

ACTS 10

Chapters 10 and 11 mark a shift in the book of Acts. Those who were scattered in persecution from Jerusalem had been preaching the gospel only to the Jews but now they are overcoming their prejudices and are taking the Gospel to the Gentiles for they need Jesus just like the Jews. We have seen the Apostles use the *keys to the kingdom*” to open the door of faith first for the Jews in Acts 2; for the Samaritans in Acts 8; and now it was time for the Gentiles to be brought into the family of God in chapters 10-11. As the book of Ecclesiastes states there is a time and season for everything. Acts chapter 10 will reveal four acts to this wonderful blessing: (1) *Preparation – vs. 1-22*; (2) *Explanation - vs. 23-33*; *Proclamation – vs. 34-43*; and *Vindication – vs. 44-48*).

Preparation (vs. 1-22)

Vs. 1-2 - Caesarea was a predominately Roman city on the shores of the Mediterranean in Judea. At that time, it was the Roman capital of Judea, a beautiful city with awesome buildings and art. The text says “*certain*” man named Cornelius for a reason. As an army officer (centurion of the Italian Regiment) he was in a difficult position. He represented Rome, but his home was in Caesarea. Tired of pagan myths and rituals Cornelius turned to Judaism in hopes he could find salvation. He actively sought God, he revered God, he was generous in meeting other peoples needs and he prayed. Although he was “religious” these acts were not enough; Cornelius knew there was more. *It is amazing how close one can be to salvation; yet not be saved.*

The difference between where Cornelius was and millions today who attend church is that Cornelius knew his religious devotion in and of itself was not sufficient to save him. Many religious people today are satisfied their character, good works, and the fact they attend church consistently will get them to heaven. They attend church but they have no concept either of their own sin or of God's grace. In **chapter 11:13-14** we'll see Cornelius praying asking God to show him the way of salvation. Cornelius was ripe for the Gospel like millions today; we just need saved people planting seed and watering where the seed of the Gospel has been planted. Jewish people of that time respected and appreciated these "God-fearing Gentiles", but they could not really share their life and homes and food with them, because they were still in fact Gentiles and not full Jewish converts.

Vs. 3-6 – God sends an angel to tell Cornelius to go get Peter. The ninth hour (3pm in the afternoon) was one of the three customary times of prayer for Jews (read the **55th Psalm vs. 11** – 9am - 12pm – 3pm were typical times Jewish people prayed). Also, as Cornelius related the incident to Peter in **Acts 10:30**, he specifically said he was praying (at the ninth hour I prayed in my house). Regarding the phrase "*He saw clearly in a vision an angel of God*" - This was not a dream, nor did an angel physically appear to Cornelius. This was a vision that came in the "mind" of Cornelius. At the same time, it was so vivid

that Cornelius would later say, a man stood beside me in bright clothing (**Acts 10:30**). I love this one word “*Cornelius*” because it shows God knows us by name whether we are saved or unsaved. It is also significant that Cornelius responded with a healthy fear of the heavenly and holy (he was afraid). This shows that Cornelius knew about good and communicated with God, but he did not have a saving relationship with God by faith at this time. However, he was on God’s “preparation table.” Now regarding the phrase “*send for Simon whose surname is Peter*” - Probably, Cornelius didn’t even know who Peter was; but he knew that he should do what God told him to do, and he could trust that God was speaking to this one named Peter also. Regarding the phrase, “*He will tell you what you must do*” – notice God sent an angel in a vision to Cornelius, but He used a man to preach the gospel to him. Angels may help to connect men with God’s appointed preachers, they are never allowed to do more. God could have sent Cornelius to the evangelist Philip who was already in Caesarea but God was also preparing Peter who had lived an orthodox Jewish life to get ready to share the Gospel with Gentiles and to know that both Jews and Gentiles get saved the same way – by confessing with their mouth the Lord Jesus and believing God raised Jesus from the dead. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ Jews plus or minus nothing else. The preparation phase in these verses is for Jews and Gentiles.

Vs. 7-8 - Apparently, the faith of Cornelius was contagious and there were those of his household and under his command who also honored the God of Israel. There is something powerful about a household that has the one whom God calls to be the spiritual leader – the “man” when he gets saved. The fact that Cornelius readily and eagerly obeyed the angel is a sign of how much he desired the truth. **Jeremiah 29:13** says, *And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

Vs. 9-10 - As God spoke to Cornelius, and as Cornelius sent the messengers to call Peter, God also spoke to Peter himself. This is typically how God operates. He speaks to several people about a matter, not just one. Then confirmation is provided, and out of the mouth of two or three witnesses a word is established. Regarding the phrase “*Peter went up on the housetop to pray*” please don’t think that was strange or Peter was hiding from the Gentiles to pray, in that culture, the housetop was normally used as a sort of patio. The phrase in **vs. 10** is noteworthy – “*then he became very hungry.*” This often happens during prayer; distractions in our body and from outside the body come as we try to direct ourselves to God; Satan dreads saved people praying and will always try to distract us. God can use anything for our good and His glory, so God used Peter’s hunger to make him pay more attention!

