

# The Land of Palestine: Where Jesus Lived

*Looking into the Face of Jesus*  
*The Life of Christ, 1: Pages 18-26*

## Outline: Lesson Plan 3

### Introduction

- A. We have looked at the political circumstances of Jesus' world.
- B. Now let us give our attention to the physical environment of His world.

### I. The Land of Palestine

- A. In the OT—the land into which Jesus was born was called Canaan.
  - 1. In the NT, it was known as Palestine.
  - 2. From north to south, the distance was about 150 miles. The land covered approximately 10,000 to 12,000 square miles. Forty of our Fifty US states are larger than this.
- B. Three provinces become known.
  - 1. Judea
  - 2. Samaria
  - 3. Galilee
- C. The Jews dominated Judea. Jesus visited Judea many times during feast days.
  - 1. Judea was in the south of Palestine.
  - 2. Judea contained Jerusalem, the capital of religious activities.
- D. Samaria was occupied by a group called Samaritans. They were a race of "half-Jews." Samaria was in the middle of Palestine.
- E. Galilee had a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Jesus spent most of His life in Galilee. Galilee was to the far north.

### II. Changes in Designation

- A. By the end of the OT, God's people were already known as Jews, but by the NT times, "Jews" was the primary designation.
  - 1. Sometimes they were called Israelites.
  - 2. At other times, they were called Hebrews because of their traditional language.
  - 3. Hebrews—descendants of Abraham
  - 4. Israelites—descendants of Jacob
  - 5. Jews—descendants of Judah
- B. These are the main terms of designation for the Israelites that we need to remember.

### III. Changes in Language

- A. After Babylonian captivity, Aramaic gradually replaced Hebrew.
- B. The universal language in the NT days was Greek.
- C. The official language of the Roman government was Latin.
- D. Remember, the sign above Jesus' head on the cross was written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

#### **IV. Changes in Occupation**

- A. Before captivity, Jews were farmers and herdsman.
- B. During captivity, they discovered that they possessed trading skills.
- C. During NT times, Jewish businessmen were scattered all over the world.

#### **V. Changes in Worship**

- A. The temple was still important to the Jews, but it was basically destroyed.
  - 1. Herod the Great had begun rebuilding the temple around 16 years before Jesus' birth.
  - 2. It was in construction throughout Jesus' life.
  - 3. It was finally completed around AD 60, but it was destroyed again by Rome in AD 70.
  - 4. Most Jews traveled to Jerusalem several times a year for the feasts.
- B. By the time of Christ, the synagogue was the heart of religious life among the Jews. Synagogues are not mentioned in the OT, but they are prominent in the NT.
  - 1. Synagogues probably originated while the nation was in captivity. It only took 10 Jewish men to organize a synagogue. They were located wherever Jews lived.
  - 2. The worship in the synagogues on the Sabbath was rather simple: songs, prayers, reading of the Scriptures, and Scripture studies.

#### **VI. Changes in Religious Leadership**

- A. In the OT, priests were the recognized religious leaders.
- B. During Jesus' ministry, Judaism had two high priests (Luke 3:2).
  - 1. The High Priest Annas had been removed by the Roman governor.
  - 2. Annas had his son-in-law, Caiaphas, take his place (John 18:13). Annas still had much influence.
- C. Other leaders emerged—the first were "rabbis" (Matthew 23: 7, 8).
  - 1. They were the teachers in the synagogues and schools.
  - 2. Rabbis had largely replaced priests in religious authority.
- D. Next were the scribes—the word translates "writer."
  - 1. Originally, scribes were to record important events.
  - 2. During NT times, the scribes were to make copies of the OT.
  - 3. They were sometimes called lawyers because they were known as authorities on the Law. They were specialists in religious Law, and many scribes were Pharisees.
- E. Next was the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court, which was sometimes referred to as "council."
  - 1. Traditionally, it consisted of 70 members; it began around 200 BC.

2. The High Priest served as president. Many of these members were Sadducees.
- F. It was important for these leadership groups to maintain the status quo, and they became Jesus' greatest foes.

## VII. The Rise of Sectarianism

- A. Jewish sects became prominent in Jesus' day. Most were influenced by politics and culture, but they deserve our time and study.
- B. Pharisees—literally means “to separate”
1. Most believe they started existing when Seleucid tried to make Jews Greeks.
  2. During Jesus' day they became a sect of self-righteousness and formalism (Matthew 23:1–36).
  3. Small in number but great in influence, they were popular among the Jews.
  4. They considered the “traditions of the elders” as binding as the Law itself.
  5. When Christ dismissed the traditions (Matthew 15:1–14), the Pharisees became bitter enemies.
- C. Sadducees—a wealthy, aristocratic group, many of whom were priests
1. They originated about the same time as Pharisees. They accepted Greek ways.
  2. Because they cooperated with whomever was in control, they became a political force.
  3. Because they accepted Greek philosophy, they rejected the concepts of resurrection and life after death and even angels. They hated Jesus because He threatened their authority.
- D. Other Sects
1. Herodians—political group dedicated to placing a Herod on the throne
  2. Zealots—dedicated to overcoming Rome with a sword
  3. Essenes—religious extremist group who separated from society that is not mentioned in the Bible but is in history

## VIII. Messianic Expectations

- A. The Jews were eagerly looking for God's Messiah. “Messiah” is a Hebrew word that means “anointed one.” Of course, they thought that He would be a king of physical Israel.
- B. The anticipation of the coming Messiah can be seen in Luke 2:25–38 with the reactions of Simeon and Anna.
- C. With the anticipation, why was Jesus not accepted?
1. He was rejected because He did not fit their expectations.
  2. The Jewish people thought they needed a strong political and military leader to overcome the Romans.
  3. Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).
  4. Isaiah 53:2 predicted that the Messiah would grow up “like a root out of the parched ground.”

5. The hearts of the people were still like the parched, dry earth.
6. However, the religion of Jesus would ultimately grow and spread throughout the world.

### **Conclusion**

- A. What lessons do we learn from Jesus being born in Palestine?  
God goes from small to great. The area was small so Jesus could travel from place to place in it.
- B. Jesus fully tasted of humanity.

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