
Analyzing Jesus Christ in the Gospels vis-a-vis Galilean Lifestyle

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Jesus in Context:

The Influence of the Galilee Region on the Life and Ministry of Jesus and His Followers

Introduction: History, Faith, and the Cultural Context of Jesus of Nazareth

According to the popular periodical Newsweek, 93 percent of Americans believe that Jesus of Nazareth existed as a historical figure ("The Christmas Miracle"), yet scholars continue to struggle with the question of how best to understand the founder of the world's largest religion. Assuming that Jesus lived in a definite historical period, one of the most significant factors in developing an accurate portrait of Jesus' life is an understanding of the cultural setting in which he lived. Due to the lack of a common foundation on which to build a thesis for such a portrait, however, scholars often clash over the specifics of the major influences that contributed to Jesus' ministry. Many scholars contend that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet of the Judaic tradition, the exclusive product of Hebrew beliefs and customs. In such "Judaic" renderings of the life of Jesus, put forward by scholars like E.P. Sanders, gentile culture plays only a peripheral role in the development of Jesus' beliefs and ministry. By contrast, others have de-emphasized Jesus' role as a Jewish prophet and cast him instead as a Hellenistic teacher of wisdom, who inherited much of his material from the philosophy of the Greek cynic school. Writing from this perspective in his book *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, J.D. Crossan describes Jesus as a "peasant Jewish cynic (Crossan 421)."

In addition to the question of Jesus' cultural influences, scholars often question whether studying and assessing the Jesus presented in the Bible - the "Jesus of faith" - can be anything other than an obfuscation or interference in discovering the historical man who lived in the first century A.D. - the "Jesus of history." At the extreme end of skeptical scholarship are contentions that dismiss the "Jesus of faith" not as irrelevant or obfuscating, but as outright fraudulent.

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Scholars in this camp will often argue that the Jesus presented in the New Testament is an elaborately constructed myth, with St. Paul often credited as the intelligence behind the construction. In contrast to the skeptical view, early 20th century scholar Rudolph Bultmann suggests, in his influential writings such as *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, that attempts to find the "objective" Jesus of history - apart from orthodox Christian faith - "produced only diverse and often conflicting results (McLaughlin)."

Following Bultmann's suggestion, I begin this study with the presupposition that the conflict between history and faith - whether artificial or actual - has been largely fruitless as a focal point of historical Jesus research. Rather than attempting to reconcile competing theories, I suggest that secular scholars and religious researchers alike would benefit from the introduction of a common foundation on which to construct a portrait of the historical Jesus. Such an interpretive approach can be found in what I and other scholars have termed Jesus' "Galilean Context." I suggest that the "Galilean Context" of Jesus can serve as a mutual focal point between the two often juxtaposed poles of Biblical scholarship - those that favor a purely secular interpretation of Jesus, and those that wish to emphasize the Christ of tradition - while offering fresh insights for both the scholarly community and the Church. A broad survey of the "Galilean Context's" ramifications for contemporary scholarship lies beyond the scope of this study. However, an overview of the Galilee region's cultural, historical, and geographic makeup is sufficient to demonstrate the significance of Jesus' "Galilean Context" as an interpretive tool for shedding light on the development of his life and ministry.

Furthermore, a "Galilean" interpretation of Jesus offers insight into the differences between Jesus and the religious establishment of his time, and can be useful in explaining the characteristics of Jesus' ministry that caused him to be put to death. Barring Jesus of Nazareth's alleged supernatural activity, the trait that most sets him apart from his contemporaries is his uncanny ability to reach across cultural boundaries and appeal to those who were traditionally excluded from first century Jewish society. Taking into account both Biblical and secular sources, it is clear that Jesus utilized the cultural diversity, economic climate, and geography of the Galilee region as the primary vehicle by which to communicate his message to both Jews and Gentiles.

Historical Context: An Intercultural Crossroads

Just as Galilee culturally stands at the center of Jesus' life and ministry, likewise the Sea of Galilee (see Figure 1) itself is central to understanding what it was for Jesus to be a Galilean. A natural depression surrounded by fertile hills, the Sea of Galilee forms a natural amphitheater 690 feet below sea level, making it the second lowest point on the Earth's surface. In contrast to the low elevation of the sea, the adjacent Hills of Galilee rise 1,500 feet above sea level on the western coasts, while the Golan Heights reach over 2,000 feet above sea level to the east. With

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a circumference of 33 miles and an approximate area of 64 square miles, the Sea of Galilee is the largest freshwater body in Israel.

