating, both in conception and execution. This book enables readers to become richly acquainted with the day laborers, merchants, fishermen, tax collectors, bandits, and others who populate the parables, along with their social circumstances in ancient Galilee, which allows Jesus' parables not only to speak anew but also to resound with the fresh power they held for their first hearers. Culpepper is an insightful interpreter, and this is a highly original and profoundly useful book for any reader of Jesus' parables."

—Thomas G. Long, author of *Proclaiming the Parables: Preaching and Teaching the Kingdom of God*

"With *The People of the Parables*, the reader is transported into the world of first-century Galilee to encounter the people and objects that populate the parables of Jesus—shepherds, estate managers, farmers, tax collectors, vineyards, day laborers, and many more. Culpepper's characterizations are comprehensive and meticulously researched, allowing the reader to fully enter into the dynamics of the parables. *The People of the Parables* fills a critical lacuna in the study of the parables of Jesus. Essential reading."

—John S. Kloppenborg, Professor of Religion, University of Toronto

"Professor Culpepper's latest opus is a one-volume encyclopedia of the social history underlying the people of the parables: well-organized, scrupulously documented, grounded in research both venerable and up-to-date, judicious, and lucid. It illuminates the obvious and probes the unnoticeable. For its insight, concision, and convenience, I shall keep this book at hand in all future study of Jesus' parables. Others are urged to do likewise."

—C. Clifton Black, Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology,
Princeton Theological Seminary

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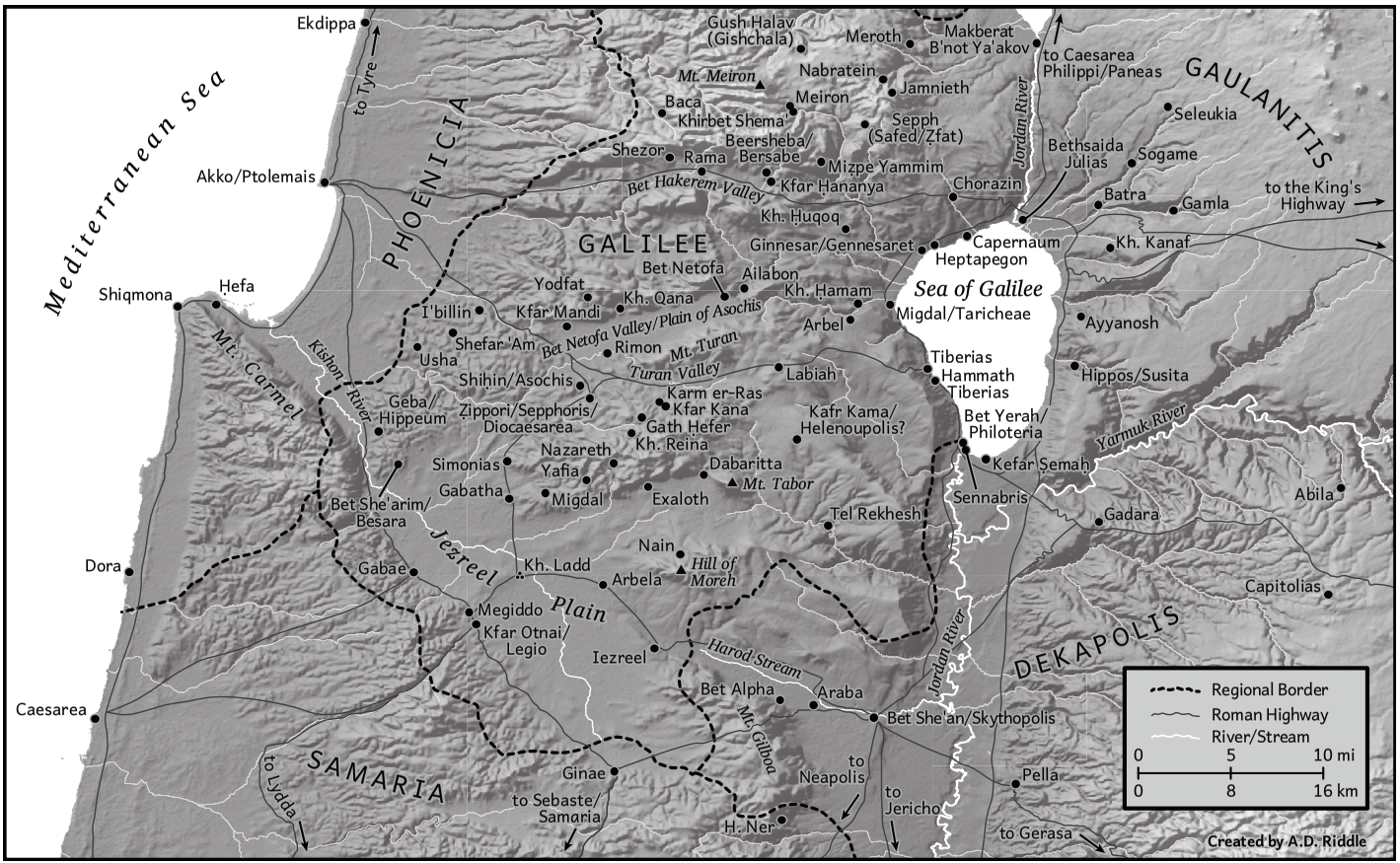
Map of Galilee



The Canonical Parables and Their Characters

Parable	Text Location	Category
1. Children in the Marketplace	Matt 11:16–17// Luke 7:31–32	children
2. Sower	Matt 13:3–8// Mark 4:3–8// Luke 8:5–8	farmer
3. Planted Weeds	Matt 13:24–30	householder, servants, reapers
4. Mustard Seed	Matt 13:31–32// Mark 4:30–32// Luke 13:18–19	householder
5. Leaven	Matt 13:33// Luke 13:20–21	woman
6. Treasure in a Field	Matt 13:44	man
7. Pearl	Matt 13:45–46	merchant
8. Fishnet	Matt 13:47–48	fishermen
9. Lost Sheep	Matt 18:12–13// Luke 15:4–6	shepherd
10. Unmerciful Servant	Matt 18:23–34	king, servants
11. Vineyard Laborers	Matt 20:1–15	householder, laborers, steward
12. Two Sons	Matt 21:28–32	father, sons
13. Tenants	Matt 21:33–43// Mark 12:1–9// Luke 20:9–16	householder, tenants
14. Feast	Matt 22:2–13// Luke 14:16–24	king, servants, guests
15. Wise and Wicked Servants	Matt 24:45–51// Luke 12:42–46	master and steward
16. Ten Maidens	Matt 25:1–12	maidens, bridegroom
17. Talents	Matt 25:14–30// Luke 19:12–27	master, servants
18. Sheep and Goats	Matt 25:31–46	king, shepherd

Parable	Text Location	Category
19. Seed Growing Secretly	Mark 4:26–29	farmer
20. Returning Master	Mark 13:34–36	householder, servants
21. Two Debtors	Luke 7:41–42	master, debtor
22. Good Samaritan	Luke 10:30–35	traveler, thieves, priest, Levite, Samaritan, innkeeper
23. Friend at Night	Luke 11:5–8	father, traveler, neighbor
24. Rich Farmer	Luke 12:16–20	rich man
25. Barren Fig Tree	Luke 13:6–9	vineyard owner, vinedresser
26. Choice Places at Table	Luke 14:7–11	host and guest
27. Tower Builder	Luke 14:28–30	landowner
28. Warring King	Luke 14:31–32	king
29. Lost Coin	Luke 15:8–9	woman
30. Prodigal Son	Luke 15:11–32	father, sons, servants
31. Unjust Steward	Luke 16:1–7	rich man, steward, debtors
32. Rich Man and Lazarus	Luke 16:19–31	rich man, beggar
33. Servant's Reward	Luke 17:7–10	servants
34. Unjust Judge	Luke 18:2–5	judge, widow
35. Pharisee and Tax Collector	Luke 18:10–13	Pharisee, tax collector
36. Sower and Reaper	John 4:35–38	sower, reaper
37. Good Shepherd	John 10:1–5	shepherd, hireling, thief
38. Vine and Vinedresser	John 15:1–8	vinedresser

Part 1

Introduction

Chapter 1

Getting Oriented

First-century Galilee furnished the cast for Jesus' parables. His repertoire drew from everyday life in Galilee's towns and villages as Jesus creatively portrayed recognizable figures: a tax collector and a Pharisee, farmers, fishermen, absentee landowners and tenants, unjust stewards and debtors, children and day laborers in the marketplace, a Samaritan, a woman hoarding a few coins, shepherds and hired hands, widows and judges, and neighbors awakened at night (Dodd, 10; Scott, 79). In this social world, Jesus announced the kingdom of God, God's justice, and vindication of the poor.

