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## Jesus and his social worlds

The four Gospels in the New Testament, all written in the common Greek of the first century, reflect the cultures and concerns of the diverse Hellenistic cities that produced them. Their variety is fascinating, but the differences a reader finds as he or she moves from one Gospel to the next can cause confusion, and even frustration. What can we know about Jesus, when the Gospels do not fully agree, and sometimes contradict one another?

For example, only two Gospels narrate Jesus' birth. One account (Matthew 2.13–15) places Jesus and his family in Egypt just after his birth, while the other (Luke 2.22–38) insists they were in Jerusalem at that time. All four Gospels depict Jesus' crucifixion; yet they disagree in recording what his very last words were. Did he say, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27.46; Mark 15.34) or, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23.46) or, 'It is finished' (John 19.30)?

Attempts have been deployed over the centuries in a failed attempt to explain away such contradictions. But since the end of the eighteenth century scholars have shown – and people who have read all the Gospels through have generally agreed – that the Gospels are not verbatim histories of the events concerning Jesus. They are rather theological interpretations of his significance for believing communities, woven from memories about him.

This evaluation of the Gospels takes account of their religious purposes: they were designed to promote faith in Jesus, not to provide an objective account of his life. Whether the reader today approaches these texts as a believer or not, the fact of their religious origin needs to be acknowledged, if the Gospels are to be understood.

On any reading, the New Testament begins with Jesus, who is the origin of the faith that all the documents profess. Each Gospel reflects both the faith *of* Jesus, the beliefs he taught and lived and

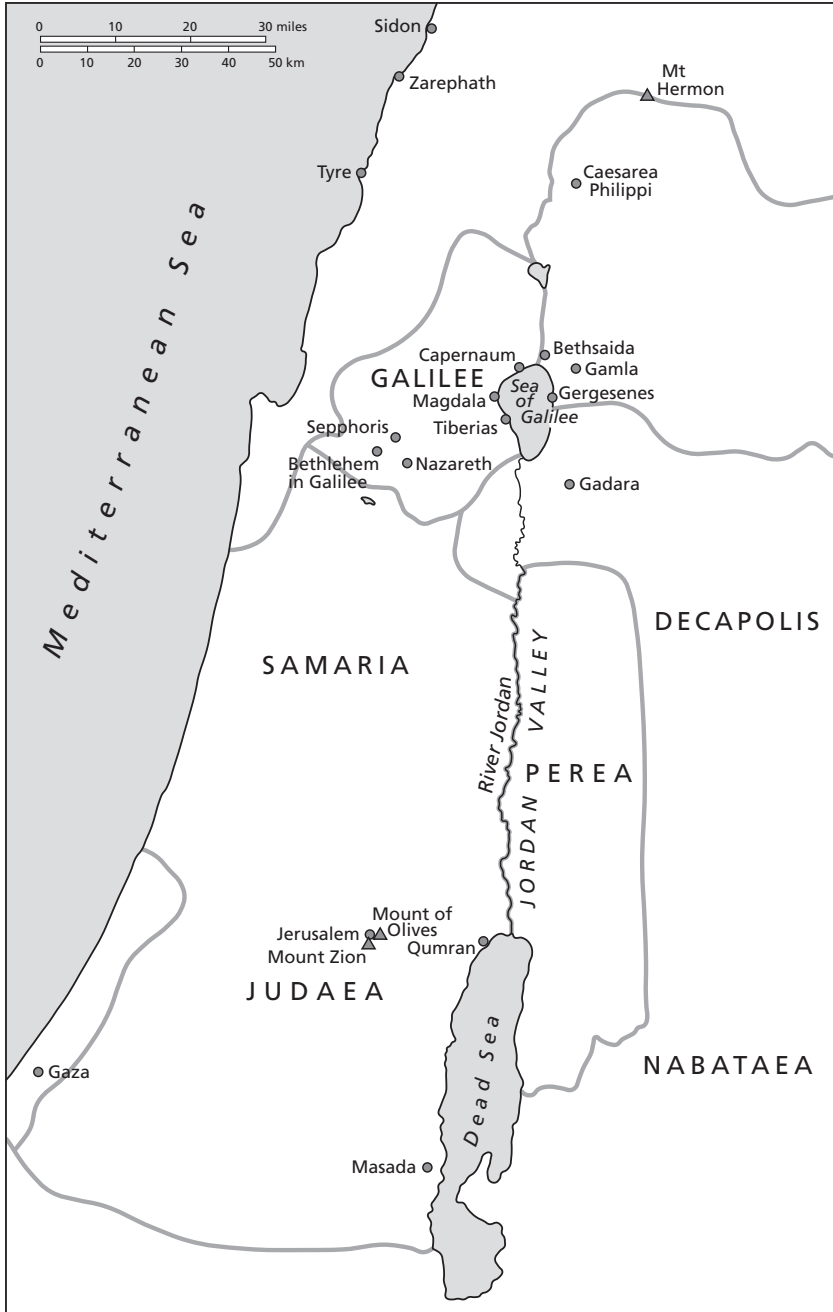
died for, and faith *in* Jesus, the beliefs his followers made into a compelling religious movement.

The distinction between the faith of Jesus and faith in Jesus permits us to read the Gospels critically, with an eye to how we can distinguish his teaching and character from claims later made about him. Fortunately, there are powerful clues to his distinctive contribution within the Gospels. Although the Gospels were written in Greek, they refer to their Jesus as an Aramaic-speaking rabbi in Jewish Galilee, who took his message of ‘the kingdom of God’ throughout Israel, and then confronted the authorities in Jerusalem with such force that they had him crucified.

That journey involved Jesus in moving through differing cultural settings. The Mediterranean world of the first century, although linked by the widespread (but not universal) usage of Greek and by the powerful, often violent rule of the Roman empire, has been revealed by the modern study of history, anthropology, archaeology and language to be a place of deep diversity. The history of the formation of the Gospels themselves will concern us later, but from the outset we can say that the Gospels were composed through an evolutionary process that left traces of earlier cultural contexts beneath the surface of texts as they can be read today. Jesus moved through the cultural equivalent of microclimates during the course of his life, and sensitivity to the clues of the cultures reflected in the Gospels has permitted a much clearer picture of Jesus to emerge over the past generation of scholarship compared to previous centuries. For example, the language of a majority of Jews living in what had once been the nation-state of Israel was not Greek or even Hebrew, but Aramaic, the common language of the Near East since the time of the Persian Empire, and Aramaic is sometimes quoted verbatim in the Gospels.

Scholarly assessments of Jesus are hardly unanimous, and should not be expected to be, given the ferment of ideas surrounding him in current debate. There is nonetheless widespread agreement that five environments he negotiated prove crucial to understanding him. Those environments are (1) rural Jewish Galilee, (2) the movement of John the Baptist, (3) the towns Jesus encountered as a rabbi, (4) the rule of Herod Antipas, and (5) deep controversy concerning the Temple in Jerusalem. We cannot set out a full account of Jesus’ life

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Map 1 Territorial Israel at the time of Jesus

here, but we can present five factors that need to be considered in any critical assessment of this rabbi and his significance.

## Rural Jewish Galilee

Until recently, Jewish Galilee has been almost as mysterious as Jesus himself. Apart from the Gospels, in this regard and others, the writings of Josephus can be helpful. Josephus lived during the first century, taking part in the Jewish revolt against the Romans during 66–70 C.E.; he then defected and became a propagandist for his former enemies. Whatever one thinks of Josephus' integrity, he remains an invaluable resource for understanding the events, personalities and conditions of Israel at the time the New Testament emerged. Josephus describes Galilee as a proud region, resistant to the occupying force of Roman rule and its customs, valued for the fertility of its land and the quality of its produce.

Yet Josephus was a Judaeon, a southerner, and a general who had tried and failed to master the proud Galilean people. Galilee in the north has lacked a voice of its own, because no written source, no body of Rabbinic literature, no scroll discovered in the midst of archaeological work, has been attributed to a Galilean of the first century. An oral culture, as resistant to change as it was to the Romans

### **Box 1.1. Josephus and Jesus**

Flavius Josephus was born in Judaea in 37 C.E. and died about 100 C.E.. Although he was named Joseph at birth he took the name Flavius when he became a Roman citizen.