Because of its freshwater composition, the Sea of Galilee would more accurately be described as a lake or "inland sea." The Sea of Galilee's status as a lake was well known in ancient times, as is revealed in Josephus' description of the region in *The Jewish War*: "The Lake of Gennesar has sweet, excellent water, perfectly pure, and the lake ends in pebbly or sandy beaches everywhere (Maier 310)." Similarly, the author of Luke 5:1 records that Jesus "stood by the Lake of Gennesaret" when he addressed the masses. Both authors associate the Sea of Galilee with the fruitful plain of Gennesaret, which lies on the sea's northwestern coast.

Luke is not unique in using alternate names for the body of water commonly called "Galilee," and the names attached to this lake are often indicative of the cultural composition of the region. In Hebrew, Galilee is often known as Yam Kinneret or Chinneroth, both of which describe the lake's elegant "lyre shape" (Dunston). Galilee's roots in Jewish history reach deep into the soil of the Old Testament, with the first mention of the region being made in Joshua 20:7. In Isaiah 8:23, Galilee is called by the Hebrew word *Gelil haggoyim*, meaning "the region of nations" (Galilee: Etymology). In its Old Testament context, the word "nations" is synonymous with "gentiles" or "heathens," which strongly implies that Galilee was wedged within the vicinity of many non-Jewish peoples.

In spite of the groping fingers of "the nations," however, the region would remain under the control of the Israelites until the armies of Assyria flooded the Northern Kingdom in 732 B.C., seizing Galilee from its Semitic masters (Sea of Galilee). Along with the rest of Palestine, Galilee would later buckle beneath the pressure of Alexander the Great's quest for Hellenistic hegemony in c. 330 B.C. Scholars who see echoes of the Greek cynic school in Jesus' teachings find support for their position in the resulting fusion of Jewish and Greek culture, which still permeated the region in the first century A.D.

Out of Alexander's conquests rose the Decapolis on Galilee's eastern shore (see Figure 1) - a collection of ten Greek cities eventually unified under Roman rule (Middendorf). The Gospels indicate that Jesus and his entourage visited the Greek Decapolis on the eastern shore of Galilee, where they journeyed to the city of Gadara as recorded in Mark 5:1. Among the Gentile population, Christ performed a series of miracles including the exorcism of the demon "Legion" mentioned in Mark 5. Following the miracle, Jesus saw the opportunity he had to spread his message amongst the Gentile population of the region and used the cured man as a vehicle for his reputation, as revealed in the Gospel narrative:

"As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demonpossessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, 'Go home to your family and tell them how much the

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Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. (Mark 5:18-20; emphasis mine)."

As a result of this missionary activity, Jesus' popularity grew in the region, as evidenced by the "great multitudes of people... from Decapolis" mentioned in Matthew 4:25. Based on Scripture, it seems that Jesus actually made a second trip into the Decapolis later in his ministry. Mark 7:31 reports that after an interlude in Tyre and Sidon to the north of Galilee, Jesus returned to the Galilee region and went "into the region of the Decapolis."

In the decades following his ministry, Jesus' influence on the Decapolis would continue to reverberate in the growing Christian community. Philadelphia, a Decapolis city far south of the Sea of Galilee, would become the site of a thriving church for whom the author of Revelation offers the highest praise in verses 3:7-11.

Following Alexander's conquests, Galilee would remain in cultural and political flux until the Maccabean revolt during the last century B.C. briefly reclaimed the lost crown of Jewish sovereignty. With a large Jewish migration into the region during the mid-100s B.C., Galilee briefly regained its Jewish character, only to fall again to Roman conquest in 63 B.C.

The author of John refers to "the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1)", connecting Galilee with the Roman city of Tiberias (see Figure 1), which stood on the lake's western shore. For Jews living in the era of Roman occupation, Tiberias was a place of dubious reputation. Constructed under the direction of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, Tiberias was a stalwart monument to the Roman presence in the region. In spite of Tiberias' pre-eminence, the city's odious cemetery repulsed the local Jewish population, who viewed the presence of a burial ground as ritually unclean (Sea of Galilee).

