

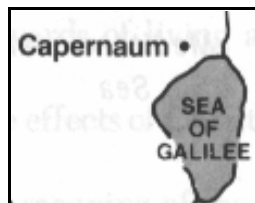
IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

The Towns and Cities of Jesus' Day

As you read your Bibles, you will come across many familiar place names. Names like Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Jericho are well known to us as are many others. But if you're like me, you might know the name and not much else about the place. You've heard of Caesarea Philippi, but would you know where to find it on the map? Would you know what kind of a town it was or what happened there? In our studies this year, we will be visiting the towns and cities that Jesus visited, traveling *In His Footsteps* so to speak. We'll learn a little about the geography and history of each location and we'll see the Savior minister to His people and to us.

Capernaum

Capernaum's name in the original language is *Kefar Nahum* (city of Nahum). Although the identity of this 'Nahum' is not known. Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, it is about 2 ½ miles west of the place where the Jordan River empties into the lake. Since 1968, the ruins of ancient Capernaum have been rediscovered and excavations have been ongoing in recent years. In Jesus' day, the village stretched along about 300 meters of coastline and stretched north about 200 m from the water. Some guess that during its peak, the population was about 1500.



Capernaum was well situated. It was the only village in the area and one of the principal roadways of the region passed through it on its way to Syria. Thus it was a center for trade moving toward Damascus and goods coming into Galilee. Customs booths were located near the Roman Imperial Highway. It was here in Capernaum that Jesus called Levi (Matthew) the tax collector to follow him (Mk 2:13-15). In addition to trade, Capernaum also had fishing and agricultural advantages. Excavations have found evidence of much agricultural work. There is evidence of cereal and olive product processing in the

area. Glass making was also a business here.



Archeologists have also uncovered some of the houses in which the people lived. They were not the type of dwellings occupied by the rich, but they were above average for the typical Galilean village. Further, the houses throughout the area are similar which suggest that there was not a huge economic disparity within the population. Houses consisted of several rooms built around a courtyard. There is no evidence in Capernaum of 'running' water or any other water storage facilities or bath houses. No doubt the inhabitants did all their washing and bathing at the Sea of Galilee.



Two other important buildings can be found in Capernaum. First, is the synagogue— the center of worship for the Jews. In Jesus' time, the synagogue was built with walls four feet thick and three feet high. This was the first synagogue. A later synagogue (4th century A.D.) was built on top of these walls. The photo at left is of the second synagogue with a few remains of the first in the foreground. Peter also lived in

Capernaum and tradition identifies the location of his house. Jesus stayed with Peter when He was in town.

Capernaum's Importance

Capernaum's ruins would probably have faded away forever and there would be little modern day interest in the village if it were not for the work and ministry of Jesus there in the region of Galilee. Capernaum is mentioned often in the New Testament because Jesus made this small town the 'home base' for His Galilean ministry. Matthew 4:13-16, "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.'"

From Capernaum, Jesus could make walking tours around the region of Galilee preaching and teaching. As mentioned before, Capernaum was a hub for trade and commerce— perhaps another reason why Jesus chose the village. There would be many people going in and out who would hear about Him. Many events in Jesus’ ministry happened in Capernaum. Look at some of them in the list below. Think about what important things the people at Capernaum learned about Christ in each instance.

John 6:15-59

Luke 7:1-9

Mark 1:21-28

Mark 2:1-12

Mark 5:21-43

The inhabitants of Capernaum had the Savior living in their midst! They witnessed His miracles. They heard Him speak to them about the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He taught them who He was and what He had come to do. They had the opportunity to hear the ministry of reconciliation directly from Jesus’ own lips.

The Fall of Capernaum

Unfortunately, the people of Capernaum eventually rejected Jesus’ ministry. He was right there with them— some of the first Apostles came from this little village— yet the people as a whole turned against their Savior. Finally, Jesus denounced the city saying (Mt 11:21-24), “And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the

depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Jesus’ words of prophecy and judgment came true. By the 7th century A.D. Capernaum was a heap of ruins. The town might serve as a reminder to us that to turn away from Jesus is to lose everything.

The Ministry of Jesus

However, we also see with joy the work of the ministry that Jesus performed in and around this town. It could well remind us of the work of the ministry that Jesus still performs this day. He speaks today through the mouths of His believers— making each one of us a mouthpiece for the good news of His salvation. Through us, His ‘earthen vessels,’ Christ tells others of His cross, His suffering, death, and resurrection that paid for the sins of all mankind and opened the door to heaven.



Through His word— the events recorded for us that took place in Capernaum— we can learn who Jesus is so that we might believe in Him for everlasting life!

Resources

<http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/sites/TScpmenu.html>

<http://www.biblepicturegallery.com/Pictures/Capernaum.htm>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/capernaum.html>

<http://www.bibleplaces.com/capernaum.htm>

Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts

The New Testament in Living Pictures by David S. Alexander

The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia Samuel Fallows, ed.