

ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES

Thursday Morning Bible Study - The World of the Early Church

The Cities, the People, and the Story of Acts 10–12

Introduction

Before we begin Acts 10, let's become familiar with the world in which these events took place.

Luke carefully tells us where these events happened because these cities are more than names on a map. They are places where real people encountered the risen Christ as His Church continued to grow.

Today we'll follow the path of the gospel along the coastal plain of Judea and become acquainted with the places and people that will shape the next several chapters of Acts.

Jerusalem

The Mother Church

Everything in Acts begins here.

Important People

- Peter
- John
- James
- Barnabas
- John Mark
- Mary, the mother of John Mark

Important Events

- Pentecost
- Birth of the Church
- Stephen's martyrdom
- Saul's persecution
- Peter's imprisonment

Yet Jesus never intended the gospel to remain in Jerusalem.

The Road to Gaza

Philip meets an Ethiopian official traveling home from worship in Jerusalem.

One divine appointment changes the course of a man's life.

Afterward, the Spirit carries Philip away to continue preaching the gospel.

Azotus (Ashdod)

One of the ancient Philistine cities.

Once associated with Israel's enemies, it now hears the good news of Jesus Christ.

The gospel continues moving north along the Mediterranean coast.

Lydda

An important crossroads between Jerusalem and the coast.

Here Peter heals Aeneas.

Many throughout the region turn to the Lord.

The gospel continues spreading from city to city.

Joppa

Judea's Ancient Harbor

Character

- Ancient natural harbor
- Peaceful Jewish coastal town
- Fishing, local commerce, and regional travel
- Long the principal harbor of Judea before Caesarea was built

People

- Tabitha (Dorcas)
- Simon the Tanner
- Peter

Historical Notes

- Retained a distinctly Jewish character
- Destroyed by Vespasian during the Jewish Revolt (AD 67)

Caesarea Maritima

Rome's Gateway... God's Gateway

Character

- Built by Herod the Great
- Capital of Roman Judea
- One of the finest artificial harbors in the Roman world
- Center of Roman government and military authority

People

- Cornelius
- Philip the Evangelist
- Pontius Pilate
- Herod Agrippa I
- Felix
- Festus
- Paul (later imprisoned here)

Historical Notes

- Residence of the Roman governor
- Major Mediterranean port connecting Judea with the nations
- Departure point for many journeys recorded in Acts

One Connected Church

As Luke's story unfolds, these cities and many of these same people continue appearing throughout Acts.

Churches knew one another.

Believers welcomed one another into their homes.

Leaders traveled between congregations.

The gospel spread through relationships.

The early church functioned as one family.

Read Together

Acts 10:1–8

'At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.'

As we read, notice how Luke introduces Cornelius before Peter ever arrives.

Looking Ahead

Next Sunday we'll return to these same cities and watch as God brings together two very different men:

Peter...

...a Jewish apostle staying in Joppa.

Cornelius...

...a Roman centurion living in Caesarea.

Their meeting will become one of the great turning points in the history of the early church.

The World of the Early Church

ACTS 10–12

A CONNECTED FAMILY

Across cities and roads, by land and sea, Jesus was building one Church—one people, many places, connected by the Spirit.

- **Peter**
Joppa → Caesarea → Jerusalem
- **Believers Scattered (Acts 11:19)**
Jerusalem → Phoenicia → Antioch
- **Barnabas**
Jerusalem → Antioch
Antioch → Tarsus → Antioch
- **Paul**
Jerusalem → Caesarea → Tarsus

- **Primary City**
Center of ministry and mission
- **Secondary City**
Other important city
- ⚓ **Major Harbor**
- 🏰 **Early Church / Believers**
- **Roman Road (Via Maris)**
Major coastal highway
- - - **Other Roads**
- - - **Regional Connections**



