

# Caesarea Maritima

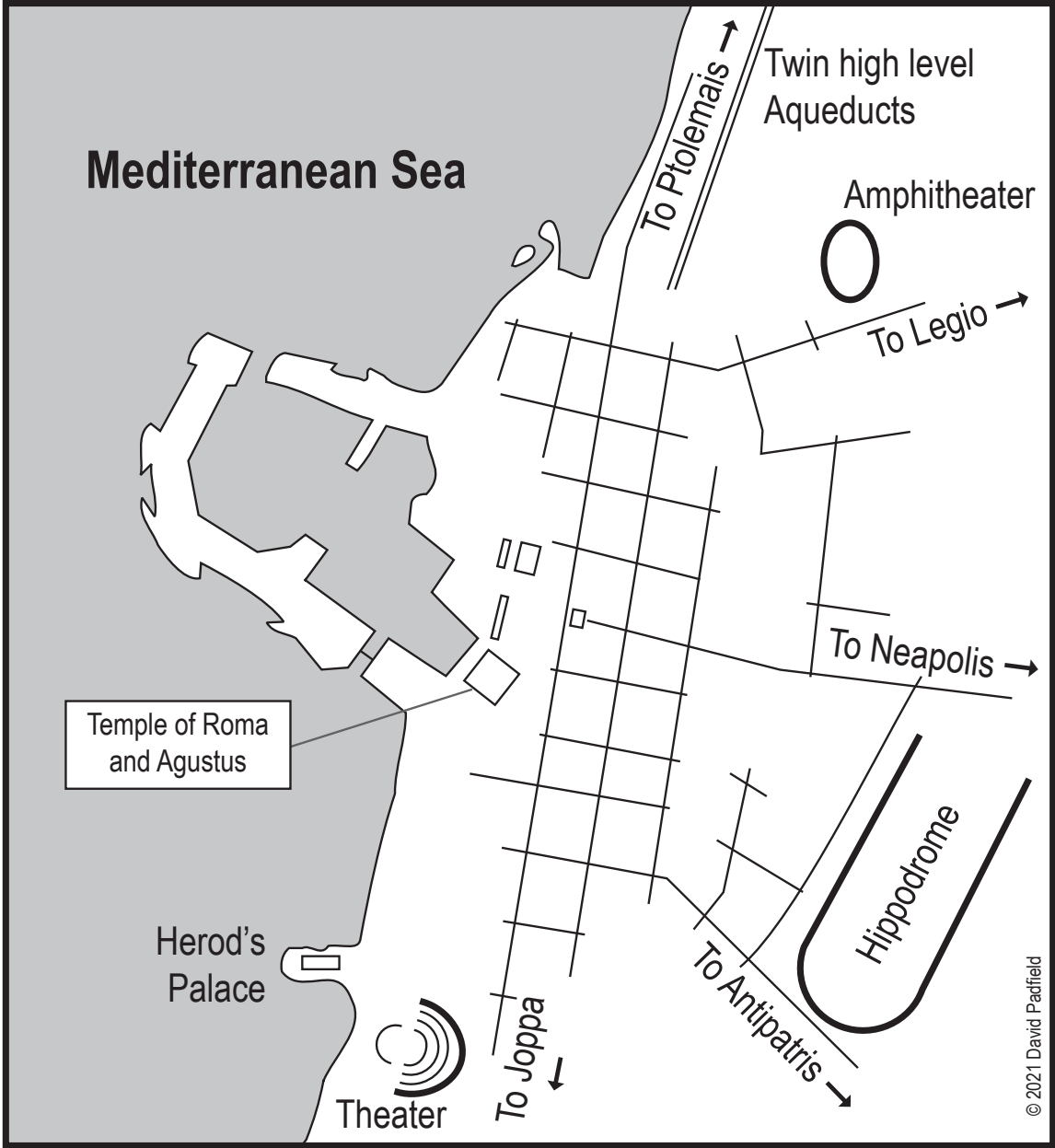


*“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.” (Acts 10:1)*

© 2021 David Padfield

[www.padfield.com](http://www.padfield.com)

