

# CAESAREA MARITIMA

**Introduction.** Herod the Great (73-4 B.C.) was an Idumean who began governing Galilee in 41 B.C., and then conquered Jerusalem in 37 B.C. Octavian (Augustus Caesar) confirmed his rule over Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and Herod remained in power until his death. He was the king who tried to destroy the baby Jesus (Mt. 2:1-18).

Herod was known for his great building projects, including fortresses like Masada, Herodium, and Machaerus. These projects demonstrated his great wealth, creativity, and paranoia; Herod was afraid of being attacked by enemies and losing his throne. He is well known for magnificently renovating the temple in Jerusalem (see Jn. 2:20), which is sometimes referred to as “Herod’s temple.” Herod also built cities which had colonnaded streets, squares, theaters, stadiums, hippodromes, baths, gymnasiums, pagan temples, water systems, and gardens. Among these building projects was Caesarea Maritima (“by the sea”), a city inhabited by both Jews and Gentiles. In ancient times, it was known as Caesarea Palestine. This designation distinguished it from Caesarea Philippi, located north of the Sea of Galilee.

Caesarea Maritima was constructed at a small Phoenician port called Strato’s Tower, which was in a state of decay. Herod built the city from the ground up (c. 22-10 B.C.), providing a suitable harbor between Joppa and Dor on the Mediterranean coast (in the Plain of Sharon). This strategic, central location facilitated great trade between the East and the West, and the project was funded by heavy taxation. The city was laid out on a grid system, with major intersecting roads running north-south and east-west (Josephus *Wars* 1.21.7).

After Herod died, his kingdom was divided among his sons, and for a short time Archelaus ruled over Judea (Mt. 2:22). Following his reign, Judea was governed by Roman prefects and procurators. Although they often visited Jerusalem during feast days, these governors normally resided in Caesarea. Its function as a capital and as a port explains the frequent mention of the city in Acts—the only book of the New Testament where this city appears. Note the following events that took place at Caesarea:

1. Philip the evangelist settled there (Acts 8:40; 21:8-9).
2. To spare his life, Paul was taken there from Jerusalem in order to sail for Tarsus (Acts 9:30).
3. The Roman centurion Cornelius was stationed there; Peter taught and baptized his household in that place (Acts 10:1, 24; 11:11).
4. Herod Agrippa I died there (Acts 12:19; see Josephus *Antiquities* 19.8.2).

5. Paul landed there after his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 18:22; 21:8-9, 16).
6. Paul was imprisoned there (Acts 23—26).
  - a. He was tried by Felix and spoke to Felix and Drusilla, a Jewess (ch. 24).
  - b. He stayed there two years (A.D. 58-60), perhaps in the palace (24:27).
  - c. Before Festus, he appealed to Caesar (25:11).
  - d. He spoke to Herod Agrippa II and Bernice (25:13).
  - e. Finally, Paul sailed to Rome, being escorted by a centurion named Julius (27:1).

Caesarea also has a place in later religious history. In the third century A.D., Origen operated a Christian school in the city. Moreover, Pamphilius established a library there, which came to hold 30,000 manuscripts. The church historian Eusebius was appointed bishop in the church at Caesarea (A.D. 315-330). A Jewish population continued to live in the city, and some work on the Talmud was done there. In A.D. 640, Muslims took over the city, gaining access into the city through the low level aqueduct. Later, Crusaders occupied Caesarea, reusing pre-existing building materials for their own purposes. Caesarea was destroyed by the Arabs in A.D. 1291. Today Caesarea is a national park; a wealthy neighborhood surrounds the ruins of the ancient city.



Ruins of Caesarea Maritima

***Herod's Harbor.*** Unlike other projects of Herod, Caesarea Maritima was a completely new construction. The city and harbor were built between 22 and 10 B.C. Herod spared no expense for the elaborate city, and only Jerusalem was greater than the magnificence of Caesarea. The city boasted 100,000 people, which was larger than Jerusalem, and it spread over 164 acres.

Herod wanted to build a harbor greater than those in Jaffa and Acre. This harbor, also called Sebastos (“Augustus”), was the first artificial harbor in the ancient world. Josephus compared the beauty of Sebastos to Athens’ port of Piraeus. He referred to the harbor as the most

impressive architectural feature of Herod's new city (*Antiquities* 15.9.6). Sebastos became the largest harbor in the Mediterranean and attracted trade from the Far East to Rome and Greece. The harbor remained a major international port for the next 600 years. Herod used the revenues from the harbor as well as heavy taxation to fund other of his elaborate building projects. He also used the harbor as a base for his navy.

