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Day 3

Sunday March 5 2023

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Caesarea Maritima

In the attractive Mediterranean seaport of Caesarea Maritima, the apostle Peter baptized the first recorded gentile convert to Christianity — Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army. When this Italian soldier and his household believed in Jesus they received the gift of the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues. This event astonished the Jewish Christians but validated the fact that salvation was for all people (Acts 10).

Caesarea Maritima (“by the sea”) was the scene of other significant events for Christians:

- It was the headquarters of Pontius Pilate. From here the Roman procurator set out for the Passover festival in Jerusalem, where he sentenced Jesus to death.
- Here the apostle Paul was imprisoned for two years and preached to the last of the Herods, King Agrippa II, who said that if he were to listen any longer to Paul’s persuasion he might become a Christian.
- The city was the home of Philip the evangelist and his four daughters, who were prophetesses. Paul stayed with them when he returned from his missionary journeys.
- At Philip’s home, a prophet named Agabus bound Paul’s hands and feet with his belt, foretelling how the apostle would be handed over to the Romans.

After Jerusalem was destroyed, Caesarea became the centre of Christianity in Palestine. A Church council held here in AD 195 determined that Easter should be celebrated on a Sunday.

Caesarea — not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi in Galilee — was founded by Herod the Great on the site of an ancient fortified town. In 22 BC, with no expense spared, he began building a new city and harbor. Massive breakwaters gave safe anchorage to 300 ships, a sewage system was flushed by the tide, and a vast hippodrome seated more than 20,000 people at chariot races. Later an amphitheater was built to present chariot races, gladiatorial combats, animal performances and theatrical events. Little wonder that Caesarea has been dubbed “Vegas on the Med.”

During the Roman occupation, clashes between Jews and the majority Greco-Syrian population, who supported Rome, were frequent. The desecration of Caesarea’s synagogue and the massacre of 20,000 Jews — in a single hour, according to the historian Josephus — culminated in the First Jewish Revolt, which ended with the AD 70 destruction of both Jerusalem and the Second Temple.

Bishop’s territory included Jerusalem = Christianity was accepted early in Caesarea. By the end of the 2nd century the city had a bishop, Theophilus of Caesarea, whose territory included Jerusalem. Well-known Christian Fathers who were active in Caesarea included Origen and Pamphilius. The library they built up

was second only to that of Alexandria (in the 7th century it held 30,000 works). Eusebius, who became bishop in 314, was both the first Church historian and the first biblical geographer. Without his book of place names, the *Onomasticon*, many biblical sites would never have been identified. Today's visitors can see a restored Roman theatre built to accommodate 4000 and a Roman aqueduct that brought water from the foothills of Mount Carmel. Just inside the theatre is a replica of an inscription carved in stone, bearing the name of Pontius Pilate. The remains of a Crusader walled city, from the 13th century, include a cathedral which was never completed because the vaults below, from an earlier period, were unable to bear the weight.

In Scripture:

Philip arrives in Caesarea: Acts 8:40

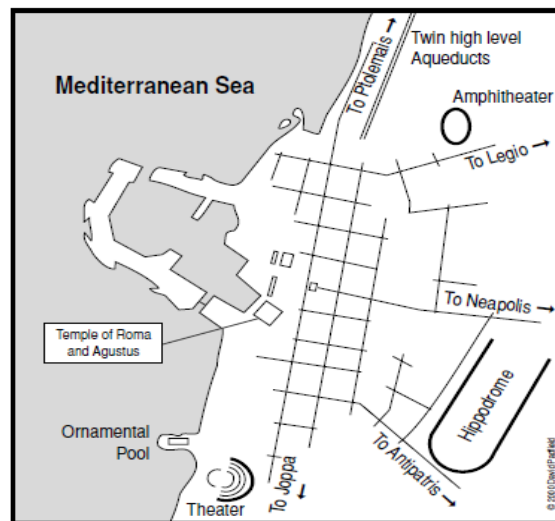
Agabus prophesies Paul's death: Acts 21:8-11

Peter visits Cornelius: Acts 10

God strikes down Herod Agrippa I: Acts 12:21-23

Paul is imprisoned in Caesarea: Acts 23:23—26:32

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.

Megiddo

Megiddo is situated on the gateway on the road linking North and South of Israel, about 30 Km south-east of Haifa. The archeologists uncovered 26 layers of ancient cities, starting before the bronze age (4000 BC) until the Greeks (4th C BC). The site is located 30Km south east of Haifa, and is located at a strategic entrance through the eastern Carmel hills where an ancient trade road (Via Maris) links the North (and Assyria) and South (Egypt). In this site an important City once flourished from the bronze ages and biblical periods, and mentioned in the Old Testament as a strong City that played an important role in the history of the Biblical Israel. The international highway traversed this pass and carried traders and armies from Asia, Europe and Africa. Megiddo’s strategic importance lay in one’s ability to use its

nearby hill to monitor such traffic. It was abandoned after the Persian times since the site was relocated in nearby locations. This left the foundations of the city virtually intact from the biblical times.

