



Where They Walked

CAESAREA

“Festus answered, ‘Paul is being held at Caesarea’” (Acts 25:4).

- *Roman capital of Judea at the time of Christ*
- *Built by Herod the Great*
- *Named in honor of Caesar Augustus*

For many years, if you wanted to play a game of golf in Israel, you had to travel to Caesarea. It didn't matter where you lived; you had to go to Caesarea, for that was the only place in all of Israel that had a golf course. (They now have about five throughout the country.) When you are at the Caesarea golf course, you are within walking distance of a very famous and important ancient city, the city of Caesarea Maritima. (This should not be confused with Caesarea Philippi, which is in the northern part of Israel.) It would not be surprising if it is discovered that some of the ruins of this ancient city lie buried beneath this golf course.

There is no record in the Bible that Jesus was ever in this city. It is a city that was visited by both the apostles Peter and Paul. Governor Pontius Pilate used it as his home base when he ruled in this area of Israel. What made this city very important were the events that had a dramatic effect on the history of Christianity. The promise of a Savior was never exclusively for Jewish people, but they, “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” got most of the attention. Things were to change in a dramatic way at Caesarea some years after the life of Jesus. In Jerusalem, Pentecost was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on visiting Jewish people from around much of the world. Later, there was a second similar outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people of Samaria. (Samaritans were Jewish people who had intermarried with Gentiles.) At Caesarea, God broadened his focus by including Gentiles with a third outpouring of the Spirit. After that, thanks to people like the apostle Paul, Christianity spread to both Jews and Gentiles throughout much of the then-known world. God indeed wants “all people to be saved.”



Caesarea Maritima

CAESAREA THEN AND NOW

The country of Israel does not have any natural harbors on the Mediterranean Sea. For centuries, Joppa served as such. Jonah sailed from this port. For Herod the Great, that wasn't good enough. About 25-30 miles north of Joppa there was a small, insignificant fishing village called Stratos Tower or Sebastos. This was located about halfway between present-day Tel Aviv and Haifa. Herod tore down what was there and began building the city of Caesarea about 25 B.C. Herod had a passion for building, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem being the most impressive project of all. He completed the city of Caesarea in about 12 years and named it after Caesar Augustus.



Caesarea Aqueduct

Herod spared nothing on his city of Caesarea. He built a magnificent palace for himself on a promenade. It had a freshwater swimming pool in it, even though the palace was but a short distance from the sea. According to Acts 23:35, the apostle Paul was kept under guard in this palace. To supply water for the pool and for the residents of the city, Herod built an 8 to 10 mile aqueduct from the foot of the Carmel mountain range. He also built a theater that could seat about 4,000 people. This refurbished theater is still used today for concerts and other performances. At Caesarea, Herod also built a

10,000-seat amphitheater that was used for chariot racing and other sporting events.

Perhaps the most impressive thing that he built was the harbor that jutted out into the sea for a great distance. To do this, he had to import shipload after shipload of material from Italy. This was the first place where a cementlike substance was used to harden underwater. The port has now sunk into the sea because of earthquakes and erosion. It is said that 19 football fields could fit in this port. The harbor was so large that it could contain up to 300 vessels. It was one of the finest harbors on the entire Mediterranean Sea, rivaling the harbor in Alexandria, Egypt. After Herod's death, the city became the administrative capital of the area. Governors like Pontius Pilate would stay there, visiting Jerusalem only when needed, such as during the Passover celebration.



Herod's theater

Discussion: How would you respond to this statement: "Herod had two loves . . . he loved to kill and he loved to build"? Do you think some people's lives revolve around "building" something to make a name for themselves? Can this happen to us while we forget about the one thing needful?

ARCHEOLOGY

After the time of the Crusades, much of the city of Caesarea was left in ruins and covered with sand. This helped to preserve many of the buildings and artifacts that archeologists are uncovering today. The theater, amphitheater, Herod's palace, and some of the Crusader buildings have all been uncovered in recent years. Archeological work continues to this day. However, only a small portion of the city that once boasted a population of about 125,000 people has been uncovered. The home of Cornelius remains unfound.

A very important find was uncovered in 1961. Since Pontius Pilate is mentioned only in the New Testament, there have been some who doubted his existence. During excavations, a stone was found with his inscription on it, thus removing the doubts of the most critical skeptics. This original stone was moved to the Israeli Museum while an identical replica can be found at the ruins of Caesarea.

ACTS 10:1-8

Dr. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, went into considerable detail in Acts 10 with the events that took place in Caesarea (and Joppa). There he answered this question: Must a person first become a Jew in order to become a Christian? Luke wrote that the Gentiles were also part of the kingdom of Jesus and did not have to first become part of the Jewish system of belief. This opened the door for gentile converts. It was something that needed to happen.