From its northeast corner, Galilee extends from Lake Hule, only the southern tip of which is visible on the Map of Galilee and which was drained in the 1950s, west to the edge of the coastal plain, south to the Mount Carmel range, southeast along the southern edge of the Jezreel Valley, east along the border of Samaria, zigzagging northeast to the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. Josephus (*J.W.* 3.35–43) distinguishes upper Galilee from Kefar Hananya north, which is mountainous, where sycamores do not grow; and lower Galilee, where sycamores do grow (m. Sheb. 9:2; cf. Avi-Yonah, 133–39).

A brief overview of major events in the history of Palestine is essential if one is to understand the setting of Jesus' parables early in the first century CE. Could someone in the remote future really understand American culture today if they did not know something about the major wars in our history: the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and the Vietnam War? In the same way, each era in its history shaped the character of first-century Galilee.

1.1 The Ptolemies and Seleucids

As a small land bridge between Egypt and empires in the north, Palestine was dominated in turn by Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, the Ptolemies, and the

Seleucids. After nearly a century of independence under the Maccabees and their descendants, the Hasmoneans, eventually Judea, Samaria, and Galilee fell under Roman rule. Each period left its mark on the region. The legacy of the Persians (538–332 BCE) was Aramaic, the primary language of the Near East from 600 BCE to 700 CE and the common language of first-century Jews. Alexander the Great defeated Darius III, first at Issus (333 BCE) and again at Gaugamela (331 BCE), bringing an end to the Persian Empire. Following his death in 323 BCE, Alexander's companions staked out their claims to portions of his conquests and spent the next twenty years fighting each other. By 301 BCE, following the Battle of Ipsus, the territories of Alexander's empire were divided among his successors: the Antigonids held Macedonia, the Ptolemies ruled Egypt and Libya, and the Seleucids controlled Syria and Persia.

The Ptolemies dominated Palestine for the next century, during which they set social and economic patterns that continued into the Roman period. In many ways, Jesus' parables reflect these patterns with large landowners, tenants, stewards, moneylenders, and day laborers. Jerusalem became a temple state governed by a high-priestly aristocracy. Travel between Jerusalem and Alexandria was common, and the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek during this period (the Septuagint; see Letter of Aristeas).

A century later, the scene shifted again. Rome was beginning its expansion in the East with campaigns in Macedonia. The Seleucid king, Antiochus III ("the Great," ruling 222–187 BCE), was preparing for the inevitable conflict with Rome and annihilated the Ptolemaic army at Panium (later called Caesarea Philippi) in 200 BCE, establishing Seleucid control over Palestine. Egypt would never again control Palestine. In 188 BCE, Antiochus was forced to sign a peace treaty with the Romans at Apamea, under which his son, who would become Antiochus IV (Epiphanes, [God] Manifest, but called by some Epimanes, the Mad One), was sent to Rome as a hostage; Antiochus agreed to pay Rome 15,000 talents over a period of twelve years. His successor, Seleucus IV (187–175 BCE), attempted to plunder the temple in Jerusalem, but his emissary, Heliodorus, returned, saying he had been prevented from doing so by supernatural beings (2 Macc 3:22–30).

1.2 The Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmoneans

Antiochus IV was influenced by the time he spent in Rome and Athens; he never opposed Roman power, and he became a proponent of Hellenism.

When Antiochus IV came to power (175 BCE), he immediately began to shore up his control of Palestine and push back the Ptolemies. When the Romans stopped him from taking Alexandria, Antiochus returned to Jerusalem, where Jason had deposed Menelaus, whom Antiochus had appointed as high priest.

> So, raging inwardly, he [Antiochus] left Egypt and took the city by storm. He commanded his soldiers to cut down relentlessly everyone they met and to kill those who went into their houses. Then there was massacre of young and old, destruction of boys, women, and children, and slaughter of young girls and infants. Within the total of three days eighty thousand were destroyed, forty thousand in hand-to-hand fighting, and as many were sold into slavery as were killed. Not content with this, Antiochus dared to enter the most holy temple in all the world, guided by Menelaus, who had become a traitor both to the laws and to his country. He took the holy vessels with his polluted hands, and swept away with profane hands the votive offerings that other kings had made to enhance the glory and honor of the place. (2 Macc 5:11–16; cf. 1 Macc 1:16–24. Note: Numbers in ancient sources are often exaggerated.)

The stage was set for revolt. Seeking to solidify his control of Judea and raise revenues for his impending conflict with Rome, Antiochus IV

> sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die." In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. (1 Macc 1:44–51)

Although his objectives were military and financial, Antiochus recognized that to establish his control over Judea, his southern border with Egypt, he would need to abolish Jewish religious loyalties. Temples were commonly believed to be residences of the local god, whom the people worshiped to assure their protection and prosperity. When the king's officers came to the town of Modein, they ordered Mattathias to be the first to offer the idolatrous sacrifice.

> But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, everyone of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left."
>
> When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu [see Num 25:6–15].
>
> Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town. (1 Macc 2:19–28)

Three and a half years of fighting followed (167–164 BCE), with the rebels and the Hasidim (the pious ones) led by Mattathias's sons. When Mattathias died, Judas Maccabeus (the Hammer) became the rebels' commander. Judas soon drove the Seleucids out of Jerusalem, regaining control of the temple, and delivering it from "an abomination that desolates" (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; see Mark 13:14 par.).

> He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. (1 Macc 4:42–46)

In these accounts we see loyalties and flash points that persisted into the first century, including adherence to the law, zeal for the traditions of their ancestors, and protection of holiness and purity from the profane and unclean, especially the temple.

The formative significance of the second century BCE was profound. In response to Antiochus IV's threat to their ancestral traditions, Judeans coalesced around the Torah, and specifically the Torah as law. John J. Collins has traced this development, which he called "the *halakic turn* toward rigorous observance of the details of the Law, in the wake of the Maccabean

revolt" (vii, 170), in the Temple Scroll, Jubilees, and 4QMMT (97–113). In *The Origins of Judaism*, Yonatan Adler sought to determine the earliest dates for which there is archaeological and literary evidence of Judaism's defining practices: Torah observance through dietary laws, ritual purity, avoidance of figural art, Sabbath observance, circumcision, and the synagogue. In essence, when does "Judaism" first appear as "a distinct way of life *governed by a legal system* composed of commandments, prohibitions, and assorted regulations founded on the Pentateuch" (Adler, 207, with his italics)? He concludes: "The Torah came to be widely known to the masses and regarded as authoritative law only in the Late Hellenistic period, following the cataclysmic events surrounding the Hasmonean revolt toward the middle of the second century BCE" (190, 234–36). In the following chapters we cite many of the documents and material remains from the first and second centuries BCE that support Adler's conclusion.

The practices and prohibitions that marked Jewish identity and distinguished Jews from gentiles continued to reverberate. In the New Testament, echoes of the zeal of Mattathias and the Maccabees persist in the Jerusalem leaders' response to Jesus and his earliest followers. Thus the chief priests and the Pharisees say, "If we let him [Jesus] go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (John 11:48). False witnesses report, "This man [Stephen] never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us" (Acts 6:13–14).

