



As we continue our visual study of the significant historical and archeological sites in Israel, we travel to

Caesarea

Caesarea is situated on the Mediterranean Coast along the northern part of the plain of Sharon. It is one of the most important of the archeological sites in Israel and a site that was home to many historical events from the 6th century BCE until the late 19th century CE.

The city was established by the Phoenicians in the 6th century BCE and flourished during the Hellenistic period circa 333 BCE and was known as Straton's Tower. In 103 BCE, it was conquered by Alexander Jannaeus and annexed to the Hasmonean Kingdom. In 30 BCE, the city was awarded to Herod the Great who built a large port city on the site and called it Caesarea in honor of Octavian Augustus Caesar.

It was a planned city with roads, a temple, a theater, an amphitheatre, markets and residential quarters. It took 12 years to build and was completed about 10 BCE.

It expanded rapidly into a great commercial center and, in 6 BCE, it became the headquarters of the Roman government in Palestine.



Since Caesarea was located on the coast and had no rivers or springs, drinking water for the city was brought via a high-level aqueduct which carried water into the city from Shuni springs, some 7.5 kilometers north and east of Caesarea.



In this slide, we are looking north from the top of the aqueduct back toward the Shuni springs



Doing an about face from the top of the high level aqueduct, we look south towards the city of Caesarea. As is apparent in this slide, the sea has claimed much of the aqueduct.



As this slide shows, a section of the low-lying area of the aqueduct was carried on arches.



The aqueduct reached Caesarea at the height of some eight meters above sea level with a gradient of 20 centimeters for each kilometer.

The population of Caesarea included Jews and gentiles and a conflict between them was one of the most important causes for the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt in 66 BCE. Caesarea served as a base for the Roman legions who dealt with the quelling of the revolt and it was here that the commanding general Vespasian was declared Caesar.

Caesarea was also a well-known city from New Testament times. It was here that Peter proclaimed the Gospel to Cornelius and it was here that Philip, the evangelist, lived and ministered along with his daughters. It is here the Apostle Paul was imprisoned and from here, he sailed to Rome. Shortly after his departure, the great revolt began. After the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, Caesarea became the most important city in the country. It was the center for quelling the Bar Kochva revolt in 135 and probably here Rabbi Akiva and other Jewish leaders met with their death.

During the third and fourth centuries, CE, Caesarea boasted among its famous citizens Rabbi Abbahu and the leaders of the Christian community, Auregines and Eusebius. During the Byzantine period, the city flourished and extended over some 400 acres. By the Sixth Century, it was the largest fortified city in the country.

In 640 CE, it was conquered by the Arabs and was not refortified until the 9th century. In 1101, it was conquered by the Crusaders and in 1251, King Louis IX fortified the city anew. However, it lasted only a few years until it was conquered by the Arab Baybars in 1265 and was destroyed and deserted.

Caesarea remained desolate until the 19th century when it was again settled by the Ottoman Turks and much of the Crusader ruins were renovated and became an administrative center.



This is the entryway into the fortified Crusader city. The archways and vaulted ceilings of the entry way are excellent examples of the Crusader architecture.



Exiting the Crusader entrance into the fortified city, one steps out on the Crusader street running west towards the Mediterranean. The street was paved with stones from the Roman period.



Exiting the entryway, we are looking now to the north along the street adjacent to the fortified wall of the Crusader city.



This is a view of the back of the entry way into the fortified city. The back of the fortified wall adjacent to the moat can be seen in the right center.

During the early Arab period, circa 9th century CE, a fortified city was constructed surrounding the harbor. The Arab city walls were later incorporated into the fortifications for Louis IX, which consisted of a high perimeter wall and a nine-meter deep dry moat. The wall was 900 meters long and 13 meters high and included gates in the north, east and south along with several secret gateways.



From the east side of the Crusader entryway, we are looking at the dry moat that surrounded the Crusader city of Louis IX.



In Herod's time, an elevated platform was built here to serve as a base for a lavish temple dedicated to Roma and Augustus. An octagonal Byzantine church was later erected at the site followed by a mosque in the Arab period and later still by a Crusader cathedral.



Extending south from the area of the Herodian temple is a continuation of the commercial area of the city from Roman Byzantine all of the way up through and including the Crusader and late Arab period. In the center of the picture are the foundations of the pier. The ruins of the pier extended into the harbor.



This is a view of the commercial area in the previous slide – looking from west to east.

