

~DECAPOLIS (237)

(De-cap'o-lis) [Ten-City Region]

.. Formation Of The League

.. Jesus' Ministry and the Decapolis

.. Later History

- A league or confederation of ten cities, from Greek, *de'ka*, meaning ten, and *po'lis*, city. The name also applied to the region in which most of these cities were centered.
- Consequently great crowds followed him from Galilee and **Decapolis** and Jerusalem and Judea and from the other side of the Jordan. (**Matthew 4:25**)
- Following the conquest by Alexander the Great in about **332 B.C.E.**, Greek colonies developed in Syria and Palestine, apparently settled by veterans from Alexander's armies who were thereafter followed by Greek-speaking immigrants.
- In many cases these colonies grew on the sites of earlier Jewish towns, while in others they were built on fresh sites, particularly East of the Jordan River. They flourished during the rule of the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt, but the rise of the Maccabean-Jewish state starting circa **168 B.C.E.** greatly jeopardized their relatively independent position.
- While the populations of these cities doubtless included many Jews, still these cities were centers of Greek culture and organization and hence were very much out of step with the Maccabean aims. When Pompey conquered and reorganized Palestine in **63 B.C.E.**, these Hellenistic cities were given Roman protection and a favored status.
- They were allowed to mint their own coins and, to a great extent, to exercise self-government, although they still owed allegiance to Rome and to the Syrian provincial government and were required to pay taxes and provide men for military service.

.. Formation Of The League

- Likely sometime between Pompey's conquest and the death of Herod the Great, circa **1 B.C.E.**, ten of these Hellenistic cities formed themselves into the loose federation known as the **Decapolis**.

- The motive underlying this union seems to have been a mutual interest in close trade relations and also defense against either anti-Hellenistic forces within Palestine or aggressive nomadic tribes in the desert regions to the East. The term **Decapolis** first appears in the **Christian Greek Scriptures** and in the writings of Josephus and Pliny the Elder both of the **First Century C.E.**
- Pliny, while acknowledging that some difference of opinion already existed, listed the following cities as among the original ten: **Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippo [Hippus], Dion, Pella, Galasa Gerasa, and Canatha.** [**Natural History, V, XVI, 74**]
- Of these, only **Scythopolis** or Beth-shean, lay West of the Jordan, because of the strategic position of the Valley of Esdraelon, it served as an important link with the Mediterranean Coast and seaports.
- Damascus, far to the North in Syria, was evidently included because of its importance as a trade center. Philadelphia, ancient Rabbah, modern `Amman, was the southernmost of the ten cities, only about 40 kilometers (25 miles) Northeast of the northern end of the Dead Sea.
- The remainder of the cities were in the fertile region of Gilead or neighboring Bashan. Most of them are believed to have been on or near the main roads of that region. Canatha is likely the Kenath of;
- And Nobah marched and went capturing Kenath and its dependent towns, and he began to call it Nobah by his own name. (**Numbers 32:42**)
- In the **Second Century C.E.**, Ptolemy names 18 cities as in the **Decapolis**, which may indicate that the name came to be used in a general way and that the number of cities varied. Some scholars would put Abila, listed by Ptolemy, in place of Raphana as among the original ten.
- It seems evident, at any rate, that the **Decapolis** region did not have precisely defined boundaries and that the authority of the cities of the **Decapolis** did not embrace all the intervening territory but applied only within the district of each particular city.

