

Preparation Guide – Volume 1

This is the first in what will be a series of resources designed to help in preparing for our tour of Israel in 2024. Our first topic is the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima, and we have also included an overview of Herod the Great and his descendants.



Caesarea Maritima - Introduction

Caesarea Maritima is one of the first sites we will be visiting in Israel and is located directly on the Mediterranean Sea (see the map above). “Maritima” means “by the sea”. It is known simply as “Caesarea” in scripture and is not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi in the Galilean Peninsula that we will visit during our stay in Tiberius.

The city was built by Herod the Great between approximately 22 and 10 B.C. and was named for Caesar Augustus. Herod built it to serve the needs of the Roman Empire, because there was not a major harbor in Israel. Throughout Israel, we will see many massive constructions projects completed by Herod the Great, and this one was no exception. Because there was not a natural bay in this area, Herod used huge blocks of sandstone assembled with lead to build the harbor. At its peak, Caesarea had a population of over 100,000 people.



The synagogue at Caesarea was also where the Jewish revolt against the Romans began in 66 A.D. After Roman time, the site was further transformed by the Byzantines in the 5th century, the Turks in the 8th century, and the crusaders in the 10th to 11th centuries. When we visit Caesarea Maritima, we will be able to see archaeological remains from all these periods.

Among many other reasons, the ruins at Caesarea are important because they show us what a Roman city looked like at that time. It was built according to a “Hippodamian Plan” which consisted of horizontal and vertical roads creating square-shaped patterns that contained buildings (we now know this as a grid system). It shows that Romans planned out their cities in detail before starting to build. This style was invented by the architect Hippodamus of Miletus.

Herod the Great (and descendants)

Before we go any farther on Caesarea, this is a good opportunity for a quick overview of Herod the Great. Not only is he prominently mentioned in the Gospels (**Matthew 2**; **Luke 1:5**), but we will see his fingerprints throughout our tour of Israel, beginning with Caesarea Maritima.

Herod the Great (72 BC – 4 BC) was a Roman Jewish client king of the Herodian Kingdom of Judea. He is known for his massive building projects throughout Israel. Among these works are the rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (along with an expansion of the temple mount), Caesarea Maritima, Masada, and Herodium. Many details of his life are recorded in the works of the first century Roman–Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

Herod also appears in the Gospel of Matthew as the ruler of Judea who meets with the wise men (**Matthew 2:1-12**) and ultimately orders the massacre of all male children in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus (**Matthew 2:16-18**). Many historians question Matthew’s account of this slaughter, but it is consistent with other actions in Herod’s life, especially toward his own family. As Herod’s reign progressed, he became increasingly paranoid and unstable. This paranoia led him to executing one of his wives and three of his sons over fear they were plotting against him. It was later recorded that Caesar Augustus proclaimed, “It is better to be Herod’s pig than his son” (Herod was part Jewish). The big takeaway is that Herod was a “Great” builder but was not a great man. Upon Herod’s death, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons and his sister. Two of these sons are also prominently mentioned in the Gospels:

Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea (**Luke 3:1**). It was Antipas who had John the Baptist imprisoned and beheaded (**Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29, Luke 3:19-20**). He later became aware of the activities of Jesus and wanted to meet him (**Luke 9:7-9**), and apparently also wanted to kill Him (**Luke 13:31-35**). Jesus was sent to Antipas by Pontius Pilate during the trial upon learning that He was Galilean (**Luke 23:6-12**).

Philip the Tetrarch became tetrarch of territories north and east of the Jordan (**Luke 3:1**). Antipas had married Philip's wife, Herodias, and John the Baptist had spoken out against Antipas for this unlawful act. This led to John's imprisonment and execution (**Matthew 14:3-4; Mark 6:17-18**).

Two other descendants of Herod the Great are mentioned in the book of Acts:

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great, son of Aristobulus. Agrippa is mentioned several times in **Acts 12**. He put James the apostle to death and imprisoned Peter who was later rescued by an "angel of the Lord". At the end of chapter 12, Agrippa dies in Caesarea Maritima (more on this below). Agrippa was responsible for beginning construction of the outer, third-wall, around the city of Jerusalem.