Near the beginning of the war against Rome (66–74 C.E.) Josephus led Galilean forces resisting Rome, but by 67, he had surrendered. Taken subsequently to Rome by the victorious Romans, he spent the rest of his life writing about the war (*Wars of the Jews*), about Judaeon history and culture (*Antiquities*) and his own life (*Life*). He wrote in Greek for Jews and Gentile readers interested in Judaeon culture. There are two passages about Jesus and one about John the Baptist.

Josephus' Testimony to Jesus (*Testimonium Flavianum*) is regarded as a significant extra-biblical reference to Jesus. Some scholars regard it as a forgery; most think it shows evidence of interpolations. Of the two versions given here, the first is in the Greek text while the second, shorter version is an Arabic version.

*Antiquities* 18.63–64:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such people as receive the truth with pleasure. He won over many of the Jews and many of the Greeks. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

A tenth-century Arabic version occurs in Arabic in Agapius' *Book of the Title*, a history of the world from its beginning until 941/942 C.E.. Agapius was a tenth-century Christian Arab and Melkite bishop of Hierapolis. While this version is shorter and simpler, changes indicate that it is probably a paraphrase of an earlier account:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their loyalty to him. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive. Accordingly they believed that he was the Messiah, concerning whom the Prophets have recounted wonders.

Josephus' second short reference to Jesus is an account of why Ananus was deposed as High Priest. Most scholars think Josephus identifies James as Jesus' brother (cf. Mark 6.3).

*Antiquities 20.197–203:*

And now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judaea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that office on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this elder Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that office a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to King Agrippa, desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; some of them even went to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble the Sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damnaeus, high priest.

who occupied it, Jewish Galilee condemned itself to silence from the point of view of history by its loyalty to the spoken word.

Archaeological excavation and study has greatly improved knowledge of Galilee as a result of work over the past twenty years. That new evidence underscores the isolation of rural Galilee from

Hellenistic culture, and attests the cultural integrity of Galilean Judaism. Tiny villages, hamlets for agriculture for the most part, persistently attest a great concern for purity, the definition of who exactly belongs to Israel and of how contact with those outside Israel should be regulated. Stone vessels for carrying water for purificatory washing are typically found. They are characteristic of Jewish villages, and quite unlike vessels for cooking or large cisterns used to store water for drinking, which are common throughout the Near East. Stone vessels for purification are more persistent in Galilee than the *miqveh*, the stepped bathing pool, or the synagogue, but all of these have been found, and they lead to a single, clear conclusion. Jewish Galilee had established institutions and practices that put it outside any supposed assimilation within Graeco-Roman culture.

All these finds have shattered the myth of a purely Hellenistic Jesus living in a thoroughly Romanized Galilee. Until a synagogue was found in Galilean Gamla, it was routinely claimed that synagogues were only a post-Christian institution. Before *miqva'oth* were discovered in several towns, bathing was often dismissed as purely the elitist practice of Pharisees in Judaea (for more on Pharisees see the box on p. 41). Indeed, it was even said that Jesus spoke Greek, rather than Aramaic, despite the fact that actual transliterations of Aramaic appear in the Greek Gospels. Now the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shows that Aramaic was widely used during the first century and earlier, and the discovery of non-sectarian scrolls near Qumran, a carefully designed settlement of Essenes on the shores of the Dead Sea, shows the wide usage of Aramaic.

The archaeological Galilee is a Jewish Galilee, as far as Jesus and his movement are concerned; garrison enclaves such as Sepphoris, although near to Nazareth, are notable for their absence from Jesus' itinerary in the Gospels. Nazareth itself was a tiny settlement of no more than a couple of hundred people, who lived in earthen sheds around courtyards for common cooking and milling, with a central facility for pressing wine and olives. The archaeological and textual scholarship of the past two decades has revolutionized how we should think about Galilee and about Judaism, and that means the once fashionable (and in some circles, still fashionable) picture of Jesus as an Athenian in Jewish dress must change.

### Box 1.2. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of 900 fragmentary scrolls discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves in the cliffs along the left bank of the Dead Sea. Until this find, there was no Jewish text in Hebrew or Aramaic that could be definitely dated to the first century C.E.. Texts date from 150 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.. The find includes versions of biblical texts, biblical commentaries, parabiblical writings like the *Genesis Apocryphon*, community regulations, liturgical works and apocalyptic visions. Manuscripts are identified by cave number, Q, and the manuscript number or an abbreviated title. 11QTemple is the *Temple Scroll* from cave eleven. Scholars who first studied the scrolls identified them as the library of the Jewish sect of the Essenes based in the adjacent settlement at Qumran.

Jewish Galilee was a peasant culture, grounded in an economy of exchange and occasional trade. For the great majority of families living there, keeping to themselves away from centers of Roman power, maintaining Israelite identity was not a matter of formal learning, because most people were illiterate, but of oral memory, local custom and occasional pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Above all, that identity was guaranteed by the common knowledge within a given community of each person's mother and father. In later Judaism, having a Jewish mother was enough to make one an Israelite. During the first century, however, not knowing who a person's father was made him a *mamzer*.

At base, a *mamzer* was the product of a union that was forbidden, because the couple were not permitted to marry and procreate according to the Torah, the Law of Moses, which set out severe punishments for illicit sexual contact. The Mishnah, a manual of Rabbinic rulings from the time both before and after Jesus, clearly sets out this definition (see Mishnah *Qiddushin* 3.12). Whatever became of the man and the woman as the result of their relationship, their offspring was considered an Israelite, but an irregular Israelite.



The same judgment applied in the Mishnah (*Ketubbot* 1.9) to a case such as Jesus': the offspring of a woman whose sexual partner was not known with certainty. If the community in which a person lived did not know who that person's father was, for example because his parents were not living together, that made the person a *mamzer*. In later Judaism, this severe standard changed. According to the Talmud, which was composed centuries later than the Mishnah, a person is a *mamzer* only if it was known that his or her father was a Gentile (*Qiddushin* 70a). But that is a later standard, which reflects the adjustment of Jewish law to the circumstances produced by two defeats at the hands of the Romans (with rapes and forced 'marriages' on a massive scale). During the first century, as the Mishnah indicates, the more stringent standard applied, and that had a profound impact on Jesus.

Deuteronomy 23.2 specifies that a *mamzer* is to be excluded from the congregation until the *tenth generation* after him, a severe penalty that permanently marginalized a person of that status and his progeny. Understandably, the term was applied with caution, and its application was subject to debate and change. The precise description of Mary's pregnancy in Matthew 1.18, as occurring between the time a contract of marriage was exchanged and the actual cohabitation of the couple, put Jesus into the position of being considered a *mamzer* within first-century practice.

As a result of these circumstances, some people accused Jesus of being born of fornication (*porneia*, John 8.41). Others, from his own town (Mark 6.3), called him 'son of Mary' rather than 'son of Joseph', although some of his followers proudly identified him as Joseph's son (John 1.45), and that was one root of the title 'son of David' as applied to Jesus. The story of Jesus' miraculous birth, one of several explanations of his paternity in the New Testament, addresses the same situation. Whoever Jesus' natural father was – Joseph prior to his actual residence with Mary, another man to whom Mary was not married while Joseph was her betrothed, or the power of the most high (Luke 1.35) – Jesus was a *mamzer* within the terms of reference of first-century Judaism. This category provoked the disparate views of Jesus' birth attested in the New Testament and, to a lesser extent, in Rabbinic literature as well.

## **The movement of John the Baptist**

John the Baptist is a crucial figure in Jesus' development, and not only because he personally baptized Jesus. John also contributed two related – and signally important – themes to what Jesus taught and did.

Josephus shows how prominent John was within his time, emphasizing John's popularity and political influence (Josephus,

### **Box 1.3. Josephus and John the Baptist**

Josephus' account of John the Baptist (*Antiquities* 18.109–19) is thought by most scholars to be basically historical. It occurs in an account regarding Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and son of Herod the Great.

