

Palestine in the time of Jesus

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998),

K.C. Hanson has taught Biblical Studies at Episcopal Theological School and the School of Theology at Claremont, Creighton University, and St. Olaf College. Douglas E. Oakman is Associate Professor of Religion at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Social System of Roman Palestine P.3

In Palestine, most of ancient world, **religious and economic institutions** were embedded in kinship or politics. Kin relations interpenetrated political, economic, and religious institutions; power relations structured village, economic, and religious life. For example, The emperor of Rome was not only supreme commander of the government and military *princes* (head man), but was *Pontifex Maximus* (highest priest) of Roman religion and posthumously voted divine status by the Senate. Successive political rulers of Palestine – Macedonians, Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Romans – appointed the Jerusalem high priests. And, immediately before the Roman era, the Hasmoneans ruled Judea as both kings and high priests. ¹

The role of economy in the U.S.

In U.S. society economics is taken as a fundamental determinant in almost all transactions, and our metaphors are dominated by economic references: One of most prevalent American phrases is “the bottom line”; referring literally to the final accounting total, it is used metaphorically to mean any central point or conclusion; quality is often assessed in terms of cost; a house, a car, an education, a vacation; people often leave family, church, and friends to pursue better-paying jobs; couples put off getting married, and church do not pursue ministries if they “can’t afford it,”; a person’s public status correlates closely with his or her income and assets; actors and athletes are given multimillion dollar contracts, while teachers are often laid off when school boards cannot even meet their very basic salaries. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 6-7..

In many ways, the society in which Jesus lived was structurally dysfunctional, since it gave inordinate power and privilege to a very few. *A conflict approach*, attends to the tensions between social factions, institutions, and subcultures that are the product of power relations in which one group seeks to dominate, control, manipulate, or subdue the others for its own advantage. Conflict theory seeks to understand who benefits from the social structures and how conflict is managed; “lumping it,” avoidance, coercion, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or adjudication. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 9.

¹ K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 5.

First-century Palestine was shaped by several dominant forces: the Israelite traditions (linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage), the Roman Empire (political control), and Hellenism (the pervasive cultural influence over the whole Mediterranean and Middle East).²

In Jesus' day, Judeans had lived under foreign rulers for almost six hundred years.³

Chapter Two: Kinship in Agrarian Roman Palestine P. 19

Gender (women) division is rooted in male fears of the female. Ancient Israelites did not simply construe females as different, but potentially *dangerous*. A man can be overpowered by a woman simply by looking at her (Philo, *On the Virtues* 38-30). Women are often categorized as fundamentally sinful, for example, in the proverbial statements of Ben Sira:

Do not look upon anyone for beauty,
And do not sit among women.
For moths emerge from garments,
And a woman's wickedness emerges from a woman.
Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good.
And it is a woman who brings shame and disgrace
(Sir 42:12-14; see also Philo, *Hypothetica* 11:14-17)

These negative statements must also be put in context with positive statements made about wives and mothers. A "good wife" is grand (Prov. 31:10-31), and mothers are deserving of their son's respect, honor, and attention (Ex. 20: 12; Prov. 1:8; 6:20). Wife or mother, a daughter or sister is worthy of love, care, and respect, but she must also remain within the parameters set by the males and must constantly be kept in check by the adult males of the family. Males must guard the females within the family.
K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 24-25.

Jesus' birth and family P. 57-58.

Chapter Three: Politics and Patronage in Agrarian Roman Palestine P. 63

Those living in **Judea, Samaria, Idumea, Galilee, Perea, Gaza**, and the northern territories (Gaulanists, Auranists, Batanea, Trachonitis, and Iturea) were governed as an independent state by a dynasty of hereditary rulers (the earlier Hasmoneans), by client-kings and governors (the later Hasmoneans and the Herodians), and by Roman prefects and procurators (for example, Pontius Pilate, Porcius Festus, and Felix) who served the will of Roman emperors (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus). As a whole or in parts, they had been provinces of the Hellenistic empires (the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt), the Parthians, and, finally, following 63 B.C.E., the Romans. The Palestinians did not elect their rulers. From emperors to regional governors, their rulers were either hereditary monarchs or elites appointed to their post by distant empires.

² K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 10.

³ K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 16.

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 65.

Politics: Urban elites, where Romans or Judeans, decided both domestic and foreign policies with little attention paid to the majority of the peasants who lived in villages. Taxes, tolls, and tribute were not open to referendum, but imposed from above; and they were not collected to benefit the populace, but only the elites. And even the post of high priest at the Jerusalem temple was a political appointment subject to the patronage of the Herodians or Romans. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 66.