Intercultural tolerance was in short supply in first century Palestine, however, and Herod eventually "attracted" Jewish settlers to the city by force. Left to brace themselves against a crumbling wall of ethnic identity, these Jews would continue to practice their traditions throughout the first century, eventually transforming the once profane city of Tiberias into a center of Jewish scholarship that would play a decisive role in the compilation of rabbinical commentaries such as the Mishna and the Talmud (Sea of Galilee).

In a technical sense, first century Galilee was a "client kingdom" of the Roman Empire, meaning that it was essentially self-governing but ultimately subjugated to the greater will of its imperial masters (Hanson). A client king, such as Herod Antipas, would rule autonomously, but he, in turn, would be responsible for maintaining Caesar Augustus' good will by sending tribute to Rome. From a practical standpoint, this meant that the local region could maintain much of its

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cultural identity, as it did under the Jewish Antipas (Hanson). However, the peace that such a system created was ephemeral, being constituted by the necessity of compromise rather than contentment. On the occasions when this structure weakened, the stirrings of rebellion could burst through the dam of stability. Josephus reports in Jewish Antiquities that while the Romans were distracted by internecine strife between Archelaus and Antipas, revolutionary activity took its toll on the Galilee region:

"the whole country was without any government, and erupted in violence. ...Judas, son of Ezekias the bandit plundered Galilee, while Simon, a slave of Herod, crowned himself king and burned the royal palace in Jericho until he was caught and beheaded... Athronges, a huge shepherd... with his burly brothers... conducted a guerilla campaign... and others also spread ruin and desolation over the country (Maier 258)."

It was this internal tension that stirred the authorities of Jesus' time to question his motives and accuse him of undermining the Roman authority. Reporting for PBS' From Jesus to Christ, L. Michael White, Professor of Classics and Director of the Religious Studies Program University of Texas at Austin, posits that the term "Galilean" itself carried loaded connotations in the first century.

"To some," he suggests, "it just might mean an outsider, or someone who's not really an old Jew of the traditional sort. Precisely because the Galilee had traditionally not been Jewish at the time of the Maccabean Revolt a hundred or 150 years before Jesus. But from another perspective, "Galilean" also took on the coloration of being rebellious, or insurrectionist...so for some, the term 'Galilean' might also mean something political (From Jesus to Christ)."

Many of Christ's followers, in fact, wanted him to be a revolutionary figure in the vein of Judas the Galilean, as evidenced by their attempts to crown him king in John 6:15. Yet, Jesus himself seems to have been alienated from the anti-Roman movement, because he responds to the attempted coronation by departing into a mountain "himself alone." Nonetheless, the Roman authorities appear to have associated him with the more radical currents of the Galilee. Ironically, the immediate consequence of Jesus' teachings was the same as that of many Galilean radicals, as described by Josephus: "Tiberius Alexander... crucified James and Simon, the sons of Judas the Galilean, who had aroused the people to rebellion (Maier 273)."

Developmental Context: Galilee During Christ's "Formative Years"

Because of the ethnic composition of the region, it would be possible for an individual living in first century Galilee to experience aspects of both Jewish and Gentile culture. As the two worlds became, of necessity, more entwined, it is likely that each succeeding generation would become more of a composite of the two.

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Little of Jesus' youth is revealed in the Gospels, yet the impact that these years would have on his ministry cannot be underestimated. In the isolated hills of the Galilean town of Nazareth (see Figure 1) that Christ would find the raw materials of many of his most enduring parables - seeds being sown, grapes ripening on the vine, and farmers ardently shaping the land. Such images resurface throughout the teachings of Christ, as in the parable of the farmer and the seeds in Matthew 13, the parable of the sheep in Matthew 18, and the parable of the fruit tree of Matthew 3. By contrast, Jesus rarely draws on examples from commerce or military life in his teachings, nor does he employ the legalistic language that would be expected of a teacher from Jerusalem.

Although the New Testament is our only source of Nazareth's history until the 4th century A.D., the agricultural character of this small community can be inferred by two means. Although such etymological constructions are at best speculative, many linguistic scholars believe that the name Nazareth derives from a root word meaning separated, which describes the town's relative distance from the rest of the Galilean community (Baird). While this may be one shade of meaning, the word Nazareth may have its origins in the Hebrew word *netser*, which means "sprout" or "shoot" (Baird). Some argue that this refers to the town's being an "offshoot" of the greater Galilee region (Baird). This may be true, but to argue that "sprout" refers to the town's size would be to read into the Hebrew language an idiom for which there is little evidence, and it seems apparent to me that a literal reading of *netser* is most appropriate. If this is the case, the name clearly carries agrarian connotations.

