

## THE CITIES JESUS DENOUNCED (Rick Yohn)

We all know Jesus as the loving, and caring Son of man and Son of God. We see Him as the good shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, or as one who was willing to stand up to the religious authorities for a woman caught in adultery, and a friend of sinners. But there is another side of our Lord that we don't often consider. Though Jesus is a compassionate and forgiving person, He also is the judge of all humanity. This attribute that was demonstrated near the end of His ministry on earth and aimed at three villages in the Galilee often referred to as "The Unholy Triangle".

Most of our Lord's ministry took place in a tiny section of Israel. In fact, on one of my visits to the Holy Land, we went out on the Sea of Galilee where we spent about half an hour that included a time of quiet meditation, singing, and listening as I was teaching. After I completed my short devotional, our guide told all of us to stand up and point our left hand towards Mt. Arbel. He then asked us to direct our right hand towards Bethsaida, after which he made the following startling statement: *"Everything you see between the palms of your hands is where Jesus spent most of His time teaching and performing miracles."* Just about everyone gasped at what they heard when they looked at the small piece of real estate lying between the palms of their hands, where you see the red marks on the map.



Figure 1 - Map of Galilee - Carl Rasmussen - Zondervan Atlas of the Bible

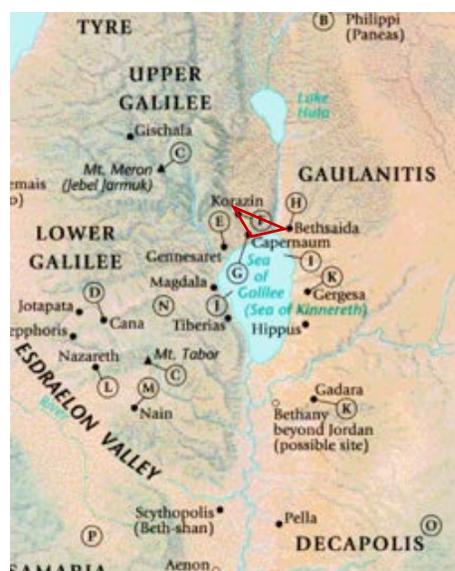


Figure 2 - MAP OF GALILEE

Jesus' major ministry was in the Galilee around the northern part of the Sea of Galilee. Within that small area lie three important towns: Capernaum, Korazim, and Bethsaida. These cities possessed more spiritual truth than any other place on earth. The people in those towns heard Jesus preach and watched Him perform miracles, but that did not increase their faith. In fact, many of them eventually turned against our Lord. To clarify what I just said, let's take an overview of these three villages.

**KORAZIM** – This town lay about two miles to the northeast of Capernaum. It is one of the most well-preserved cities from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Period, i.e., when Jesus was living on earth. It has several different spellings: Korazim, Korazin, and Chorazin. Today you will find a synagogue from the 2<sup>nd</sup>

Century, as well as the ruins of houses in the area. Scripture provides little information concerning this village, built out of black basalt rock. Within the synagogue, archaeologists found "**The Seat of Moses**," a specific seat for important teachers of the Law. In fact, Jesus referred to such a place when He spoke to the crowds. He said, *"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach"* (Matthew 22:2-3).

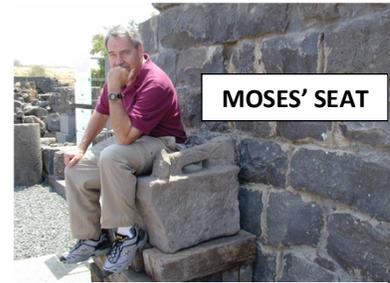


Figure 3 - Map of Rick Yohn sitting in Moses' Seat - Photo by Linda Yohn

**BETHSAIDA** - The second important town of these "Tri-Cities" is Bethsaida (Beth – house of/Saida – fishermen). This town was the home of three disciples: Peter, Andrew, and Philip and is mentioned seven times in the Gospels. Fishing was the principal industry of the town.

On one occasion, when Jesus and His disciples entered, a group of men brought a blind man to Him and asked Jesus to touch him. The Lord took him out of the village, spit on the eyes of the blind man, laid His hands on him and asked, *"Do you see anything?"* The man replied that he saw people, but they looked like trees, walking. So Jesus laid His hands on the man's eyes a second time, and the man saw everything. Another great miracle occurred when Jesus fed the multitudes in this location.



Figure 4 - Bethsaida (et Tel) - Photo by Rick Yohn

Today you may be taken to one of two locations when you go to Bethsaida. The first is on the eastern shore of the Jordan River. I've been to that location on several occasions. It is known as **et-Tel**. Here they have signs letting you know what each basalt structure used to be. The one problem with this location is that it is a mile and a half from the Sea of Galilee.

