

Acts Chapter 10

Acts 10:1 "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian [band],"

A centurion was one of 60 officers in a Roman legion, each of whom commanded 100 men (see note on Matt. 8:5).

“Cornelius”:

He was a Roman centurion at Caesarea who would have been under Pontius Pilate’s authority until A.D. 36, and who was in command of approximately a hundred men.

He is mentioned only in Acts 10 but he is important because he was the first known Gentile to be saved (11:1, 18; 15:7, 14).

“Italian band (or Cohort)”:

Ten Cohorts of 600 men each makes up a legion.

Philip had gone earlier to the Samaritans and to the proselyte from Ethiopia (chapter 8), but both of these had undergone circumcision and were following the law.

So they were not a major offense to the Jews.

The Jews could, according to the law, fellowship with such men.

But such was not the case with an uncircumcised Gentile like Cornelius, even though he was a “God-fearer” who gave alms and prayed to God.

Hence, God used four supernatural events (11:4-17), to persuade Peter to go to the Gentiles and to convince the Jerusalem Jews to accept them.

The importance of the “Cornelius” incident in the history of the early church is evidenced in that, not only does chapter 10 record the historical account, but chapter 11 reiterates it.

Herein is recorded the conversion of the first Gentiles (11:1, 18).

Gentiles who had become circumcised proselytes had no doubt already been saved (2:10; 8:27), but not those uncircumcised (and so unaccepted by the Jews for fellowship).

This event happened very early in the history of the church (15:7, 14).

“Caesarea” was a magnificent Roman city built about 10 years before the birth of Christ by Herod the Great in honor of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus.

It was situated on the Mediterranean coast 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem at a site formerly called Strato's Tower.

Caesarea was the official residence for both the Herodian kings and the Roman procurators who at various times governed Judea and Samaria.

This Gentile city was a busy commercial center, handling both inland trade between Egypt and the north (Tyre), and the maritime trade made possible by its man-made harbor.

Three significant New Testament events occurred at Caesarea, which is mentioned only in Acts.

First, this is where the door of the church age was opened in somewhat of a second Pentecost for the Gentiles (11:1, 18; 15:7, 14), through the Roman centurion Cornelius (verses 1-48).

Second, evidently Caesarea became the base for Philip the Evangelist's lifelong ministry (8:40 with 21:8).

Third, Paul stopped there several times, and later he was imprisoned there for two years (24:27), before being shipped to Rome for another two years of imprisonment (28:30).

Today, the city is in ruins.

Its interesting features are the enormous Roman Theater and aqueduct, and the fort which was built by the Crusaders.

Verses 2-4

Though Cornelius's good works and prayers served as a "memorial," they did not save him.

He was saved after he heard the gospel of Jesus Christ (see verse 44; 11:10-14).

Acts 10:2 "[A] devout [man], and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always."

"Feared God":

A technical term used by Jews to refer to Gentiles who had abandoned their pagan religion in favor of worshiping Jehovah God.

Such a person, while following the ethics of the Old Testament, had not become a full proselyte to Judaism through circumcision.

Cornelius was to receive the saving knowledge of God in Christ (see note on Rom. 1:20).

Cornelius is a Roman.

He is a Gentile who loves God and prays.

This Roman Gentile, not only loved God and prayed, but was like Dorcas in the last lesson.

He was full of good deeds.

He feared and loved God.

God does not let that kind of loyalty to Him go unnoticed.

Cornelius is to be the first convert of a Gentile to Christianity.

You see, Saul was a Jew as well as being a Roman citizen.

Acts 10:3 "He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius."

“About the night hour”:

3:00 p.m. (see note on 3:1).

People who God speaks to in visions are those who keep their mind and spirit stayed upon God.

Cornelius was such a man.

Cornelius was a military man whom many believe would keep him from knowing God.

God does not look at the outside of man, but at the heart.

Cornelius had a pure heart.

This visit was from God.

God sent this angel (ministering spirit), to Cornelius.

This angel knew Cornelius' name, because God had given it to him.

