

EUROPEAN BIBLE TRAINING CENTER

RESEARCH PROJECT: AN ANALYSIS OF EPHESUS AND CAPERNAUM

Anthony Sean Henderson  
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## Ephesus

### Archaeological and historical discoveries with biblical significance

The story of Ephesus begins in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, when it became a Greek port city on the western coast of modern Turkey. Since ancient times, the land of Anatolia has been inhabited by god-seekers, mystics and a host of religions<sup>1</sup>. Despite its long history, much of its beginnings are shrouded in myth and mystery. In the region, Cybele was worshiped as the Anatolian mother goddess, until the Greeks absorbed this cult into their worship of the Greek virgin goddess Artemis. She was worshiped as the daughter of Zeus and Leto, twin to Apollo and goddess of the hunt. Statues at Ephesus have been found, depicting a female deity covered with lobes, which has led some scholars to speculate them to be breasts. Although Cybele was the goddess of fertility, Artemis was not. Hence these statues may be a remnant of the vestige of Cybele.

Those worshiping Artemis would “use portable images or shrines, which were little models of the more celebrated objects of devotion. They were carried in processions, on journeys and military expeditions, and sometimes set up as household gods in private houses”, says Albert Barnes.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: Statue of female deity found at Ephesus. Possible an image of Artemis or an earlier vestige of Cybele<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Albus, *Auf den Spuren des Apostels Paulus: Frühe Stätten der Christenheit*. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006) 83.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Barnes, *Scenes and Incidents in the Life of the Apostle Paul*. (Philadelphia, PA: Zeigler and McCurdy & Co., 1869), 233.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Sommer, *The Great Ionic Temples – Samos, Ephesus, Didyma*  
<https://www.petersommer.com/blog/archaeology-history/the-great-ionic-temples-samos-ephesus-didyma>

Since the sixth century BC, Ephesus has been a temple city<sup>4</sup>. Although an earlier temple was destroyed by fire, the reconstructed building, was designed on an even grander scale. It measured 137 meters by 69 meters with 127 iconic columns and 18 meters in height<sup>5</sup>; it became known as the Artemision. While all ancient cities had patron deities, the temple in Ephesus was so famous, it became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In 140 BC, Antipater of Sidon described the temple at Ephesus in a poem this way:

*I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the Colossus of the Sun, and the huge labor of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, 'Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.'*<sup>6</sup>

Other ancient writers have stated that cities throughout the empire worshipped the Ephesian Artemis above all other deities. The city was so captivated by its temple, it even refused Alexander the Great's offer to pay for its reconstruction, after the earlier temple was tarnished by fire in 356 BC<sup>7</sup>. Ephesians wanted no outside authority interfering with their sanctuary. Not only did the temple serve as a place of worship, but also as a place of commerce. The temple was the regional bank for daily financial affairs. There was immense wealth in Ephesus, much of it unsurprisingly was connected to the worship of Artemis. Even so, scholars estimate that 95 percent of the population lived in poverty<sup>8</sup>. Inappropriate usage of these finances however, led Paullus Fabius Persicus, proconsul of Asia, to issue an edict, reports David Braund<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Nigel Wilson, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 261.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Fairchild, *Ephesus and Asia Minor*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Laale, *An Abbreviated History from Androclus to Constantine XI*. (Bloomington: Westbow Press, 2011), 103.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation*. (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2001), 79.

<sup>8</sup> Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis and the Jews in Ephesus*. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 76.

<sup>9</sup> David Braund, *Augustus to Nero: A Sourcebook on Roman history, 31BC-AD68* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1985), 213-215.



Figure 2: Image of a menorah etched into the steps of the Celsus Library<sup>10</sup>

The Temple of Artemis was finally destroyed during a raid by the Goths in AD 268<sup>11</sup>.

Today, where this magnificent wonder of the world once stood, remains an empty field, marked by a single column.

