

Preface to the First Edition

While many books describe the world of first-century Palestine, the originating home of Jesus and the Gospels, most of the existing ones do so from the perspective of history, literature, or theology. Only recently have biblical scholars begun to apply social-scientific models to the Jesus traditions in any systematic way. While isolated observations and conclusions of a “social” or “anthropological” character have been made for years, what has been lacking are clearly conceived models of social relationships to organize this material. The problems have been compounded by the lack of cross-cultural comparisons. Another difficulty has been the failure to provide any systemic overview showing the structure of the social domains, the institutions that embody them, and the relationship between those institutions.

In reading the New Testament and contemporaneous works, it is fundamental to understand both the social values and the social institutions of ancient Palestine. The following pages focus on social institutions with a view to how they are reflected in or had an impact upon Jesus and traditions within the Gospels.

Since we intend this book for the undergraduate, seminarian, pastor, or generally educated reader, we have had to assume some things for the sake of clarity and emphasis. Beyond what is said in chapter 1 and in our glossaries, the reader should consult some of

the many introductions to the biblical literature or the history of this period. We hope that our book, despite its limitations, will help readers to sort through complicated material and issues in comprehensible and readable form. We have the following general goals in mind throughout our work:

- To examine the primary social institutions of first-century Palestine through a social-scientific methodology
- To present testable models of society that can be employed when studying the Bible and therefore be refined or modified as the reader acquires more information
- To relate the systemic analysis directly to New Testament passages in each chapter in order to demonstrate how this material is applicable

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the use of models (or scenarios) and why they are important in doing social analysis. Especially important here is to make clear that models are instructive tools to help us visualize meaningful configurations, not pigeonholes into which one forces the data. Chapter 1 also covers social domains and how the world was perceived and organized differently in the ancient Mediterranean. The relationships and interactions of social domains are investigated. Finally, we compare, on a large

scale, the differences between a preindustrial society (such as first-century Palestine) and a postindustrial society (such as the twentieth-century United States).

Our persistent aim is to employ the lenses of our models to help the reader of the New Testament Gospels to imagine institutions and scenarios more appropriate to first-century Palestine than those into which we were socialized. In each major chapter we examine materials related to Jesus as we address a different social domain. Chapter 2 focuses on kinship, chapter 3 on politics, chapter 4 on political economy, and chapter 5 on political religion. We take pains to show the reader how these social domains interact and interpenetrate through specific social institutions. Chapter 1 explains why the chapters and institutions unfold in this order. Each chapter then follows the same structure:

- Identification of central biblical passages or other texts
- A list of questions the passages raise
- The construction of meaningful models or scenarios
- Application of the models and scenarios to the focal texts, with consideration of the initial questions
- Highlighting of aspects of the Jesus tradition through the models and scenarios
- Identification of material for further reflection and suggested applications of the chapter's perspectives
- Recommended readings

We have summarized important technical discussions through graphical aids (pic-

torial conceptual models). While pictures are not always worth a thousand words—we often require quite a few to explain our charts—these can be helpful to the reader as orienting maps for the social-scientific discussions. The general model of chapter 1 is elaborated for specific institutional domains in subsequent models.

The reader will also find helpful the three glossaries at the end of the volume, which include terms relevant to Palestinian culture (for example, “tetrarch”), identification of ancient authors and documents (for example, Josephus), and modern social-scientific terms (for example, “institution”). The first time a technical term is used in each chapter, it will be highlighted in boldface type to indicate that it is defined in a glossary and followed by a number in brackets to give its location in the glossaries following the main text.

We have adopted a number of terminological conventions within our book. *Palaestina* was the Roman designation for the area (including Judea and Galilee) in which the early church and rabbinic Judaism emerged. Roman Palestine in this book refers primarily to Palestine in the Herodian period (37 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.). We adopt consistently “Israelite” or “Judean” rather than “Jew” for reasons that will be discussed, and the scholarly temporal indicators B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era). Biblical and other translations are usually our own, although we have checked these against standard versions of the Bible, the Loeb Classical Library, and other authoritative resources (see the first bibliography, which follows the glossaries). We have also checked the original

languages of quoted translations wherever possible, since older translators were not as sensitive to their own “social-structural inexperience” as we are attempting to be.

We think the reader will also find our Web site helpful in using this book and in doing further research. The Web site includes a variety of helps organized by our chapter headings: links to photos, ancient documents, maps, archaeological information, the discussion questions from each chapter, full quotations of the ancient sources cited in each chapter (Josephus, the Mishnah, etc.), the authors’ publication lists, and e-mail links to ask questions of the authors. It is available at: <http://www.fortresspress.com/hansonoakman>

Our presentation does not intend to be comprehensive in the sense of treating all aspects of every social institution. The archaeological data alone would swamp the reader. We intend to focus on central institutions in each chapter, to provide the reader sufficient argumentation to support our understanding of the institutions and domains, and sufficient data (ancient documents or archaeological materials) to lead the reader to examine the case for herself: to read the New Testament Gospels with fresh eyes, to test models and scenarios against the data, and to search for more data that will bring light on the constructs, confirming or disconfirming. In this way, the reader is brought into a new type of dialog with this sacred heritage. Out of dialog will hopefully emerge new insights into the mysteries of which the Bible speaks.

This book has gestated over a fairly long period, since we have both been heavily

involved in teaching responsibilities. It was written in the spaces of our lives, but that (we hope) has permitted a maturing of the ingredients, like a fine beer or wine.