Caesarea Harbor



The large artificial harbor, Sebastos, was built here during the time of Herod. It consisted of an outer quay with a 400-meter long breakwater, an inner quay, and an anchorage area along which stood columns and mooring stones.

The breakwater sank and collapsed during the Roman period but the harbor was repaired in the time of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius (491-518 CE).



Following the Arab conquest, the harbor fell into disuse and filled up with silt but was restored again in the 9th century. During the Crusader period, a new breakwater was built with columns taken from the ruins of Byzantine Caesarea. The inner basin, which had been clogged with silt, became a residential quarter. The buildings and restaurant seen here were built after the creation of the State of Israel.



This is a view of the commercial and administrative area built on the southern section of the Roman-Byzantine insula. The commercial area was erected on vaults, which served as warehouses.



This is another view of the commercial and administrative area. One of the vaulted chambers was used as a sanctuary of the God Mithras.



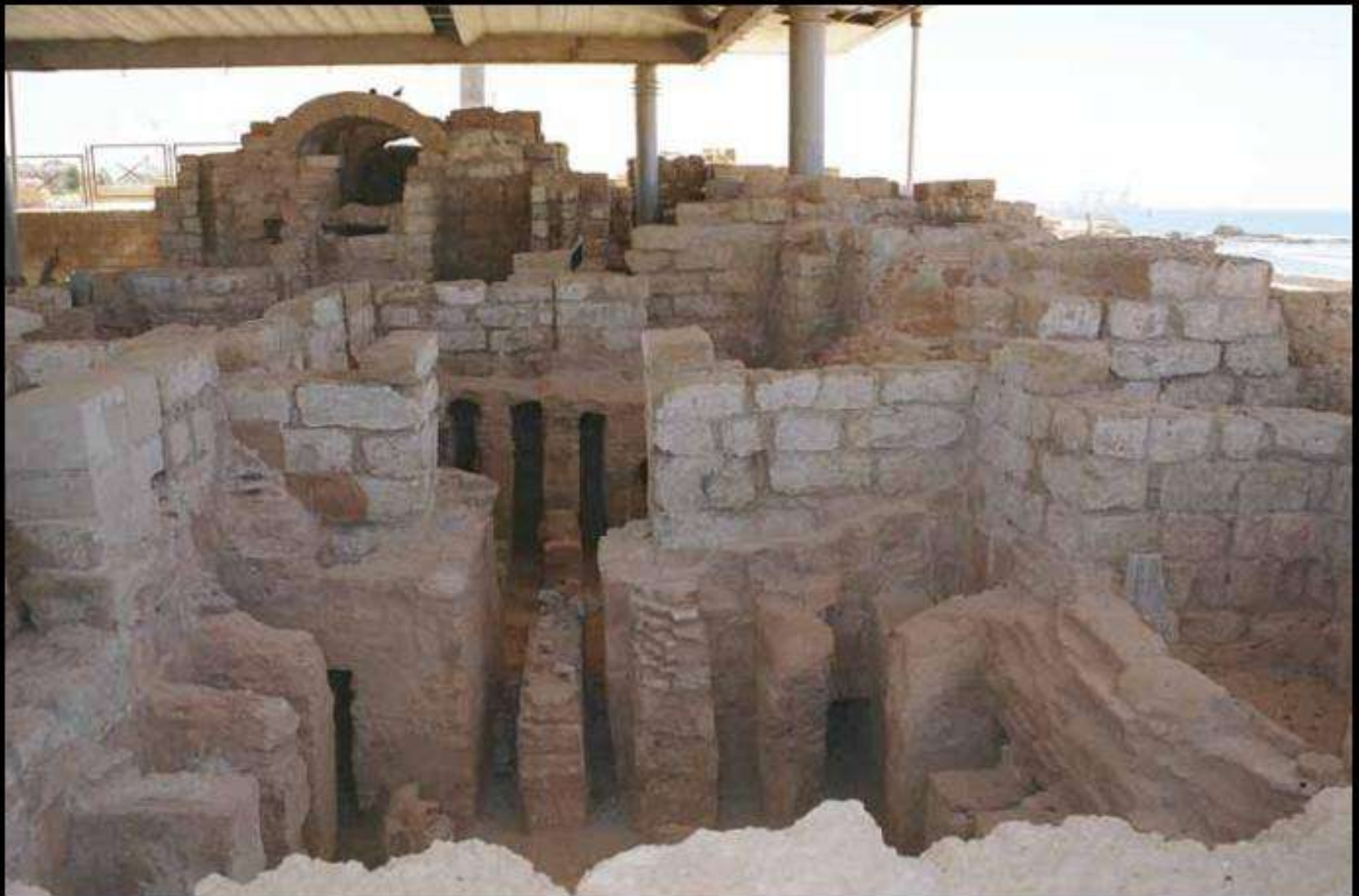
This is a view of the commercial and administrative area looking north along the edge of the Herodian amphitheatre.