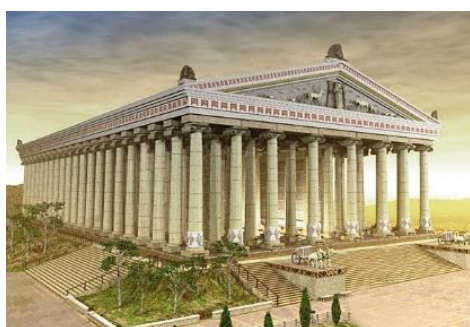


Figure 3: Drawing of Temple of Artemis<sup>12</sup>



Figure 4: Column of Temple remnants<sup>13</sup>

From its first mention in Acts 19, in circa AD 52, all the way up to Revelations 2 in AD 90<sup>14</sup>, the church at Ephesus played a prominent role in Scripture. Nearing the end of his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul ministered in Macedonia and Achaia, before making his trip back to Syrian Antioch. The influence and the power of Ephesus could not fail to attract the attention of Paul. Being joined by Aquila and Priscilla, he made a brief, yet strategic stop at Ephesus. It was his first visit to this metropolis on the

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Fishman, *More Ancient Synagogues in Turkey*. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/scholars-study/bar-authors-respond-to-readers-letters/>

<sup>11</sup> L. Krystek, *The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus*. <http://www.unmuseum.org/ephesus.htm> (accessed January 10, 2020)

<sup>12</sup> Family Holiday. *Traveling to Greek Temple Holiday of Artemis Ephesus*.

<https://www.familyholiday.net/temple-of-artemis-the-great-marble-temple-at-ephesus/>

<sup>13</sup> Anton Bammer: *Das Heiligtum der Artemis von Ephesos*. Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt.

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempel\\_der\\_Artemis\\_in\\_Ephesos](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempel_der_Artemis_in_Ephesos)

<sup>14</sup> B. Windle, *Evidence from Ephesus for the reliability of Scripture*.

<https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2017/11/06/evidence-from-ephesus-for-the-reliability-of-scripture/> (accessed January 10, 2020).

Aegean Sea, though it would not be his last. An earlier attempt in AD 48 had been thwarted by God (Acts 16:6). Heading for thriving commercial centers around the Mediterranean with a thriving Jewish community is consistent with Paul's missiological strategy. Although the synagogue has not yet been found, there are hints of a Jewish presence at Ephesus. Archaeological traces like this second century menorah, carved into the steps of the library of Celsus, support such claims.

Paul Trebilco writes:

*No synagogue has yet been found in the city of Ephesus. However, the existence of a synagogue in Ephesus seems to be implied in Ant. 14:227, to be dated to 43 BCE, where Jews are given permission to 'come together for a sacred and holy rites in accordance with their law.'...An inscription of the Imperial period mentions archisynagogoi (Head of the synagogue) and presbyters...It seems very likely this was from a synagogue.<sup>15</sup>*

The library was the third largest in the Roman Empire, following the libraries at Alexandria and Pergamum respectively. It housed 12,000 scrolls, including the writings of Aristotle, Plato and the Roman historian Suetonius<sup>16</sup>. The library was a place for teaching and learning; indeed, the city was known to be an intellectual center in Asia Minor.



Figure 5: Reconstructed façade of Library of Celsus<sup>17</sup>

On his third missionary journey, the apostle Paul settled at Ephesus, teaching for a period of three years<sup>18</sup>. It is here that he would write 1 and 2 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8-9)

<sup>15</sup> Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 2006), 161.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Andrews, *The Reading Culture Of Early Christianity*. (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2019), 84.

<sup>17</sup> Turkish Archaeology News. *Library of Celsus in Ephesus*. <https://turkisharchaeonews.net/object/library-celsus-ephesus>

and both letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3). New Testament letters were written to address false teaching, ignorance and common misunderstandings about the gospel and the nature of God. Such errors crept in frequently through untrained individuals either unintentionally or in some cases intentionally. One cannot forget that first century churches did not have local pastors, but instead relied on the itinerant ministry of the apostles and evangelists. Paul's preaching resonated with a large number of residents of the city, so much so, that his ministry began to undermine the silversmith's enterprise located at the commercial agora. It is because many earned their income through the worship of Artemis that the spread of the gospel became an existential threat to many of these craftsmen. Acts 19:24-27 records the events as follows:

*For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.*



Figure 6: Commercial Agora with Library in background<sup>19</sup>

The commercial agora was a square-shaped marketplace, surrounded by a portico with pillars and numerous shops, selling food and other local products. In the

<sup>18</sup> Mark Fairchild, *Christian Origins in Ephesus and Asia Minor*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers), 33.

