

## Cornelius the Centurion

### Listed Scriptures

Ac 10-11; Rom 11; Ps 4:3, 115:13

### Lesson Aim

- 1) To imitate Cornelius' love for God and men.
- 2) To be impartial in our treatment of others.
- 3) To preach the gospel to people of all nations.

### Memory Verse

"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." (Ac 10:35)

**Bible Reading For This Week** *(for students and teachers)*

*Isaiah 11-15*

## B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



### **Caesarea**

This Caesarea sometimes called Palestinian Caesarea, was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, thirty-two miles north of Joppa. The largest and most important port city in Palestine, Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province of Judea. Because of frequent outbreaks of violence, Roman soldiers had to be stationed there to keep peace throughout Israel. This was the first city to have gentile Christians and a non-Jewish church.

### **Centurion of the Italian Cohort**

Cornelius was a centurion. Centurions commanded units of about 80-100 men. His century was part of a "regiment" or "cohort", which was made up of 600 men. Five cohorts were stationed in Caesarea and one in Jerusalem.

## W A R M U P



1. On meeting a person for the first time, what do you usually observe first?
2. What are some principles or beliefs you have held that have limited your ability to reach out to people “different” from you?
3. Are there certain groups of people that you feel prejudiced towards? Why?

## B I B L E S T U D Y



### Part 1

### *Cornelius, the Man*

Before His ascension, the Lord Jesus commissioned His apostles to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Ac 1:8). In the first nine chapters of Acts, the work of God’s Spirit was mostly confined to the Jews and centered in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The believers held onto the belief that the salvation of God was given only to the Jews. However, suddenly in Acts 10, we read about the Spirit’s sovereign activity in a gentile army officer stationed on the Mediterranean coast. The conversion of Cornelius and his family was an epoch-changing moment. It not only served to break down age-old Jewish traditions and beliefs, it also marked a new phase in the development of the church. The one true God – the God of the Hebrews – was about to unveil His eternal plan, hidden through the ages. “There is no longer Jew or Gentile ... you are all Christians ... one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The door of the gospel was now swinging wide open to the world.



### **A** A Charitable and Devout Man

Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian Cohort in Caesarea. Caesarea was the largest and most important port city in Palestine. However, due to frequent outbreaks of violence, Roman soldiers had to be stationed there to keep peace throughout Israel. Although Cornelius was a Roman army officer, he was not aggressive or oppressive towards the Jews. Rather, he was a devout and God-

fearing man who generously helped those around him (Gal 6:9-10). Thus Cornelius was well spoken of throughout the Jewish nation.

### Reflection:

1. What does fearing God mean? (1.To have respect and reverence for God; 2.To recognize Him for who He is and be in awe of His majesty and power; 3.To keep His commands. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.” Because we know that God is just and merciful, and detests all evil, we need to keep ourselves holy by abiding in His laws.)
2. How can we learn to fear God?
3. How does fearing God correlate with our actions?



### **B** A Man of Prayer

The Bible not only describes Cornelius as a devout man with good deeds, but also as a man who prayed constantly. His prayers and his alms were consequently remembered by God. This reminds us that our prayers affect our behavior just as our behavior affects our prayers. The effectiveness of our prayers comes as a result of changing ourselves to meet God’s will. Aside from asking God to grant our requests, we must be determined to live by God’s principles. If we are friends with the world (Jas 4:4), if we possess sin (Ps 66:18), or have incorrect motives—all these will affect our prayers. The Bible tells us that the prayer of one who does not heed God’s law is an abomination in His eyes (Jer 6:19-20; Prov 28:9, 15:8; 1 Sam 15:22). Through prayer, we can be transformed to be more like Christ and fruitful in good deeds.

### Reflection:

1. What relationship does the effectiveness of prayers have with our daily conduct?
2. Reflect on how effective our prayers have been– is there some sin or obstacle that hinders our prayers from reaching God?