After Herod's amphitheatre ceased to function, a luxurious bathhouse was built here.



The bathhouse occupies more than half of the insula and considering its age and proximity to the sea, it is in an excellent state of preservation with tile and mosaic floors.



Here we can see a portion of the caldarium where heat was channeled under the floor suspended by small columns.



Adjacent to the bathhouse complex and the administrative area was the huge U-shaped entertainment structure built by Herod the Great. It was probably used for horse racing, sport events and entertainment during the Roman period.



The amphitheatre was more than 250 meters long and 50 meters wide and originally had 12 rows of seats with place for some 10,000 spectators.

At the southern end of the amphitheatre and just west of the theater, jutting out into the sea are the remains of what was an impressive palace with a pool in its western section.



The palace dates back to the Roman and Byzantine periods and archeologists believe that the pool once served as the city's fish market.



The Herodian theater at Caesarea is the most ancient of all theaters found in Israel. Its location was carefully chosen providing an excellent view of the sea. It had two seating areas and could accommodate 4,000 spectators. This is the view of the back of the theater with the entrance into the theater.

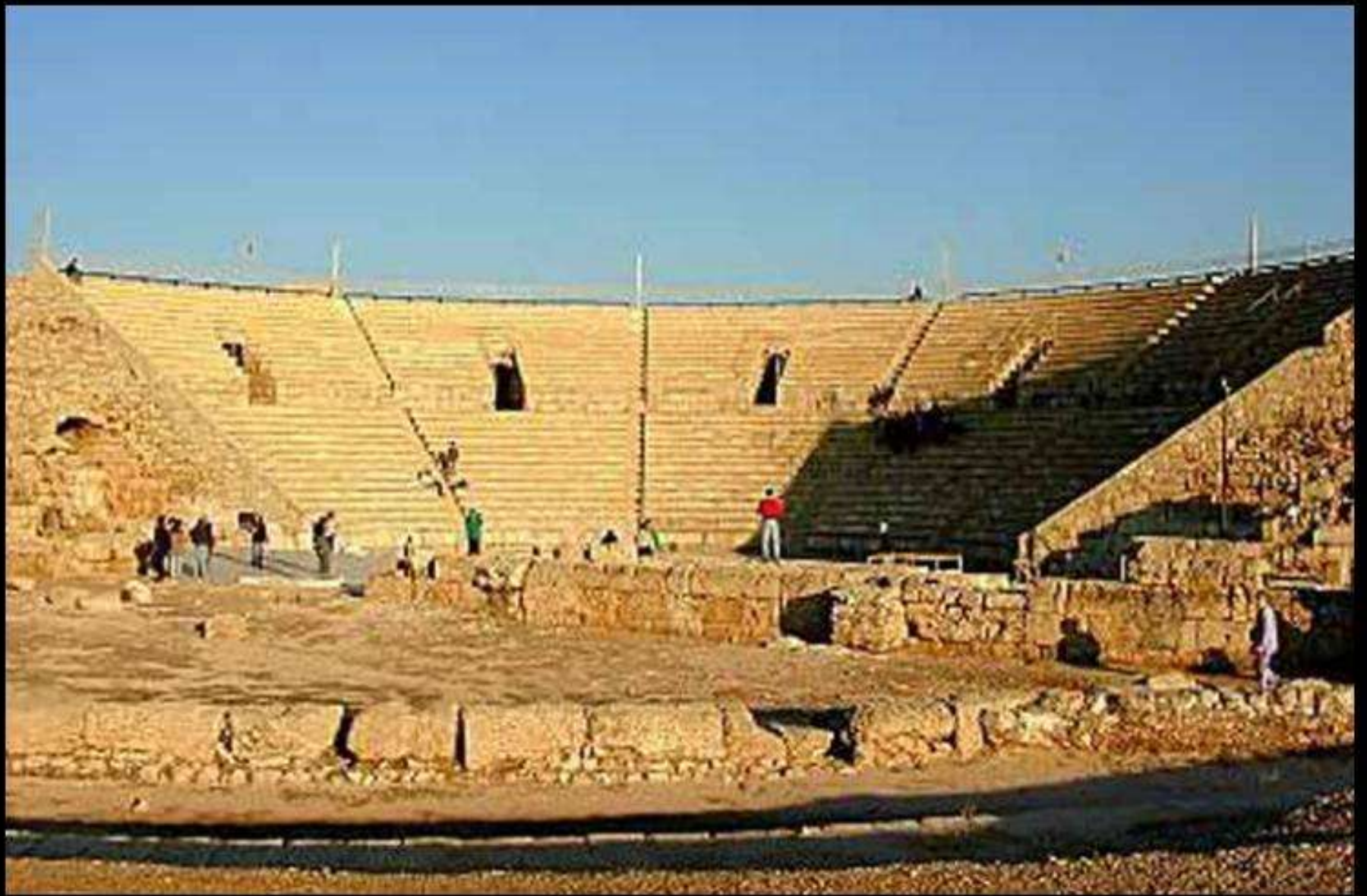


This slide shows the inside of the theater

The orchestra area was decorated with marble-like plaster. Behind the stage stood a lavishly decorated three-story high wall, which served as the stage background.

