

## Acts 10 • A Ministry Turning Point

### Introduction

*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*

— Acts 1:8

*Beginning in Acts 2 we saw Peter assuming the lead in taking what began in Jerusalem to all the Jews in surrounding Judea. Beginning in Acts 8 Peter supported the expansion of the Gospel to the Samaritans. Now he will play an integral part in fulfilling Christ's command by opening the door of faith to the Gentiles and on “to the remotest part of the earth”. Here as in every other case when God wants to do a work, He calls a man of God, empowers him with the Spirit of God, and enables him to preach the Word of God.*

<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, <sup>2</sup>a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. <sup>3</sup>About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, “Cornelius!”

<sup>4</sup>And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, “What is it, Lord?”

And he said to him, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup>Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; <sup>6</sup>he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.”

<sup>7</sup>When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, <sup>8</sup>and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

### [Read v.1-8]

#### **Q: First of all, what is significant about Caesarea at this time?**

A: This is a Roman city bearing the name of the Roman emperor, functioning as the Roman capital of the province of Palestine. In no way is this considered to have any kind of “Jewish” connection or purpose.

#### **Q: Second, what is significant about Cornelius from an earthly point of view?**

A: He is not just a Gentile, but a Roman military commander.

#### **Q: What is significant about Cornelius from a spiritual point of view?**

A: He was devout, honest, generous and sincere – all qualities of a very **religious** person, but he was not a saved man or what we would call a regenerate believer.

**Point:** *This is a very important biblical example which refutes the argument that there are “many ways” to God and that there can be those who are saved by God without an exclusive saving faith in Christ. Cornelius represents those who may be sincerely religious, but they are nonetheless lost without Christ!*

#### **Q: What do the characteristics in v.2 tell us about Cornelius?**

1. “...a devout man...” tells us he is sincere in his obedience to the whole Word of God as summarized in the first tablet to love God.
2. “...with all his household...” tells us that he is not just in it for himself but is sincere to the point of seeing others live in accordance with God's Word and ways.
3. “...gave many alms...” tells us he is sincere in his obedience to the whole Word of God as summarized in the second tablet to love others.
4. “...prayed to God continually...” tells us that this is not just an infatuation but a lifestyle.

#### **Q: Why didn't God save time and just have the angel share the Gospel message with Cornelius?**

A: Because God has not given to angels the ministry of sharing the Gospel with sinners.

**Application:** *Sharing the Gospel is a privilege given to us which the angels cannot have. God is already in the process of preparing those He intends for us to share the Gospel with.*

<sup>9</sup>On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. <sup>10</sup>But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; <sup>11</sup>and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, <sup>12</sup>and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup>A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" <sup>14</sup>But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." <sup>15</sup>Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." <sup>16</sup>This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

<sup>17</sup>Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; <sup>18</sup>and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. <sup>19</sup>While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup>But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself."

<sup>21</sup>Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?"

<sup>22</sup>They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you." <sup>23</sup>So he invited

### [Read v.9-16]

**Q: How might what is taking place be a fulfillment of the principle, "God prepares us for what He is preparing for us"?**

A: It is God who is preparing the way and hearts for the Gospel to be preached to Cornelius representing all the nations of the earth, and God who is preparing the way and hearts of Peter to preach the Gospel as he represents all believers.

**Q: Why should we immediately recognize that there is a greater spiritual meaning to this vision?**

A: Throughout Scripture there is a repeated teaching relationship associating physical food to God's Word. This was the greater teaching of the manna (Dt. 8:16) and the feeding of the 5,000 (Jn. 6:35). Peter's physical hunger is leveraged for a greater teaching concerning spiritual hunger.

**Q: Why might Peter's initial resistance be understandable?**

A: He might be thinking he is being tested as to whether he will uphold the Levitical laws concerning what foods are "clean" versus "unclean".

**Q: Why would this be particularly relevant to the current situation where Peter, a devout Jew, is concerned?**

A: Because Gentiles did not observe God's dietary Laws, they were by default considered by Jews to be spiritually unclean and therefore unfit for God's service, a kind of "lost cause".

**Application:** Peter is still judging people by whether or not they hold to God's law instead of realizing that no one can be compliant with God's Word unless they are truly observant from the heart. It is just as important for the bearer of the Gospel to have a right heart as it is the recipient of the Gospel.

### [Read v.17-23a]

**Q: Why did Peter consent to go to the Gentiles? Was it because he understood the vision?**

A: At this point (confirmed by his testimony in chapter 11) Peter went not because he understood the vision but because the Holy Spirit told him to go.

**Q: What did Peter do which might indicate his heart is starting to change?**

A: If he was to continue strictly observing the Law as he had been taught, applying it to Gentile relationships, he would have never offered them lodging.

**Application:** Whether we fully understand it or not, what is taking place in the earthly realm is a reflection of things taking place in the spiritual realm. What God was teaching Peter spiritually had a real-life application physically.

them in and gave them lodging.

And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. <sup>24</sup>On the following day he entered Caesarea.

Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup>When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. <sup>26</sup>But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

<sup>27</sup>As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. <sup>28</sup>And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. <sup>29</sup>That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me."

<sup>30</sup>Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, <sup>31</sup>and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. <sup>32</sup>Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' <sup>33</sup>So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

<sup>34</sup>Opening his mouth, Peter said:

"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. <sup>36</sup>The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)— <sup>37</sup>you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. <sup>38</sup>You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup>We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

### [Read v.23b-33]

**Q: We know that Christ gave the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) to take the Gospel to the whole world, and had already established that it was not physical things which made someone "unclean" (Mt. 15:17-20), so what is Peter's problem? Why is he so slow to get on board?**

A: It probably due to his still clinging to a popular teaching about the Messiah which was not really true, that the Jews would first be saved in their entirety as a prelude to the Messiah establishing His earthly kingdom over the entire earth.

At the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13) Peter acted the way he did because he thought the Millennial Reign was beginning. At the Olivet Discourse the disciples wanted to know, "When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of the Your coming and the end of the age?" (Mt. 24:3) At His ascension the disciples queried, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac. 1:6) It is very likely that Peter is still fixated on the notion that the Messiah will save and elevate the whole of Israel before attending to the rest of the world, and has been concentrating his efforts on all things Jewish toward that end.

**Q: What has the vision accomplished in Peter so far?**

A: It has spurred him to visit this Gentile household.

**Q: What has the vision NOT accomplished?**

A: Peter does not yet understand its full meaning because he still asks them why they sent for him.

**Q: What is the need for both the messenger and the listener?**

A: To "hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord". It is always about the Word.

**Application:** If we are holding to a doctrine, theory, or principle which prohibits us from sharing the Gospel, it is no doubt an unbiblical ideal.

### [Read v.34-43]

**Q: This is a very important starting point: Does Peter say that all who do "good" will be saved? Or only those who are obedient to the Jewish application of the Old Testament Law?**

A: No. Peter says "God is not one to show partiality" to reinforce that salvation comes to "the man who fears Him and does what is right". It is obedience to God's Word and ways, not the traditions of men or works.

**Q: We discussed previously Peter's predisposition to Israel first. How is that affirmed here?**

A: He characterizes it as, "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel". (v.36) This is further supported by his contention, "He ordered us to preach to the people" (v.42) which would be interpreted as strictly being Israel. Now he is basically revealing that the work of Christ from the ministry of John the Baptist through the message and miracles of Christ on through to His death and resurrection are not exclusive to Israel. Peter is now both teaching and personally realizing there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles.

<sup>40</sup>God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, <sup>41</sup>not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. <sup>45</sup>All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup>For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, <sup>47</sup>“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” <sup>48</sup>And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

— Galatians 3:28

**Q: What is the key truth which Peter speaks here?**

A: “...everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”. (v.43)

**Point:** All those who still contend that Gentiles must still obey some or all of the Old Testament Law such as circumcision, worshiping on the Sabbath, etc. need to revisit these verses to understand that no such restrictions were expressed nor implied from the very outset.

**Application:** The message of the Gospel is not concerned with ritual observances or the traditions of men. It is focused solely on the teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ and how each individual heart responds, the correct way being to fear Him and do what is right (v.35) and to believe for the forgiveness of sins through His name.

**[Read v.44-48]**

**Q: Why did the Holy Spirit interrupt Peter’s speech?**

A: Those listening believed the Word!

**Q: Why was what took place just as much a testimony to Peter and the saved Jews who were present as it was to these new Gentile converts?**

A: It was a very effective testimony from God that it is not necessary for Gentiles to first become Jewish proselytes before becoming a Christian, not to mention the real plan for the Millennial Kingdom. The Gospel message of faith in Christ alone is enough.

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

— Romans 10:17

**Point:** Let us review the relationship in Acts between the Spirit and baptism:

- In Acts 2 the Jews believed and had to be baptized to receive the Spirit.
- In Acts 8 the Samaritans believed and were baptized, but they received the Spirit by the laying on of the Apostles’ hands.
- In Acts 10 the Gentiles heard the Word, believed, received the Spirit, and **then** were baptized. This is the pattern for the church today.

*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

— Ephesians 1:13–14

- Today, when sinners accept Christ, the Spirit comes into their body and they in turn are baptized into the body of Christ.

*The problem early Jewish believers struggled with is their thought that the Gentiles could only be saved through Israel’s rise as a kingdom, but it would later be explained by Paul that it was actually brought about by the **FALL** of Israel. (Rom. 11:11-25) In truth, Israel has been set aside and will not be prominent in God’s will on earth again until after the church has been withdrawn through the Rapture. There is always confusion whenever “kingdom truth” is mixed in with “church truth”.*

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## Overall Application

*The Church today operates under the Great Commission...*

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

— Matthew 28:19–20

- *We are to make disciples, which calls for a body of work that does not end at evangelism.*
- *We are to baptize, with which is implied fellowship in a local assembly.*
- *We are to teach the Word not just for the sake of hearing it, but for putting it into practice.*