

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

It's "Judeans" Not "Jews"

English translations of the Bible make a tragic mistake. The Greek word, "Ioudaioi," translated as "Jews" actually means "Judeans."

Aside: There is no "j" in the Greek alphabet, so occasionally Greek words that use "i" are translated into English words that use "j." And so, "Ioudaioi" becomes "Judeans."

"Judeans," as in "From the region Judea in the south."

"Judeans," as in "From the region Judea in the south where the capital city Jerusalem is."

"Judeans," as in "From the region Judea in the south where the capital city Jerusalem and the Temple are."

"Judeans," as in "From the region Judea in the south where the capital city Jerusalem, the Temple, and the headquarters of the Roman Governor are."

"Judeans," as in "The elite with power, wealth, and privilege that is dependent on collaboration with the Roman occupiers."

"Judeans," as contrasted with "Galileans from the region Galilee in the north."

"Galileans," as in "Those from the region Galilee in the north who were (according to those from Judea) uncultured, uneducated, backwoods hillbillies."

"Galileans," as in "Those from the region Galilee in the north who came from (according to those from Judea) no-name hamlets like - what's-it-called? Oh yeah - Nazareth - whoever has heard of that?"

"Galilean," as in "The (Judeans) were astonished at it, saying, 'How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?'" (John 7:15)

"Galileans," as in "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?" (John 7:41, spoken by a Judean.)

"Galileans," as in "Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee." (John 7:52, spoken by a Judean.)

"Galileans," as in "Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?'" (Acts 2:7, spoken by "Jews" from around the Mediterranean who were wealthy enough to travel to the Temple in the capital city Jerusalem in Judea for the Pentecost Festival.)

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And, most chillingly, "Galilean," as in "After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the *Judeans* (the text has the mistranslation, "Jews") were looking for an opportunity to kill him." (John 7:1)

In other words, at the time of Jesus - as now - where you were from carried a load of cultural baggage - of social status.

Everywhere in the world - even today - power, privilege, status, and wealth (and corruption) are associated with the capital city and its region. And those outside that region are looked down on. With those from the poorest regions at the bottom of the barrel. And at the time of Jesus, Galilee was the bottom of the barrel.

And at the time of Jesus - as now - those from outside the region identified everyone from that area with the capital. And so Romans used "Judeans" as the generic name for Judeans, Galileans, Samaritans, and Pereans (the area we now call the West Bank). And it is from this usage that the word "Judean" has been shortened to the English word, "Jew."

But at the time of Jesus, "Judea, Galilee, and Perea constituted three population areas that together made up the 'house of Israel.'" (Malina, page 45, see footnote below.)

"Israel," as in "The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel." (Luke 1:80)

"Israel," as in "I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." (John 1:31)

"Israel," as in "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:5-6)

"Israel," as in "He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" (Matthew 15:24)

"Israel," as in "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus (*and notice the pointedly unstated 'from Nazareth in Galilee'*) whom you (*and notice the pointedly unstated, 'from Jerusalem in Judea'*) crucified." (Acts 2:36)

Thus the conflict in the Bible is **NOT** between Jesus and the "Jews." This makes no sense because Jesus himself was of course "Jewish" - he was of the house of Israel.

But there is a real conflict between Jesus and Judeans. Between that Galilean hayseed yokel, Jesus, from that no name village, Nazareth, and the Judean elite, Roman-collaborating, authorities from the capital city, Jerusalem.

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So. Get out your indelible black ink pens, and wherever you see "Jews" in an English translation of the Bible - cross it out. And write in, "**JUDEANS!**"

And then weep. Weep for the thousand years of bloody carnage inflicted on Jews - carnage legitimized in part by mis-understanding and mis-translation of one word - "Ioudaioi."

It's "Judeans," not "Jews."

In fact. Even better is "Judean Authorities."

"Judean Authorities," as in "Therefore the **JUDEAN AUTHORITIES** started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath." (John 5:16)

"Judean Authorities," as in "For this reason the **JUDEAN AUTHORITIES** were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God."

"Judean Authorities," as in "The **CROWD WHO SUPPORTED THE JUDEAN AUTHORITIES** answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'" (John 19:7)

"Judean Authorities," as in "Then the **CROWD WHO SUPPORTED THE JUDEAN AUTHORITIES** as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (Matthew 27:25)

Malina makes a wonderful final observation:

The inscription over the cross, John 19:19, has in it a wonderful irony that would have rankled Jesus' Judean opponents: It spells out Jesus' identification as "Jesus of Nazareth" - that is, Jesus, a Galilean, is being designated, "King of the Judeans."

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John, see link below, pages 44-46.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

And do yourself and the world a huge favour. Actually click on the link to Amazon, and buy at least one of Malina's books. I guarantee it will transform your understanding of Jesus and give as-yet-unknown authenticity to your preaching and Bible study.