

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

Chapter 10 continues the record of the ministry of Simon Peter. Later Peter will pass from the scene, and the history will continue with the ministry of the apostle Paul. Although Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, Peter opened the door to the Gentiles by entering the home of Cornelius and presenting salvation through Christ to his household. - McGee

### ***Peter and Cornelius***

***Act 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,***

Remember that Paul had been in Caesarea (Act\_9:30) and probably some of the other apostles had been preaching the gospel along the coast. Tel Aviv is really a part of old Joppa. As one travels up the coast from Joppa, the next place of any size is Caesarea, which was really a Roman city. It was the place where Pilate lived. The governor and those who ruled the land stayed there. This is where Cornelius was stationed. He was a centurion, which means he was a commander of a hundred soldiers in the Roman army. The Italian band was a cohort of Roman soldiers recruited in Italy. - McGee

***Act 10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.***

He was “a devout man.” That means his worship was rightly directed. He recognized his dependence upon that which is divine. Remember that even a pagan can have devotion and a deep conviction to his gods. Sometimes we wish that Christians today had more devotion and conviction.

He was a devout man and “one that feared God.” He was not a Jewish proselyte in the strict sense of the term, but gravitated toward Judaism and could be called a “proselyte of the Gate.” Today we might say that he was a man who lived in the neighborhood, attended church on special occasions, was friendly toward the church, but was not actually a Christian. That could have been Cornelius. He feared God.

He “gave much alms to the people” means he gave many gifts of charity to the Jewish people. The nation Israel has always laid great stress upon giving. God had taught them this in the Old Testament. We speak of the tithe, but it is obvious from the Mosaic system that they actually gave three tenths. They gave for the running of the government (which was a theocracy at the beginning), they gave for the maintenance of the temple, and they gave a tenth of all that they produced. So they have been a giving, generous people.

It is interesting that even today many of our eleemosynary, that is, charitable foundations, were established by Jews. There is no group of people in our day that gives as generously as does the Jewish community in its support of the nation Israel. They are a very generous people.

Cornelius “prayed to God always.” This centurion took his needs to God. He needed to have more light. He wanted it. He probably didn't really know too much about prayer, but he prayed. - McGee

***Act 10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"***

This centurion was an officer in the Roman army, a career officer, and a man of influence. Also he had a tremendous influence in his own household, as we shall see. He was a good man to all outward

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

observation. In America today he would pass for a Christian, a Christian of the highest degree, an outstanding man. But he actually was not a Christian. He had not even heard the gospel.

He is an example of a man who lived up to the light which he had. Joh\_1:9 says this of Jesus: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This centurion had not met Jesus Christ nor come into His presence, but he was living up to the light that he had. Paul is referring to those who do not live by the light they have in Rom\_1:19-20 : "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." This is God's answer to that oft-repeated question, "What about the poor pagan, that 'good' heathen, who wants to know God but never had a chance? Is he lost?" The answer is that God will get light to such a person. God will enable him to hear the gospel. Now how will God get the gospel to Cornelius? The barriers seem insurmountable. The church at this time—and for the first eight years—was exclusively Jewish.

These Christian Jews were still going to the temple and observing many Jewish customs. They could do that under grace because they were trusting Christ. Then the gospel broke over into Samaria. The Jews in Jerusalem were surprised, but they recognized the hand of God in this. Now how is God going to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles? Paul is to be the great missionary to the Gentiles, but God has Paul out in the desert in Arabia, training him there. It is Simon Peter who must open the door to the Gentiles. God used perhaps the most prejudiced and religious bigot, the greatest extremist of the day. Obviously, the Holy Spirit directed every move in getting the gospel to the Gentiles. My friend, all genuine Christian work is directed by the Holy Spirit. No other work amounts to anything. The Holy Spirit had to work in the heart of the Gentile; the Holy Spirit had to work in the heart of the Jew. The Holy Spirit directed the bringing of the gospel to the gentile world. - McGee

***Act 10:4 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.***

An angel of God appeared to Cornelius in a vision. He was not dreaming but was given this vision while he was praying.

Now I do want you to notice that there are certain things that do count before God. These are things which can in no way merit salvation, but they are things which God notes. The prayers of Cornelius and his alms had come up for a memorial before God, and God brought the gospel to him. Wherever there is a man who seeks after God as Cornelius did, that man is going to hear the gospel of the grace of God. God will see that he gets it. - McGee

***Act 10:5-6 Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."***

The angel tells him where to find Peter. He doesn't need more of an address. The odor of those hides down in that vat will lead them to the right place!-McGee

That Peter shares hospitality with Simon is significant. Just like Jesus, he is eating and drinking with the outcast, people who are Jewish but on the fringe of society from the perspective of Temple purity and Pharisaical tradition. While tanners are never included in the list of outsiders with whom Jesus eats, they might very well be in the same category as tax collectors and prostitutes.

