

Gospels class 18—background to Jesus Christ's Galilean Ministry 2013-10-12

Good afternoon, everyone.

Today we'll take a look at the background of the region of Galilee. Why is this important? Galilee is where most of the events recorded in the Gospels took place. It's where Jesus Christ gave most of His teaching. It's where He performed more of His miracles than any other location. This was the region of most of Jesus Christ's ministry that we read about in the Gospels.

One of the study questions I sent out for this sermon was, "Did Bible prophecy indicate where the Messiah would do His work?" Does anyone know the answer? It's found in **Matthew 4:13-16, which is quoting Isaiah 9:1-2:**

13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali,

14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

So it was foretold about eight centuries earlier that the Messiah would appear in Galilee.

Nazareth was in the tribal allotment of Zebulun, and Capernaum and the other towns of Galilee in which Jesus conducted His ministry were in the allotment of the tribe of Naphtali. So not just Galilee was foretold, but the *specific areas* of Galilee were foretold centuries before Jesus appeared. So let's look at this area where it was foretold that the Messiah would minister and be a light in the darkness.

MAP This the maps at the back of your Harmony of the Gospels. It's for times like this that I provided those maps so you can see where the places relate to each other. We're going to be referring to this a lot today so you might want to keep it handy. Galilee is in the far north of the area of Israel, not far at all from ancient and modern Lebanon and Syria. As the crow flies it's about 75 miles north of Jerusalem, and walking would've taken about a week either way going up along the Jordan River in the Jordan Valley or through the mountain route along the spine of the mountains through Samaria.

MAP This is another of the maps at the back of your Harmony of the Gospels. The province or area of Galilee is about 30 miles north to south and east to west. So the whole area of Galilee would fit within many of our major cities and outlying suburbs like Denver. The whole area would fit within the Denver metro area. We see on this map a number of places mentioned in the Gospels—Capernaum, the center of Jesus' ministry; Chorazin, about two or three miles away; Bethsaida, about five miles away, home of the disciples Peter, Andrew, James and John; and Magdala, about six miles away, where Mary the Magdalene came from. Somewhat further away are Nazareth, where He grew up, and Cana, where He performed His first public miracle of turning water into wine (and also the home of the disciple Nathaniel).

The Galilee region gets its name from the Sea of Galilee, which is **called several different names** in the Bible. It is also called the Sea of Chinnereth, meaning "harp" because it was shaped like an ancient harp (Num. 34:11; Josh. 12:3), the Lake of Gennesaret (Greek transliteration of "Chinnereth") (Luke 5:1), the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1, 21:1), and sometimes simply "the lake" (John 6:16).

The Sea of Galilee is a fresh water lake fed primarily by the Jordan River in the north rainwater from the mountains surrounding the lake and Jordan Valley. The sea is nearly 700 feet below sea level. It is about eight miles wide at its widest point, and more than 12 miles long from north to south. Its depth is more than 200 feet in some places. From any point on the shore of the lake, if the weather is clear you can see virtually the entire shoreline all the way around the lake. So when Jesus and the disciples got in a boat and started sailing away, the people could see where they were going and sometimes walked around the shore and caught up with Him, as we sometimes see in the Gospels.

The climate of Galilee is quite tropical, with winter daytime highs in the 50s and summertime highs in the 80s. It gets about 20 inches of rain a year, considerably more than we do here. The soil is quite fertile. In Jesus' time, wheat, barley, figs, grapes, and olives were produced in the fields and hills around the lake. Because the land was quite fertile, people were generally a little better off than average. Not many were wealthy, but on the whole they were middle class as opposed to poor peasants barely eaking out a living.

Earlier in our studies on the Gospels we talked a bit about Bethlehem where Jesus Christ was born and Nazareth where He grew up. Where we last left off He moved to the city of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And to understand some of the events of Christ's ministry, we need to understand the history of this region and its peoples and culture.