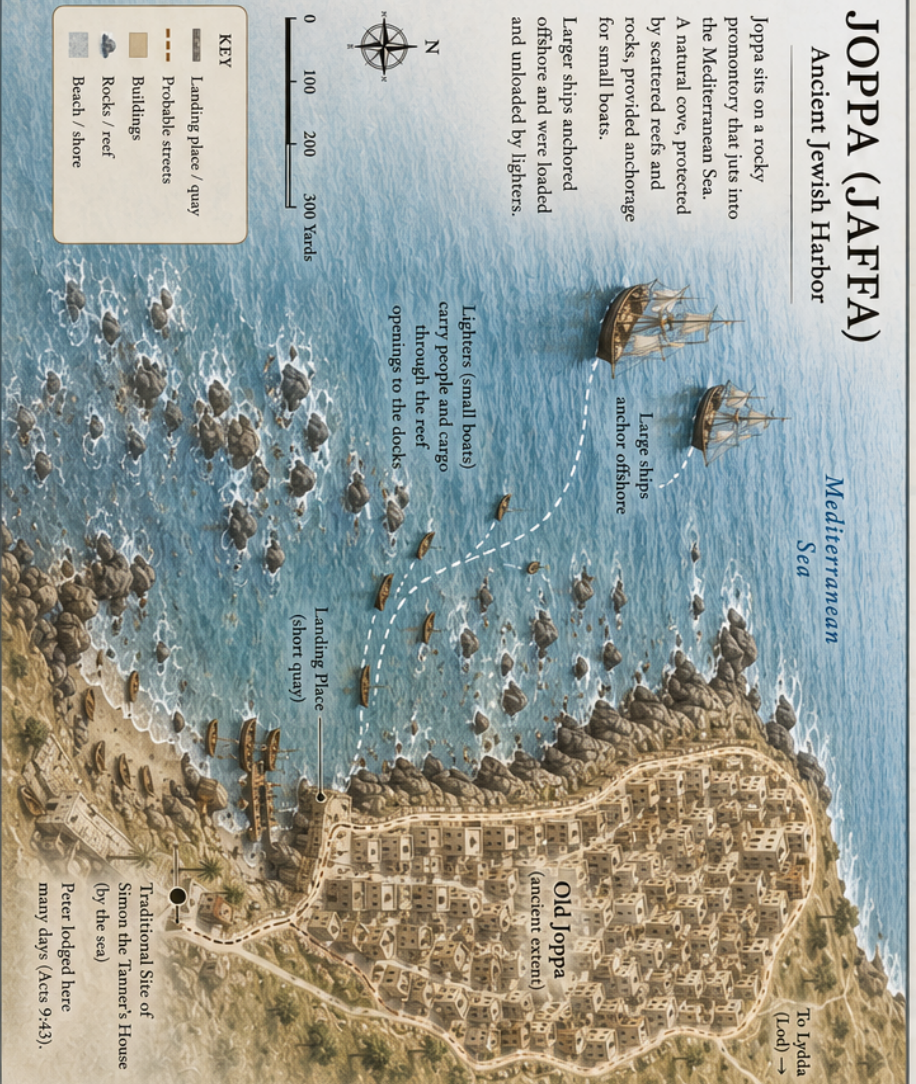
JOPPA (JAFFA)

Ancient Jewish Harbor

Joppa sits on a rocky promontory that juts into the Mediterranean Sea.

A natural cove, protected by scattered reefs and rocks, provided anchorage for small boats.

Larger ships anchored offshore and were loaded and unloaded by lighters.



