

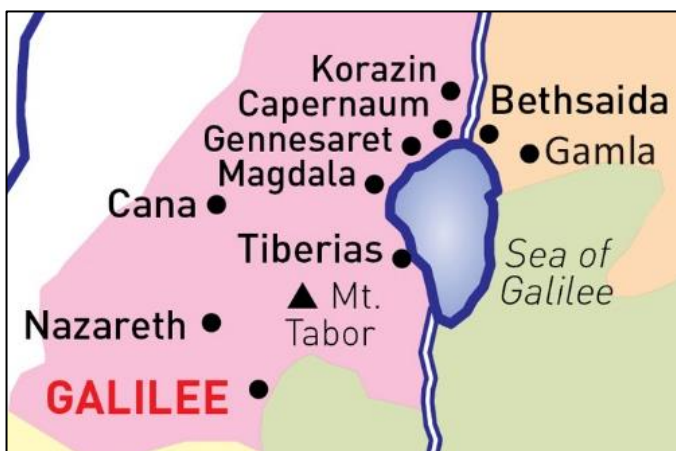
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|-------------|--|---------|-------------|
| Week #      | 251  | Series: | The Gospels |
| Title:      | The World of a Galilean Rabbi  |         |             |
| Scriptures: | Luke 24:25-27; Matthew 7:28-29; Luke 2:46-47; Matthew 11:28-30; I Peter 2:21 |         |             |

Notes:

### The World of a Galilean Rabbi:

Jesus grew up in Galilee. He grew up in the area where the non-traditionalists lived – the people who worshipped God more extemporaneously than those to the south. Jesus' Galilean heritage shows in many encounters he had with the more traditionalist groups.

Jesus had 11 Galilean disciples and 1 Judean disciple. Guess who that Judean disciple was? Judas. The rest were Galilean Jews, like Jesus. Judas was from the more traditionalist south in Judea, not from Galilee in the north.



**The city of Tiberias** had about 60k people in Jesus' day. It was home to the Herodians – secular Jews; pro-Roman; pro-Herod; most inhabitants were wealthy, but not overly religious. They weren't anti-God, they just only worshipped a few times a year (the "Easter and Christmas only" crowd).

**The city of Gamla** is situated overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Gamla was built on a steep hill shaped like a camel's hump, from which it derives its name (Gamla meaning 'the camel' in Aramaic). This was where the Zealots settled. They advocated for the violent overthrow of Roman rule in Judea. These people thought they had to bring the Kingdom of God about with the sword. They always mistook Jesus for a zealot; even his own disciples did at times. The Zealots were committed to killing, or at least resisting, anyone who was Roman, Greek, or collaborated with them. They assassinated pro-Roman Jews for 125 years. Jesus had 1 disciple who was a Zealot – Simon (not Simon Peter). Jesus' choice of disciples was interesting. How he had a zealot and a tax collector in the same group baffles the mind.

**Area of the Orthodox Jews** – known by some as the triangle because of the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum that are all about 3 miles apart from each other. Most of Jesus' miracles were performed in the area of these three cities. More than 70% of the teaching verses in the Gospels happened in or right next to these three cities.

**Bethsaida** – "Beth" means place of or house of – "saida" means fishermen or hunters (in Hebrew you would say "hunters of fish"). was a city of about 400 people that consisted of 6-8 families. Everyone knew each other. The

city had been formed about 100 years when Jesus got there. It was so insignificant of a town that it wasn't even marked on Roman maps. From this little fishing village with no significance to the world, Jesus picked five of His disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip. We sit here today because of five guys from a nothing-ville town were chosen by a rabbi. It's a very God like way of doing things.

