

1. Geography of First-Century Israel

- The geography of first-century Israel plays a crucial role in understanding the ministry of Jesus and the context of the biblical text.
- First-century Israel had three significant regions: **Judea** in the south, **Galilee** in the north, and **Samaria** in the middle. These areas were home to distinct cultural and religious dynamics that influenced Jesus's message and mission.
- Sadly, the Gospel of John has been used throughout Church history as a justification for the prosecution of Jewish people. This stems from the translation and interpretation of a Greek word that can either be translated as “Jews” or, just as acceptable, “Judeans.” “Jews” assumes all Jews at all times even though Jesus is Jewish and all of his early followers are Jewish. “Judeans,” on the other hand, points to the region of Judea, dominated by the Temple, the Temple authorities, and the Sadducee party.
- One final region to note is the area east-northeast of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, known by various names such as Bashan, Golan, Gaulanitus, or Batanaea. This region was distinct from Galilee, ruled by Herod Philip, and home to a violent revolutionary group known as the Zealots.

2. Three Regions of Israel (North to South):

Galilee	<p>- Region west of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.</p> <p>- Jesus grew up in Nazareth, moved to Capernaum, and conducted most of his ministry in this northern region of Galilee.</p> <p>Many Jews living in Galilee were descendants of those who returned from Babylon to Israel between 160 and 63 BC. Worship was influenced by Babylonian Judaism and included Rabbis and Synagogues.</p> <p>Many in Galilee resisted Roman rule and were persecuted by the Roman government through the local reigning king—first Herod the Great and then his son, Herod Antipas.</p> <p>- Ruled over on behalf of Rome by Herod Antipas – one of the three sons of Herod the Great.</p> <p>Herod Antipas initially had his headquarters at Sepphoris, but in 20 AD, he founded a city on the Sea of Galilee called Tiberias and moved his headquarters to this location.</p>
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Samaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The region of Samaria was originally the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which is alternatively known as Ephraim. - Samaritans link their descendants to Jacob’s son Joseph (through Ephraim and Manasseh). - The pure Jewish line was corrupted when the Assyrians relocated foreigners into the land. - The Samaritans and the Judeans hated one another. - The Samaritan’s Holy Book is the first five books of the Bible. The Samaritan Pentateuch. - The Samaritans worshiped God at a temple on Mount Gerazim.
Judeans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Temple authorities dominate Judea in the south. - Worship is Temple oriented. - The Priests and Levites dominate scripture interpretation and practice. - The Essenes – Dead Sea Scrolls – were from the priesthood but rejected the Temple's authority. They separated themselves and moved into the desert east of Jerusalem.

3. The Messiah will Unite the Israelites:

- Ezekiel 37:15-28 describes, via an object lesson using two sticks, that God will bring the divided nations back together.
- God will place over them “one king” and “one shepherd.” This king is King Messiah.
- Part of the message of John’s Gospel is that Jesus is King Messiah. He will bring the divided nation – Galilee, Samaria, and the Judeans – under one reign.