Secondly, it must be remembered that Galilee's primary source of food production was its shoreline fishing industry. Geographically cut off from the region's cornucopia and too small to participate in any significant trading, Nazareth would, by necessity, have relied on small-scale agriculture for its survival (Hanson). Much like the *Kibbutzim* - small, socialistic Jewish settlements - of modern Israel, Nazareth would most likely have been a self-sufficient village that produced most of its own goods.

Aside from its rural qualities, other characteristics of Nazareth must be inferred from the Biblical texts. In particular, the question arises as to where and when Jesus developed his sage knowledge of Jewish scripture and tradition, as well as his provocative orator's skill. According to John 7:15, the initial reaction to Christ's literacy was one of surprise: "The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" The picture seems to be one of a supposedly ignorant villager suddenly displaying a profound knowledge of Jewish learning, revealing himself to be distinct from the other peasants of his day.

Although Nazareth appears to have been a Semitic island in an intercultural sea, it seems implausible to assume that Jesus grew up in ethnic isolation. Consider, for example, his easy tolerance of non-Jewish peoples and customs and his eventual conflicts with the conservative

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element of the Jewish religion. According to many Biblical scholars, these skills could hardly be expected in a man who had been reared in isolation, with limited cross-cultural contact (Reed 104). A plausible explanation, then, must be sought outside of Nazareth.

While Nazareth did exist apart from the Sea of Galilee's cosmopolitan coastline, the Jewish hamlet was only an hour's walk worldly-wise Sepphoris, Antipas' capital of Galilee (Reed 105). In his book *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, Professor Jonathan Reed asserts that it would be almost impossible for Jesus not to have seen Sepphoris (see Figure 1) at some point in his life, "out of curiosity, if not necessity" (Reed 105). In spite of its prominence in Galilean society, however, Sepphoris is completely absent from the Gospel narratives. That the Bible never mentions Christ teaching in this city has usually been explained as a political snub to Antipas or a necessity for Christ's safety, in light of John the Baptist's execution (Reed 104). Other scholars contend that Jesus did teach in Sepphoris, but that his teachings there were not well-received and thus dismissed by the Gospel writers (Reed 104). The latter theory seems odd, since the Gospel writers include multiple accounts of audiences unfriendly to the teachings of Jesus, including his childhood neighbors in Nazareth.

What both of these theories fail to recognize, however, is the probability that Jesus had visited Sepphoris in his youth, but chose not to return in adulthood. According to the Gospels, Joseph's trade was carpentry, and as sons usually took on the trade of their fathers in first century Palestine, Christ is also called a "carpenter" in Mark 6:3. Assuming that Christ was born in the first decade of the first century, he would likely have been too young to participate in Antipas' ambitious construction of Sepphoris in A.D. 3 or 4. However, should Joseph have been contracted to work in the city, it is likely that he would have taken the young Jesus with him for "on the job" training. Putting aside Antipas' initial building project, Nazareth's close proximity to Sepphoris would seem to indicate that Joseph, or perhaps Jesus himself, would have sought work in the bustling Roman city.

If Jesus' career did bring him to Sepphoris, then a plausible explanation can be offered for the ease with which he learned to cross traditional cultural boundaries. Recent excavations of the site reveal that its inhabitants were mostly from the upper-class, as evidenced by the presence of extravagant ritual baths called miqweh in the houses of the city (Reed 107). The sheer cost of transporting fresh, clean water from the Sea of Galilee into the city of Sepphoris would have made these a luxury (Meyers). While Jesus would denounce elitist attitudes during his ministry, he draws from a wealth of material that may have been engendered by contact - perhaps as a hired worker - with Sepphoris' urban nobility. For example, the parable of the royal banquet in Matthew 22:1 -14 describes an occurrence that Jesus may have witnessed while in Sepphoris, while the rich men of Luke 12 and 16 may have been based on personages met in the city.

Assuming that Jesus did have contact with Sepphoris, then it may have been his experiences

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as a hired laborer that fueled Christ's later criticisms of the wealthy. A traditional picture of "class warfare" begins to emerge when one recognizes that Jesus belonged to a lower-income family. In Luke 12:24, Mary the mother of Jesus makes an offering of "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." This offering of birds was customary of poor families, who could not afford to offer the usual lamb (LaSor 83).