There were many natural problems with the location of Herod's new artificial harbor. Some of the challenges were: no existing islands or bays, an unstable coastline, a current running along the shoreline that carried in a lot of sediment, frequent heavy storms, and a fault line along the ocean floor. Herod was determined to build the biggest and best harbor at Caesarea Maritima so he brought in Roman architects and engineers to accomplish a major engineering marvel, even by modern standards.

Even today, most harbors are built where a natural harbor or bay already exists. As there was no natural existing harbor or bay at Caesarea, one had to be constructed. Huge stone blocks were piled into the sea for the harbor's foundation. Massive wooden forms were set in place. Then the engineers were able to use a sophisticated cement that was able to harden under water known as hydraulic concrete. The main ingredient of hydraulic concrete was "pozzuolana" or volcanic ash, probably imported from Mount Vesuvius in Italy or the island of Santorini. Vitruvius, a first century architect, said that this concrete was capable of hardening under water (*On Architecture* 2.61); however, it had never been used on such a massive project as Herod's harbor. One block that was found made from this hydraulic concrete measured 39 feet by 49 feet by 5 feet.

Josephus recorded that the circular harbor was made by extending two breakwater walls from the shore. The longer one (originating in the south) ran west and then curved to the



Area of Ancient Harbor

north. The shorter one (originating in the north) ran straight west. Therefore, the entrance to the harbor was from the northwest. It had six colossal statues, three on either side (*Wars* 1.21.7). The harbor was 40 acres and able to accommodate 300 ships. The visible harbor line today is much smaller than the sizable harbor built by Herod.

There were other unique features related to the harbor. For instance, warehouses (vaults) were built in the bedrock to facilitate the unloading of ships and storage of commodities. Moreover, Caesarea had an elaborate sewer system that was flushed by the tides.

The harbor was damaged by an earthquake in A.D. 130. Apparently, the earthquake pushed the harbor floor up so the breakwaters were just under the water's surface. The result was 17 shipwrecks, which are mostly unexcavated, lying on the sea floor. They date until the fifth century when use of the harbor was discontinued.

Underwater explorations of the harbor at Caesarea Maritima began in the summer of 1960. The precise location of the harbor was established, and excavations showed that the description by Josephus was mostly accurate. Excavations show that two breakwaters extended 1,500 feet out into the water. The northern one was 150 feet wide and the southern one was 200 feet wide. The two breakwater walls meet at the northwest end of the harbor and form a 60 feet wide entrance. Blocks were found that weigh more than 50 tons; they are even larger than those described by Josephus. Artifacts such as lamps, coins, and statues that have been found in the sea are displayed in the nearby archaeological museum at Kibbutz Sdot Yam.

The harbor at Caesarea was used by the apostle Paul on several occasions. When the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill Paul, the brothers took him to Caesarea, and then he sailed for Tarsus (Acts 9:30). Paul also landed at this port on his return from the second and third missionary journeys; on both occasions he was on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 18:22; 21:7-8). Finally, after Paul spent two years imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 24:27), he set sail from there to Rome because he had appealed to Caesar (Acts 27:1-3).

**Aqueducts.** Herod the Great was well known for building impressive aqueducts in order to supply his cities with fresh water, and Caesarea was no exception. Even though this city was built next to the Mediterranean Sea, it had no source of fresh water within its limits or close by. The only way that the city could have the supply needed for the people was to bring the water from some other place.

The ruins of the city indicate that Caesarea had two aqueducts. One is referred to as the high level aqueduct, and the other is the low level aqueduct. Herod built the high level aqueduct in the first century B.C., and the low level aqueduct was constructed later in the Byzantine period.

*The high level aqueduct.* This water system stretched for about ten miles, originating northeast of Caesarea. Half of this aqueduct ran underground in a tunnel; the rest was above ground, and parts of its architecture reached a height of twenty feet. The water flowed to the west, and then south down the coast. Upon reaching the city, the water flowed through pipes until it filled fountains and collecting pools. The southern coastal portion of the aqueduct had two channels, one constructed next to the other. Archaeologists believe that the eastern side was built first, and the western channel was added later. This conclusion is based on the fact that the outer sides of the eastern channel are dressed, while the western channel is only dressed on the outer western side. Several Latin inscriptions have been found along the aqueduct, dating from the time of Hadrian. These suggest that, in the second century A.D., the second and tenth Roman legions repaired the aqueduct and added the western channel.



