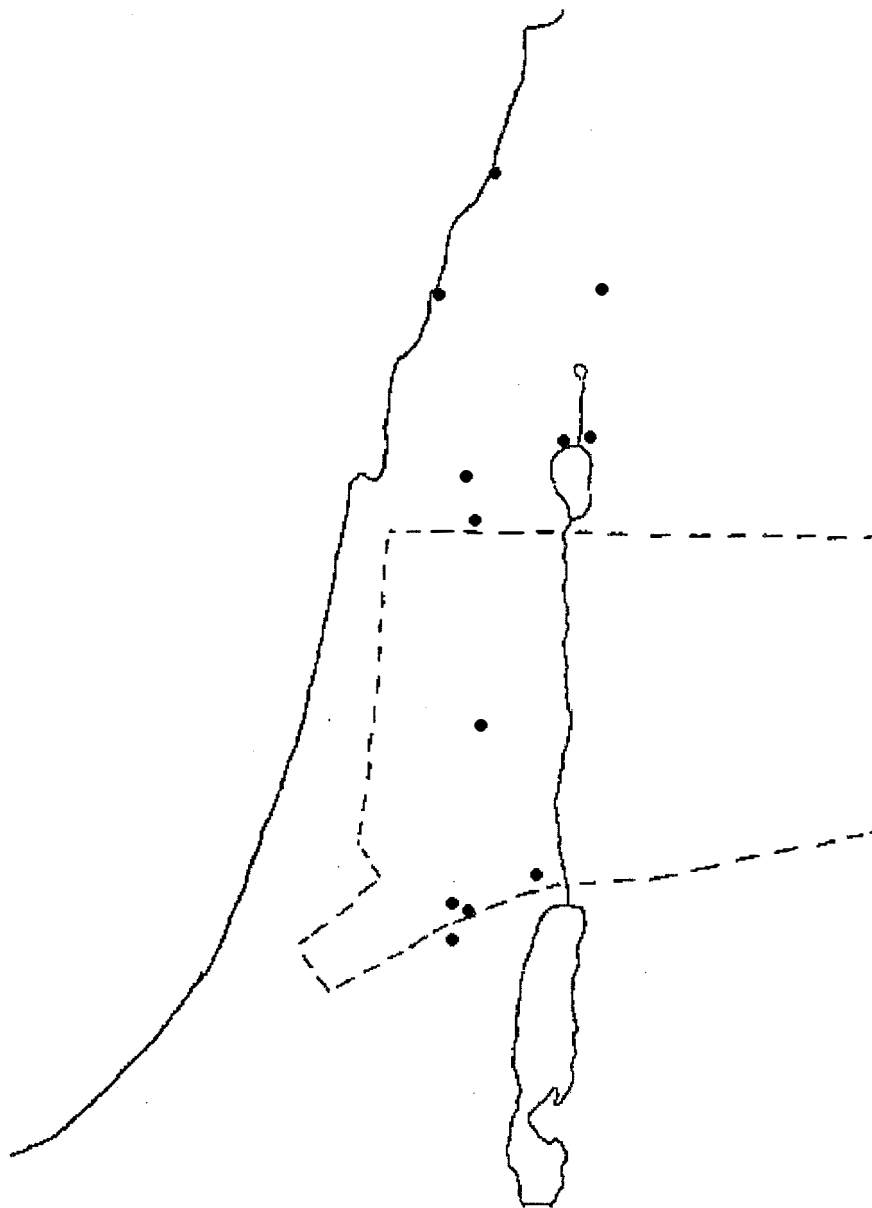


CHAPTER 1

Backgrounds of The Life of Christ

Geographical



This above is a map of Palestine in the time of Christ. The size of the land of Palestine is shown in comparison with the state of Connecticut. Connecticut is not a very large state; it is much smaller than New York or Pennsylvania or Ohio.

Please place the following cities, provinces and bodies of water on the map in their correct location (you may use the maps in the back of your Bible to help you):

CITIES

Bethany (John 11:1,18)
 Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-6)
 Bethsaida (Mark 8:22)
 Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13)
 Cana (John 2:1)
 Capernaum (Matthew 4:13)
 Jericho (Luke 10:30)
 Jerusalem (Matthew 16:21)
 Nazareth (Luke 1:26; 2:4)
 Sidon (Luke 6:17)
 Sychar (John 4:5)
 Tyre (Mark 7:24)

PROVINCES

Galilee (Luke 1:26; 2:4)
 Judaea (Luke 2:4; 3:1)
 Samaria (John 4:3-5)

Note: In John 4:3-4 all three of these provinces are mentioned.

BODIES OF WATER

The Great Sea--Mediterranean (Numbers 34:6-7)
 The Dead Sea or Salt Sea*
 The Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18)
 The Jordan River (Matthew 3:5-6)

*** The Dead Sea or Salt Sea is so salty--six times saltier than the ocean--that fish die in a few minutes when entering from the Jordan River!**

Spiritual Application With Respect to the Bodies of Water:

The Sea of Galilee receives a fresh supply of water from the north and releases its waters to the south into the Jordan River. Fish thrive in the fresh waters of the Sea of Galilee (see Luke 5:4-9). The Dead Sea receives fresh water from the Jordan River, but it does not release its waters anywhere else. It has an inlet but no outlet. Living fish die when they enter this salty sea of death. When God teaches us from His Word, and when God's truth flows into our lives, we should be like the Sea of Galilee which not only takes in but also flows out. We should not be like the Salt Sea which has no outlet (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim.2:2; etc.). Truth should come into our lives from God and His Word, and truth should flow out of our lives as we share it with others.