About this time Aretas, the king of Petra, and Herod the Tetrarch had a quarrel on account of the following. Herod the tetrarch had married the daughter of Aretas and had lived with her a great while; but once when he was on his way to Rome he lodged with his half-brother, also named Herod but who had a different mother, the high priest Simon's daughter. There he fell in love with Herodias, this latter Herod's wife, who was the daughter of their brother Aristobulus and the sister of Agrippa the Great.

This man ventured to talk to her about a marriage between them; she accepted, and an agreement was made for her to come to him as soon as he should return from Rome, one condition of this marriage being that he should divorce Aretas' daughter. So when he had made this agreement, he sailed to Rome; but when he had finished there and returned again, his wife, having discovered the agreement he had made with Herodias, and before he knew that she knew of the plan, asked him to send her to Machaerus, a place on the border between the territories of Aretas and Herod, without informing him of any of her intentions.

Accordingly Herod sent her there, thinking his wife had not perceived anything. But she had sent messages a good while before to Machaerus, which had been under the control of her father, and so all things necessary for her escape were made ready for her by the general of Aretas' army. By that means

she soon came into Arabia, under the conduct of the several generals, who carried her from one to another successively; and soon she came to her father and told him of Herod's intentions.

Aretas made this the start of his enmity toward Herod. He also had a quarrel with him about their boundaries in the area of Gabalis. So they raised armies on both sides and prepared for war, sending their generals to fight instead of themselves. And when they had joined battle, all Herod's army was destroyed by the treachery of some fugitives who, though they were of the tetrarchy of Philip and joined the army, betrayed him. So Herod wrote about these affairs to Emperor Tiberius, who was very angry at the attempt made by Aretas and wrote to Vitellius to make war upon him and either to take him alive, and bring him in chains, or to kill him, and send him his head. This was the command that Tiberius gave to the governor of Syria.

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and was a very just punishment for what he did against John called the baptist. For Herod had him killed, although he was a good man and had urged the Jews to exert themselves to virtue, both as to justice toward one another and reverence toward God, and having done so join together in washing. For immersion in water, it was clear to him, could not be used for the forgiveness of sins, but as a sanctification of the body, and only if the soul was already thoroughly purified by right actions. And when others massed about him, for they were very greatly moved by his words, Herod, who feared that such strong influence over the people might carry to a revolt – for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise – believed it much better to move now than later have it raise a rebellion and engage him in actions he would regret.

And so John, out of Herod's suspiciousness, was sent in chains to Machaerus, the fort previously mentioned, and there put to death; but it was the opinion of the Jews that out of retribution for John God willed the destruction of the army so as to afflict Herod.

Both Josephus and the Gospels agree that Herod Antipas had John killed but for different reasons. Thus Josephus and the Gospels present alternative accounts of the same figure.

*Antiquities* 18.106–19). Josephus also confirms a basic element of the presentation of the Gospels: John expected Israelites to purify themselves by confessing their sins and receiving forgiveness while immersing in water, and he believed that God's Spirit would one day be bestowed on those who engaged in the preparation he demanded.

Immersion, for John, was not a once-for-all act, as it later became in Christian baptism. In the practice of the early Church, believers felt that they received the Spirit of God when they were immersed in the name of Jesus. That conviction emerged *after* the resurrection, and stemmed from the belief that Jesus was alive at the right hand of God, and able to dispense divine Spirit (see Acts 2.33). But in John's practice, as in Judaism as a whole, purification was a routine requirement, and people could return to John many times. They naturally engaged in many forms of purification other than John's, whether in their villages or at the Temple. Impurity was a fact of life, as routine as childbirth and preparing a loved one's body for burial, for example, and therefore so was purification.

John offered purification within the usual understanding of Judaism, but he did so in the wilderness, teaching that natural-gathered (or 'living') water supplied by God made people ready for worship and access to the Temple, provided that immersion was accompanied by repentance. Within John's activity, there was also an esoteric meaning. John conveyed a definite understanding of the final significance that his purification for Israel offered.

As John himself expressed it, immersing oneself in water prepared one to receive the Spirit of God himself, which was to drench all Israel with its sanctification. The key to John's idea of immersion being a preparation for God himself lies in the wording attributed to him, 'I immerse you in water, but he himself will immerse you in Holy Spirit' (Mark 1.8; see Matthew 3.11; Luke 3.16). Within the context of Christianity after the resurrection, those words are fulfilled when the risen Jesus endows believers with God's Spirit (again, see Acts 2.33). Within the context of John the Baptist long before the death and resurrection of Jesus, however, what is at issue was the purification that prepares the way for God to give his own Spirit in the future.

To make his way to John, Jesus had to depart from Galilee, and live in the Judaeian wilderness, where John was active. John's two concerns, purity and the Spirit of God, focused on the place on earth where in early Judaism purity and forgiveness were most celebrated and God's Spirit was universally recognized: the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus did not simply meet his teacher after he became an adult (as a superficial reading of the Gospels, as if they were literal history, would suggest), but apprenticed himself to John as a youth.

Josephus indicates that John the Baptist was executed by Herod Antipas in 21 C.E. (*Antiquities* 18.109–19); Jesus must have associated himself with John long before John's death to have thoroughly assimilated his master's teaching. What Josephus does not say, but the Gospels do attest (Mark 6.18–29; Matthew 14.3–12; Luke 3.19–20; 9.9), is that John criticized Antipas for breaking the Torah by marrying Herodias, who had previously been married to Antipas' brother. As a teacher of purity, John naturally attacked this action, because it broke the Law of Moses (Leviticus 20.21). Antipas reacted to this challenge to the legitimacy of his marriage by having John arrested and executed. Josephus' account dovetails with the Gospels, and shows how the New Testament is best read within the context of the literature of its time.

Jesus' extensive period of study and even controversy with John, indicated by John's Gospel (John 3.22–36), allows time for Jesus to remain in the land of Judaea *and to practise immersion himself*, as John 3.22 specifically states he did. Although this Gospel then tries to take its assertion back (John 4.1–3), the initial statement is emphatic, unambiguous and in all probability historical: Jesus practised a ministry of immersion comparable to John's.

The Synoptic Gospels are quite plain about when Jesus' characteristic, public ministry began: as Mark 1.14 puts it, 'after John was delivered over' (see the comparable formulations of Matthew 4.12; Luke 3.19–20). From the point of view of Herod Antipas, Jesus represented no immediate continuation of John's threat, because Jesus had stopped immersing Israelites as John had been doing. When Herod later *did* react to Jesus with the threat of violence (Mark 6.14–16; Matthew 14.1–2; Luke 9.7–9), the issue was his activity of healing, not baptism.

Even as Jesus desisted from John's practice of immersion, he intensified John's second focus: awareness of God's Spirit. This signature concern of John's activity, which also became a hallmark of Jesus' emphasis, took up a theme from the book of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36.25–27). The close and causal connection between water and Spirit there is the precedent for John's baptism, and his prophecy that Israel was going to enjoy a new accessibility of God's presence.

Ezekiel was also the central text of Jewish mysticism, the practice of God's presence, visualized as centred on his movable throne, the chariot or *Merkavah* (in Aramaic). Traces of this *Merkavah* mysticism are plain in the story of Jesus' baptism.

John practised a personal discipline (or *kabbalah* in Aramaic) of envisioning the Throne of God, the spiritual counterpart of his practice of immersion, which made it possible for John to speak of baptism in the Spirit. He and his disciples saw the Spirit of God before the *Merkavah*, ready to drench Israel, just as Israel was drenched in the waters of purification. Careful discipline, repetitive, committed practice, and sometimes-inadequate diet and exposure to the elements all contributed to the vividness of visions of God's throne, and visionary narratives are a significant aspect of the literature of the New Testament.

The Gospels all relate the baptism of Jesus in a way that foreshadows baptism in early Christianity. But they also refer to the particular vision of Jesus, which not every baptized Christian could or did claim (Mark 1.9–11; cf. Matthew 3.13–17; Luke 3.21–22). As Jesus was immersed for purification, following John's teaching, he came to have an increasingly vivid vision, of the heavens splitting open, and God's Spirit coming upon him. And a voice: 'You are my son, beloved; in you I take pleasure.'

