



Book of Acts

Chapter 10

Conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion

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Theme: Conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion (son of Japheth)

To the Uttermost Parts: Gentiles

The Book of Acts shifts from the Jews (Jerusalem and Judea), to the half-Jews (the Samaritans), then to the uttermost parts of the earth (the Gentiles).

About eight years after Pentecost.

Peter, not Paul, is to be the “door opener” to the Gentiles. [Had Paul been the prime move toward uncircumcised Gentiles into the Church, the Jewish contingent, who were never friendly to him, would have acquired such strength to bring a disastrous schism in the Church.]

ESV: 1–48 Conversion of Cornelius. The conversion of a Gentile soldier and his relatives and close friends is the longest narrative in Acts. The importance of the story is highlighted through repetition. The visions of Cornelius and Peter are repeated several times, and 11:1–18 is a detailed retelling of the events of ch. 10. The incident put Peter at the center of the mission to the Gentiles.

Introduction by Adam Clarke:

I have already observed (see the conclusion of the preceding chapter) that hitherto the apostles confined their labors among the Jews and circumcised proselytes, not making any offer of salvation to the Gentiles; for they had fully imbibed the opinion that none could enter into the kingdom of God, and be finally saved, unless they were circumcised, and became obedient to the law of Moses. This prejudice would have operated so as finally to prevent them from preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, had not God, by a particular interposition of his mercy and goodness, convinced Peter, and through him all the other apostles, that he had accepted the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and would put no difference between the one and the other, purifying their hearts by faith, and giving the Gentiles the Holy Ghost, as he had before given it to the Jews. The means which he used to produce this conviction in the minds of the apostles are detailed at length in the following chapter.¹

Barnes’ Introduction: This chapter commences a very important part of the history of the transactions of the apostles. Before this, they had preached the gospel to the Jews only. They seem to have retained the feelings of their countrymen on this subject, that the Jews were to be regarded as the peculiarly favoured people, and that salvation was not to be offered beyond the limits of their nation. it was important, indeed, that the gospel should be offered to them first; but the whole tendency of the Christian religion was to enlarge and liberalize the mind; to overcome the narrow policy and prejudices of the Jewish people; and to diffuse itself over all the nations of the earth. In various ways, and by various parables, the Saviour had taught the apostles, indeed, that his gospel should be spread among the Gentiles. He had commanded them to go and preach it to every

¹ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the New Testament

creature, Mark 16:15. But he had told them to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, Luke 24:49. It was natural, therefore, that they should receive *special* instructions and Divine revelation on a point so important as this; and God selected the case of Cornelius as the instance by which he would fully establish his purpose of conveying the gospel to the Gentile world. It is worthy of observation, also, that he selected Peter for the purpose of conveying the gospel first to the Gentiles. The Saviour had told him, that on him he would build his church; that he would give to him first the key of the kingdom of heaven; that is, that he should be the agent in opening the doors of the church to both Jews and Gentiles. Matthew 16:18, Matthew 16:19. Peter had, in accordance with these predictions, been the agent in first presenting the gospel to the Jews, Acts 2; and the prediction was now to be *completely* fulfilled in extending the same gospel to the Gentile world. The transaction recorded in this chapter is one, therefore, that is exceedingly important in the history of the church; and we are not to be surprised that it is recorded at length. It should be remembered, also, that this point became afterwards the source of incessant controversy in the early church. The converts from Judaism insisted on the observance of the whole of the rites of their religion; the converts from among the Gentiles claimed exemption from them all. To settle these disputes, and to secure the reception of the gospel among the Gentiles, and to introduce them to the church with all the privileges of the Jews, required all the wisdom, talent, and address of the apostles. See Acts 11:1-18 Acts 15; Romans 14; Romans 15; Galatians 2:11-16.²

Evangelism, Universality—God leads His people to share the good news with all people. Roman race and employment by the enemy army did not exclude Cornelius from the gospel. God's plan is to bless all peoples through the gospel. He calls us to take an active role in fulfilling the plan.³

Spurgeon: This chapter shows us how the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, which our Lord broke down by his death, was in due time practically removed by the calling of a Gentile household to the faith of Jesus. Before this time only Jews, proselytes, and Samaritans, all branches of the older family, had been converted, but now a Roman captain and his house were to be saved.

Acts 10:1

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian *band*,

[**Caesarea**] Not Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13), which is in the north. This Caesarea is on the coast, sort of the headquarters for the Roman establishment. This is a city built by Herod between Joppa and Mt. Carmel (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 16, 2:1). Philip settled here (Acts 21:8). Always when mentioned singly it refers to this city. It was also called also Strato's Tower, and the residence of the Roman procurator.

² Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

³ Disciple's Study Bible Notes

Bible Background Commentary (BBC)

Herod the Great had renamed Strato's Tower "Caesarea" in honor of the emperor. The residence of the Roman governor of Judea (Acts 23:23-24), it held a regular Roman garrison. Centurions commanded units of roughly eighty men (rather than their official designation of 100). Unlike the aristocrats who could directly become tribunes or legates, centurions were generally soldiers who worked their way up through the ranks.

His century was part of a "regiment" (NIV, TEV) or cohort (NASB, NRSV), one-tenth of a legion, made up of six hundred men. Five cohorts were stationed in Caesarea and another in Jerusalem. This particular cohort is known to have been in Palestine in A.D. 69, though not specifically attested here in this period; from A.D. 41 to 44 Agrippa I had his own troops in Caesarea, so these events must be before A.D. 41.

Military service was the preferred occupation; only roughly half those who enlisted survived the twenty years of service (generally ages seventeen to thirty-seven; it became twenty-five years of service later in the first century), but the rewards for survivors were high. Noncitizens could not join legions but could become auxiliary troops who received citizenship upon their discharge.⁴

[Cornelius] A centurion of an Italian cohort, serving under Herod Agrippa, the representative Roman power in the district. He and his house were the first Gentiles to hear the gospel since Pentecost (Acts 15:7-13). Until then it did not occur to the church that anyone could be saved unless he was circumcised and kept the law of Moses. This fallacy would have continued if God had not intervened and convinced Peter, and through him all the other apostles (Acts 10:9-28,34-35; Acts 11:1-18; Acts 15:7-13). This is a Latin name, and shows that the man was probably a Roman.

[Centurion] does not mean hundred. Rome had a total of 28 legions, a legion being 5500. Each legion had 59 centurions and consisted of 10 cohorts. The first cohort was larger than the others, it was divided into 5 double centuries of about 800 men total. Cohorts 2 thru 10 were 6 centuries, about 80 men each. Since each legion also had about 120 horsemen, the total legion was about 5500 men. So a centurion was a rank of officer of nominally a hundred, if you were in cohorts 2 thru 10 it was about 80, the first cohort being about twice that. If you signed up with the Roman legions you signed up for 25 years, it was a very serious obligation. At least 10 such men are mentioned in the New Testament (Matthew 8:5; Matthew 27:54; Luke 7:6; Acts 10:1; Acts 21:32; Acts 22:25; Acts 23:17,23; Acts 27:1). A centurion among the Romans was about the same rank as a captain among us.

[band] Greek: *speira* (GSN-4686), cohort or regiment of about 555 infantry and 66 cavalry. This one was all Italian.

Barnes: The Italian band. Probably a band or regiment that was composed of soldiers from *Italy*, in distinction from those which were composed of soldiers born in provinces. It is evident that many of the soldiers in the Roman army would be those who were born

⁴ Bible Background Commentary: New Testament

in other parts of the world; and it is altogether probable, that those who were born in Rome or Italy would claim pre-eminence over those enlisted in other places.

McGee: Remember that Paul had been in Caesarea (Acts 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.⁵

Acts 10:2

A devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

“Godly” but not a proselyte: outside the covenant. A person who worships the true God, and is no idolater.

Dake: [devout man, and one that feared God ...] Eight things that do not save the soul:

1. Being devout, pious, or dutiful to religion. In Acts 10:7 the word "devout" is used of a soldier devoted to Cornelius and in Acts 22:12 it is used of Cornelius being devout according to the law. It is used of religious, unsaved men in Acts 2:5; Acts 13:50; Acts 17:17.
2. Fearing God (Acts 10:2). Demons fear (James 2:19) as well as unsaved people (1 Samuel 12:18; 2 Kings 17:32-34,41; Jonah 1:16; Rev. 21:8).
3. Giving much alms (Acts 10:2). Pharisees did this and yet rejected salvation (Matthew 6:1-2). One may give all he has and be lost (1 Cor. 13:3).
4. Praying always (Acts 10:2). Sinners and hypocrites pray often (Matthew 6:5-7; Luke 18:9-14). People even pray in hell, but it avails nothing (Luke 16:23-31).
5. Seeing visions (Acts 10:3-6). Unsaved people have seen visions that did not save them (Job 33:14-30; Isaiah 29:7-12; Daniel 2:1-9,28; Daniel 4:5,27-37; Daniel 5:1-31; Zech. 13:5).
6. Being just in the eyes of men (Acts 10:22).
7. Having a good reputation among men (Acts 10:22). Paul had this while murdering saints (Acts 23:1; Acts 26:5; Phil. 3:6).
8. Fasting (Acts 10:30). Hypocrites did this weekly (Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:9-14).⁶

Clarke: One that feared God One who was acquainted with the true God, by means of his word and laws; who respected these laws, and would not dare to offend his Maker and his Judge. This is necessarily implied in the fear of God.

⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:554). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

With all his house—He took care to instruct his family in the knowledge which he himself had received; and to establish the worship of God in his house.

Gave much alms—His love to God led him to love men; and this love proved its sincerity by acts of beneficence and charity.

Clarke: Prayed to God alway—Felt himself a dependent creature; knew he had no good but what he had received; and considered God to be the fountain whence he was to derive all his blessings. He prayed to God alway; was ever in the spirit of prayer, and frequently in the act. What an excellent character is this! And yet the man was a Gentile! He was what a Jew would repute common and unclean: see Acts 10:28. He was, therefore, not circumcised; but, as he worshipped the true God, without any idolatrous mixtures, and was in good report among all the nation of the Jews, he was undoubtedly what was called a proselyte of the gate, though not a proselyte of justice, because he had not entered into the bond of the covenant by circumcision. This was a proper person, being so much of a Jew and so much of a Gentile, to form the connecting link between both people; and God chose him that the salvation of the Jews might with as little observation as possible be transmitted to the Gentiles. The choice of such a person, through whom the door of faith was opened to the heathen world, was a proof of the wisdom and goodness of God. The man who was chosen to this honor was not a profligate Gentile; nor yet a circumcised proselyte. He was a Gentile, amiable and pure in his manners; and, for his piety and charitableness, held in high estimation among all the nation of the Jews. Against such a person they could not, with any grace, be envious, though God should pour out upon him the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Barnes: And one that feared God. This is often a designation of piety. Acts 9:31. It has been supposed by many that the expressions here used denote that Cornelius was Jew, or was instructed in the Jewish religion, and was a proselyte. But this by no means follows. It is probable that there might have been among the Gentiles a few at least who were fearers of God, and who maintained his worship according to the light which they had.

BBC: Cornelius is clearly not yet a full convert to Judaism (Acts 10:28), but his almsgiving and the appreciation of Jews who know him (Acts 10:22) testify to his devotion. Although the term “God-fearer” had a broader usage, it generally functions technically in Acts and in some other Jewish sources for righteous Gentiles who had not been circumcised. Josephus, Philo, inscriptions and even the pagan philosopher Epictetus mention this class of incomplete converts. Inscriptions indicate a high level of religious interest among many of the soldiers.

If these events are before 41 (see comment on Acts 10:1), Cornelius would probably be retired (centurions could retire at the age of sixty) by the war of 66-70. Nevertheless, most of Luke’s Jewish readers after A.D. 70 would not be fond of Roman officers stationed in Syria-Palestine, and this account would challenge their prejudices. Recruits had all sworn oaths of allegiance to the divine emperor.

Cornelius’s “household” (NASB, NRSV) or “family” (NIV, TEV) is of interest. Luke would certainly know that military personnel were not permitted to marry. Soldiers commonly had illegal concubines whom superiors ignored, but centurions were

frequently moved around and thus could rarely hope to maintain long-term informal marriages with local concubines. Thus while Cornelius may have unofficially married a concubine, the weight of probability does not favor it. It was considered proper for a wife to share her husband's religion, so if he *was* married, her shared devotion here would be natural. But the term translated "household" could include servants or freedpersons; although a cheap slave would cost about one-third of a regular soldier's annual pay, centurions received fifteen times the pay of rank-and-file soldiers. "Household" here may just mean "servants" (Acts 10:7).

Life Application Notes (LAN): "What will happen to the heathen who have never heard about Christ?" This question is often asked about God's justice. Cornelius wasn't a believer in Christ, but he was seeking God, and he was reverent and generous. Therefore God sent Peter to tell Cornelius about Christ. Cornelius is an example that God "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Those who sincerely seek God will find him! God made Cornelius's knowledge complete.⁷

McGee: 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 of Israel. They are a very generous people.

Cornelius "prayed to God alway." 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.⁸

Jewish New Testament Commentary (JNTC): A "God-fearer." Greek *phoboumenos ton theon*, "one who fears God," is regarded by most scholars as a technical term describing a Gentile who attached himself to Judaism but chose not to undergo formal conversion, which included circumcision and public immersion (proselyte baptism). This

⁷ Life Application Bible Notes

⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:554). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

class of Gentiles, known in Judaism as “proselytes of the gate,” was quite large at this time. They were attracted to the nobility of Jewish worship and to the truth of the one God who had revealed himself in the Bible, but for various reasons did not become Jews. See 13:16.

