



CONTEXT FOR THE CHRIST EVENT:

Galilean I

THE NORTHERN AREA of Israel has long been known as Galilee (Hebrew *galil* = circle or circuit). It is an elliptically shaped territory about 25 miles from east to west and around 50 miles from north to south. Galilee forms the northern extremity of the Great Rift Valley, which stretches from the base of Mount Hermon down through Lake Huleh, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, then through the Red Sea, and finally across East Africa to central Mozambique. The rift was created by the separation of the great Asian and African tectonic plates.^{1, 2}

“Galilee is sharply divided into two sections. . . . Upper Galilee is a high plateau divided by narrow gorges, with elevations ranging from 1,500 to 3,963 feet high, while Lower Galilee ranges from 500 feet above sea level to around 700 feet below sea level at the Sea of Galilee (except for the mountains in the southeast, which do not exceed 2,000 feet).”³

From ancient times Galilee has been known as Israel’s most agriculturally productive region. “In the spring the valleys and slopes become an ocean of wildflowers and blossoming trees. Beginning in March the area is covered by a vast blanket of green. The fertile land is a texture of orange groves, vineyards and fruit orchards.”⁴

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Recent excavations in the Amud Cave, overlooking the Amud River (Wadi Amud) just northwest of the Sea of Galilee, have revealed the fragmentary remains of sixteen Neanderthal skeletons. “This material has been dated by thermoluminescence to approximately 45-47 thousand years old.”⁵ Examination of the remains shows a surprising affinity between these

Neanderthals and Homo sapiens. Thus, there must have been an intermingling of these species in Galilee during those ancient times.

Permanent settlement in Galilee began in Paleolithic times about 9000 BCE. A tribal group known as the Natufians established the first settlements on a terrace just north of Lake Huleh. This site, known as Eynan, has been extensively excavated and has revealed the remains of several villages. Each village had been inhabited by about 200 people, who had learned to cultivate the soil and thus had become one of the first sedentary peoples. Decades ago the tomb of a Natufian king was discovered at Eynan. The dead king was propped up on a pillow of stones, “facing the snowy peaks of Mount Hermon, thirty miles away.” The evidence strongly suggests that the Natufians were among the first to be endowed with a bicameral mind and metaphoric “god-consciousness.”⁶

“ . . . [At least seven millennia later,] with the establishment of urban civilization in the Early Canaanite period, cities were founded in the plains surrounding the Galilean mountain massif and in its northern plateau while the wooded core of the country was left unoccupied. Egyptian documents mention only the cities (apart from those in the Jordan Valley and the coastal plain) lying on the branch of the Via Maris (the road leading from Damascus to the sea) which crosses the southeastern corner of Lower Galilee. . . .

“The armies of the Pharaohs and of the invading Hyksos avoided the difficult mountain region as far as possible. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Israelite tribes exploited this situation by infiltrating into the forested hill country before attacking the Canaanite strongholds in the plains. . . .

“The victories of Joshua at the waters of Merom and of Deborah at Mt. Tabor ensured Israelite supremacy over the whole of Galilee. In biblical times Galilee was divided between four tribes: Asher in the northwest, Zebulun in the southwest, Naphtali in most of the eastern half, and Issachar in part of the southeast. . . . By conquering the remaining Canaanite cities in the Jezreel Valley, David annexed the whole of Galilee to his kingdom.

Under Solomon, Galilee was divided into three districts, each roughly

corresponding to a tribal area: the ninth district included Zebulun and probably Asher, the eighth, Naphtali, and the tenth, Issachar. With the division of the monarchy Galilee became part of the northern kingdom of Israel and was in the forefront of the struggle with Aram-Damascus. . . . In 732 B.C.E.

Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, conquered Galilee and turned it into the Assyrian province of Magiddu (Megiddo). Some of the Israelite inhabitants were deported but the remaining remnant renewed its relations with Jerusalem in the time of Josiah, who may have reunited Galilee with his

“The victories of Joshua at the waters of Merom and of Deborah at Mt. Tabor ensured Israelite supremacy over the whole of Galilee.” – Encyclopaedia Judaica

kingdom. . . . Nothing is known of Galilee under the Babylonians and Persians. . . . In the Ptolemaic period some estates in Galilee were held by Greeks; it appears in the Zenon papyri as a supplier of wheat to Tyre. It was part of the eparchy of Samaria in Seleucid times . . . ; its administrative center was the royal fortress on Mt. Tabor (Itabyrion). According to 1 Maccabees 5:15 there were Jewish settlements in western Galilee in the confines of Acre-Ptolemais. These were evacuated by Simeon but others remained in eastern Galilee; Bacchides, the Seleucid general, is reported to have attacked the Jews of Arbel on the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was incorporated into the Hasmonean kingdom by Judah Aristobulus I (104 B.C.E.). It rapidly became completely Jewish, for only two years later at the beginning of the reign of Alexander Yannai, its cities could be attacked on a Sabbath for an easy victory. After Pompey's conquest (63 B.C.E.) Galilee was left to Judea. . . . Under Hyrcanus II, Herod was governor of Galilee for a time; when he became king, Galilee was one of the centers of opposition to his rule and it remained a Zealot stronghold until the fall of Jerusalem.”⁷

It was in this historical context that God became manifest as Jesus Christ. He spent most of his life in Galilee with his parents, siblings and neighbors. Here the ultimate, authentic God-consciousness of the Word occurred — in the very location where God had first endowed humanity with metaphoric “god-consciousness”!

Endnotes

1. See “The Galilee,” at www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/galilee/galilee.htm.
2. See “Great Rift Valley,” at www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0821681.html.
3. “The Galilee.”
4. Ibid.
5. “Amud Cave in Israel,” at ancientneareast.tripod.com/Amud_Cave.html.
6. See Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990), pp. 138-144. See also Julian Jaynes Society, “Summary of Evidence,” at www.julianjaynes.org/evidence_summary.php; “Origins,” *Outlook* (September 2001); “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* (October 2001); “Life Is Bound Up,” *Outlook* (April/June 2002); “Atonement I: Prehistoric,” *Outlook* (March 2006).
7. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (1997), s.v. Michael Avi-Yonah, “Galilee.”