The rededication of the temple in 164 BCE was celebrated annually at Hanukkah (see John 10:22). When Judas Maccabeus died (160 BCE), he was succeeded by his brother Jonathan (160–142 BCE). In the late 140s BCE, following the death of Ptolemy VI in 145, Seleucid contenders battled for power, with devastating effects on Galilee: "The epicenter of the chaos appears to have been the Galilee, where more than a dozen sites of various size were destroyed or abandoned" (Berlin, 38). Following Jonathan's death in 142, Simon seized the opportunity presented by the weakness of both the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, captured Jerusalem, and established the Hasmonean kingdom, becoming "leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise" (1 Macc 14:41). The Hasmoneans were a succession of priest-kings. Josephus traces the name "Hasmonean" to the great-grandfather of Mattathias (*Ant.* 12.265).

- John Hyrcanus (134–104)
- Aristobulus I (104–103)
- Alexander Jannaeus (103–76)

- Shelamzion (Salome) Alexandra (queen; her son, Hyrcanus I, was high priest, 76–67)
- Conflict between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (67–63)

John Hyrcanus ceased to pay tribute to the Seleucids and captured Shechem, then Idumea and Samaria.

If the Torah received a new prominence as the law by which Jews regulated their lives during the Hasmonean period, as Collins and Adler argue, it is not surprising that Jewish sectarianism appears almost immediately. Some of the Essenes established the community at Qumran probably during the reign of John Hyrcanus, and Josephus first mentions the Pharisees and Sadducees during the reign of John Hyrcanus, saying that he initially supported the Pharisees, then renounced them, supporting the Sadducees (*Ant.* 13.288–298). Aristobulus I continued his father's program of expansion by annexing Galilee: he "compelled the inhabitants, if they wished to remain in their country, to be circumcised and to live in accordance with the laws of the Jews" (*Ant.* 13.318–319; cf. 13.257). Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Pharisees and executed their families in front of his dying victims (*Ant.* 13.380). Salome Alexandra, Alexander Jannaeus's widow, provided a period of relative peace and prosperity following her husband's wars. In 63 BCE, when both Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II sent emissaries to Damascus to appeal for Pompey's support, that Roman general seized Jerusalem and freed the cities conquered by the Hasmoneans (*J.W.* 1.155–158; *Ant.* 14.74–76), leaving only Galilee to the Jews, making Judea a vassal to Rome, subjecting it to Roman taxation, and appointing Hyrcanus II as high priest (*Ant.* 14.73–79). Judea's brief period of independence (164–63 BCE) thus ended.

1.3 Roman Domination

Julius Caesar removed the burdens imposed by Pompey and named Antipater, the governor of Idumea, to be procurator of Judea. Shortly before his death, Antipater appointed his sons to be governors: Herod, governor of Galilee; his brother, Phasael, governor of Jerusalem. When the Parthians invaded Syria and Palestine in 40 BCE, Herod fled to Rome. There, supported by Mark Antony and Octavian, he was declared king of Judah (37 BCE). Returning to Judea, Herod seized Jerusalem and married Mariamme (Mariamne), a Hasmonean princess (granddaughter of Hyrcanus II), and proceeded to root out rebels and rivals. When Mark Antony was killed at Philippi (30 BCE), following the assassination of Julius Caesar (44 BCE),

Herod pledged his loyalty to Octavian, who became Caesar Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE). Cleopatra fostered conflict between the Idumeans and the Hasmoneans in Herod's court. Never fully accepted by the Jews because he was an Idumean, Herod hired a mercenary army and wiped out any suspected opposition, including eventually Hyrcanus II (d. 30 BCE) and other descendants of the Hasmoneans, including Mariamme and three of his own sons.

Styling himself as a Hellenistic monarch, patron, and benefactor, Herod was a great builder of cities, including Sebaste (in Samaria) and Caesarea Maritima, along with the aqueduct to bring water from Mount Carmel to that city. He transformed Jerusalem, erecting a palace, hippodrome, and theater; his greatest project was the rebuilding of the temple. Josephus describes its magnificence.

> The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. (*J.W.* 5.222–223)

Philo agrees: "Foreign visitors . . . are amazed both at their [the temple buildings'] beauty and magnificence" (*Spec. Laws* 1.73). Herod's benefactions to cities abroad proclaimed his loyalty to his Roman patrons as well as his place on the world stage.

Still, Herod never felt secure. He built fortresses across the land, including the fortress of Antonia, named for Mark Antony, in Jerusalem; Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea; Herodium, eight miles south of Jerusalem; and palaces at Jericho and Masada. Intrigue and rivalry among his wives and sons led to brutal reprisals and eventually Herod's own deterioration. Before his death he planned a lavish funeral and ordered mass executions when he died, so there would be mourning throughout the land (*Ant.* 17.176–181). The executions were not carried out.

Augustus ratified Herod's will, yet denied the title "king" to Herod's sons. The emperor appointed Archelaus tetrarch of the provinces south of Galilee: Samaria, Judea, and Idumea (4 BCE–6 CE); Herod Antipas tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, which was across the Jordan River (4 BCE–39 CE); and Philip tetrarch of regions north and east of the Sea of Galilee (4 BCE–34 CE). Archelaus was removed from office for excessive brutality in 6 CE (see Matt 2:22). Philip built Caesarea Philippi and Bethsaida.

Herod Antipas, "that fox" (Luke 13:32), built Sepphoris, then forcibly brought new settlers to Tiberias (*Ant.* 18.36–38), aspiring continually to succeed his father as king of Judea (Chilton, xv, 147, 171).

Following Archelaus's removal, Judea was governed by Roman prefects (6–41 CE), then procurators (44–66 CE). Pontius Pilate, neither the best nor the worst of the Roman prefects (Brown, 1:722), was prefect from 26 to 36 CE. A partially intact inscription that mentions Pilate, probably from the decade of his prefecture and now preserved at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, was recovered at Caesarea Martima. By the end of this period, Judea was sinking into anarchy, with rebel groups fighting one another. In contrast, Galilee remained under Herodian rule: Herod Antipas, then Agrippa I (39–44 CE). In response to Gaius Caligula's order to erect his statue in the temple (39 CE), Galilean peasants petitioned Petronius, governor of Syria, to intervene and refused to till the land (*Ant.* 18.273).

The procurator, Gessius Florus (64–66 CE), who was worse than his predecessors, "stripped whole cities, ruined entire populations, . . . proclaiming throughout the country that all were at liberty to practice brigandage" (*J.W.* 2.278). Then he pillaged seventeen talents from the temple (*J.W.* 2.293) and marched on Jerusalem to quell the uproar that followed, actions that precipitated the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE. The revolutionary council in Jerusalem sent Josephus to Galilee to maintain peace while preparing to confront the Romans. When some men seized a large quantity of silver and gold from the wife of Agrippa II's finance officer, Josephus dispatched most of the plunder to Jerusalem to fund work on the city's walls and said he kept the rest to fortify Taricheae. When Vespasian marched through Galilee in 67 CE, taking Sepphoris without a fight, Josephus retreated to Tiberias, then to Yodefat, before defecting to the Romans. Standing before Vespasian and Titus, Josephus predicted that they would both become Caesars, a prophecy for which they spared his life. Vespasian then besieged Jerusalem and called in additional legions from Alexandria. After the succession of three claimants to the throne in Rome following the murder of Nero, Vespasian's troops acclaimed *him* as emperor. When Vespasian returned to Rome, his son, Titus, carried out the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE, then besieged the Zealots at Herodium and Machaerus, and finally took Masada (ca. 73 CE). One can hardly imagine a more turbulent time or place for "a marginal Jew" (John Meier's term) to announce the coming of the kingdom of God.

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Chapter 2

Reading Our Sources

If we were dependent on sources written in Galilee in the first century, we would have very little to work with. The Gospels themselves are among our best sources since they preserve Jesus' teachings and were written in the latter part of the first century, although their places of composition are debated. Q (the parables and sayings found in Matthew and Luke but not Mark) may have been composed in Galilee (see esp. Bazzana; Keddie, 217–67). Josephus wrote of his experiences in Galilee. Beyond the Gospels and Josephus, the available sources come from elsewhere, earlier or later than Jesus' ministry: the writings of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Philo; Josephus; the Dead Sea Scrolls; rabbinic writings, especially the Mishnah (the collection from the oral tradition of the Pharisees); and papyri from Egypt and near the Dead Sea. Each has its limitations.