One thing we need to understand is that the history of this area is quite a bit different from the history of the area around Jerusalem. In the first century, Jerusalem was part of what was called the Roman province of Judea. The Roman province of Judea would roughly correspond to the territory of the kingdom of Judah after the split into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah after the death of Solomon nine centuries earlier. And of course, we know what happened to those two kingdoms. In 721 to 718 B.C. the northern 10 tribes were invaded by and taken away into captivity by the Assyrians, and they became known as the lost 10 tribes.

The southern kingdom of Judah didn't learn the lesson, and they continued on for more than a century later, after the fall of the Assyrian Empire, until 586 B.C. when Judah was invaded and conquered by the Babylonians. Many of its people fled or were likewise taken away into captivity into other parts of the Babylonian Empire, which is why to this day you find scattered groups of Jews all over the Middle East, even in places like Iran and Iraq and Syria. This map shows where the 10 tribes of Israel were initially taken, and where people were brought from to take their place. And when the kingdom of Judah fell, they also were taken away and resettled in Babylon.

When the Babylonian Empire was defeated by the Medo-Persian Empire, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return from Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. We read about this in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. You may remember how they rebuilt their walls basically with one hand on their tools and one hand on their weapons, as depicted in this model. The people realized that they had been taken into captivity because of their sins, and they were determined not to repeat their mistakes. So those Jews who returned from Babylon and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple had a very religiously conservative mindset.

And so in the time of the Gospels, Jerusalem was the religious center of the nation, with **its great temple constructed by King Herod the Great**. This was also the center for the priests and the scribes and the Sadducees, groups that we see mentioned often in the New Testament. You might say that Jerusalem was the center for the religious traditionalists, and sometimes that was good and sometimes it was bad as we see reflected in the New Testament—because this was where a lot of the early persecution of the Church came from by those who wanted to maintain the religious establishment and their own power because they were part of this Jerusalem religious establishment.

To the northeast of Judea was **another province called Samaria**. It gets its name from what had been the capital of the northern 10 tribes, the city of Samaria—which, of course, was invaded and **destroyed by the Assyrians** seven centuries earlier. The Israelites were taken away into captivity and **other peoples were brought in** by the Assyrians to live in what had been the land of the kingdom of Israel. These people who were brought in blended their religions with some of the remnants of the true religion that managed to survive in that area. And the Jews viewed them, and rightly so, as being pagans.

As we see in the Gospels, there was a lot of antagonism between the Samaritans and the Jews. We covered that in considerable detail when we talked about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans as half-breeds and some of them even viewed the Samaritans as being subhuman and not in the image of God. If you were a Samaritan who walked through Judea by yourself, you could easily end up being killed. And at the same time, if you were a Jew who walked through Samaria by yourself, you also could easily end up being killed. That's how great the hatred and antagonism was between the two groups. It wasn't safe to travel alone through the territory of the other. At times Jesus and the disciples did so, but they traveled in a group of 10 to 20.

North of Samaria and on the east side of the Sea of Galilee was another area called the Decapolis, most of which is in what is today the kingdom of Jordan. The Decapolis is referred to in the Gospels, but not much is said about it. But just because this area is not mentioned often in the Gospels does not mean that it wasn't important. It was. And when we understand this, it clears up some questions we might have about events recorded in the Gospels.

The culture of the Decapolis was quite a bit different from Judea and Samaria because of its history, too. Who knows what Decapolis means? It's a Greek word, so let's break it down. *Polis* is pretty easy. We see it in the word metropolis, which means a big city. *Polis* is the Greek word for city or cities. *Deca* is the Greek word for the number 10—as in decimal. So Decapolis means 10 cities. You may have heard of some of them, like Gadara and Scythopolis (called Beth Shan in the Hebrew Bible) or Philadelphia (modern-day Amman), all of which are mentioned in the Bible. So how did this area get a Greek name?

Here, too, we need a lesson in history. We've mentioned the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, and the Medo-Persian Empire. Which great Gentile empire came next in to dominate the Middle East? Who was it that defeated the Persian Empire? It was **Alexander the Great** and the Greek empire.