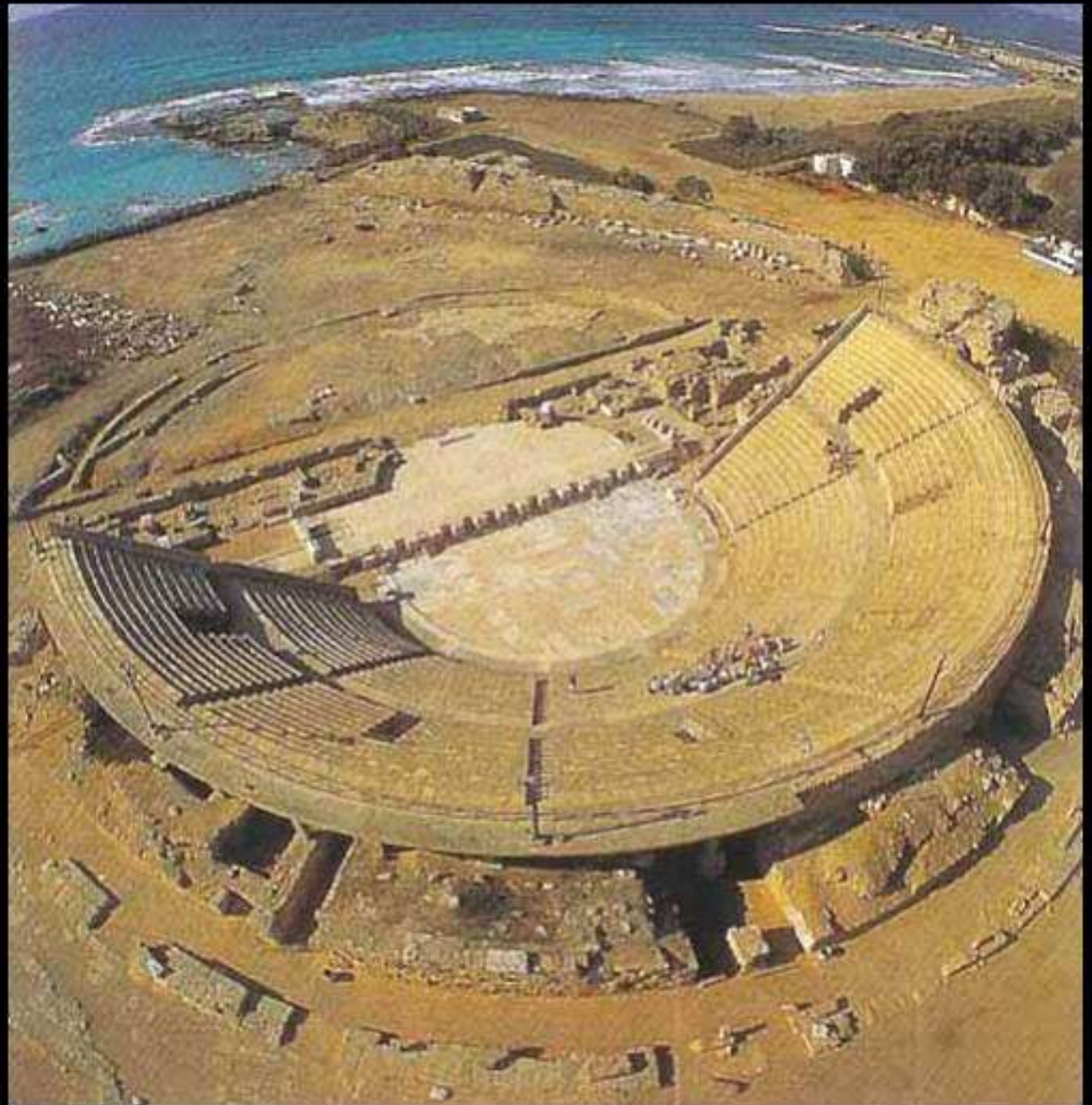


This is a view from the top of the theater north towards the previously visited areas.



A view of the theater from the west to the east.

This is
an aerial
view of
the
theater
at
Caesarea.



The last picture in our series is the Hippodrome. The hippodrome was built in the 2nd century CE for chariot racing. It was 450 meters long and 90 meters wide and could seat some 30,000 spectators.

Columns originally set on the wall running along the middle of the racetrack were unearthed in the arena as well as a 27-meter high obelisk made of polished marble. The obelisk was designed to reflect the sun so that it would frighten the horses and cause them to run ever faster.