Scripture taken from the New King James Version.  
Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



# Caesarea Maritima

## Introduction

- I. The city of Caesarea was one of the most important cities in Israel during the time of Christ and the first few centuries of the early church.
  - A. Located on the Plain of Sharon, King Herod the Great built a great international seaport here.
  - B. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, lived here (Acts 10:1).
  - C. Philip, the evangelist, made his home here (Acts 8:40; 21:8).
  - D. King Herod Agrippa I was smitten by an angel of the Lord here (Acts 12:19–24).
  - E. After AD 6, the Roman governors of Judea, including Pontius Pilate, Felix (Acts 23:23–24), and Festus (Acts 24:27; 25:13–15), resided in Caesarea.
  - F. Paul visited this city on several occasions and was imprisoned here for two years (Acts 9:30; 18:22–23; 23:23–35).
- II. In this lesson, we want to look at the history of Caesarea and then see how it relates to the preaching of the gospel in the first century.



Roman Theater at Caesarea

## Discussion

### I. History Of Caesarea

- A. The name *Caesarea Maritima* was unknown in ancient times—it was usually known as Caesarea of Palestine.
  1. *Caesarea Maritima* means “*Caesarea by the sea*”—it is a name given in modern times to separate this city from *Caesarea Philippi*.
  2. A Phoenician fortress, Strato’s Tower, had already existed as a port here (established during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC).
  3. Caesar Augustus gave this the site to Herod the Great after the deaths of Mark Antony and Cleopatra (Josephus, *Antiq.* 15:216–217).
  4. The city was named *Caesarea* by Herod the Great, in honor of his patron, Caesar Augustus.
- B. Between 22 and 9 BC, Herod the Great built the city and a harbor.
  1. Out of Herod’s many famous building projects (Jerusalem, Masada, Herodium, Jericho, Macherus, the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, etc.), this one is probably his most impressive achievement.
  2. The first century historian, Flavius Josephus, was very impressed by Caesarea, for he spent a great deal of time describing the beauties of this city (*War* 1:408–415; *Antiq.* 15:331–341)

3. “Herod the Great loved the art and culture of Europe. So this Middle Eastern king needed a seaport to connect him with Rome and its luxury goods. Caesarea on the sea was his answer. Herod built this 165-acre city, flush with imported architecture and building materials, between 22 and 10 BC. What is more, Herod designed this city to have a thoroughly European look and feel. To be in first-century Caesarea was like being in Rome, even though you never left the Middle East.” (Beck, *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers*, 108)
4. “Jerusalem, Herodium, Jericho, and Masada—Herod’s work in these places gives the impression that he was a lavish builder who generally combined practicality with magnificence. On a far different scale, however, is a city that provided revenue for the lavish building and one of his greatest successes. Unlike other cities we have considered, Caesarea Maritima was built completely new, from the ground up, by Herod. On the coast, halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa, the city in Herod’s time covered about 164 acres.” (McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 139)
5. “Now upon his observation of a place near the sea, which was very proper for containing a city, and was before called Strato’s Tower, he set about getting a plan for a magnificent city there, and erected many edifices with great diligence all over it, and this of white stone. He also adorned it with most sumptuous palaces, and large edifices for containing the people; and, what was the greatest and most laborious work of all, he adorned it with a haven, that was always free from the waves of the sea.” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 15:331–332)
6. “Established by Herod the Great in 12 BC as a tribute to Caesar Augustus, Caesarea was a great international seaport on the coast of the Sharon plain. It was also called Sebastos, which was the Greek name for Augustus. It was built on the site of a longtime trading outpost known as Strato’s Tower and was situated along the great caravan route between Egypt and Tyre. It was a magnificent city featuring an elaborate harbor complex and Greco-Roman structures such as a hippodrome, theater, and pagan temples. Caesarea soon became the seat of Roman government as the capital of the province of Judea in about 6 AD.” (Lang, *The Accordance Bible Lands PhotoGuide*, n.p.)
7. “Herod spared nothing in his elaborate designs for the port facilities—a major engineering feat at the time—as well as for the city, which included palaces, temples, a theater, a marketplace, a hippodrome, and water and sewage systems. When it was completed 12 years later, only Jerusalem outshone the splendor of Caesarea. Its population under Herod grew to around 100,000, larger than that of Jerusalem; the city was spread over some 164 acres.” (Haberfeld, *Fodor’s Israel*, 199)