<sup>19</sup> Istemihan Teleri, *Ephesus Commercial Agora*. <http://ancientephesus.com/ephesus/commercial-agora>

center of the agora was a sundial and a water-clock<sup>20</sup>. It measured 109 meters in length and was connected to three gates. The first gate led to the harbor, the second to the Celsus library and the gate at the northeast corner led to the theater.

It is in this agora that silversmiths during the days of Paul began to riot against his ministry, his influence and the business they were losing to all those responding to the gospel.



Figure 7: Inscription found at Ephesus, affirming its imperial status<sup>21</sup>

Several inscriptions have been uncovered, highlighting the silversmith's wealth, power and influence. One inscription describes Ephesus as “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia, [and] the thrice-honored temple guardian of the venerable Ephesians”<sup>22</sup>. This, after having been granted the distinction of a third imperial temple, an honor, cities aspired to receive. Acts 19:35 uses the same term *neokoros*<sup>23</sup> as the inscription to describe the city's role as the temple's ‘guardian’. It is therefore unavoidable, that Christianity produces change and commotion. It interferes with the existing institutions of society; it denounces the objects at which many men place their worship.

<sup>20</sup> “Commercial Agora” <http://www.ephesus.us/ephesus/agora.htm> (accessed January 10, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> James Edwards, *Archaeology gives new reality to Paul's Ephesus riot*. <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/42/4/2>

<sup>22</sup> Eric Metaxas. *Archaeological Evidence Supports Acts 19*. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/archaeological-evidence-supports-acts-19-opinion-167027/#RH6DS1c4PJWHCwui.99> (accessed January 11, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> David Fiensy, *Insights from Archaeology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 40.



While proclaiming, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (v. 28), they seized his travel companions Gaius and Aristarchus (v. 29) and led them to the theater where a large crowd gathered to riot Christianity’s influence in the city. He was urged by friends not to go to the theater, which reluctantly, he did (v.31, 32). The theater having only recently been completely unearthed (J.T. Wood, 1863), had a capacity to seat 25,000 spectators<sup>24</sup>. Originally build in the second century BC, it was expanded in the third and fourth century AD. It was indeed the largest theater in Anatolia, which is unsurprising due to the city’s sizeable harbor, one of the largest in the Aegean Sea. The harbor was the lifeblood of the city. The city sat at the mouth of the Cayster River, a major artery leading to the interior of Asia Minor. Scholars estimate that the population of Ephesus ranged between 180,000 and 250,000 during the first century<sup>25</sup>.



Figure 8: excavated Theater at Ephesus, holding up to 25,000 spectators<sup>26</sup>

Further attention of a growing Christian presence at Ephesus is echoed in the ‘Epistle to the Ephesian church’, written by Ignatius shortly before his martyrdom in the second century.<sup>27</sup> Biblical scholar Ben Witherington III wrote, “The Ephesus of the mid-

<sup>24</sup> LeMoine DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 376.

<sup>25</sup> Roland Worth, *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 224.

<sup>26</sup> Ephesus Travel Guide. *The Great Theater of Ephesus*. <http://www.ephesustravelguide.com/ephesus-theater-church-of-mary.html#>

<sup>27</sup> H. Burn-Murdoch, *Church Continuity and Unity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 120.

first century A.D. was a thriving place, and religiously pluralistic in nature, though certainly the Temple of Artemis dominated the religious landscape”<sup>28</sup>.

Over time, Ephesus became the center for Christian ministries in Asia. Paul withdrew from the synagogue and set up the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), teaching and instructing new disciples for a period of two years. Though little is known about Tyrannus, it is safe to assume he was a wealthy citizen in the city. An inscription was found at the harbor in Ephesus honoring all those who have financially contributed to the city. One person mentioned is named ‘Tyrannus’, possibly referencing the person who provided Paul with quarters for the training of his disciples. Scholars believe that Tyrannus functioned as Paul’s patron in Ephesus<sup>29</sup>. Wealthy individuals lived in the Terrace Houses which are the newest archaeological discovery at Ephesus. It is also possible that the school of Tyrannus was located in or near his home. Shops fronted the terrace houses facing Curets Street, and one of these could have been used for the school. These homes were decorated lavishly with beautiful mosaic floors, frescoed walls, marble facing and courtyards. Moreover, they were equipped with running water and heating.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 9: Terrace houses at Ephesus, home for the wealthy<sup>31</sup>

