

First-Century Housing and Biblical Interpretation in Chorazin

Lecture: 02-26 Lecture: First-Century Housing and Biblical Interpretation in Chorazin | Israel 2026

SITE OVERVIEW

Location: Chorazin (modern: Khirbet Kerazeh / ancient: Chorazin), northern Galilee, Israel

Date of Visit: Not explicitly mentioned

Biblical References:

- Matthew 12:1–14
- Luke 4:31–37
- Luke 15:8–10
- Luke 11:5–13
- Mark 2 (paralytic lowered through roof)
- John 3:28–29
- John 14:1–3
- Genesis (man leaving mother and father — exact verse not cited)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

First-century population of Chorazin: approximately 2,500 residents

Chorazin was part of what Catholic archaeologist Bargill Pictioner calls the “Evangelical Triangle” — the three cities most associated with Jesus’s ministry: Chorazin, Capernaum, and Bethsaida

Chorazin is the only city of the Evangelical Triangle that was not a fishing village; its primary industry was agriculture, sustained by fertile volcanic basalt soil

The Talmud records that the wave offering of first wheat was almost always sourced from Chorazin due to its early and abundant harvests

First-century Jewish marriage customs were practiced and embedded in the social architecture of the insula, directly informing several of Jesus’s teachings and parables

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Volcanic basalt rock defines Chorazin's built environment; basalt cannot structurally bear its own weight beyond five feet, requiring buildings to incorporate arches or internal supporting pedestal walls

Insula (Latin pl. insulae) housing structures are physically present and partially visible at the site, with identifiable courtyard spaces and room entrances pointed out by Dr. Schilling during the visit

Roofing construction confirmed as wooden beams with thatch overlaid by rolled mud, consistent with the Gospel account in Mark 2 of the paralytic's friends breaking through the roof

Comparison noted between regional housing types:

- Chorazin / Capernaum: insula courtyard model
- Nazareth: cave dwellings carved into the hillside
- Bethlehem: houses constructed over caves (as evidenced beneath the Church of the Nativity, where visitors must descend into the cave and re-emerge on the opposite side)

Dr. Schilling notes that excavations at Capernaum make insula identification significantly harder due to the density of construction and compressed layout

DR. SCHILLING'S KEY POINTS

The insula (a central courtyard surrounded by rooms added over generations) is the key architectural framework for understanding numerous Gospel narratives that are otherwise opaque to modern readers

Four specific Scripture passages gain heightened meaning when read through the lens of insula architecture:

- **Mark 2** — The paralytic's friends could not enter the insula courtyard due to crowds; they accessed the roof from behind and broke through it to reach Jesus
- **Luke 15:8-10** — The woman searching for a lost coin would have been searching an enclosed, dimly lit insula room with only a candle
- **Luke 11:5-13** — The friend requesting bread at night disrupts an entire household; the father sleeping across the doorway (as protection), children between parents and the storeroom, made retrieving bread in the dark a significant imposition — reinforcing Jesus's teaching to persist in prayer
- **John 14:1-3** — "In my Father's house are many rooms" is the correct translation; the King James rendering "mansions" is identified as a mistranslation reflecting 17th-century English cultural expectations rather than the Greek text

First-century Jewish betrothal and marriage customs are directly embedded in Jesus's teaching:

- Engagement was legally binding and equivalent to marriage
- The groom and his father built an additional room onto the insula before the bride could be received

- The groom’s arrival was unannounced and typically at night, heralded by the shofar, requiring bridesmaids to have oil in their lamps
- The best man stood at the door of the bridal chamber until the marriage was consummated, then announced the celebration — referenced in John 3:28–29 by John the Baptist

This entire framework illuminates John 14:1–3 as a direct bridal metaphor: Jesus as the groom preparing a room and returning for his bride

Dr. Schilling corrects the misconception embedded in the KJV translation of John 14:2: “mansions” should read “rooms,” consistent with the insula room-building custom

Only sons remained in the family insula; daughters married into the bridegroom’s family insula

Insula size varied by family size and generational depth; a single insula compound could house approximately 100 people across multiple generations

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Chorazin is situated in the hills above the Sea of Galilee, in contrast to Capernaum (on the lakeshore) and Bethsaida (to the east)

The volcanic basalt geology of the region is responsible for the region’s exceptional agricultural productivity

The Evangelical Triangle (Chorazin–Capernaum–Bethsaida) represents the concentrated geographic locus of Jesus’s Galilean ministry

Nazareth lies across the Jezreel Valley; its cave-dwelling culture is described as geographically and culturally isolated from the Galilean lakeside communities

Next planned stops: Capernaum (including Peter’s house) and the Chorazin synagogue (adjacent to the current location)

QUOTABLE MOMENTS

“In my Father’s house are many rooms. And I’m going to prepare a room for you. And when the room’s done, I’ll come and receive you unto myself — exactly what the bridegroom told.”

“The stories that we hear in Scripture about Jesus make a whole lot more sense when we understand the insula.”

“He says, I’m going to prepare a place for you, and when it’s done, I’ll come back and receive you unto myself.” — Dr. Schilling paraphrasing John 14:2–3 in the context of first-century bridal custom

“They were so excited to get to Jesus, they busticated the roof to get in.” — attributed to Dr. Schilling’s Greek professor, describing Mark 2

PERSONAL NOTES

Follow-up questions to consider:

- What is the precise Greek word translated as “rooms” / “mansions” in John 14:2, and what is its full semantic range? (Dr. Schilling implies the Greek does not support “mansion” — worth verifying in lexicons)
- Confirm the identity and full bibliography of Bargill Pictioner and his use of the term “Evangelical Triangle” ⚠️ (Name may be phonetically transcribed and require verification)
- What Talmudic tractate references Chorazin wheat and the wave offering?

The modern Palestinian multi-story family dwelling described in East Jerusalem is offered as a living cultural analogy to insula multigenerational living — [speculative parallel, not direct archaeological evidence]

Matthew 12:1–14 and Luke 4:31–37 were cited for the synagogue portion of the visit but not yet addressed in this segment — notes to follow at the synagogue stop