Each of these elements is resonant with the Israelite mysticism of the divine throne. The heavens are viewed as multiple, hard shells above the earth, so that any real disclosure of the divine must represent a rending of those firmaments. But once opened, Jesus' vision is not of ascending through the heavens, as in *1 Enoch* (from the Pseudepigrapha), but of the Spirit, as a dove, hovering over him and descending. That image is a vivid realization that the Spirit of God at creation once hovered over the face of the pri-

meval waters (Genesis 1.2), as a bird. The bird was identified as a dove in Rabbinic tradition, and a fragment from Qumran supports the association. The Spirit, which would one day come to Israel, in Jesus' vision was already upon him, and God took pleasure in him as a 'son'.

Jesus' approach to the *Merkavah* by means of John's teaching had opened the prospect that the gates of heaven were open again for the Spirit to descend upon Israel and pour outward to the nations. Jesus' conscious framing of a personal tradition or *kabbalah*, an approach to the divine *Merkavah* for himself and for his disciples, naturally included an understanding of his own identity. Clearly, the association of Jesus as God's son gained currency as a consequence of the resurrection. But its currency is very difficult to explain, if Jesus himself avoided this designation. *Some* consistent usage of messianic language would likely have been in the background of Jesus' teaching for the term to emerge as the primary designation of Jesus. Anointed by the Spirit of God, Jesus viewed himself as enacting and articulating the claims of God's transforming power ('the kingdom of God'). Once Jesus' approach to the *Merkavah*, on the basis of his endowment with Spirit, is seen to be the pivot of his experience and his program of activity, his care in defining how he was God's son acquires its sense. He said God's Spirit was upon him, and anointed him (Luke 4.18), so that he could make God known as his son: 'Everything has been delivered over to me by my father' (Luke 10.32).

### **The towns Jesus encountered as a rabbi**

Jesus returned to his native Galilee after the death of John the Baptist, and that was when he took up his characteristic message of 'the kingdom of God'. He taught as a rabbi, but he also called attention, in the manner of the prophets, to how God was transforming the world, as the king of all creation. In common with the greatest prophets of his region centuries before, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus was reputed to be endowed with miraculous powers. Like them, he could render people who were impure owing to skin disease pure again (see 2 Kings 5 and Mark 1.40–45), heal even those thought

to be dead (see 1 Kings 17.17–24 and Mark 5.35–42), and invoke signs of God's presence such as feeding many people with little food (see 2 Kings 4.42–44 and Mark 6.30–44). The last similarity is relevant, because Jesus used the imagery of feasting in order to refer to the kingdom of God, the alternative to human rule that he believed was transforming the world. As in the cases of prophets before his time, the belief that God confirmed Jesus' teaching by means of miracles is a matter of historical record, however one might explain miraculous events.

The picture of God offering a feast on Mount Zion 'for all peoples', where death itself is swallowed up, had been current from the time of Isaiah 25.6–8. In synagogue worship, the congregation heard the Scriptures recited in what became their language for centuries, Aramaic. This Aramaic recitation was called a 'Targum', the Aramaic word for 'translation', but in fact some Targums include new wording as compared to Hebrew originals, and reflect the creative religious language of ancient Judaism. The Targum of Isaiah refers to the divine disclosure on Mount Zion with the verbatim phrase 'the kingdom of the Lord of hosts' (24.23). Jesus' practice of fellowship at meals with his disciples and many others amounted to a claim that the ultimate festivity God desired had already begun. He even promised a prophetic feast with the patriarchs of Israel, raised from the dead, when his followers would recline like aristocrats on couches (Matthew 8.11; Luke 13.29).

Apart from its vivid imagery, the economics of this assertion are striking. Wealth that a Galilean could scarcely imagine is to be enjoyed in the most fundamental medium of peasant exchange – the festive communal meal. This statement is a surreal promise in the context of Nazareth (as in the context of Galilee as a whole); in the setting of the periodic movements of rebellion that broke out in this region, such an economic transformation must have carried with it in the minds of some practitioners at least an implication that foreign wealth was to be appropriated.

In contrast to his embrace of wealth within festal imagery, Jesus also, in a prophetic manner, attacked the wealth that leads to oppression, during the period of his settled activity as a rabbi in Capernaum, a fishing town that he deliberately made his dwelling place in Galilee (Matthew 4.13–16). Despite living there with



Simon and Andrew, moreover, he also voiced the prophetic demand for conventions of wealth to melt away (Luke 6.20b–23):

The poor are favoured, because *yours* is the kingdom of God; Those who hunger now are favoured, because you will be satisfied; Those who weep now are favoured, because you will laugh; You are favoured, when humanity hates you and when they exclude you and censure you and put out your name as evil on the one like the person's account. Rejoice in that day and skip, for look: your reward is great in the heaven; for their fathers did the same things to the prophets.

At first, it seems odd to find these words attributed to Jesus during his period in Capernaum. After all, here was a Jewish town – of a thousand or two rather than a few hundred – with a synagogue and genuine comfort: distinctive houses of basalt, with windows, stairs to upper storeys, ornamental pebbles on the floors, and the relatively luxurious furnishings of ceramic lamps, plates, bowls and cups. All quite unlike Nazareth, and potentially an image of just the sort of festivity Jesus had spoken of in the hill country of Galilee. And yet what had been praised as a metaphor is rejected when it becomes reality.

Confronted with wealth, he praises poverty, or so it might seem at first. But the situation is actually more complex. Capernaum lived off its well-developed port and fishing industry – a coordinated commerce involving those who caught fish, those who stored, those who salted and those who sold. Commerce that complex necessarily involved currency. From the year 19/20 c.e. Herod Antipas had coins struck for towns such as Capernaum at nearby Tiberius. Josephus attests the existence of landless Galileans during this period, who were attracted not only to established towns such as Capernaum, but to the newly founded Tiberias, whose construction on an old cemetery enraged local sentiment against it, but made for cheap land, and even free homesteads donated by Herod Antipas (*Antiquities* 18.36–8).

Jesus' well-known imperative to the townspeople of Capernaum is to reverse this progression, to give away property and follow him along with the other disciples (Mark 10.17–31, cf. the analogous passages in Matthew 19.16–30 and Luke 18.18–30). The urgency of this imperative is especially plain in v. 25, 'It is easier for a camel

to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God.’ A policy of disposing of wealth in order to alleviate poverty is evident both here and elsewhere in the traditions of the New Testament, along with a claim that the reversion to an exchange economy by means of wealth so disposed will bring eternal rewards.

Within the actual conditions of Capernaum, of course, there was virtually no chance that such a policy could succeed among the general population. It is no coincidence that it is precisely to that town that Jesus says (Luke 10.15; cf. Matthew 11.23): ‘And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.’

Nonetheless, Capernaum, rather than Nazareth, became the center of Jesus’ activity, owing to the hospitality and the following he enjoyed there. Two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, stand out as leaders – and leading supporters, from their family holdings in Capernaum – of Jesus’ movement at this stage, from around 24 c.e. (Matthew 4.18–22; Mark 1.16–20). They commanded sufficient resources to be able to support Jesus as well as their own families, and yet kept a sufficient distance from the economic system of the Roman estates so as to enable Jesus to persist in his criticism of unjust *mammon*, as he said in Aramaic (Luke 16.1–9). This period saw Jesus taken into the home of Peter, and his growing reputation as a healer (Matthew 4.23–25; 8.14–15; Mark 1.29–39; Luke 4.38–44). He had been known as a visitor to the synagogue who exorcized unclean spirits (Mark 1.21–28; Luke 4.31–37), but his actual residence there caused a genuine following to gather around him. He became not only a charismatic rabbi, but the conscious leader of a movement designed to promulgate the kingdom of God. Indeed, journeys outward from Capernaum were to some extent undertaken, the Synoptic Gospels indicate, to avoid the crush of casual sympathizers (Mark 1.35–38; Luke 4.42–43).

Small villages in Galilee became as characteristic of Jesus’ activity as streams in the Jordan Valley were within John’s. In political terms, the villages provided camouflage for Jesus. They were not wilderness, and nothing to do with the Jordan Valley, the place of John’s opposition to Herod Antipas. But they were also quite unlike

a city (particularly Sepphoris, a garrison and seat of Antipas' power), where Herod's official presence as well as the occupying Romans were forces to be reckoned with.

