



The Half Shekel Journals of 2022 by Pastor Ed Rice
#17 Sun 6 Nov Capernaum



We got off the boat and onto the bus. The flavor of worship still hung in the air. It was very special to be on the “Jesus boat” of Holy Land Sailing, and to worship for an hour, while adrift on the Sea of Galilee. Like unbelievably special, but the flavor of worship, for this group, was not dependent on location, it was dependent on the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, in hearts and minds.



This Sunday was to be a day of ongoing worship,



and our next location was to be where Jesus fed the 5000. Eiad maneuvered the tour bus into the overlaiden parking lot at Tabgha. There are more tour buses per square mile in Israel then there are in any other country on earth. This morning half of them were pulled up to the very Roman Catholic Church of the Loaves and Fish. When Pastor Charlie and Joe were unable to secure a secluded site away from the Romanism, Eiad maneuvered the tour bus right back out of the parking lot and pointed it toward Capernaum. Thank you Pastor Charlie and Joe, that was wisely done.

Capernaum was the town of Jesus. *“And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast,*

in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim”

(Matt.4:13) ... *“And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. 22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes”* (Mar.1:21–22).

Stepping into Capernaum, was like stepping back in time. Archaeologists and their students, had been very busy in the streets of the city. Rows and rows of home and building foundations were uncovered, and the size, structure, and density of the town was easily visualized. Just the same, well laden walkways were paved and garnished so that hordes of tourists could be comfortably exposed to the



ample first century findings.

We were first led into the synagogue of Capernaum, and our guide, Joe, taught us how to make the distinction between the first century synagogue, where Jesus taught, and the fourth century reconstructions. The white limestone ashlar stones used in the reconstruction, contrasted sharply with the black basalt rock of the first century synagogue.

Any good teacher throws in a pop quiz here and again, so as our group stood in the center

of the largest and grandest 1st century synagogue of Israel, found in the center of Capernaum, the town of Jesus, Joe ask us to point out the front of the synagogue, and say

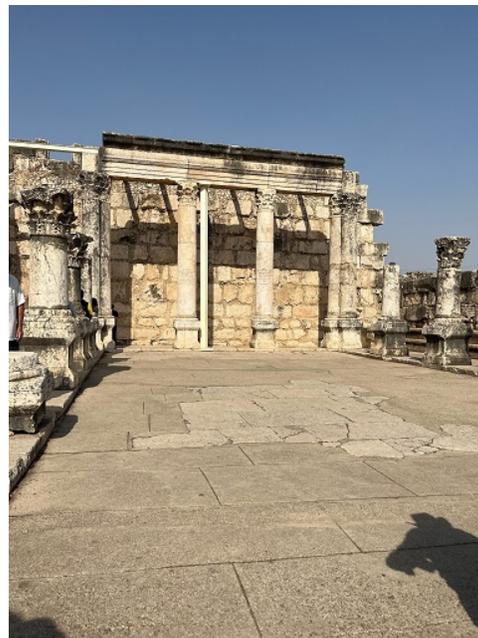
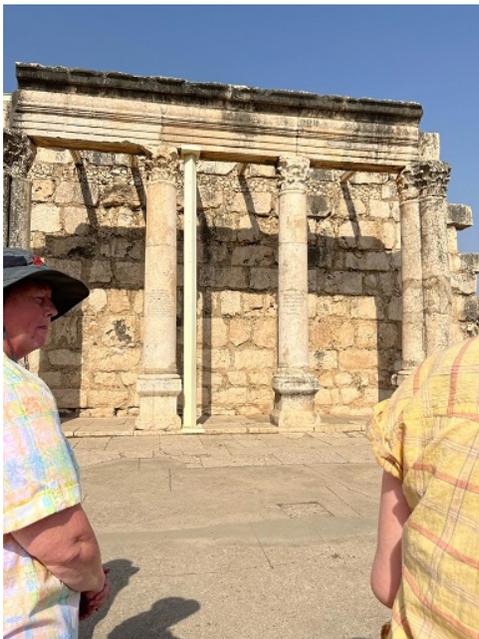
why we thought so. I was pretty sure he would have assigned that as a short answer essay, if he had the authority, but instead, he entertained several outspoken opinions from the group, and then form them into a well worded spoken, essay himself.

