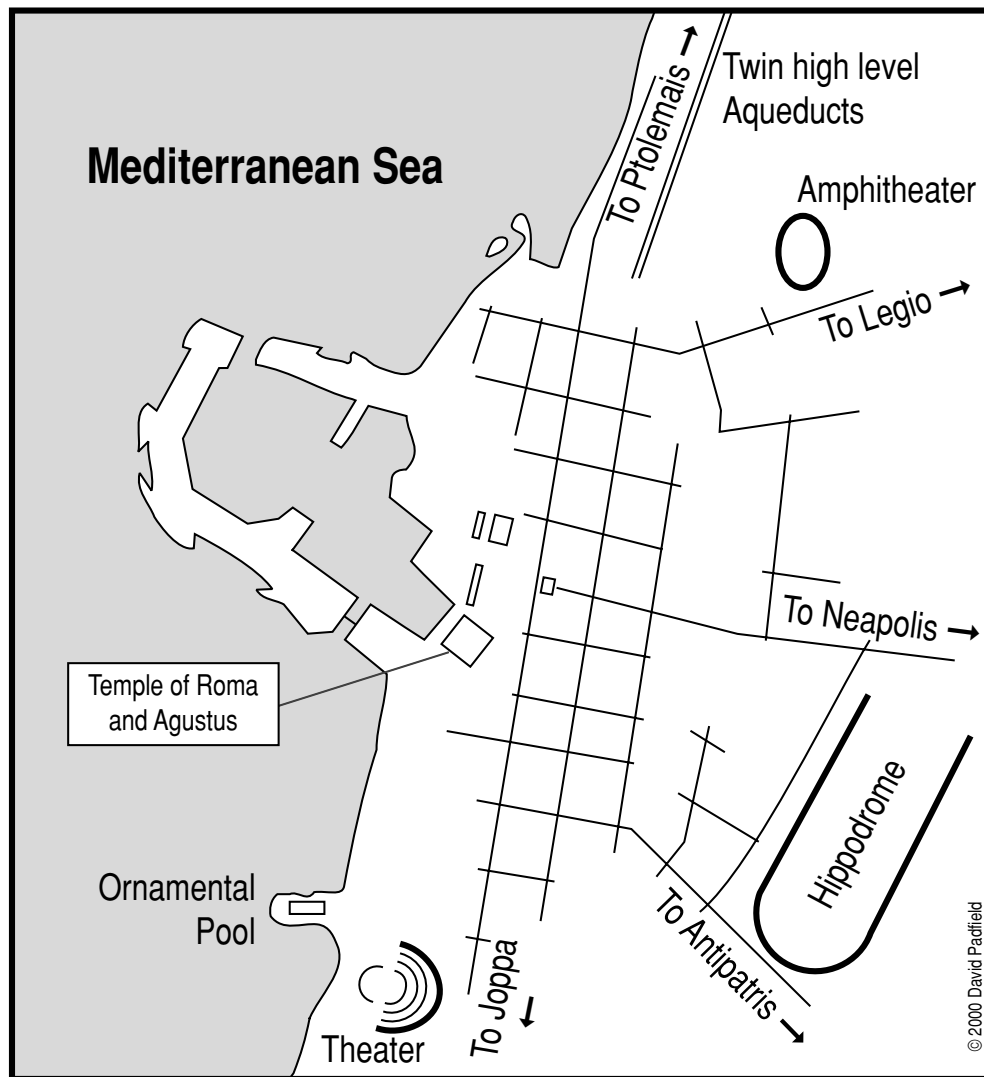


The Biblical City Of Caesarea Maritima



“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 10:1-2)

The Biblical City Of Caesarea Maritima

Introduction

- I. The city of Caesarea was one of the most important cities in Israel during the time of Christ and during the first few centuries of the early church.
 - A. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, lived here (Acts 10:1).
 - B. Philip the evangelist made his home here (Acts 8:40).
 - C. Herod Agrippa I was smitten by an angel of the Lord here (Acts 12:21–23).
 - D. The apostle Paul visited Caesarea on many occasions (Acts 9:30; 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.

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. The city was named *Caesarea* by Herod the Great, in honor of his patron, Caesar Augustus.
 3. A Phoenician city, Strato’s Tower, had already existed as a port here.
- B. Between 22 and 9 B.C., Herod the Great built the city and a harbor.
 1. “Two decades before the birth of Christ, Herod the Great, King of Judaea, set out to create an international metropolis on the coast of Palestine where no major city had ever stood before. In a career marked by grandiose building projects—the Temple in Jerusalem, the winter palace in Jericho, the lofty Dead Sea citadel of Masada—this was to be his crowning achievement: Caesarea Maritima, rival to Alexandria in the eastern trade, a city in opulence and magnificence worthy to be named for Herod’s patron, Caesar Augustus, master of the Roman world.” (*National Geographic*, February 1987, p. 266).
 2. “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*, p. 199).
 3. “The Romans annexed Judaea in 6 B.C., and made Caesarea the headquarters of the provincial governor and his administration. Of these governors Pontius Pilate was one. At first the province was known as Judaea, later Palestina.” (Grenville, *The Holy Land*, p. 135)
 4. When Judea was ruled by the Romans, the prefects or governors resided in Caesarea.