We owe many debts of gratitude. Fortress Press, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Pacific Lutheran University provided money to support our work along the way. Drafts of material have received occasional critical comment by colleagues in our institutional departments. The Context Group, an international group that meets annually to discuss the application of the social sciences to biblical studies, for several years has given us steadfast encouragement as well as discerning feedback. Bruce J. Malina, Dennis C. Duling, David Weidkamp, Eliese Hansen, Ryan Fletcher, and Deborah Oakman and Justin Oakman served as readers for penultimate drafts. We thank them for the problems they helped us to identify and the suggestions for improvement they made. Of course, the synthetic perspectives and faults of this book remain our responsibility alone.

Deborah, Justin, and Jonathan Oakman played a significant role in encouraging this project to fruition. They worked around us when we had our annual work sessions, putting up with papers and books strewn all over the house. Part of the joy of seeing this book finally in print is sustained by the memories of those who have shared with us in its writing. To these friends and family, we dedicate our efforts with gratitude.

Finally, we salute Marshall Johnson for his encouragement and patience during earlier years of the project. And we thank

Michael West, David Lott, Debbie Finch, and other members of the dedicated Fortress staff for their indispensable assistance in producing a finished volume. May this book be as stimulating for biblical students as it has been for us in the writing.

Preface to the Second Edition

Ten years have now passed since the first edition of *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* was originally published. The book has been remarkably well received by its intended audiences, having found frequent use in university and seminary classrooms, service in pastors' studies, and positive responses from general readers. Indeed, the first edition was awarded "Book of the Year" by the Association of Parish Clergy in 1999. Even more remarkably, the book has received appreciative critical reviews by professional scholars and frequent employment in graduate seminars. This range of use commends the clarity of the writing as well as the accuracy of content.

At the request of the publisher, the authors have undertaken some necessary or desired revisions to both the form and the content of the original book. We hope that this second edition will be as widely used and helpful to scholar, student, pastor, and general reader alike. Besides a more reader-friendly format, we have added sidebars, new or revised models, new photos, key terms and a chapter outline at the beginning of each chapter, additional study questions, updated suggested readings, and updated bibliographies. We have also responded in various places to scholarly criticisms of the original edition. The authors have been blessed to enjoy a twenty-year friendship, and our collaboration on this new edition has marked

again the joy we share in scholarly insight into the life and times of the enormously important historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth.

While the introduction will give much more detail about the articulated approaches of this book, it will be helpful to remind the reader here of several points. The first relates to methodology. This book is in many senses a congeries of models of the ancient world of Jesus of Nazareth. The book may be thought of as a metamodel of the social structures and social conflicts of that first-century period. Any model, as John Kautsky reminds us, is a simplification of reality in order to facilitate understanding. Hopefully, a model does not oversimplify nor distort reality. Many critics of what has come to be called social-scientific criticism of the Bible complain that modeling "forces" the data into predetermined forms. These critics are unreformed historians who believe their inductive generalizations are adequate to the data. By working without explicit models, they fail to surface their implicit categories (models) for scrutiny and run the danger of inappropriate, anachronistic, or ethnocentric inferences. Conversely, the materials of this book make models explicit from large-scale down to smaller-scale, while testing these models against a variety of textual, documentary, and archaeological data. Models actually facilitate the "seeing" of data or evidence ("seeing out of"). This modeling procedure has proven its

worth in winning the assent of many scholars. Often, these scholars accept our general conclusions while taking issue with specific details. This is probably the result of the book's review by traditional historians, who glory in individuals and data, who, while recognizing the validity of the bigger picture, eternally caution against "overgeneralization." Indeed, some critics actually try to play off differences of detail against the big picture, all the while missing the validity of the big picture in the midst of all the details. More will be said about our procedures in chapter 1, but some of the criticism leveled at the first edition of this book was rooted in the ideological differences implicit in the approach of modeling the typical versus the historian's focus on the individual detail.

Second, we point out in chapter 1 that we have combined systems and conflict approaches precisely better to comprehend *the endless conflict within Jesus' environs that never led to any significant social change*. Ancient agrarian or peasant societies were static over long periods of time. Another way to say this is that major families assumed pre-eminence within static, pyramidal political-economic structures legitimated by powerful rituals of political religion. Not until the modern commercial, industrial, and communications revolutions were values and social forces set in motion to produce the revolutionary social changes associated with democracy and capitalism.

Finally, this book is best appreciated when it is understood that the systems it attempts to understand and explicate for the reader unfold in hierarchical fashion: Mediterranean societies, organized at the core around dominant families, issued in politics and political arrangements (treatment of all other families and clans) that structured both economic life (especially within households but also between households) and religious institutions (beliefs, rituals, practices). We have attempted to instruct readers on using compound terms like "political family" or "domestic religion" to capture these hierarchies of social institutions. In other words, religion and economy are embedded in household or political life; politics is embedded in the lives of dominant families.

As this new edition of *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* encounters a new millennium, we hope it will continue to challenge and inspire its readers to appreciate the distance of Jesus' social context from our own. In a world increasingly disrupted by cultural misunderstandings, and a world in which many are enthralled beneath rather mindless and solipsistic religious extremisms, we hope that this book will also help to free readers from thoughtless absolutisms and to move them toward a greater appreciation of both the social meaning of Jesus of Nazareth and his enduring significance as a human liberator.