High Level Aqueduct Along the Coast



High Level Aqueduct from the East

*The low level aqueduct.* Dated to the fourth century A.D., the low level aqueduct, which was covered and about six feet high, brought fresh water from springs about three miles north of Caesarea. The springs were at a lower level than the city, so two dams had to be built in order to raise the water level. This aqueduct added significantly to the amount of water supplied to the city.

**Herod's Palace.** Herod built an impressive palace for himself at Caesarea. Through such grand construction projects, the client king over Judea expressed his loyalty to Rome (in this case, Caesarea was named after Caesar) while also displaying his own political power. The palace served as a place for him to stay while visiting the region. Surrounded by porticoes, Herod's palace jutted out into the sea; but it had a freshwater pool at its very center. Only remnants of the palace foundation remain, but the outline of the pool is still visible. The ruins of the structure are now known as the Promontory Palace.



Columns of Herod's Palace



Outline of Palace Pool and Mosaic Floor

Herod constructed the palace so that visitors traveling by ship could disembark there. The palace was used as a place to hear people's grievances, deal with civic and legal issues, and to pass down rulings. It was the place where Pontius Pilate lived most of the time during his tenure as prefect (see *Antiquities* 18.3.1). Later procurators, such as Felix and Festus (who are named in the book of Acts), also resided there. Archaeologists have found columns from the palace with the names of some governors inscribed on them. Further, the palace was the place where Paul remained imprisoned for two years (Acts 23:33-35). This was likely the spot for Paul's defense before Felix and the location for some of his other speeches in Caesarea (Acts 24—26). It is possible that the "auditorium" (*akroaterion*) was located there (Acts 25:6, 23).

**Hippodrome.** To celebrate the founding of Caesarea (c. 10 B.C.), Herod also built a hippodrome next to the harbor. A “hippodrome” is a Greek stadium used for horse and chariot racing. The term is derived from the Greek words *hippos* (“horse”) and *dromos* (“race”). The hippodrome in Caesarea is estimated to have seated nearly 10,000 people. Starting gates have been discovered at its northern end. Moreover, an inscription has been found which reads “Morismus [the] charioteer.” In the second century A.D., the south side of the hippodrome was reconstructed as an amphitheater to be used for gladiatorial contests. (In the second century A.D., Hadrian built a much larger hippodrome in the southeastern part of the city.)



Herod's Hippodrome



Turning Area on Southern End



Special Seating for Dignitaries

Herod established games in honor of Augustus Caesar, which were held every five years. The games included both horse and chariot races as well as athletic and gladiatorial contests (*Antiquities* 16.5.1).

One of the most notable events that occurred at the hippodrome was recorded by Josephus. Because of the Jews' support, Julius Caesar had granted them many privileges. The greatest of these was that they were not obligated to worship any of the Greco-Roman gods; instead, they were free to worship the Lord alone. This allowance changed when Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea (AD 26-36), was put into office. Pilate set up the military standards of the emperor Tiberius in Jerusalem, which greatly offended the Jews. In order to remove the standards, the Jews conducted a protest at Pilate's residence for five days. In response, the prefect addressed them all in the hippodrome, threatening to kill them if they did not accept the display of Caesar's standards. Josephus wrote that "Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the great stadium" (*Wars* 2.9.3). Ultimately, Pilate did not carry out his threat, but rather he removed the standards from Jerusalem.

The hippodrome (sometimes called "the amphitheater") is believed to have been the place where a great number of Jewish prisoners were murdered in A.D. 70 (*Wars* 7.3.1). These killings came at the end of the first Jewish revolt, which had begun four years earlier (A.D. 66). At that time, the synagogue in Caesarea had been desecrated and thousands of Jews had been massacred (*Wars* 2.14.4-9; 2.18.1). Caesarea was also the site where many Jewish captives were executed during the second Jewish revolt (A.D. 132-135).

**Roman Theater.** On the southern end of Caesarea (below the harbor, hippodrome, and palace), Herod built a Roman theater that seated about 4,000 people. This structure opened to the sea so that the spectators faced the west. The rows of seating were designed so that members of the audience could optimally hear the sound waves projecting from the stage. Behind the stage, an ornate wall served as an acoustical barrier blocking the crashing sound of large waves from the Mediterranean Sea. Niches in the front of the stage alternated between semi-circles and rectangles; these openings would have held decorative statues. Entertainment also included mimes; the ones who performed at the theater in Caesarea became famous in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. The theater was excavated from 1959 to 1964.