Herod Agrippa II was the great grandson of Herod the Great, son of Herod Agrippa I. This Agrippa interrogates the apostle Paul while he was imprisoned in Caesarea Maritima (**Acts 25:15 – 26:32**). He is most famous in scripture for being the one who asks Paul "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" (**Acts 26:28**). Agrippa II was the last "Herod" to be called "King" and finished the outer wall around Jerusalem after his father's death. We will have an opportunity to see the remains of the palace of Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea Philippi.

Biblical Significance

Caesarea Maritima is prominently mentioned numerous times in the book of Acts:

- It is first mentioned when Philip the evangelist came to Caesarea as he went from city to city, spreading the gospel after the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (**Acts 8:40**).
- After Paul's conversion, Paul was brought to Caesarea and sent on a ship to Tarsus to avoid death by those who were opposed to his testimony (**Acts 9:30**).
- Caesarea was the home of Cornelius, and was mentioned in **Acts 10:1, 24** and **11:1** related to his conversion.
- Soon after Peter escaped from prison, Herod Agrippa I journeyed to Caesarea where he made his final speech (**Acts 12:19–23**). Acts records that he sat down and praised himself as one with the voice of a god (**Acts 12:22**). An angel of the Lord struck him down (with worms) because he did not give God the glory (**Acts 12:23**).
- During Paul's second missionary journey, it is recorded that after he landed at Caesarea, he greeted the church (**Acts 18:22**).
- During his third missionary journey, Paul visits Philip the evangelist, who had a house in Caesarea (**Acts 21:8**).
- The last mention of Caesarea in the New Testament comes in the long narrative of chapters 23 through 26, in which Paul appears before Felix, Festus, and Herod Agrippa II (**Acts 23:33–26:32**). Paul makes his case before Festus, finally invoking his right as a Roman citizen and appealing to Caesar (**Acts 25:11**).



Overview of the Site

Herod's Theater



One of the primary things we will see in Caesarea are the remains of a magnificent theater built by Herod with many marble statues standing just outside.

Caesarea was full of marble sculptures, as was typical of Roman cities of the time. All of them are headless today as they were later beheaded by Muslims (Turks) because Islam does not allow icons.

There is no marble in Israel, so all of this had to be imported from other parts of the Roman Empire to build the statues and columns in the city. They also imported other materials such as granite in

the construction of Caesarea.

In the middle of all the Roman statues, there is one that is very different from the rest. This one is of a little shepherd boy with a lamb over his shoulders and is from the Byzantine period (~5th Century AD). Throughout Caesarea, we will see a blending of artifacts from various periods of history.



The theater itself was built out of sandstone. The base of the theater today is original, but the seats have all been restored with concrete to allow for modern-day concerts.



This structure was called a theater rather than an amphitheater, which we might say today. In Roman times, an amphitheater was a full circle or oval.



Roman theaters were always built so the audience would have the best view, which is why this theater faces the Mediterranean. Theaters were typically for the arts and amphitheaters were for sports and games.

Fun Fact: An entrance/exit tunnel in a Roman theater was called a “vomitorium” (Where we get our word vomit) because it "spit out" the crowd.

Herod’s Palace

In addition to the theater, Herod also built a magnificent palace in Caesarea Maritima. Between the theater and the remains of Herod’s palace, we will be able to see several column fragments and a sarcophagus that have been found at Caesarea. These are also made from materials that were brought in from outside of Israel. They have different symbols on them depending on what time period they are from.



For example, the columns with a cross are from the Byzantine period. (see picture above)

Herod’s palace was built right on the Mediterranean. The remains today primarily consist of foundation stones and columns, but it gets much more interesting down at the sea. The views

here are spectacular all around, so make sure you have your camera ready!