**Capernaum** was where Jesus dwelt for most of His ministry. This was a world of mostly farmers. It was a small village of about 2,500 people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Outside of the city there is a place known as "*Eremos Topos*" – meaning "a solitary place." A typical farm was about 1 acre of land. That area had to feed your family for an entire year. So a rabbi with hundreds or thousands of people following behind couldn't go traipsing across those fields. It would ruin the crops for that family to survive. So instead they would go to a solitary place outside the city. Jesus often taught in solitary places. He often went off to pray in solitary places. Solitary didn't mean he was way out in the sticks – it meant he was in one of those places where they don't farm. It's likely that the *eremos topos* hillside outside Capernaum was where Jesus did His healing of the leper that was sent to the temple, the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), the feeding of the 5,000, etc.

Capernaum was a fishing village, much like Bethsaida. It overlooked the Sea of Galilee. It was in their world: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Oxford. If you take the Mishnah (which is the record of Jewish oral traditions from the first century AD) there are more quotes from the rabbis of Capernaum than all the rest of the rabbis of the world combined. Jesus didn't do His ministry in the backwoods of TN or the jungles of South America. He did His ministry at the intellectual hub of the world. He went to where the best of the best educated individuals were located.

The ruins of the city show that it was not a very rich place – pretty typical living structures. It was, however, a very passionately religious place. The main structure in Capernaum is the Synagogue. The black stone is from Jesus' day – destroyed by the Romans. About 400 years later a new Synagogue was built on top of those ruins.

What's amazing about this Synagogue is that it is 4 times larger than any other Synagogue ever found anywhere in the world until the 1500s. This was the largest rabbinical school that existed anywhere in

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the world, and that's where Jesus chose to go to teach.

**First Century Rabbis:**

In Jesus' day there were many rabbis. The word RABBI means "honored person/honored one." Rabbi in that day was not an office, it was not a title; you didn't get ordained and you didn't get a degree. It simply meant that because of your Godliness and your wisdom you were honored by others. Jesus was called Rabbi by five different kinds of people: a Roman, a Pharisee, a Sadducee, his own disciples, and a Phoenician. So he was obviously recognized as someone who was a rabbi.

There are two types of rabbis in their world:

- Torah Teachers (teachers of the law, or Torah)
- Rabbis with S'mikhah (pronounced: "smee-hah)

**Torah Teachers:**

The word **Torah** is the Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible. Torah teachers were considered to be people who were "*masters of the Torah.*" That means they knew the Torah by memory. What a feat that was – to have the entire first five books of the Bible memorized! Not only did they have to have them memorized, but they had to have such a knowledge of the Torah that they could work from them.

Sidenote: Jesus drew His disciples from the group of people whose standard was to know the Torah by memory by the time you were 12-15 years of age. We don't know that all His disciples had this knowledge, but this is the world in which they lived. They were not Biblically illiterate peasants. They were people with a deep understanding of scripture. Torah Teachers were master teachers. They used: parables, alliteration, and creative ways of blending verses together to tell stories that could be applied to life to encourage people. They had students that would follow them around at times, but they did not have disciples (talmidim).

Torah Teachers were recognized by the community. No ordination, no degree, no installation, no hiring. The community simply said that they recognized in this person that he knew the Torah and was a great teacher, so they wanted to listen to him. These crowds would often then leave some monetary compensation for the torah teacher. There were many Torah Teachers in Jesus' day.

Torah teachers were limited in the sense that they could only teach what the community believed was right. They did not have freedom to do midrash (new teachings). They had the freedom to think of new parables and applications, but they could not teach new ideas.

Their method of teaching would follow this pattern:

1. "*It is written...*" then he would quote the text (from memory)

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2. “...and that means...” and he would explain with a parable, story, alliteration, etc.
3. “...according to...” and he would give the name of the person (rabbi) or document/text that this teaching was founded upon – whose authority this teaching was under.

Torah teachers were brilliant rabbis, but they were limited in their teaching by the interpretation of others.