One interesting event that occurred in the theater involved Herod Agrippa I, who was the grandson of Herod the Great. After Agrippa had ruled over Judea for three years, he visited the city of Caesarea, where he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar. A great crowd of influential people had gathered for the festival. On the second day of the shows, Agrippa entered the theater early in the morning wearing a garment completely made of silver. The sun's rays reflected off the silver material in such a way that they caused the people who looked intently



at him to be frightened. The crowd began to shout that Agrippa was not a man, but a god. They also cried out for him to be merciful to them. However, he neither rebuked them, nor rejected their impious flattery. A deep pain in his stomach overcame him, and after five days he died. This story, recorded by Josephus (*Antiquities* 19.8.2), is also briefly told by Luke in Acts 12:21-23. The latter text says that angel of the Lord struck Agrippa for not giving glory to God; as a result, “he was eaten by worms and died.” Agrippa died at the age of 54.



The Theater



Theater Seating and Exits



Reconstructed Niches for Decorative Statues

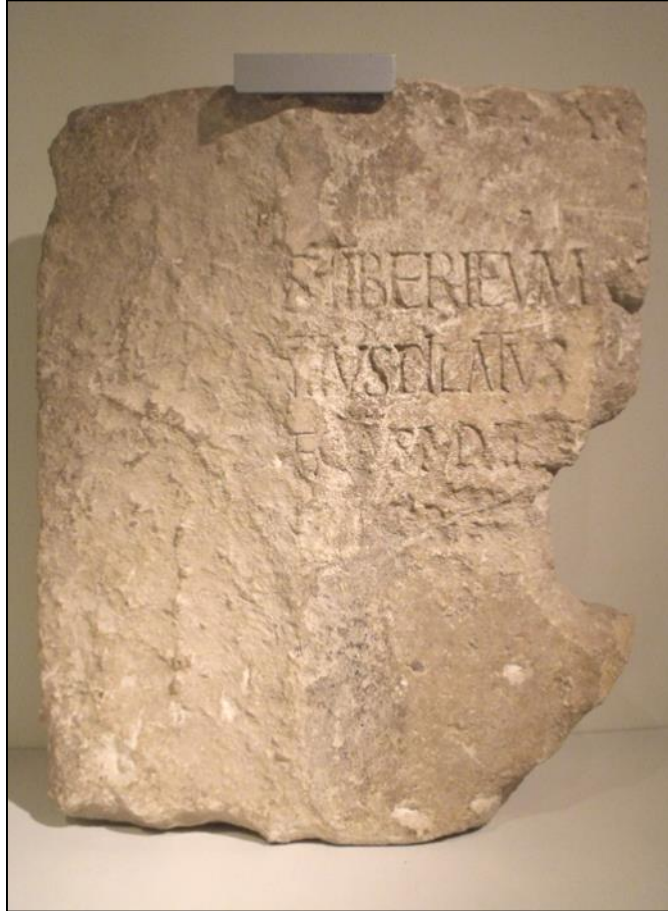
**Pilate Inscription.** Pilate is well known for his role in the trials of Jesus leading to the crucifixion (Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18—19; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28). Outside the New Testament, he is mentioned by Josephus (*Wars* 2.9.2-4), Philo (*Embassy of Gaius* 38.299-305), and Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44). Pilate was the Roman prefect (governor) over Judea from A.D. 26 to 36, during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14-37). Lucius Aelius Sejanus, prefect of the troops, assigned Pilate to his position. Pilate felt secure under Sejanus’s protection because Sejanus ruled as de facto emperor whenever Tiberius was not in Rome. Pilate even attempted to establish Roman dominance throughout Jerusalem by posting images of the emperor around the city (*Antiquities* 18.3.1). Tiberius later arrested and executed Sejanus for wanting more power. Pilate himself was recalled for his abuse and desire for domination (see Lk. 13:1). During a religious restoration among Samaritans on Mount Gerizim, Pilate’s military forces attacked them, suspecting them of a rebellion. Tiberius learned about this attack from Vitellius, legate of Syria. Pilate was then called back home to Rome to pay for what happened (*Antiquities* 18.4.1-2). After that, Pilate was not heard from again. Later tradition says that he committed suicide, but this is uncertain.

In 1961, during the excavation of the theater in Caesarea, a stone with a Latin inscription was found which names Pontius Pilate. This should not be surprising since this city served as his main residence. Originally, the dedication stone was chiseled during Pilate’s governorship as a part of a building called the “Tiberium,” likely a temple in Caesarea. However, it had been reused as one of the stairways of the theater during its reconstruction. The dedication marker, made of limestone, measures two feet by three feet. At some point, it was damaged, and, as a result, only three of the four lines are legible. The text reads in Latin:

[ ]S TIBERIEVM  
 [PON]TIVS PILATVS  
 [PRAEF]ECTVS IVDA[EAE]  
 [ ]E[ ]

A plausible reconstruction of the inscription is this: “Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea, [erected a building to] Tiberius.”