## **The rule of Herod Antipas**

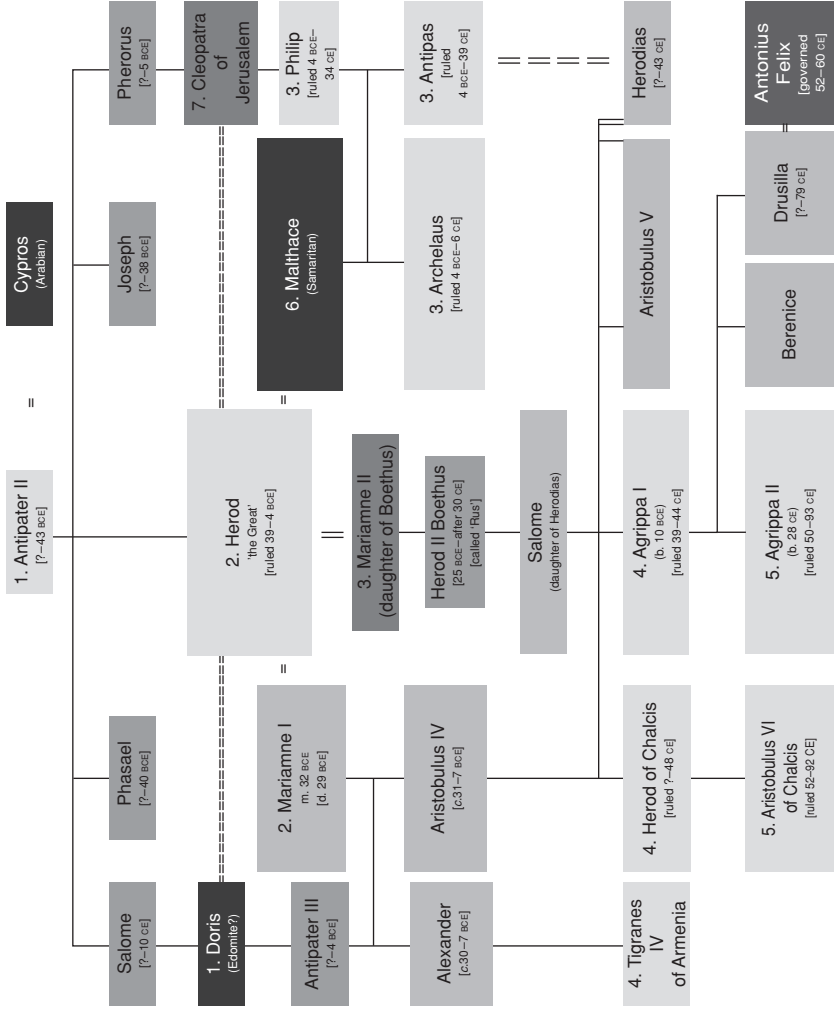
Despite his avoidance of cities and his different pattern of activity from John's, Jesus came to Antipas' attention (Luke 13.31–33):

In that hour some Pharisees came forward, saying to him, 'Get out and go from here! Because Herod wants to kill you.' And he said to them, 'You go, and say to that fox, "Look, I put out demons and will send healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will be completed." Except that I must go today and tomorrow and the following day, because it is not acceptable that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem!'

Jesus puts himself into the general category of prophets who will be killed as a result of their prophecy and sets out to avoid Herod Antipas (see Figure 1 overleaf). When final confrontation with authorities would take place, that was to be in Jerusalem, in the manner of several prophets before Jesus.

Jesus' exorcisms and healings – his reputation as a wonder worker after the model of Elijah and Elisha – had come to Antipas' attention, and Antipas also knew of Jesus' connection to John the Baptist (Mark 6.14–16; Matthew 14.1–2; Luke 9.7–9). By the year 27 c.e. or during the 'fifteenth year of Tiberius' (Luke 3.1, the only chronological notice in the Gospels of Jesus' public activity), Jesus had become too well known to continue to make Capernaum his permanent base.

The support of his disciples now became crucial to Jesus. To them he entrusted his most treasured possession: the teaching he had crafted in order to convey his sense of how God was in the process of transforming the world. His emblematic approach to God in the Lord's Prayer was central to that instruction. The names of the disciples vary in the New Testament somewhat (see Matthew 10.2–4; Mark 3.16–19; Luke 6.13–16; Acts 1.13) for two main reasons. First, there was a confusion between the large group who followed Jesus around Galilee to learn his teaching as thoroughly



Key	
Ruler – client of Rome	Lesser heir of Hasmonean priests
Lesser descendant	Non-Hasmonean Jewish spouse
Roman procurator	Non-Jewish spouse
=	single line > descendants
1.	order of Herod's marriages

**NOTE**

Herod's wives create logistical problems for graphic representation of all his descendants and their complex inter-relationships. The five wives presented above (indicated by a double line: == ) are those whose children had the greatest impact on the history of the House of Herod. For completeness, however, the following table lists all of Herod's ten wives and 16 children. Since Josephus (*Antiquities* 17.19–22) does not give details on most of the marriages and births but, instead, claims that Herod practised polygamy like the Hebrew patriarchs, the numbering in this table should not be interpreted as an exact historical sequence.

Wife	Son(s)	Daughter(s)
1. Doris	1. Antipater III	
2. Mariamne	2. Alexander 3. Aristobulus IV	4. Salampsis* 5. Cypros II
3. Mariamne II	6. Herod II	7. Salome 8. Phaesalis
4. ? (daughter of his sister, Salome)	(none)	(none)
5. ? (daughter of his brother, Pheroras)	(none)	(none)
6. Malthace	9. Archelaus 10. Antipas	11. Olympias
7. Cleopatra of Jerusalem	12. Philip 13. Herod	
8. Pallas	14. Phaesalus	15. Roxanne
9. Phedra		16. Salome
10. Elpis		

\* Herod's oldest daughter Salampsis (4) was married to Phasaël II, the son of Herod's older brother by the same name. They had three sons and two daughters, the youngest of whom (Cypros III, named after Herod's mother) was married to her cousin Agrippa I, the son of her mother's brother, Aristobulus IV (3). She was the mother of Agrippa II. (Marrying daughters to uncles or cousins was common in the family of Herod and other contemporary rulers and was not regarded by Romans or Jews as incest.)

Reference: Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.19–22.

**Figure 2 The house of Herod**

#### Box 1.4. Pray then like this . . .

The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples has become known as the Lord's Prayer and is found in two places in the Gospels, Matthew 6.9–15 and Luke 11.1–4. A third version of the prayer is also found in the *Didache*, an early non-canonical text (for this text see p. 51).

The three versions are not exactly the same, and it is likely that oral variations account for the differences. Despite the differences each version has two parts: the first addresses God and the second makes requests of God for food, forgiveness of debts and deliverance from temptation and evil.

The opening address to God is consonant with the theology of the particular text in which it appears (for more on the work of the Gospel writers in crafting their narrative see pp. 104–17). Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer opens with the direct address of Jesus to God, 'Father, hallowed be your name.' Matthew emphasizes the location of the heavenly Father: 'Our father, the one in the heavens', which is consistent with his instruction to 'call no one father on earth for you have one father, the one in the heavens' (23.9). In Matthew, Jesus instructs the disciples to pray succinctly within the wider context of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), an epitome, or summary, of Jesus' message.

Only the *Didache's* version of the Lord's Prayer concludes with a doxology, that is, a concluding ascription of glory to God. Texts show that various doxologies were added to the Matthaean and Lucan versions of the Lord's Prayer as its liturgical use developed.

At the heart of the Lord's Prayer is the request that God's name be known and God's reign actualized. These ideas echo prayers and narratives of Hebrew Scriptures. Exodus 3.14, for example, records the revelation of God's name; Psalm 145 celebrates God's name and the spread of God's kingdom. Only when God's kingdom comes fully will God be honoured and glorified (Ezekiel 36.20–23). Jewish prayers that may have been in use in the first century C.E., such as parts of the Eighteen Benedictions (or *Tefillah*, literally 'prayer'), ask for forgiveness for the sake of God's name. According to Mishnah *Berakhot* 4.1, the *Tefillah* was said three times daily, as was the Lord's Prayer, according to the *Didache* 8.2–3.

as they could, and the select twelve whom at a later stage Jesus delegated to speak and act on his behalf (Matthew 10.1; Mark 6.7; Luke 9.1).