At one time, Caesarea was a thriving metropolis boasting as many as 250,000 inhabitants. Only a small portion of the city has been excavated today. No telling what will be found in future excavations. We do know from the writings of Jerome that there was a large library in Caesarea and Jerome states that in the library in his day there still existed a copy of the original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew.

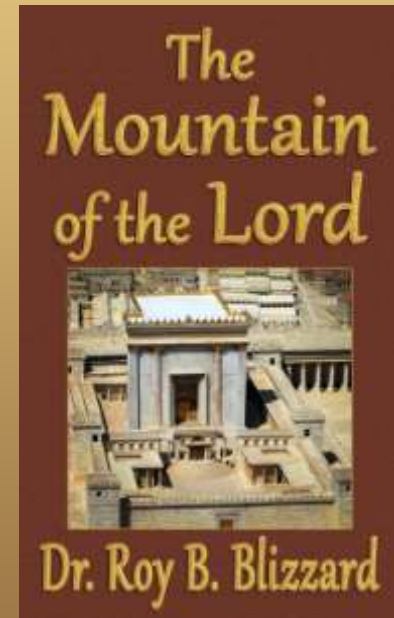
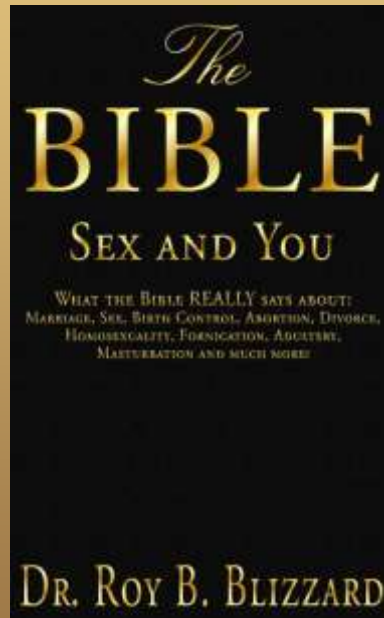
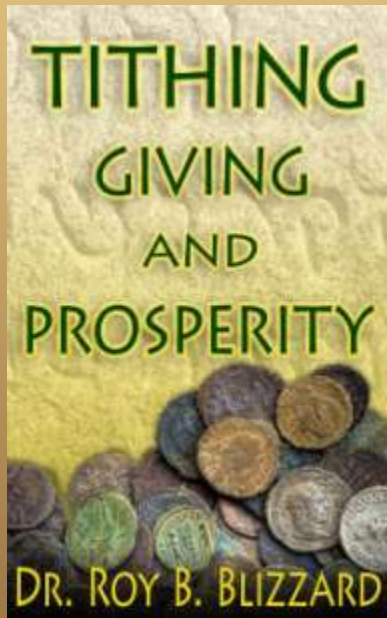


We hope you have enjoyed your trip through

Caesarea

For more information on our historical and archeological study program to Israel, contact us at

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