

02-24 Site Overview: Nazareth First-Century House and the Meaning of 'Katalima'

Lecture: Archaeological Domestic Life in Nazareth and the Meaning of 'Katalima'
Duration: 3m 40s | Date: February 24, 2026

SITE OVERVIEW

- **Location:** Nazareth, specifically a recreated or excavated first-century house, referred to as “Mary’s house” (speculative).
- **Date of Visit:** February 24, 2026
- **Biblical References:** Gospel of John (implied reference to Nathanael’s comment in John 1:46), unspecified Gospel reference to a man requesting bread from a neighbor at night (likely Luke 11:5-8).

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **Key events that occurred at this site:** The speaker uses this site as a model to explain the living conditions during Jesus’s time in Nazareth and the circumstances of his birth in Bethlehem.
- **Time period(s) covered:** First Century AD (the time of Jesus).
- **Historical figures associated with the site:** Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

- **Physical features, excavations, or artifacts mentioned:**
 - The house structure consists of a primary room for family living (eating, sleeping, working) and a connected cave serving as a stable for animals.
 - A silo for food storage was found within the main hall.
 - A single, large oven was excavated, suggesting it was communal and potentially served “half a village.” The speaker notes this as significant for it being “Mary’s house.”
 - The speaker mentions a museum where important artifacts from the excavation are displayed.
- **How the archaeology confirms or illuminates the biblical account:**
 - The house layout provides a new interpretation of the nativity story. The Greek word *kataluma* (often translated as “inn”) is argued to mean “upper room” or main living space. This implies Joseph and Mary found no space in the family’s main room but were given shelter in the lower part of the

house, the stable/cave, where the animals were kept. This means Jesus was born in the stable portion of a family home, not a commercial inn.

- The description of family members sleeping close together on the floor illuminates the parable of the neighbor asking for bread at midnight, explaining why the homeowner would be reluctant to get up and disturb his entire family.

DR. SCHILLING'S KEY POINTS

- **Main arguments or insights presented:** The common understanding of Jesus being born in a separate stable because the “inn” was full is a mistranslation. The term *kataluma* refers to the guest room or main living area of a private home. Jesus was born in the stable section of a relative’s house in Bethlehem, which was a common architectural feature.
- **Connections drawn between sites, events, or themes:** The speaker connects the architecture of this Nazareth house to the probable setting of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem, arguing the layout would have been similar. He also connects the small, close-knit nature of Nazareth to the skeptical question recorded in the Gospel of John: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
- **Any corrections to common misconceptions:** The primary correction is regarding the meaning of *kataluma* and the “no room at the inn” narrative. It was not a commercial inn but a family home that was full.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

- **Relationship to other biblical sites:** The house in Nazareth is used as a model to understand the likely location of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem.
- **Strategic/trade route significance:** Not mentioned.
- **Terrain, water sources, or natural features mentioned:** The layout of the house incorporates a natural cave, which served as a stable. The speaker notes that ancient Nazareth was a very small village, approximately 400 feet long, containing 40-50 cave-dwellings/houses, with a total population of around 300-400 people.

QUOTABLE MOMENTS

- “When they say, there is no place for Mary and Joseph to spend the night in the katalima... this is the Greek word katalima, which has nothing to do with inn, it mistakes translation. Katalima means room, the upper room.”
- “So Jesus was born in a house, but in the back side of the house was a stable.”
- “That way in the gospel of John [it makes sense they would ask] is something good coming out to Nazareth? Because Nazareth was very small village.”

PERSONAL NOTES

- The speaker’s identification of this specific excavation as “Mary’s house” seems speculative, likely for illustrative purposes for the tour group. It serves as a representative example of a first-century Galilean dwelling.

- The reinterpretation of *kataluma* is a significant point of modern scholarship on the nativity narratives. This is a crucial takeaway for understanding the social context of Jesus's birth.
- Follow up: Research the scholarly consensus on the meaning of *kataluma* in Luke 2:7. Investigate the specific archaeological site in Nazareth being discussed—is it the “Nazareth Village” reconstruction or another excavation?