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THE MYTH OF A GENTILE GALILEE

The Myth of a Gentile Galilee is the most thorough synthesis to date of archaeological and literary evidence relating to the population of Galilee in the first century CE. The book demonstrates that, contrary to the perceptions of many New Testament scholars, the overwhelming majority of first-century Galileans were Jews. Utilizing the gospels, the writings of Josephus, and published archaeological excavation reports, Mark A. Chancey traces the historical development of the region's population and examines in detail specific cities and villages, finding ample indications of Jewish inhabitants and virtually none for gentiles. He argues that any New Testament scholarship that attempts to contextualize the Historical Jesus or the Jesus movement in Galilee must acknowledge and pay due attention to the region's predominantly Jewish milieu.

This accessible book will be of interest to New Testament scholars as well as scholars of Judaica, Syro-Palestinian archaeology, and the Roman Near East.

Mark A. Chancey is Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Southern Methodist University. He has written articles and reviews for *New Testament Studies*, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*, and *Africa Journal of Theology*.

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PREFACE

Little did I know when I departed the first time to participate in excavations at Sepphoris the impact that experience would have on me. I was instantly captivated by fieldwork – the physical challenges, the tangibility of archaeological evidence, the camaraderie that develops while digging. By season’s end, I had developed a new interest in Galilean Judaism and its significance for Historical Jesus research. In my subsequent reading, I quickly became aware of a gap between the archaeological evidence I observed in Galilee and the descriptions of Galilee I encountered in much New Testament scholarship. I also soon realized the need for scholars to support generalized descriptions of archaeological finds with references to specific finds and specific publications.

This study is the result of my ensuing investigation of Galilee’s population. The consistency of my findings surprised me. In examining the Gospels, Josephus, and published archaeological data, I discovered impressive amounts of evidence for Judaism and very meager evidence for paganism. I found little support for oft-repeated claims that large numbers of gentiles lived in first-century CE Galilee. The implications of these findings are clear: in our attempts to situate Jesus and the Jesus movement in Galilee, we must always keep in mind the region’s predominantly Jewish milieu. Because the persuasiveness of my argument depends upon the thoroughness of my research, I have not been sparing in bibliographical detail.

In addition to advancing an argument about Galilee’s population, I seek here to provide New Testament scholars with an up-to-date synthesis of the published archaeological data. To make this summary as readable as possible, I have avoided archaeological jargon and relegated technical details to the footnotes. My hope is that this work will serve as a resource for scholars investigating other aspects of Galilee, in addition to its population.

This book is of obvious relevance for those interested in investigating the extent of Greco-Roman culture in Galilee, and I make preliminary

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observations on that subject. My primary focus, however, is on the considerably narrower topic of who was living in Galilee. A full investigation of Hellenism in Galilee requires its own treatment, and I will turn to that issue in my next book.

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation, “The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies,” which I defended at Duke University in April 1999. I was fortunate to have E. P. Sanders and Eric M. Meyers as my dissertation directors; both provided me with solid guidance and kind encouragement. E. P. Sanders pushed me on multiple occasions to delve more deeply into the data, each time with the hope of catching one more glimpse of ancient Galilee. Eric M. Meyers, as director of the Sepphoris Regional Project excavations, first encouraged my archaeological interests and allowed me to serve on the staff of the dig. I am also greatly indebted to the other readers on my dissertation committee, Richard B. Hays, D. Moody Smith, and Bart D. Ehrman. My discussion of Sepphoris in the third chapter reflects material considered in two previous publications, “The Cultural Milieu of Ancient Sepphoris,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 127–145) and “How Jewish was Sepphoris in Jesus’ Time?” co-authored with Eric M. Meyers, *BAR* 26:4 (2000): 18–33, 61.

In discussing specific Galilean sites, I have sometimes utilized the Greek name and sometimes the Hebrew, depending on which is better known. In spelling site names, I have generally used the form prevalent in secondary literature; thus, sometimes a *het* is indicated by an *h*, and sometimes not, though I have tried to be consistent with individual sites. Biblical translations are usually my own, sometimes those of the NSRV; translations of Josephus are usually from the Loeb edition.