The spread of Christianity allowed Luke to make the claim that “all who lived in Asia heard of the Lord” (19:10). In 1906, a further archaeological discovery was made by

<sup>28</sup> Ben Witherington III. *Wealth In Ancient Ephesus – Part 6*  
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2016/04/06/gary-hoags/> (accessed January 9, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Mark Fairchild. *Christian Origins in Ephesus and Asia Minor*, 36-37.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Wikipedia, *Ephesus*. <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ephesus> (accessed January 13, 2020).

the Austrian Archaeological Institute in a hillside cave. It became known as the Grotto of St. Paul. The site has its roots in the first and second centuries and has therefore played an important role for early Christians in and around Ephesus. Frescos of Paul believed to be the earliest image of the apostle, was discovered under the plaster on the walls<sup>32</sup>.

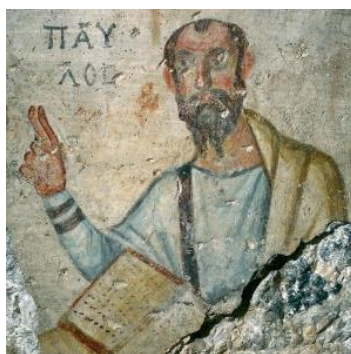


Figure 10: Earliest image of the apostle Paul found to date<sup>33</sup>

In book five of *Against Heresies*, the second century work of Irenaeus testifies that John the Apostle moved to Ephesus in the latter part of the first century and lived there until his death, sometime during the reign of Domitian, the Roman emperor<sup>34</sup>. John became the leader of the churches in Asia, ministering to them along the coastal route. It is here that the apostle writes his gospel and 1, 2 and 3 John. Eusebius, the 4th century church historian records that Timothy was appointed as the first bishop of the city of Ephesus<sup>35</sup>.

### Devotional reflections on Ephesus

One can draw from a myriad of examples, as it is such a theologically rich and well-preserved ancient site. Proclaiming in his Gospel at Ephesus, John wrote, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (3:14,15). His first century

<sup>32</sup> Özgen, Acar. *St. Paul in Ephesus*. <https://archive.archaeology.org/online/news/stpaul.html> (accessed on January 12, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Michael Caba, *The Grotto of St. Paul in Ephesus*. <https://blog.bibleplaces.com/2013/04/the-grotto-of-saint-paul-in-ephesus.html>

<sup>34</sup> Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views – A Parallel Commentary*. (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1852), 294.

audience would immediately have remembered the account in Numbers 21. As the Israelites wandered through the wilderness, they grew impatient with God and spoke against the Lord. In judgment, He sent snakes amongst His people who through their bites killed many Israelites. The account further reads (Num. 21:8,9):

*And the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.*

The staff lifted up by Moses was a symbol of the cross of Christ. Everyone who would look to the bronze serpent would live. It was representative for healing and the shedding of its skin bringing forth new life. Understanding the gospel, believers can look up to the suffering Christ bringing forth healing and new life. Therefore, the idea of the cross is as old as Moses. One of the Greek mythological deities was Asclepius, worshiped as god of medicine. He was the son of Apollo and Coronis. The rod of Asclepius, a snake entwined on a staff has been the symbol of medicine since ancient times and persists to this day. Even at Ephesus, archaeologists discovered a tablet with the symbol of Asclepius.



Figure 11: Snake wrapped around poll, symbol of Asclepius – god of medicine<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Paul's love and concern for the church, accompanied him wherever he went. Following his extended stay at Ephesus, Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the capital of the empire. From there, he wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus, a text which has become

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<sup>36</sup> Ephesus Travel Guide. *Caduceus or Rod of Asclepius*. <http://www.ephesustravelguide.com/denizhans-blog/caduceus-or-rod-of-asclepius>

known as Ephesians, one of his prison epistles in the New Testament. In it, Paul urges unity amongst Jewish and Gentile believers (Eph. 2:12-22). This call to unity is as critical today, as it was two millennia ago. As the modern reader holds history and archaeology in one hand and the biblical account in the other, he will discover that both tell the same story. Therefore, may to him be the “glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21).