Vs. 11-16 – Why would God place Peter in a trance or vision about food? To teach Peter both Jews and Gentiles were unclean before God; it takes the Gospel to cleanse both. This meant a Gentile did not have to become a Jew in order to be saved. In Peter’s trance or vision about food he saw all sorts of clean and unclean animals prominently displayed on a sheet-like background. The distinction between unclean and clean foods was a major problem between Jews and Gentiles of that day. Then, Peter heard a command: Rise, Peter, kill and eat. Regarding that phrase in **vs. 13** “*A voice came to him*” - we don’t know exactly what this was like for Peter. It is rare for God to speak in an audible voice but He can and will occasionally. Most often, God speaks to our inner man (while/after prayer/reading the Word, or silence and solitude/meditating on the Word). In **vs. 14** even though Peter’s initial refusal to the Lord’s command in the vision was a polite and respectful NO, it was nonetheless a No to God’s command. If Jesus is truly your Savior and “Lord” then our response to a command of God must be “Yes, Lord.” In seminary when we studied this text my professor shared a quote from the prince of preachers - Charles Spurgeon so profound I must repeat it: Peter had pretty much put God in a box of limitations, and now God was going to shake Peter up to change his thinking. He can do the same for us. “Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise may the Lord set you on fire, and

consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety.” Later on the Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 9:22** – *“to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”* Paul nor Peter engaged in sin, to win some, they just got out of their comfort zone – their rigidity to win some. The church can ostracize those who don’t dress like we think they should – ostracize those with tattoos, piercings, we have to understand we cannot clean a fish until its first caught. In **vs. 15**, *“And a voice spoke to him again the second time”* God responded clearly to Peter. What God has cleansed (declared clean) you must not call common (impure, unholy, unacceptable to God). The vision was a sign from God that Jews were no longer to call Gentiles unclean. God is breaking down Peter’s prejudices here.

Vs. 17-20 – God’s timing is perfect, note the phrase *“Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant”* - when the vision ended, Peter did not have it all figured out. We are told that the “Spirit” spoke to Peter. This was God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, speaking to Peter. God the Holy Spirit told Peter, “Three men are seeking you...go down and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them.” At

this point, God has not told Peter that his visitors were Gentiles. Normally, a godly Jew like Peter would not associate in this manner with Gentiles.

Knowing this, and knowing Peter's previous resistance (*Not so, Lord! in vs. 14*), God simply surprised Peter with the knowledge that these men were Gentiles. And Peter was to make no distinctions between the Jews and the Gentiles. All Peter needed to know was that the Spirit said, "I have sent them." And a sad reality is there is still remnants of this type of division in the church at large today...especially among some predominant Caucasian Baptist churches and some predominant African American Baptist churches...a major reason the Baptist General Convention of Texas was established was due to the fact it initially forbade African American Baptist churches from joining the Southern Baptist Convention.

Vs. 21-23 – Now although Peter obeyed God the Holy Spirit and he went away with the Gentiles in public; notice the later part of **vs. 23** that says *some brethren (meaning Jewish men) went with him (11:12 says it was 6 Jewish men accompanied Peter as witnesses)*. A Gentile – worse yet, an officer in the Roman army – wanted to hear the gospel from Peter. Peter never did anything like this before! How will he respond? The idea that God could send and use Gentiles was entirely new to Peter. God was expanding Peter's mind and heart. And by entertaining these Gentile guests, Peter went against the

customs and traditions of Israel, but not against God's Word. Possibly, at that very moment, God flooded Peter's heart with an understanding that though the Old Testament said God's people were not to become like their pagan neighbors, it also said God wanted His people to become a light to their neighbors who didn't know the true God. This text is so interesting and makes us peek at a person from the Old Testament. "Centuries ago another Jew had come to Joppa with a solemn message from his God, which he was commissioned to bear to the Gentiles. Do you remember "Jonah, the prophet", who took a ship from Joppa and he refused to be obedient to his divine call." Jonah ran from God's call, thinking he could get away from the Lord, and he did not share God's heart for the lost at first. Peter was willing to re-examine his traditions and prejudices in light of God's word – he was willing to engage in "Divine ReFOCUS" and he shared God's heart for a lost world. Are you like Peter or Jonah (prior to his great fish experience)?

