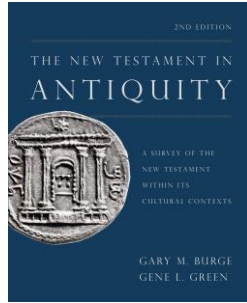


Chapter 3-The World of Jesus in His Jewish Homeland



Key Terms Passover, Pentecost, Sanhedrin, synagogue, *Tanak*, Septuagint, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Targum, Mishnah

Key Locations and People Josephus, Philo, Samaritans, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, The “fourth philosophy,” Scribes, Herodians, Caesarea, Judea, Galilee, Capernaum

Key Points

- Trade and communication between Mesopotamia and Egypt logically passed through Israel, thus making the territory crucial.
- Most of Jesus’s ministry took place in Galilee, particularly in Capernaum.
- Judaism is not comprised of one monolithic voice but several. It is better to describe the culture as comprised of different “Judaisms.”
- We gain much insight into first-century Judaism through its literature (e.g., DSS, Pseudepigrapha, Mishnah, Josephus, etc.).

Noteworthy Backgrounds Pictures of synagogues in ruins, picture of the DSS, drawing of the temple

Chapter Summary

In order to understand accurately the New Testament, we must be aware of the land, culture, and history. This chapter primarily addresses the former two items as they relate to Jesus’s career. The location of Israel’s land is particularly important for its neighboring nations. Trade and communication between Mesopotamia and Egypt logically passed through Israel, thus making the territory critical. Topographically, the land of Israel contains a wide variety—mountains, deserts, plains, lakes, rivers, and coasts.

North of Jerusalem lies the region of Galilee. Conservative Jews inhabited the southern portion (Nazareth, Cana), whereas Gentiles dwelled in the northern cities (Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin). Jesus regarded Capernaum as his “base of operations,” a strategic location enabling him to influence those who passed through the significant trade route.

In addition to geography, first-century Palestine was shaped by numerous, even competing political and religious groups. Some of the more prominent ones are the following: The Pharisees, perhaps to be identified with the Hasidim, advocated strict obedience to Torah and extreme piety, free from the taint of Hellenism. They anticipated the coming Messiah and believed in a future resurrection of the dead. Quite different from the Pharisees, the Sadducees probably controlled the priesthood, were comparatively wealthy, and benefited from and

supported Roman occupation. This group denied the bodily resurrection and rejected messianism. The Essenes consisted of a small ascetic group and most likely are to be identified with the secluded Qumran community, who composed the majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They believed that they constituted “true Israel,” living in the “last days.” The sect passionately anticipated the Messiah’s arrival and God’s intervention in history. The “Fourth Philosophy” vehemently and physically opposed Roman occupation through a number of violent means.

The Jerusalem temple was the centerpiece of the Israelite religion—the place where God dwelled in the midst of his people. Herod the Great, in 20 BC, began to rebuild the structure, making it one of the most ornate and opulent buildings in the ancient world. Attendance at three festivals at the temple was required, according to the Torah, for Jewish men each year—Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles/Booths.

One lasting effect of the Babylonian exile was the synagogue. Jews creatively maintained worship in exile without the temple and its sacrifices. Instead of sacrifices and cultic rituals, prayers were “offered” to God, and the Torah slowly became the object of meticulous study. The synagogue facilitated gatherings such as these. Moreover, the synagogue decentralized worship by enabling Jews to gather as a community, to listen to the reading of the Torah, and to worship in a local setting.

Much of our knowledge of first-century Judaism stems from a plethora of Jewish writings—the Hebrew Bible (*Tanak* and the Septuagint), the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Rabbinic literature, the Targums, Josephus, and Philo.