Although Megiddo has been extensively chronicled in extra-biblical sources, it is only mentioned 12 times in the OT¹ and once, indirectly, as Armageddon in the NT (Rv 16:16). Most Christians know the book of Revelation prophesies an end-times battle that will be fought at a place called Armageddon (Rv 16:16), and many know that Armageddon is, in fact, a corruption of the Greek word, Ἀρμαγεδών (Harmagedon) or “the hill of Megiddo.” A 35-acre (14 hectare) mound, 200 ft (60 m) high, in northwest Israel called Tell el-Mutesellim is believed to be the site of Megiddo. Many Christians travel to Megiddo and walk to the 15-acre (6 hectare) summit because of its eschatological significance. There they look at the excavated buildings, walls, water and gate system and then move to the north edge of the mound where they have a magnificent view of the valley, or more correctly, plain, which spreads out before them known as the “Jezreel” in the OT and “Esdraelon” in NT times (Esdraelon being the Greek modification of Jezreel). The plain separates the Galilean hills in the north from Mounts Carmel and Gilboa to the south. The immensity of the plain is so astonishing that when Napoleon Bonaparte first viewed it, he was reported to have said: “All the armies of the world could maneuver their forces on this vast plain...There is no place in the whole world more suited for war than this...[It is] the most natural battleground of the whole earth” (Cline 2002: 142).

In addition to its strategic location, Megiddo had access to the agriculture products from the rich soils of the Jezreel Plain. The Hebrew translation of Jezreel, “God sows,” illustrates the land’s fertility. When George Adam Smith, a late 19th-century AD traveler, stood on Mount Gilboa and surveyed the Jezreel Plain, he wrote:

The valley was green with bush and dotted by white villages...But the rest of the plain [as] a great expanse of loam, red and black, which in a more peaceful land would be one sea of waving wheat with island villages; but has mostly been what its modern name implies, a free, wild prairie...(1966: 253).

And when the American scholar and explorer, Edward Robinson, visited the area in 1852, he wrote:

The prospect [view] from the Tell [i.e. Tell el-Mutesellim] is a noble one; embracing the whole of the glorious plain; than which there is not a richer upon earth...A city situated either on the Tell or on the ridge [Mt. Carmel] behind it, would naturally give its name to the adjacent plain and waters; as we know was the case with Megiddo...The Tell would indeed present a splendid site for a city (as quoted in Davies 1986: 4).

Megiddo’s mound has a copious spring emanating from a small cave near its base that provided water for those who settled there. Aharoni, in his comprehensive historical geography of the Holy Land, lists four criteria for occupation: strategic location, access to roads, water and agricultural lands (Aharoni 1979: 106–107). Megiddo’s location met all four.²

The downside for being such an attractive site was the probability of war as nations sought to control this place for their own ends. Like bears drawn to honey, realms fought at and near Megiddo for fruit of the Jezreel Plain, to control and tax international traffic, or secure lines of communication to and from far-flung lands. In his historical review of Megiddo and its surrounds, Cline counts no fewer than 34 wars there from ca. 2350 BC to AD 2000 and adds, “nearly every invading force [of Israel] has fought a battle

in the Jezreel Valley” (2002: 11). Proof of this can be seen in some of the 20 occupational levels dating from the Chalcolithic to Persian periods (ca. 5000–332 BC), with evidence that they met their ends in fiery destruction (DeVries 1997: 215).

[Megiddo] was easily accessible to traders and migrants from all directions; but at the same time it could, if powerful enough, control access to means of these routes and so direct the course of both trade and war. It is not surprising therefore that it was at most periods of antiquity one of the wealthiest cities of Palestine, or that it was a prize often fought over and when secured strongly defended (Davies 1986: 10).

Excavations: The first deliberate archaeological excavations at Tell el- Mutesellim were in 1903–1905, by G. Schumacher on behalf of the German Society for Oriental Research. He had a north-south trench dug the length of the mound that exposed several Iron Age (ca. 1200–600 BC) buildings, and he made soundings along the walls at other places on the site (Aharoni 1993: 1004–1005). Among his finds was a royal official’s seal from the reign of Jeroboam II (ca. 793–753 BC; 2 Kgs 14:23–25). The seal, made of jasper with the image of a crouching lion, had an inscription, “(belonging) to Shema’ Servant of Jeroboam,” the only reference to Jeroboam II outside of the Bible. Unfortunately, the seal has disappeared and only a copy exists (Wood 2000: 119).