The Romans governed Judea as a minor imperial province. It is Rome that had controlled Palestine's politics and political economy, by the time of Jesus' ministry, for nearly one hundred years. Rome influenced Israelite political religion through control and patronage of the Jerusalem high priesthood. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 67.

Political Economy and Infrastructure

The primary functions exercised by aristocratic families are *tax collection and warfare* in support of "the noble life." While the small number of elites compete for honor and the right to control and tax peasant families, peasant families are kept *subsistence level*. These empires are "*exploitative*" in that peasants have little say in the control of production or taxation. Since much of the peasant families' produce (the so-called surplus) is extracted by the aristocratic families in the form of labor, produce, and money (through the instruments of tithes, taxes, tolls, rents, tributes, and confiscation), *technological progress is impeded*, minimizing change; the exception to this is the technology of warfare, since it is subsidized by the aristocratic families to protect their honor, power, privilege, holdings, and possessions. *Improvements in the infrastructure* (for example: roads, aqueducts, harbors, sewers) are for the increased benefits of the aristocratic families, not to benefit peasant families in return for their taxes.

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 69.

Social Bandit: One of the recurring ways disaffected peasants react is through "**social banditry**." Social bandits are peasants who have been repressed and separated from their land and village. This is usually the result if they have been excessively taxed and forced to sell their land, have had their land confiscated by elites, or have broken a law enforced by the elites. They lash out by organizing into bands that raid and steal to survive, usually from the local and imperial elites (like Robin Hood of English legend). Rather than common thieves, they are groups that form for survival and protest against the elites. Bandits of this type helped force the First Judean Revolt. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 87.

Jesus' Relationship with Bandits: Gospel traditions link Jesus to the issue of social banditry in several ways. Jesus inquired whether the temple guards thought him to be a bandit (Mark 14:48); he was crucified between two such bandits (Mark 15:27), and just such a bandit, Barabbas was released by Pilate at Jesus' trial (Mark 15:6-15). While Jesus

was not a social bandit himself, several factors linked him with these issues. Like the social bandits, Jesus was from the villages (Mark 2:1), he associated with a variety of people who were “disreputable” by urban elite standards (Luke 7:36-38), and he was known to have uttered saying about Roman taxation and the Jerusalem temple that were potentially inflammatory issues with regard to the peasants (Mark 12:13-17). K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 88.

Crucifixion: Elite Force in Action

Anthropologists who study peasants note that peasants do not often revolt or even voice their feelings of hostility and oppression against elites. They usually find covert ways of protesting: keeping secrets or lying to elites, hiding taxable goods, sabotage. But if peasants occasionally responded by forming bandit groups when the situation became intolerable, then crucifixion was the ruling elite’s way of responding to banditry and other forms of rebellion (along with other means of execution). Crucifixion was an institution of humiliation, torture, and execution designed to deal with the people considered most threatening to the establishment and its interests. It was public, demeaning, and painful; and it was designed to strike fear into the hearts of any who would dare pose a threat to the status quo. “Whenever we crucify the condemned, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this terror. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect.” Both Cicero and Josephus refer to it as the worst form of death. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 91-92.

More about crucifixion on P. 92-93

Reason why Jesus was crucified (P.94).

While social bandits usually concentrated on attacking country estates, Roman garrison, and Roman supply lines, Jesus posed a different sort of threat to the urban elites. He gathered large crowds wherever he went, and he was recruiting members of a new group. Rumors had begun to spread about his healings and exorcisms, his radical statements about Roman taxation, the Jerusalem temple, and Herod Antipas. He was known to flaunt the scribe’s conservative interpretations of the Sabbath and purity laws. And, pivotal to the Gospel passion narratives, Jesus was accused of actually being a pretender to the royal throne of Judea (a messiah), meaning he was a threat to both the Roman rule of Palestine and the leadership role of the high priestly families.

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 94.

Jesus’ response to interrogation

Notice that when Jesus was interrogated by the Jerusalem high priest (Joseph Caiaphas), he was asked: “Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61). This is parallel to Pilate’s question: “Are you the king of the Judeans?” (15:2a). Pilate Uses the common term “king,” and Caiaphas uses traditional Judean designation. “Christ” (Greek *christos*) is the equivalent of “messiah” (Hebrew *masiah*), both meaning “anointed one,” referring to the traditional anointing as part of the Judean royal ritual (I kings 1:33-35). And “son of the Blessed” is a phrase acknowledging the Judean kings’ “adoption” as son of Yahweh (2 Sam 7:7; Pss 2:7; 89:26-27). What both Caiaphas and

Pilate want to know is: Was Jesus intentionally a threat to the political status quo by reinaugurating popular Judean kingship? The Gospels, in fact, differ in their account of how Jesus answered these questions.