I owe thanks to numerous others. Richard Bauckham, editor of the SNTS series, proposed changes that have improved key aspects of my argument. Joanne Hill, my copy editor, deserves my gratitude for her careful reading of my manuscript. The chair of my department at S.M.U., Richard W. Cogley, and my other colleagues have given me a warm welcome to Dallas. The teaching of George Howard, David S. Williams, and Theodore J. Lewis, all at the University of Georgia, first attracted me to the academic study of the Bible. My interaction with students at Duke University, Duke Divinity School, and Southern Methodist University has made me thankful to have entered this profession. The Dorot Foundation and Endowment for Biblical Research awarded me grants enabling travel to Israel. Tracy Anne Allred, my wife, has encouraged me in graduate school, the job search, and these early days at S.M.U.

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My deepest gratitude, however, is to my parents, Gladys Chancey and the late Gene Chancey. They first introduced me to the biblical text, and they strove to cultivate in me a love for it. While I have learned much from my formal education, I have learned far more from them. It is in their honor I write.

ABBREVIATIONS

Reference works

- ABD* *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Ed. David Noel Freedman et al. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- EAEHL* *The Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Ed. Michael Avi-Yonah. 4 vols. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975–1978.
- NEAEHL* *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Ed. Ephraim Stern. 4 vols. Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society and Carta; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.
- OEANE* *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*. Ed. Eric M. Meyers. 5 vols. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Periodicals

- AASOR* *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
- ADAJ* *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
- AJA* *American Journal of Archaeology*
- BA* *Biblical Archaeologist*
- BAIAS* *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeology Society*
- BAR* *Biblical Archaeology Review*
- BASOR* *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
- CBQ* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- ESI* *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*
- HTR* *Harvard Theological Review*
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- INJ* *Israel Numismatic Journal*
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature*

Abbreviations

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<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Liber Annuus</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>QDAP</i>	<i>Quarterly of the Department of the Antiquities in Palestine</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

Josephus

<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>War</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>

Rabbinic works

The abbreviations used for rabbinic references are taken from Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).

NOTE ON DATING

Archaeological terminology is used for chronological references:

