

D. LEARNING MORE ABOUT BIBLE TIMES

Jews and Gentiles

In the Old Testament, God commanded the Jews to separate themselves from their heathen neighbors. He knew that if His people had close contact with the ungodly, they would find it difficult to remain holy themselves. However, God showed in various ways that He still loved the Gentiles and accepted those who had faith in Him.

During New Testament times, both Jews and Gentiles lived in Palestine. Neither group enjoyed living close to the other. To keep from losing their identity as a people, the Jews had invented many extra rules to keep themselves apart from others. They despised the Gentiles (instead of just keeping themselves pure), and the Gentiles disliked them for it. The following information will help you to understand the problem between Jews and Gentiles, and why the Jews objected when Jesus and the apostles helped Gentiles.

Gentiles had to become proselytes (converts) before the Jews would teach them about their religion. Otherwise, the Jews felt they had no right to know about God. If Gentiles asked about their beliefs, some Jews cursed them rather than giving them an answer.



Proselyte Family at Prayer

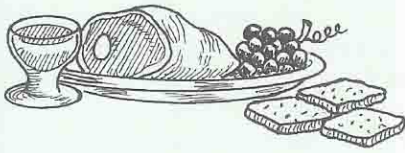
Despised Children

Children born of mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles were considered illegitimate by the Jews. Some Jews of Jesus' time believed that everything that caused the Gentiles to increase was sinful. For this reason, they refused to help any Gentile mother.

Jews did not try to put Gentiles into danger. But if they saw a Gentile in danger, some Jews believed it was wrong to help him.



God had commanded the Jews to avoid certain foods. But strict Jews of Jesus' time considered all foods touched by Gentiles to be unclean. Gentile servants could never be left alone in a room with food, lest they touch something. Even catching a whiff of Gentile wine made a Jew "unclean." When a Gentile milked a cow, Jews could not drink the milk. Neither could they enter a Gentile's house without becoming "unclean" for the rest of the day.



Gentiles set aside shady groves as places for idol worship. The Jews were correct in avoiding these places. However, some of their rules regarding these trees were extreme. Not only did they refuse to sit in the shade of such trees, but they also believed that eating bread that was baked over a fire of their branches was wrong. Even wearing a garment that was woven with a shuttle made from such a tree was considered sinful.



- The book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (mentioned in the Teacher's Introduction) has several appendices that give interesting information such as this. Much of this information is not commonly known and will add interest to your teaching if you have time to study it.