As we have seen, Galilee changed under the Hasmoneans and the Herods, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE brought marked changes throughout Palestine. As a result, the available sources for the history and culture of first-century Galilee require careful handling. Greco-Roman literature, generally written by the elites of Athens and Rome, is of limited value. Yet it may preserve descriptions applicable to life in antiquity generally or economic patterns that influenced Galilee, such as estates and absentee landowners or the authority of the paterfamilias. Philo of Alexandria was roughly contemporaneous with Jesus, but as a wealthy, urban, Hellenistic, diaspora Jew, his writings are of limited value for understanding Galilean village life. As a rule, where reflections of daily life and culture are similar in earlier and later sources—as, for example, in Sirach (early 2nd c. BCE) and the Mishnah (200 CE, with sayings attributed to earlier rabbis)—we may assume that what they show us about Jewish life would have been true for first-century Jews in Galilee also. For example, the similarity between the attitude expressed by the servant girl who identified Peter as a Galilean (Matt 26:69; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59) and the much later slur, "foolish

Galilean" (b. 'Erub. 53b), directed at Jose the Galilean, a contemporary of Akiva (early 2nd c.)—this similarity suggests a common Judean sentiment toward Galileans throughout this period. On the other hand, many rabbinic rulings did not apply before 70 CE.

Interpreters must be sensitive not only to the geographical and chronological contexts of our sources but also their ethnic, religious, and social locations. For example, only in the Gospel of Luke, which was probably addressed to a more affluent, Greco-Roman audience than Matthew or Mark ("most excellent Theophilus," Luke 1:3), do we find Jesus saying, "Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'?" (Luke 17:7–8). In most of Jesus' sayings and parables, landowners and slaveholders are outsiders, not his audience.

Some of our sources are earlier or later than the first century, but some of what they record would have been true for the first century also. The same can be said for sources written in Jerusalem, Egypt, or elsewhere. Apocryphal stories often project ideals and virtues, yet incidental details about life in antiquity also. Historians, especially Josephus, used sources and had biases that influenced their writings. Rabbinic texts may reflect first-century practice, but more often they retroject later traditions and practices. Many texts are quoted or cited in the following chapters, so the reader must continually ask whether what they tell us is relevant to understanding life in first-century Galilee or not. Nevertheless, a more accurate picture of Galilean culture is emerging from the sources and data as historians sift them *chronologically*, exposing the differences between Galilee in the early first century and the second and later centuries; *geographically*, exposing the differences between upper Galilee and lower Galilee, and between villages, towns, and cities; and *socially*, distinguishing the elites from the great majority of the population, who were farmers and artisans. Still, the sources are so sparse that we often catch only glimpses of life in Galilee at this time. With these cautions in mind, we turn to a survey of our available sources.

2.1 Galilee in the Old Testament and the Gospels

Galilee appears only a handful of times in the Old Testament: Joshua 20:7 lists "Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali" among the cities of refuge; 21:32 says, "Out of the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in [upper] Galilee with its pasture lands, the city of refuge for the slayer" was given to the

Levites (cf. 1 Chr 6:76). King Solomon gave King Hiram of Tyre twenty cities in Galilee, but "they did not please him" (1 Kgs 9:11–12). Tiglath-pileser of Assyria captured strongholds in the region, including "Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria" (2 Kgs 15:29). Yet Isaiah prophesies, "In the former time [the LORD] brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (9:1).

The Gospels, especially the parables, provide rare glimpses into everyday life in Galilee. Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, collects a group of agricultural parables in Mark 4 and others in Mark 12:1–11; 13:28–29, 33–37. Matthew and Luke, drawing on a common "source" (Q = *Quelle* [German]), contain more parables than Mark, both in Galilee and in Jerusalem; in Luke, Jesus speaks many of them on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees is especially sharp in Matthew (see ch. 23). In contrast, the Gospel of John contains little of Jesus' Galilean ministry, only the wedding at Cana (2:1–11), the healing of the royal official's son (4:46–54), and the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the water (John 6). John 21 reports the risen Lord's appearance by the Sea of Galilee. John also contains figurative sayings (*paroimia*, e.g., 3:8, 29–30; 5:19; 8:35–36; 10:1–5; 15:1–8) but none of the synoptic parables. Surprisingly, Acts seldom mentions Galilee. The disciples are instructed to remain in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). Then, they are charged to be witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), but this commission does not mention Galilee, which appears only in Acts 1:11, "Men of Galilee"; 9:31, "the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria"; 10:37, the gospel "spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced"; and 13:31, Jesus "appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem."

2.2 The Apocrypha

The Old and New Testaments are supplemented by the (OT) Apocrypha, generally the books that appear in the Septuagint (LXX) but not in the Hebrew Bible. Jerome included these books in the Latin Vulgate. Although some of these writings are difficult to date, most of them originated in the second or first centuries BCE. They include historical writings (esp. 1 and 2 Maccabees), additions to Esther and Daniel, wisdom writings (Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach), expansions of biblical tradition (Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah), and edifying folktales (Tobit, Judith).

Tobit presents a vivid description of Jewish piety prior to the Maccabean era. Tobit's family was from the tribe of Naphtali in upper Galilee:

> All my kindred and our ancestral house of Naphtali sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected in Dan and on all the mountains of Galilee [1 Kgs 12:25–33]. But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the festivals, as it is prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree. I would hurry off to Jerusalem with the first fruits of the crops and the firstlings of the flock, the tithes of the cattle, and the first shearings of the sheep. (Tob 1:5–6; cf. Exod 13:12; Lev 27:32; Deut 14:22–27; 18:4; 26:1–11; Culpepper, 451–52)

Tobit gives readers an expansive window onto Jewish piety and its social world as it encourages not only paying the tithes, giving alms, and journeying to Jerusalem for the festivals but also such expressions of piety as burying the dead and marrying within one's tribe. At the end, Raphael, Tobias's angel companion, offers the following summation:

> Bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you. Bless and sing praise to his name. With fitting honor declare to all people the deeds of God. Do not be slow to acknowledge him. It is good to conceal the secret of a king, but to acknowledge and reveal the works of God, and with fitting honor to acknowledge him. Do good and evil will not overtake you. Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies. (Tob 12:6–10)

Galilee appears at the beginning and end of Judith (1:8; 15:5), the spellbinding story of a heroine who delivers her town from the siege of Holofernes, a Persian general. Judith's religion is vigorously nationalistic, a blend of patriotism and piety. She scrupulously obeys the law of Moses regarding dietary laws, fasting, prayer at fixed times, and ritual ablutions.

First and Second Maccabees are our primary sources for the events of the Maccabean Revolt (167–164 BCE), although they present sharply contrasting views. First Maccabees, "composed by a historian working in the circle of John Hyrcanus" (Berlin and Kosmin, 406), tells the story from the outbreak of the revolt to the reign of John Hyrcanus, lauding Mattathias and his sons, "the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel" (1 Macc 5:62), and drawing parallels between King David

and Mattathias to establish the legitimacy of the Hasmonean dynasty. Second Maccabees abridges the work of Jason of Cyrene, who is otherwise unknown, denigrating the high priests Jason and Menelaus and the brothers of Judas Maccabaeus, while praising the high priest Onias III and emphasizing the purification of the temple, the deaths of the martyrs, the miraculous victories that followed, and beneficial covenants with righteous gentiles (Goldstein, 3–36). "Galilee" occurs eleven times in 1 Maccabees but never in 2 Maccabees. Especially notable is the report that "the people of Ptolemais and Tyre and Sidon, and all Galilee of the Gentiles, had gathered together against them 'to annihilate us [the Israelites]'" (1 Macc 5:15). When Judas heard this, he sent his brother Simon to rescue the Jews in Galilee, which he did, pursuing the gentiles to the coast (Ptolemais) before leading "the Jews of Galilee and Arbatta" to Judea (1 Macc 5:16–23, 55).