Late Bronze Age = 1500–1200 BCE

Iron I Age = 1200–926 BCE

Iron II Age = 926–586 BCE

Neo-Babylonian Period = 586–539 BCE

Persian Period = 539–332 BCE

Early Hellenistic Period = 332–198 BCE

Late Hellenistic Period = 198–63 BCE

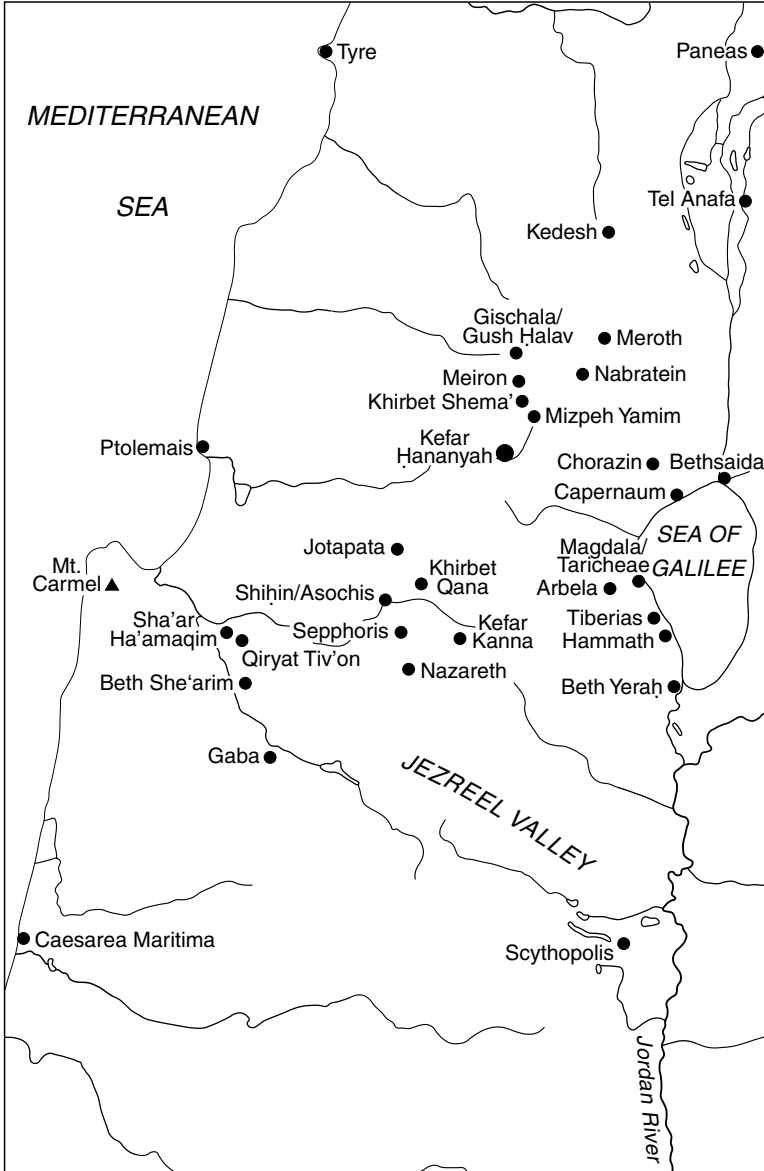
Early Roman Period = 63 BCE–135 CE

Middle Roman Period = 135–250 CE