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 94.

In Mark, Jesus seems to answer Caiaphas affirmatively (14:62), and Pilate vaguely (15:2b). In Matthew, Jesus is evasive to Pilate and silent before the Jerusalem leaders (27:11-14). In Luke's account, Jesus gives the evasive "You say that I am" to the Jerusalem leaders (22:70) and "You have said so" to Pilate (23:3). And in John, Jesus answers the Jerusalem leaders evasively (18:19-23) while telling Pilate: "My royal power does not come from this world (Palestinian politics or the Roman Empire); otherwise my adherents would have fought to keep me from being handed over to the Judeans"(18:36). The difference between these accusations is not between religious and political deviance, but political deviance in Judean and Roman terms (Belo 1981:223-24). K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 94.

What Jesus actually said or did not say to the accusations made against him cannot be assuredly recovered by comparing these accounts. It does appear that Jesus' ambiguous answer, which plays a role in all of the accounts, fits both his way of dealing with direct challenges (as seen in many of the Gospel dialogs) and his skepticism that any sort of straight answer would satisfy these authorities.

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 94

But all the passion narratives agree that Jesus was not crucified for being a teacher, or healer, or making personal claims. He was crucified as a perceived enemy of the Romans and the Jerusalem priestly elite. Jesus was not a messiah in a traditional sense – a reigning king – but he led a faction under the banner of "the reign of God." How do authorities usually deal with someone who refuses to conform and who fails to fit widely accepted categories? Execution usually works well when the political establishment wants to insure that a leader not upset the status quo and that a group gets derailed. Public crucifixion was usually a great damper on popular movement. Little did they know that this execution would not be the last word. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 95.

Read more about the system –Pyramid style ruling.

It is like under military dictatorship anyone oppose their policies arrest, torture or kill them.

Summary P. 95.

The politics of first-century Palestine must be interpreted in light of its domination by Roman interests. The different parts of Palestine were successively ruled by Roman client-rulers (first the Hasmoneans, and then the Herodians), prefects, and procurators. Unlike politics in modern Western nation-states, ancient Mediterranean politics were run solely in the interests of the urban elite rulers and their retainers; rule was hierarchical, aristocratic, and extractive, with the peasants having virtually no say in the process.

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 95.

Banditry and Crucifixion: P. 95.

When the pressures of rents, taxation, tolls, duties, and confiscation became too heavy for peasants to bear, one means of extreme resistance to the imperial powers and wealthy elites was banditry. Groups of bandits raided country estates and Roman garrison for both survival and revenge against those who had forced them from their lands or into poverty. The Roman means of dealing with rebels and bandits was public execution by crucifixion – humiliating, torturing, and killing the “deviants” in a manner that would warn others about attempting similar strategies against the state. Jesus was considered a dangerous deviant by both the Jerusalem elites and the Roman perfect. They feared his recruitment of a large group, and the crowds spoke of him in terms of traditional Judean kingship. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 95.

Read and study (P. 96).

1. Luke 7:10
2. Matt. 27:38, 44; Luke 10:30, 36; Mark 11:17; 14:48; and John 10:1; 18:39-40.
3. I Tim 2:1-7.
4. Mark 8:27

Chapter Four: Political Economy in Roman Palestine P. 100

Political Economy in Agrarian Roman Palestine	101
Distribution	112
Taxation	113
Control of Land: Cities and Estates	116
Control of Labor: Indebtedness	119
Control of Capital: Money	120

Jesus and the Palestinian Political Economy 125

Jesus himself came from a small village and was the son of an artisan (*tekton*). Those he recruited for his earliest network were peasants, fishers, and artisans from Galilean villages and towns. Central to Jesus' activity and message was his proclamation of God's reign. For well more than a century, scholars have been trying to understand what Jesus meant or intended by his conception. Much earlier work embraced individualist and purely religious assumptions that prevented recognition of Jesus' message in terms of social meaning. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 125.

Jesus was not an individualist but shared in the strong-group orientation of his general Mediterranean world and that any vision he articulated was a strongly social vision. Furthermore, Jesus' vision emerged from an appreciation of non-elite experience in his social world. This fact makes sense of remarkable statements in early Jesus traditions about wealth's dangers (Mark 10:25; Luke 16:13//Matt. 7:24), of hostility toward Jerusalem purity concerns (Mark 7:15, 18-23; Luke 11:39-41// Matt. 23:25-26), and of conflict with the Herodian and Judean elites that eventuate in Jesus' death (Mark 3:6; Luke 13:31). K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 125-126.