However, recently another location has been discovered and is right on the Sea of Galilee. It is known as el-Araj. This site seems to be more plausible. They continue to excavate the site, and hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, we will know the actual location of Bethsaida. As important as those two villages were, the third and most important one is Capernaum.

**CAPERNAUM** – The name comes from two Jewish words, which are “Kaphar” (Village) and Naum (the name of an individual). It could be named after the Prophet Nahum. However, he was the Prophet that prophesied against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Since the name was a popular name in that area, it most likely was named after another Nahum.

Capernaum lies along a major travel route, so it was the ideal location for Jesus to live there for



Figure 5 - 3rd Century Capernaum Synagogue - Photo by Rick Yohn

three years, choose His disciples, perform miracles, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. But another reason why Jesus chose this location for His ministry was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah predicted that the people living in Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the Sea and along the Jordan were in distress and gloom. The reason for this is that in 622 B.C. the Assyrians invaded the northern Kingdom of Israel and deported the majority of the Jewish people, taking them back to Mesopotamia. The Assyrian King

Sennacherib then repopulated the area around Galilee with Gentiles from Mesopotamia. Over time, their pagan religion mixed with the Jewish faith and ended up with a hybrid religion. As time passed, Jews and Gentiles married one another resulting in a mixed race known as the Samaritans.

The people living in this area no longer had the spiritual light that the region enjoyed years previously. But Isaiah promised that in the future, the people living in this specific area would see a great light. This prophecy is given in Isaiah 9:1-2 and fulfilled in Matthew 4:15-16. *“Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – **to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah**”* (Matthew 4:13-14).



Figure 7 - Peter's House before they placed a church over it

Our Lord most likely lived with Peter in his mother-in-law's house. One day as Jesus was preaching in that house, he suddenly heard a noise. He looked up at the ceiling and saw men ripping away the tiles to lower a lame man so Jesus could heal him. Once the man reached the Lord, Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven. Immediately the man stood up, rolled up his mat and walked out of the house (Luke 5).

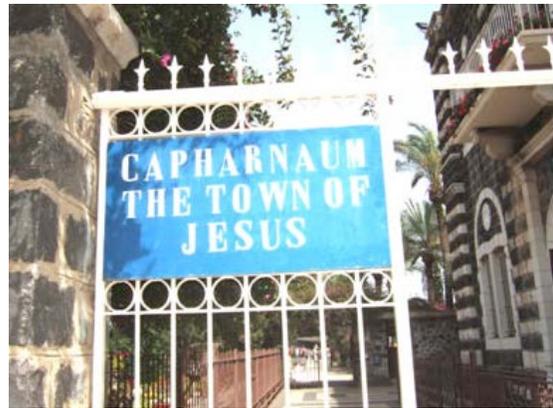


Figure 6 - Capernaum - Photo by Rick Yohn



Figure 8 - One of our Tour Groups - 2001

Furthermore, Capernaum was where a centurion (a Roman commander of one-hundred soldiers) asked Jesus to heal his servant. When the Lord was on His way to the house of the centurion, this commander sent word to the Lord that He did not have to trouble Himself and come to the home of the centurion. All He would have to do is *"just say the word, and my servant will be healed"* (Matthew 8:8). Jesus was amazed at this man's faith and said that no one in all of Israel possessed such a strong faith.

It was also in Capernaum where Jesus met a hated tax-collector and challenged him to **"Follow me"**, and the man named Levi did exactly that. He left everything for which he had worked and schemed to get ahead of others. But when he met Jesus, Levi realized that there was something special about this Rabbi that would be worth following. And it's a good thing for us that he did, otherwise, we would have three rather than four Gospels. You see, that tax-collector eventually changed his name and became known as Matthew, the writer of the first Gospel.

With so many miracles taking place in such a small village, you would think that the entire town would place their faith in Jesus. After all, He lived among the residents of the city. But neither those in Capernaum, Bethsaida, nor Korazim accepted Jesus for who He was. In spite of the miracles, they rejected Him. They were like the religious leaders who saw Jesus' miracles and heard His teaching, but rejected what they had experienced – *"But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John"* (Luke 7:30). Let that sink in for a moment. These leaders heard the truth, but rejected God's purpose for themselves. May this never be said about any one of us. God has a purpose in life for each of us. However, too often we think that we have a better idea and miss out on His purpose entirely. Compare that statement with King David's perspective about himself. He wrote, *"The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever – do not abandon the works of your hands"* (Psalm 138:8).

How did our Lord respond? Jesus denounced all three cities. *"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you"* (Matthew 11:20-24). It's true that our Lord is slow to anger and quick to forgive. But when these people rejected so much truth, there was no longer a remedy for their sin. They had rejected God's only provision for man's sin.