5. The Jews and Greek-speaking population repeatedly clashed, with hostilities exploding in the Jewish revolt of 66 A.D.—the pagans massacred most of the Jewish population.
 6. The first Jewish rebellion was squelched by Vespasian and it was in this city that the Roman legions proclaimed him emperor in 69 A.D.
 7. A year later Vespasian's son, Titus, captured and destroyed Jerusalem.
 8. After 70 A.D., Caesarea became a Roman colony and the local Roman capital of Palestine for nearly 600 years.
- C. Caesarea continued to be of commercial importance until after the Crusades—it was from here that the Polo's set out in the 13th century for their travels to the court of the Great Khan of the Mongols in far-off Peking (Beijing, China).

II. Caesarea Today

- A. Archaeologists began working on Caesarea Maritima in 1873.
1. The first real excavations of the site took place in 1945.
 2. "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*, p. 31).
 3. "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." (*Jesus and His World*, p. 33).
- B. The Theater.
1. "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." (*Jesus and His World*, p. 31).
 2. In 1962 the "Pontius Pilate Stone" was discovered, which provides tangible evidence of Pilate's presence in Judea in Jesus' time and gives clarification of his title (prefect).
 3. Scripture references: 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.

4. "Just inside the theater's main gate is proof that one of the Roman rulers who resided here was Pontius Pilate governor of Judea when Jesus was crucified. It is the only archaeological evidence of the governor's presence in Palestine. The fragmented Latin inscription on a mounted plaque, a replica of the original in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, is believed to say that 'Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judaea, built and dedicated the Tiberieum [probably a temple or shrine dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius] to the Divine Augustus.'" (*Fodor's Israel*, p. 200).
- C. The Herodian Harbor.
1. "Even today, Herod's monumental port, Sebastos, may be regarded as an awesome achievement. The 1st 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*, p. 201).
 2. The port was devastated by an earthquake in 130 A.D.
- D. The Aqueducts.
1. "During Roman rule, the demand for a steady supply of water for the city's drinking, household use, public baths, and city fountains was considerable. 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*, p. 203).
 2. "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." (*Jesus and His World*, p. 31).

- E. The Hippodrome.
 1. "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. Archaeologists believe the Byzantine walls of the city ran just east of here." (*Fodor's Israel*, p. 202).
 2. "South of the city center Herod erected a huge theater on a promontory with a spectacular view of the sun setting into the sea. In the eastern precincts he built a hippodrome, or circus. Here in 9 B.C. he staged elaborate games to dedicate his city. Later the hippodrome may have witnessed mass deaths of Jewish prisoners to mark the end of the first Jewish revolt, A.D. 70, which had begun four years earlier with the slaughter of 20,000 Caesarean Jews." (*National Geographic*, February 1987, p. 270).
- F. The Amphitheater.
 1. The arena was larger than that of the Coliseum in Rome.
 2. The exact date of construction is uncertain—it might have been built by Herod (an example of his megalomania).
- G. The Herodian Temple.
 1. "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." (*Jesus and His World*, p. 31).
- H. The Byzantine Street.
 1. "...just across from the Crusader city entrance is a small sunken, fenced-in area known as the Byzantine street. It was during this period and in late Roman times that Caesarea thrived as a center of Christian scholarship and as an episcopal see; in the 7th century, Caesarea had a famous library with some 30,000 volumes that originated with the collection of illustrious Christian philosopher Origen (185–254), who lived in Caesarea for two decades. Eusebius, who was an ecclesiastical advisor to Emperor Constantine and is known as the Church's first historian, became Caesarea's first bishop in the 4th century. Once lined with workshops and stores, the street is paved with marble slabs, and a mosaic has been uncovered." (*Fodor's Israel*, p. 202).

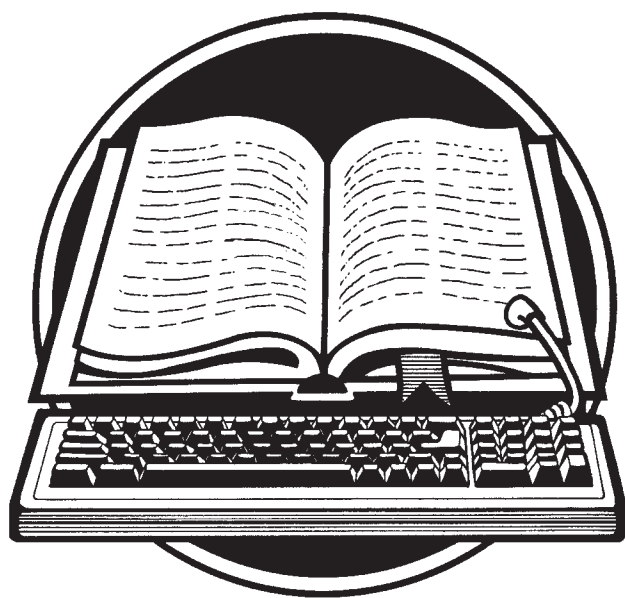
III. Caesarea And The New Testament

- 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. Herod Agrippa I was smitten by an angel of the Lord here in the theater built by Herod the Great (Acts 12:20–23).
1. Notice 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.* 19.8.2).
 3. Josephus said Herod died after five days of suffering.
- D. The apostle Paul visited Caesarea on many occasions:
1. On his way from Jerusalem to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).
 2. Caesarea was Paul’s port of landing on his return from his 2nd and 3rd evangelistic journeys (Acts 18:22; 21:7–8).
 3. He was sent here by Lysias (Acts 23:23–35).
 - a) The 200 soldiers and 200 spearmen left Paul at Antipatris and the 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. He 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 this city is most noted by Christians is the fact that Cornelius, a Gentile, heard and obeyed the gospel in this city.



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