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

It is therefore quite curious that Peter hesitates when he is told to God to Cornelius in chapter 10. This is a testimony to how far Jews and Gentiles were separated culturally. Peter has no problem staying in the home of a tanner who was unclean, yet will not enter the home of a Gentile God-fearer, someone who was likely more “clean” than the tanner, with respect to the Law. The difference, of course, is that even if Cornelius was a God-Fearer, he was still an uncircumcised Gentile. - Phillip J. Long has taught full time at Grace Christian University since 1998, specializing in Bible and Biblical languages.

A tanner. Showing that the strictness of the Jewish law was losing its hold on Peter; since the tanner’s occupation was regarded as unclean by strict Jews, and the tanners were commanded to dwell apart. “If a tanner married without mentioning his trade, his wife was permitted to get a divorce. The law of levirate marriage might be set aside if the brother-in-law of the childless widow was a tanner. A tanner’s yard must be at least fifty cubits from any town” (Farrar, “Life and Work of St. Paul”).

Marvin Richardson Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 497. – Logos Word Study

***Act 10:7-8 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. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.***

These men won't have any trouble finding the tanner's house. While they are on their way, God must prepare Simon Peter.

**Notice: Cornelius obedience and lack of specifics by the Lord. Have you ever notice that many blessing come after acts of faith and obedience?**

### ***Peter's Vision***

***Act 10:9 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.***

It is absolutely necessary for God to prepare Simon Peter. You see, Simon Peter didn't have the breadth that Paul had. Although he didn't have the background or the training that Paul had, God can use him differently. I believe it is a tremendous mistake to think that every person has to be poured into the same mold for God to use him. - McGee

***Act 10:10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance***

***Act 10:11 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.***

***Act 10:12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.***

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

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

***Act 10:14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."***

The next day, at about noon, Peter went up on the flat roof of Simon's house in Joppa to pray. He was hungry at the time and would like to have eaten, but the meal was still being prepared down below. His hunger, of course, provided a fitting preparation for what was to follow. Falling into a trance, he saw a sheet ... let down from heaven by its four corners, with all kinds of four-footed animals ... , birds, and reptiles in it, clean and unclean. A voice from heaven directed the hungry apostle to "Rise, ... kill and eat!" Remembering the Law of Moses which forbade a Jew to eat any unclean creature, Peter uttered the historic contradiction, "Not so, Lord!" Scroggie comments, "Whoever says 'not so' should never add 'Lord,' and whoever truly says 'Lord' will never say 'Not so.'" – Believers Bible Commentary

While Peter is wondering what this means, a voice speaks to him. Isn't it interesting that he calls Him, "Lord," but he doesn't obey what the Lord tells him to do?

Now don't miss this. Here is a man who is on this side of the Day of Pentecost. He is living in this age of grace when it makes no difference whether we eat meat or whether we don't eat meat. However, Peter is still abiding by the Mosaic system and he is not eating anything that is ceremonially unclean. He is sincere and honest about it. Someone may say that he ought to be broad-minded and eat everything. Well, you see that the Lord is teaching him that he is no longer under the Mosaic system and is free to eat anything. Today the big problem is that some people decide they don't want to eat meat and then they try to put everyone else under that same system. My friend, under grace you can eat meat or not eat meat. That is your business. Eating some certain food may give you indigestion, but it certainly will not change your relationship with the Lord. – McGee

**Is this really about what type of meat we eat? Can food really impact your relationship with the Lord?**

***Act 10:15-16 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.***

It is clear that the vision had deeper significance than the mere matter of eating foods, clean and unclean. True, with the coming of the Christian faith, these regulations concerning foods were no longer in effect. But the real significance of the vision was this: God was about to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. As a Jew, Peter had always looked upon the Gentiles as unclean, as aliens, as strangers, as far off, as godless. But now God was going to do a new thing. Gentiles (represented by the unclean beasts and birds) were going to receive the Holy Spirit the same as the Jews (clean beasts and birds) had already received Him. National and religious distinctions were to be dissolved, and all true believers in the Lord Jesus would be on the same level in the Christian fellowship. – Believers Bible Commentary

***Act 10:17-22 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. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." 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?" 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."***

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

While Peter was pondering this vision in his heart, the servants of Cornelius arrived at the gate and inquired for him. Directed by the Spirit, he went down from the housetop to greet them. When he learned the purpose of their visit, he invited them in and gave them accommodation for the night. The servants paid high tribute to their master as “a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews.” – Believers Bible Commentary

***Act 10:23-25 Then he invited them in and lodged them. 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. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.***

On the next day Peter set out for Caesarea with the three servants of Cornelius and some brethren from Joppa. They apparently journeyed all day, because it was on the following day that they reached Caesarea.

