



# Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 10

## Chapter 10

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- In Chapter 10, God begins to prepare Peter's heart to open the Gospel to the Gentiles
  - As we learned last week, the responsibility for the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles rested primarily on Paul's shoulders
    - Peter's ministry was always a ministry to the Jew
    - And yet Peter's willingness to reach out to the Gentiles was critically important to the outward movement of the Gospel
      - Peter holds the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:19)
  - So bringing Peter to an awareness of God's plan for the Gentile Church was a necessity
    - And Chapters 10-11 tell the story of how Peter's heart is opened to receiving Gentile converts

**Acts 10:1** Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

**Acts 10:2** 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.

**Acts 10:3** 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!"

**Acts 10:4** 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.

**Acts 10:5** "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

**Acts 10:6** he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

**Acts 10:7** 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,

**Acts 10:8** and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

- Cornelius as we learned last week was a Roman soldier
  - He is a devout man, but his religious devotion was directed toward the God of Israel
    - Cornelius is giving alms – religious donations – to the Jewish people
    - And he prayed to the Lord continually
  - This pattern of worshipping the true God but with a limited understanding is evidence of God's handiwork
    - Paul himself teaches about this kind of spontaneous response to God in Romans 2

**Rom. 2:14** For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

**Rom. 2:15** in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their

**conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,**

- Paul is describing the way God will step into lives of His elect and bring faith, sometimes without any direct connection to human revelation
  - He describes a Gentile who knows nothing of God's expectations for Law yet still strives to live in a way that pleases God
    - Where did such a person get the desire and understanding to live in a godly way?
    - Paul says the Law of God is written on their hearts
  - Remember the promise of the New Covenant?

**Jer. 31:33** “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people

- In other words, the way the occasional Gentile becomes a follower of the Living God is no different than the way all men and women come to that place
  - The Lord reveals Himself to our hearts by His Spirit
    - It is a supernatural process, not one dependent on human agency
  - But once the Lord makes that change, it will drive us to seek God in a new and earnest way
    - For Cornelius, it was through alms and prayer
    - And then God transitioned from the supernatural revelation of Himself to a reliance on human agency to transfer that knowledge
    - Always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit
  - For us today, the process is still the same
    - Our faith moment is a supernatural work of God to write the Law upon our hearts
    - But then God moves us forward through the help of others who have gone before us in this process
      - Recent experience with Jewish convert
  - When the time was right, the Lord sent an angel to Cornelius so that he would come to know Peter and understand and receive the full testimony of the Gospel
    - He's told to find Simon, not Peter
      - Probably because of Cornelius' affinity for Jews and his identification of their God with His people
    - And based on the angel's instructions, Cornelius moves quickly to comply

**Acts 10:9** 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.

**Acts 10:10** But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;

**Acts 10:11** and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

**Acts 10:12** and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

**Acts 10:13** A voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!”

**Acts 10:14** But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.”

**Acts 10:15** Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”

**Acts 10:16** This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

- The trip from Caesarea was a two day walk
  - On the second day at noon (sixth hour) Peter goes to the rooftop to pray
    - The rooftop was a place of privacy
    - While he was praying, the text says he became hungry
      - The sentence construction in Greek indicates he was extremely hungry
      - God appears to have created this strong sensation of hunger in Peter
  - With the power suggestion, God then leads Peter into a trance
    - From Heaven a large sail or sheet (literally, linen cloth) held up by four corners begins to descend to earth
      - Inside the sheet are all kinds of four-footed animals and other creatures
      - Notably, the sheet held many types of animals that were not lawful for Jews to eat according to the Mosaic Law
    - Peter felt great hunger, but not enough to eat something he had been taught and trained never to eat
  - So Peter responds indignantly
    - He begins, “No, Lord...”
      - Those two words should never appear together in that order
      - They are self-contradictory
        - Peter is behaving in a pattern similar to days past
        - When he heard that Jesus would die, he declared, God forbid it Lord
    - He then says he has never eaten anything that wasn’t kosher and killed properly
      - The Jewish dietary laws require that only certain kinds of animals be eaten
      - And even those must be killed in a specific way that removes the blood
        - The animal can’t be killed in the common way, which was strangling –

or any method that left the blood in the body

- God's response to Peter is that Peter shouldn't consider something unclean if God has cleansed it
  - And in the case of the dietary restrictions of the Law, they were no longer in effect because the Law no longer held authority over those who had received the Messiah
  - Furthermore, God is teaching a principle to Peter
    - We follow God where God goes
  - And as God changes His expectations and purposes, we are obliged to change with Him
    - The dietary rules came at a point in time for a purpose
    - Once that purpose has been met, then God will remove those restrictions
  - This was Paul's essential argument in Galatians

**Gal. 3:17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

**Gal. 3:18** For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

**Gal. 3:19** Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

**Gal. 3:20** Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

**Gal. 3:21** Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.

**Gal. 3:22** But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

**Gal. 3:23** But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

**Gal. 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

**Gal. 3:25** But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- The ultimate purpose in this message to Peter was to create a willingness in him to preach the Gospel to Gentiles
  - The previously unclean nations of pagans were about to become children of God by faith
- Despite the clear message, Peter resists
  - The whole conversation is repeated twice more
    - Can you imagine denying God's command in a personal conversation?
    - One commentator suggested that Peter may have heard Jesus' voice in

this conversation and probably recognized it from memory

- If so, I wonder if Peter had thoughts of a previous conversation of threes?
  - Jesus asks Peter if he loved the Lord three times
    - Which followed Peter's denial of the Lord three times
    - Which itself followed his refusal to believe he could ever forsake the Lord
- Peter has a history of stubbornness when it comes to listening to the Lord
  - Nevertheless, the Lord has made his point and Peter didn't miss it

**Acts 10:17** 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; **Acts 10:18** and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.