ROUTES (Acts 10–12)

- PETER**
Joppa → Caesarea → Jerusalem
- BELIEVERS SCATTERED** (Acts 11:19)
Jerusalem → Phoenicia → Antioch
- BARNABAS**
Jerusalem → Antioch
Antioch → Tarsus → Antioch
- PAUL**
Jerusalem → Caesarea → Tarsus

LEGEND

- Primary City
Center of ministry and mission
- Secondary City
Other important city
- Major Harbor
- Port for trade and travel
- Early Church / Believers
Homes, communities, gatherings
- Roman Road (Via Maris)
Major coastal highway
- Other Roads
- Regional connections

ONE CONNECTED FAMILY

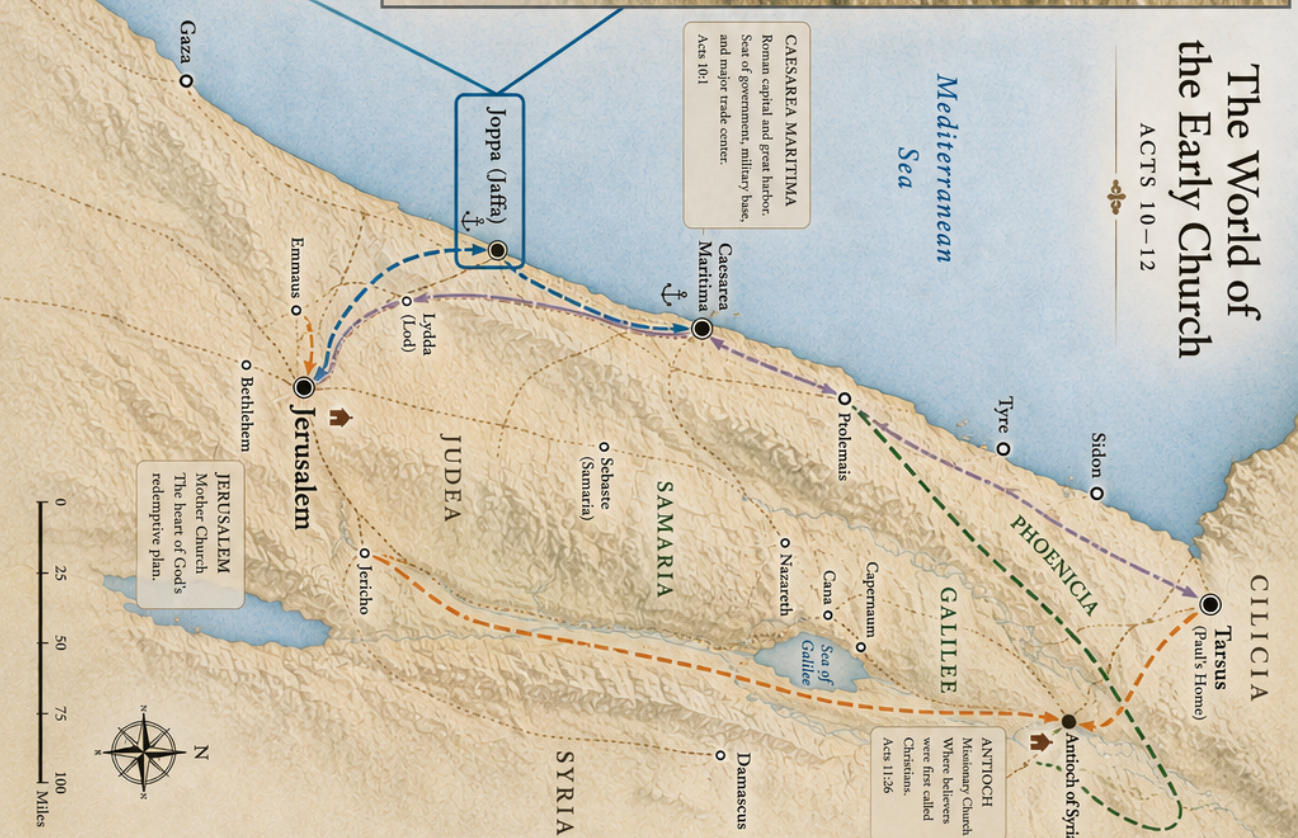
Across cities and roads, by land and sea,
Jesus was building one Church—
one people, many places,
connected by the Spirit.

