

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #238

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 10

Cornelius Sends for Peter

1. There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.
2. A devoted man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always.
3. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"
4. And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" so he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.
5. "Now send men to Joppa and send for Simon, whose surname is Peter.
6. "He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."
7. And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually.
8. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius' name means *the beam of the sun*, and surely this man was a light to many because he had been touched by the son. He was stationed at Caesarea, which was the Roman headquarters in Palestine, and he was a centurion, which means he was over 100 Roman soldiers. Disgusted with the paganism of Rome, Cornelius had turned to God. According to Barclay, when a man was identified in the New Testament as a *God fearer*, he was usually a Gentile who believed in one God and attended the Jewish synagogue but did not believe in circumcision nor did he embrace the Jewish law. Furthermore, Cornelius was not a Christian believer initially but was only a man who believed in God and lived a godly life, giving generously to the poor and given to prayer. The Lord honored his faithfulness and Cornelius' steadfastly walking in what little he knew of God by sending an angel to him at the ninth hour which was 3 PM. This was the hour of prayer

in Jerusalem. Nine in scripture symbolizes completeness, finality, and fullness. Nine is the last of digits, and three (which represents divine completion) times three equals nine. There are nine fruits and nine gifts and nine months for the fruit of the womb. The ninth hour was the hour, according to the synoptic Gospels, when Jesus cried out and then died (Matthew 27:44-46, Mark 15:33-34, Luke 23:44) and the hour when Peter and John, on the way to the temple, healed the lame man.

Notice that the angel gave Cornelius the Apostle's name, the city where he was lodging, the occupation and name of the host, and the address. The angel did not minister to Cornelius nor share with him the Gospel message. Angels are ministering spirits sent forth to them who are heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). God did not send the angel to convert Cornelius. He sent a believer, i.e. Simon Peter, to share the word of salvation. Also notice that Cornelius immediately obeys what the angel tells him.

Joppa was about 30 miles south of Caesarea. The name Joppa means *beautiful*. Joppa is now called Jaffa, a suburb of Tel Aviv, and is located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, one of the bluest and most beautiful bodies in the world. Two famous Bible personalities came from Joppa- Dorcas or Tabitha, who was healed by Peter, and Simon the Tanner.

Simon, the tanner, no doubt, like Dorcas, was a Christian believer. The fact that Simon Peter stayed with Simon the tanner indicates that Simon Peter was become less rigid concerning the Jewish laws. Simon worked with dead animals, and thus he was permanently unclean, according to Jewish law (Numbers 19:11-13). No strict Jew would have stayed in the house of a tanner. Perhaps the reason Simon lived on the seashore was because of his uncleanness from working with these dead animals, and perhaps Peter went to the roof top to escape the horrible smell of leather being cured. At any rate, I don't think there is any other tanner named in the whole Bible.

Peter Sees the Great Sheet

9. The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.
10. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.
11. And saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.
12. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

13. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat."
14. But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."
15. And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."
16. This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.
17. Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate.
18. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.
19. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.
20. "Arise, therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them."
21. Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?"
22. And they said, "Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, one who hears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear words from you."

This passage speaks of one of the greatest days in the history of the Church. In fact, before this time the Church was made up of Jews who happened to believe in Jesus but were still true Jews who strictly observed three things: 1) the sanctity of the Sabbath, 2) circumcision, and 3) the dietary laws. We will see in the next passage that Cornelius becomes the first non-Jew or Gentile to become a Christian. Thus, the Church became open to all, including non-Jews. If Peter had not seen this sheet, we might all have never known that Jesus had other sheep (John 10:16-*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they will hear My voice and these will be one flock and one shepherd.*)

Four is a very important number here. Sometimes it can mean *testing*, but in this passage of scripture it is symbolic of the whole world, as in the four corners of the world, or world-wide. These animals not only represent the unclean animals which the law strictly prohibited the Jews to eat as in Leviticus 11, but they also are symbolic of the various nations, just as the eagle is a symbol of America. Basically, the Jewish dietary laws allowed Jews to eat only animals which chew the cud and which had cloven feet.

The vision happened three times so that Peter could not mistake what the Lord was telling him. The Lord was showing Peter that He could cleanse the common and unclean nations, whether Hebrew or Gentile. Thus, this is the fourth and final step in the Great Commission. Jesus said to go make disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2), in Judea (Acts 7-9), in Samaria (Acts 8) and in the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 10-28).

Peter Preaches to the Gentiles

23. Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.
24. And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.
25. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.
26. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up. I myself am also a man."
27. And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.
28. 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.
29. "Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"
30. So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,
31. "And said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.
32. 'Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'
33. "So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now, therefore, we are all present before God to hear all the things commanded you by God."
34. Then Peter opened his mouth and said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.
35. "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.
36. "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ-He is Lord of all-

37. "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:
38. "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.
39. "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.
40. "Him God raised up on the third day and showed Him openly.
41. "not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.
42. "And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.
43. "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

Notice that the men did not come into the house until Peter invited them in. No respectable Jew would have allowed a non-Jew or even a Jew who was not following the law to enter nor go into a non-Jew's house. The Jews thought that all other people were not under the mercies of God. Cornelius, knowing this and perhaps wondering if Peter would enter his house, met him at the door. Peter not only entered but quickly told Cornelius not to bow down and worship him since he was only a man too. What a lesson Peter had learned from the dropped sheet vision, i.e. that God shows no partiality.

We cannot fault the Jews too much for their attitude that they were superior to all others. From Abraham through the First Coming of Christ, God dealt specifically with the chosen people, i.e. the Jews. God chose the Jews so that they would preserve the scriptures, hold on to the covenants and promises of God, have the Law and the Shekinah Glory, and preserve a seed line from which the Messiah could be born. Jesus Christ "came unto His own, and His own received Him not (John 1:11). It was only after the Resurrection that the Gospel was opened to whosoever will. All of this had been prophesied (Genesis 22:18, Isaiah 11:1-5; Isaiah 10; Isaiah 54:3; Jeremiah 16:19; Malachi 1:11 to name just a few), but Peter did not fully get it yet. He does open the door and brings a "first fruits" type of revival. It is up to Paul, however, to continue as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Gentiles Are Baptized in the Spirit and Speak in Tongues

44. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

45. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

46. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,

47. "Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

The baptism of these Gentile believers in the Holy Spirit shocked the Jewish Christians. In the Book of Acts there are only two sovereign outpouring of the Spirit, i.e. outpourings that did not follow the laying on of hands or the ministry of individuals. These two outpourings were totally unexpected and a work of the Holy Spirit without any use of men: The Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and then this outpouring in Acts 10. Always remember that Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Fellow believers baptize in water.

Kevin Conner shows the comparison between Noah and the Ark and the book of Acts:

Noah	Peter
Three storied Ark of Salvation	The Father, Son, & Holy Spirit
7 of each of clean animals on Ark	The House of Israel and Judah
2 of unclean animals	The Gentiles
Animals enter by door of Ark	Jews and Gentiles enter by Door of Christ
Animals all one in Ark	Jews and Gentiles all one in Christ
End of ungodly flesh	End of Flesh-life of sin
Flood waters of Baptism	Waters of Baptism for all

The last sentence in this Chapter 10 is interesting. These new converts needed to be and wanted to be taught. After they received both the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the baptism in water, Peter most likely stayed with them for a period to teach them. As we will see in the next chapter, however, Peter was initially criticized by the Jewish Christians, including the Apostles at Jerusalem for eating with these Gentile brothers. Nothing much has changed. We have known of many groups who think they have all the answers and have criticized other groups. We will address this more next week.