Excavations were renewed in 1925 by the Oriental Institute of Chicago at the encouragement of Egyptologist James Henry Breasted and financially underwritten by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. This work continued until 1939, when it was interrupted by the onset of World War II. The goal of the first field director, Clarence Fisher, was to clear the mound layer-by-layer. After four years it became obvious the effort could not be sustained on such a grand scale, and the scope became more limited. For those who are familiar with archaeological techniques used today, it may be of interest that H.G. Guy, who replaced Fisher in 1927, was the first to “use ‘locus numbers’ to designate rooms and or other small areas and the taking of aerial photographs of major structures by means of a camera attached to a captive balloon” (Davies 1986: 19–20).

Yigael Yadin started work at Megiddo in 1960 on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with additional seasons in 1961, 1966, 1967 and 1971. Yadin helped to clarify the dating of many buildings uncovered by previous excavators. Yadin’s colleagues continued excavating until 1974 (Aharoni 1993: 1005). Since 1992, and every other year since, excavations have been done under the direction of Israel Finkelstein, David Ussishkin and Baruch Halpern, and under the auspices of Tel Aviv University and The Pennsylvania State University. Their work continues to shed light on previously excavated areas as well as performing reconstruction activities to make the site more comprehensible for visitors (Finkelstein, Ussishkin, Halpern 2008: 1944–1950).

History: The occupation of Megiddo could have begun as early as ca. 5000 BC (Davies 1986: 25). By 2700 BC a large village was there, surrounded by a great wall—the largest and strongest ever built on the mound (Aharoni 1993: 1007). Visible at the bottom of a large archaeological cut is a worship complex from this period, with a 26Z ft (8 m) diameter circular altar, 5 ft (1.5 m) high, with a flight of stairs to its top. This was also the time when Megiddo became the target of the first known recorded

military campaign. An Egyptian tomb inscription from the Early Bronze Age described how Weni, a general under Pharaoh Pepi I (ca. 2325–2275 BC), invaded the region and found fortified towns, excellent vineyards and fine orchards (Aharoni 1979: 135–37). Weni campaigned four more times around Megiddo to put down insurrections, probably local farmers chafing under oppressive Egyptian rule (Hansen 1991: 85).

In succeeding generations Megiddo continued to attract Egyptian interest, and was the site of the world's earliest battle for which a detailed account exists. Carved on the walls of Karnak in Egypt is a well-preserved description of how Pharaoh Thutmose III, one of Egypt's greatest sovereigns and her finest military strategist, fought a coalition of Syrian princes at Megiddo ca.1469 BC. The Syrians had occupied Megiddo and controlled the pass through the Carmel ridge, the Wadi 'Ara. Thutmose moved a large army from Egypt to a place just south of the entrance to the Wadi 'Ara. Contemplating his next move, Thutmose consulted his generals, who urged him not to consider the Wadi 'Ara but to use two other less narrow valleys north and south of the 'Ara. His staff feared an ambush in the narrow 'Ara pass. Disregarding their advice, Thutmose ordered the army through the Wadi 'Ara. They traversed the pass unmolested and exited onto the Jezreel Plain, surprising the Syrian princes who had anticipated that the Egyptian army would come through the two other, less dangerous, routes. In the ensuing battle the Syrians were able to escape to the safety of Megiddo where, after a seven-month siege, the city fell.³ After the siege, the amount of agricultural spoils captured by Thutmose is impressive: "...1,929 cows, 2,000 goats, and 20,500 sheep...[The] of the harvest which is majesty carried off from the Megiddo acres: 207,300 [+ x] sacks of wheat, apart from what was cut as forage by his majesty's army..." (Pritchard 1958: 181–82). It is estimated the wheat, alone, measured 450,000 bushels (Pritchard 1958: 182 n.1). Megiddo was a very wealthy and fertile target, indeed!

