

Capernaum



Description

After Jesus had been rejected in His hometown of Nazareth, He moved to Capernaum (Matthew 4:13; John 2:12), which in Hebrew was called “Kfar Nahum” or the village of Nahum. It was one of the most important towns on the Sea of Galilee. It was located on the crossroads of the region’s major highways and its population is estimated to have grown to between four and five thousand.

Many important events in Jesus’ life took place in Capernaum. Among these events were the calling of some of His disciples (Matthew 4:19-22); the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:30-31) and many others at Peter’s house (Mark 1:32-33); the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10); the healing of the blind and dumb (Matthew 9:27-33); the miracle of the coin in the fish’s mouth (Matthew 17:24-27); the healing of the man with palsy who was let down through the roof (Mark 2:1-12); the healing of the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day (Mark 3:1-5); the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:21-34); the healing of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:35-43); the lesson to His disciples concerning the children (Mark 9:33-37); the casting out of demons (Luke 4:31-39); Jesus’ condemnation of Capernaum, telling them that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than it will be for it (Luke 10:15); the healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54); and Peter’s great declaration that Jesus is the Christ (John 6:59-69).

It was here that Matthew tells us that “Jesus began to preach, and to say, ‘Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Clearly the residents of Capernaum had

opportunity upon opportunity to repent and turn to Christ, believing on Him.

Capernaum was a fishing village inhabited continuously from the 1st century B.C. to the 13th century A.D. As the first town encountered by travelers on the other side of the Jordan, it was equipped with a customs office and a small garrison overseen by a centurion.

Capernaum was a Jewish village in the time of Christ. It was apparently poor, since it was a Gentile centurion who built the community's synagogue (Luke 7:5). The houses were humble and built of black basalt stone.

Scripture

Bible References in Context

- ▶ Jesus spent a majority of His time here during His ministry
- ▶ Home of Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Levi (Matthew)
- ▶ Jesus healed the man with the unclean spirit (Luke 4:31–36 and Mark 1:21–28)
- ▶ Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:31–44)
- ▶ Jesus meets the Centurion, and heals his son (Luke 7:1–10)
- ▶ The location of the famous healing of the paralytic lowered through the roof to reach Jesus (Mark 2:1)

Matthew 4:12–22

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

Matthew 8:5–13

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But

the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Matthew 9:9-12

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Matthew 9:27-33

And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

Matthew 17:24-27

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

Mark 1:21-34

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all

amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

Mark 2:1-12

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Mark 3:1-5

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

Mark 5:21-43

And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague. While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

Mark 9:33-37

And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

Luke 4:31-39

And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

Luke 7:1-10

Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Luke 10:15

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

John 2:12

After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

John 4:46-54

So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard

that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

John 6:59-69

These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Points of Interest



Peter's House (now the Church of Capernaum)

Ruins of the 5th-century octagonal basilica over the House of Peter, before they were covered over by a Franciscan basilica in 1990.

As we tour the ancient ruins, we first come to what is believed to be Peter's house. Of course, a church has been erected overtop of the site; however, it is very likely that this was Peter's house. This is supported primarily by reverence and public use of the house in the mid 2nd century which would be difficult to explain otherwise. They also found many fish hooks and netting that certainly would indicate that it was the house of a fisherman.

The church of Capernaum was founded on the traditional site of Peter's home. Closer to the shore than the synagogue, the house was in a poor area where the basalt walls would have supported only a light roof (which perfectly suits the lowering of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12) and could have no windows. The floors of these houses and courtyards were made of black basalt cobbles, in which it would have been easy to lose a coin (Luke 15:8). By the mid-2nd century A.D., there is evidence that one room in this complex was singled out for public use: pottery and lamps replace utensils of normal family use, and there is ancient graffiti in the plastered walls, some of which mention Jesus as Lord and Christ.

The house was certainly a church by the time Egeria made her pilgrimage in 381 A.D., which she said included the original walls: "In Capernaum the house of the prince of the apostles has been made into a church, with its original walls still standing."

Archaeological excavations indicate it was indeed around this time that the room was given a more solid roof, which required the addition of a central arch, and two rooms were added on the two sides. This was probably the work of Count Joseph of Tiberias, a converted Jew, who obtained authority from Emperor Constantine to erect churches in Capernaum and other towns of Galilee.

In the 5th century, the site was razed to the ground and a grander church was built in its place, indicating increased Christian population and pilgrimage to Capernaum. The new church was octagonal in shape.

The central octagon enshrined the venerated room from Peter's house, which was given a floor mosaic featuring a peacock and a lotus-flower border. An apse with a baptistery was soon added on the east end. In 570, the Piacenza pilgrim reported that "the house of St. Peter is now a basilica."

Points of Interest



The Synagogue

The synagogue of Capernaum is located just inland from the shore with its façade facing Jerusalem. It has been difficult to date, with scholarly opinion ranging from the 2nd to 5th centuries. It stands in an elevated position, richly decorated and built of imported white limestone, which would have contrasted dramatically with the local black basalt of the rest of the village.

The “white synagogue” has a basilica-type plan, with a small terrace on the front (south) and a court on the east side. All three entrances are in the south wall; the other walls were lined with columns supporting the roof. A side door in the east wall leads to a courtyard used for community purposes.

Precise dating of the synagogue has proved problematic for several reasons. Aspects of its style suggest a date near 200 A.D., and its orientation to Jerusalem also suggests an early date, yet coins and pottery were found under the floors that date from the 5th century. The diverse architectural elements found in the ruins make it difficult to reconstruct coherently. And, it has 12 doors instead of the usual three or four.

One possibility is that it was built at an early date, and the 5th-century artifacts derive from later repair work. Another suggestion has been that up to four successive synagogues stood here in the 2nd-4th centuries, then dismantled in the 5th century by Christians who rebuilt a pilgrim shrine on the site. This would have occurred around the same time that a prominent new church was built nearby.

Points of Interest- Synagogue

Significant to this discussion is a layer of black basalt foundations beneath the white synagogue. The excavators believe this is the synagogue where Jesus taught and cast out demons.

At this point, a discussion on the functioning of the synagogue might be helpful. The Sabbath began when the first 3 stars appeared on Friday evening. The Sabbath trumpet was blown, calling people from their work. The Sabbath had begun and supper would be served. Work was forbidden, including normal household chores. All of the meals had to be made prior to the beginning of the Sabbath. After the evening meal, no more food was eaten until after the synagogue service the following morning. The synagogue had no priests and no sacrifices. It was run by an elected committee. The service began with prayers recited by one man standing in front of the ark containing the Torah.

Those gathered would join in the recitation of prayers. When praying, a Jewish male wrapped himself in a prayer shawl. During the morning weekday services, he would tie phylacteries to his forehead as well as his left arm. These were reminders of the obligation to keep the Law. After the prayers, one



scroll was taken from the ark and given to the first of seven readers. The texts were read in rotation so that the whole law could be read within a year. The text was read in Hebrew, which was not the spoken language of the people during Jesus' time. The Jews spoke Aramaic which was the universal language of their day. When the reader was finished he sat down and gave a sermon on the text



Typical houses of Capernaum

Blocks of houses have been found at Capernaum in Galilee. They were crudely built of rough granite and plastered over with flat roofs. The layout of the town can still be seen today in the excavated ruins. Among the items found in the ruins were roof rollers used in constructing the roof and also mills used in crushing wheat into flour.

Points of Interest



Roman Milestone

There is a milestone dating back to the time of the Roman emperor, Hadrian. There is also a marker indicating that the descendants of James and John, the sons of Zebedee continued to live at Capernaum in the 5th century, they also were still writing in Hebrew at that point.