In A.D. 37 or 38 the city of Caesarea had become the headquarters for the Roman army in control of that region. Also, after Herod's death, the governors made this their home base. A man named Cornelius, a Gentile, served in the Roman army as a centurion. He was in charge of one hundred soldiers. He was also a proselyte, or resident alien (see Exodus 20:10). These people could be a functioning part of the religion without conforming to all the Jewish rituals and circumcision. Cornelius practiced his religion by giving to the poor and sharing his faith with his family, slaves, and fellow soldiers. We read that his deeds of faith were pleasing to our heavenly Father. He was also a man of prayer. We see him in prayer at three o'clock in the afternoon. God came to him in a very special way during this time of prayer. Cornelius was told to send for a man named Peter who was in the seacoast town of Joppa about 25 miles to the south. He sent three people to Joppa to find Peter.

Discussion: Why were the good deeds of Cornelius considered good? What makes something a good work in the eyes of God? If an unbeliever does something that is great or outstanding, does God consider that as good in the same sense as a deed of a Christian? Give some examples in your life where someone did something good but you didn't really appreciate it. How does motivation play into the picture of good deeds?

Acts 10:9-16

The following day in Joppa, Peter was on a rooftop praying. In a trance, Peter "saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air." The scene showed animals that were "clean" and those considered "unclean" according to the Jewish law recorded in Leviticus 11. Peter was then commanded to eat these animals, but he objected, saying that he had never eaten anything unclean. The voice went on to say, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." The dietary laws that had kept the Jewish nation separate from the other nations were now being abolished. There was no more need for them; they had served the purposes that God had intended. Jesus had come, and he had fulfilled the law. If God now told Peter to consider something as pure, who was he to say otherwise?

Discussion: How does God normally answer our prayers? Does our diet today have anything to do with our lives as Christians?

Acts 10:17-29

At that very moment, the three people whom Cornelius had sent to Peter appeared at his home. After relating their story about Cornelius, Peter, with six others, went to Caesarea to talk with Cornelius.

God, in his grace, had prepared both Cornelius and Peter for what would be a historic meeting. Cornelius called together his relatives and friends to hear what Peter would have to say. Peter addressed the gathering: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." The lesson learned in Joppa would now find an application for Peter in Caesarea.

Discussion: Can you think of something that you learned in a worship service that had an application for you later that week?

Acts 10:30-35

After Cornelius explained why he had sent for Peter, Peter made this statement: *“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”* God does not show favoritism! Gentiles are as wanted by our God as are Jews. Nationality does not make a difference to God. Later Paul would write to the Galatians, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28). Jesus is the uniting force. His work is all-inclusive.

Discussion: Here, nationality was the big issue. How else could God show favoritism (intelligence or wealth, for example)? How does the fact that God does not show favoritism underscore his grace? Are we sometimes guilty of showing favoritism to or against certain members of our church?

Acts 10:36-43

Peter then shared a message that focused on God’s plan of salvation in Jesus. Cornelius had been led to believe that the Messiah was still to come. Peter assured him and his household that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus was proof that God had accepted the death of Jesus on the cross as payment for all sin. The Old Testament prophets had pointed forward to this, and Peter was now called to proclaim the message.

Discussion: Can you name some of the things that made Cornelius and the church that gathered in his home exemplary? What could we learn from their behavior?

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. These Gentiles received what the Jews had received at Pentecost. The people who had accompanied Peter from Joppa were amazed at this. The truth that God does not show favoritism was being reinforced. The question was removed once and for all. Gentiles do not have to become Jews to be saved. These people believed and were baptized into Jesus.

Although this story deals with Peter and Cornelius, it is a much bigger story. It was God’s way of saying that the gospel is for the entire world, that the Mosaic Law was finished, for Christ had come. It may be safe to say that most of the people reading this study have been personally affected by the events in Caesarea.

PAUL SPENDS YEARS IN CAESAREA

Paul visited Caesarea following his second and third missionary journeys. Caesarea also played an important part in Paul’s life later in his ministry because he spent two years in prison there awaiting his appeal for a trial before Caesar at Rome. Here his case was presented before governors Felix and Festus as well as King Herod Agrippa. You can reference these years in Acts 23:23–26:32.

OTHER REFERENCES TO CAESAREA

Note: Caesarea is only mentioned in the book of Acts.

Acts 8:40	Philip traveled to Caesarea after he met with the Ethiopian eunuch.
Acts 12:19-23	Herod Agrippa died a horrible death in Caesarea.
Acts 18:22	Paul visited on his second missionary journey.
Acts 21:8	Paul visited on his third missionary journey where he stayed at the home of Philip.
Acts 24,25	Paul’s trials before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.
Acts 27:1,2	Paul set sail for trial in Rome.