Both General Weni and Pharaoh Thutmose III campaigned before the Israelites entered the Promised Land ca. 1406 BC.⁴ Although Joshua defeated the king of Megiddo (Jos 12:21), the Bible does not tell us how. Apparently Joshua did not capture the city because Megiddo was still occupied by Canaanites at the time of the Judges (Jgs 1:27). However, during the time of the Conquest (the period covered by Joshua and Judges), Megiddo became the focus of attention for one nearby city-state, Shechem. The Bible implies the invading Israelites made peace with the king of Shechem (Hansen 2005: 37). The king of Shechem apparently then used his association with the Hebrews as an opportunity to attack some of his neighbors, including Megiddo. This is reported in the Armana tablets found in Egypt in AD 1887. They were written by various rulers from around the Middle East, including leaders of Promised Land city-states to Pharaohs Amenhotep III (ca. 1402-1364) and Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, ca. 1350-1334).⁵ Letter EA 252 is from Labayu, the king of Shechem, who shows contempt for Egypt and implies he had become independent of Egyptian rule (Hess 1993). The king of Megiddo wrote in EA 244 that his city has been besieged by Labayu, complains of Egypt's lack of response, and pleads for military assistance:

ever since the archers returned (to Egypt?), Lab'ayu has carried on hostilities against me, and we are not able to pluck the wool, and we are not able to go outside the gate in the presence of Lab'ayu, since he learned that thou hast not given archers but let the king protect his city, lest Lab'ayu seize it... He [Lab'ayu] seeks to destroy Megiddo (Pritchard 1958: 263).

Letters EA 287 and EA 288 are from the king of Jerusalem, who requests reinforcements to protect against the Habiru who are attacking cities. He also accuses Labayu, the king of Shechem, of giving land to the Habiru (Pritchard 1958: 270–72). The mention of Habiru in these tablets refers to a migratory people group who were invading the Promised Land at the time of the Conquest. Many conservative Bible scholars believe the Habiru to have been the Israelites.⁶

Excavations at Megiddo have revealed that the period when the Amarna letters were written was wealthy. Many lovely gold artifacts, and a horde of 382 ivories, show the prosperity of Megiddo's rulers. Several ivories have hieroglyphic inscriptions that point to Egyptian influence at the site. Other ivories are pieces of a board game or games, women's cosmetic utensils, and a small box carved from a single piece of ivory (Aharoni 1993: 1011). Following this time, Megiddo suffered a major destruction dated to the time of the Judges (Price 1997: 147).

The first mention of Megiddo after the book of Judges is during the reign of Solomon (970–930 BC). The governor he appointed to Megiddo's district was required to annually supply Solomon's palace with a month's worth of provisions (1 Kgs 4:7, 12). Although the evidence is weak, it was probably King David who conquered the city, as evidenced by the remains of a violent conflagration over 3 ft (1 m) deep (Shiloh: 1016). If correct, it was David who built a new city, referred to in 1 Kings, over the remains of the previous one.

In succeeding years Megiddo became a major fortified city. At this level excavators revealed the remains of a large gate complex of six chambers, three on each side, with two towers. In an amazing piece of detective work, Yadin proved Megiddo's gate complex mirrored those from the same period found at Gezer and Hazor (1975: 193–94). Yadin concluded Solomon constructed the three city gates, using a shared plan, at the time he "built the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer" (1 Kgs 9:15). Of this discovery Yadin wrote, "...as an archaeologist I cannot imagine a greater thrill that working with the Bible in one hand and the spade in the other" (1975: 187).

Many structures from Solomon's time, as well as that of the gate system, have been uncovered. However, it must be stated that some archaeologists challenge the dating. Among the contested structures are several long, narrow buildings archaeologists have identified as horse stables, while others argue they were barracks or storehouses (Shiloh 1993: 1021). If stables, the structures fit well with what the Bible tells us about Solomon, who built "cities and towns for his chariots and for his horses" (1 Kgs 9:19). A large grain storage pit, 69 ft (21 m) deep and 69 ft (21 m) wide, was found near the "stables" and could have provided 150 days' worth of grain for up to 330 horses (Ussishkin 1997: 467). Parts of this level's city were destroyed by fire, probably by Pharaoh Shishak, who invaded the country shortly after Solomon died ca. 925 BC (1 Kgs 14:25; 1 Chr 12:2).

Shishak (who is Egyptian pharaoh Sheshonq I, ca. 945–923 BC) left a record of his invasion of Judah and Israel at Karnak in Egypt, and Megiddo is among the places he listed as being conquered. During the 1929 excavations of Megiddo, Clarence Fisher found a fragment from a stele erected by Shishak that commemorated his capture of the city.

One of the most interesting structures to explore at Megiddo is the large water system, probably built during the reigns of the northern kings Omri and Ahab (ca. 880–853 BC) in order to gain protected access to the spring outside the city walls. An 82 ft (25 m) deep square vertical shaft with steps along its side was dug inside the city walls and connected to a 262 ft (80 m) tunnel dug through rock that led to the city's water source, a spring in a cave 115 ft (35 m) below the surface. The outside approach to the cave was then concealed and blocked (Shiloh 1993: 1023).