## **Capernaum**

### **Archaeological and historical discoveries with biblical significance**

There is no better location in all of Israel than Capernaum, to understand the ministry of Jesus. Although, he was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth, it was Capernaum that marked his time on earth (Mt. 4:13). It was a small fishing village with an estimated population of 1,500 people<sup>37</sup>. What socioeconomic status did the people of Capernaum have? Reed writes, “chiefly the lower levels of society inhabited Capernaum, like the most villages in antiquity”<sup>38</sup>. Much of Christ’s work, many of his parables and a major part of his miracles happened in or around Capernaum. His disciples Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew all lived in Capernaum. Rene Baergen writes: “Jesus scholars of all methodological and ideological stripes agree that if the historical Jesus is to be found anywhere or somewhere, he is to be found in and around Capernaum. If he is to be described, historically, he is to be described on the northern shore of the Kinneret, in terms of this local place, whether he is subsequently cast in the guise of eschatological prophet, itinerant healer, Cynic, holy man, Rabbi, counter cultural peasant or social

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<sup>37</sup> JL Reed, *Archaeology and the Galileen Jesus: A Reexamination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 159.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 164.

reformer”<sup>39</sup>. All four gospels make clear that Capernaum was the hub of Jesus’ work. Luke records that after being rejected in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:28-30), Jesus cast out demons and healed people in Capernaum. Mark’s Gospel gives an overwhelming assertion that Jesus lived in Capernaum. There have been exegetical insights that Mark’s interest in Galilee must be connected that his Gospel must have been written in the region<sup>40</sup>. Biblical scholars like Robert H. Lightfoot present a compelling view that Capernaum is distinctly Markan<sup>41</sup>. In his examination, he highlights how Mark paints Jerusalem in fierce opposition towards Jesus while contrasting the positive response in Galilee. This not only pertains to people’s reaction towards Jesus, but also of the eschatological and messianic return that is evident in Jesus’ Galilean ministry<sup>42</sup>.

In his Gospel, Matthew calls Capernaum “his own town” (Mt. 9:1). After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to Galilee (Mt. 14:13), presumably to seek seclusion. Taking a closer look however, the reader will discover that Matthew believed in the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. The exact correlation between Isaiah 9:1-7 and Matthew 4:14-16 remains a point of debate between scholars. Barry Beitzel does make clear however that, “Isaiah is making use of the known character of the Galilee to communicate a theological concept. Vulnerable to outside influence and conquest, the Israelites who settled here faced the dilemma of how to live in the international environment with all its inherent risks and opportunities, and yet remain faithful to YHWH”.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Rene Baergen, *Re-Placing the Galilean Jesus. Local Geography, Mark, Miracle and the Quest for the Jesus of Capernaum.*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Zeichmann, *A Hub for the Historical Jesus or the Markan Evangelist?* (2017), 147-165.

<sup>41</sup> Robert H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 1-78.

<sup>42</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936), 52.

<sup>43</sup> Barry Beitzel, *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, 87.

In the days of Jesus, the multi-cultural, religiously diverse environment existed because Israel refused to live according to God's pattern in areas of justice, righteousness and worship. Therefore, it is possible that Jesus' withdrawal from Nazareth, was a retreat from the conservative and traditional mindset to the more international audience he would encounter in Capernaum.

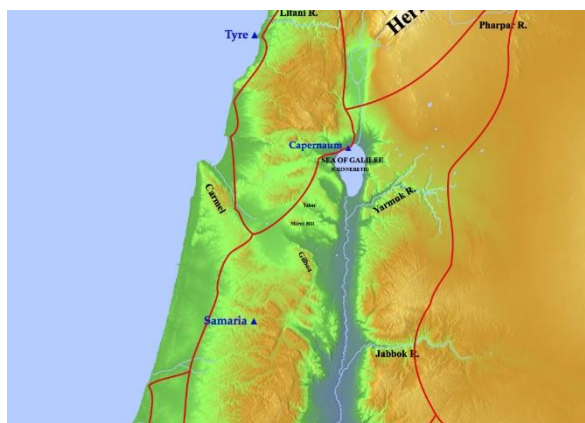


Figure 12: Map of northern Israel, displaying Capernaum's location near the Via Maris (red line going through Capernaum)<sup>44</sup>

