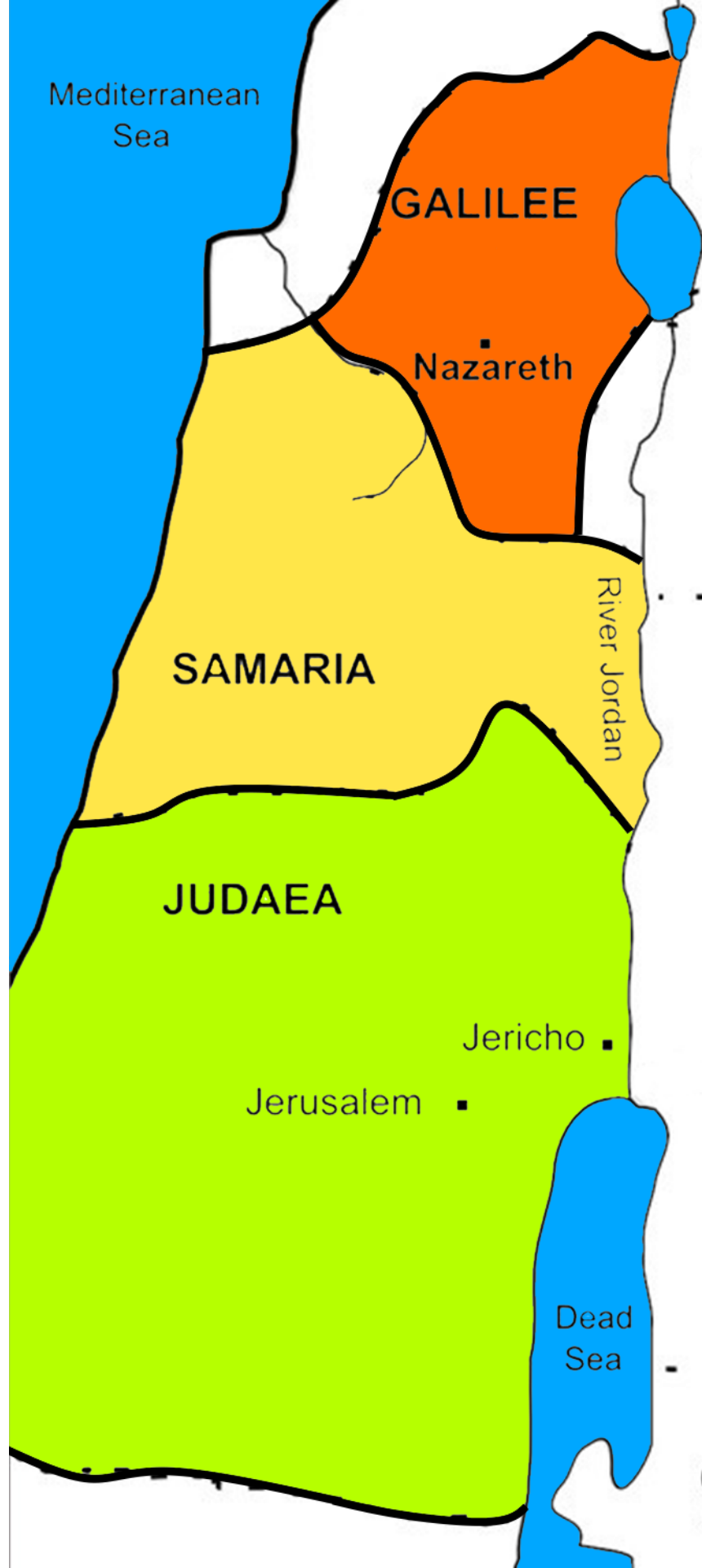


# The God from Podunk

Galilee itself is largely a rugged and hilly backwater region that had been out of the mainstream of Jewish culture and life for many hundreds of years. When Israel split into two kingdoms at the death of King Solomon, Galilee was part of the northern kingdom, which abandoned the worship of the one true God and was eventually conquered in 721 BC. At that point, the ruling class and urban dwellers were deported, but it seems that the poor were left and continued their subsistence lives.





Later, the southern kingdom was itself conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and the inhabitants deported. But eventually, they were allowed to return, and when they did, they rebuilt their temple and compiled the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. They then centered

their government and religion around these five books. But they still had no interaction with the remnants of the northern kingdom who lived in Galilee.

Eventually, both areas came under the dominion of the Greek Seleucids, until the Jews in the area around Jerusalem revolted and won their independence under a Jewish dynasty called the Maccabees. When the Maccabees came to power, they set about conquering the lands around them, and it was about 100 BC that they conquered the area of Galilee and imposed their laws—the laws from the first five books of the Bible—on the land. That's how recently the Galileans had become integrated into the Jewish religion and way of life.





Clearly, the Jews from the area around Jerusalem didn't think very highly of the Galileans. They apparently even talked differently, as indicated by the comment to Peter on the night of Jesus' trial: "You

also were with Jesus the Galilean ... for your accent betrays you." (Matthew 26:73) Maybe even Jesus Himself spoke with an accent that sounded odd to the Judeans.

The chief priests and Pharisees obviously thought the idea of a prophet, let alone the Messiah, coming out of Galilee was ludicrous. They even scorned one of their own, Nicodemus, for thinking that this could be possible: "Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!" (John 7:52) And it seems that Jesus' home village was of a particularly poor reputation. John's Gospel reports one of Jesus' apostles, Nathanael, saying "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)





Even the Romans didn't have a good opinion of the place. The book of Acts notes that a certain Judas from Galilee had started a revolt there before being killed and his followers

scattered. (Acts 5:37) The Romans had also put down a rebellion there around the year Jesus was born, and destroyed Sepphoris, Galilee's most important city, which was only a short distance from Nazareth.

Many people don't realize that most of Jesus' ministry took place in Galilee, and He's only recorded as going very occasionally into Judea. No wonder He got such a tough reception from many of the cultural and intellectual elite of His land. I'm left to ponder sometimes if I would have been quick to embrace Him and His teachings if I had been around in those days.



But follow Him they did. And not just people from Galilee, but Jews from all over the Mediterranean world. Just 50 days after He had been ignominiously executed in Jerusalem, thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate an important religious festival and decided that this Galilean was not just a prophet, but also the long-awaited Messiah, and eagerly embraced the fledgling Christian movement. What got into them?



The answer is God got into them in a very significant way. The Christian movement was born. And soon it was not only Jews, but people from the myriad nations of the Roman Empire and beyond who were embracing faith in

the God from Podunk. It took over 300 years before it was acceptable, even preferable, to be a Christian in many quarters. Yet when you consider that it all began in what could arguably have been called the most insignificant part of the most troublesome province in the Roman world, with a man who preached for about three years and was executed in his thirties as a criminal, it's astonishing.

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