66 Caesarea

Names (also known as)

Caesarea Maritima, Colonia Prima Flavia Augusta Caesariensis, Herodian Caesarea, Horvat Qesari, Kaisariyeh, Kessaria, Qaisariya, Qaisariyeh, Qaysariyah, Qesari, Qisri, Qisrin, Strato's Tower, Straton's Tower (Sidonian settlement)

Etymology

Caesarea literally means Caesar's city – it was built by Herod to honour Caesar Augustus.

Location/Description

Caesarea is located on the Mediterranean coast midway between Haifa and Tel Aviv.
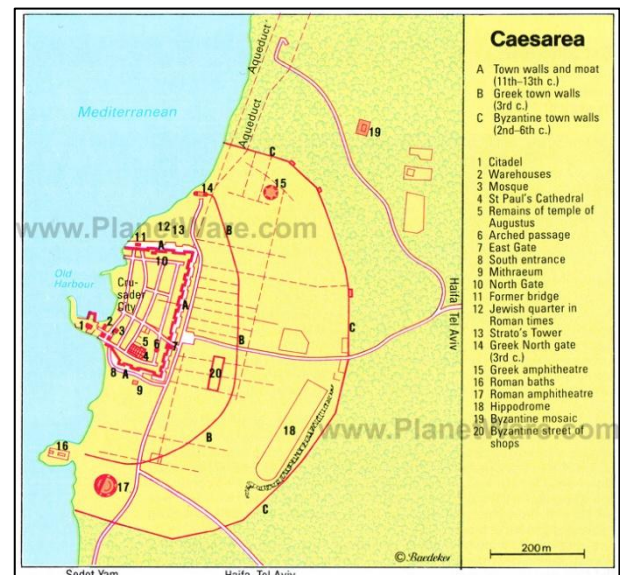

Scriptural references

New Testament

Acts 8:40; 9:30; 10:1,24; 11:1; 12:19; 18:22; 21:8,16; 23:23,33; 25:1,4,6,13

In Acts 8 Philip goes to Caesarea and we see from Acts 21:8 that he stays there. He would have been the one who brought the gospel to the city and set up the ecclesia that was in it. In Acts 10 and 11 we have the conversion of Cornelius by Peter. This brought a brother into the truth and also taught Peter a principle that we should all remember and that is it is our obligation to preach the gospel to all people, nations, and tongues. In Acts 23-26 Paul is taken to Caesarea to stand before rulers such as Festus, Ananias, Felix, and Agrippa. This fulfilled the requirement that the truth was to be preached even to the rulers of the land. Paul spoke the truth so passionately that his words almost persuaded Agrippa to convert to the truth.

Famous characters

Paul
Cornelius
Peter
Philip the evangelist
Herod the Great
Festus and Felix
Pontius Pilate

Brief history

The city was built by Herod the Great in 25-13 BC. It served as an administrative centre for the Judean province and under Byzantine rule became the capital of Palestine. Caesarea is built upon the ruins of Straton's tower. This was a town built by Straton I a king of Sidon who used it as an agricultural storehouse. The town was taken by Alexander Janneus of the Hasmoneans who used it to strengthen his naval forces. It remained in Jewish hands for two generations until it came under Roman control.

The city came into prominence when Herod dedicated it to Caesar and built it into the most impressive city in Israel outside of Jerusalem. He built a deep man made sea harbour, aqueduct, hippodrome, amphi-theatre, palace, and numerous temples. The

harbour was an amazing construction that could accommodate 300 ships and provide protection for them even in the winter months. It was the largest man made port and one of the biggest in the whole of the Roman empire.

The theatre could seat 3,500 people and according to Josephus is the place where Agrippa was smitten and ultimately died. The hippodrome was built to house gladiatorial games and chariot races and could seat over 10,000 people.

The promontory palace that Josephus called a most magnificent palace was built right on the water and had an Olympic sized pool. It is here that Paul was probably held while he was at Caesarea (Acts 23:35). A lack of fresh water created the need for an aqueduct that would bring water from springs on Mt Carmel almost 16 kms (10 miles) away. This aqueduct was used for centuries, with Hadrian and the Crusaders further adding to it.

The city had a mixed population that was half Jewish and half Gentile, which was often a cause of controversy. The great revolt of AD 66-70 actually started in Caesarea due to a dispute over a pagan ceremony held outside a synagogue on the Sabbath. When the Roman's ignored the Jewish protests the violence spread across the country. When the Romans finally ended the rebellion Caesarea became the capital of Palestine.

The famous aqueduct at Caesarea

During the Muslim and Crusader period the city was fought over and during this period the city's great mosque was converted into the church of St. Peter and a Crusader castle was built. King Louis IX of France fortified the city with high walls and a deep moat but the city still fell to the sultan Baybars. During the Mamluk era the city was left uninhabited and it stayed that way till the 19th century.

Today there is a growing town with a population over 4,500. Another piece of history that was found in Caesarea was a

tablet bearing the name of Pontius Pilate. This is the only piece of history that bears the name and title of the man who condemned Jesus Christ to death. Archaeology continues to support the Biblical narrative and silence the arguments of those who doubt the accuracy of God's word. We know without a doubt that God's word is true and that it alone will stand the test of time. We do however have the choice of following after it so and if we do we too will stand the test of time at the side of our King who unlike Pilate is the rightful judge of the whole earth.

The lesson of Caesarea for Peter

In Acts 10 we have for us recounted the story of Cornelius and his baptism. We often focus on this part of the story as a Gentile is baptized and received the Holy Spirit. The question should be asked; why is Peter sent to perform this baptism? We are told that Philip the evangelist made his home in

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Caesarea (Acts 8:40; 21:8). Here was a man who had already converted Gentiles, why was he not then sent to Cornelius as he was already right there? It seems that while this was a life changing moment in Cornelius' life it was also a pivotal one in the life of Peter. Here was a lesson that Peter had to learn as we do as well, that we don't decide who will accept the Gospel message. Peter did not understand that the Gospel was meant for all the earth and not just his own people. Christ made it clear that while salvation was of the Jews it was not limited to them (John 4:14,21-24). We are told specifically that the angel told Cornelius to search out Peter for his help (Acts 10:22). Peter accepted this lesson and expounded it to others (Acts 11:1-18), and they listened, understanding that salvation was for Jew and Gentile. We need to heed this lesson and not hold back our preaching of the truth because someone doesn't fit the mould of what we view as worthy. We are commanded to plant the seed and God will give the increase.

Sources:

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Wikipedia
bibleplaces.com
biblewalks.com

(Compiler – Dan Leadbetter)