Fourth Maccabees contains a discourse on religious reason and the Mosaic law, followed by the stories of the Maccabean martyrs: the priest Eleazar (5:1–7:23), the seven brothers (8:1–14:10), and their mother (14:11–18:19). Other books of the Apocrypha contain wisdom traditions and materials that offer insights into Jewish culture and ethics during the period immediately preceding the New Testament.

The books of the Pseudepigrapha contain a wide variety of Jewish and Christian writings from 200 BCE to 200 CE that circulated in early Jewish and Christian communities (Charlesworth; Bauckham, Davila, and Panayotov). Although Galilee seldom appears in these writings, they furnish valuable reflections of the diversity of thought and practice among Jews during this period.

2.3 Josephus

Beyond the New Testament itself, the most important source is Flavius Josephus (born in 37 CE), an aristocrat from Jerusalem, and commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee during the First Jewish Revolt (66–70) before he defected to the Romans in 70. After the war, Josephus was granted Roman citizenship and a pension in Rome. There he wrote *The Jewish War* (about 79 CE), in which he depends on Nicolaus of Damascus, Herod's adviser; he attributes the war not to the Jewish people generally but to a small group of revolutionary leaders, especially Eleazar ben Simon, John of Gischala, and Simon bar Giora (Rhoads, 101–5, 122–36, 140–47). This account of the war was followed later by *The Antiquities of the Jews*, which recounts their history through the Old Testament and up to the outbreak of the war in 66. The latter part of this longer history overlaps the first two books of *The Jewish*

War: while they contain some differences in perspective, both works present the history, religion, and practices of the Jews to the Roman public in the most positive light. Two other works followed later: his *Life*, a brief (and poorly written) autobiography; and *Against Apion*, which responds to slanderous accusations against the Jews. Josephus's descriptions of Galilee are remarkably consistent in these works, but his references to the revolutionary leaders, relations between the cities and the rural towns and villages, and population figures are suspect because of his personal agendas (Root, 10–20).

2.4 The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls, from caves near Qumran, contain writings of that community, a Zadokite sect generally identified as Essene. These scrolls include works peculiar to their community, such as rules, hymns, prayers, and liturgical materials; as well as the earliest known biblical scrolls (3rd c. BCE scrolls taken to Qumran) and books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Some of the scrolls are distinctly sectarian; others offer glimpses of practices shared by other Jewish communities. The Romans' destruction of Qumran in 68 CE furnishes a firm terminus for the dating of the scrolls, but questions remain concerning the existence of Essene communities elsewhere and the ways in which their practices reflect or differ from the practices of other Jews.

2.5 Philo

Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE) was a prolific interpreter of Scripture and Jewish tradition. Writing for Jews in Alexandria and elsewhere, Philo argued that Jewish tradition and learning was as sophisticated as that of the Greeks. He is therefore a leading representative of Hellenistic Judaism as he mediates between Hellenism and Jewish Scriptures and teachings. Again, we must ask: To what extent and in what ways was such dialogue occurring in Galilee during this time? Galilee appears in Philo's writings only in passing (*Embassy* 326).

2.6 Rabbinic Sources

The oral tradition of the Pharisees is preserved in parts of the Mishnah, a collection encompassing six tractates, as committed to writing around 200

CE by Judah the Prince in Galilee. Although the Mishnah occasionally attributes teachings and traditions to pre-70 teachers, its traditions were shaped following the destruction of the temple; the continuity between Second Temple Pharisees and the later rabbis is not as strong or clear as was once thought (see ch. 17 below).

Rabbinic tradition remembers Galilean charismatic holy men who could pray for the sick and for rain: Honi the Circle-Drawer (*Ant.* 14.22; m. Ta'an. 3:8), Hanina ben Dosa (m. Ber. 5:5), and Jose the Galilean: "When, for their sins, there is drought in Israel, and such a one as Jose the Galilean prays for rain, the rain comes straightway" (y. Ber. 9b; see Vermès, 72–78; Meier, 2:581–88; Avery-Peck; below, in 21.6). The first challenge is to distinguish the traditions and sayings that reflect practices in the early part of the first century from those that reflect a later period. The second is to determine which ones give us a window onto Galilean as well as Judean practices. The usefulness of rabbinic sources for our purposes is further complicated by considering that this literature is "the product of an intellectual and religious elite and therefore not necessarily reflective of a wider population" (Lapin, 241).

2.7 Papyri

Papyri are emerging as another valuable source of information. Sabine Huebner, a leading papyrologist, describes problems facing research into the lives of ordinary people in the New Testament period.

> Common people held no high offices and composed no histories, epics, or poems—in fact, most were not able to write at all. Their everyday lives and deeds were generally of no importance to the writing of history. Roman law had little personal relevance to those who did not own or bequeath anything and could not afford to start legal proceedings. A commoner did not have the means to dedicate a portico to the public forum; nor did the city have any reason to honor them publicly with a monument. Their offspring could rarely afford to mark their tombs with a stone inscription. (1)

Nevertheless, they did pay taxes; they, their families, and any property they owned were entered on census and tax records. Many letters and business documents written on papyrus also survive, but due to the susceptibility of papyrus to dampness, most of these materials come from the sands of Egypt. "Hundreds of thousands of papyri, preserved by favorable environmental

conditions, report on details of life in Roman times, including individuals' daily fears and worries, which are unavailable with this degree of quality and in this quantity in any other sources" (Huebner, 3). Although there were pronounced differences between Egypt and Galilee, study of the papyri and ostraca (inscribed pottery fragments) reveals much about the ages, health, life expectancy, families, work, travel, and business activities that would have been true in Galilee as well as Egypt (Kloppenborg 2006; 2010). In addition, many of the Qumran scrolls are papyrus texts, other papyri have been recovered from the "Cave of Letters" (see 7.8 below), and 4th c. BCE Samaritan Aramaic papyri were found at Wadi ed-Daliyeh, about 9 miles north of Jericho (see below, 19.1.3).

2.8 Inscriptions

Scholars lament the dearth of Galilean inscriptions and other documentary evidence (Lapin; Knauf, 337–38). Nevertheless, the few that can be dated to the Second Temple period provide valuable data. Ancient Palestinian inscriptions are generally burial inscriptions or dedications on public buildings, especially synagogues, written in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek; most of these postdate the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

A set of Greek inscriptions (ca. 202–195 BCE) discovered at Hefzibah in the Bet She'an/Scythopolis Valley contains orders from Antiochus III; Antiochus IV; and Ptolemaios, the region's *strategos*. These orders shed light on the administration of Seleucid estates (see 9.3 below). An ostracon from the second century BCE found at Sepphoris contains part of the term *epimelētēs*, a general term for an administrator; two lead weights contain the title *agoranomos*, "market overseer" (117/116 BCE and 29/30 CE), the latter from Tiberias (see 12.5; Chancey, 30–31, 135). A decree from Caesar, probably from the period following the death of Agrippa I in 44 CE, is recorded on a Greek inscription that may have originated in Galilee; it forbids grave robbery, promising the penalty of death for transgressors (Chancey, 56–58). The construction of Roman roads can be dated by inscriptions on milestones (see 13.1). Only one inscribed ossuary (a limestone box for secondary burial of bones) from Galilee can be dated to the first century or early second (Chancey, 130), but affluent Galileans may have collected the bones of family members in Judean ossuaries. The Galilean synagogue inscriptions are all later (3rd/4th c. and later; cf. Chancey, 139–55; Lapin). A translation of the Theodotos Inscription, which documents a first-century synagogue in Jerusalem, is discussed below (3.2).

2.9 Archaeology

These written sources can now be supplemented by a constantly increasing volume of information from archaeological excavations of Galilean sites (see esp. Fiensy and Strange; Fiensy 2020). Each new discovery tells us more about the people of Galilee, economic conditions, how they lived, what they did, where they gathered, and even what they ate. The challenge now is correlating the record of material remains with written historical sources.