In 333 B.C. Alexander the great founded the 10 cities of the Decapolis, or city-states as they would more properly be called since they controlled the territory around them, in this region. **Alexander is known as being a really great military leader**, what most people don't realize is that

he was also a *missionary*. He wanted to conquer the world, but he also wanted to *transform* the world. He wanted the whole world to adopt Greek culture, which is known as **Hellenism**. Say “Hellenism.” This is a word you should add to your vocabulary. The Hellenists are another group that we see mentioned in the New Testament. These are basically people who adopted the Greek culture and practices of the day and in some cases even adopted its religion. Its influence on that part of the world in that day was very powerful. This is how such pagan ideas as the immortal soul and going to heaven or hell after death became so popular in that part of the world and became a part of paganized Christianity early on. These were straight out of Greek philosophy and religion introduced into this area by Alexander the Great.

So Alexander the great was a missionary of Hellenism. At the center of Hellenism was the belief that **man was the center of the universe**. Your mind, your body and your creations are what really mattered. So Alexander said, if I can control four things I can transform the world. Those four things were sports, entertainment, education, and religion. If I can control those I will control and transform the world.

So the way he put this into practice is that as he invaded and conquered an area, he would muster out some of the Greek soldiers who had served their time in his army, and he would give them land to establish Greek colonies and **Greek cities everywhere he went**. That’s why you find cities with Greek names scattered throughout the Middle East—places like Alexandria, Egypt, which is named after Alexander.

So in these Greek cities they would build four things. They would build a **gymnasium**, which would be the school for educating the mind and the body. That of itself wasn’t bad. But the root word of *gymnasium* is the Greek word *gymnos*, which means “nude.” A lot of the education, of the mind and of the body, was done in and **involved nudity**. They would build an **arena for sports**. Sports were also practiced and **conducted in the nude**. They would build a **theater for entertainment**. And much of the entertainment was quite **raunchy** and filthy, just like today. And they would build **temples for religion and worship**. And the religion often involved both male and female temple prostitution, which made it very popular.

With these four things Alexander began to transform the world in the areas that he conquered—which included most of the Middle East. He said, when these people see what happens when you make the human being the center of the universe—which exists to this day in what is called humanism, one of the most dominant forces directing Western civilization today—he knew that people would fall in love with it.

And they did. And did he ever change the world! Those things that were started by Alexander the great survived long past him. The Roman Empire adopted those same four things. And those same four things in many ways dominate our culture even to this day—education, sports, entertainment and religion—unfortunately, the religion being false religion rooted in paganism instead of the true religion.

And just as the Jewish children and teenagers and young adults of the first century were drawn to that humanist culture and lifestyle and mindset, so that same battle is going on to this day. It all boils down to the question of which god are you going to follow? Will you follow the god of this age and this world with all his temptations of self-gratification and philosophy of “if it feels good, do it,” or will you follow the true God of the Bible? It’s the same exact battle today that was being waged 2,000 years ago.

Some Jews of that day embraced Hellenism or Greek culture, which we see reflected in the New Testament where it refers to these Jews as Hellenists. But many Jews were horrified by it. For example, the gymnasium, which was for training body and mind. The Greek word *gymnos*, as I mentioned, means naked. **The gymnasium was a place to be naked.** So you went to school naked. You exercised and had your sports naked. The Greeks thought this was perfectly normal, because they thought man was the center of the universe and the human body was ideal and something to be seen and admired. This is one reason that so much Greek statuary shows the body naked.

The Greek temples **all had prostitution as part of their worship.** Female prostitutes, male prostitutes, men with women, men with men, women with women—it didn't matter. The whole worship was about how to become one in the spirit with the god or goddess of that temple, and you did that by having sex with the priest or priestess or the temple prostitutes who were representing that god or goddess. That was the whole worldview of Hellenism. It was popularized by the Greeks, and when the Greek Empire was absorbed by the Roman Empire, it was pretty much adopted wholesale by them and various strains of this thinking continue right down to our day.

