

# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

### *Chapter 9:32 – 11:18* The gospel comes to the Gentiles

\*Who was the first non-Jew to be saved?

\*What is the ideal listener like?

\*How did Jews react to the news that Gentiles were now a part of the church?

#### **Introduction**

*Acts 10 is a major turning point in the book of Acts and in the history of God's kingdom. We saw in the gospels how Jesus was to be "a light of revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32), and in Acts that God had promised to "pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind" (Acts 2:17). But up until this point, only one culture of people had received the message of salvation in Jesus: the Jews. The gospel was spread first in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, and even when disciples began to spread outside of Jerusalem (like in Acts 8), they preached to Jews only for a while (see Acts 11:19). Even the Samaritans, who received the word in Acts 8, had believed in the Law of Moses, the Jewish law, beforehand. But Acts 10 will tell us the story of the first Gentile convert. After this point, the gate will be open for non-Jews to follow Christ.*

#### **Acts 9:32-43                      Peter in Joppa**

After the conversion of Saul in the first part of chapter 9, the narrative turns back to Peter. Peter was traveling along the west coast of Judea. At a place called Lydda, he healed a paralytic named Aeneas. People in the area who saw this miracle believed in Jesus Christ because of it.

At a nearby city, Joppa, a disciple named Tabitha had just passed away. All the others were grief-stricken, because she was a very loving woman that always acted kindly and generously. So they called Peter from where he was, and Peter came with them to the room where Tabitha's body was laid. Peter prayed and told the woman to arise. Tabitha had been raised from the dead! Again, because of this incredible miracle, many people believed in the Lord. Afterwards, Peter stayed for a while in the city with a man named Simon. These two stories reconfirm that the power of the Lord was at work in Peter, and they show Peter's willingness to respond to calls for help. We will see the importance of these ideas as we move into the next chapter.

#### **Acts 10:1-8                      A vision to Cornelius**

In the city of Caesarea, which was a major port city in Palestine, there was a man named Cornelius. He was a centurion, a type of officer in the Roman army. He was not a Jew, but He was still a believer in the one, true God. He did many good deeds, including giving charity and praying. One afternoon, an angel came to Cornelius and told him to go get Peter, and where to find him. Cornelius called for three of his closest servants, and sent them right away to Joppa to bring Peter.

#### **Note: "Seek, and you will find"**

*Many people today believe God will save them just because they are "good" people. "Since I am not a murderer, an adulterer, or commit any other major sin," they think, "how can God condemn me to hell?" Cornelius was a very good person; the Bible even calls him "devout." But it was not enough! He still needed to hear and believe the word of truth in order to be saved (see Acts 11:13-14).*

*There are many "good" people in the world. But Cornelius was so special because he diligently sought God. He prayed constantly, striving to have a relationship with his Creator,*

*and the angel said these prayers had pleased God. Jesus promises, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). If we have an attitude like Cornelius, God will always send someone or some way in which we can learn the truth and be saved. It won't be an angel in a vision like Cornelius received, but if we are open-minded to listen to God's word, then we will find the truth.*

### **Acts 10:9-23                      A vision to Peter**

A day after the angel came to Cornelius, God gave Peter his own vision. Peter had gone on the roof (people back then would often spend time on their housetops, which were flat) to pray at about noon. While he was there, he saw a vision where something like a big sheet was brought to the ground. Inside it were all sorts of animals. A voice told him to kill and eat. Peter objected, because he had always strictly followed the Jewish laws about what kinds of animals to eat. But the voice responded, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." The whole process happened three times. Was this vision really about food? It is the key to the entire story, and we will see what it meant later.

Peter himself was still wondering what it meant when Cornelius's servants finally arrived. The Holy Spirit told Peter to go with them. The servants explained to Peter why they had come, and after they all spent the night there, they started off to Caesarea.

### **Acts 10:24-33                      Peter arrives at Cornelius's house**

Cornelius was already prepared for Peter when the group arrived the following day. Not only was he himself ready to listen to what Peter had to say, but he had also invited his family and friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius bowed down in order to worship him, but Peter refused to accept the worship. He was just the messenger of God, and as a mere man did not deserve the adoration God alone receives.

Then Peter spoke to the people assembled. This was an unprecedented situation. It was against the Jewish law for Jews to enter the house of a foreigner or even socialize with them. Yet Peter had done so because he had grasped the meaning of the vision: God was not speaking so much animals as about human beings. God had cleansed the Gentiles, and was ready to accept them into His kingdom. And, as the voice in the vision had said, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Peter was free to come Cornelius's house now. Then he asked Cornelius why he had called him, and Cornelius explained about the vision he had. Cornelius invited him to speak about the gospel.