All this material, much of it published by specialists in various disciplines, requires careful study. The purpose of this volume is to gather relevant findings and interpret them for those who study, teach, and preach the parables: all who wish to know more about the setting of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

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Chapter 3

Introduction to First-Century Galilee

The historical events that shaped first-century Galilee introduced movements of peoples, cultural changes, population growth, new cities, and smaller towns connected by a network of roads. Material remains from the early Roman period provide clues to the culture, religious practices, and responses to gentile influences. This chapter surveys these demographic and cultural shifts and the artifacts they left behind.

3.1 Galilee before the Hasmoneans

Greco-Roman writers seldom mention Galilee. Pliny the Elder (23/24–79 CE) says only, "The part of Judaea adjoining Syria is called Galilee" (*Nat.* 5.15). Strabo (64/63 BCE–21 CE) identifies its inhabitants not very accurately, as follows:

> This region lies towards the north; and it is inhabited in general, as is each place in particular, by mixed stocks of people from Aegyptian and Arabian and Phoenician tribes; for such are those who occupy Galilee and Hiericus [Jericho] and Philadelphia and Samaria, which last Herod surnamed Sebaste. But though the inhabitants are mixed up thus, the most prevalent of the accredited reports in regard to the temple at Jerusalem represents the ancestors of the present Judaeans, as they are called, as Aegyptians. (*Geogr.* 16.34)

Galilee was only sparsely settled after it was overrun by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE, and little is known about the area during this period. Indeed, "there is a nearly complete absence of historical sources concerning eastern Galilee during the 550 years between the Eastern conquest and the Hasmonean rebellion" (Leibner 2009, 315). Palestine was exposed to

Hellenism after its conquest by Alexander the Great (about 332 BCE) and Roman occupation following Pompey (63 BCE). Nevertheless, while these events shaped the future of the eastern Mediterranean world, they had little effect on rural Galilee.

The Mishnah lists "the old castle of Sepphoris, the fortress of Gush-Halab, old Yodpat, [and] Gamla" among the fortified towns in Galilee (m. ʻArak. 9:6). A series of Hasmonean campaigns led to the abandonment of Galilean settlements and repopulation by Jewish settlers (Leibner 2021, 142–43). Aristobulus I (104–103 BCE), who continued John Hyrcanus's (135–104 BCE) expansion of Jewish territory, annexed Iturea (southern Lebanon) and Galilee (Goodman, 599–600). Immediately, new towns and villages began to appear, including many referred to frequently below: Capernaum, Gamla, Yodefat, Nazareth (see below, 21.1), and Sepphoris (Reed 1999, 97). Hasmonean fortresses made the region safer (Moreland, 158), and the Judeans who settled in Galilee maintained connections with Jerusalem (Aviam 2004a, 54; Aviam 2004b, 7–15). Magdala (Migdal/Taricheae), strategically located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee at the eastern end of Wadi Hammam, was established by the Hasmoneans (De Luca and Lena, 280–83), and the population of Capernaum increased greatly (Mattila, 244; Zwickel, 172).

3.2 The Jewish Character of First-Century Galilee

Population growth accompanied by modest economic expansion continued in the early part of the first century. Galilean villages "thrived and expanded" under Antipas, and the iconography on his coins displays sensitivity to Jewish religious feelings (Jensen 2007, 29; Jensen 2012, 51–55). The population of Galilee more than doubled between 50 BCE and 50 CE. Increased security and political stability fueled limited social mobility (Edwards 2007, 359–62; Leibner 2009, 333–35; Reed 2010, 351, 364–65; Root, 156–58). Capernaum and Magdala became centers of the fishing and fish-processing industry. Construction at Sepphoris and Tiberias provided employment; the growth of these cities created new markets. Roads from villages and towns to the cities were the veins and arteries of the economy: farmers and artisans brought their goods to the markets, and traveling merchants brought their wares and imported items to the villages (Edwards 1992; see below, 13.1). As Edwards observes, "Villages were not static bastions of tradition but rather fluid entities that reflected as well as participated in the economic and cultural currents swirling around them" (2007, 374).

Josephus reports there were 204 "cities and villages in Galilee" (*Life* 235). Material remains confirm that Galilean villages in the first century were predominantly Jewish (Bonnie, 11–12). Religious markers begin to appear in the first century BCE, including *miqva'ot* (stepped pools for ritual cleansing; Aviam 2004b, 17; Magness, 16–17; Luff, 78–86), stone vessels (which did not retain impurity; see Edwards 2002, 114–15; Miller 2003; Reed 2003; Zangenberg; Berlin 2011, esp. 92–96), Hasmonean coins, Judean oil lamps (attesting a close affinity with Jerusalem; Jensen 2012, 61; Jensen 2013, 21–22; Luff, 86–91), Judean ossuaries (bone boxes made of Judean limestone and carried to Galilee), and the absence of images and pig bones. Although secondary burial of bones dates back to the Chalcolithic Period (4500–3400 BCE; Luff, 91), Judean ossuaries begin to appear in 20–15 BCE in Judea, disappear from Jerusalem after 70 CE, but continue to be found in fewer numbers in Galilee until the third century (Magness, 151). About seventy-five ossuaries have been found in Galilee (Aviam 2013b, 109).

The stress on Jewish identity in early first-century Galilee may well have been an expression of social protest. Galilean Jews built *miqva'ot* to maintain their ritual purity; refused to use coins with images of gods, temples, or political leaders; and used stone vessels while refusing gentile ceramics (Richardson and Edwards, 249–50; Edwards 2007, 370–73; Jensen 2013; Miller 2015, 45–55; Fiensy 2020, 286). The majority of coins found in lower Galilee are Hasmonean coins that did not bear human images, and Herod Antipas did not put his image on coins he struck. Nevertheless, coins with images clearly circulated in Jewish areas (Mark 12:15–17), and the Tyrian shekel, which bore the image of the Phoenician god Melqart, was, ironically, the preferred coin for payment of the temple tax (Sanders, 400–401; Richardson, 246–47; Culpepper, 334–35). After the Romans established a colony for veterans on the ruins of the Phoenician city Berytus in 15 BCE, red-slipped table vessels, which were identified with Roman culture and domination, quickly disappeared from Galilean homes (Berlin 2002, 69; Berlin 2011, 96–99).

The sheer number of *miqva'ot* in Judea and Galilee—over 1,000 (Adler, 61–66; cf. De Luca and Lena, 306), many of which are in homes—illustrates the heightened concern for purity among Jews during this period (Bonnie, 287–313, 329–32). In contrast, no such pools have been found along the coast or in the Decapolis. *Miqva'ot* have not been found at Capernaum, probably because the lake could be used for ritual purification, but Magdala had at least two.

The Hasmonean conquest of Galilee under Aristobulus I (see above, 1.2) was followed by settlement of Judeans in Galilee (see 3.1 above; Cromhout).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the earliest Galilean synagogues date from the first century BCE. Anders Runesson distinguishes between public synagogues and private or association synagogues (Runesson 2001, 213–35, 361; Runesson 2017; Miller 2015, 45; Runesson and Cirafesi). In addition, some synagogues were in private homes. The remains at Tel Rekhesh are a private synagogue: "There is no doubt that this is an assembly room, in a Jewish farmstead, and therefore we can easily suggest that this is a synagogue, where the owner of the estate gathered his family and workers for reading the Torah and study [of] the law" (Aviam and Safrai, 101). This discovery suggests further "that synagogues were common in every village[,] even the small ones" (Aviam and Safrai, 101). Remains of synagogues from the early Roman period have been found at Magdala, Wadi Hammam, Tel Rekhesh, Shikhin, Cana (Khirbet Qana), Gamla, and Magdala (Aviam 2019, 298–99; Bonnie, 172–74, 177–78; Catto, 93–96, 102–3; Edwards 2002, 111–14; Hachlili, 23–42; Leibner 2015, 348–50; McCollough 2015, 141; McCollough 2021; McCollough 2022, 115; Richardson, 66, 104; Runesson 2017; Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, passim; Ryan 2017, 61–67; Ryan 2023). The Gospel references to a first-century synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21; John 6:59) may also be corroborated by probes beneath the existing limestone synagogue (Catto, 99–102; Cirafesi; Runesson 2001, 182–85; Runesson 2017, 164; Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, 29–32; see, however, Bonnie, 181–84). Synagogues served primarily as places for public reading and interpretation of the Scriptures. As such, "the synagogue functioned primarily as a kind of *educational* institution," where the Torah was taught and interpreted (Adler, 170, with his italics; cf. Runesson 2001, 213–35, 342–50). Secondarily, public synagogues also functioned as community centers: "These new institutions probably helped standardize religious customs within each community" (Root, 168). The Migdal Stone, discovered in the synagogue at Magdala that was destroyed during the revolt of 66–70 CE, is especially exciting because it gives us the earliest representation in Galilee of the Menorah in the temple in Jerusalem and other images that confirm a close connection between the Jews in Galilee and Jerusalem.