In anticipation of their arrival Cornelius ... had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter arrived, the centurion fell down at his feet as an act of reverence. The apostle refused such worship, protesting that he was only a man himself. It would be fitting if all self-appointed “successors” of Peter would imitate his humility by forbidding people to kneel before them! – Believers Bible Commentary

***Act 10:26-29 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 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. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"***

Finding a crowd assembled inside the house, Peter explained that as a Jew he would not ordinarily have come into a Gentile house like this one, but that God had revealed to him that he should no longer think of the Gentiles as being untouchables. Then he asked for what reason they had sent for him. – Believers Bible Commentary

This amazes me. Why would Simon Peter ask that question? Why didn't he immediately begin to tell them about Jesus Christ? Well, you see, the Spirit of God is in charge here, and He keeps Peter from rushing right into this.

This should be an important lesson for us. So often we are rather brisk and even crude in our witnessing. Because we find it difficult to witness, generally when we do it, we are very amateurish about it. We do it so abruptly and in such a way that often it offends people.

We need to be led by the Spirit of God. I personally believe that the finest kind of evangelism today is prayer evangelism. I mean that we should begin by praying for an individual. Then the day will come when we need to put legs on the prayer. Ask God to lead you. Friend, I know that He will lead you. If you have been praying for a loved one, or a friend, or a stranger, don't just go to him in your own strength and in the power of the flesh. If you do, you will fail. Let God be the One to lead you.

Let me share with you one of my first experiences of witnessing. When I was a student in college, I was very zealous to be a witness for God, but I was rather timid about it, and, very frankly, I wanted to be sure I had the leading of the Holy Spirit. I didn't have any money for bus or train fare, so I did a lot of

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

hitchhiking. One time when I was out on the highway, a man in a brand new Model A Ford drove by and stopped fifty yards past me. Then he motioned for me to come on and get in. He said that he always looked over a hitchhiker before he picked one up. He introduced himself and told me he was a salesman for drug companies. He asked where I was going and I told him it was to Memphis. Well, he was going all the way to Memphis and he would be glad to take me all the way, but he did need to stop at several drug stores on the way to get his orders from them. Obviously, that was fine with me.

As we rode along, we talked of everything under the sun. Under my breath I was praying, "Lord, I'd like to witness to this man, but You will have to open the door for me. I'm not going to broach the subject because if I do, he'll think he has some religious nut in the car with him. If I open the door, he will probably open the car door and tell me to get out." So we rode along some more and just talked and talked. Finally he asked me whether I'd mind driving for him. Of course, I would love to drive that new car; so I did. He sat there and relaxed.

We got about sixty miles from Memphis and we had run out of conversation. There was a lull, and I was still praying, "Lord, we're getting near Memphis and there still hasn't been a door open for me. I'm not going to open it because I'm afraid he'll throw me out. You open the door for me if You want me to witness." We rode on for about ten more minutes, and then out of a clear sky he said, "You know, my wife and I went to church yesterday." He looked at me and laughed, and I laughed. Then he said, "I don't go very often. But that preacher said the funniest thing. He said Jesus was coming to this earth again. What do you think about that?"

Well, friend, I told him. Then I told him all about the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Finally I said, "The second coming of Christ means nothing to you now. You've got to come to Christ and accept what He did for you the first time He came if you are to have an interest in His second coming." This man was wide open. He drove me to the dormitory where I stayed at the college. He parked there and said, "I want to see you again." So I just blurted out, "Wouldn't you like to accept Christ as your Savior?" He said, "I sure would." I told him he could do that right there in the car. So we bowed our heads in prayer. I prayed and then asked him to pray, and he accepted Christ. Now I'll be honest with you, I would never have opened my mouth if the Lord hadn't prompted him to open up the conversation. We need to be led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit had prepared his heart, and his conversion was genuine. The first sermon I preached after I was ordained in Nashville, as I looked down at the congregation, I noticed this man and his wife. He just sat there and smiled. Afterward I invited him to join my church. He said they had already joined a good church over in another part of town. He and his wife had become active Christians. What a wonderful experience that was!

We ought to be very careful in our witnessing that we are being led by the Spirit of God. Simon Peter does not walk right in and begin lecturing or preaching. He first finds out what is going on. "Why have you called for me? Why did you send these men for me?" - McGee

***Act 10:30-33 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, and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 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.'" 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 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

Cornelius readily described the vision he had seen four days before when an angel assured him that his prayer had been heard and directed him to send for Peter. The hunger of the Gentile heart for the word of God is praiseworthy. He said, “Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” Such an open and teachable spirit is sure to be rewarded with divine instruction. – Believers Bible Commentary

### *Gentiles Hear the Good News*

***Act 10:34-35 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.***

Peter prefaced his message with a frank admission. Up to now he had believed that God's favor was limited to the nation of Israel. Now he realized that God did not respect a man's person because of his nationality, but was interested in an honest, contrite heart, whether in a Jew or a Gentile. “In every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.”