**Rabbis with S’mikhah:**

In Jesus’ world, there was also a small group of “Rabbis with S’mikhah.” We know of about a dozen by name from the hundred years in which Jesus lived right in the middle of (from about 30 BC to 70 AD). They weren’t as common as Torah Teachers, and they didn’t exist in the region of Judea, only in Galilee.

A Rabbi with S’mikhah is sometimes a Torah Teacher who has moved up. He is a master of the Torah and the Haftorah – which is a Hebrew word for “the rest.” So you could say that a Rabbi with S’mikhah is someone who is a master of the whole Tanakh. The name *Tanakh* is a combination of the three portions of text: the Torah (the law), Nevi'im (the prophetic books), and the Ketuvim (the wisdom books). They took the first letters of each word and put them together into the word: *TNK* or *TaNaKh*. The Tanakh consists of the other books that, when combined with the Law of Moses (Torah), make up what we call the Old Testament.

Jesus said to the men on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:25-27

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “Foolish people! So unwilling to put your trust in everything the prophets spoke! <sup>26</sup> Didn’t the Messiah have to die like this before entering his glory?” <sup>27</sup> Then, starting with Moshe and all the prophets, he explained to them the things that can be found **throughout the *Tanakh*** concerning himself.

Jesus told them, starting with Genesis and working his way through the prophets and the wisdom writings where the Messiah and His kingdom were mentioned, explaining what they had misunderstood about Him. A Rabbi with S’mikhah had to know the entire Tanakh by memory. How many verses could you recite by memory – from the Old Testament? The average for most Christians is about a dozen verses, mostly paraphrased, and a good portion being from the Psalms. These Rabbis with S’mikhah knew the entire Bible (Tanakh) by memory. These rabbis had disciples (talmidim), unlike Torah Teachers who only had students who would follow them around. There is a big difference between students and disciples.

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**Notes:**

They were master teachers, better than the Torah Teachers, and were recognized by the community (just as the Torah Teachers). Many of them were healers. Every single miracle Jesus did except raising the dead is attested in other rabbis of this time (casting out demons, stilling or causing storms, healing the blind, healing the lepers, multiplying food, etc.) We always think – if Jesus did all these miracles, why did they not recognize Him as the Messiah? Because Jesus was no different than these other Rabbis with S’mikhah.

Their method of teaching would follow this pattern:

1. “It is written...” then he would quote the text (from memory)
2. “You have heard it said this means \_\_\_\_, but I tell you it means \_\_\_\_.”

Who does this sound like?

Matthew 7:28-29

<sup>28</sup>When Yeshua had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at the way he taught, <sup>29</sup>for he was not instructing them like their *Torah*-teachers but as one who had authority himself.

**Hebrew School:** In Galilee, boys and girls went to school.

**1<sup>st</sup> Level: Bet Sefer.** *Bet* means *place*, *sefer* means *the book/reading* – so together it means *place of the book* or *place of reading*. The age range was about 4 to 10 – elementary school ages.

The boys memorized the Torah (first five books). The goal was by age 12 to know the first five books by memory. If they knew it by age 10, then you were allowed to go to Jerusalem for your “first Passover” – the first one you would be allowed to offer the sacrifice for your family, because you are now an adult. Jesus did this in Jerusalem at age 12 – this tells you Jesus had the Torah memorized. If you didn’t learn the Torah by age 10, it wasn’t a disgrace – not everyone had those talents – but then you were finished and you would go and learn a trade. A few did memorize and moved on.

The girls memorized Psalms, Proverbs, and Deuteronomy. Jesus quotes scripture three times to what is referred to as “women” – men were there too, but he was mostly talking to the women. In each instance he quotes from Psalms. He was quoting scriptures they knew.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Level: Bet Talmud.** *Bet* means *place*, *talmud* means *learning*. So this was a *place of learning*. Here, they studied all of Tanakh and memorized all of them between the ages of 10-14. Very few of these students ever made it this far. The girls marry when they reach menstruation, so this level is only boys. While doing this, you are also learning a trade with your dad. They would study the Torah (first five books) and the Haftorah (the rest), memorizing parts of the haftorah as well as what they already memorized.

