

TOURING ISRAEL | A VIRTUAL AND BIBLICAL JOURNEY
STOP 6 | CAPERNAUM, THE HEADQUARTERS OF GALILEAN MINISTRY

THE LOCATION

Capernaum is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee in modern-day Israel. It is situated about 2.5 miles (4 km) west of the Jordan River and about 120 miles (190 km) north of Jerusalem. The surrounding area is characterized by hills and valleys, and the Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake in the world. Capernaum itself is built on a rocky outcropping overlooking the lake, and there are several hot springs in the area.

BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The name "Capernaum" is believed to come from the Hebrew words "kfar nahum", which mean "village of Nahum." Nahum was likely a local figure or a person of some significance in the area. The name "Capernaum" appears in the New Testament in Greek as "Kapharnaoum" (Καφαρναούμ), which is likely a transliteration of the Hebrew name. It is unknown whether there is any connection with the Prophet Nahum.

The village is mentioned by name 16 times in the New Testament, always in connection with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus began His ministry after Nazareth in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13), and this was a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1. Because of the word **Gentiles** given in Matthew 4:15, many have assumed that there was a large Gentile population there, and that this is why Jesus chose to headquarter His ministry there. However, the quote from Isaiah 9:1 is a reference to what was, at that time, the coming invasion of the Assyrians. Thus **the people that saw a great light** (Mat. 4:16) were not Gentiles but descendants of Jewish forefathers from the misnamed "ten lost tribes."

Here is a non-exhaustive list of miracles which took place in or around Capernaum in Jesus' day:

- Healing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10)
- Healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-39)
- Healing of a paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26)
- Healing of the man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue (Mark 1:23-26, Luke 4:31-37)
- Healing of the man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:9-13, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-11)
- Healing of the woman with a hemorrhage (Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:43-48)
- Healing of the blind man (Matthew 9:27-31)
- Healing of the mute man (Matthew 9:32-33)
- Miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11)

In addition, Jesus taught His famous "Bread of Life" sermon in Capernaum (Jn. 6) as well as His parables on the Kingdom found in Matthew 13. In addition, in Mark 1:22 it is said that Jesus **taught them as one that had authority**, and in Luke 4:32 it is mentioned that in Capernaum **his word was with power**.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

The Jewish synagogue in Capernaum is one of the most important archaeological sites in the city. It is believed to date back to the fourth or fifth century AD, though it was built on the site of an earlier synagogue, with the foundations of the earlier synagogue remaining to this day (look for the grey basalt stones under the white limestone).

The synagogue in Capernaum is notably large compared to other synagogues from the same period, since Capernaum was a wealthy city with a large Jewish population. The synagogue measures about 80 feet by 50 feet and had a main floor in addition to a balcony, thus would have been able to accommodate a sizable congregation. The synagogue is built of white limestone and includes several ornate carvings, including a menorah, shofar, and palm tree.

The older synagogue upon which the new is built may have been the one built by a Roman official who was sympathetic to the Jewish community in Capernaum, mentioned specifically in Luke 7:5.

A second major sight is what is believed to be site of the home of Simon Peter. No longer a house, a church was built on the site at least as early as the 4th Century. During this time, it was common for Christians to build churches over places of significance to their faith. The church was built as an octagon. Symbolically, the octagonal shape was often associated with resurrection and new life. The number eight was seen as significant because it represented the new creation, as it was the first day of the new week and the day on which Christ rose from the dead. The octagonal shape was also believed to represent the transitional space between the square (representing the earth) and the circle (representing heaven).

Finally, visitors to Capernaum will want to see the olive press in the courtyard near the synagogue. The Hebrew word for olive press is "gat shemen" (גַּת שֶׁמֶן). This is the name, transliterated, of the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Capernaum is a great place to learn how olives were pressed in the ancient world, and how this relates to the three times of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane by Jesus.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The ministry of Jesus is the city's greatest "claim to fame." It is likely that many skirmishes or battles took place during the first Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70.

MODERN SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

There is no modern city of Capernaum, and all that remains are ancient ruins. This, in the minds of many, aligns with the words of Jesus in Luke 10:15, **And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.** Here, the word **hell** is used as "the grave" (a translation of *hades*) rather than the place of torment (*Gehenna*). Other than a tourist destination, Capernaum is "in the grave."