

76 Capernaum

Names (also known as)

Tell Hum, Khirbet Karazeh, Capharnaum, Kefar Nahum, Kafarnaum, Kefar Tanhum, Talhum, Tanhum.

Etymology

Capernaum = “village of comfort” (Thayer).

Evidently from the primitive Hebrew root *kaphar* - to cover (specifically with bitumen); figuratively to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel. Hence, often translated “atone-ment” in the OT. Suggests one reason why the Lord selected Capernaum as his home during his ministry.

The *naum* part of the name derives from a primitive Hebrew root – *nacham* - properly to sigh, that is, breathe strongly; by implication to be sorry, that is, (in a favorable sense) to pity, console; hence comfort. Perhaps another reason for the Lord selecting Capernaum, as its name encapsulated the purpose of his mission.

Location/Description



Capernaum is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee in what is today an area preserved from modern development. It is about 45 kms by road from Nazareth and 15 kms from Tiberias.

Scriptural references

New Testament

Matt. 9:1; 4:13; Mark 9:33; Luke 7:1; John 6:24

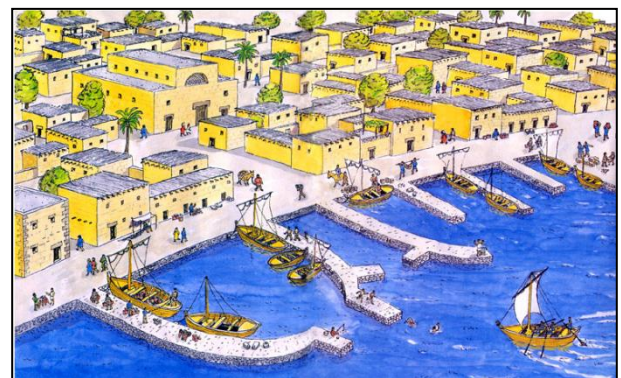
Famous characters

Jesus, Peter, Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Matthew.



Brief history

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that the town was established in the 2nd century BC during the Hasmonean period. The site had no defensive wall and extended along the shore of the nearby lake (from east to west). The cemetery zone is found 200 meters north of the synagogue, which places it beyond the inhabited area of the town. It extended 3 kilometers to Tabgha, an area which appears to have been used for agricultural purposes, judging by the many oil and grain mills which were discovered in the excavation. Fishing was also a source of income; the remains of another harbor were found to the west of that built by the Franciscans.



No sources have been found for the belief that Capernaum was involved in the bloody Jewish revolts against the Romans, the First Jewish-Roman War (AD 66–73) or Bar Kokhba's revolt (132–135), although there is reason to believe that Josephus, one of the Jewish generals during the earlier revolt, was taken to Capernaum (which he called "Kapharnakos") after a fall from his horse in nearby Bethsaida (Josephus, Vita, 72).

Josephus referred to Capernaum as a fertile spring. He stayed the night there after spraining his ankle. During the first Jewish revolt of 66–70 Capernaum was spared as it was never occupied by the Romans.



Capernaum and Christ

It was the vicinity of Capernaum that Jesus chose several of his disciples: the resident fishermen Peter and his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16-18), James and John, the sons of Zebedee, also local fishermen (Mark 1:19-20), and Matthew, a tax collector (Mark 2:13-14).

Jesus chose as the headquarters for his Galilaean ministry the city of Capernaum. In Matt. 9:1 Capernaum is referred to, in fact, as Jesus “own town”. Jesus stayed in Peter’s house there and frequently taught at the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31-38). Residents of the town (said to be around 1,500) were simple folk who made their living from fishing, agriculture, industry and trade.



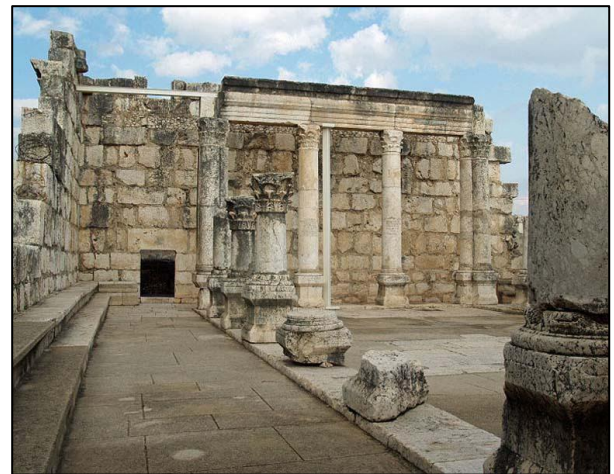
Jesus performed several miracles there. He cured Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:29-31), healed many towns-people of diseases (Mark 1:32-34) and restored a man “sick of the palsy” on a bed let down with ropes by his friends through a roof (Mark 2:1-5). Elsewhere in the town Jesus healed the servant of the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10).

The major trading road leading to Damascus, the Via Maris (“the way of the sea”) passed nearby, providing a commercial link with regions to the north and south.



The Via Maris from Damascus to Egypt

The Synagogue at Capernaum



The remains of what was probably a first century synagogue were discovered beneath those of a later 4th century AD Byzantine-period synagogue. The first-century structure archaeologists uncovered featured a basalt floor 18 metres (60 feet) wide by 24 metres (79 ft.) long. Too large to have been a private dwelling, this was very possibly the synagogue in which Jesus taught (Mark 1:21).

Peter’s House

A site that may have been the location of Peter’s house has also been excavated. The remains are located 26 metres (84 ft) south of the synagogue, at the bottom of three layers of construction. The house had narrow walls, which would have been too weak to support a roof of masonry; it probably had a roof of branches covered with earth. Thus, this house or one like it could have been the scene of Jesus’ healing of the man “sick of the palsy” who was lowered through the roof (Mark. 2:4).



The remains of what archaeologists believe may be Peter's house or one like it

Sources:

Bibleplaces.com

New Unger's Bible Dictionary

NIV Archaeological Study Bible

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capernaum>

(Compilers – Darren Peeler/Jim Cowie)