Vs. 24 -26 - Cornelius was waiting for them in faith. He waited for Peter to come, knowing that since God motivated him to call Peter in the first place, God would bring the plan to completion (**Philippians 1:6**). Pay close attention to the phrase "*Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.*" Cornelius didn't know Peter, but must have thought he was a special man of God, so he fell down at his feet and worshipped him. It could have

been a moment where Peter accepted that honor especially since he had the 6 Jews accompany them. But Peter recognized he was a servant not a celebrity. That is why Peter corrected Cornelius by saying, “*Stand up; I myself am also a man.*” If Cornelius should not give such reverence to Peter, neither should Peter receive it. Pastors better watch out that they don’t allow themselves to be celebratory treated, I know armorbearer is in the Bible, but I personally believe that some pastors have taken it out of context and need to realize we are called out, of the called out, of the called out (called out of sin; saved – then called out from the saved to be a minister – and then called out from being a minister to being a pastor) but we are still “mere men.” It is passages like this that lead me to use the phrase as often as I can “To God be the Glory.” God will share everything with man but not His glory (read **Isaiah 42:8**).

Vs. 27-29 – One of the most important phrases in the book of the Acts is the short phrase in **vs. 27** “*He went in.*” Peter actually entered the house of a Gentile, something Jewish customs and traditions strictly prohibited. By entering a Gentile’s home, Peter showed that his heart and mind had changed, and that he had learned the lesson of the vision of the great sheet. This chapter reflects the conversion of Cornelius and the growth and development of Peter to fulfill **Acts 1:8**. When Peter said, “*I should not call any man*

common or unclean,” Peter understood that the vision was about people, not food. But the principle still relates to food. We understand believers are not under any obligation to keep a kosher diet. How we eat may be better or worse from a health perspective, but it doesn’t make us any more right with God. The Apostle Paul taught about this principle also when he said, in **Colossians 2:16-17** “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Finally, the phrase “Therefore I came” confirms if Peter had not received this vision, he would have never traveled with these Gentile messengers. God had to prepare Peter’s heart with the vision before Peter would come.

Vs. 30-33 – Even though Cornelius had not read **Jeremiah 29:13** he received an answer because he sought God in a way that an answer will always come (read **Jeremiah 29:13**). Regarding the statement “*I was fasting*” - the intensity of his prayer was evident. Cornelius sought after God so intensely that he fasted because for a time, food became less important. He sought God diligently and God revealed Himself to Cornelius (read **Mark 9:29** some things only come by prayer and fasting). The phrase “*I prayed in my house*” - undoubtedly, Cornelius prayed either generally to draw closer to God, or specifically that God would send the Messiah. God would answer this prayer

through the gospel Peter brought to Cornelius. This phrase is very important to note – *“Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.”* Although Cornelius was not a Christian in the sense that he was regenerated or born again, yet in this case God heard his prayers and remembered his generosity to others. This is because of how Cornelius sought God and the fact God knew in time Cornelius was going to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. God hears sinners when they are seeking to find Him. **Vs. 33** reflects a pastor/preacher dream situation – note the phrase *“Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”* Peter was prepared by the Holy Spirit, and those at Cornelius’ house were prepared to hear the message Peter brought. Our blessing is greatly increased when we prepare ourselves to hear the word of God. *How should present day Christians prepare themselves for Sunday’s worship and the Word service?* If you want to hear a good message when you get to church in person or online; did you pray for the message and the messenger? Absolutely it is the preacher’s responsibility to pray, study, and prepare to share God’s word. But when God prepares the messenger as well as those who are to hear Him, then tremendous things can happen.” Every Tuesday morning pray God unveil to your pastor what He would have me say to you on Sundays...For the past 10 years I have been pastor, Tuesday has always been the day I begin the

exegetical process of sermon preparation...that would be a good time for you to pray for the message and the messenger.

Vs. 34 – The first thing we need to notice is there can be no faith apart from the Word of God. I know the praise and worship songs minister to us in a special way; however, singing only without the word of God is not God’s methodology to salvation. **Romans 10:17** says, “*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Note carefully the all important phrase “*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality*” because it is the foundation for Peter’s understanding that the gospel should now go forth to Gentiles. This statement goes completely against the prevailing Jewish thought at that time that God certainly did show partiality, towards the Jews and against the Gentiles. In essence, many Jews in Peter’s day thought that God loved the Jews while hating the Gentiles. It was common for a Jewish man to begin the day with a prayer thanking God that he was not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. A basic part of the Jewish religion in the days of the New Testament was an oath that promised that one would never help a Gentile under any circumstances, such as giving directions if they were asked. But it went even as far as refusing to help a Gentile woman at the time of her greatest need – when she was giving birth – because the result would only be to bring another Gentile into the world.