While Sepphoris no doubt brought Jesus into contact with the gentiles, evidence suggests that the city was largely Jewish in character, but of a less traditional style (Reed 107). In archaeological digs, ample piles of pig bones have been found in the second and third century strata, but the first century layer of the city includes almost none - indicating that the Jews, who did not eat pork, were the dominant citizens of the city during the time of Christ (Reed 107).

In spite of the Jewish presence in the city, the culture of Sepphoris would have been of a more urbanized type than that found in Judea. Writing in Jewish War, Josephus reports that Sepphoris took a pro-Roman position in the first-century Palestinian revolt (Chancey). Sepphoris' decision to routinely harbor Roman garrisons is described by Josephus as a betrayal of "the allies of their tribe" and an insurrection against the common religious center of Jerusalem (Chancey). German Scholar Walter Bauer, cited in Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus, argues that the religious life of Sepphoris was distanced from the legalistic religion of the Pharisees and contends that by extension so was Christ in his early years. Clearly, the rift between Christ and the legalism of the Jerusalem authorities that resulted from Christ's upbringing offers one plausible explanation for his death.

However, while Bauer's argument may be sufficient in explaining Jesus' later conflicts with the Pharisees, it may overemphasize the role of Sepphoris in shaping the religious life of the young Christ. Because of Jesus' economic position, it is unlikely that he would have viewed the aristocracy of Sepphoris as role models to be emulated. Like the majority of Galileans, Jesus was alienated from both the secular wealthy and the religious elite. If, as the saying goes, individuals are defined by the "company they keep," then Jesus' distance from the prominent people of his time is proved in his choice of average Galilean fishermen as companions.

Socio-Economic Context: On the Shores of Galilee

It was shortly after his baptism that Jesus made his way to the shores of the Sea of Galilee itself. A remarkably fertile country, the hills of the Galilean seashore would have been brimming with life as Jesus strolled among them, teaching the people and proclaiming that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mrk 1:15).

For the fishermen who worked along Galilee's coasts, however, the iridescent majesty of the sea would not have been the primary motive for slogging around its waters on a daily basis.

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Rather, these men were motivated by the perennial need for economic survival. Although many Galileans owned their own fishing boats and equipment, there is little evidence to suggest that they participated in a "free market" economy, such readers in the Western world might envision. While Galilean society was not communistic by any stretch of the imagination, its primary economic movers were political and familial structures, with production largely seen as an ends to maintaining the stability of both (Hanson). Generally speaking, the legs that carried Galilean society were peasant fishermen or farmers whose primary economic motive was to feed their families, with family units serving as both producer and consumer (Hanson). It must be realized, however, that the Galilean concept of "family" was much broader than that with which most Americans are familiar, and usually included a complex network of inner and outer relations. In order to maximize production - and prevent domestic squabbles - semi-formal trade relations were established among kin, creating endeavors of mutual interest (Hanson).

Fishing in Hellenistic Galilee usually took one of four forms: casting a line with bronze hooks, dipping a flaxen net into the sea, primitive fish traps, or pronged tridents (Hanson). It is unclear from Mark 1:18-19 what type of net Simon and Andrew were using, since the Greek word used in this passage, *dictua*, is a generic term for "nets" (Hanson). Matthew 1:18 clarifies in telling us that Simon and Andrew were working with an *amphiblestron*, or hand-held casting net (Hanson).

In spite of their relative independence, the fishermen of first century Galilee crawled through life at "subsistence level," producing only enough to meet their basic needs (Hanson). Roman "client kings," such as Herod Antipas, were supportive of the fishing industry only insofar as it gave them the ability to profit by levying severe taxes and tolls on the fisherman's product. This constant taxation - which allowed Antipas to pay tribute to the reigning Caesar - left the average fisherman in Galilean society just slightly above the status of the average laborer. So, it was in keeping with his concern for the marginalized of society that Jesus' first followers were drawn from the decks of Galilean fishing boats.

Mark 1: 16 records that as Jesus walked by the shores of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting a fishing net into the sea. Although John 1:36 records that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and already knew of Jesus' coming, the response of the fishermen to Christ's invitation to become "fishers of men" (Mrk 1:17) is profound. Considering that the very survival of these men rode on their ability to bring in a bounty of fish each day, their abrupt decision to "forsake their nets and follow him" (Mrk 1:18) reveals the unique skill of Jesus in appealing to the average Galilean. His ability to frame his invitation ("follow me") in a Galilean context ("fishers of men") drove home a provocative point that would have been lost on these brothers had Christ engaged in sophisticated theological argumentation. Because of Christ's clever association of his message with the Galilean fishing economy, the fishermen were drawn to Christ's larger theme of "eternal life".