Luke expands the select group to include 70 or 72 people (Luke 10.1), but that is a symbolic number, corresponding to the traditional number in Judaism of all the non-Jewish nations of the world; Luke's Gospel manifests a particular interest in the promise of Jesus for the Gentiles. The 70 could also represent the 70 elders chosen by Moses in Numbers 11.24–25, but Luke's interests make that less likely. A reasonable estimate is that twenty or thirty disciples in the vicinity of Capernaum, some with wives and children, followed Jesus as best they could. But of course, not all of them could follow him all the time, and the identity of the group would change. That brings us to the second reason for the variation of the names: the larger group of his disciples, from whom the delegates were chosen, came and went, some defecting because they came to disagree with Jesus' increasingly radical teaching.

One element of controversy was Jesus' acceptance of the fellowship of a woman described as sinful (Luke 7.36–50). Female disciples are named, including Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus exorcized repeatedly (8.1–3). The element of scandal here is probably not discussion with women, which was permitted even later in Rabbinic circles, but travel with them, which could not help but prompt suspicions of impropriety. When Jesus spoke of a woman baking as an instance of divine kingdom (Luke 13.21) or referred to himself as a mother bird gathering her young (Matthew 23.37), he was not just inventing arresting images. The lush fecundity of Wisdom, an emphatically feminine image of divine power (see Proverbs 8.22–31), was as basic to God as sexuality was to the people created in God's image, and in one case Jesus even spoke in Wisdom's name (Luke 11.49).

Jesus acknowledged defections from his own controversial views in his parables. The parable of the sower and its interpretation (Mark 4.1–9, 13–20; Matthew 13.1–9, 18–23; Luke 8.4–8, 11–15) expressly involves a theology of failure, the recognition that the word of the kingdom would not always prove productive after sowing. He could even speak trenchantly of someone who sowed bad seed in the midst of good (Matthew 13.24–30), and of fish caught, only to be destroyed

(Matthew 13.47–50). These are parables of harsh judgment, directed against those once associated with Jesus, who had proved themselves useless, or even as hostile.

Opposition was inevitable, from many ordinary practitioners of Judaism, including the Pharisees. In a Rabbinic fashion, Jesus applied Pharisaic principles to respond to their objections. His stance sometimes reflected teachings in the Mishnah. A rabbi named Hillel (50 B.C.E.–10 C.E.) had argued that the inside of a vessel, whether pure or impure, determined the purity or impurity of the whole vessel

### **Box 1.5. Parables**

Parables lie at the heart of Jesus' proclamation of God's realm. Much research on the parables attempts to uncover information about the historical Jesus and his teaching or the intentions of Gospel writers. Other approaches stress reader-oriented interpretations focused away from historical context and towards readers as co-creators of meaning.

Parables are considered as metaphors from a common stock of proverbial comparisons. (In fact, the term translated from Hebrew into English as 'parable' most basically means 'comparison'.) Thus in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus uses a theme from Israelite traditions in which the younger son succeeded at the expense of the elder (compare Cain and Abel; Jacob and Esau). The parable can be read and renamed as a story of restored harmony between estranged children and forgiving fathers. A socio-critical interpretation reads the parable as a Mediterranean family story about a dysfunctional relationship between a father and two sons in which the younger son behaves inappropriately in asking for his inheritance before the father has died. A reader interested in feminist concerns might ask the whereabouts of the mother or sisters in the parable. We might also ask why the younger son has run away in the first place. If, for example, an implied reader with a history of sexual abuse reads the parable, the return of the prodigal son to the patriarchal family could be unhelpful for abused victims. The point here is to recognize that the experience of a reader affects interpretation of the text.



(in the Mishnah, see *Kelim* 25.6). In his criticism of the Pharisees, Jesus adhered to Hillel's principle: cleanness proceeds from within to without and purifies the whole. But if that is the case with cups, he argued with a flash of insight that disarmed his opponents, then all the more so with Israelites who are pure by their intention and the way they work the land. It is what is *within* that makes a person pure. His well-known aphorism conveys just this insight: it is not what goes into a person that defiles one, but what comes out of a person defiles one (Mark 7.15; see also Matthew 15.11). Against the Pharisees, Jesus asserted that purity was a matter of the totality of one's being. One was either clean or unclean; for Jesus, there was no vacillation. The Pharisees' policy for dealing with specific, exterior sources of defilement, skilfully crafted to deal with the complexities of urban pluralism, found no resonance in his mind, formed by the relative isolation of rural Galilee.

The threat of Antipas accounts for Jesus' crossing into Herod Philip's territory (at first in Bethsaida, where some of his disciples had relatives) east of the Sea of Galilee. In stark contrast with Jesus'

### **Box 1.6. Pharisees**

Josephus claims to have been a Pharisee (*Life* 9–12) and Paul is associated with them by his own testimony (Philippians 3.4–6). Josephus describes them as a philosophical sect, attributing to them a belief in an imperishable soul, and eternal punishment for the souls of the wicked. They believe in fate, free will, and God. They make no concession to luxury, and show respect for their elders. In the Gospels the Pharisees often debate with Jesus about issues of purity, including Sabbath observance, fasting, and tithing. The dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees about eating with unclean hands enables Gospel writers to distinguish the Pharisees' 'traditions of the elders' from the commandments of God (Mark 7.1–23; Matthew 15.1–20). The Pharisees may have been a lay group concerned with interpretation and application of religious piety to everyday life, especially as they were concerned with maintaining a standard of purity consistent with worship in the Temple.

acceptance – albeit at a safe distance from the danger Capernaum now posed – of the delegation from the centurion garrisoned there (Matthew 8.5–13; Luke 7.1–10), his reaction to an attempt at reconciliation by his own family was forbidding (Mark 3.31–35; Matthew 12.46–50; Luke 8.19–21). When they sent a delegation of family friends to him, he would not interrupt his teaching to greet them: ‘Whoever does the will of God that is my brother and sister and mother.’ Still more surprising is his sojourn in Decapolis. Despite some success (Mark 7.31–37; Matthew 15.29–31), the time in Decapolis proved a disaster on the whole, in that Jesus’ practice of purity and the proudly Hellenistic ethos of that region were as incompatible as the pure waters of the sea of Galilee proved to be with the swine that drowned therein (Mark 5.1–20; Matthew 8.28–34; Luke 8.26–39).

The fiasco of attempting to establish a base outside territorial Israel led Jesus to the innovation of the Twelve, a number that relates to the theological purpose of the institution. Hunted by Herod Antipas in Galilee itself, uncertain of safety within the domain of Herod Philip, repulsed by the Gentile population east of the Sea of Galilee, where exactly could Jesus go? How could he continue to reach Galilee with his message?

His response to this dilemma was a stroke of genius that assured the wider promulgation of the message of the kingdom: he dispatched twelve disciples as delegates on his behalf. The practice of sending a delegate (a *shaliach*) was common in the Middle East to seal a marriage or business contract. The role of ‘apostle’, from the Greek term *apostolos* (which translates *shaliach*) came out of the ordinary practice of sending a go-between to settle routine transactions. Jesus applied this custom of personal, business and military life to spread his own ideas and practices. He dispatched each *shaliach* to do what he did: proclaim God’s kingdom and heal (Matthew 10.1–16; Mark 6.6–13; Luke 9.1–5).

Those who were sent by Jesus had crossed with him into Herod Philip’s territory. There was Peter, his ‘Rock’, the two noisy brothers James and John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, another James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon called ‘Zealot’, and Judas Iscariot (Mark 3.16–18; Matthew 10.2–4; Luke 6.14–16). Other disciples, such as Nathanael and Kleopas, did not take on

the role of a delegate, which involved more hardship than honor; it is not surprising that only twelve (rather than the 70 of Luke) took on the task.