Of course, we would expect a synagogue to face the holy Temple in the city of Jerusalem, and this one does. That simply means that the placement of the columns, the benches, and the “bima”, would point toward Jerusalem, and in the Galilean type synagogue, the Torah shrine would be constructed in the wall closest to Jerusalem. The Basilica construction here put an emphasis on a Jerusalem

orientation by incorporating an apse (a domed, vaulted recess) on the wall, facing Jerusalem, and an entrance, atrium, and narthex, or waiting room, on the opposite side. Thus the elements in the front of the synagogue are the *aron ha-kodesh*, or the holy ark or niche containing the Torah scrolls, the “*amund*” or prayer desk facing the ark, and the “*bima*” or reading desk, from where the Torah scroll is read.

Jesus was here in this very synagogue when he gave the controversial teaching of John 6.

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. 58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this



bread shall live for ever. 59 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum (John.6:56–59).



There are only three places in the Bible, where one can find a verse reference



of 666. The third and most prominent one



says, *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him”* (John 6:66). (all the 666 references are curious; it is left as an exercise of the Bible student to find the other two.)

Joe was equally excited to escort us off into another room of the synagogue and give us another pop quiz. “What does this look like to you all?” Joe pointed down into a black basalt rock structure unearthed in the corner of a room in the synagogue of Capernaum. The answers rang out from the group “It is a Jewish mikvah, a Jewish ritual bath used for purification before prayer and scripture reading.” “And from what century does it come?” “Since it is basalt, it comes from the first century”

Joe quite beamed with satisfaction and led us off towards Saint Peter's house.

And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. 15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them. 16 When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with [his] word, and healed all that were sick: 17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matt.8:14–17).

There was not a dated placard that said, “Saint Peter slept here!” But it was pretty close to that. Over 26 years ago in one of the earliest BAR (Biblical Archaeology Review) documented discoveries, Italian excavators, working in



Capernaum, uncovered a mundane simple dwelling deduced to be a first century home. Remarkably it was found under the ruins of a octagonal Byzantine Martrium Church (a church or shrine built over the tomb or home of a Christian martyr).

As excavations continued, it was discovered that the simple home with a few small rooms clustered around an open courtyard, changed functionally into a communal meeting area with plastered floors, plastered walls, and plastered ceilings. Pottery findings also changed from household cooking pots and bowls to larger storage pots and oil lamps. The simple residence had transformed into a gathering place for the earliest Christian gatherings. The rooms old stone walls were buttressed by a new two-story arch that supported a new stone roof. Also graffiti on the walls in multiple languages, said “Lord Jesus help” and “Christ have mercy”. This simple first century home was transformed into a church that survived for more than 300 years before it was replaced in the fifth century by a well built octagonal martrium church, whose inner sanctum was built directly over the very place called Peter's house,



which transformed into the central hall of the earlier church.

Most of us are quite satisfied that that substantiated the placard “Peter slept here”, and that is witnessed by Matt.8:14–17 to authenticate that Jesus slept here. All in all it comes to the explanation of blind guide Peter of Oxford... “It’s not the place,... It’s the person.”

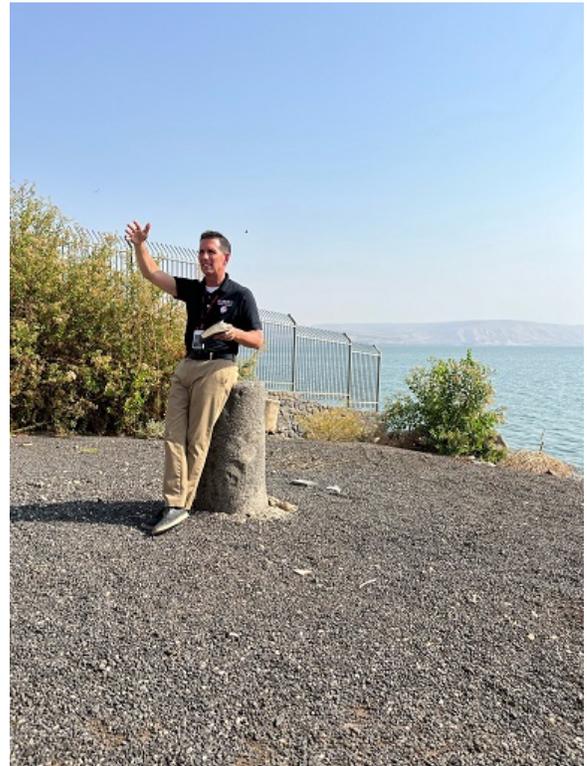
Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. 18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. 19 And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. 20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. 21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught (Mrk.1:16-21).



