

## BRINGING HONOR TO GALILEE

The northern region of Israel has been known as Galilee since the 7th century B.C. but it did not hold much significance in Israel's history until the time of Christ. Lower Galilee was blessed with wide valleys and rich soil for agriculture fed by the streams from the highlands of upper Galilee, which had the highest geographical elevation in Israel, up to 3000 feet above sea level. Galilee was not highly esteemed by the rest of Israel, because it was home to various non-Jewish inhabitants such as Phoenicians, Syrians and Sidonians.

(Solomon gave King Hiram 20 towns in Galilee, but after Hiram inspected them he called them 'The Land of Cabul', it sounds in Hebrew like 'good for nothing').-1 Kings 9:11-13, 2 Kings 15:29, Judges 1:30

Jesus spent his first 30 years in Galilee, which had a teeming population of 240 towns and villages surrounded by some of the loveliest landscapes in the Middle East with its rolling hills, dales and lakes. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a frontier town situated in a high valley in lower Galilee. He and his father were builders / stone masons who mostly worked with rocks, although they may also have done some wood carpentry. There was a small city 3 miles to the west of them, where King Herod undertook a great beautification project which required much stone work. There was a large stone quarry half way between Nazareth and that city. It is likely that Jesus and his earthly father Joseph were involved with some of those projects. Later, Jesus would begin a new venture to gather a group of followers to become like him. Although he had learned to form and place stones together in buildings under the direction of his earthly father, his main purpose on earth was a call from the heavenly Father to form disciples as 'living stones' as he built a ruling body called the 'ecclesia' to one day rule and reign with him. Jesus would later be referred to as the 'Cornerstone of the church.'

Jews living in other areas of Israel scorned Galileans as backward and unsophisticated with distinctive accents - Mark 14:70, Acts 2:7. Philip introduced Nathaniel to the prophesied Messiah by calling him, 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Nathaniel responded with; 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'. Philip gave him wise advice. 'Come and See!' - John 1:45-46

The apostle Peter was the foremost spokesman in the early church. God used a dream and a supernatural encounter to rid him of his prejudice towards Gentiles.

*'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. This is the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

- Acts 10:34-38

**Why did Jesus begin his ministry in Galilee and choose his first disciples from that region?**

Since Jesus grew up there, he was familiar with those down to earth hardworking people. Throughout the Bible we see that God often chooses the unchosen, the despised, the lowly, the unlikely and the unqualified for his great tasks. This is so that there can be no boasting in man so that God will get the greatest glory. - 1 Corinthians 1:26-28. We see this also in how God chooses to manifest his presence or power in unusual places and desperate situations.....to Jacob at a rock, to Moses at a burning bush in the desert, to Israel at the Red Sea, to Elijah at Mount Carmel, to Daniel in the lions den, through teenager David stoning giant Goliath, in Jesus, the Savior and future king of the world being born in a cave in the little town of Bethlehem.

Recently the following words from Isaiah 9 caught my attention.....

*'in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles.'*

These were part of the words given to the prophet Isaiah about 700+ years before the time of Jesus. It might be helpful to read Isaiah 8 to get a little more context to Isaiah 9.

*'Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*

*- Isaiah 9:1-2*

Just as Jesus began his ministry, John the Baptist quoted much of the above prophecy. - Matthew 4:12-17. The light of the gospel and the good news of the kingdom of heaven was first delivered to the people in Galilee. What a great honor to be the first recipients of the person and message of Jesus, the future king of the whole world. Wow! As often happens, those closest to unique persons and places often do not appreciate them. This happened in several cities in Galilee where Jesus was not accepted by those who were 'wise and learned' in their own eyes and thus skeptical and unbelieving in his miracles and ministry. - Matthew 11:20-52. Jesus said that we should become like little children.....transparent, teachable and trusting. These are the ones who can enter His kingdom and enjoy living in it. Jesus was an unlikely person to influence the world for centuries to come. He was a Jew.....living in a land overrun by Roman imperialism. He was from Nazareth.....a place most scorned in the country by the religious and political elite in Jerusalem. He had no apparent connections with the rich and powerful. However, he had resources from an unseen realm where the Heavenly Father dwelt in unapproachable light.

The world was evil.....goodness had arrived. People were full of fear and hate.....love had come in its fullness. The world was selfish.....a selfless One was revealed. The world was sick.....a healer was here. The world was proud.....humility was displayed. The world was enslaved..... a deliverer brought freedom. The world was lost.....a Savior was born. People longed for a king who was gracious, generous and kind.....Jesus was the one. Our world is dark and so was the land of Israel, but a great light began to shine many years ago, it all began in the land of Galilee. May your Christmas be merry and bright. - December 2020

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