**Acts 10:19** While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you.

**Acts 10:20** "But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself."

**Acts 10:21** 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?"

**Acts 10:22** 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."

**Acts 10:23** So he invited 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.

- Peter is troubled and puzzled by what he received in the vision
  - While still thinking about it, the men from Cornelius arrive
    - The fact that these two events are so closely associated in time is further evidence that the message Peter received is related to the arrival of these men
  - In fact, Peter gets a second vision from God
    - The Spirit tells Peter that these men are looking for him and he must go down immediately and follow them
      - Since these were Roman soldiers asking for Peter, his host may have tried to hide Peter or deny he was in the house
      - So Peter himself was directed to greet the men
    - Furthermore, the Spirit has sent these men to Peter, so don't fear their intentions
      - Go with them without concerns
- And you have to love the dedication to the mission of the Roman soldiers

- They deliver the precise message Cornelius gave them
- Peter receives them, and gives them lodging
  - They had arrived at the end of a second day's walk, and it was too far to set out on a trip to Caesarea until morning
  - They left the next morning, and six other Christians in Joppa accompanied Peter
    - We learn the number in Acts 11
    - A total of seven Jews witnessed the first Gentile conversion
- This point in the book of Acts is the turning point for Gentiles
  - Here the man with the keys to the Kingdom is about to turn the key for the sake of Gentiles
    - Beginning with this centurion
  - And to show how monumental this moment is for the Church, consider what it took to get here:
    - Peter, brought to Joppa through a series of circumstances
    - An angel sent to Cornelius, a delegation coming to Peter's home, a voice from Heaven to Peter, and the Holy Spirit coaching Peter to respond

**Acts 10:24** On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

**Acts 10:25** When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.

**Acts 10:26** But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

**Acts 10:27** As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.

**Acts 10:28** 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.

**Acts 10:29** "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."

- Cornelius' first reaction is to worship the one sent to him
  - This is understandable
    - The centurion received his instructions from an angel and must have been waiting for this encounter with tremendous anticipation
    - But Peter corrects him and reminds Cornelius that Peter's presence in his home is a risk for Peter
      - Because he's violating the religious rules of the Jewish people
      - And Peter says he came without objection, so he's done his part
        - So let's get on with this
        - The tone and sense of Peter's words suggest he's not comfortable and

he's here somewhat reluctantly

- Despite his words to the contrary
- The Centurion responds...

**Acts 10:30** 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,

**Acts 10:31** and he said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

**Acts 10:32** ‘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.’

**Acts 10:33** “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.”

- By his own words, Cornelius describes how the Lord spoke to him and instructed him to find Peter
  - And he invites Peter to present the truth Cornelius has missed up to this point
    - He knew of God and he knew that the God of Israel was the only true God
      - But he lacked the fulfillment of what he sought
      - There was a piece missing, and he was ready for that piece
  - So Peter responds with another version of his Pentecost and Sanhedrin speeches

**Acts 10:34** Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,

**Acts 10:35** but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

**Acts 10:36** “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) —

**Acts 10:37** you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

**Acts 10:38** “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.

**Acts 10:39** “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.

**Acts 10:40** “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,

**Acts 10:41** 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.

**Acts 10:42** “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.

**Acts 10:43** “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

- Peter begins reminding himself of what he’s always known
  - The language is Greek, but the phrase is a direct translation of the Hebrew in Deuteronomy

**Deut. 10:17** “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.

- On the contrary, Peter affirms that God welcomes anyone who fears Him (has faith) and accomplishes works of righteousness (gives evidence of faith)
  - Then Peter gives the presentation of the Gospel to this Gentile
  - In his delivery of this message of hope, Peter uses his keys to open the Kingdom to the Gentiles according to God’s purpose and leading

**Acts 10:44** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

**Acts 10:45** 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.

**Acts 10:46** For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,

**Acts 10:47** “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”

**Acts 10:48** And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

- Here’s the pattern we expected to see as a new category of believers receive the Gospel
  - Even as Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit falls upon all who were listening
    - Notice that the effect extends beyond the Gentiles
      - Even those who were previously indwelt by the Spirit are responding in this moment
      - This fact means that the response is not a response of new faith
        - It is something altogether different
        - It is a special manifestation added to this moment by the Holy Spirit to mark the occasion in a unique way
    - The Jews understand the meaning of these signs
      - It’s been seen twice beforehand
        - First at Pentecost and then with the Samaritans

- But now with Gentiles?
  - It's something no Jew ever imagined would happen
- And the moment comes complete with all the signs and wonders we've come to expect when the kingdom arrives for a new category of believers
  - Finally, the Jewish observers have no choice but to accept what they've seen
  - And they agree they can't refuse baptism
- This conversation at the end is important in the way it keeps baptism in its proper role
  - Cornelius and his household were made children of God by faith in the Gospel
    - And the arrival of the Holy Spirit gave proof of their acceptance by God
    - At that point, the Jewish observers could only acknowledge what was obvious
      - Then they agreed that since these Gentiles were believers, therefore they must be baptized
      - Their own reason for not withholding baptism was that they had already received the Holy Spirit
        - Water baptism pictures the baptism of the Holy Spirit
        - So if the Holy Spirit had arrived, then water baptism was the natural next step
  - But we see that baptism didn't make them believers
    - It was a recognition of their faith
  - But it was important (Peter ordered...) and it was the means by which Cornelius joined into the Church and into fellowship with believers