*The Harbor at Caesarea*

- C. When the Romans ruled Judea, the prefects or governors resided in Caesarea.
  - 1. The Jews and Greek-speaking population of the city repeatedly clashed, with hostilities exploding in the Jewish revolt of AD 66 when the pagans massacred most of the Jewish population.
  - 2. Vespasian squelched the first Jewish rebellion, and it was in this city, the Roman legions proclaimed him emperor in AD 69.
  - 3. A year later, Vespasian's son, Titus, captured and destroyed Jerusalem.
  - 4. After AD 70, Caesarea became a Roman colony and the local Roman capital of Palestine for nearly 600 years.
- D. Caesarea continued to be of commercial importance until after the Crusades.
- E. From Caesarea, the Polo's set out in the 13<sup>th</sup> century for their travels to the court of the Great Khan of the Mongols in far-off Peking (Beijing, China).

## II. Caesarea Today

- A. While archaeologists began working on Caesarea Maritima in 1873, the first real excavations of the site took place in 1945.
  - 1. "Although the total excavation work may seem minimal—the overall area of the ancient city was 8,000 acres and only 5 have been dug—architectural and artifactual discoveries have been voluminous." (Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 31)
  - 2. "It is almost impossible to imagine the splendor of the city and harbor, where the less noble building material was white limestone. Mosaic sidewalks, with long rows of columns, led from the city to the theater. Thousands of columns standing in parallel rows along the main streets formed majestic promenades throughout the city. More than 1,300 column fragments were found on the bottom of the harbor alone. They were made of marble imported from Italy and Egypt; columns of pink granite came from Aswan. Large slabs covered streets and sidewalks. Maritime trade was extensive: large warehouses facing the harbor contained amphorae of garum (a sauce made of decaying herrings seasoned with spices, which was much liked by the Romans), wine, olive oil, fruit syrups, and nails. The presence of Chinese porcelain attests to the geographical reach of Herod's commercial activities." (Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 33)
- B. The Theater.
  - 1. The theater had a seating capacity of somewhere between 4,000 and 6,000 spectators.
  - 2. "At the southern end of the city, facing the sea, a theater that could seat 4500 spectators was erected on a concrete pad. Its floor was of fine plaster painted with vivid colors, and more than a dozen layers of paint showed that it had been used over a long period of time. Indeed, the theater had been modified and partially rebuilt several times." (Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 31)



Roman Theater at Caesarea

### C. The Pontius Pilate Stone.

1. In 1962 the “Pontius Pilate Stone” was discovered in the theater, which provides tangible evidence of Pilate’s presence in Judea in Jesus’ time and clarifies his title (*prefect*).
2. The stone you see in Caesarea today is only a replica of the original, housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.
3. “A suggested restoration reads: ‘Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judaea, made and dedicated the Tiberieium to the Divine Emperor.’” (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land*, 243)
4. “The word *Tiberium* in the inscription refers to a building, probably a temple or shrine, dedicated to the emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) by Pilate, who was procurator from 26 to 36. Foundations of the temple which Herod built to Augustus still stand inside the Crusader Fort.” (McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 145)
5. New Testament references to Pilate are plentiful (Matt 27:2, 24; Mark 15:1, 5, 15, 44; Luke 3:1; 13:1; 23:12, 52; John 18:29, 33; 19:8–19, 38; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28).



