

Bethsaida

Bethsaida means “house of fishing.” It is located on the north shore of Galilee which has receded over time. Herod Philip the Tetrarch rebuilt Bethsaida and called it Julia after Caesar Augustus’ daughter. It was situated in the fertile delta of the upper Jordan River right on the north shore of the Sea at the cross roads of the major trade routes that ran:

- north to Caesarea Philippi and on to Damascus
- South to Gadara and Gilead
- East to Aram
- West to Capernaum, Genneserat, Magdala to the main route (Via Maris) which went south through the land of Israel towards Egypt

In the Old Testament during the Iron Age Bethsaida was in the land of Geshur and bordered on the tribe of Asher’s east side. Due to the trade location, the fishing industry and the fertile soil there are many ancient villages and sites near Bethsaida so it was a difficult to identify as a biblical site. A large Iron Age gate that led to a paved square in front of a huge palace has been discovered here which would make this fortified city (20 acres) the site of the capital city of Geshur known as Zer (Zed). It was destroyed by Tiglath-Pileser in 734 BC, but Josephus writes that it was rebuilt in the 200’s BC and he calls it Bethsaida. It was given to Herod Philip in 30 AD who fortified it, called it Julia and was buried there in 34 AD.

In the Bible: **Joshua 13:11-13**, the Geshurites and Maachathites dwelt among Israel; **2 Samuel 3:3**, David’s wife Maacha, the mother of Absalom, was from here; **2 Samuel 13:37-38**, Absalom fled to stay with his father Talmai and Grandfather Ammihud, king of Gesher, for three years; **2 Kings 15:29**, Destroyed in Pekah’s day by Tiglathpileser; **Matthew 11:20-22**, Jesus rebukes Bethsaida; **Mark 8:22-26**, Blind man healed outside of Bethsaida; **Luke 9:10-17**, five thousand fed near Bethsaida; **John 1:44**, Bethsaida is the hometown of Peter, Andrew and Philip..



The Fisherman’s House from the NT times is marked along with the winemaker’s house , etc.



Need to get better pictures of Bethsaida. Here is a photo of Galyn looking through some rocks in Bethsaida. (Photo by Toni.)