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The Context

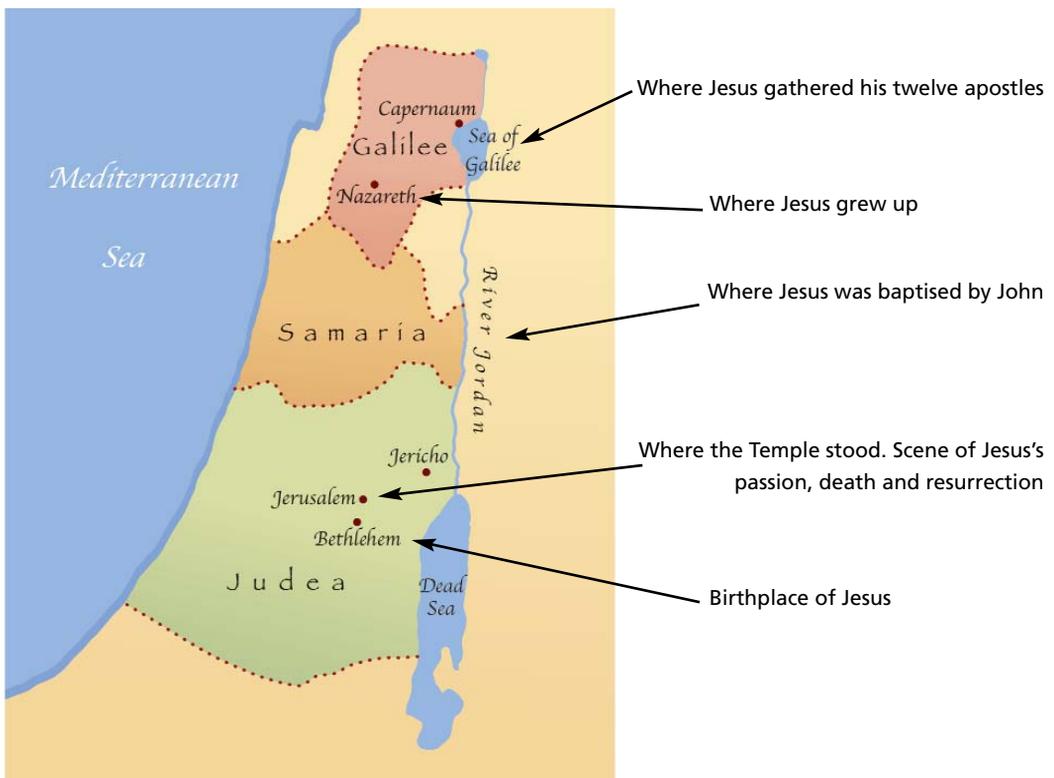
aims

- To understand the geography of Palestine.
- To know how Palestine was governed.
- To be aware of the different reactions among the Jews to Roman rule.

key point

- **Holy Land** – the name given to the area of the Middle East where the story of Jesus took place, i.e. modern Israel and the Palestinian Territories.
- **Roman Empire** – the vast territory, stretching from northern England to the Persian Gulf, ruled from Rome.

Palestine



Palestine in the first century CE

Two thousand years ago, the Holy Land was known as Palestine. It was a province of the Roman Empire.

Size

Length (from north to south): about 240 km (150 miles).

Width (from east to west): 50–80 km (30–50 miles).

Political regions

As you can see from the map, the principal political regions of Palestine were:

- Galilee in the north
- Samaria in the centre
- Judea in the south.

Challenges

Life was difficult because:

- though the area around the Sea of Galilee was green and fertile, much of the landscape was sand and rock and therefore unsuitable for farming
- there were periodic droughts
- the sirocco (hot east winds) could strip away dry topsoil
- plagues of locusts could devour crops.

How Palestine was governed

- Herod the Great ruled over Palestine on behalf of the Roman emperor until his death in 4 BCE.
- Then the emperor appointed a **procurator** (governor) to administer Samaria and Judaea. One of Herod's sons was made **tetrarch** (commander) of Galilee.
- The Roman procurator of Samaria and Judaea between 26 CE and 36 CE was Pontius Pilate.
- His job was to maintain order among 750,000 people, keep the trade routes open and make sure taxes were paid promptly and in full.
- However, Pilate had only a garrison of 3,000 soldiers at his disposal to do all this. So he needed the help of the **Sanhedrin**.

The Sanhedrin

- The Sanhedrin was the ruling council of the Jewish religion.
- It was based in the Temple compound in Jerusalem.
- It acted as a court, with powers to punish any Jews who broke their religion's laws, and had its own armed force, the Temple Guard, to enforce its decisions. However, it could not impose the death penalty.
- It was composed of 70 Jewish elders who elected a High Priest to oversee its activities; however, the Romans could remove the High Priest if he displeased them.
- Its membership was divided into two rival groups – the **Sadducees** and the **Pharisees**.