The Pontius Pilate Stone

### D. The Herodian Harbor.

1. “Even today, Herod’s monumental port, Sebastos, may be regarded as an awesome achievement. The 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus glowingly described the wonders of Sebastos and compared it to Athens’s port of Piraeus; once the underwater ruins were explored, it became clear that what had been long dismissed by many historians as hyperbole was as Josephus described it. Its construction was an unprecedented challenge; never before had such a large artificial harbor been built. There was a total absence of islands or bays as natural protection, furthermore, work was hindered by bad weather. During preliminary underwater digs in 1978, archaeologists were stunned to discover concrete blocks near the breakwater offshore, an indication of the highly sophisticated use of hydraulic concrete, which hardens underwater. Though historians knew that the Romans had developed such techniques, before the discoveries at Caesarea, hydraulic concrete was never known to have been used on such a massive scale. The main ingredient in the concrete, volcanic ash, was probably imported from Mt. Vesuvius in Italy; it is likely that the wooden forms were, too.” (Fodor’s *Israel*, 201)
2. “The foundation of these breakwaters employed hydraulic cement (cement that hardens under water). This engineering innovation had never been used to the extent that it was here. One of the ingredients for this cement was *pozzolana*, volcanic ash found in Italy. In order to complete the project, Herod imported forty-four shiploads of this ash at four hundred tons per ship. When it was finished, Caesarea Maritima boasted a harbor more than twenty-five acres in size, the second largest in the ancient Roman world.” (Beck, *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers*, 109)

3. “Herod constructed a port for ships at Caesarea by creating a huge breakwater wall to provide protection from the pounding surf and shifting sands. This was accomplished by towing huge wooden forms out to sea, then filling them with stones and concrete and sinking them into place on the sea floor. This is one of the first documented uses of concrete in the ancient world. Over time, this sea wall collapsed, but some of the huge concrete blocks that made up the wall still remain in the water. These are not visible from the shore, but they have been discovered through underwater archaeology.” (Knight, *The Holy Land*, 221)
  4. “Herod engineered the first artificial harbor in the ancient world. It was built with the latest technology—the first extensive use of hydraulic concrete in the eastern Mediterranean. This concrete, made with a volcanic sand known as pozzuolana and available in almost limitless quantity on the island of Santorini, was described by the first-century architect Vitruvius as being capable of hardening under water. One block found that had been formed from this poured concrete underwater measures 39 feet by 49 feet by 5 feet.” (McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 139)
  5. “Caesarea gave the Romans an entry and a base. The sea wall was a notable triumph of engineering. How the blocks of limestone, some of them 15 by 3 by 2.7 m. (50 by 10 by 9 ft.), were put in place to form the mole, itself some 61 m. (200 ft.) wide and standing in 180 ft. of water, is not known. It would tax all the resources of a highly mechanized society. The sea wall curved around to form a haven. Behind it, on the low sandy shore, a semicircle of wall protected the town—its houses, racecourse, theater, and temples. The harbor, however, dwarfed the city, and a coin of Nero bears the inscription: ‘Caesarea by the Harbor of Augustus.’” (Blaiklock, “Caesarea,” *NIDBA*)
  6. The port was devastated by an earthquake in AD 130.
- E. Herod’s Palace and the Roman Praetorium.
1. This was the procurator’s headquarters and the place where Paul was imprisoned before he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10–12).
  2. This palace had two major sections: the upper palace and the lower palace.
  3. Herod’s palace had a panoramic view of the hippodrome and harbor to the north, and the theater to the southeast.