So what does this have to do with Galilee and the Gospels? Realize that this was the culture Jesus was rubbing shoulders with. When we see things in the Gospels like Jesus sending a horde of demons into a herd of 2,000 pigs, we wonder what some Jewish farmers are doing with 2,000 pigs. And the answer is, the people with the pigs weren't Jews at all—they were some of these peoples of a Greek and pagan background and they were raising these pigs in the region of the Decapolis on the eastern hillsides overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Why such a huge herd of 2,000 pigs? Probably because **the pigs were intended to be sacrificed** in the temples to the pagan gods like Dionysus on the mountaintop overlooking the Sea of Galilee. We know from archaeology that these gentile cities to the east of the Sea of Galilee had temples to various Greek and Roman gods and **sacrifices of pigs** was part of that worship.

And if we don't understand the cultural background, we are puzzled or confused by or totally miss what's really going on in the story. That's why it's so beneficial to understand the background of where these events took place. It adds a great deal to our understanding of the biblical events.

So from the Jewish cities of Capernaum and Bethsaida and Chorazin, when you looked to **the east across the Sea of Galilee**, you saw this large bluff towering over the Sea. Today we call it the Golan Heights. Then it was called the Decapolis. It was viewed as a corrupt and evil place, the place of false gods and demons. Self-respecting Jews avoided it—except for Jesus, as we'll read about later in the Gospels.

Let's take a look at another event from the Gospels that ties in with this. The Jews, of course, because this area was so steeped in Greek culture and religion, viewed it as a terribly wicked place. One of their terms for this place was "the other side," because most of it was on the other side of the Jordan River and the sea of Galilee. Another term for it was "a far country." We find this term in Luke 15, one of Jesus Christ's parables.

A certain young man went to his father and ask for his share of his inheritance. And he took the inheritance and went to a far country. Where did he go? He went across the Sea of Galilee to the area called "a far country." It really wasn't that far at all, it was just on the other side of the Sea

of Galilee about seven or eight miles away. But religiously and culturally, it might as well have been in a different universe. The young man's father could look across the Sea of Galilee and see where his son lived.

What did the son do with his inheritance? He wasted it on riotous living and prostitutes. Again, this is the Greek culture of the area of the Decapolis on the other side of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. And what does the son end up doing after he has wasted all his inheritance? He ends up **slopping the hogs, or feeding the pigs**. Again, he's not in a Jewish area at all, he's gone over to the area with the Greek culture where raising pigs and eating pigs and sacrificing pigs is quite common.

When we understand this background to the parable, it gives an added dimension to Christ's teaching. We can better understand the anguish and pain and hurt and sorrow of the father, whose son has rejected him and everything he tried to teach him and has instead chosen a lifestyle and living in a pagan culture that was utterly abominable to the father. And the father of the parable, representing God the Father, never loses his love for his wayward child—which is us. In the end he rejoices that his wayward son comes to his senses and returns to him. It's a profound story, and one all the more profound when we understand the background to the parable.

So again this is why it's important to understand the geography of the Bible and the historical and cultural background of these areas. You miss a whole lot of the story if you don't understand these things.

That is a quick background of **the pagan areas to the east and south of the Sea of Galilee** known as the Decapolis. What about the area on the north of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus did most of His ministry? What was the history of that area? We talked earlier about how Jerusalem was a center of religious fervor for the Jews. Galilee was also an area of deep religious fervor like Jerusalem. That also has to do with its history. The area of Galilee was part of the **northern 10 tribes before they were taken away into captivity** at the hand of the Assyrians. And although the Assyrians moved some people from other regions of their empire into this area when they took the Israelites when the captivity, this area was largely empty and mostly uninhabited for several centuries.

When the first groups of Jewish refugees whose parents and grandparents and great grandparents had been taken captive by the Babylonians were given permission to return by Cyrus king of Persia, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, they settled around Jerusalem and rebuilt the city and the Temple. But **most Jews stayed in Babylon**. They didn't see a reason to go back because in Babylon they were under Persian rule, and if they returned to Jerusalem they would still be under Persian rule there also. So they stayed in Babylon. They had lived there for up to several generations and they were settled and quite prosperous there. It was home to most of them and had been for a number of generations.

