

God's Grace is Extended to the Gentiles Acts 10

Introduction

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Jesus' apostles. Thousands of Jews heard the gospel preached, repented, were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38 and 41). Eventually, the believers were forced to leave Jerusalem to escape persecution (Acts 8:1). They scattered to surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria. They preached the gospel and, as a result, the Samaritans received the good news of Jesus Christ, were baptized in His name, and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:4-17). An Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile who practiced Judaism, heard the gospel message, believed, and was baptized (8:26-39). Next, the grace of God was extended to the Gentiles.

By God's grace, Saul had turned from persecuting Christians to preaching the gospel, and God had appointed him a minister to the Gentiles. However, before Saul was sent to the Gentiles, Peter was sent to the Gentiles first. God used two separate visions to bring Cornelius and Peter together. Peter preached the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius, his family, and friends. They listened, believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized. The way was opened for the spread of the gospel to *the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

Outline of Acts 10

- I. Cornelius' Vision - Acts 10:1-8
- II. Peter's Vision - Acts 10:9-33
- III. Peter's Obedience to the Holy Spirit - Acts 10:34-48

I. Cornelius' Vision - Acts 10:1-8

Cornelius was a Roman centurion who lived and worked in the mostly Gentile city of Caesarea. As a centurion, Cornelius was in charge of 100 soldiers. Centurions were men who had risen through the ranks of the army.

They were usually Roman citizens and hard-working men of good character.

Cornelius was a *devout man*, evidenced by the fact that he prayed to God, fasted (10:30), and generously gave **alms**. He was a Gentile who followed the teachings of the Jewish law, and he worshiped God. The ninth hour (around 3:00 p.m.) was the time of the evening sacrifice and prayer. As Cornelius prayed (Acts 10:30), an angel appeared to him in a vision and called him by name.

The angel told Cornelius his prayers and alms had ascended as a *memorial* before God. This means that God took pleasure in Cornelius' worship. Cornelius was told to send men to Joppa to find the apostle Peter who was staying with Simon, the tanner. Peter would tell Cornelius what to do next.

Cornelius immediately called two of his trusted servants and a soldier under his command who also trusted in God. He explained the angel's instructions and sent them to Joppa, about 33 miles south of Caesarea. (Approximately the distance from Torrance to Disneyland.)

II. Peter's Vision - Acts 10:9-33

God showed Peter a vision so he would be ready for the men coming from Caesarea. It was *unlawful...for a Jewish man to keep company with a Gentile* (10:28). If Peter was to go to Cornelius, a Gentile, God had to make that clear.

It took the men two days to travel to Joppa. They arrived and were looking for the house where Peter was staying. At the same time, Peter went to pray on the roof (which was flat). He became hungry, but the meal was not yet ready. While he waited, he *fell into a trance*. Peter saw heaven open and something like a

large sheet coming down to earth. As it came closer, he saw that it was filled with all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds.

As he looked, a Voice spoke, *Rise Peter; kill and eat*. Peter could not believe his own ears. He had been raised a proper Jew and had never eaten an animal which the God had called unclean in Leviticus 11. He did not plan to start now. By refusing what the Voice said, Peter was obeying the Jewish law. His **intentions** were good, but he was being disobedient to God. Obedience to God is always more important than any good intentions we think are important.

The Voice corrected Peter: *What God has cleansed and pronounced clean, do not... (call)... unclean* (Amplified Bible). God was using this vision to show Peter that the laws of cleanliness from the book of Leviticus had expired. The laws which were set up to make Jews **distinct** from other nations were no longer necessary. The whole world would now have access to the fellowship and privilege of the gospel. Jesus had said *there is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man* (Mark 7:15). God repeated the vision three times for Peter so that this lesson would stick in Peter's mind.

While Peter was thinking about the meaning of the vision, the Holy Spirit told him that three men were outside the house looking for him. The Holy Spirit instructed Peter to get up, go downstairs, and go with them and to not have any doubt. Peter obeyed.

Peter introduced himself to Cornelius' men and asked why they had come. They described Cornelius as *a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews*. They told Peter that God sent an angel who instructed Cornelius to send for Peter and hear what Peter had to say.

Peter invited the Gentile men in, and they spent the night. The racial and religious differences

between the men was already starting to break down! The next day, Peter took six (Acts 11:12) of the disciples from Joppa, and they started the journey to Cornelius' house.

The next day, the group arrived in Caesarea and went to Cornelius' house. There, they found that Cornelius had invited all of his relatives and close friends to be there when Peter arrived. Cornelius met Peter at the door and *fell down at his feet and worshiped him*. The word "worship" here means "to honor." Cornelius was probably showing the **homage** he felt Peter deserved because he was a messenger from God. He did not realize that his focus should be on the message and not the messenger. Do you focus fully on Christ? Do you get distracted and focus too much on your pastor, a Bible study teacher, a mentor, a sports hero, or political figure? The only One worthy of your homage is the Lord!

Peter lifted Cornelius onto his feet and explained that he was not worthy of such actions. Peter pointed out that he was just a man like Cornelius! Then, he went inside with Cornelius and found that there were many people waiting for him — all friends and relatives of Cornelius...and all Gentiles.

Peter began by reminding them that according to the Jewish custom, a Jewish man was not allowed to visit a Gentile. (Note: this was a Jewish custom and not God's Law.) However, God had shown him that he should not call any man *common or unhallowed or (ceremonially) unclean* (Amplified Bible). That is why he was willing to come when Cornelius sent for him.