*Herod's Palace*

#### F. The Herodian Temple.

1. “Herod also built a temple to Rome and Augustus, his patron. It stood on a raised platform immediately opposite the harbor, separated by a formal garden. The temple was oriented toward the harbor and not aligned to the city’s grid plan. A stairway ascended from the harbor to the temple’s pronaos (portico in front of its entrance). A second stairway entered the temenos (temple court) from the street, running south to the theater. Columned porticos enclosed the temenos on three sides. In the temple’s naos (inner sanctuary) stood statues of the Olympian Zeus and Dea Roma, the goddess who represented Rome.” (Currid and Chapman, *ESV Archaeology Study Bible*, comments on Acts 10:1)
2. “Facing the harbor, the temple was built on an artificial mound supported in part by vaulted chambers 65 feet long and 21 feet wide. It contained two colossal statues of Augustus and Roma. A three foot long, white marble foot belonging to one of these statues was found... Because Caesarea was a totally new creation, its planners took advantage of the available space to design a perfect north-south, east-west grid of streets.” (Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 31)

#### G. The Aqueducts.

1. Due to the rapid rise in population during Roman times, the need for freshwater was significantly increased.
2. Another example of Herod’s excellent building skills was a great aqueduct, which brought water from a spring eight miles away, and from Mt. Carmel, thirteen miles to the north.
3. “The source of water, however, was a spring about 8 miles away in the foothills of Mt. Carmel. Workers labored to cut a channel approximately 4 miles long through solid rock before water was piped into the aqueduct, whose arches spanned a length of 4 miles.” (*Fodor’s Israel*, 203)
4. “There are no natural water sources in the area, and rainfall alone would not have provided enough to satisfy the needs of a large population. To solve the problem an aqueduct was built to bring water from the springs of Mount Carmel. As the city grew a second one was built, parallel and adjacent to the first, in the time of Hadrian. It bears inscriptions acknowledging the work of the second, sixth, tenth, and fifteenth legions.” (Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 31)



*The Aqueduct at Caesarea*



5. “The high-level aqueduct contains two channels with independent foundations. The eastern channel (facing the parking lot) was built by a Roman Procurator about the middle of the CI AD... Inscriptions reveal that the western channel (facing the sea) was commissioned by the emperor Hadrian shortly before or after the Second Revolt (132–5) , and that the work was done by the Second, Sixth, Tenth, and Twenty-second Legions. Two channels meant that the one could be taken out of use for repairs without interrupting the supply.” (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land*, 249)

#### H. The Hippodrome.

1. Two Roman-era hippodromes (horse racing stadia) have been found at Caesarea.
  - a) The oldest hippodrome is a small one located between the harbor and the main palace.
  - b) A larger hippodrome has been found just east of the central city.
  - c) The older hippodrome was converted to a standard type of amphitheater for athletic and gladiatorial contests when the larger hippodrome was built.
2. “A fabulously popular stadium for chariot races and other athletic competitions, this was possibly one of the largest such arenas in the Roman world—some 1,400 feet long and 290 feet wide, with a seating capacity of 38,000. Pieces of a toppled obelisk made of Egyptian granite lie in the middle of the now neglected field.” (*Fodor’s Israel*, 202)
3. In this hippodrome, many of the Jews who participated in the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70) were executed.



*The Old Hippodrome at Caesarea*

### III. Caesarea And The New Testament

- A. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, lived here (Acts 10:1–8).
  1. Peter was living 30 miles away in Joppa (Acts 10:5).
  2. When Peter entered Caesarea on the road from Joppa, he would have passed by the Roman theater (cf. Acts 10:23–24).
- B. Philip, the evangelist, made his home here (Acts 8:40; 21:8).
- C. In AD 44, King Herod Agrippa I, a persecutor of the early church, was smitten by an angel of the Lord here in the theater built by Herod the Great (Acts 12:20–23).
  1. As you read Luke’s account, you should consult a Bible atlas to see the proximity of Tyre and Sidon to Caesarea.

