Galilee, Galileans

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The term “Galilee” appears for the first time in the Bible in Josh 20:7; 21:32, concerning the cities of refuge: “Qadesh in the Galilee, in the Mountain of Naphtali.” Although it is clear that it already has a geographical unit connotation, the common description in the Bible is “Land of Naphtali” or “from Dan...”. In the list of administrative units of the kingdom of Solomon, where some geographical units are mentioned, the Galilee is still missing and instead the territories of the tribes are described. In the famous episode of King Solomon returning the land of Kabul to King Hiram in 1 Kgs 9:11, the unit Galilee is mentioned again. It is clear however that in those books of the Bible in which it is mentioned, the name is connected to the northern, mountainous part of the land of Israel.

In the book of Judith (1:8) it is first mentioned as a geographical term divided into “upper” and “lower,” meaning “higher” and “lower,” in correlation. The book of Maccabees (1 Macc 5:14-24) mentions it for the first time in connection with the native population who connect themselves to the Jews of Judea, and Judah the Maccabee, or the author of the book, called them “brothers.” Since then, all historical sources are using the term Galilee, or its two geographical units, as a common reference. The first source which gives a geographical description of the Galilee and some of its borders is Josephus (J.W. 3:35-40).

This border is based on the concentration of Jews in Jewish villages and towns and therefore does not include western Galilee. A similar border line is reflected in the list of sixteen settlements which were fortified by Josephus Flavius in the Galilee, and it includes eastern Upper Galilee and the entire Lower Galilee (J.W. 2.572-75).

In the Mishnah, there is a comment which hints at a geographical position that from Kefar Hananya and higher it is Upper Galilee and lower, it is Lower Galilee (mAr 9:2). Not only do we have here a division between Upper and Lower Galilee, but the mention of the sycamore tree (Shigna) reflects the differences in altitude and vegetation between Upper Galilee (1200 m. above sea level) and Lower Galilee (600 m. above sea level), as sycamores do not grow in areas higher than 400 m. above sea level.

The term “Galileans” appears only in the late Second Temple period. This is a good reason to connect it to the self-identification of the Jews living in this region or the Judeans identifying the Galileans. To understand this self-identity it is necessary to present the development of the Jewish settlement in the Galilee from the First Temple period to the 1st century CE. It is very clear today, according to many archaeological excavations which were conducted in the Galilee that its Israelite population collapsed after the Assyrian attack in 732 BCE. Very few sites continued to exist for ten to fifty years after the Assyrian conquest and most of the sites were abandoned. Historical sources are almost completely silent about any remnants from this period, until the second century BCE. The book of Maccabees (1 Macc 5:14-24) describes the arrival of messengers from the Galilee and Trans-Jordan who ask Judah to help them against the Gentile’s attacks. Judah sends his brother Simon to rescue the “brothers” in the north and the campaign brings Simon and his troops to chase the Gentile militias “to the gates of Ptolemais.” Then Simon takes those who did not want to stay in the Galilee and brings them to Jerusalem “with joy.” What can we learn from this story? 1) There were people in the Galilee who considered themselves “brothers” of the Judean Jews. 2) Judah was ready to risk his small army by sending them far away to help these people. 3) The clashes with the Gentiles took place in central Lower Galilee. 4) The number of Jews in Galilee was probably small, they needed help, and some of them if not all did not want to stay there while a strong Jewish territory was built in Judea. 5) The force of a young Hasmonean territory in Judea was not strong enough to establish and protect a Jewish territory in the Galilee.

Neither the book of Maccabees nor Josephus, give us a description of a conquest of the Galilee by the Hasmoneans. There is the famous short description by Josephus about the conversion of the Ituraeans to Judaism by Judah Aristobolus which, according to some historians, was the annexation of Galilee; others suggest that Galilee was already taken at the time of John Hyrcanus I, after his campaign against Scythopolis. Some archaeological evidence was found, displaying destruction layers of settlements from the late Hellenistic period (Mt. Mizpe HaYamim, Yodefat, the fortress of Qeren Naftali, Esh-Shuhra). In some of them Hasmonean coins were found above this layer. In any case, young Jannaeus, according to Josephus, was raised

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potential for anti-Sacramentarian polemic (Comm. Gen. 31.48-55).


See also — Mizpah, Mizpah

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in the Galilee. The first two Galilean cities and their inhabitants which appear on the stage of history in postbiblical times during the event of the annexation of Galilee by the Hasmoneans are Sepphoris (Zippori) and Asochis (Shikhin) in central Lower Galilee – the same area where Simon’s troops may have marched towards Ptolemais some years before. It can hint at the area in which Jewish/Israelite remnants concentrated during the five hundred years of historical and archaeological silence.