### **C** A Man of Humility

Cornelius was a centurion, a man of power and means. Men like Cornelius are used to giving orders rather than taking them. But Cornelius was unlike other men – he was very humble. When the angel appeared to him and told him to send for Peter, Cornelius obeyed immediately. When Peter arrived, he treated Peter with the utmost respect: he fell down and worshiped him (Ac 10:25). Although Peter was

not a Jewish leader, but a mere fisherman, Cornelius did not allow worldly differences and prejudices to prevent him from recognizing the truth.

In God's household there is no rank or file. We have to treat others with the same love and respect regardless of our worldly status. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27). God shows no partiality (Rom 2:11) and if we show partiality we commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (Jas 2:9). Let us therefore "Clothe ourselves with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Ac 10:25; 33; Mt 5:3).

**Reflection:**

1. Why is treating others with partiality a sin?
2. How was humility a key factor for Cornelius in accepting the truth?
3. Reflect on the way we treat others in church— are we prone to remain within a certain circle of friends, excluding others? What is our reaction to someone who comes to church dressed in rags, and someone smartly dressed?
4. How can we remove partiality?



*Part 2*

*Cornelius' Conversion*

The picture of Acts 10 is of God orchestrating events in individual lives to bring about His eternal purposes. Through His Spirit and the cooperation of His workers God leads people to Him through many wonderful and marvelous ways.



**a. The revelation to Cornelius**

One day an angel appeared before Cornelius in a vision telling him that his prayers and his alms had reached God. The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa to ask for a man named Peter to come. Angels are responsible for sending the messages of God, and guiding people to salvation. They are ministering spirits and labor for those who are to receive salvation (Heb 1:14; Mt 18:10; Ac 12: 7, 15). We too need to be a messenger of the gospel, leading others to know God.

**b. The revelation to Peter**

Cornelius' reception of the truth depended not only on God's choosing but on the movement of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the workers. From the passage recorded in Acts 10:9ff, God not only showed a vision to Cornelius, God appeared to Peter too. Without proof from the Lord, it would have been almost impossible for Peter who had been brought up in the Jewish traditions and ways to accept Cornelius' invitation (Ac 10:9-22). God showed Peter the vision for a purpose (Job 33:14-18; Cf Ac 16:6-10). He understood that the salvation of Cornelius would be startling not only to Peter's Jewish mind but also to the believers in Jerusalem because it called for a radical reorientation of their concept of God and of themselves as the chosen people. The Jews prided themselves as God's chosen race and in their minds, everyone outside the Jewish race was considered unclean. According to the teachings of the Rabbis, Jews were permitted to do business with gentiles or converse with them, but no pious Jew would ever enter a gentile's home or invite them to their own house and dine with them (Jn 18:28; Ac 11:3). He would be contaminated if he did, unable to worship God until he had been ceremonially cleaned. Furthermore, the Jews had certain dietary laws that allowed them to eat only of things that were considered clean (Lev 11).

In order to fulfill His purposes, God prepared Peter for the work he was to do. Peter had to first get rid of his own preconceptions. When doing God's work we should put aside our own thoughts, customs, habits and will. If Peter had not cooperated, the will of God would have been hindered. After the incident, Peter understood God's will when he said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Ac 10:34-35; Rom 1:16; Eph 6:9). This teaches us that when we preach to others, we should not prejudice or avoid certain groups of people because we personally dislike them. It is important that we welcome everyone into Christ. God's pure love is unconditional and to Him every soul is worth more than the whole world.

**Reflection:**

1. Peter's mindset was changed through the movement of the Holy Spirit. Has there been a time when your viewpoint was changed completely by God? Share your experience.
2. Have you ever avoided preaching to certain people because you felt s/he just didn't seem to be the type to believe in God?
3. Share an incident where someone who seemed unlikely to receive the gospel embraced the truth.



## **B • The Apostles' Testimony**

When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, the kinsmen and close friends of Cornelius were already waiting to hear Peter's testimony. On hearing the truth, Cornelius and all those who had gathered believed in the Lord and were baptized (Ac 10:34-43). Cornelius had a magnanimous heart. He wanted to share the good news with those around him. Sadly we often lack Cornelius' earnestness in preaching to others. The following testimony illustrates the necessity to share the faith to others.