At Capernaum, the international highway (Via Maris) connected the Jezreel Valley, Phoenicia and Damascus. This worldly audience would be more receptive to the message Jesus was proclaiming. It would be received by a more diverse audience, comparing if he had stayed at Nazareth. He encountered people from the Decapolis, Transjordan, Tyre and Sidon. Capernaum was at a crossroad between Africa, Asia and Europe. Josephus called it a "fertile spring"<sup>45</sup>. From a political vantage point, Capernaum was a strategic destination. It was located in the district of Galilee, which was ruled by Herod Antipas<sup>46</sup>, thereby bordering Gaulanitia, part of Herod Philip's territory<sup>47</sup>. Across the Sea of Galilee lay the Decapolis, this was a predominantly Roman and Gentile region, controlling all of the Sea's eastern shore.

<sup>44</sup> Abidan Paul Shah, *Via Maris, Capernaum*. <https://abidanshah.com/2017/07/27/the-sin-forgiver-by-pastor-abidan-shah/via-maris-capernaum/>

<sup>45</sup> Josephus, Wars – Book III, 10, 8).

<sup>46</sup> Frederick Tomlins, *A complete system of geography, ancient and modern; comprising a full description of the world, physical, political and historical*. (Halifax: William Milner Cheapside, 1845), 415.

<sup>47</sup> Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn. *Betsaida/Bethsaida Julias (et-Tell)*. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 242.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the reader is shown the reasoning behind Jesus's relocation. He writes, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles" (Mt.4:15). He connects Nazareth with the ancient territory of Zebulun and Capernaum with the territory Naphtali, culminating his theological argument, Matthew writes, 'Galilee of the Gentiles'. It is here that Jesus would speak the words "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt.4:17). This statement evoked deep emotions in the hearer of the first century Jewish person. He would immediately, like Isaiah, recognize it as restorative language. Israel's restoration, something anticipated for many centuries, would be embodied in Jesus. Beitzel continues, "The Galilee, which had failed to remain faithful to the Mosaic covenant and as a result had been the first to go into exile, was the first to see the dawn of the coming kingdom, and the very things which had made it vulnerable in the past now brought it blessing"<sup>48</sup>. There is more at work in the Gospel of Matthew, than first meets the eye. It is not simply the restoration of Israel that Matthew has in mind, but just as Israel was to see the light, the invitation was extended to the gentiles of the world. As Beitzel asserts, "just as Israel was intended to serve this role of a light to the nations, Jesus as Israel's true representative, completes this calling. Placing himself on the international road, accessible, yet vulnerable, his message spreads and God's larger work of restoration has begun"<sup>49</sup>.

The remains of ancient Capernaum sit on the northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee (see *Figure 12*), bringing to life the historical events of Jesus. Since its modern rediscovery by Edward Robinson in 1838<sup>50</sup>, biblical academia has been examining closely the ruins that have rested peacefully for hundreds of years undisturbed. It has

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<sup>48</sup> Barry Beitzel, *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*. (Philadelphia: Lexham Press, 2016), 89.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> James Strange, *Has the House where Jesus stayed in Capernaum been found?*  
<https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/8/6/4>



been an important cite for Christians ever since the second half of the first century. Archaeological finds in Capernaum give an insight into the importance Christians have placed on preserving the living memory of their Savior. Therefore, it was unlikely that disciples of Christ would allow this place to dissipate into oblivion. One house in particular has a place of prominence, it is known as Peter's house.