Yet their success was such that Jesus could not avoid confronting the possibility of militant insurrection, as is reflected in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6.1–15; Mark 6.32–44; Matthew 14.13–21; Luke 9.10–17). The Gospels (but for Luke, which places the incident near Bethsaida) report that five thousand men followed Jesus into the Syrian wilderness, but the precise number obviously cannot be known. The total population of Galilee was about 150,000 at this point, less than half of whom were Jews living among the 204 cities and villages (Josephus, *Life* 235); even one thousand would have represented some 4 per cent of able-bodied Jewish men, the most militant arm of Galilean Judaism. Jesus' movement had become politically significant, but militarily far short of overwhelming. Over a period of several months, what have been described as would-be zealots abandoned their families, left their peasant life behind and their hillside villages, covertly making their way north and east, into the rolling countryside well outside Herod Antipas' jurisdiction. Although an overtly political program is eschewed by Jesus in the narrative of his temptations (Matthew 4.1–11; Luke 4.1–13), it is telling that he had to resist the impulse to turn himself into the king some of his followers wanted him to be (see John 6.15).

Written as they are to support the Christian practice of Eucharist in the Hellenistic world, the Gospels imbue this feeding with deeply symbolic significance. From only five loaves of bread and two fish that Jesus blessed and broke, the delegates fed the crowd, and collected remnants in twelve baskets. Twelve, the number of the clans of ancient Israel, marks the event as the promise of feeding all Israel. Within the setting of Jesus, however, the crucial decision was to attempt no insurrection in the wilderness against Antipas, but in a prophetic manner to resolve his fate in Jerusalem.

## **Deep controversy concerning the Temple in Jerusalem**

Jesus' resolve was not to lead any military revolt, but to press for a program of climactic sacrifice in Jerusalem. The transfiguration represents a key moment of decision, in a story whose sacrificial overtones become plain when its Old Testament antecedents are observed (Matthew 16.28—17.13; Mark 9.1–13; Luke 9.27–36). Jesus is transformed before Peter, James and John – the three disciples who became preeminent in his movement immediately prior to and just after the resurrection – into a gleaming white figure, speaking with Moses and Elijah. Jesus' visions were not merely private; years of communal meditation made what he saw and experienced vivid to his own disciples as well.

On Mount Hermon, the probable location of this event, Jesus followed in the footsteps of Moses, who took three of his followers (Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) up Mount Sinai, where they ate and drank to celebrate their vision of the God of Israel on his sapphire throne (see Exodus 24.1–11). But unlike what happened on Moses' mountain, Jesus' disciples, covered by a shining cloud of glory, hear a voice, 'This is my son, the beloved, in whom I take pleasure: hear him', and when the cloud passed they found Jesus without Moses and Elijah, standing alone as God's son (Matthew 17.5). Divine 'son' was the same designation Jesus had heard during his immersion with John the Baptist (Matthew 3.13–17; Mark 1.9–11; Luke 3.21–22): now his own disciples saw and heard the truth of his vision.

In a manner symmetrical with the baptism, the voice that came after the luminous cloud in the transfiguration insisted that the same Spirit that had animated Moses and Elijah was present in Jesus, and that he could pass on that Spirit to his followers, each of whom could also become a 'son'. In the transfiguration, Peter offers to build 'huts' or 'booths' for Jesus, Moses and Elijah (Mark 9.5–6; Matthew 17.4; Luke 9.33). In so doing, Peter in his fear is presented as not knowing what to say by the Greek-speaking writers of the Gospels, but the 'huts' in question are reminiscent of those built at Sukkoth, the feast of Tabernacles. That was the sacrificial feast that, according to Zechariah 14, was to see the transformation of Israel and the world.

Attempting this sacrifice, enacting the prophecy of Zechariah, brought Jesus into direct opposition with the high priest, Caiaphas. Jesus' actual entry into Jerusalem probably took place at Sukkoth in the year 31 C.E.; that is the feast when waving and strewing branches at the altar was a regular part of processional practice (see Mark 11.8 and *Sukkah* 3.1—4.6 in the Mishnah, and the echo of 'Hosanna' of Mark 11.9 in *Sukkah* 3.9; 4.5).

The Aramaic Targum of Zechariah predicts that God's kingdom (14.9) will be manifested over the entire earth when the offerings of Sukkoth are presented by both Israelites and non-Jews at the Temple. It further predicts that these worshippers will prepare and offer their sacrifices themselves without the intervention of middlemen. The last words of the book promise, 'and there shall never again be a *trader* in the *sanctuary* of the Lord of hosts at that *time*' (Targum Zechariah 14.21, innovative wording italicized). The thrust of the Targumic prophecy brought on the dramatic confrontation that Jesus would shortly provoke in the Temple.

Enthusiastic supporters swarmed around Jesus, including his brother James. James adhered to his brother's movement once Jesus' program was defined in terms of sacrifice, rather than exorcism or military revolt. Jesus' focus on sacrifice in the Temple rather than revolt – which had perplexed the militant expectation of the '5,000' – was exactly what brought James to his side. Two things about James stand out from the principal sources from which we learn about him (Acts, Josephus and the historian Hegesippus from the second century): he never participated in armed revolt and never wavered in his loyalty to the Temple. He remained devoted to the practice of sacrifice and became famous for his piety in Jerusalem, where he was ultimately killed in 62 C.E. by a high priest who was jealous of the reverence in which he was held (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.197–203).

Although the stratagem of Jesus, in converting a potential revolution into apocalyptic sacrifice, was brilliant at several levels, it ultimately misfired. Conflict with Caiaphas was perhaps inevitable, given Jesus' commitment to implementing the program of Zechariah. But in addition Caiaphas had newly been emboldened to change arrangements in the Temple. According to the Talmud, forty years before the destruction of the Temple (that is, during Jesus'

last visit to Jerusalem), Caiaphas had expelled the Sanhedrin from their special room and place of honor called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, within the Court of the Israelites in the Temple. The Sanhedrin, consisting of priestly aristocrats, Pharisees and notables of Jerusalem, were the council of some 70 of the most important Jews in the city, who advised Caiaphas and Pilate on cultic and civic matters. They were ‘exiled’, as their own recollection of this expulsion put it, to Chanuth (according to the Babylonian Talmud in *Shabbat* 15a; *Sanhedrin* 41a; *Avodah Zarah* 8b), the market most likely on the Mount of Olives. That expulsion permitted Caiaphas to set up vendors in the porticos of the Temple.

Jesus’ Zecharian storming of the Temple (John 2.13–16; Mark 11.15–16; Matthew 21.12; Luke 19.45) challenged Caiaphas directly, by forcing out of the Temple the trade that Caiaphas had authorized there. After his occupation of the Temple, when it became clear that he could not prevail against the high priest, Jesus denied the efficacy of sacrifice in the Temple. He called the wine and the bread of his own fellowship meal the ‘blood’ and ‘flesh’ of true sacrifice (Luke 22.15–20; Mark 14.22–25; Matthew 26.26–29). In their original setting, these words meant that Jesus set up his meals with his disciples – which were regular occasions to celebrate God’s kingdom both before and after his last pilgrimage to Jerusalem – as a replacement for offerings in the Temple. Even some of his own disciples, Judas among them, were appalled by that implicit blasphemy, which played into Caiaphas’ hands (John 6.60–71; 13.21–30; Matthew 26.21–25; Luke 22.21–23).

Fatefully, unknown to Jesus, the high priest’s influence over the Roman prefect of the Judaea province, Pontius Pilate, was about to increase exponentially. On 18 October 31 (the same year that Jesus entered Jerusalem), the commander of the Roman imperial guard, Sejanus, had been executed in Rome. This weakened Pilate’s position, because Sejanus had approved the harsh attitude of Pilate’s earlier policies towards local authorities in Judaea. Pilate became more susceptible to conciliation with Caiaphas. Between then and the subsequent Passover, probably in the year 32 after a longer period than the Gospels indicate, Caiaphas managed to gain Pilate’s consent to the crucifixion, with the approval of a much-relieved Antipas (Luke 23.6–12).

