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*Who Were the Galileans?*  
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The Land of Israel, often called Palestine, has frequently had a changing population. In recent decades, many Jews have migrated into Israel returning from their ancestors' forced exile centuries ago. The Israeli-Palestinian talks that began this week after the Annapolis Conference will address the Palestinian desire for return of refugees and their descendants from their more recent exile.

The same was true of Palestine in the first century A.D. Palestine is a narrow strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley, divided into four regions south to north. Idumea was populated by immigrants from Arabia to the southeast, Judea contained descendants of Jews who had returned from Babylonian exile in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., while Samaria was populated by the descendants of people whom the Assyrian Empire forcibly moved in the seventh century B.C. (2 Kings 15-16).

And Galilee, the fourth and northernmost area of Palestine? Well, that has been a matter of debate. To be sure, the population there was Jewish, for Jesus is well-known for his mission among the Galilean Jews. But where did those Jews come from?

Many people may wonder why this is a question. Have not Jews been in Galilee since the 12 Tribes settled there in the 13th century B.C.? Actually, no.

Certainly Galilee was settled by the tribes of Zebulon, Naphtali, Issachar and Asher. Later it belonged to David's kingdom and then to the northern nation of Israel. But the Assyrian Emperor Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Israel in 733 B.C. and the surviving rump state was obliterated by his successor Shalmaneser V in 722. All the population was relocated to other areas of the empire.

At this moment, Galilee drops out of history for the next 600 years. To be sure, 2 Kings 17 tells of the resettlement of Samaria, but Galilee is not mentioned.

Archaeological research now reveals this was not just an oversight of the Biblical writers. Surface surveys indicate no human occupation of Galilee during the sixth and seventh centuries B.C. A few scattered, small settlements began to appear in following centuries, mostly military outposts and a few small farming communities that sent their harvests to the coastal cities. The same conclusions can be drawn from the excavations of major

sites as well. So Galilee remains essentially empty for more than half a millennium following the Assyrian invasions.

The archaeological evidence reveals a sudden change about the start of the first century B.C. Over a period of a couple decades, dozens of new villages appear. This indicates that a new, rather large, population comes into Galilee. The trend continues for the next half century or so, with many new settlements appearing and then growing larger.

Who were these new inhabitants? These new archaeological findings indicate that they were transplanted Judeans. The ancient historian Josephus relates how Alexander Jannaeus, the King of Israel from 102 to 76 B.C., extended the northern boundary of his Judean-centered country into Galilee during his reign using military means.

Unfortunately, Josephus says nothing about Jannaeus' management of the country once it came under his control. For a long time, scholars have held that he simply converted the people he found there, the Itureans, to Judaism. Since there was no large population in Galilee at the time, we now know this incorrect.

The archaeology instead reveals that the new inhabitants were Judeans. First, the currency of the region is now that of the Judean Jannaeus and his successors; it is not that of the coastal cities or of Damascus further north in Syria. Second, excavated village areas reveal the same interest in religious purity common among Judeans, with ritual baths cut out of the bedrock and houses that contained stone bowls, cups and plates that were impervious to impurity. Third, the Galileans followed a Judean diet in that they did not eat pork; no pig bones are found in the garbage dumps.

So the archaeological research of recent decades now shows that the Galilean people of Jesus' time were descendants of Judean immigrants of a century or so earlier.