"You will be my witnesses in
Jerusalem, and in all Judea and
Samarita,
and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8

The World of the Early Church

ACTS 10–12



CAESAREA MARITIMA SEBASTOS HARBOR, c. AD 40

Built by Herod the Great between 22 and 10 BC, Sebastos (Caesarea Maritima) was the Roman capital of Judea and one of the greatest artificial harbors of the ancient world.

Harbor entrance
faces north toward
the gentler winds.



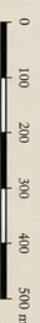
KEY TO FEATURES

- 1 Harbor Entrance (facing north)**
Entrance flanked by towers with statues.
The safer approach from prevailing winds.
- 2 Northern Breakwater (Mole)**
Built of massive stone blocks and concrete.
About 200 ft. long.
- 3 Main Harbor Basin**
Large protected basin, about 20 fathoms
(≈120 ft / 36 m) deep.
- 4 Landing Recesses (Berths)**
Arched recesses and quays along the city
side for ships to dock and unload.
- 5 Herod's Palace**
Magnificent palace complex projecting
into the sea with private docks.
- 6 Temple of Augustus**
Dedicated to Caesar, symbol of Roman
authority in the province.
- 7 Theater**
Seats about 4,000 people for dramas,
music, and public events.
- 8 Broad Promenade**
Wide colonnaded terrace and waterfront
walk welcoming arrivals.
- 9 Hippodrome**
Chariot-racing stadium with capacity
for thousands.
- 10 Aqueduct**
Brought fresh water from the hills
about 10 miles (16 km) to the north.



BY THE NUMBERS

- Harbor depth: up to 20 fathoms (≈120 ft / 36 m)
- Breakwater width: about 200 ft (≈60 m)
- Stone blocks: about 50 ft long, 9 ft high, 10 ft wide
- Built by Herod the Great: ca. 22–10 BC



Sources: *Josephus, Jewish War 1.408–415; A. Ruban, Caesarea Project; D. Gullit, ROMAcons Project; archaeological surveys and excavations.*

Joppa

An Ancient Harbor

"Before we continue into Acts 10, I'd like you to come with me for just a moment. Let's leave the pages of our Bible and imagine ourselves standing in the city of Joppa."

The morning sun has only recently climbed above the hills of Judea, but the harbor has already awakened. The cool Mediterranean breeze carries with it the unmistakable smell of salt, seaweed, fresh fish, damp rope, and weathered wood. Gulls circle overhead, their cries mingling with the gentle rhythm of waves breaking against the rocks below.

This is an ancient harbor. Long before Herod the Great ever dreamed of building Caesarea to the north, Joppa had served as Judea's principal gateway to the Mediterranean. For centuries, travelers, merchants, fishermen, and pilgrims passed through this port. But those days have largely passed. Herod's magnificent harbor at Caesarea has drawn away much of the great commerce of the empire. Joppa remains active, but now its pace is slower, serving the needs of the surrounding region more than the wider Roman world.

Fishing boats drift quietly in and out of the natural harbor. Small merchant vessels ride at anchor offshore, while lighter boats ferry cargo between ship and shore where the reefs make larger vessels cautious. Families stroll the waterfront. Craftsmen open their workshops. Fishermen mend their nets as they prepare for another night's work upon the sea.

Unlike Caesarea, Joppa still feels unmistakably Jewish. The streets are narrower. The faces are familiar. Aramaic is heard more often than Latin. The rhythm of life reflects the customs and traditions of Judea rather than the grandeur of Rome. Although Roman authority is never far away, this city has retained its Jewish identity.