This inscription is important because it corroborates the biblical testimony regarding Pontius Pilate. It should remove any doubt from the minds of skeptics that there was a man named Pontius Pilate who served as prefect over Judea in the time of Christ. A replica of this inscription can be found at Caesarea today, whereas the original is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. (For the more recent discovery of the Pilate ring, see the *Herodium* section.)



Pilate Inscription (Israel Museum)

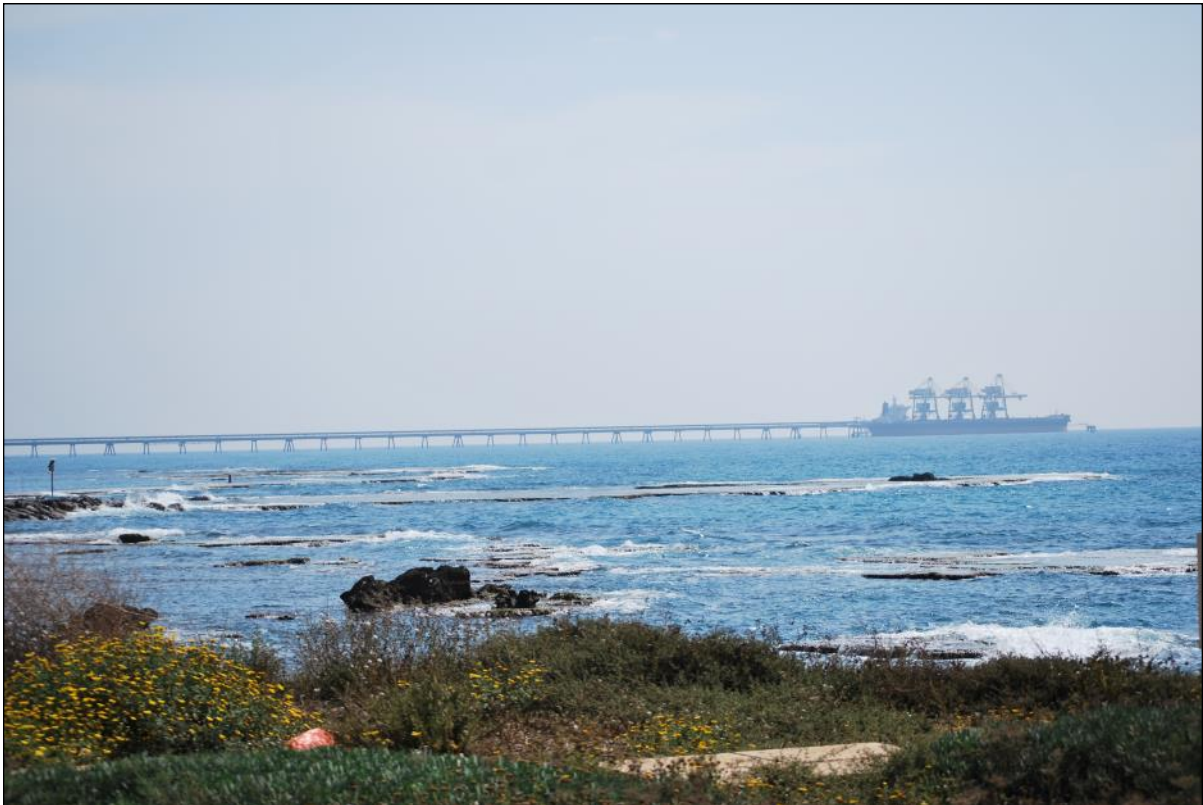
**Mosaics.** Some unique mosaics have been discovered in Caesarea. In a large public building near the sea, archaeologists have found two floor mosaics featuring a portion of Romans 13:3. The full verse says, “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.” One mosaic quotation is longer than the other (see McRay, 373-74). It has been suggested that the verse was used to encourage Christian businessmen to pay their taxes.

Another mosaic from Caesarea, dating from the sixth century A.D., is displayed at the Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv. It is decorated with geometrical shapes as well as trees and animals. In the center, there is a woman named Kalokeria holding a fruit basket, which symbolizes the prosperity of the city.

**Moat.** About the twelfth century A.D., a Crusader fort was built in Caesarea, and around that fort was a moat. In that same area—above the harbor—Herod had built a temple to Caesar, which featured colossal statues of Augustus and Roma (Josephus *Wars* 1.21.7).



Crusader Mote



Mediterranean Sea at Caesarea