
Caesarea - Judea

from the Thompson Chain Reference Bible

Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea in the time of Christ and Paul, was located by the sea, thirty-two miles north of Joppa, and some sixty miles northwest of Jerusalem. Herod the Great began to build the city in 25 BC, and completed it in 13 BC. At the dedication on 12 BC, he named it Caesarea, in honor of Caesar Augustus, and made it the Roman capital of Judea.

It soon became a busy seaport and a great commercial center. It was one of the most attractive cities of its day. It was constructed so well, and on such a magnificent plan, that it was frequently called "Little Rome." Here lived Philip the Evangelist, and here Paul was imprisoned for two years, during which time he appeared before Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa.

The city stood, with varying fortunes, until 1256 AD, when Sultan Bibars of Egypt captured the city and destroyed its walls and most of its buildings. During succeeding centuries it lay in ruins, with only broken pottery, portions of gates and castles, and fragments of granite and marble columns protruding from the sands and lying half-submerged in the shallow waters of the nearby sea.

The Department of Antiquity of the Government of Israel has undertaken the excavation of Caesarea. Their larger finds, thus far, have included a very splendid Crusader castle, the theater, the amphitheater, the hippodrome, and the pavement of a Jewish synagogue, possibly the very one, or the successor of the one, in which Cornelius once worshipped, and which Philip, Peter, and Paul visited. In the theater they found an inscribed stone which bore the names of Pilate and Tiberius. This was the first time Pilate's name has been found on a stone inscription. A large temple dedicated to Caesar of Rome was uncovered, which contained an unusually large statue of the emperor.

In 1960 the Link Expedition to Israel explored and charted the extensive harbor built by Herod the Great. Only the tops of the elaborate stone breakwater protruded here and there above the

waters, but undersea explorations went far in confirming Josephus' description of Caesarea's massive and extensive harbor.

From the Encyclopedia Britannica

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Caesarea

Hebrew HORBAT QESARI ("Ruins of Caesarea"), ancient port and administrative city of Palestine, on the Mediterranean coast of present-day Israel south of Haifa. It is often referred to as Caesarea Palaestinae, or Caesarea Maritima, to distinguish it from Caesarea Philippi near the headwaters of the Jordan River. Originally an ancient Phoenician settlement known as Straton's (Strato's) Tower, it was rebuilt and enlarged in 22-10 BC by Herod the Great, king of Judaea under the Romans, and renamed for his patron, the emperor Caesar Augustus. It served as a port for Herod's newly built city at Sebaste (Greek: Augusta), the ancient Samaria of central Palestine. Caesarea had an artificial harbor of large concrete blocks and typical Hellenistic-Roman public buildings. An aqueduct brought water from springs located almost 10 miles (16 km) to the northeast. Caesarea served as a base for the Herodian navy, which operated in aid of the Romans as far as the Black Sea.

The city became the capital of the Roman province of Judaea in AD 6. Subsequently, it was an important centre of early Christianity; in the New Testament it is mentioned in Acts in connection with Peter, Philip the Apostle, and, especially, Paul, who was imprisoned there before being sent to Rome for trial. According to the 1st-century AD historian Flavius Josephus, the Jewish revolt against Rome, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70, was touched off by an incident at Caesarea in AD 66. During the Bar Kokhba revolt of AD 132-135, the Romans tortured and killed the 10 greatest leaders and sages of Palestinian Jewry, including Rabbi Akiba. Caesarea was almost certainly the place of execution of Rabbi Akiba and the others according to tradition (c. AD 135). The death of

Caesarea - Judea

these Ten Martyrs is still commemorated in the liturgy for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement).

After this Caesarea became the capital of the province renamed Syria-Palaestina by the emperor Hadrian. Under the Byzantine Empire it was capital of the province of Palaestina Prima. The church historian and biblical topographer Eusebius (c. 260/264-c. 340) served as bishop of Caesarea. The city declined under later Byzantine and Arab rule. Its port and part of the ancient citadel were rebuilt by the crusaders; the city was successively taken and retaken by Muslim and crusader forces, until finally it was captured and razed by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars I in 1265. Between 1884 and 1948 Bosnian Muslims had a settlement there. In 1940 the fishing kibbutz of Sedot Yam was founded just south of the ancient site; this settlement has built a jetty over the Roman and crusader breakwater. It also engages in agriculture and operates a resort hotel.

Excavations undertaken since 1950 have uncovered a Roman temple, amphitheater, hippodrome (which seated 20,000), the aqueduct, and other ruins of Roman and later times. Of particular interest is a Roman inscription, found in 1961, which mentions Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judaea at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. This is the first mention of Pilate ever found that can be accurately dated within his lifetime.

Further excavations in the 1970s and '80s, both on land and underwater, gave a clearer picture of the artificial harbor built by Herod the Great. It was probably the first harbor ever constructed entirely in the open sea (i.e., without the benefit of any protective fringing bay or peninsula) and was protected from the sea primarily by two huge breakwaters built of concrete blocks and filled with stone rubble. This spacious harbor, which Josephus compared favorably with that of Athens at Piraeus, was one of the technological marvels of the ancient world and helped make Caesarea a major port for trade between the Roman Empire and Asia.

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