"Earlier, the fact that the gospel had not reached other Christians and ethnic groups in our communities did not bother me too much. Then a vision appeared to me during a prayer one Friday evening. I was lifted above the earth in a flying motion and everything was dark below me. I could see row upon row of trenches filled with people, trying to get out but not being able to. I asked the Lord, 'Who are these people in the trenches?' The answer came, 'They are the ones who are not saved'. My next two questions were, 'Did You not come to save them? Why are there still so many people not saved?' There was silence! Then out of the vast expanse of darkness I saw a tiny speck of light in the distance. As I advanced towards it I could see four beams radiating out like a cross. I was reminded of two past events in my life. When I was one year old the Lord healed me of a life-threatening disease. When I was ten years old I nearly drowned. The Lord saved my life then, too. The radiant cross brought me back to the Lord's atoning death. He had already completed His work of salvation for mankind when He said, 'It is finished.' That answered my first question. The Lord spoke to me, 'The reason why there are still so many people not saved is because there are too many Christians like you doing nothing about it'. After hearing that I felt the same way Peter must have felt after he denied Christ. I was a sinner before my Lord, my Lord who had done everything for me, and I had done nothing for Him. I broke down and cried. Through this vision, I learned again how urgent the work of salvation is."



## **C • The Down-Pouring of the Holy Spirit**

Cornelius is an example that God "rewards those who diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6). Cornelius was religious, devoted, generous, respected and sincere (10:1-2) and yet, he was spiritually separated from God. In order to be in right standing with God, God sent Peter to present to him the truth about salvation. While they were listening to Peter, God poured down His Spirit upon them to confirm that the truth was being preached (Mk 16:15-18). Let us not fall into the trap in equat-

ing good character and good deeds with salvation. Being a good person is not enough. The Bible reminds us that we have all sinned (Rom 3:23) and we are saved not by works of righteousness but through God's mercy. Only through baptism of the water and Spirit can we be brought into right standing with God (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5).

### C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

### L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



#### *One in Christ*

Have you ever been in a setting where you were the only person different from everyone else in the room? You notice the way they look; the color of their hair, eyes and skin differ. The language they speak and the way they express themselves, their culture and their background are all different from the way you were brought up. What were your feelings? How did you respond? Did you try to mingle or did you just sit in the corner feeling totally left out? Worse still, did you end up walking out?

Such a culture shock was probably not far from what Peter felt when God told him to meet Cornelius who was a gentile. Even today, there may be some truthseekers or even believers who face this kind of culture shock when they come to church. Some truthseekers continue to study the truth but they never quite feel as if they belong while for some, they never come back again. Some believers stay out on the perimeters because they never feel a part of the group. Since the Lord Jesus has commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations, how can we make the church more welcoming to those who are different from us? How can we address their needs?

Read the following article, which illustrates what one church did to incorporate people of all races in the church, and then complete the activity and discussion section.

### **“A Multiethnic Church: Is It Really Possible?”**

(Manna, issue 31 April-June 2000)

Jesus Christ gave His disciples two great commissions before ascending into heaven; to care for His church and to preach the gospel to all nations (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47). This was a command to the first Christians, and similarly it is a command to us today. Because it is a command, we have assurance that we can succeed in this mission. The unity of cultures corresponds to the Lord's will (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Is 11:6-9) and should not pose an obstacle for the church today. Harmony between members despite differences of culture shows that we are united by the power of the Holy Spirit, the one faith, and the will of God. We should try our best to carry out this mission so that all people can see our union of love, peace and joy.

#### **Addressing Multicultural Issues**

Many problems arose when the church in Jerusalem, which comprised primarily of Jewish members, began to include Gentiles. There were theological problems (i.e. should Gentiles be circumcised?), cultural differences (i.e. should women be veiled?) and no doubt communication issues (i.e. which language should sermons be delivered in or translated into?) Today some people think that the solution to multicultural issues in the church is to separate the cultures, but that would be a serious mistake. First, this is not the example set by the apostolic church. Second, the multiethnic church is proof that unity comes from our faith and from the Holy Spirit. If the other churches fail, we the True Jesus Church can succeed because we are the only church united by the one true faith and the Holy Spirit. Although it is the will of God for all nations to be unified in His church, the task is not necessarily an easy one. It requires a good understanding of God's will and a lot of effort from the believers.