A destruction layer in several buildings at Megiddo denotes the arrival of the Assyrians. The city undoubtedly fell to Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BC) when he invaded the northern kingdom, as documented in his annals (Pritchard 1958: 193–94) and the Bible (2 Kgs 15:29–30). However, many structures, including the city walls, water system and grain storage pit, continued in use during the Assyrian period. New buildings displayed typical Assyrian architectural features, and indicate the city was an administrative or residential center (Ussishkin 1997: 468).

Stratum II represents the period ca. 650–600 BC, during which the city fell rapidly into decline. Although many of the Assyrian buildings continued to be used, the city was unfortified except for a structure that may have been a fortress. It is unclear who controlled the city, the Israelites or the Egyptians; it was a time when a power vacuum existed in northern Palestine, and both the king of Judah, Josiah (640–609 BC), and the Egyptians saw this as an opportunity to expand their empires. The two kingdoms clashed at Megiddo in 609 BC when Pharaoh Neco II, on his way to assist his Assyrian allies in a battle against the Babylonians, met Josiah. Under circumstances that are not certain, the Bible reports that Josiah “marched out to meet him [Neco] in battle, but Neco faced him and killed him at Megiddo” (2 Kgs 23:29). 2 Chronicles 35:20–24 describes the same event, adding details that Josiah was wounded in battle on the plain of Megiddo and taken to Jerusalem where he died. Josiah's death opened the door for Babylon's invasion, and Megiddo soon fell into disuse. It was abandoned by the time Alexander the Great conquered the region, ca. 332 BC.

Remarkably, visitors today see acres of ruins, a fascinating water system and complex gate systems, and would find it hard to believe the exact location of Megiddo was lost in history. But, from about 330 BC on, Tell el-Mutesellim was forgotten as the site of the city of Megiddo. By the fourth century AD, Jerome had only a vague idea of where Megiddo had been, and scholars in subsequent centuries conjectured it was at various other places in the area. When Edward Robinson visited Tell el-Mutesellim in 1852 he wrote: “The Tell [has] no trace, of any kind to show that a city ever stood there” (Davies 1986: 4). It was not until Tell el-Mutesellim was excavated in the early 20th century that the location of the ancient city of Megiddo was known.

St. Peters Fish

<https://st-peters-restaurant.business.site/>

Jesus Boat ??

The Sea of Galilee Boat, also known as the Jesus Boat, was an ancient fishing boat from the 1st century AD, discovered in 1986 on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel. The remains of the boat, 27 feet (8.27 meters) long, 7.5 feet (2.3 meters) wide and with a maximum preserved height of 4.3 feet (1.3 meters), first appeared during a drought, when the waters of the Sea (actually a great fresh-water lake) receded. Moshe and Yuval Lufan, brothers and fishermen from Kibbutz Ginosar, discovered the Ancient Galilee Boat buried in the mud near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The discovery of the boat rocked the archeological and spiritual world. Never before was such an ancient vessel found so complete. Once the boat was positively dated to the First Century BCE, pilgrims from around the world flocked to view the boat on which could have been the very same vessel on which Jesus sailed the Sea of Galilee. There is no evidence connecting the boat to Jesus or his disciples. It may have functioned as a ferry boat, but its measurements also suit those used by ancient fishermen employing a seine, or dragnet, "cast into the sea" as described in Matthew 13:47-48.

Boat Ride Nof Ginnosar to Nof Ginnosar

To truly experience the Sea of Galilee a boat ride is a must! We take the boats at the Ancient Boat Museum. The ride lasts about an hour and we leave from the Tiberias side and then get off at Capernaum to continue our tour. It is a very inspirational experience and something that I do every time I am in the Galilee. The boats have plastic chairs or there is like a bench that wraps around the entire circumference of the boat on the inside where we typically sit, enjoy the view and experience and take pictures. Once you are out in the middle the captain shuts off the motor and you float for a while.

Yardenit Baptismal Site

Yardenit is situated on the banks of the Jordan River, at the Southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Yardenit, also known as the Yardenit Baptismal Site, is a baptism site located along the Jordan River in the Galilee region of northern Israel. According to Christian tradition, the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17) took place in Bethany Beyond the Jordan (Al-Maghtas), north of the Dead Sea and east of Jericho.

The Israeli Ministry of Tourism established Yardenit in 1981 as an alternative pilgrimage site.[2] Yardenit became the first regulated baptism site in Israel. Qasr al-Yahud reopened in 2011.[In 2015, UNESCO declared Al Maghtas on the East bank a world heritage site. The Yardenit Baptismal Site currently averages 400,000 visitors a year and attracts members of all faiths.[7]