

# 80 Sepphoris

## Names (also known as)

Zippori, Le Saphorie (Crusader), Autokratoris, Suppheriyya (Arabic), Diacaesarea (Ancient Greek)

Hebrew - Tzipori

## Location/Description



Sepphoris is a village and an archaeological site located in the central Galilee region of Israel, 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) north-north-west of Nazareth. It lies 286 m above sea level and overlooks the Beit Netofa Valley. The site holds a rich and diverse historical and architectural legacy that includes Hellenistic, Jewish, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader, Arabic and Ottoman influences. In late Christian tradition it was believed to be the birthplace of Mary the mother of Jesus.

## Scriptural references

None



Sepphoris today from the air

## Brief history

During the 1st century Sepphoris was known as “the ornament of Galilee” and is thought by many to be the birthplace of Mary and home to her parents Anna and Joachim. The Bible however is silent as to details of this town in Galilee except for its identification with Kitron or Kattah a city in the tribe of Zebulun that was never conquered by the Zebulonites. In 47 BC Herod the Great conquered the city for Rome and made it his Galilean capital. Herod’s son built up Sepphoris and made it a commercial centre during the time of Christ. So even though the gospels are silent on the subject of Sepphoris it is easy to visualize him and his father possibly finding work there as carpenters and later him preaching to the inhabitants of the city.



During the Jewish rebellion around 66 AD the Jews of Sepphoris submitted to Roman rule and were spared the destruction that occurred elsewhere, and even retained Jewish rulership until after the revolt led by Simon Bar Kochva when the name of the city was changed to Deocaesarea and ruled by Rome for much of the 2nd century. At the beginning of the 3rd century, Sepphoris was again ruled by Jews and even became the seat of the Sanhedrin for a time. Yehuda Hannaasi head

of the Sanhedrin at the time also lived there for about 17 years and it is thought he completed the Mishna while living there.



In 363 AD a major earthquake hit the Galilean area and destroyed much of the city. It was rebuilt, and during the time of Constantine became a major centre for Christianity in the Holy Land although the majority of its citizens were Jewish. During the time of the Crusaders they captured this city and further rebuilt and fortified it, calling it Le Saphorie and controlling it until after the Battle of Hittim. They also built a church which they dedicated to Anne the mother of Mary. After this, Arab dynasties like the Mamluks and Ottomons controlled the city they called Suppheriyya until evicted by the British in 1918.

During this long period it lost much of its cultural significance and importance, although it was known for its olives, wheat, and pomegranates. In 1948 it was the largest Arab village in Galilee with some 4,000 inhabitants. On 1 July 1948 it was bombarded by Israel and captured in operation Dekel. Most of the residents were evicted and many subsequently relocated to Nazareth. They now mostly live in the al-Safafira quarter of Nazareth. Today Zippori is an amazing archaeological park full of beautiful mosaics and other ancient structures.



The Nile mosaic in Sepphoris



This aerial view gives an interesting perspective of the extent of the archaeological work

### A lesson from Sepphoris

While Sepphoris is never mentioned in Scripture we are reminded by its history of God's word spoken through his prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 29:4,20) where He commanded His people to submit to the invader and not resist with a promise that they would live. We are under that same command to submit until the time that will surely come when our Lord and Master will return and establish his Father's Kingdom. Then the saints will no longer be required to submit to the governments of this world for they will be part of the government of Yahweh and His son.

### Sources:

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(Compiler – Dan Leadbetter)