By this age, it was clear most boys would not be able to go to the next level. Instead they would learn a trade from their father. At this level they are students, not talmidim [disciples]. They study with Torah Teachers, not Rabbis with S’mikhah, and they’re not studying to become like, they’re just studying to understand.

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Some men in this group would marry. During this time, students also learned the Jewish art of questions and answers. Instead of answering with an answer, they were taught to answer with another question. In this way, students could demonstrate both their knowledge and their great regard for the scriptures. They were taught to always be curious about the Scriptures. Look at how Jesus was described as a young boy.

Luke 2:46-47

<sup>46</sup> On the third day they found him — he was sitting in the Temple court among the rabbis, not only listening to them but questioning what they said; <sup>47</sup> and everyone who heard him was astonished at his insight and his responses.

**3rd Level: Bet Midrash.** *Bet* means *place*, *midrash* means *to explain/interpret*. So this was a *place of explaining* or a *place of interpreting*. Now you move beyond memory and into explanation or interpretation. This was for boys age 15-30. They would study the entire Tanach to interpret it – not just to understand or explain as in the previous levels.

If you were smart enough and knew your Scriptures well enough to make it this far, you were given the opportunity to go to a rabbi with s’ mikhah to seek further education. The rabbi would grill you and ask you all kinds of questions, because he was trying to find out if you were good enough to be his student. He wanted to know if you knew enough, but even more importantly, **if you could be like him in all areas of your life**. If he decided that he didn’t think you could do it, then he would tell you to go back to the family business. It was very rare, but if he thought highly enough of you, he would become your teacher and it would be your goal to **become like him in every way**. You would agree to take on his “beliefs” and his interpretations of the scriptures. This was called his **“yoke”** and he would say to you, **“come follow me.”** This was a huge privilege that was offered to very few people. The disciple’s (also called “talmidim”) job was to become like the rabbi in every way. If the rabbi was hurt and had a limp, you might see his healthy disciples walking behind him (in his footsteps or “in the dust” of the rabbi) with a limp. You follow your rabbi 24 hours a day – sleep in the room where he sleeps, eat in the room where he eats, even go to the bathroom together – because when the rabbi comes out,

he may pray (blessing God for whatever the situation). They want to see their rabbi 24 hours a day because they want to end up being JUST LIKE HIM. The phrase is **to sit at his feet** – or, **to be covered with his dust**. You are so close to the rabbi that when he walks on the dusty paths, you get covered with his dust. A talmid wants to be **just like the rabbi** – and the only way to do so is to know him as intimately as you know your closest friend, or even more.

Western culture has absolutely destroyed the truth about discipleship. We are not disciples an hour on Sunday, ten minutes before we go to bed, and a Bible study a week. That is not a disciple. A disciple is 24 hours a day, and it's every fiber of your body. There never is a moment that passes without you thinking, *"How could I be [as a person; as an athlete; as a student; as an artist; as anything] more like Jesus at this moment?"* If you and I are not consumed with a passion to know Jesus so well that we become like him more and more and more, we're not talmidim. Almost all of his disciples died as martyrs – were they like the rabbi or not?

Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, **and you will find rest for your souls.**

<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We in the church often wonder why the disciples were so quick to drop their nets, their jobs, and their lives to follow Jesus. However, this understanding of their culture changes things. Jesus' disciples were normal guys who were out working in their family trades. This means they didn't make the cut. They had already dropped out of school and had resigned themselves to the fact that they would probably never be able to follow a rabbi or become a disciple [talmid]. When Jesus came along and made His offer, they jumped at the opportunity. They didn't want to miss it so they dropped what they were doing and went.

In the end, Jesus is our rabbi. We are to become like him in every way.

I Peter 2:21

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, this is what you were called to; because the Messiah too suffered, on your behalf, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps.

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