Vs. 35-43 – Peter is not preaching a works-based salvation...he is saying the evidence of your faith in Christ is a righteous walk and good works. He is not saying all religions are the same and all of us worship the same God by a different name. That is not true. There can be no salvation apart from faith in Christ Jesus; one must exercise **Romans 10:9** to be saved (also read **Acts 4:12**). There are millions if not billions like Cornelius (up to this point in his life) that have morality and piety, but do not have salvation because they have not accepted Jesus as “*Lord*” and Savior. One of my preaching professors at seminary used to say all the time...“*If Jesus is not Lord of all, He’s not Lord at all.*” In this text the phrase “*Lord of all*” is referring to Jesus being Lord over Jews and Gentiles. In **vs. 39** notice the phrases “*Whom they killed by hanging on a tree...Him God raised up on the third day*” Peter’s preaching to the Gentiles was essentially the same as his preaching to the Jews. He presented the person and work of Jesus Christ, with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus and our responsibility before God in light of these things. Paul gives a brief sermon on the Gospel in similar fashion as Peter’s in ***1 Corinthians 15:3-6***. And by Peter making the statement in **vs. 41** “*Even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead*” - Peter was stressing eating and drinking with Christ was a way of saying that Jesus was truly “*Resurrected from the dead.*” I love the conclusion of Peter’s sermonette in **vs. 43** when he

closes by saying, *“Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”* Peter wants everyone to understand the broadness of God’s promise of salvation. **Whoever believes! Jew or Gentile; slave or free; white or black; good or wicked; rich or poor – whoever believes.** Peter didn’t have one sermon for one group and another sermon for another. All people needed to be saved by coming to a living faith in a living Jesus Christ. Paul says in **Romans 10:13** (read verse).

Vs. 44-46 – In these verses we see God-fearing Gentiles are filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized. The glorious phrase *“While Peter was still speaking these words”* - the moment of a person’s salvation isn’t necessarily when they raise a hand or come forward at an evangelistic invitation. It is more likely at the moment they surrender to God and embrace with trust Jesus in the sincerity of their hearts. Also, note Peter was being led by the Holy Spirit while preaching and he obeyed the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Peter allowed the Holy Spirit to interrupt his sermon. The Holy Spirit was doing the *greater work in the hearts of those listening*, and Peter went with the flow. He stopped and called for their baptism. Notice God, not only while preaching is going on can immediately do something while the called out one is ministering. God also, can do this while a saved person is praying – read **Isaiah 65:24** (I love the NLT which says: *“I will answer them before they even call to me. While they*

are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers)!”

The preaching of Peter since the conversion of Cornelius was new to the Gentiles. All before this, a Gentile could certainly trust in Jesus as Messiah and receive the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won for them at the cross. Yet in doing so, he would first have to become a Jew – and then continue on in the Jewish ritual laws and attend/participate in the 3 annual feasts. Regarding the phrase, “*The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word... they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God*” - their filling with the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the demonstration of spiritual gifts. This was a filling with the Holy Spirit in two senses: 1st, in the sense that He indwells and abides in every believer; and 2nd, in the sense of a special empowering with gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit. When they spoke with tongues, it was to magnify God, not to teach men. The audience was God, not man, as is consistent with the principle of **1 Corinthians 14:2**. Now this was unique; it was not common in the Book of Acts nor in subsequent Christian experience for those who were not previously converted (born again) to instantly be born again and receive such evident spiritual gifts. Yet it was good and even necessary on this occasion, to show that they received the exact same Spirit, the exact same blessing as the apostles and first followers of Jesus did on the morning of Pentecost (**Acts 2**). The Apostle Paul would in **1 Corinthians 14**

lay out specific instructions of how the spiritual gift of tongues was to be utilized in the church.

Vs. 47-48 – Baptism is an outward sign of an inward transformation. They were baptized because they were saved not to get saved; nor as a requirement for salvation but to show their full acceptance into the community of those who followed Jesus. Their baptism showed they were accepted as saved Gentile followers of Jesus. And the entrance of Gentiles into the church was not a new plan, but something promised long before. The Old Testament looked for the day when a light would shine in the darkness of the Gentile world. *Isaiah 60:1-3* says, “*Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*” Remember Jesus’ promise of “other sheep, not of this fold” in **John 10:16**. Jesus also promised, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself in **John 12:32**.