

## Joppa and the Beautiful Mediterranean Shores

Lessons in obedience



From the scenic seaside boardwalk of Joppa and Tel Aviv, to the ancient harbor and aqueduct of Caesarea, to the modern seaport of Haifa, the Mediterranean shores of Israel are mesmerizing. Seeming to lack the Biblical significance of Jerusalem, the Galilee or Samaria, one may be lulled into thinking this is only a fun-lover's paradise. But let's destroy that myth!

We find tremendous Biblical significance and a huge golden nugget for Gentile believers buried in the history of this area! That nugget will remain tucked away until our tour group arrives in Caesarea, but let's consider the quarry from which that nugget is mined. It is a quarry rich with Biblical significance, and these beautiful shores provide the setting.

Relevant to this area is the tribe of Dan and two other Biblical characters, Jonah and Peter. Dan, the oldest son of Jacob, was given territory bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Dan's tribe was second in size only to Judah (Numbers 1:38-39), and Dan was the standard-bearer on the northern flank (Numbers 2:25-31) when the 12 tribes set up camp in the wilderness.

Though Dan was surely favored, there was a serious problem. Even with remarkable seaside land, they were less than satisfied with their allotment. In disobedience, they exchanged the territory God gave them for that which they desired. Thinking the grass was surely greener in the northernmost reaches of Israel, the tribe abandoned their God-given territory and settled in the north, not understanding destruction was coming and they would be first to be destroyed.

Isn't it just like us to miss God's plan for us! We trade the trials God has ordained to make us stronger for what we believe are easier circumstances or better perks. This faulty thinking always proves to be destructive.

*<sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)*

Indeed, embracing the trials God ordains produces perseverance, character and hope! After building altars to false gods and worshipping idols in the new land, destruction came at the hands of the Assyrians, and the tribe of Dan disappeared eternally. When Revelation 7:5-8 lists the 12 tribes of Israel from whom the 144,000 Jewish evangelists will come during the Tribulation, the tribe of Dan is missing. All because the tribe was not obedient to trust God, but did their own thing instead.

Now, to our first of two characters. The port city of Joppa is best known for another Biblical example of disobedience. Remember Jonah? God gave him specific instructions to go to Nineveh (today's Mosul, Iraq), one of the largest, most sinful, pagan cities in the world at the time. Jonah was a Galilean Jew, so that was not his culture and not his style. Besides, who wants to go to such a vile, pagan city anyway!

You know the narrative. In disobedience, Jonah took off the opposite direction by boarding a boat in Joppa and heading west across the Mediterranean Sea. And we all know it did not go so well!

*<sup>3</sup> But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish **from the presence of the Lord**. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish **from the presence of the Lord**. (Jonah 1:3)*

Seems Jonah took a page from Adam and Eve's book! Realizing their sin in the garden and feeling shame for the first time, the first family took cover and tried to hide.

*<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves **from the presence of the Lord God** among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)*

Disobedience does that. Just as it did with Adam and Eve, and just as it did with Jonah, disobedience brings shame and drives us to hide ourselves from the presence of the Lord. But consider the absurdity!

*<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
<sup>8</sup> If I ascend into heaven, You are there;  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.  
<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> Even there Your hand shall lead me,  
And Your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-10)*

Ahhh...aren't you glad there is nowhere to hide from Him! But that means all is laid bare before His eyes. Nothing is hidden from our omniscient King of Glory! Knowing exactly what they did, God pursued Adam and Eve in the cool of the day and later pursued Jonah in the turbulent sea. Adam, Eve and Jonah ultimately acknowledged God and repented (though consequences remained). The tribe of Dan never did, so they forfeited the prize of being chosen as God's spokespersons who will survive the Tribulation.

Peter is the other character we will consider today. He seemed to keep at least one foot in his mouth during his discipleship years with Jesus. He also denied His Lord but came into his full calling after the Lord restored him. On the beautiful shores of the Mediterranean, three specific narratives provide evidence of Peter's obedience to the Lord.

First, Acts 9:36-42 tells of a woman full of good works and charitable deeds. Tabitha (Dorcas, in Greek), had become sick and died. Some knew that Peter was in Lydda, a nearby city, where he had just healed a paralyzed man, so they called for him to come to Joppa. (Yes, that same port city from which Jonah fled in disobedience.) Once there, Peter demonstrated His trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*<sup>40</sup> But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup> Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. <sup>42</sup> And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. <sup>43</sup> So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner. (Acts 9:40-43)*

After so many failures, Peter learned to trust in and be obedient to the One who had restored him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Now, here he was, healing in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit!

But God was not done with Peter. There was a king-size mission God would call him to, but only after specific preparation. The second narrative is found in Acts 10, which is a powerful testimony of the work of the Holy Spirit. A Roman centurion in the Mediterranean city of Caesarea had a vision in which he was to call for Peter, who was still in Joppa. (Verses 1-8)

Meanwhile, Peter had a vision of his own while the centurion's men were on their way from Caesarea to Joppa to fetch Peter! Hungry, Peter fell into a trance, saw heaven open and a giant sheet descending. In the sheet were lots of animals considered unclean by Jewish dietary laws. Yet, the Lord said, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat!" (Verses 9-13)

Can you imagine! A kosher Jew being told to eat what the Torah said was unclean. After some resistance on Peter's part, the Lord said, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." Of course, he wondered what it all meant, when suddenly, knock, knock, knock!

The Gentile centurion's servants were in Joppa seeking Peter and the Lord told him, "Go." Obediently, Peter went, and when they arrived in Caesarea, he found many Gentiles gathered together.

*<sup>28</sup> Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?" (Acts 10:28-29)*

Peter and the centurion traded stories regarding their visions, confirming God's plan to connect the Jewish evangelist with the wealthy Gentile centurion. Both were obedient to God's call, despite obstacles. Peter traveled a distance to get to the centurion, and he gave up Jewish law in favor of liberation to pursue what God declares clean! This was a monumental moment in early church history as Peter began to understand the good news of Jesus Christ is for Jews and Gentiles alike!

What can we learn from the tribe of Dan, Jonah and Peter?

We have all had Dan moments when we forsook the calling of God to pursue greener pastures. How often have we found ourselves taken captive by the very things we pursued?

We have all had Jonah moments when God called us one direction and we high-tailed it the opposite way. None of us have been spit up on shore by a great fish, but haven't we have all encountered consequences convincing enough to lead us back to the path we were called by God?

And yes, we have all had Peter moments when the surge of Holy Spirit power rushed through us to give us the courage to do what we never thought possible.

What kind of day will you have today? Dan, Jonah or Peter? Make it a Peter day!

PS: There is a third Peter narrative, and it will be revealed onsite when we arrive in Caesarea!