Political

During the time of Christ, what government ruled supreme over the world (John 11:48; Matthew 22:17-21)? _____ Who really ruled supreme over the world (1 Chron. 29:10-13; 2 Chron. 20:6; Psalm 103:19)? _____ Who was the Roman emperor who reigned during the time of Christ (Luke 2:1)? _____ (He reigned until 14 A.D.). Who was the Roman emperor who reigned during the second half of our Lord's earthly life (Luke 3:1)? _____ (He reigned 14-37 A.D.).

The land of Palestine during Christ's time was first a **KINGDOM** (one king) and then a **TETRARCHY** (a rule of four--see Luke 3:1--Palestine was ruled by four men).

The Kingdom Under Herod the Great

Herod the Great (who was an Edomite) ruled from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. In Luke 1:5 he is called the _____ of J _____. Who was born during the last days of Herod's reign (Matthew 2:1-11)? _____ Herod died in 4 B.C. This date is a well established historical fact. Was Christ born before or after Herod's death (compare Matthew 2:7,16,19-21)? _____ This means that Christ must have been born prior to Herod's death in 4 B.C. What do we learn about Herod's character from Matthew 2:3,13,16?

_____ He was a monster of a man.

The Tetrarchy Under Herod's Sons

1) Archelaus was the ruler of **Judea** and Samaria and Idumea. He was the oldest son of Herod the Great, and the most important part of the kingdom was given to him. What do we learn about his character from Matthew 2:22? _____ (like father, like son!) He did not continue as ruler for long. In 6 A.D. he was deposed by Emperor Augustus. From that time on Rome sent men to rule and govern Judea. One of these men was Pontius Pilate (Luke 3:1) who began his rule in 26 A.D. and who played such an important part in the trials and death of Christ.

2) Herod Antipas was the tetrarch of **Galilee** and Perea. He was another son of Herod the Great and he ruled from 4 B.C.-39 A.D. (see Luke 3:1). What did our Lord call this cunning and crafty ruler (Luke 13:32)? _____ What great man of God was beheaded by the command of Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1-12)? _____ Why did Herod and Pilate, who were once bitter enemies, become such good friends (Luke 23:6-12)?

Note: Don't confuse Herod Antipas with Herod Agrippa I who killed James the brother of John (Acts 12) or with Herod Agrippa II whom Paul almost persuaded to be a Christian (Acts 25-26; see 26:28).

3) Philip was the tetrarch of **Ituraea and Trachonitis** (an area to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee)—see Luke 3:1. The city Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13) was named after **Philip** (and also after **Caesar**, the emperor). Unlike the other sons of Herod, he was a very just and beloved ruler. He married Salome, the daughter of Herodias (Mark 6:22). **Note:** Don't confuse this Philip with Philip Herod I mentioned in Mark 6:17.

4) Lysanias was "the tetrarch of _____" (Luke 3:1), which was a small district north of the Sea of Galilee between Mt. Herman and Damascus. He was **not** the son of Herod the Great.

* * * * *

It was at the time of this political situation that God stepped into history "to be the S _____ of the _____" (1 John 4:14). What political situation are you under today? Who rules **over** you? Is the living God involved in the governments of the world (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; 1 Tim. 2:1-4)? _____ Do you allow God to govern and rule over your heart?

Religious

The Religious Parties:

1) THE PHARISEES

The New Testament, especially the gospel accounts, has much to say about this religious sect. The Pharisees were very "religious"—they prayed, fasted, gave **tithes** (one tenth), gave alms to the poor, etc. (Luke 18:12; Matthew 6:1-5). In doing all these things they thought they were _____ (Luke 18:9) and that they were better than _____ men (Luke 18:11) and they loved to be S _____ of (by) men (Matthew 6:5).

Concerning their doctrine and beliefs, they were basically **orthodox** (correct, right). They professed to believe the Bible. According to Acts 23:7-8, what did they believe in?

_____ Thus they believed in the supernatural and they believed in the **immortality of the soul** (the soul never dies but will go either to a place of punishment or to a place of bliss).

The Pharisees were patriotic Jews who hoped that someday they would be delivered from Roman rule. They were very popular among the majority of the Jewish people and they won the support of the masses. They looked for a "Messiah" who would be a political deliverer and liberator. Jesus came with a message of spiritual deliverance (Matthew 1:21) and a message of liberation from sin (John 8:32-36) and He was rejected.

