

Lesson 3: Welcome



Introduction

Throughout the days of the Old Testament, God had worked through his chosen people, the Jews. God wanted the Jewish people to be a light for the nations (Isaiah 49:6). With the coming of the Holy Spirit in Christ, God began to bring *all* people into the family of faith.

Read: Acts 10:9-35

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

Old Testament

New Testament

Where in the Bible?

The New Testament begins about 3/4 of the way through the Bible.

The New Testament: Service

The believers of the early Church cared for each other and took care of one another's needs. They met together in Scripture and prayer, and they lived their lives in love and service to their neighbors.

Biblical Background

Most of the very first Christians were people with a Jewish background. They spoke the same language and were used to worshipping together. However, as the church continued to grow, many Gentiles (non-Jews) also became followers of Jesus as well.

This was one of the first challenges faced by the early church. Though Jews and Gentiles saw each other as foreigners, God taught them how to be one community in Christ. As Paul later wrote: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

When in Time?

From the time of Alexander the Great (356-325 B.C.), the Greek culture and language dominated the ancient world. Greek was the international language in Jesus' day, and for many years after. This is why the New Testament was written in Greek, not Hebrew (like the Old Testament).



Discuss: Acts 10:9-35

1. Read Deuteronomy 14:3-20. In the Law of Moses, what were some of the animals that Jewish people were not allowed to eat? Why do you think that God would have given his people such rules?
2. Read Mark 7:14-20. In this passage, what did Jesus tell his disciples? How was he helping them (and us) understand the true nature of sin? If not food, what is it that Jesus says makes us "unclean"?
3. Read the lead-up to today's story in Acts 10:1-8. Who was Cornelius? What was his job and position? How does the Bible describe his character?
4. Why do you think most Jewish people would have been suspicious of Cornelius or would have been cautious about meeting him?
5. What did the voice tell Peter in Acts 10:15? How does today's story show that God was not just talking about different kinds of *food*, but about different kinds of *people*?
6. Read Acts 10:34-35. How would you describe what is meant by "not showing partiality" (v. 34)? In what way is this a matter of fairness and equal opportunity? How is this different from simply saying "all people are equal"?
7. Read the follow-up to this story in Acts 10:44-48. How did the Holy Spirit confirm God's will for the Gentiles? Why was this so important for the early church?
8. Read Ephesians 2:13-18. According to these verses, what did Christ accomplish? How does this change the way we treat one another?

Where in the World?

The map to the right shows the three major areas of the Holy Land referred to in the New Testament: Judea in the south, Galilee in the north, and Samaria in between. Today's story refers to two cities located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea (also known as The Great Sea). These cities are Caesarea and Joppa.

- a) **Caesarea:** At the time of the New Testament, there were many cities that were called Caesarea (sez-ah-REE-ah) — named after Caesar (SEE-zer), the leader of the Roman Empire. This port city was known as *Caesarea Maritima* (which means "by the sea"). The great harbor of this port was built by King Herod the Great (the king at the time Jesus was born). The city later became the Roman provincial capital of Judea.
- b) **Joppa:** This Jewish port city (known today as Joffa), has one of the oldest functioning harbors in the world. This was the same port where the Old Testament prophet Jonah boarded a ship when he was fleeing from the Lord (Jonah 1:3).

About how far apart were these two cities? _____ miles