Acts 10:4 "And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

“Memorial”:

A remembrance.

Cornelius' prayers, devotion, faith and goodness were like a fragrant offering rising up to God.

God has been aware of the good deeds and prayers of Cornelius.

Fear gripped Cornelius.

You remember he feared God, and he associated this Angel messenger with God.

Verses 5-6

Philip was probably already in Caesarea at this time, (8:40), but God required Cornelius to "send" for "Peter."

Peter's presence here was just as important as it was in Samaria (8:14-17).

On each of the three occasions where God initiates a new aspect of the church age, at Pentecost among the Jews, then among the Samaritans; and here among the Gentiles.

God chooses Peter for the task, thereby providing unity and equality among each of these groups within the church.

Note that even Peter comes under attack for his actions (11:1-2).

How much more any other man!

Acts 10:5 "And now send men to Joppa, and call for [one] Simon, whose surname is Peter:"

We see specific instructions for Cornelius to do.

Just as Cornelius had said above, "What is it, Lord?"

That is every person's question: What must I do to be saved, Lord?

Acts 10:6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do."

We see here, that the Lord leaves no question where they are to go and who to see.

Many times, we have a tendency to get ahead of God, although we must wait for our instructions from God.

Acts 10:7 "And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;"

“Devout soldier” (see note on verses 1 and 2).

Notice, Cornelius did not delay.

He chose his most trusted servants to do the job.

Acts 10:8 "And when he had declared all [these] things unto them, he sent them to Joppa."

He sent them exactly where the Lord had told him to.

Acts 10:9 "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:"

“Housetop ... to pray”:

All kinds of worship were occurring on the flat roofs of Jewish homes (see 2 Kings 23:12; Jeremiah 19:13; 32:29).

“Sixth hour”:

12:00 noon.

Cornelius had sent his men to Joppa to find Peter.

About noon, Peter went up on the house top to pray.

Acts 10:10 "And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,"

This was a supernatural hunger.

Now it was the time of day to eat, but this hunger was brought on by the Spirit of God, and not by the flesh.

This trance just meant that the things of the real world around him were not in his mind.

Acts 10:11 "And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:"

He saw a vision of a vessel descending from heaven.

The sheet knit at the four corners means the four corners of the earth and indicates that this is a universal message.

Four means universe, spiritually, or all of the people.

This message was from God to the people of the earth.

Heaven (its origin), and earth (its destination), show it is a message from God.

Acts 10:12 "Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air."

“All manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth”:

Both clean and unclean animals.

To keep the Israelites separate from their idolatrous neighbors, God set specific dietary restrictions regarding the consumption of such animals (Lev. 11:25-26).

These represented all life, except human life on the earth.

There were clean and unclean life.

Acts 10:13 "And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat."

“Kill, and eat”:

With the coming of the New Covenant and the calling of the church, God ended the dietary restrictions (Mark 7:19).

This message had come to Peter, because now he was the last word on Christian matters here on the earth.

Jesus had placed him as the ruling authority of His church on earth.

Acts 10:14 "But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean."

“Common or unclean”:

Impure or defiled.

What Peter is saying, is that he had kept the Levitical law about clean and unclean food to eat.

Certain animals, certain fish, and certain fowl were forbidden for the Jew to eat.

Peter had kept this ordinance.

Here though, he is disobeying God.

Acts 10:15 "And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common."

"God hath cleansed":

More than just abolishing the Old Testament dietary restrictions, God made unity possible in the church of both Jews, symbolized by the clean animals, and Gentiles, symbolized by the unclean animals, through the comprehensive sacrificial death of Christ (see note on Eph. 2:14).

God uses the sheet vision to teach Peter two important truths:

- (1) "God" has now "cleansed" all animals for food, contrary to the dietary codes of the Mosaic Law;
- (2) all men are fit for salvation (verse 28).

Acts 10:16 "This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

This voice spoke with authority and repeated it three times.

Then the vessel was taken up into heaven.

There is no question that this message is from God to mankind.

God made everything and everyone in the beginning, and He said it was good.