Somewhere among these homes lives Tabitha, whose quiet acts of kindness had touched an entire community. Near the shoreline stands the home of Simon the Tanner. Tanneries were almost always located near water, both because large quantities of water were needed in the tanning process and because the odor of curing hides was anything but pleasant. From the flat rooftop where Peter often prayed, he could look across the Mediterranean, watching fishing boats come and go through Joppa's natural harbor, perhaps noticing the occasional merchant vessel farther offshore waiting for its cargo to be brought in.

Only a few years after these events, this peaceful harbor would become a place of violence. During the Jewish revolt, rebels launched attacks against Roman shipping from these very waters. In response, the Roman general Vespasian destroyed the city in AD 67, bringing an end to much of the Joppa Peter knew.

But for now, the harbor is peaceful. Peter has no idea that just thirty-five miles up the coast, in another city very different from this one, God is preparing to forever change his understanding of the gospel.

Caesarea Maritima

Rome's Gateway... God's Gateway

"Now let's continue north along the Mediterranean coast."

As you approach Caesarea, the difference is impossible to miss.

This is **Sebastos**, Herod's magnificent harbor, named in honor of Caesar Augustus. To us, its stone breakwaters may seem like little more than ancient ruins. But to those living in the first century, this harbor represented the very height of engineering, wealth, and Roman power. It was one of the wonders of the Mediterranean world.

Where nature had provided no safe harbor, Herod ordered one to be created. Massive stones, some weighing many tons, were lowered into the sea to form enormous breakwaters, enclosing a deep-water harbor unlike anything Judea had ever known. Ancient sailors who had spent their lives navigating natural anchorages would have stood in awe of what Herod's engineers accomplished here.

As you enter the city, the harbor is never far from your mind. The masts of great merchant ships rise high above the rooftops, their sails catching the Mediterranean wind. Like the towering profile of a modern ocean liner in a harbor, these ships dominate the skyline, constantly reminding everyone that this is one of the busiest ports in the Roman world.

The harbor never truly rests.

Great merchant ships arrive from Egypt loaded with grain. Vessels from Cyprus, Cilicia, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy crowd the docks. Smaller coastal ships come and go throughout the day carrying travelers and goods to neighboring ports. Roman warships ride at anchor nearby, their presence a constant reminder that this is Rome's city.

From this harbor, a traveler could sail to nearly every corner of the known world. It was the gateway through which ideas, commerce, cultures, and people constantly flowed into and out of Judea.

The air is alive with activity.

Dockworkers shout as cargo is unloaded. Sailors call to one another in Greek and Latin. Merchants bargain over spices, olive oil, textiles, lumber, and wine from distant provinces. Animals are led off transport ships. The smells of saltwater mingle with cedar, fresh grain, livestock, imported spices, smoke, and the countless scents of a city where the nations meet.

The city itself reflects Roman power at every turn.

Wide streets.

Marble buildings.

Government offices.

The Praetorium, where Roman governors conducted official business.

Herod's palace overlooking the sea.

The hippodrome and amphitheater, where races, spectacles, and public entertainments drew crowds from across the region.

Roman standards flutter above government buildings while soldiers patrol the streets in disciplined formation. This is the administrative heart of Judea. Pontius Pilate ordinarily governed from this city, traveling to Jerusalem only during the great feasts when unrest was most likely.

It would be difficult to forget, even for a moment, that Rome rules here.

And yet...

Somewhere among the thousands who call this city home lives a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Almost certainly he is only one of many stationed here among the soldiers and officers responsible for maintaining Roman order.

Somewhere else in the city lives Philip the Evangelist. Years earlier, the Spirit had carried him to Azotus, and he preached his way north along the coast until he settled here. He has built a home. He is raising a family. Years from now, Paul himself will stay beneath Philip's roof before making his final journey to Jerusalem.

Paul will also spend two years imprisoned in this very city, standing before Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa before eventually boarding a ship from this harbor bound for Rome.

To the Roman Empire, Caesarea is a monument to Caesar's power.

To Luke, it is something altogether different.

It is the place where King Jesus will publicly open the door of His Church to the Gentile nations.