Notice in verse 18, that these fishermen “forsook their nets.” When a person receives Christ, and turns to follow him, we find, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2Cor.5:17). Notice also, in verse 21, that their first stop, upon following him on his teaching tour where they were to be “fishers of men” was right here in their hometown of Capernaum.



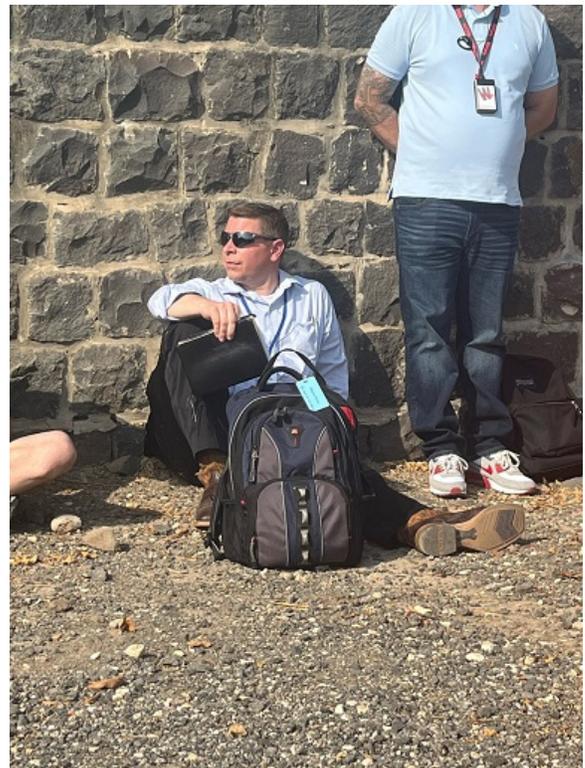
In training to be “fishers of men” the next teachable moment came from a rebel rouser from their home town.



And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24 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. 25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. 26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. 27 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 (Mrk.1:23-27).

This little “sea” we are on is only 33 miles in circumference, and yet here is where a majority of the ministry of our Lord unfolded. We just came from the house of Simon and Andrew where he stayed the night, the next morning there was a predawn prayer meeting and then they were off, *“And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee.”*

Back in Capernaum look at Mark chapter 2:





And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 2 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.

He preached the word unto them! We are all familiar with those who uncovered the roof to reach him; look at verse 13 where he taught them by the sea side; look at verse 14 where there is a “follow me” call to Levi; all this happened in Capernaum, where we stand today.

In John 6:6 it says, *“And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.”* Jesus proves his disciples, still does. Jesus knew what he would do, ... still does. From verse 17, we talked earlier about

how the storms of life prove us, and train us. In verse 59 he was back in Capernaum, he taught “I am the bread of life” (6:48) and *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him”* (John.6:66).



Follow him. You will not die. You will learn and grow, and become a fisher of men ... and he will never leave thee nor forsake

thee.

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee Pastor Charlie drove home these points better than my meager notes could capture; he had supernatural assistance. When sitting beside replica fishing boats, right where Peter James and John heard the words of the Messiah, the waves lapping on the shore asked that I pay more strict attention to his eternal Word that lie open in my lap. Our



second worship service of the day dismissed with some testimonies, and song. We had to move along to get to the site of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. There we would have a third worship service. You cannot worship too much on the Lord's Day, especially when you are right here on the Sea of Galilee.



An Israel touring blog I had read gave “10 things to see at Capernaum's Ancient Synagogue”:

- The well-preserved ruins of the synagogue, which date back to the 4th or 5th century AD
- The large stone Torah ark that housed the Torah scrolls
- The bimah, a raised platform where the Torah was read
- The House of St. Peter, believed to be the home of Peter the Apostle
- The mikveh, a Jewish ritual bath used for purification
- The synagogue's mosaic floor adorned with various Jewish symbols
- Inscriptions found in the synagogue, including one in Aramaic
- Stairs that lead down to a room below the synagogue, believed to have been used for storage
- The communal seating area divided into different sections for men and women
- The stunning lakefront views of the Sea of Galilee

Thank you Joe for deserving a huge check-mark beside each item. Thank you Pastor Charlie for opening the

pages of God's Holy Word, on the Sea of Galilee. Thank you Father for what you are still doing because we got to set on the very shores where you taught your disciples 1,993 years ago. God is good.