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Jesus' invitation to the fishermen is consistent with the teaching style he used during his Galilean ministry, which relied on the imagery of the region to convey theological points. In Mark 6, for example, Jesus uses a boy's "small fish" - most likely sardines - and five loaves of bread to feed a five thousand people. Through this example, Jesus demonstrates the process by which his teachings would reach the world - first from through his death (illustrated by the broken bread and fish), then through the Apostles on Pentecost ("He gave them [the loaves and fish] to the disciples"), and from the Apostles to all the nations of the world ("and the disciples gave them [the loaves and fishes] to the crowds").

A large fishing net, called a sagene, is mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 13:47 as an illustration of the Kingdom of God's cross-cultural reach (Hanson). Like a net dragged behind a boat, Jesus explains, the Kingdom of Heaven pulls in a diversity of people - some good for consumption and some stale and rotten - all which will be sorted out at the end of the age. Where most Jews expected the Messianic kingdom to be exclusively Semitic, Jesus' sagene illustration is a bold departure from tradition, especially when one considers that Galilee is home to over thirty different species of fish.

James and John, Jesus' second set of seafaring apostles, may have been mending such a net in Mark 1:20. Their reaction to Jesus' call to ministry was the same as that of Simon and Peter, and it may have been partially inspired by the endorsement that the former pair of fishermen had given to the traveling Messiah. It is likely that some knot of kinship bound the Yonah family of Simon and Peter together with the Zebedee family of James and John, for in Luke 5:10, the Gospel writer records that the "sons of Zebedee were partners with Simon." The Greek word usually read as "partners" - "koinonoi" - would more be more accurately translated as "cooperative-members," implying that familial trade relations existed between the two fishing interests (Hanson).

Based on the fact that both families owned their own boats and fishing equipment, some scholars have concluded that they represent a sort of "upper middle class" in Galilean society (Hanson). Others argue that this conclusion inappropriately reads free-market ideas into the Galilean economy and infers a degree of economic stratification that probably did not exist in first century Galilee (Reed 165). While the inference of an "upper middle class" may be a historical hyperbole, Mark 1:20 does indicate that the Zebedee family at least had hired servants. Accordingly, it can be inferred that Galilean fishermen were higher up the economic ladder than those who contributed the raw materials and manual labor that supported the fishing trade. Nonetheless, it is true that the hiring of itinerant peasant workers was a common practice that in no way indicates membership in the upper class (Reed 165), although we may assume that the Zebedee family was capable of maintaining a living.

Jesus not only mingled with the fishermen of Galilee, but he also lived with them during his

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ministry at Capernaum (see Figure 1). Archaeological evidence suggests that Capernaum was near the bottom of Galilee's social registry, lacking in niceties such as marble, frescoes, mosaic, and ritual baths (Reed 165). While the affluent left their indelible mark on society by sponsoring public buildings like the theater at Sepphoris, no such projects have been found among the ruins of Capernaum (Reed 165). Thus, Capernaum became the setting for Jesus to work with common or even lowly people, who would become his primary followers throughout much of the Galilean ministry. Capernaum clearly influenced Jesus' treatment of the poor, satisfying his drive to reach those of his own social class with his message.

In addition, Capernaum would have extended Christ's interaction with Galilee's non-Jewish population. Although the unassuming city lingered on the edge of Antipas' tetrarchy, Capernaum appears to have been part of a regional trade network (Reed 165). Because of this, the city would have witnessed a steady stream of gentile merchants and sojourners passing through on business. This intersection of Jews and Gentiles is exhibited by Matthew 8:5, in which a Roman centurion implores Jesus to heal his dying servant. Much like American peacekeepers in Iraq today, the centurion may have been viewed by Jewish peasants as a necessary, but unwelcome, foreign intruder. Apparently, the Gentile's faith startled Jesus (Matt 8:10), who immediately healed the man's withering servant and declared the centurion's faith superior to that of Jewish Israel.

During a later trip through Capernaum, Christ would again display his tendency to cross cultural boundaries by calling Matthew, a tax collector, into his retinue (Mark 1:14). In the pristine holiness of dusty Renaissance paintings and chapel windows, we tend to imagine the apostles as

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