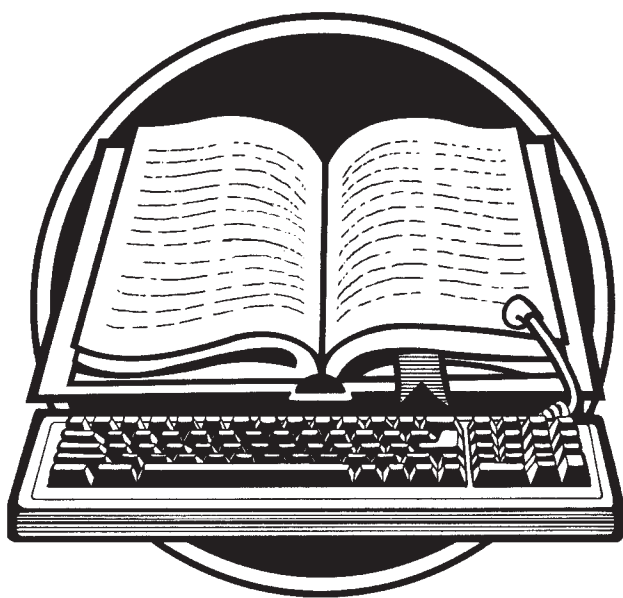
2. “Now, when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato’s Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety. At which festival, a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province. On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god; and they added, ‘Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.’ Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery.” (Josephus, *Antiq.* 19:343-346)
  3. Josephus said Herod died after five days of suffering (*Antiq.* 19:350).
- D. The apostle Paul visited Caesarea on several occasions.
1. On his way from Jerusalem to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).
  2. Caesarea was Paul’s landing port on his return from his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> evangelistic journeys (Acts 18:22; 21:7-8).
  3. He was sent here by the Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, after the uproar in Jerusalem (Acts 23:23-35).
    - a) The 200 soldiers and 200 spearmen left Paul at Antipatris, and 70 horsemen went on with him to Caesarea (Acts 23:31-32).
    - b) He gave his defense speech here (Acts 24:10-21).
    - c) He preached to Felix and Drusilla here (Acts 24:22-27).
    - d) He was imprisoned here for two years (Acts 24:27).
    - e) When questioned by Festus, he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12).
  4. Paul set sail for Italy from here (Acts 27:1-3ff).

#### *Conclusion*

- I. Caesarea Maritima was the site of many exciting events in the first century.
- II. The thing for which Christians most note this city is the fact that Cornelius, a Gentile, heard and obeyed the gospel in this city (Acts 10, 11).

# Bibliography

- Beck, John A. *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers: An Illustrated Guide to Israel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017.
- Blaiklock, Edward Musgrave. "Caesarea." *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*. Accordance electronic edition, version 1.5. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.
- Currid, John D. and David W. Chapman, eds., *ESV Archaeology Study Bible*. Accordance electronic edition, version 1.0. Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2017.
- Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P. *The Holy Land. A Pilgrim's Guide to Israel, Jordan, and the Sinai*. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- Haberfeld, Caroline, ed. *Fodor's Israel*. New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, 1995.
- Josephus. *The Works of Flavius Josephus, Complete and Unabridged*. New Updated Edition. Translated by William Whiston. Accordance electronic edition, version 1.8. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987.
- Knight, George W. *The Holy Land*. Uhrichsville: Barbour Publishing, 2011.
- Lang, David and James F. Davis. *The Accordance Bible Lands PhotoGuide*. Accordance electronic edition, version 2.0. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2016.
- McRay, John. *Archaeology and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003.
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *The Holy Land*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Rousseau, John J. and Rami Arav. *Jesus and His World. An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.



**[www.padfield.com](http://www.padfield.com)**

Sermon Outlines  
Bible Class Books  
Bible Class Curriculum  
PowerPoint Backgrounds  
Bible Land Photographs  
Church Bulletin Articles

This booklet is protected by Federal Copyright Laws. Individuals and local congregations are allowed to reprint this book. No one is allowed change the contents. This book may not be placed on any other Web site, nor is it allowed to be sold.