Tax collectors

- As subjects of the Roman emperor, the Jews had to pay heavy taxes.
- Tax collectors were Jews willing to collect these taxes.
- Tax collectors were despised by most Jews and treated as social outcasts.
- They were not allowed to hold any religious office or to give evidence in court because they were considered to be dishonest and treacherous.
- Jesus shocked many people by inviting a tax collector named Matthew to become an apostle.

Jewish expectations about the Messiah

- The Jews had messianic expectations, i.e. they believed that God would send a **messiah** (from the Hebrew word *moshiach*, meaning ‘anointed one’).
- Most Jews believed that the Messiah would:
 1. free them from Roman occupation
 2. establish an independent Jewish kingdom
 3. bring peace and prosperity.

Jewish reactions to Roman Rule

By the first century CE, four groups had emerged among the Jews. Each reacted differently to Roman rule.

1. Sadducees

- A small powerful group composed of the High Priest, Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats.
- They dominated the Sanhedrin.
- They accepted Roman rule and used their influence to help the procurator fulfil his mission.
- They rejected belief in life after death.
- They did not expect a messiah to liberate them.

2. Pharisees

- A large powerful group composed of lay religious teachers (rabbis) who controlled the local synagogues.
- Unlike the Sadducees, they rejected Roman rule but did not actively oppose it.
- They devoted all their energies to living rigidly according to the laws of their religion.
- They believed in life after death.
- They expected a messiah to emerge from their ranks to free them from Roman rule and establish an independent Jewish kingdom.

3. Essenes

- A community of monks who devoted their lives to prayer, fasting and study.
- They rejected Roman rule but did not actively oppose it. Instead, they separated themselves from the rest of society and established communities in remote desert areas.
- They believed that they alone had the correct interpretation of the Tenakh (Hebrew scriptures).
- They may have been the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- They expected two messiahs: a priest who would restore the Temple; and a warrior who would free them from foreign control.

4. Zealots

- Members of a movement of deeply religious Jews who sought to overthrow Roman rule by violent rebellion.
- They hated the Sadducees for co-operating with the Romans and sometimes carried out assassinations of Sadducees.
- They expected the Messiah to be a warrior king who would end foreign domination and establish an independent Jewish kingdom.

Sample Exam Paper: Questions and Answers

Section 1

There are three types of question in this section: tick the correct box; fill in the answer; and make a match (all 5 marks each)

Tick the Correct Box

1. A world view can be described as a set of assumptions which a person holds about the basic make-up of the world.
True False
2. Historical evidence for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth can be found in the writings of:
Hosea Isaiah Tacitus
3. The Last Supper was a meal associated with which of the following religious celebrations?
Bar Mitzvah Hanukkah Passover Sukkot
4. The river Ganges is sacred to which of the following world religions?
Christianity Hinduism Islam Judaism
5. The Law of Karma is a state law.
True False
6. Morally mature people think only of themselves in making decisions.
True False

Fill in the answer

1. In religious traditions martyrdom means *dying/giving one's life for one's religious beliefs*.
2. In religious traditions a division or major split between people of the same faith is known as a *schism*.
3. Materialism means *following a way of life that seeks fulfilment or happiness through acquiring wealth, i.e. money and property*.
4. The Dalai Lama is associated with which world religion? *Buddhism*.
5. Libertarianism is *the view that we should all be free to do as we choose, without undue interference from the state, so long as we do not interfere with the equal freedom of others*.

Section 2

- A. Study the picture given and answer the questions accompanying it.

This is a photograph of Muslim pilgrims at the Grand Mosque in Makkah (Mecca).

- A. Pick **one** thing from the photograph which shows that this is a holy place. (2 marks)



Your answer should include any **one** of the following:

- It shows the Kaaba in Makkah.
 - It is an Islamic shrine covered in a black cloth.
 - There are many pilgrims gathered around it.
 - The pilgrims are wearing a special seamless white garment called the ihram.
- B. State **two** reasons why people go on pilgrimage.
Give any two of the following (2 marks per reason):
- To fulfil the fifth Pillar of Islam, which is to go on the Hajj at least once in one's lifetime.
 - To seek God's help in facing some life crisis.
 - To grow closer to God through prayer and doing penance.
 - It is a tradition in many religions to go on pilgrimage.
- C. Identify **two** rituals associated with pilgrimage.

Give any two of the following (2 marks per ritual):

For a Muslim when on pilgrimage to Makkah:

- Bathing on arrival at Makkah to show one's intention to complete the pilgrimage.
- Putting on the ihram and walking barefoot.
- Passing around the Kaaba seven times.
- Passing between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times.
- Throwing stones at the pillar in the village of Mina.

For a Catholic on pilgrimage in Knock, Co. Mayo:

- Attending Mass.
- Reciting the Rosary.
- Attending the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Fasting overnight.