Another group that is often mentioned in connection with the Pharisees were the scribes and the lawyers. In fact, most of the scribes and lawyers were Pharisees. The scribes and lawyers were the "experts" in the law. Their job was to study, interpret and teach the law and apply it to every situation of life. Not only did they expound the written law (the law of Moses and other parts of the Old Testament Scripture), but they also interpreted the **oral law** (called "the _____ of the _____" in Mark 7:5). Thus they **added** to the Bible their own traditions and commandments (Mark 7:3,5,7,8,9,13).

How did the Lord address the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:13,15,23,25,27,29?

_____ This word means the person is wearing a mask to hide what is really underneath. That which is seen on the outside **belies** [gives a false impression of] what is really on the inside--see the illustrations Jesus used in Matthew 23:25-28. Do you think the scribes and Pharisees were delighted and flattered when they heard this woeful message by Christ as recorded in Matthew 23:13-36? _____

What great Apostle was once a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5; Acts 23:6)? _____ Who did the Pharisees seek to destroy (Mark 3:6)? _____ In the days of the early church, Paul, along with other Pharisees, made every effort to destroy the disciples of Christ (Acts 8:1,3; 9:1,21).

Another "famous" Pharisee was named _____ (John 3:1). The great need of all the Pharisees, like Nicodemus, was to be B _____ A _____ (John 3:3)!

Today, can you think of any religious group that is similar to the Pharisees? Remember, the Pharisees were religious, orthodox, self-righteous, hypocritical, needed to be born again and they added their own traditions to the Word of God. They also wanted to destroy those who truly belonged to Christ.

2) THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees were not as numerous as the Pharisees but in many ways they were more powerful. They controlled the temple, the priesthood and the **Sanhedrin** (the council or ruling body of the Jews consisting of 70 members, most of whom were Sadducees). When the gospel accounts mention the "chief priests," this usually refers to the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were not nearly as popular as the Pharisees in the eyes of the common people. They were less patriotic and more favorable to Rome. They were more concerned about pleasing Rome than pleasing God.

The Sadducees were in many ways unorthodox in their beliefs. What important doctrines did they deny (Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:7-8)?

Thus, they denied the supernatural and they believed that "souls die with their bodies." This is a denial of the immortality of the soul. Also they did not believe in hell or eternal punishment.

The Sadducees rejected the tradition (oral law) of the Pharisees and insisted that the Scripture alone is authoritative. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote, "The Sadducees say, only what is written is to be esteemed as legal...what has come down from tradition of the fathers need not be observed" (*Ant.* xiii, 10,6).

Today, can you think of any religious group that is similar to the Sadducees? Remember, the Sadducees rejected tradition and accepted the Bible alone, yet they denied the reality of hell and the resurrection and angels, etc.

Other Groups Worth Mentioning:

1) The Herodians

These were Jews who supported the **dynasty** (series of rulers who belong to the same family) of Herod. Their name is very appropriate because they were murderous like Herod the Great (Mark 3:6 and compare Matthew 2:16) and they were sly and crafty like Herod the Tetrarch (Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:13; compare Luke 13:32)!

2) The Zealots

These were Jews who were extremely patriotic and who wanted to be liberated from Rome even if it took violence to do so. They hated the Romans and refused to pay their taxes, etc. Barabbas may have been a zealot (Luke 23:18-19). Which of the 12 disciples was formerly a zealot (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)? _____

One of the other disciples was Matthew, the publican or tax collector (Matthew 10:3), who formerly worked for Rome. Apart from Christ, Simon and Matthew would have been hostile enemies and at each other's throats! But the Lord is able to bring such men together to form a harmonious unit. He does the same today in the body of Christ! Compare Ephesians 4:3.

The Religious Institutions:

1) THE TEMPLE

The temple of Zerubbabel was rebuilt by Herod the Great who was known for his splendid building projects. The Jews made mention of Herod's temple in John 2:20. There was only one temple and it was located in the city of _____ (Luke 2:45-46). This was the only acceptable place where sacrifices were offered. Herod's temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans under General Titus. Since then the Jews have been without a temple, without a priesthood and without animal sacrifices.

Throughout the history of Israel, the tabernacle, and later the temple, was the central place of worship and the place where the living God dwelt in the midst of His people.

2) THE SYNAGOGUE

The word "synagogue" means a place where people can **gather together** for a certain purpose. The Jewish synagogue served as a place where the Scriptures could be read and where prayer and worship could be offered. It was basically an educational institution so that the Jews could be instructed in the Word of God.

Though there was only **one temple**, there were **many synagogues**: "For Moses...hath in _____ them that preach him, being read in the _____ every _____ day (Saturday)" (Acts 15:21).

Our Lord frequently visited the synagogue and taught there (see Luke 4:16-30). When Paul went into a new city on his missionary travels, he often went first to the synagogue (Acts 17:1-4; 18:4-6 etc.).

Today the local assembly of believers is to be both a temple and a synagogue! As a temple it is the dwelling place of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:21-22). As a synagogue it is the place where believers gather together for worship and instruction and the public reading of the Scriptures (James 2:2—"assembly" is literally "synagogue"; Hebrews 10:25—literally, "not forsaking the synagoging (gathering) of yourselves together"; 1 Tim. 4:13—public "reading" of Scripture; etc.). Are you an active part of a local assembly of believers?