Attempts have been made to compute the date of the crucifixion according to when Passover fell on a Friday; that yields the familiar alternatives of 30 and 33 C.E.. But the authorities in Mark 14.2 decide to *avoid* putting Jesus to death during the feast of Passover, when the crowds would have been a threat to their plans. It appears that the calendrical association of Jesus' death and Passover is a product of the liturgical practice of Christianity, which prepared candidates for baptism during the Paschal season. Liturgy is also responsible for the presentation of the events concerning Jesus' death in a single Passion Week (between Palm Sunday and Easter).

The successful execution of Jesus, of course, did not end his influence. The conviction that God had raised him from the dead, however, went beyond the assurance that Jesus had been vindicated personally. Rather, faith in the resurrection developed the force that it did because, during his life and particularly in the midst of his last controversy in the Temple, Jesus had insisted that God was in the process of transforming society and nature to the benefit of all people, which meant that his vindication changed the nature of worship forever, and changed what would become of the world.

## **Bibliographical background**

Study of Jesus has been well served in recent years by the multi-volume project of John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991 (series continued in New Haven by Yale University Press)). The perspective of this chapter reflects that work, and others that place Jesus within his environment in Judaism. That contextualization has been challenged by some scholars, who have attempted to mount the argument that Jesus was a Hellenistic thinker. The foremost representative of this school of thought in recent years has been John Dominic Crossan in, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). Crossan has since acknowledged that archaeological investigation has gone against his theory in a book he wrote with Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).



Reed has been more trenchant in this regard in *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000). For a still more vigorous statement of how archaeology has undermined the fashion of the past few decades of scholarship, see Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Another way of denying Jesus' Jewish environment has been the argument that scholars have only emphasized Jesus' Jewish identity in the wake of the Holocaust; see Paul Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009). In fact, the perspective arose with the historical critical method, an inheritance of the Reformation; see Bruce Chilton and C. A. Evans (eds), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, New Testament Tools and Studies 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1994 and 1998 [in paperback]).

Themes developed in this chapter rely on recent work on the *Merkavah* – see Timo Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Exaltation Discourse*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.142 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); the Targums – see Bruce Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (Wilmington, Delaware: Glazier, 1984, 216; also published with the subtitle, *Jesus' Own Interpretation of Isaiah* in London: SPCK, 1984); and the archaeological evidence regarding synagogues and *miqva'oth* – see Dan Urman and Paul V. M. Flesher (eds), *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, Studia post-Biblica 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1998). Work of that kind has been applied to the question of Jesus' development in Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000). Paula Fredriksen investigates the relative responsibility of Roman and Jewish authorities for Jesus' death, with particular emphasis on the Romans' intent to deter the followers of Jesus, in *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999). The claim of the Gospels that Jesus was Messiah, the anointed one of God, is also found in Paul. While many writers still redefine 'Messiah' to bring it into line with their religious convictions about Jesus, the concept nonetheless coheres with Jesus' crucifixion and the inscription over the cross, 'The King of the Jews'. This discus-



sion speaks to the question of messianic self-consciousness, which is also embedded in Jesus' relationship to the book of Zechariah; see Deirdre J. Good, *Jesus the Meek King* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999).

## Exercises

### 1. Birth stories

Accounts of Jesus' birth exist in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. They share common features but differ in details. Scholars think that these narratives were added after the bulk of Gospel material had been composed. Thus it is possible to see motifs and themes in them reflected elsewhere in the Gospel and, conversely, that they encapsulate the Gospel in which they occur. Setting out the different elements of the birth stories of Matthew and Luke side by side helps to highlight the differences in their accounts (see Table 1 overleaf).

#### *Questions*

- 1 Are there core elements to the story of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke?
- 2 Are these core elements known to the Gospels of John or Mark?
- 3 What are the particular features of Matthew 1—2 and how might they be explained?
- 4 What are the key features of Luke's account and how might they be explained?

### 2. Parables

Jesus often taught his followers using parables, deceptively simple stories based in the realities of everyday life (for more on this see the box on p. 38). One parable that has been interpreted very differently by scholars is the Vineyard Workers (Matthew 20.1–16).

#### *Questions*

- 1 If the vineyard owner is identified with God, how might the parable be interpreted? What is the principle of justice operative in the parable? Does it resonate with ideas of justice elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel (see for example Matthew 5.20)?

- 2 How might the parable be interpreted from a social-scientific perspective in which the vineyard owner is a member of an oppressive elite being judged for his unfair treatment of workers? Who are the tenants and what might the message of the parable be?

### 3. The Lord's Prayer

The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples has become known as 'The Lord's Prayer' and is probably the best-known prayer of the Christian tradition. Read the text box 'Pray then like this . . .' on p. 38 and then compare these three versions of the prayer (see Table 2).

**Table 1: Comparison of accounts in Matthew and Luke**

<i>Matthew 1—2 (48 verses)</i>	<i>Luke 1—2 (132 verses)</i>
1.18–24 An angel tells Joseph of Jesus' birth in a dream	1.5–38 Gabriel tells Zechariah of John the Baptist's birth; then Mary of Jesus' birth 1.39–80 Mary visits Elizabeth; John the Baptist is born and circumcised 2.1–5 Joseph and Mary journey to Bethlehem for the census
1.25—2.1a Mary's son is born in Bethlehem of Judaea and named Jesus	2.6–7 Mary gives birth to a son in Bethlehem of Judaea 2.8–20 Angels appear to shepherds who visit the child in a manger 2.21 The infant is circumcised and named Jesus
1.1b–12 Magi come from the East visiting Herod then Jesus	
2.13–21 Joseph takes 'the child and his mother' to Egypt where they remain until the death of Herod	
2.22–23 They return to Israel and settle in Nazareth to fulfil prophecies	2.39–40 The trio returns to Nazareth 2.41–52 A teenage Jesus and extended family visit the Jerusalem Temple

**Table 2: The Lord's Prayer**

<i>Matthew 6.9–15</i>	<i>Luke 11.1–4</i>	<i>Didache 8.2</i>
Our Father, the one in the heavens	Father,	Our Father, the one in the heaven
Hallowed be your name	Hallowed be your name	Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.	Your kingdom come.	Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;	Give us each day our daily bread;	Give us this day our bread for the morrow;
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors;	And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us;	And forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us;
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.	And lead us not into temptation.	And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the power and glory are yours forever.

### **Questions**

- 1 What are the differences between these three versions of the Lord's Prayer?
- 2 Why is the Lord's Prayer absent from Mark's and John's Gospels?
- 3 Summarize the content of the prayer. Are there specifically Christian elements (compare e.g. Exodus 3.14; Psalm 145; Ezekiel 36.20–23)? Could you imagine someone Jewish praying this prayer today?

### **4. The last words of Jesus**

Jesus' last words before he died on the cross were considered significant by each of the Gospel writers. However, they each record his words differently:

- Mark 15.34: At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

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- Matthew 27.46: And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'
- Luke 23.46: Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last.
- John 19.28–30: After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the Scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

### *Questions*

- 1 Does it make a difference to the reader's understanding of Mark and Matthew if Jesus' words seem to be quoting Psalm 22?
- 2 Why do Gospels written in Greek preserve Aramaic words of Jesus? Where else does this happen and what is its significance? (Begin by looking at the following passages: Mark 5.41; 14.36.)
- 3 How do you account for the variations among Jesus' last words as reported in the Gospels?

### **Further reading**

- M. A. Beavis (ed.), *The Lost Coin: Parables of Women, Work and Wisdom* (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002)
- Mark A. Chauncy, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series 134 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Bruce Chilton, *Jesus' Prayer and Jesus' Eucharist: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997)
- Elizabeth M. Dowling and W. George Scarlett (eds), *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2006), 'Lord's Prayer', 267–9
- Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996)

*Jesus and his social worlds*

Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2008)

Joan Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism, Studying the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997)

Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York and London: Penguin, 2004)



**Figure 3. Ephesus Theater:** The Emperor Augustus made Ephesus the capital of the Roman province of Asia, in which it became the preeminent city in commercial, cultural, and philosophical terms despite a destructive earthquake in 23 C.E. Acts 19 describes Paul’s effect on the city, reflecting the realities of a sizeable Jewish population (although a synagogue has yet to be located), a thriving market in idols connected with a monumental temple to Artemis, and serious differences among Christian preachers. *Photo by Norman Herr, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (public domain image).*