#### **The Apostolic church and the True Jesus Church**

When the Holy Spirit first descended on the Jewish believers in Jerusalem during the apostolic period, they began spreading the good news. Their mission was to preach the message of salvation to all corners of the earth— which in their minds stopped at Spain!

Members of the early church in Jerusalem were in no hurry to preach the gospel “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” They were too busy managing the daily growth of the church. The believers were rejoicing under the blessing of the Lord and led abundant Christian lives full of sincerity, joy and harmony. It was only when persecution arose that the church started to expand.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit descended at the beginning of this century as the latter rain, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Jesus Christ has chosen the True Jesus Church, which originated from China, to spread the true and complete plan of salvation to all nations.

Like the early church, the True Jesus Church is heavily involved in caring for local churches. The majority of preachers spend their time and energy pastoring members rather than spreading the Word. Like the early Jewish Christians who preached to their fellow Jews, the majority of the Chinese members preach to other Chinese simply because it is easier and more natural.

#### **Hope of the New Generation**

Despite this situation, the gospel has begun to spread to all continents due to immigration and occasionally to missionary work. Unfortunately though, most of the churches comprised of Asian immigrants have been unable to “open up” to all cultures— particularly to the local population. Generally, the True Jesus Church has spread to different countries without really integrating with the local people or accepting the local customs. It is therefore difficult for the only church of God, chosen by His spirit, to accomplish the plan of salvation for all nations.

Today, we are at the beginning of a new phase. The second-generation immigrants have integrated with the local culture and speak the native language. Perhaps God will work with the second-generation immigrants to bring new believers from all nations into the church. Furthermore, overseas missionary training programs are now in progress to complete the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us. Most churches established by immigrants face similar problems— they are involved in pioneer work without the benefit of prior experience that other local churches enjoy. But due to God's grace and members' efforts, the church has successfully begun to open up to non-Asians, thereby concretely carrying out God's mission.

#### **The Paris Church – An Example of a Multiethnic Church Today**

The True Jesus Church in Paris is one of the churches whose multiethnic congregation enjoys unity through our faith and through the Holy Spirit. The Paris church has a congregation of about sixty members who attend services regularly. These believers are from Cambodia, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Laos, Reunion Island, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Though the majority are Asians, they neither speak the same language nor

share the same culture. About 20% of the Paris members are Caucasian—the highest percentage of any local True Jesus Church. By the grace of the Lord, none of the native French members have left the church.

### **Background of France**

France is traditionally a Catholic country. However, the majority of the French do not read the Bible and do not believe that it is the Word of the living God. Generally, people go to church for baptisms, marriages, and funerals; some attend midnight mass on December 24th. In French history, the church was responsible for much bloodshed. Unable to overlook the past, most French reject Christianity and consequently reject Jesus.

French philosophers like Descartes spread the humanistic view that people are intelligent enough to detect God's presence; and since they cannot prove it, therefore God does not exist. This concept led most French to become atheists. There are also some French who, having been disappointed by Christianity and rationalism, have turned to Buddhism. These confused circumstances make it difficult for the True Jesus Church to preach the gospel in France, but if we keep our eyes on our almighty God, we need not be discouraged.

### **A Church For All People**

When the Paris church was first established, members were conscious of the difficulties of preaching in the Western Hemisphere and were prepared to integrate. They wanted others to know that this is the Church of God— not a “Chinese Church”. Some of our church buildings in western countries display the name “True Jesus Church” only in Chinese. This reinforces the popular notion that the Chinese tend to congregate and to recreate their native environment wherever they go. The non-Asians who pass by take no notice at all because they think it is a Chinese church— not a place where they belong. Although in Paris the majority of the members are Chinese, the name of the church is displayed in French. This shows nonmembers that this is a church for all people, not just for the Chinese community.