This message is twofold. Not only is it speaking to Peter about not calling any man common, but it is also speaking of eating food.

Food is made pure by prayer.

1 Timothy 4:4-5 "For every creature of God [is] good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:" "For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

We see from this that, God is saying that praying over food before we eat it and thanking God for it cleanses it for us.

We cannot call anyone common because except for the grace of God, or else we would be unclean ourselves.

Acts 10:17-18 "Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate," "And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there."

These men had been sent by Cornelius to Peter, to bring him to their master Cornelius.

God's timing is perfect.

Acts 10:19 "While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee."

This Spirit is the Holy Spirit of God because it is capitalized.

The Spirit reveals to Peter that the men are there.

Acts 10:20 "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them."

This still is the Spirit giving Peter instructions.

Peter is not to doubt, but go with them.

These three have actually been sent by the Spirit of God.

Cornelius gave the orders, but his orders came from the angel of the Lord.

Acts 10:21 "Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what [is] the cause wherefore ye are come?"

Peter already knows why they are here, but goes through the formality anyhow.

Acts 10:22 "And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by a holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee."

“Warned ... by a holy angel”:

See verses 3-6.

We see here, that Cornelius is well thought of not only by God, but by his own men and even all of the Jews who live around him.

These men of Cornelius tell Peter that Cornelius was told of God to send for Peter to come.

Peter is to bring a message from God to Cornelius.

Acts 10:23 "Then called he them in, and lodged [them]. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him."

“Called he them in”:

Self-respecting Jews did not invite any Gentiles into their home, especially soldiers of the hated Roman army.

“Certain brethren”:

Six Jewish believers (11:12), identified as “the circumcised believers” (in verse 45).

A true Jew would never have invited these non-Jewish people to spend the night.

They were thought of as unclean people.

Christians were not that particular, but had been taught to be a friend to man.

Jesus had even done miracles for those who were not Hebrews.

These brethren of Peter's were not physical brothers, but they were brothers in Christ.

They were disciples of Jews.

It was not unusual for an apostle to be accompanied by other disciples.

Peter was not going, because of the request of Cornelius' men, but because the Holy Spirit told him to go.

Acts 10:24 "And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends."

We see that Cornelius was waiting for Peter.

This unselfish man had invited others so that they might receive, as well.

Acts 10:25 "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped [him]."

Remember, Cornelius was a humble man.

He did not know who Peter was, only that God told him to send for Peter.

He perhaps, thought Peter to be deity so he fell down and worshipped Peter.

Acts 10:26 "But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man."

“I myself also am a man”:

See 14:11-15; Revelation 22:8-9)

Only the true God deserves our worship.

Peter was quick to tell Cornelius that he too, was a servant of God.

Acts Chapter 10 Questions

1. Who was Cornelius?
2. Where did he live?
3. Describe Cornelius' character?
4. How was he like Dorcas?
5. Who did Cornelius see in a vision?
6. How did Cornelius feel when he saw him?
7. Who did Cornelius call him?
8. What had come up as a memorial before God?
9. Where was Cornelius to send his men?
10. Who were they to go for?
11. Where was he staying?
12. Who did Cornelius send to Joppa?
13. Where did Peter go to pray at the sixth hour?
14. Why did he not eat?
15. What did Peter see in a vision?
16. What is the number four symbolic of?
17. How did we know this message was from God to man?
18. What was in the sheet?
19. What did the voice tell Peter to do?

20. What reply did Peter give?
21. The voice told Peter what about common things?
22. How many times did Peter see this?
23. What causes food to be clean?
24. What Scripture tells us that?
25. How did Peter feel about the vision?
26. What inquiry did Cornelians' men make?
27. Who told Peter to go with them?
28. Who really sent them?
29. What question did Peter ask the men?
30. Verse 22 tells us who, besides God, had great respect for Cornelius?
31. In verse 23, what did Peter do that a true Jew would not have done?
32. Who had Cornelius invited to meet Peter?
33. When Cornelius saw Peter, what did he do?
34. How did Peter correct him?