The Theodotos Inscription, discovered in a cistern filled with rubbish south of the temple in Jerusalem, is generally dated to the Herodian period. Because other inscribed stones were found in the same cistern, they were apparently placed there after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The inscription describes the functions of a synagogue, at least of that synagogue:

> Theodotos son of Vettenus, priest and *archisynagōgos*, son of an *archisynagōgos* and grandson of an *archisynagōgos*, built the assembly

> hall (*synagōgē*) for the reading of the Law and for the teaching of the commandments, and the guest room, the chambers, and water fittings, as an inn for those in need from foreign parts, (the synagogue) which his fathers founded with the elders and Simonides. (Kloppenborg, 252–53)

The "water fittings" could have been facilities for washing and purification, and these may have been unique to the function of the synagogue in Jerusalem, where visitors would have been common (Hachlili, 523–26).

The influence of Greco-Roman culture in Galilee during the lifetime of Jesus has often been greatly exaggerated. The inroads of Hellenism were actually quite modest. Herod the Great built extensively at Caesarea, Sebaste, Jerusalem, and elsewhere but left Galilee almost wholly untouched. Prior to Herod Antipas, who started building Sepphoris shortly after Herod's death in 4 BCE and Tiberias in 19 CE, Galilee had no cities, and none of the edifices of Hellenistic culture: theaters, amphitheaters, hippodromes, or gymnasia (Freyne, 53). In the early part of the first century, Galilee enjoyed an increase in population, economic growth, and relative political stability during Herod Antipas's 43-year reign (4 BCE–39 CE): "He was not a *remaker* of Galilee, but rather a modest *developer*" (Jensen 2007, 31). While the establishment of Sepphoris and Tiberias as administrative centers was important, their influence in the early first century was not as pronounced as it would become (Meyers 1997, 59; McCollough 2013, 55–57). Throughout the first century, Sepphoris "remained overwhelmingly Jewish" (Meyers 1997, 64). Rather than being oriented toward the West and absorbing the influence of the cities, it now appears increasingly that the Jewish population of Galilee came from Judea during the period of the Hasmoneans and retained its ties with Jerusalem and the temple.

Mark Chancey contends that "the processes of Romanization were in only their nascent stages under Herod the Great and Antipas" (142; so also Keddie, 25; and Bonnie, esp. 319–23). Josephus records that Herod Antipas's palace at Tiberias contained representations of animals (*Life* 65), but Antipas's coins did not bear animal or human images (Adler, 93). Because imported pottery (Eastern terra sigillata or red-slipped pottery, popular in Galilee during the late Hellenistic period), mold-made lamps, brass, public inscriptions, and marble were associated with Greco-Roman culture, their disappearance in Galilee at the same time as the appearance of markers of Jewish religious identity discussed above may be evidence of Galilee's resistance to Roman culture in the first century (Magness, 54–59; Root,

132–35). Ernst Knauf notes the dramatic increase in Greek inscriptions in northern Israel and the Transjordan, from only four in the first centuries BCE/CE to thirty-seven in the second and third centuries CE (344–45; cf. Lapin, 263; Bonnie, 115–20).

Aristocratic Jews in Jerusalem began to adopt Hellenism at least by the Maccabean period (1 Macc 1:11–15), but the Hellenization of Galilee did not make great advances until the Roman period, and then not until the settlement of Roman garrisons in Galilee around 120 CE. The story of Jesus and the centurion (Matt 8:5–13//Luke 7:1–10) is the only record of an encounter between Jesus and a gentile in Galilee; the centurion was probably a Herodian officer rather than a Roman soldier. Jesus met the Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon (Matt 15:21–28), and the Gadarene demoniac on the east side of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 5:1–20). Direct Roman administration of Galilee did not begin until after the death of Agrippa I in 44 CE, and even then the influence of Roman culture is evident first in the cities and among the elites.

3.3 Towns and Villages

"Lakeside Galilee" developed its own subculture with its fishing industry, nascent urban centers (Magdala and Tiberias), and intersections with interregional trade routes (Root, 171–73). Josephus extolls the idyllic fruitfulness of Galilee.

> For the land is everywhere so rich in soil and pasturage and produces such a variety of trees, that even the most indolent are tempted by these facilities to devote themselves to agriculture. In fact, every inch of the soil has been cultivated by the inhabitants; there is not a parcel of wasteland. The towns, too, are thickly distributed, and even the villages, thanks to the fertility of the soil, are all so densely populated that the smallest of them contains fifteen thousand inhabitants. (*J.W.* 3.42–43)

Even granting Josephus's penchant for exaggeration—certainly his estimate of the population of the villages is grossly exaggerated—Galilee *is* more fertile than the surrounding regions. Most Galileans lived in villages with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, which were more homogeneous than larger cities. David Fiensy, who estimates populations based on 160 persons per acre, suggests three categories: village, town, and city.

Figure 1

Nomenclature	Examples	Size (acres)	Population
Village (<2,000)	Nazareth	200–400	
	Capernaum	10–12	600–1,500
	Cana (Khirbet Qana)	8–9	1,200–1,400
	Yodefat	10	1,600
Town (2,000–4,000)	Chorazin		
	Gamla	15	2,400
Small City (4,000–6,000)	Magdala	22.5	4,000–5,000
	Sepphoris	50	2,500–5,000
	Tiberias		5,000–6,000
(Fiensy 2014, esp. 185; Fiensy 2020, 52, 58; cf. Crossan and Reed, 119; De Luca, 169; McCollough 2013, 58; 2022, 112; Reed 2000, 152; Richardson, 76, 81; Schumer)			

Size and population estimates vary for different periods of occupation. For example, although it is common to say that Sepphoris and Tiberias were the only two cities in Galilee, the former established beginning in 4 BCE and the latter in 19 CE, estimates of their size, population, and influence may be greatly exaggerated in light of their later development. Josephus says, "Herod [Antipas] fortified Sepphoris to be the ornament of all Galilee" (*Ant.* 18.27); actually, "Herod Antipas renovated only the city wall and did not construct or finance any other building projects there"; and "None of the Roman-style public buildings unearthed at the site so far dates to the early first century CE" (Weiss, 54, 55). These buildings and the monumental theater, seating 4,500, were built during "the city's massive development in the late first and early second centuries CE" (Weiss, 67). The "simple buildings" that Zeev Weiss and his team excavated on the eastern summit and its slopes "resembled the typical rural construction of the Galilee" (55). Technically, Sepphoris did not become a Roman city until the royal bank moved there in 61 CE (Keddie, 51). While most estimates of the population of Sepphoris are 8,000 to 12,000, a recent reassessment, based on dating the lower city to the second century, places the first-century population at 2,500 to 5,000 (Schumer). Keddie concludes that, in the early Roman period, Magdala was "a more significant urban-type settlement than Sepphoris. . . . After Antipas moved his capital to Tiberias in

19 CE, Sepphoris and Magdala were comparable settlements, and Magdala may even have overshadowed Sepphoris in economic significance" (64).