### **Note: The ideal listener**

*Cornelius was the ideal listener to God's word. He described his attitude in verse 33, "Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." There are three things about his attitude that we should imitate when we are listening to a message about the Bible. We need first to be present. It seems obvious that we can't learn about God if we aren't present to hear His word, but very often we skip opportunities to study the Bible. Second, we need to recognize that we are before God when we listen to His word. Therefore, we should have a deep reverence as we listen. This means we are attentive, involved, and respectful. Finally, Cornelius and the others were ready to hear "all that you have been commanded by the Lord." It is so easy to fall into the trap of listening only to parts of the Bible: the parts about blessings, but not about sacrifices we must make; the parts that are easy to understand, but not the ones we have to really study; the parts that we've already accepted, but not the parts that contradict our beliefs. When we come to listening to God's word, we must be present, reverent, and open-minded.*

### **Acts 10:34-43                      Peter's message**

Peter took the opportunity and told the people gathered in the house about Jesus. He told them all the essential points of the story of Jesus: His good deeds and miracles, His death on the cross, His resurrection, His command for the chosen witnesses (the apostles) to preach, and His power to save. In his message, Peter emphasized the universal nature of the gospel:

- People of all nations, if they will obey God, are welcome to Him (verses 34-35).
- All men are subject to Jesus Christ, because He is Lord (Master) of all (verse 36).

- Both the living and the dead will be judged by Christ (verse 42).
- Every person, of any nation, who believes in Christ will be forgiven of their sins (verse 43).

Peter's message clearly shows that Christianity is not like Judaism, which was a religion only for one nation of people, the Jews. Race does not matter in Jesus' kingdom.

### **Acts 10:44-48                      God shows He accepts the Gentiles**

As Peter was still speaking, God showed that He wanted the Gentiles in His kingdom in a dramatic way: He poured out His Holy Spirit upon them. This was not like the "gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) that all believers receive when they are saved; it was not like the miraculous abilities from the Spirit that certain believers received when the apostles laid their hands on them (remember Acts 8:14-17). The only thing that was similar, as Peter notes (verse 47), was what happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Just like the apostles on that day, this outpouring of the Spirit was unexpected and caused them to speak in languages they had never studied (compare verse 46 with Acts 2:1-4). And just like God had a major point to make on Pentecost — that the church was about to begin — He was making a major point here: He was ready to take the Gentiles into the church. Peter was right: no one, after seeing this sign, could deny the Gentiles the right to enter the kingdom by baptism. So Cornelius and the people with him were baptized. Peter and the other amazed Jewish disciples stayed with them for a few days.

### **Acts 11:1-18                      Peter returns to the church in Jerusalem**

Although God had signaled His acceptance of the Gentiles, the full implications of this event didn't yet hit home with the Jews that heard about it. So when Peter got back to Jerusalem, many of the Jewish disciples demanded to know what happened. They were upset that Peter had even dared to enter the home of a foreigner.

But instead of getting upset himself, Peter calmly explained why he acted the way he did. He retold the same story we read in chapter 10, step by step. Why is this story repeated twice in the book of Acts? Obviously, it is very important! It constituted a radical change for the people of God, and it was hard for the Jews to understand and accept what was happening. The only reason they could believe it was because it was clearly God's will, as Peter emphasized over and over: he received a vision from God (verse 5), it was God that cleansed the Gentiles (verse 9), God's Spirit told him to go to Cornelius's house (verse 12), it was the Holy Spirit who fell upon them (verse 15). If God was behind every step, then, as Peter said, "Who was I that I could stand in God's way?" The only thing to do was glorify God for His mercy!

#### **True or false:**

1. Nobody in Lydda or Joppa believed that Peter had truly healed either Aeneas or Tabitha, so they rejected the gospel.
2. Cornelius was not a Jew, but he gave charity to the Jewish people.
3. Cornelius believed in the Roman gods.
4. An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter so that he could hear words that would save him.
5. Peter refused to eat the animals in his vision, saying that he had never eaten any unholy or unclean thing.
6. Peter refused to go with the servants of Cornelius, saying that he had never been in any unholy or unclean person's house.
7. Only the most important religious leaders should allow people to bow before them.
8. God does not show partiality to different races of humanity.
9. The Gentiles received the same outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the disciples did on the day of Pentecost.
10. Because they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Cornelius and his household did not have to be baptized in water.
11. The circumcised (the Jews) immediately accepted the fact that God had granted the Gentiles the opportunity to be saved.

#### **Match the person with their description:**

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Peter              | Behind each step of the story; “fell upon” the<br>Gentile believers |
| 2. Tabitha (Dorcas)   | Peter stayed at his home in Joppa                                   |
| 3. Holy Spirit        | A paralytic who was healed by Peter                                 |
| 4. Aeneas             | A Roman centurion who became the first<br>Gentile convert           |
| 5. Cornelius          | Gave the brethren in Jerusalem a report of<br>what happened         |
| 6. Simon (the tanner) | A kind sister who died, but was raised by Peter                     |

*After you’ve filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.*

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