•• **Jesus Ministry and the Decapolis**

- While people from the **Decapolis** were among the crowds that flocked to hear Jesus teaching in Galilee.
- Consequently great crowds followed him from Galilee and **Decapolis** and Jerusalem and Judea and from the other side of the Jordan. (**Matthew 4:25**)
- There is no specific mention of his having devoted time to any of its Hellenistic cities. Jesus did enter the region of Decapolis during his Galilean ministry when he crossed the Sea of Galilee and entered the country of the Gerasenes, or Gadarenes according to;
- When he got to the other side, into the country of the Gadarenes, there met him two demon-possessed men coming out from among the memorial tombs, unusually fierce, so that nobody had the courage to pass by on that road. (**Matthew 8:28**)
- Well, they got to the other side of the sea into the country of the Gerasenes. (**Mark 5:1**)
- But here, after he had cast out demons and permitted them to enter a herd of swine, resulting in the herds destruction, the people from the nearby city and countryside urged Jesus to get out of their districts.
- He complied, but the man he had freed from demon possession obeyed Jesus instruction to go witness to his relatives, and he proclaimed Jesus healing works in the **Decapolis**.
- And immediately after he got out of the boat a man under the power of an unclean spirit met him from among the memorial tombs. (**Mark 5:2**)
- He had his haunt among the tombs, and up to that time absolutely nobody was able to bind him fast even with a chain. (**Mark 5:3**)
- Because he had oftentimes been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains were snapped apart by him and the fetters were actually smashed, and nobody had the strength to subdue him. (**Mark 5:4**)
- And continually, night and day, he was crying out in the tombs and in the mountains and slashing himself with stones. (**Mark**

5:5)

- But on catching sight of Jesus from a distance he ran and did obeisance to him. (**Mark 5:6**)
- And, when he had cried out with a loud voice, he said; What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I put you under oath by God not to torment me. (**Mark 5:7**)
- For he had been telling it; Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. (**Mark 5:8**)
- But he began to ask him; What is your name? And he said to him; My name is Legion, because there are many of us. (**Mark 5:9**)
- And he entreated him many times not to send the spirits out of the country. (**Mark 5:10**)
- Now a great herd of swine was there at the mountain feeding. (**Mark 5:11**)
- So they entreated him, saying; Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. (**Mark 5:12**)
- And he permitted them. With that the unclean spirits came out and entered into the swine, and the herd rushed over the precipice into the sea, about two thousand of them, and they drowned one after another in the sea. (**Mark 5:13**)
- But the herders of them fled and reported it in the city and in the countryside, and people came to see what it was that had happened. (**Mark 5:14**)
- So they came to Jesus, and they beheld the demon-possessed man sitting clothed and in his sound mind, this man that had had the legion, and they grew fearful. (**Mark 5:15**)
- Also, those who had seen it related to them how this had happened to the demon-possessed man and about the swine. (**Mark 5:16**)
- And so they started to entreat him to go away from their districts. (**Mark 5:17**)

- Now as he was boarding the boat, the man that had been demon-possessed began entreating him that he might continue with him. (Mark 5:18)
- However, he did not let him, but said to him; Go home to your relatives, and report to them all the things Yehowah has done for you and the mercy he had on you. (Mark 5:19)
- And he went away and started to proclaim in the Decapolis all the things Jesus did for him, and all the people began to wonder. (Mark 5:20)
- Some scholars believe the herd of swine there was a further evidence of the non-Jewish influence prevalent in that region.
- After the Passover of 32 C.E, and upon returning from a trip to the regions of Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, Jesus came to the sea of Galilee up through the midst of the regions of Decapolis.
- Now coming back out of the regions of Tyre he went through Sidon to the sea of Galilee up through the midst of the regions of Decapolis. (Mark 7:31)
- Somewhere in this region he healed a deaf man having a speech impediment and later miraculously fed a crowd of 4,000.
- Here they brought him a man deaf and with a speech impediment, and they entreated him to lay his hand upon him. (Mark 7:32)
- Yet there were about four thousand men. Finally he sent them away. (Mark 8:9)

.. Later History

- According to Eusebius, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E, Christians of Judea fled to the Decapolitan city of Pella in the mountainous region of Gilead, thereby giving heed to Jesus prophetic warning. [The Ecclesiastical History, III, V, 3]
- Furthermore, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then know that the desolating of her has drawn near. (Luke 21:20)

- Then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains, and let those in the midst of her withdraw, and let those in the country places not enter into her. (**Luke 21:21**)
- By no means alone among the cities of Palestine in their Hellenistic leanings, the cities of the **Decapolis** reflected the most powerful expression of Greek influence. They are believed to have reached their peak during the **Second Century C.E.**, and in the following century the league began to break up.
- Evidence of the strong Greek influence, as well as the wealth of the **Decapolitan** cities, can be seen in the impressive remains of theaters, amphitheaters, temples, baths, aqueducts, and other structures at Gerasa, modern Jarash, as well as at other cities.