### **Bridging the Gap**

When you come to the Paris church, you often feel touched by the love and kindness of the members who approach you with slightly broken French, trying their best to make you feel at ease. You also hear everybody singing hymns in French, except on rare occasion when there are visitors from abroad.

Realizing that it is hard for people to be touched by hymns in a foreign lan-

guage, the Paris church worked hard to produce a French hymnbook. The members learned to sing in French in order to evangelize to the native population. The Chinese members put aside their Chinese hymn books to sing in a language they barely understand, practicing each hymn and learning the meaning of the words. For the native French members, this was a tremendous blessing. It showed the members' spiritual growth and their love for those who have not heard the truth. These acts, which reach out to people of other cultures, are a kind of holy work that should not be overlooked. Today, the Asian members have improved their French through sermon translations (from Mandarin to French) and by communicating with the native French believers.

### **Celebration of Brotherly Love**

Last year, the Paris church made further progress by holding the annual new year's meal on the French new year rather than the Chinese (lunar) new year. During this celebration, one Chinese mother cooked a French dish for the members who preferred French cuisine, and a French mother cooked a Chinese dish for her Asian brothers and sisters! The food is not the issue here; it is that these acts of thoughtfulness show brotherly love and kindness. Through the grace of God, this is the spirit of the Paris church today. We still have a long way to go, but for the majority of the Paris members, there is no such thing as “Chinese” or “French” because we are all one in Christ Jesus!

### **Unity – Everyone's Responsibility**

In the True Jesus Church it is possible for all cultures to come together in Jesus, and this quality shows the world that we are the only church of the last days. But this is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested by a concrete willingness to love God and to love men. Paul said that he was free from all men, but he became a servant to all so that he would not be an obstacle for the spread of the gospel. He became all things to all men so that he might by all means save some (1 Cor 9:19ff). Of course, Paul did so within the bounds of the gospel. Paul's attitude reminds us to try our utmost to become Kenyan in Kenya, a Canadian in Canada, a German in Germany, and a Cambodian in Cambodia— out of love, out of duty, and to have a part in the blessing of the gospel (1 Cor 9:23).

The Paris church still needs to improve in many areas, and it should not be seen as the ideal church. Through its example, however, we can see that cultural unity requires everyone's effort. Although it is the will and command of God, there are many things we must do to achieve it. May God help us as we encourage one another to accomplish His will and to preach to all nations. Amen!

**Activity:**

(For this activity make sure that students have collected all the completed surveys that were passed out to the church congregation a couple of weeks ago. A more complete and accurate picture of the church situation can be obtained only when all the surveys are collected).

With the completed surveys, draw up the demographics of your local church. Count the total number of completed surveys returned and tally up the total responses for each question. Consider the make-up of your church (ethnically, socially and age-wise).

**Church Life**

One of the unique characteristics of the True Jesus Church is that people of different ages, race and backgrounds can come together in the Lord. As part of the J2 curriculum, the students will be examining the demographics of their local church. To do this, we would like to ask each member of the church congregation to take a little time to fill out the following survey and to return the completed forms. Besides the stated objective, the survey will remain anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

1. What is your sex?
  - Male
  - Female
  
2. What is your race?
  - White
  - Black, African-American
  - Native American
  - Latino
  - Chinese
  - Japanese
  - Korean
  - Vietnamese
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Which country were you born in?
  - United States
  - Outside the United States. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4. How old are you?
  - 0-10
  - 11-20
  - 21-30
  - 31-40
  - 41-50
  - 51-60
  - 61-70
  - 71 and above
  
5. What is your marital status?
  - Single
  - Married
  - Widowed
  - Other
  
6. What is the highest level of education you have received?
  - Elementary
  - High School
  - College Graduate
  - Post Graduate degree
  
7. What language(s)/dialect(s) do you speak?
  - English
  - Mandarin
  - Taiwanese
  - Spanish
  - Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking? \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. I am ....
  - A student
  - Currently working
  - A housewife
  - Retired
  - Other
  