Eventually the Persian Empire fell to Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered most of the known world and introduced Hellenism, or Greek culture, to the Middle East—including the area of the Decapolis as we talked about. Alexander then died in Babylon at age 33 and his empire, which included the land of Israel, was divided up among four of his generals. And what follows is described in Daniel 11 with many of the conflicts between the ancient kings of the North, who

were centered basically in Syria to the north of Israel, and the kings of the South who were centered in Egypt to the south of Israel.

By the year 200 B.C. there were about a million Jews in Babylon, but only 150,000 in the area that had been Judah and Israel. But then came the Maccabees. The Maccabees were Jewish freedom fighters who rose up and overthrew the worst of those ancient kings of the North, a despicable character by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. He was so bad and so evil but the Jews of Judea rebelled against him and drove his forces out and in 168 B.C. the Jews gained their freedom for the first time in more than 400 years, dating back to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. This changed everything.

Now some of those million Jews in Babylon decided to go back to their homeland. So in that period between 168-167 B.C. and the birth of Jesus Christ, more than *half a million* Jews left Babylon and moved back to the area that was formerly the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Where did they move? **Galilee was one area with lots of empty space.** This map is at the back of your Harmony of the Gospels, and you may want to keep it handy because we'll look at it several times in the remainder of this sermon. So about 40,000 settled in Galilee. And they founded cities like Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Gennesaret and Magdala—cities that are mentioned over and over again in the four Gospels.

We know from archaeology that some of these places had been inhabited earlier by the Canaanites and Israelites, but were basically empty after the Assyrian invasion and these people moved back **and built new towns in these places.** These towns had from about a hundred to about 2-3,000 people in Christ's day, so they were quite small.

And another thing we see from the Gospels is that the religious establishment in Jerusalem looked down on the Galileans. They viewed them as a bunch of country hicks who weren't nearly as smart or educated or knowledgeable of the Torah as the Jews of Jerusalem were. So we sometimes see these snide, insulting comments directed at Jesus and His disciples by those in Jerusalem.

So Jesus is a Galilean Jew who grew up at Nazareth. **He chooses His disciples** primarily from Galilee. From Bethsaida, a few miles along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum, He chose four fishermen as disciples—Peter, James, John and Andrew. From Cana He chose Nathaniel. From Capernaum he chose Matthew Levi, who is a tax collector for Rome.

Here's what this area looks like today, which isn't that different from what it looked like 2,000 years ago. Here you can see the locations of some of the places mentioned in the Gospels. We should also understand that Galilee is a hotbed of religious and patriotic fervor. In fact, when the great Jewish revolt of 66 A.D. began several decades after Christ's death, and which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and the events at Masada where several hundred Jewish fighters and their families held out against the Romans for several years before they committed mass suicide rather than die or be enslaved by the Romans, that revolt broke out first in Galilee. And two of the centers of their rebellion were Magdala, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Gamla, a little inland from the northeast shore and not far from Bethsaida. Both were very close to where Jesus conducted most of His ministry. **Here's where they are on the map.**

The Jews there were very nationalistic and hated the Romans, and they wanted to throw out the Romans out and reestablish Jewish rule. **They were known as the zealots or the sicarii, or “dagger-men.”** They were known for carrying a dagger underneath their cloak, and if they had the opportunity in a crowd or traveling along a road they would pull out the dagger and stab a Roman or those who were viewed as collaborating with the Romans, such as tax collectors. If you watched the movie *Masada* or have read anything about it, that’s who these people were who were going around raiding, attacking and killing the Romans. In the Gospels, these would have been the people who wanted Jesus Christ to proclaim himself King and Messiah who would rise up and lead the people into battle against the Romans.