*Figure 13: First century house of Peter, home of Jesus in Capernaum.<sup>51</sup>*

It was a simple structure, like most Roman-period buildings were, consisting of two small rooms with two open courtyards. Excavators believe that the most striking part of this discovery is what happened to the building after the death of Jesus. Common household cooking pots and bowls were exchanged for large jars and oil lamps. The walls were plastered from ceiling to floor, which was rare in first century Galilee<sup>52</sup>. Scholars believe that this house no longer functioned as a residence, but as a place of communal gathering. This may very well have been the first meeting place for Christian gatherings<sup>53</sup>. Over the centuries, the building has remained a meeting place for believers. Some of the world's earliest graffiti was uncovered, etched into the plaster of the walls,

<sup>51</sup> Garo Nalbanian, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/the-house-of-peter-the-home-of-jesus-in-capernaum/> (accessed January 14, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, *The House of Peter: The Home of Jesus in Capernaum?*

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/the-house-of-peter-the-home-of-jesus-in-capernaum/> (accessed January 14, 2020).

<sup>53</sup> <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/07/08/footsteps-three-things-in-capernaum-that-peter-likely-saw/>

the words read “Lord Jesus Christ help thy servant”<sup>54</sup> or “Christ have mercy”<sup>55</sup>. Small crosses, boats and even the name of Peter were deciphered<sup>56</sup>.



Figure 14: Sitting across the octagonal house, believed to be Jesus' home in Capernaum, are the excavated ruins of the synagogue<sup>57</sup>.

The remnants of the synagogue standing in Capernaum today are not from Jesus's day, but have been built over an older synagogue in the fourth century<sup>58</sup>. Scholars agree that the Roman columns made of limestone and other architectural elements support this analysis.

*“The synagogue of Capernaum was an impressive structure. Built of large, white limestone blocks from the hills of Galilee west of the town, it stood out among the buildings of grey basalt surrounding it. The synagogue was built on a platform, two meters above the houses of the town, and separated from it by streets on all four sides. Oriented north-south, it had a decorated, southern façade towards Jerusalem”<sup>59</sup>.*

After calling Peter, Andrew, James and John to be his disciples, Jesus went to the synagogue in Capernaum and began to teach. Since Peter came from this small village, he likely visited numerous times before. Joining Jesus at the synagogue, however, he witnessed Jesus casting out a demon (Mark 1:23-26) and healing a man with a withered

<sup>54</sup> Finegan, Jack. *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*. (Princeton: Princeton Legacy Library, 1992), 110-111.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>57</sup> FOOTSTEPS: Three Things in Capernaum Peter Likely Saw.

<https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/07/08/footsteps-three-things-in-capernaum-that-peter-likely-saw/> (accessed January 15, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> Stanislaw Loffreda, *Coins from the Synagogue of Capernaum*. (1997), 223-44.

<sup>59</sup> *Capernaum-City of Jesus and its Jewish Synagogue*

<https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/israelexperience/history/pages/capernaum%20-%20city%20of%20jesus%20and%20its%20jewish%20synagogue.aspx> (accessed January 14, 2020).

hand (Mark 3:1-6). He also sat in the synagogue as Jesus gave his Bread of Life discourse (John 6:25-59), the only mention of him being at Capernaum in the fourth Gospel.

After excavations by Cordo and Loffreda in and around the synagogue, coins have been found that have helped date the structure and the earlier foundation sitting underneath<sup>60</sup>. The black basalt stone was somewhat out of line with the newer structure and it has been concluded that this was the foundation of the first century synagogue that Jesus and his disciples would have known.



*Figure 15: The black basalt foundations of the first-century synagogue are visible beneath the white limestone synagogue from the 4th century AD<sup>61</sup>.*

### **Conclusion and Devotional reflections on Capernaum**

Much more could be said about Capernaum and the importance it plays for believers in uncovering the historical Jesus. From the archaeological discoveries in Galilean towns and villages, scholars know that homes were constructed so that it was easy to add small rooms onto the complex when necessary. This type of home was called an insula<sup>62</sup> house structure with inter-connected rooms in order to accommodate extended families. Likewise, when a son married, he would bring his new wife into his family home, this was very much a celebrated event.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph M. Holden and Norman Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, (Eugene: Harvest House Publisher, 2013), 362.

<sup>61</sup> Konrad Summers/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 2.0

<sup>62</sup> Barry Beitzel, *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, 109.

When Jesus began to prepare his disciples for the events leading up to his death, he comforted them with the assurance that in his father's house were many rooms. Jesus went on to say, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Jesus assured his disciples that they would be added to his family. This symbolism of the groom preparing a place for his bride, is a powerful and enduring one for the church.

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