It is a common assumption today that the Jewish population of Galilee in the 1st century BCE was composed of Jews who remained from earlier periods, possibly some groups of local Gentiles who had converted to Judaism after the Hasmonean annexation, veterans and garrisons of the Hasmonean army, and mainly Jews who had emigrated from crowded Judea.

The term Γαλιλαῖ/omikronι appears in Josephus a few times but the most important one is probably the reference in *Ag. Ap.* 1.48 “… I was in command of those whom we call Galileans…”

However, it seems as though the term came into use during the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE, at the same time that the term “Edomeans” appears in southern Judea.

**Bibliography:**
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II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Galilee (MT גָּלְיָה, גְלִילָה; LXX Γαλιλαία) is the name of the mountainous region in the north of Palestine, delimited by the Mediterranean coast to the west, Litani river to the north, the Jordan to the east, and the Jezreel Valley to the south. Its name is derived from the Hebrew root גלֶל “to roll,” like the substantives גליל “round rod,” “ring” (Esth 1:6), and גלילא “district” (Josh 13:2; Ezek 47:8; Joel 4:4). In the MT, when used as the name of the region, these substantives are always determined by definite article or in a genitive relation (the latter only Isa 8:23 [9:1]).

The MT refers to Galilee six times. Kedesh in Galilee was one of the refuge cities set apart under Joshua (Josh 20:7; 21:32; 1 Chr 6:61 [76]; cf. 1 Macc 11:63). Twenty cities in the land of Galilee were given by Solomon to Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Kgs 9:11). According to 2 Kgs 15:29, Galilee was among the regions captured by Tiglath-Pileser III in 734–733 BCE, and its population was deported to Assyria. Later, Isaiah uses the term “Galilee of the nations” (Isa 8:23 [9:1]).

The translation of LXX is not always in accord with the MT. Thus, in Joel 4:4, LXX translates “all Galilee of the foreigners” where MT indicates “all the regions of Philistia,” and in Isa 31:9 LXX substitutes “Galilea” for “Bashan” of the MT. In the early 2nd century, Galilee seems to have belonged to the administrative circumscription of Samaritis (1 Macc 10:30) and continued to be considered in accord with other above-mentioned texts as “Galilee of the foreigners” (1 Macc 5:15) inhabited by “nations” (Jdt 1:8; 1 Macc 5:21), but also by the Jews (1 Macc 5:23).

Bibliography: • Lebbiner, U., Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Galilee (TSAJ 127; Tübingen 2009). • Zangenberg, J. et al. (eds.), Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee (WUNT 240; Tübingen 2007).

Jan Datěk

III. New Testament

The Gospels refer to Galilee by name fifty-nine times. Acts speaks of the area on three occasions (9:31; 10:37; 13:31). Galilee is not mentioned in the rest of the NT.

1. The Setting for the Ministry of Jesus. Notwithstanding the tradition that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4), all four Gospels depict Galilee as the area in which he lived and initially ministered (Matt 2:22; 26:69; Mark 1:19; Luke 2:39–40; 23:6; John 7:41). They remember him as living in Nazareth (of lower Galilee) in particular and as healing and teaching in several Galilean villages (e.g., Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida) as well as in adjacent wilderness areas. Although some traditions speak of Jesus’ fame and success in those places (Matt 4:23–25; Mark 1:32–39), other traditions report that he sometimes met a negative reception (Matt 11:20–24; Mark 6:1–6; Luke 10:13–15). All four Gospels relate that Jesus at some point determined to take his message to the south, where he was crucified. Matthew, Mark, and John but not Luke report that a resurrection appearance took place in Galilee (Matt 28:7, 16–20; Mark 16:7; John 21).

Much discussion has centered on the ways in which the Galilean Judaism of Jesus might have differed from the religion of Jerusalem and its environs. Many for instance have argued that the Judaism of the north was more open to pagan influence or more hellenized than its counterpart in the south (cf. Judg 18:7; 2 Kgs 15:29, 17:24–7; Isa 9:1–2; 1 Macc 5), or that Galileans were less stringent about Torah observance (cf. yShab 16:8), or that they were less attached to the cult in Jerusalem’s temple. Scholars have then used such proposed differences to help explain Jesus’ hostility toward the temple or his alleged loose attitude to Torah, or to account for his coming into conflict with the Sanhedrin or religious leaders in the south. Others have wondered whether Jesus’ location in Galilee may have encouraged him to identify himself with Elijah and Elisha, who were prophets of the northern kingdom, still others whether some of Jesus’ teaching might reflect resistance to the policies of Herod Antipas, who increased Roman control over Galilee and adversely affected local economies.

It was once quite common to discuss changes in Jesus’ thought and tactics, changes believed to have been occasioned by the falling away of the Galilean populace, a circumstance read out of John 6. Indeed, the notion that Jesus’ preaching ministry passed through a stage of success and one of failure was standard in 19th-century lives of Jesus, as was the suggestion that he moved to the south because he was rejected in the north. In the wake of form criticism, which questioned the accuracy of the chronological and geographical notices in the Gospels, scholars have generally become less attracted to this reconstruction of events. They have accordingly had to offer other explanations as to why Jesus left Galilee.