Now consider that one of Jesus Christ’s disciples was an individual the Gospels call Simon the zealot. He would have been one of these individuals who supported fighting and killing the Romans and raising up a leader to drive them out. That doesn’t mean he was like that during all the time he spent as one of Jesus’ disciples, because he obviously changed his views, but I’ve often wondered about the interpersonal dynamics among the disciples when you had one who was a zealot and another one, Matthew Levi, who was a tax collector for the Romans, whom most zealots if they had the chance would’ve killed as a collaborator of the Romans. The Gospels don’t talk about it, but it had to be quite interesting.

Have you ever wondered why sometimes when Jesus performed a miracle He told those He had healed to not tell anybody about the miracle, and at other times He told them to tell others about the miracle? Have you ever wondered about that? The answer seems to be in where He performed those miracles and who was around. For example, when He healed the demon-possessed men on the other side of the Sea of Galilee in the area of the Decapolis, He told them to go tell others about it. But when He was in areas where there seem to have been a lot of zealots or those with that kind of leaning, He told them not to tell others. It seems that in those cases He was trying to not get the masses stirred up so that the people would not be inflamed and want to proclaim Him as king the Messiah.

Lets’ notice one of Jesus miracles on the north side of the Sea of Galilee in **John 6**, one of the times when He fed thousands of people by multiplying bread and fishes.

11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

12 So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.”

13 Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Nothing would have stirred up the zealots like a King or leader who could heal the injured and raise the dead—think of what a military advantage that would be! If a fighter gets wounded or killed in battle, the way they viewed it, Jesus could just heal him or raise him from the dead and send him back into the battle! Who wouldn’t want a king to lead your army if he had those kind of miraculous abilities! And what about a commander who could feed thousands of soldiers on a

few fish and loaves of bread? Think of what a logistic advantage that would be! So it's no wonder that people like the Zealots would've wanted to make Jesus their commander and king.

But Jesus would have none of it. So He was judicious and who He did or did not tell to spread the word about His miracles. I think this is very much an unstated factor playing into what we read in the Gospels. In fact, when Jesus is crucified, Matthew and Mark say He was crucified with two "robbers." The word translated "robbers" in the Gospels is the same word that appears in other writings of the time describing the Zealots. The same word was used of Zealots and robbers. So the men Jesus was crucified with might've actually been Zealots who were put to death for rebelling against Rome.

And what accusation did the Jewish leaders make against Jesus? Notice **Luke 23:1—23:1 Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate.**

2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

This thread is there in the background of the Gospels, although it's not specifically spelled out. The Romans didn't care if Jesus had said he was the Son of God or blasphemed as the Jewish religious establishment accused Him. To get the Romans' attention they had to come up with something better, so they accused him of sedition and rebellion against Rome. This threat of rebellion was something very serious to the Romans, and it broke out into full-fledged war a generation later—leading to the **destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.**, as depicted here, and the scattering of the Jewish people for almost 2,000 years until the modern reestablishment of the nation of Israel, setting the stage for end-time prophecy. So this is another thread that is playing out in the background of the Gospels, although not explicitly spelled out.

Let's talk about another subculture of people who lived along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Another study question I asked was this: "In Jesus' day **Tiberias** was by far the largest city on the Sea of Galilee and only a few miles by boat from Capernaum, yet the Bible gives no indication that He ever set foot there. Why would He have avoided this city when it's clear that He visited many other areas of Galilee?"

So **why didn't Jesus visit Tiberias**, only a few miles from Capernaum? What was it about Tiberias that kept Jesus from visiting there?

Tiberias, named after the Roman emperor Tiberius, was very different from the areas where there were a lot of zealots. At the time it was the home of secular, nonreligious Jews. They were Jewish, but religion meant little to them. They were generally wealthy and pro-Roman. They were called Herodians because they were supporters of the sons and family of Herod the Great, who ruled under the Romans and supported the Romans. What do the Gospels say about the Herodians?

Matthew 22:16 And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "...

17 Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?

Mark 3:6 Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Mark 12:13 Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words.