Summary 128

Society was layered – elite above non-elite. In the Roman Empire, elites (rulers, military commanders, priests) inhabited the cities and large estates; non-elites (peasants, artisans, fishers, laborers, and “expendable” people of various kinds) populated outskirts of cities, towns, and country villages. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 128.

The society of early Roman Palestine, like almost all ancient societies, had an extractive economy wherein goods were taken from the agrarian producers and redistributed by the powerful. The fundamental flow was in a “vertical” social direction. For the non-elite family or individual, proportionately fewer goods and services flowed in a “horizontal” direction; horizontal flow would have involved very basic and locally available commodities only. The elite controlled the product of most land and the labor of most people. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 128.

Jesus offers a potent critique of political arrangements and through the symbol of God's reign speaks of a reorganization of society through fictive kinship patterns. Exchanges based upon general reciprocity will decentralize distribution and not be strictly accounted for by money mechanisms. We can indeed now understand not only why “the Lord Jesus . . . Said, ‘It is more honorable to give than to receive’”(Acts 20:35), but how this might become a general economic principle in the inauguration of God's reign. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 128.

1. Mark 2:15; 14:4-7; Acts 2:44.
2. Jesus' attitude toward political economy are implicit in a number of places in the Gospels. How might Mark 10:28-30 provide insight into his views on control of land?
3. Debt and taxes were significant manifestation of political economy in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Study of the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:9-13 (and v. 14) and Luke 11:2-4. How does such Jesus material respond to the political realities?
4. The extent of family responsibility for debts, and the sometimes brutal means for collecting them, are shown in the following text from Philo:
K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 129.

Recently (early first century) a certain collector of taxes was appointed in our area (Alexandria, Egypt). When some of the men who apparently were in arrears because of poverty fled in fear of unbearable punishment, he laid violent hands on their wives, children, parents, and other relatives, beating and trampling and visiting every outrage upon them to get them either betray their fugitive or to pay up on his behalf. (Special Law 3.159, quoted in Lewis 1983:161-62). K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 129.

Consider similar procedures in Matt. 18:23-30, 32-34. Why does Jesus utilize such an image? How does it perhaps point to alternative social relations? K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 129.

Chapter Five: Political Religion in Roman Palestine P. 131

Summary P. 156

The role of the temple in the life of early Roman Palestine was so pervasive that the temple was the hub of a redistributive economy: Goods and services, raw materials, crops, animals – all flowed to this central point. There, these goods were redistributed in ways not necessarily benefiting their original producers. Religious ideology legitimated this arrangement. In fact, religious obligation sustained the arrangement. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 156.

The temple institution played a crucial role in organizing and governing the life of the Judean peasantry. The peasantry held an ambivalent attitude toward this institution and its representatives (especially if those representatives lived far from the village). The Jesus movement began with a central concern for such institutional reform, but its rapid expansion into the gentile world, and the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., relegated such reform impulses to the dustbin of history. K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 156-157.

Applying the Perspective P. 157

<u>Chapter Six: The Rearview Mirror – Conclusion</u>	P. 161
<u>Glossaries</u>	P. 167
1. Ancient Groups, Institutions, Objects, and Events	P. 167
2. Ancient Documents, Collections, and Authors	P. 188
3. Social-Scientific and Cross-Cultural Terms	P. 194

Peasant (Hebrew *‘am ha-‘ares, perazon, ikkar*; Greek *georgos, agroikos*; Latin *agricola, rusticus, colonus*). A farmer or animal-herder in an agrarian society; one whose livelihood derives directly from the land. At a higher level of abstraction, “peasants” can describe all non-elites in an agrarian society, both in villages and cities, including fishers and artisans, potters, weavers, woodworkers, ironsmiths, etc. Terms of derision were often used of peasants by the elite, for example; “insignificant ones” (*asematatoi; life 35*) and “the masses” (*hoi polloi; Ant.20.255*). (see Judg. 5:7, 11; Jer. 31:24; 2 Esd 9:17; Sir 38:25-26; 2 Tim 2:6).

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 201.

Agrarian society is a society in which primary production and subsistence centers around agriculture (such as all of those in the ancient Mediterranean) as opposed to hunter/gatherer, fishing, or industrial societies. “Advanced agrarian” are identified by their use of iron tools, the dominance of the plow over the hoe, and the use of large animals (Oxen, donkeys, horses) for plowing and carting. (see 1Sam 13:19-21; Jer 52:16; Luke 9:62; 1Cor 9:10). Artisan is a craftsperson who does hand fabrication, usually of a complete product, a pot or table, for example (see Exod 35:35; Sir 9:17; 38:27-34; Mark 6:3; Acts 19:24).

K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 194.