2. Theology of the Evangelists. Before the 20th century, the geographical notices in the Gospels were thought of most often as historical memories. In the wake of form criticism, scholars began to think of them as having theological or literary import. Ernst Lohmeyer argued that, in Mark and Matthew, Galilee is the land where the παρακολούθων will take place (cf. Mark 14:28), and Willi Marxsen contended that Mark’s redactional activity shows that he wrote for Galilean Christians. While those two theses are problematic (see Steenbergen) and do not represent the consensus of scholarship, the idea that Galilee serves theological and literary functions in the Gospels is now taken for granted.
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In Mark, the references to Galilee are concentrated at the beginning and end (1:9, 14, 16, 28, 39; 14:28; 15:41; 16:7). This helps unify the book and creates a sense of closure: the end returns to the beginning. Throughout Mark, Galilee functions for the most part positively (the exception being 6:21). In this it stands over and against Jerusalem, which crucifies Jesus. There is, to be sure, opposition to Jesus in Galilee, but Mark does not emphasize its geographical source. He rather emphasizes the welcome that Galilee gave Jesus (1:28, 39; 1:7).

Matthew's understanding of Galilee arises from his quotation of Isa 9:1–2 in Matt 4:12–17. The evangelist quotes it because of its phrase, “Galilee of the Gentiles.” He gives the originally pejorative expression new content so that its connotations become positive. Although Jesus’ ministry is confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:5–6; 15:24), his work in “Galilee of the Gentiles” foreshadows the time when the gospel will pass beyond the Jewish people (28:16–20).

Luke seems less interested in Galilee than Mark and Matthew, an inference supported by the sparse attention Acts pays to the locale. For him, the gospel may have originated in Galilee (Acts 10:37), but it is hard to see that he reads much theological meaning into this. Luke’s most notable contribution is his creation of the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem in Luke 9:51–19:10. This long section, which names Galilee only once (17:11), disconnects half of Jesus’ public ministry from the place.

The treatment of Galilee in John differs from that of the Synoptics in at least three ways. First, John depicts Jesus as going up to Jerusalem from Galilee on three occasions, not just one. Second, he stresses that Jesus’ first miracle, the production of wine for a wedding, took place at “Cana in Galilee” (2:1–11). Third, he preserves the idea that some considered Jesus’ being from Galilee to be dishonorable or problematic: “Is the Christ to come from Galilee?” (7:41); “no prophet is to rise from Galilee” (7:52).

3. Early Christian History. Galilee plays no role in Paul, Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, or Revelation, and Acts’ only reference to Galilean post-Easter followers of Jesus is the sweeping generalization in 9:31: “the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up.” Otherwise Acts says nothing about a Christian movement in Galilee. Some scholars, however, have thought that traditions in the Gospels must reflect a Galilean Christian movement (note e.g., Mark 3:7: “a great multitude from Galilee followed”), and both rabbinic sources and archaeology attest to Christians living in Galilee (cf. Htid 2:22–23; Aviam). Despite the scant evidence, Leonard E. Elliott-Binns attempted to reconstruct the history and theology of such a movement. He did this in part by classifying James as a witness to pre-70 CE Galilean Christianity. While in this Elliott-Binns has had few followers, a number of contemporary Q specialists think that hypothetical text was formed by followers of Jesus in Galilee (e.g., Arnal). The inference, however, is uncertain, and if one does not accept it, one will have to conclude that our knowledge of Galilean Christianity remains frustratingly minimal.


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Galilee, Sea of

The Kinneret in its ancient and modern Hebrew name or Lake Tiberias (in the talmudic sources), or the Sea of Galilee (in the NT) are the names of the only deep, fresh water lake in the land of Israel, also the lowest altitude fresh water lake in the world. 210 m, below sea level, located in the northern part of Israel, as geographical part of the longest geological rift in the world, stretching from east Africa to southern Turkey. Its dimensions are: maximum depth 44 m; area 168 km²; length 21 km; width 12 km.

Most scholars today agree that the origin of the name derives from a Canaanite god’s name Kinner which appears in Ugaritic texts. The name was given to the ancient city built on the northern edge of the lake as early as the Early Bronze age and the lake became “the lake of Kinneret.” The first biblical reference comes from Num 34:11: “And the boundary shall go down, and reach to the shoulder of the sea of Kinneret.” As a large and noticeable geographical feature it is used in the Bible as a geographical landmark, while in Second Temple period sources the lake is the scene of many events.

The importance of the lake was based on two elements. The central one is without doubt the fishing industry as already mentioned by Strabo (16.2.45):