Then, Cornelius told Peter about the vision, the instructions to send for him, and the promise that Peter would speak to him. Cornelius and Peter had both done as they had been commanded. Now everyone in Cornelius' house wanted to hear what God had commanded Peter to say.

Peter *opened his mouth* and gave a sermon. The result was that Gentiles were welcomed

into the body of Christ. The gospel would go *go to the end of the earth* (1:8). *The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek* (Gentile) (Romans 1:16).

Peter now understood the full meaning of his vision so he preached the gospel to the Gentiles. He presented the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and called them to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

Peter preached that no one is accepted by God because of their works, and no one is righteous in God's sight except by faith in Christ. *Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Hebrews 11:6). (See also Philippians 3:9)

Peter also proclaimed Jesus Christ is Lord of all. This was a revolutionary concept. God was reaching out to the Jews and all people through Jesus Christ, the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6).

The Gentiles listening to Peter at Cornelius' house knew that Jesus had preached to the people of Israel in Galilee and Judea. They knew John the Baptist had preached about a baptism for the repentance of sins. They knew that Jesus of Nazareth had been baptized by John (Luke 3:21-22) and anointed with power to do good and heal those who were oppressed by the devil. They knew that the Jews had killed Jesus by *hanging* (him) *on a tree*.

Peter had the authority to preach because he was a witness to all that Jesus had done. He was not only a witness to the ministry and murder of Jesus, he was also one of those chosen to see Him after God raised Him from the dead. He had shared food and drink with Christ after His resurrection.

The Gentiles believed the word as it was spoken by Peter and *the Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the word*. Later, the apostle Paul (Saul) would explain the reason for this in a letter

to the church at Corinth: *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles* (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The evidence that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit was the same evidence given to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost: speaking in tongues (see Acts 11:15). What began at Pentecost had now been extended to the Gentiles. This evidence proved that the Gospel was for both Jew and Gentile. It also proved that the message Peter preached was truth.

Those who had come with Peter from Joppa were of *the circumcision*, meaning they were Jewish believers. They were *astonished* when they heard the Gentiles speak in tongues. The idea of the Gospel being shared with Gentiles had never occurred to them.

It was obvious to Peter that Cornelius and his household should be baptized. God had clearly accepted their faith. Who was Peter to question what God had done. Cornelius asked Peter to stay a few days longer so that he and his family could hear more about Christ. †

Prayer

You were created for a purpose: to glorify God. Ask the Lord to begin preparing you now for the ministry He has for you.

Memory Verse

Acts 10:42 *And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.*

Vocabulary

alms - money or food given to the poor

intentions - plans or ideas

distinct - recognizably different from something of a similar type

homage - special honor or respect shown

QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 9

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Review last week's lesson and notes.

1. What did you learn about obedience from Peter and Cornelius?

2. What was important about Peter preaching to Cornelius and his family and friends?

DAY TWO: Read Acts 11:1-18.

3. a. What upset the Jewish believers (*those of the circumcision*) when they heard that Peter had preached to Gentiles?

- b. How did Peter respond?

4. What did Peter tell the Jewish believers about the Holy Spirit?

5. a. In verse 17, what is the *gift* Peter spoke about? (See also Acts 10:45.)

- b. What else do you learn about this gift in John 16:7-8 and 13-14?

DAY THREE: Read Acts 11:19-30.

6. a. Besides the Jews, who heard preaching about the Lord Jesus in Antioch?

- b. How did they respond to the preaching?

- c. What did the church in Jerusalem do when they heard about this?

7. 💡 (Memory Question) From all you remember about Barnabas, why was he a good choice to send to Antioch?

8. Answer the following questions about Barnabas in Antioch.

- a. What did he see? _____

b. How did he feel? _____

c. What did he do? Why? _____

d. What was the result? _____

9. a. Who did Barnabas bring to Antioch and what did they do there?

b. Give two important facts about the Antioch church.

DAY FOUR: Read Acts 12:1-17.

10. What two bad things did King Herod do in verses 1-4?

11. a. From verses 5-6, what do you learn about Peter's night in prison?

b. Are you surprised that Peter was able to sleep? Why or why not?

c. From 1 Peter 5:6-7, (in Peter's letter, which he wrote later) what probably helped him to sleep?

12. a. What miraculous thing happened that night while Peter was in prison?

b. According to Peter (in verse 11), why did God send His angel? Underline correct the answers below.

To deliver Peter from the hand of Herod

To confuse Herod

To test Peter

To deliver Peter from the Jewish people

To train the angel to help people

13. a. Where did Peter go?

b. What happened there? Circle T (true) or F (false) next to each statement below.

T OR F Rhoda went to the door and gave Peter a big hug.

T OR F Rhoda was so happy when she heard Peter's voice that she forgot to open the door.

T OR F Rhoda ran to tell the disciples that Peter was there.

T OR F The disciples told Rhoda she was out of her mind.

T OR F The disciples thought it was Peter's angel at the door.

T OR F Peter gave up knocking and went to get some dinner.

T OR F When the disciples saw Peter, they were astonished.

c. ♥ (Heart Question) Have you ever prayed for something and then been very surprised when God answered in an amazing way? Please share about it.

DAY FIVE: Read Acts 12:18-24.

14. What was Herod's reaction when he could not find Peter?

15. How did the people of Tyre and Sidon try to make peace with Herod?

16. a. How did God judge Herod. Why?

b. What do you learn from this?
