

TOURING ISRAEL | A VIRTUAL AND BIBLICAL JOURNEY
STOP 1 | CAESAREA MARITIMA, PART 1

THE LOCATION

Welcome to our first stop on the journey of a lifetime! Caesarea Maritima (*Caesarea by the Sea*) is often simply called *Caesarea*. It is a different location than *Caesarea Philippi*, which goes under the modern name of *Banias*.

Caesarea is located about 35 miles north of Tel Aviv (Israel's second largest city). Due to its location, it is often the first stop tour on a group-tour to Israel, and it never disappoints. Even without the historic and Biblical significance, the location itself is simply beautiful, with the wide-open plains meeting at the Mediterranean Sea.

BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Caesarea is found only in the New Testament due to its founding by King Herod at about 21 B.C. The city is mentioned 15 times, always in the book of Acts. It is not surprising that the city is not found in the Gospels since it was built as a trading post and governmental center for the Roman Government (and Jesus was **a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers**, Rom. 15:8).

The first mention of the city is a passing reference in Acts 8:40, where Philip had been with the Ethiopian eunuch and then, being miraculously carried away by the Spirit, **was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea** (Acts 8:40). It is interesting that he preached **till he came to Caesarea**, which helps confirm that the Messianic assembly was still going only to the Jews, following the Lord's instruction to **Go not into the way of the Gentiles** (Mat. 10:5).

In Acts 10-11 the Lord reveals to Peter that he is to take the message of the Kingdom not only to Jews, but also to God-fearing Gentiles. God introduces Peter to a man named Cornelius, who is said to be **a devout man and one that feared God** (Acts 10:2). The word **devout** is εὐσεβής [eusebes] which means "good worshiper." And could he be a "good worshiper" if he was not one who **feared God** and worshiped in the only way that had been revealed to this point, which was in the Jewish manner? Peter struggles with going to a gentile, but eventually makes his way to Caesarea to meet with this Gentile prospect for the Jewish believing assembly.

The city is mentioned, in passing, in Acts 12:19 as the home of Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great. In fact, remains of Herod Agrippa's massive palace complex (including indoor, fresh-water swimming pool) are visited by hundreds of thousands of people annually.

The most significant Biblical events take place with the Apostle Paul. In Acts 23:23 it is noted that Paul is taken from the prison in Jerusalem to Caesarea with **two hundred soldiers ...and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night**. This was for Paul's own safety, since 40 men had covenanted together to make sure Paul was killed (Acts 23:12-13). Paul would be taken to the governor of the province, Felix, for trial. Felix kept Paul for two years, often conversing with him about theology, but never accepting Paul's teaching. In fact, we are told that one reason he



kept bringing Paul for conversation was to eventually get bribe money from Paul (Acts 24:24-26). Felix could have let Paul free but chose not to for political reasons (Acts 24:27).

Felix was replaced by Festus, and it was before Festus and King Agrippa that Paul gave his most famous public address. Paul met before King Agrippa, who came **with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city** (Acts 25:23) to hear Paul. Was this august **place of hearing** the theater that is so prominent in Caesarea? Paul stood before Agrippa and said that he was being **judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers** (Acts 26:6). Paul then claimed that he took the Jewish message of the Kingdom both to Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:20), and that he had originally said **none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come** (Acts 26:22). We know that later Paul received a vision that went beyond the prophets and Moses and includes the mystery of our salvation (see Eph. 3:1-12).

At Caesarea Paul was accused of things of which he was not guilty, and he always defended himself on these false charges. For example, in Acts 24:5 Paul was accused of being **a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**. Paul eloquently defended himself but did claim to be guilty of being **a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes** (see Acts 24:6ff). Perhaps Caesarea can remind us that we may never defend ourselves and our faith before kings, but we should certainly be *ready, willing, and able*.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE IN CAESAREA

In Caesarea you will see these amazing sites:

- A Roman theater that held some 4,000 viewers. If you look for the older, more worn stones, these are untouched. Many of the seats have been restored in modern days, and the theater is still used for concerts and other large events.
- Lots of architectural “debris” like columns and capitals, many with amazing art design.
- Several ancient *sarcophagi*, a “bone box” for deceased loved ones after their bodies have been removed from family tombs.
- Herod Agrippa’s first century palace. Look out over the terrace and see the remains of his once-indoor (and fresh-water) swimming pool.
- A large *hippodrome*, the site of chariot races and the place where Christians and Jews were fed to the wild beasts, for sport.
- Crusader fortresses and walls built by King Louise IX (St. Louise), in about A.D. 1250.
- The slight remains of the underwater breakers built by King Herod the Great to make Caesarea into a great seaport.

Coming in part 2:

- Matters of extra-Biblical significance, including proof of Pontius Pilate, the story of Rabbi Akiva, and the work of Eusebius.
- The modern significance of the city.