10. How many in your immediate family are believers?
  - I am the only believer

- My entire family are believers
  - Not all of my family members are believers
11. I was ....
- Baptized since I was an infant
  - Introduced to the church
12. How large is your church congregation?
- 50-100
  - 100-150
  - 150-200
  - 200 and above
13. The congregation consists mainly of .... (check the ones that apply)
- Children (0-17 years of age)
  - Youths (18-39 years of age)
  - Middle aged (40 – 55 years of age)
  - Elderly (56 years of age and above)
  - A good balance of all age groups
14. The main culture in the church is ..... as my own
- The same
  - Different
  - Somewhat similar
15. The most common language(s) spoken around the church is ....
- English
  - Chinese/Taiwanese
  - Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
16. What language(s) is/are used during worship services?
- English only
  - Chinese only
  - Chinese with English interpretation
  - English with Chinese interpretation
  - Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
17. Do you stay for lunch at the church? If no, what are your reasons? \_\_\_\_\_
- Yes
  - No
- Sometimes
18. The kind of food served during lunch consists of:
- Mainly Chinese food
  - Mainly Western food
  - A variety of foods
  - Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
19. I am ..... in the activities and work of the church.
- Very involved
  - Fairly involved
  - Not involved
20. Do you have a sense of belonging in the church?
- Generally yes
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
- 20b. If you have answered sometimes or rarely, what are some of the reasons for this? \_\_\_\_\_
21. My close circle of friends consists ....
- Mainly of church members
  - Mainly of non-believers
  - Of both believers and non-believers
22. How well do you know the members of your church?
- I can interact well with most members
  - I have only a superficial knowledge of them
  - I mingle with just a select few
  - I rarely speak to anyone
23. What are some of the reasons that have prevented you from getting to know the other members more? (Check those that apply)
- Lack of time
  - Lack of opportunity
  - Lack of interest
  - Lack of communication
  - Shyness



- Language barrier
- Cultural differences
- Previous misunderstandings
- Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

24. Do you feel that the brothers and sisters are sensitive to and understand your needs?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

25. What would you suggest to promote better understanding and fellowship between the members of the church? \_\_\_\_\_

**Discussion:**

1. From the survey responses, do you think the needs of the different ethnic groups in your church are met?
2. What forms or practices contribute to this?
3. What kind of ambience does our church generate, i.e. do we give people the impression that we are a “Chinese church” or do others see the church as one that welcomes all races?
4. What things can we do to be sensitive to the needs of those different from us?
5. From the article, how did the brothers and sisters of Paris church deal with some of their cultural differences?
6. What guiding principles does the author suggest to promote harmony and unity between members of diverse cultural backgrounds?

**R E F L E C T I O N   &   P R A Y E R**



*Living in a multicultural society, we will encounter people of all walks of life. As the church stands in the 21st century, we need to learn how to reach out to people of backgrounds very different from our own. "Therefore welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Rom 15:7)*

**Lesson 4**

**Naaman and Gehazi**

Listed Scriptures

2 Kgs 4:12-36, 5:1-27, 8:4,5

Lesson Aim

- 1) To realize the importance of inner transformation after believing in the Lord Jesus.
- 2) To know the importance of resisting temptation.

Memory Verse

“For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.”  
(Heb 3:14)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 16-20

**B I B L E   B A C K G R O U N D**



**Syria**

Syria was Israel’s neighbor to the northeast. Its boundaries varied over the centuries but generally included areas south of Taurus Mountains, north of Galilee and Bashan, west of Arabian Desert, and east of the Mediterranean. Its chief cities included Damascus, Antioch, Carchemish and others. Syria and Israel were rarely on friendly terms. Under King David, Syria paid tribute to Israel (2 Sam 10:6-19). It became independent under King Solomon. In Elisha’s day, Syria was growing in power and she frequently conducted raids on Israel. Israelite captives were often taken back to Syria after successful raids (2 Kgs 6:8-33).

**Leprosy**

Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases of Bible times. The word leprosy in Hebrew is sara’at, which is a term of uncertain origin and meaning but includes a variety of skin diseases as well as other molds and fungi. The leprosy found on