Little evidence of first-century buildings has been found at Tiberias: possibly the first phase of a Roman theater seating 5,000–6,000; an agora (1st–2nd c.), "a luxurious structure" under a Byzantine building; and an early Roman stadium (Cytryn-Silverman, 192–97; Luff, 154–55). Nevertheless, at least during the pre-70 period, the population of Tiberias may also have been less than the commonly accepted estimates of 8,000 to 10,000. Given these reassessments, the divide between villages and cities in Galilee was also less significant in the early part of the first century, emerging clearly only in the second century (Chancey, discussed above; Schumer; and Keddie, 51–53).

Drawing on his excavations at Yodefat and elsewhere, Mordechai Aviam finds evidence that Galilean villagers represented a broad spectrum of poor and middle- to upper-middle-class inhabitants. They were wool workers, weavers, potters, shop owners with flour mills and olive presses, and elites (probably high officials, oligarchs, and tax collectors) who lived in frescoed houses (Aviam 2004b, 17; Aviam 2013a, 44; see also McCollough 2013, 62, 71–72). At the same time, general prosperity does not mean there was an equitable distribution of goods. Nevertheless, the rapid increase in the population of Galilee and the expansion of settlements and cultivated land in the first century (Leibner 2009, 332–35) probably fueled a rise in the standard of living for many (Root, 118–20).

3.4 Galilean Houses

From the Gospels themselves, we can begin to sketch the houses, furnishings, and surroundings of a Galilean village. In the parable of the neighbor at night, the family sleeps together, and the door is shut, locked, or barred (*kekleistai*, Luke 11:7). Four men, friends or relatives, carried the paralyzed man up on the roof, where they "dug it up" (*exoryxantes*), made an opening by digging through the sun-baked clay of the flat roof, and lowered the man into the house (Mark 2:4). Luke, picturing the house as one typical of a Mediterranean city rather than a Galilean village, describes the roof as made of tile (Luke 5:19): hence, a pitched roof. The wedding at Cana was held at an elite's home or at the synagogue; few if any private houses in Cana would have had six large stone vessels and a dining room (*triclinium*) supervised by a head waiter (*architriklinos*, John 2:2–9; see 8.3 below). The dining area in Simon the Pharisee's home is open so that people from the community can see the banquet in progress (Luke 7:36–38). A master could

assign a slave to watch the door (Mark 13:34; cf. Luke 12:35–38). Houses are furnished with an oil lamp (*lychnos*), a lampstand (*lychnia*), and a bed or couch (*klinē*; Matt 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; 11:33). Millstones are common (Matt 18:6//Mark 9:42//Luke 17:2).

Excavations at Capernaum, Khirbet Qana, Magdala (Migdal), Yodefat, and Gamla are filling out the picture (Luff, 149–58). These sites are diverse in location: Capernaum and Magdala by the lake, others on hilltops. In population, they range from 1,000 to 2,000 inhabitants (see above, 3.3). Yodefat and Gamla were destroyed by Vespasian in 67 CE and not rebuilt, so these sites provide time capsules for pre-70 Galilean villages. Khirbet Qana contained ceramics from the early Roman period, a prominent rectangular building, Hasmonean coins, pottery like that produced at Shikhin, stone vessels, a possible *miqveh*, an Aramaic abecedary, and a cave with Greek inscriptions showing that it was frequented by later pilgrims (Negev and Gibson, 109–10).

Villages were generally unwalled and did not have an agora (marketplace) or public buildings. Josephus fortified Gamla, Yodefat, and Magdala/Taricheae (*J.W.* 3.462–465; 4.9). Although most villages did not have communal cisterns, Khirbet Qana and Yodefat were exceptions (Edwards 2002, 114–15).

Families lived in villages and worked in fields and vineyards nearby. The basic styles include simple houses, often one multipurpose room with a storage area and a side courtyard; complex houses built around three or more sides of a courtyard; and terrace houses built on steep hillsides (Hirschfeld, 22, 99–103). In Capernaum, small houses were built with dry-set basalt stones around a courtyard. From the street, one entered through a wooden door. The houses typically had dirt or stone floors, flat roofs, and either no windows or small windows facing the courtyard. Mortar consisted of clay or soil and water, sometimes mixed with straw for greater strength (Hirschfeld, 222–23). The roofs were made of wattle-and-daub construction: clay pressed down between bundles of reeds or brush, which are laid over and at right angles to wooden beams. Fixed stairs or portable ladders provided access to the roof, which could be used for a variety of activities (Acts 10:9). Some houses shared a courtyard, where most domestic activities took place. Courtyards often contained hearths, ovens, millstones, handpresses, and cisterns collecting rainwater from the roofs. Several types of ovens were used, but generally bread was baked in the same chamber as the fire (Frankel, 236–37; Frank). Those sharing a courtyard might be extended families, although by the first century extended families may have been declining because

of the economic pressure on small landholders (Fiensy 1991, 126–32). Courtyard neighbors were therefore not necessarily related (Hezser, 38). Some rooms around a courtyard were used for storage or for animals. Chickens and dogs ranged freely and inhabited courtyards and other open areas (Horwitz, 519). Villagers relieved themselves "outside the fence" or used chamber pots (Hirschfeld, 276–77). Families lived, worked, ate, and often slept outside, moving inside only in inclement weather. Rooms were dimly lit by oil lamps. Only two-room or larger houses had beds. Poor families in one-room houses rolled out mats at night for the family to sleep on—hence the predicament of the father whose neighbor knocked on the door while the family was asleep.

Rabbinic judgments illustrate the kinds of disputes that arose in such community settings: "If two joint holders [partners] would make a partition in a courtyard, they should build the wall in the middle. Where the custom is to build of unshaped stones, or of hewn stones, of half-bricks, or of whole bricks, so they should build it: everything should follow local use" (m. B. Bat. 1:1).

Similarly, we find rulings regarding what must be done if the wall falls down: the joint holders must rebuild it (1:4); who is responsible for building a gatehouse or door to the courtyard: everyone who uses it (1:5); how close to another's cistern may one dig a cistern: no closer than three handbreadths away (2:1). Moreover, "If a man sold a courtyard, he has sold also its houses, cisterns, trenches, and vaults, but not the movable property" (4:4).

Terrace houses without courtyards were the norm in villages built on hillsides (Gamla, Yodefat, and Cana). Josephus says that at Gamla "the houses were built against the steep mountain flank and astonishingly huddled together, one on top of the other, and this perpendicular site gave the city the appearance of being suspended in air and falling headlong upon itself" (*J.W.* 4.6–7). With terrace houses, a family would use the roof of the house below it as its outdoor space. Some homes had an upper room or underground storage. In places (Nazareth), some houses backed up to caves. Poor families also lived in tents or makeshift shelters on the edge of the town or outside the gates of a walled city (Fiensy 2014; Richardson, 77–79, 103–4; Corbo, 1:867). More affluent homes have been found also, notably the frescoed house at Yodefat, an elite house (early Roman) at Cana (McCollough 2022, 118), the erroneously named "triple courtyard house" (with one inner courtyard) at Capernaum (1st–3rd c. CE; Hirschfeld, 68–69), two large houses at Magdala (Aviam 2022, 98–99), and a farmstead at Tel Rekesh (Aviam 2022, 99).

3.5 Reflections

The locus of Jesus' ministry was Galilee (Mark 1:14, 39) and more specifically Galilean towns and villages, so we turn now to meet the people through whose lives and life situations Jesus preached the kingdom of God, the people of the parables. Jesus recalled the promises to Israel in the prophets and proclaimed the Power and Authority (God) higher than the Romans and their Herodian vassals. Jesus no doubt tapped the economic distress and unrest of struggling Galileans, but the Jesus movement was no revolt of the poor (Schröter, 260). Although he subverted Roman and Herodian authority, that was not the driving focus of his ministry. Jesus announced the coming of a kingdom that transcends earthly powers. Israel would be delivered from its oppressors, not by open revolt but by the God who had faithfully guided Israel in the past and would soon establish divine justice and sovereignty on the earth. Although essentially religious and apocalyptic, the social and political implications of this message continue to reverberate twenty centuries later.

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