

History in the Making
Understanding the Book of Acts-Part Nineteen

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout 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. Acts 10:1-8 NKJV

Introduction: As we come to chapter 10, the range of the Gospel proclamation has already crossed the barrier which separated Jew and Gentile, but now for the first time it is crossed authoritatively by an apostle.

NOTE: Philip (deacon) to Samaritans/Ethiopian, but now Peter

- ✓ Narrative unfolds in the largely Gentile city of Caesarea
- ✓ Takes place in the home and among the family and friends of Cornelius—a centurion in the Roman army
 - Probably had command over 60-100 men and was equivalent of an army captain
 - Noteworthy that the first Gentile with whom Jesus had dealings with was a centurion

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! 11 And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:10-12 NKJV

(Beginning to be fulfilled)

- ✓ Both Peter and Cornelius will be prepared for their meeting by vision—this narrative is greatly important
 - Peter will use the “keys of the kingdom” to make way for a Gentile
 - Interface between Jews/uncircumcised Gentiles will be first discussed—subject of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15

✓ Cornelius is a “God-fearer”

- Many Gentiles attracted to monotheism of Jews
- Loved ethics of Jews-worshipped in synagogues
- Some practiced Sabbath and other Jewish observances
- Cornelius likely did-devout, prayed, gave to charity

NOTE: These “God-fearers” formed the nucleus of the church in almost every community in Acts. Luke’s preoccupation with them makes one wonder whether he was one or not.

I. The Vision of Cornelius (3-8)

A. Vision at 9th hour (3:00 p.m.) vision of angelic messenger

NOTE: During the Jewish afternoon hour of prayer and sacrifice

- B. Initially afraid-fears calmed-God has seen your charity-heard your prayers
- C. Command to send for Simon Peter who is staying with Simon the Tanner-He will tell you what you must do! (v. 6)
- D. After vision-he called two servants and a soldier and sent them to Joppa

Two crucial truths here today-very relevant to our post-modern society

1. God does NOT pronounce Cornelius saved because he obeys the light he has, but rather grants him more light
 - a. Danger of Universalism/Pluralism today
 - b. Could have left him in that state-a “God-fearer”
 - c. Instead, go get Peter to reveal Jesus
 - d. Informs our missions, evangelism, giving, passion
2. The pre-eminence of preaching

He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do." Acts 10:6 NKJV

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:47 NKJV

- a. This is God’s chosen method-through foolishness of preaching men will be saved
(1 Corinthians 1:21)
- b. This narrative should inform our strategy/methods

II. The Vision of Peter

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. Acts 10:9-16 NKJV

William Larkin—"a culinary vision"

A. Peter needed to be prepared for this encounter as well as Cornelius

NOTE: And Peter had some real issues to overcome-prejudice

B. As the three messengers for Caesarea approached Joppa, Peter had his own vision

1. About noon he is on roof of tanner in prayer (6th hour)
2. Became hungry, wanted to eat
3. Fell into a trance-vision of great sheet full of four-footed animals, creeping things, birds of the air (some fit/some unfit for Jews)
4. Command to Peter and response

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. Acts 10:13-15 NKJV

5. Happened three times

NOTE: Peter's ancestral conscience said this was all wrong and that unclean animals could NOT be used for food-ever!

GREAT TRUTH! (Three times this is repeated)

- Claim that the abolition of food barriers for Jews is taking place-but much deeper
- Peter gets the point-he will say later

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. Acts 10:28 NKJV

- Not just about food/humans

Nature of salvation is made clear-It is divine mandate, not something inherit in the creature, that established the dividing line between clean and unclean!

- ✓ Three times repeated “what God has cleansed, you must not call common.”
- ✓ People we may not think-not like us-not in our comfort boxes-God calls them clean!

III. The Messengers Arrive in Joppa

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 fears 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." 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. Acts 10:17-23a NKJV

A. Vision is over and Peter is pondering its meaning

1. Messengers stand at the door
2. Enquire about Simon Peter
3. God orders Peter to meet them

B. Peter and the messengers meet

1. “I am who you are looking for!”
2. “Why are you here?”
3. Cornelius was instructed by an angel to hear what you have to say
4. Peter invites them in

IV. Peter and Cornelius Meet

On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 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." Acts 10:23-33 NKJV

A. The next day Peter goes with them and some from Joppa accompany him to Caesarea

1. Cornelius is waiting-family and friends gathered
2. They all stop to listen to what Peter has to say

B. Cornelius honors Peter

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." Acts 10:25-26 NKJV

GREAT TRUTH! The ground is level at the cross!

IMPORTANT: This is the starting point for all evangelism-we are not better than they-poor, ethnically different, educationally diverse, LEVEL GROUND!

1. As they enter the house, Peter acknowledges his quandary
2. This is unlawful-but God has spoken!

C. Cornelius rehearses his vision

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.' Acts 10:30-32 NKJV

D. We are ready to listen

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." Acts 10:33 NKJV

NEVER DID A PREACHER HAVE A MORE PROMISING AUDIENCE!

Conclusion: Next week-miracle in the home of Cornelius

1. Power of obedience
2. Leaving comfort zone
3. Laying down all racial, societal, socio-economic barriers puts you in a place where He can move

What barriers are hindering God from working?

- ✓ In your life?
- ✓ At GT?