

# Chorazin Synagogue Archaeology and Hillel vs. Shammai in Gospel Sabbath Narratives

*Lecture: 02-26 Lecture: Chorazin Synagogue Archaeology and Hillel vs. Shammai in Gospel Sabbath Narratives | Israel 2026*

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## SITE OVERVIEW

Location: Chorazin (modern Khirbet Kerazeh); also referenced in relation to Capernaum and Bethsaida

Date of Visit: Not explicitly mentioned in the recording

Biblical References:

- Matthew 23 (Pharisees and Moses' seat)
- Matthew 12:1–14 (disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath)
- Matthew 11:20–24 (Jesus denounces Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum)
- Luke 4:31–37 (Jesus teaches and heals in Capernaum on the Sabbath)

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Key Events:

- Chorazin is identified as a site where Jesus performed miracles and taught, yet the population did not repent
- The grain field incident in Matthew 12 is geographically contextualized here at Chorazin, as Capernaum and Bethsaida were fishing villages lacking hillside grain fields
- Jesus pronounces woe upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in Matthew 11:20–24, comparing them unfavorably to Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom
- The healing of the synagogue leader's daughter at Capernaum is referenced as illustrative of the leadership dynamics in that village

Time Period: First century CE, during the ministry of Jesus

Historical Figures Associated:

- Jesus of Nazareth
- Rabbi Hillel (founder of the School of Hillel)
- Rabbi Shammai (founder of the School of Shammai)

- The leader of the Capernaum synagogue (unnamed; referenced via the account of his daughter’s healing)

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

### Physical Features:

- A synagogue structure with a large main aisle (designated for bar mitzvahed men and boys), and a balcony above for women, children, and boys under 12
- A bima (raised platform for Torah reading) is present and laid out at the site
- A Seat of Moses was excavated at Chorazin — a significant find directly corroborating Matthew 23, in which Jesus references the Pharisees sitting on “Moses’ seat”
- The artifact on site is a reproduction; Dr. Schilling noted the original is housed in a museum
- He noted that in earlier visits (the “first few years”), the seat was positioned on the opposite side of the bima from its current placement

### Confirmatory Significance:

The discovery of the Seat of Moses at Chorazin is presented as direct archaeological confirmation of the Matthew 23 reference, making Chorazin one of the few sites where a tangible artifact substantiates a specific gospel saying

Scholarly Debates: None explicitly raised; the geographic identification of the grain fields with the hillsides surrounding Chorazin (as opposed to the lakeside fishing villages) is Dr. Schilling’s interpretive argument, not a formally published debate cited in the recording (flagged as interpretive/speculative)

## DR. SCHILLING’S KEY POINTS

Geographic argument for Matthew 12: The grain fields of Matthew 12:1 are most plausibly located on the hillsides around Chorazin, not in Capernaum or Bethsaida, which were fishing villages without agricultural fields. Dr. Schilling therefore situates the Sabbath grain-plucking incident at or near Chorazin (flagged as interpretive)

### Two Schools of Pharisaism:

- **School of Shammai (Shammaiim):** Obligated to the letter of the law; strict interpretation; no exceptions
- **School of Hillel (Hillelian):** Responsible to the spirit of the law; practical mercy permitted where the law’s intent is served

### Village affiliations (interpretive):

- Chorazin is identified as a Shammaiite village, based on the Pharisees’ confrontation with the disciples in Matthew 12 (flagged as speculative)
- Capernaum is identified as a Hillelian village, based on the community’s receptiveness to Jesus’ Sabbath healings in Luke 4:31–37 (flagged as speculative)

Jesus as Hillelian: Dr. Schilling argues Jesus operated within a Hillelian framework — prioritizing the spirit of the law — as evidenced by his rhetorical question, “Was the Sabbath made for man, or man made for the Sabbath?”

- Sabbath made for man = Hillelian
- Man made to fulfill the letter of Sabbath law = Shammaiite

Matthew 11:20–24 as judgment oracle: Jesus’ denunciation of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum reflects three years of sustained messianic demonstration that was ultimately rejected; the comparison to Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom escalates the severity of condemnation

Correction of common misconception: Dr. Schilling implicitly corrects the assumption that Jesus was opposed to Pharisaism broadly, instead framing him as aligned with one of its two dominant internal schools (Hillel)

## **GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT**

Relationship to Other Sites:

- Chorazin is situated on a hillside above and inland from Capernaum and Bethsaida, both of which sit on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee
- Bethsaida is described as located on the east side of the Jordan River, near its entry into the Sea of Galilee
- The route from Capernaum up the hillside to Chorazin is proposed as the path taken in the Matthew 12 Sabbath walk (flagged as interpretive)

Agricultural vs. Fishing Economy:

Chorazin’s hillside terrain supports grain agriculture, distinguishing it economically from the lakeside fishing villages of Capernaum and Bethsaida — a distinction Dr. Schilling uses to anchor the Matthew 12 narrative geographically

Wider Comparanda: Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom are invoked theologically (via Matthew 11:20–24) rather than geographically

## **QUOTABLE MOMENTS**

“Jesus said, Matthew 23, ‘The Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. So do what they say. But don’t do what they said.’ They found a seat of Moses.” — Connecting textual claim to archaeological discovery

“If Sabbath was made for man, that’s Hillelian. If man is made to live the letter of the law of Sabbath, that’s Shammaiim.” — Concise pedagogical summary of the two schools

“He never took ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People.’” — Dr. Schilling’s aside on the bluntness of Jesus’ woe oracles in Matthew 11

“So Jesus is demonstrating one form of Pharisaism, but that’s not the earthly form that’s being practiced in the villages.” — Key interpretive claim about Jesus’ relationship to rabbinic Judaism

## **PERSONAL NOTES**

Follow-up question: Which museum holds the original Seat of Moses from Chorazin? Confirm institution name and current exhibition status

Follow-up question: Dr. Schilling references “three schools” at the end of the recording but does not identify the third — this warrants clarification in a subsequent session

Verification needed: The village-level Hillelian/Shammaiite affiliations of Capernaum and Chorazin respectively are presented confidently but are interpretive; check primary sources (Mishnah, Talmud) and secondary scholarship for corroboration

Note on Matthew 12 reading: The reader’s rendition in the transcript appears garbled in places (e.g., “house of David,” reference to “the devil”), suggesting audio quality issues — cross-reference with a standard critical text