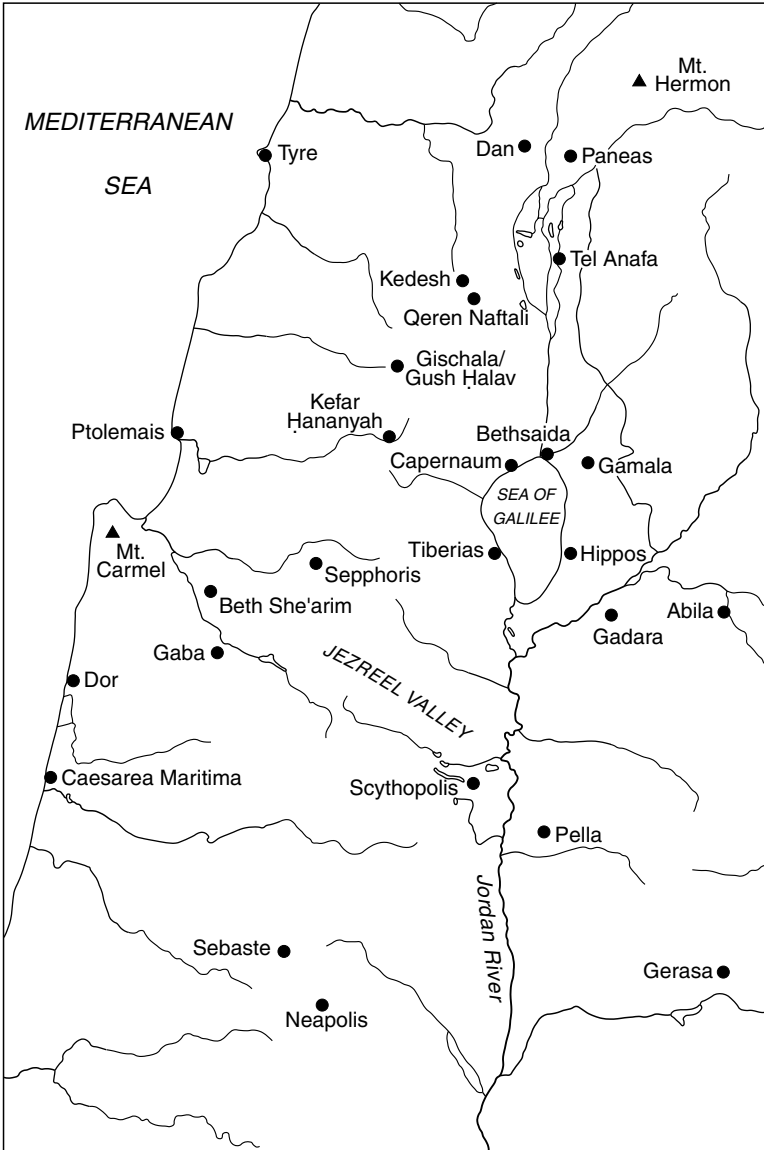
Late Roman Period = 250–360 CE

Byzantine Period = 360–640 CE

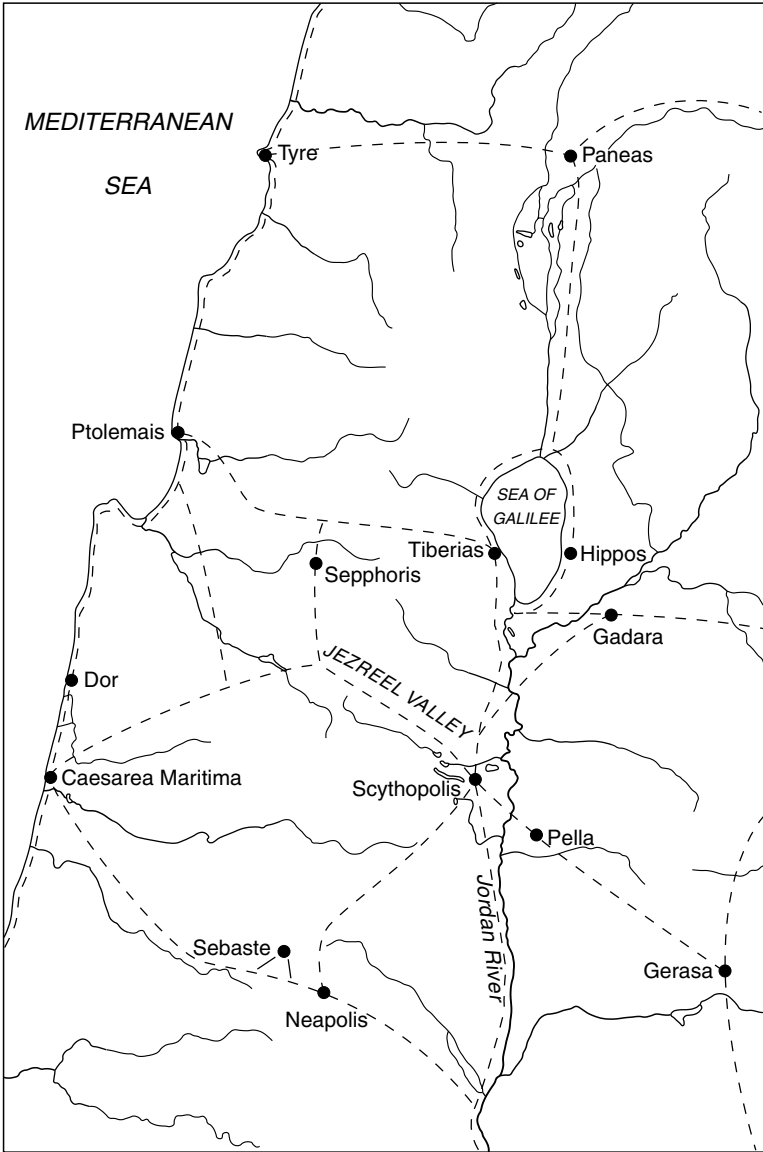
For discussion, see Walter E. Rast, *Through the Ages in Palestinian Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992).



Map 1: Galilee and northern Palestine



Map 2: Galilee and the surrounding areas



Map 3: Chief roads