The only three times the Herodians are mentioned in the Gospels, they are plotting to discredit or kill Jesus. So they're not a reputable lot. They adopted a lot of the Roman culture. They lived in a Roman-style city with a main **street like the Romans**, as we see here. They had a **large theater like the Romans**, as we see here. They had **hot-spring baths like the Romans**, as we see here. It was a city of maybe 50 to 60,000 in the time of Jesus but interestingly, the Gospels don't record Jesus ever visiting there. Why?

There was another factor at work here. Tiberias was the capital of **Herod Antipas**, shown here on a coin and in an artist's conceptions of what he might've looked like. He lived in Tiberias. Who was Herod Antipas? This is the same Herod who had John the Baptizer beheaded—and Jesus knew if He drew too much attention to Himself He might end up like John the Baptizer before His time had come. I think it's evident that this is why we have no record of Jesus ever visiting Tiberias, even though it was so close. Had He gone there and performed miracles, Herod would've likely viewed that as a major threat—especially with all these Zealots not far away to the north—and Herod Antipas likely would've had Jesus killed.

So why didn't Herod Antipas just come to Capernaum and capture and kill Jesus anyway? This is where some geography plays into the picture. Although Tiberias was only about seven or eight miles away as the crow flies, there was no road along the shore between them. There was a huge mountain, Mount Arbel, that rose up right from the Sea of Galilee. Although there's a road there now, there wasn't one in Jesus' day, so to go from Tiberias to Capernaum you had to go about 20 or 30 miles around the mountain—which would've given anyone in Capernaum plenty of time to know you were coming.

For those of you who are students of history, you might be interested in knowing that Mount Arbel is also the location of the Horns of Hattin, **the battleground where Saladin's** Muslim forces defeated the Crusaders in 1187 and ended Crusader control of the Holy Land. If you've watched the movie "Kingdom of Heaven" about the Crusades that came out several years ago, this is where the climactic battle took place in the movie. Darris McNeely and I visited that battlefield in 2006. As you can see, there's a lot of history in this area going back thousands of years. There's much more that I don't have time to cover.

Back to Jesus' day in Galilee, as near as we can tell most of the Galileans, at least those other than the peoples we have talked about, were very **serious about their religion and did their best to live according to Scripture**. You see this reflected in the Gospels many times. These were the people who went to the synagogues, who asked probing questions of Jesus, who went to Him for healing, and who followed him and listened to His teaching. They were a devout people who followed Scripture and taught it diligently to their children.

The center of religious teaching for these people was also the center of Jesus Christ's ministry—an area **called the triangle on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee**. It's called the triangle because it was bounded by three cities—Capernaum, center of Jesus' ministry, Bethsaida, about five miles to the east also on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Chorazin about three miles to the north of Capernaum above the Sea of Galilee. All of these cities are about three to five miles apart.

This area is mentioned again and again and again in the Gospels. Most of Jesus' miracles took place at or around these three cities. If you go through the Gospels with an atlas—and hopefully

you'll all want to buy a good atlas if you don't already have one—you'll find that most of Jesus Christ's teaching verses given in the four Gospels took place in the same area. Somewhere around 70 percent of His teaching was given in this area of about three miles by five miles on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Consider that for a moment. We tend to think the Jesus covered dozens or perhaps hundreds of miles, teaching all over the place. But He didn't. Most of His teaching, most of His ministry and most of His miracles were within an area that most of us could walk across and back within a day.

On occasion He went a little further afield to areas like Caesarea Philippi further north, or the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, as we discussed earlier, and in one case about 40 to 50 miles to the coast of Lebanon, and repeatedly to Jerusalem, sometimes passing through Samaria, but that's about the extent of His travels. Jerusalem is about 75 miles as the crow flies from Galilee, and that's as far as we can tell He ever traveled. But again, most of His teaching took place in an area about three miles by five miles along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

But what He did in that area changed the world.

That's all for today. I did leave out one question and answer about Capernaum, and I thought I'd start with that question next time. I've given you enough to absorb right now.

Any questions?