There are two principal interpretations of verse 35:

1. Some think that if one truly repents and seeks after God, he is saved even if he has never heard about the Lord Jesus. The argument is that although the man himself might not know about Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, yet God knows about it and saves the man on the basis of that sacrifice. He reckons the value of the work of Christ to the man whenever He finds true faith.
2. The other view is that even if a man fears God and works righteousness, he is not thereby saved. Salvation is only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But when God finds a man who has lived up to the light he has received about the Lord, He makes sure that the man hears the gospel and thus has the opportunity to be saved.

We believe that the second view is the proper interpretation. – Believers Bible Commentary

***Act 10:36-38 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.***

Peter next reminds his hearers that although the gospel message was sent to the Jews first, yet Jesus Christ ... is Lord of all—Gentile as well as Jew. His audience must have heard the story of Jesus of Nazareth; it had begun in Galilee, at the time John was baptizing, and had spread throughout all Judea. This Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, had lived a life of selfless service for others, doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. – Believers Bible Commentary

***Act 10:39-40 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,***

Notice carefully what Simon Peter does. He presents the facts concerning Jesus Christ, assuming there are some of the incidents which they already know. He makes it very clear to them that this Jesus was

## ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles

crucified on a tree and that He rose again on the third day. God raised Him and showed Him openly. This is the gospel. Nothing short of that will do.

This past Christmas I received many cards on which were printed the rather well-known message, "One Solitary Life." It is very fine; there is no question about that. It is very readable, but there is a strange omission—a solitary omission in it. The most important fact is not recorded. It records that Jesus died, even mentions that He was buried, but completely leaves out His resurrection. Friend, there is not a single sermon preached, as recorded in the Book of Acts, that does not mention the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the very heart of the gospel. Until that is preached, the gospel has not been preached. Jesus Christ died, He was buried, He rose again from the dead. Those are the historical facts. Your relationship to a risen Savior determines your eternal destiny. He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was raised again for our justification (Rom\_4:25). - McGee

***Act 10:41-43 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 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. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."***

In resurrection, the Lord commissioned the apostles to proclaim Him as Judge of the living and the dead. This agrees with many other Scriptures which teach that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (Joh\_5:22). This means, of course, that as Son of Man He will judge Jews and Gentiles alike.

10:43 But Peter does not linger on a note of judgment. Instead he introduces a grand statement of evangelical truth, explaining how the judgment can be avoided. As all the prophets of the OT had taught, whoever believes in the name of the Messiah will receive remission of sins. It is not an offer to Israel alone, but takes in all the world. Would you like to know the forgiveness of sins? Then believe in Him! – Believers Bible Commentary

### ***The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles***

***Act 10:44-48 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.***

This incident has been called the Gentile Pentecost. Peter was astonished that the Gentiles should receive the Holy Spirit. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was made audible by their speaking in tongues. The tongues were an evidence to Simon Peter and the others with him that God would save the Gentiles and would give to them His Holy Spirit. Peter later relates this as evidence that these Gentiles had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and that God had granted repentance unto life also to the Gentiles (Act\_11:17-18). In Act\_15:7-11 Peter again refers to this incident, declaring that it proves that the Holy Ghost has been given to the Gentiles and that they are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ just as are the Jews. It is hard for us to realize the great barrier that existed between Jew and Gentile. The Jews of that day simply could not believe that Gentiles were going to be saved—in spite of the fact



## **ACTS 10 – The Holy Spirit comes upon the Gentiles**

that the Lord had told them this was to be so. Then the Gentiles at Cornelius' house are baptized in water.

Again let me call your attention to the fact that the Book of Acts records three representative conversions. The Ethiopian eunuch was a son of Ham. Saul of Tarsus was a son of Shem. Cornelius was a son of Japheth. In each instance the Holy Spirit moved, using a man of God and the Word of God. – McGee

The general lessons of our study are apparent of Cornelius.

1. Cornelius and Peter, Jew and Gentile, both had visions granted by God. God is no respecter of persons. Some very ignorant, uneducated man, despised in our eyes, may find the truth as well as we.
2. Christ takes what is best out of all as the foundation of advance into new truth concerning Himself. God's Spirit makes a preparatio evangelica everywhere.
3. All men need progress religiously—progress not beyond Christ, but progress deeper into the mysteries of the sublime truth given to us in Him. Let no one ever say he has no more to learn about the Son of God. (D. J. Burrell D. D.) – Biblical Illustrator