At the palace site, we will see a replica of an inscription that was found at Caesarea mentioning Pontius Pilate (*The original is in the Israel Museum*).

The palace at Caesarea was likely used by Pontius Pilate while he was a Roman Governor in Israel (**Luke 3:1**). The inscription reads, "Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea, erected a building dedicated to the emperor Tiberius." (As an aside, Tiberius

was the son of Augustus, for which this city was named).

Also at the palace, there are the remains of a swimming pool that can be clearly seen out in the Mediterranean. This pool was surrounded by beautiful mosaics that are largely intact even though they are over 2,000 years old.



Again, in addition to the ruins at Caesarea, the views of the sea from this spot are incredible. You may

not think the ruins of the palace are as impressive as the theater, but it is important to remember Paul being imprisoned here for two years. It was specifically mentioned in **Acts 23:35** that Paul was being held in Herod's palace:

Acts 23:35 (ESV) - he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in **Herod's praetorium**.

This is the spot!

Hippodrome



The hippodrome was a massive oval amphitheater (full oval) from the late Roman period built for game and sport (e.g. horse and chariot races). This would have been built *after* the time of Herod the Great.

Like Herod's palace, the hippodrome was also built directly on the Mediterranean, and the side of the hippodrome closest to the water has been completely consumed by the sea.



Next to the hippodrome is a public toilet for the great crowds that would attend sporting events. You are welcome to try them out (not really)!

At the hippodrome is also a great opportunity to go down to the Mediterranean. My family dipped their hands in the water on our last visit.



Roman District

North of the Hippodrome is a section of Caesarea from the Roman period (until the 4th century AD). These are just a few highlights from this district.

To the right is an example of a “Roman Arch”. With a Roman Arch, the center “keystone” is larger on the top than the bottom, which allows all subsequent stones to form the arch. This was an invention of the Romans, and we will be able to see examples of this type of arch throughout Israel.



To the left are the remains of a magnificent bath house with marble columns from the late Roman period. This was likely not built by Herod the Great, though we will be able to see other bathhouses he built at Masada and Herodium.

To the right is a picture inside the remains of a Roman period house with beautiful mosaic floors.



Byzantine District



A little farther north is a district believed to be from the Byzantine period (5th century AD). There are many structures here which also have beautiful mosaics. Some of these mosaics were damaged by earthquakes.

Crusader Fortress

Even further north, beyond the Byzantine area, is a fortress and moat from the Crusader period (10th to 11th Century AD). The crusaders built several structures of fortification within Caesarea.



The Harbor



North of the Crusader fortress is the location of the harbor at Caesarea, built by Herod the Great.

Even though the only remaining ruins are under water, it is important to note that this is the spot where Paul is recorded in Acts as having embarked or disembarked when fleeing to Tarsus, or after his missionary journeys, or on his voyage to Rome as a prisoner (see page 4).

Crusader Gate

On the northernmost end of the site are the remains of a city gate from the Crusader period (10th to 11th century AD).



The route through this gate is shaped like an L, which was designed to slow down horses trying to make it through during an invasion. We will be able to see other examples of these “L Shaped” gates in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Aqueduct



Further up the coast (after a short bus ride) are the remains of Herod the Great's massive aqueduct for Caesarea. Aqueduct literally means "water carrier" in Latin.

It was important for cities to have a source of fresh water, and this aqueduct was built by Herod the Great to carry water approximately eight miles from a spring at the base of

Mt. Carmel. This fresh water would have been used for daily consumption, ritual washings by the Jews, and fountains for the Romans. This will be the first of many sites we will visit dedicated to the supply and protection of water sources.

Archaeologists have uncovered three pipes on top of this structure, made from ceramic, that were used to carry the water. They have also found inscriptions at the site from unit 10 of the Roman Army.

It is believed that this is the same unit that destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, and the assumption is that Herod had soldiers doing construction and maintenance work when they were not in battle.



Until Next Time...

That's it for Volume 1. Our hope is to put these out regularly up until our classes begin next year. Let us know if you have any feedback or questions.