He gave generously to help the Jewish poor. The text does not say “the Jewish poor” but “the people,” Greek *laos*. However “*laos*” is frequently a technical term referring to the Jewish people, the people of God, not people in general; hence this rendering.

And prayed regularly to God. Like Ruth in the *Tanakh* (Ruth 1:16) this God-fearing Gentile had accepted the two essentials of true worship (see above, 2:1): (1) “Your people shall be my people.” Although Cornelius did not officially join the Jewish people, he cared for them as his own. (2) “And your God shall be my God.” He prayed to the God of Israel. Or, looking at it another way, he had works stemming from faith (Ro 1:5, 16:26; Ga 5:6; Ep 2:10; Ya 2:14)—which is how the New Testament defines true religion (Ya 1:27), as does the *Tanakh* (Micah 6:8, Ecclesiastes 12:13).⁹

[Devout] is the Greek word *eusebes*. *Eu* means “well” and *sebomai* means “to worship or reverence.” Whereas this might refer to a worshipful pagan (17:23), when Luke connected the word with the idea of “one who feared God,” he usually meant a God-fearing proselyte (10:22). Luke used this word to refer to the Gentile God-seekers, many of whom worshipped in the synagogues, even though they had not been circumcised. They were called “proselytes of the gate” and were not full proselytes. Cornelius and his family may have had reserved places in the synagogue, but they had not made the transition to Judaism. The morality and cleanliness evident in the lives of the Hebrews from their obedience to the Mosaic Law attracted many such devout Gentiles. Nevertheless, Cornelius’s eternal salvation depended on Peter’s bringing him the gospel (11:13, 14).¹⁰

Cornelius was a Gentile God-fearer. (He had not formally converted to the Jewish faith.) He “prayed regularly.” The 3:00 PM hour was the second of three prescribed hours of prayer for the Jews. See note on 3:1. His vision occurred while he was in prayer. The angel indicated his prayers were answered, having been remembered by God. Regular prayer will eventually result in receiving God’s answer.¹¹

Acts 10:3

He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

9th hour = 3 in the afternoon. This was the usual hour of evening worship among the Jews. He keeps the Jewish hours of prayer, which corresponded to the morning and evening offerings in the temple (Acts 3:1).

⁹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

¹⁰ Believer’s Study Bible Notes

¹¹ Disciple’s Study Bible

Clarke: He saw in a vision evidently—The text is as plain as it can be, that an angel of God did appear to Cornelius. This was in a vision, i.e. a supernatural representation; and it was manifestly, evidently made; and at such a time too as precluded the possibility of his being asleep; for it was about the ninth hour of the day, answering to our three o'clock in the afternoon, (see note on Acts 3:1 (note)), the time of public prayer, according to the custom of the Jews, and while Peter was engaged in that sacred duty. The angelic appearance to Cornelius was something similar to that made to Daniel, Daniel 9:20-23, and that especially to Zachariah, the father of John Baptist, Luke 1:11, etc.

Barnes: An angel of God. Matthew 1:20. Comp Hebrews 1:14. This angel was sent to signify to Cornelius that his alms were accepted by God as an evidence of his piety, and to direct him to send for Peter to instruct him in the way of salvation. The importance of the occasion—the introduction of the gospel to a *Gentile*, and hence to the entire Gentile world—was probably the chief reason why an angel was commissioned to visit the Roman centurion.

McGee: This centurion was an officer in the Roman army, a career officer, and a man of influence. Also he had a tremendous influence on his own household, as we shall see. He was a good man to all outward 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. John 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 Romans 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.¹²

Cornelius has a vision (10:3-8)

The fateful time of Cornelius' calling is at hand. It begins on a certain day about three o'clock in the afternoon, one of the statutory Jewish hours of prayer (3:1). Cornelius is praying at this time (10:30). He has a vision in which a messenger from God, an angel, said: "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God" (10:4).

The angel speaks in the language of sacrifice used in Jewish circles. The "memorial offering" mentioned here alludes to the Old Testament flour offerings made from grain that were to be burned "as a memorial portion" (Leviticus 2:2). (The Greek word for "memorial" in Acts 10:4 was the same one the Greek Septuagint used in Leviticus 2:2.) This offering was burned on the altar and "an aroma pleasing to the Lord" went up to God (Leviticus 2:2).

Like the aroma of the sacrifice, the scent of Cornelius' prayers and gifts is going "up" to God. God is signaling his pleasure with Cornelius, and he is ready to reveal his salvation to him. In preparation for this, the angel tells Cornelius to send men to Joppa to ask Peter to come to his home. Cornelius calls two servants and a military aide, a devout man, and dispatches them to Joppa (11:7-8).¹³

Acts 10:4

And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

[**What is it, Lord?**] This is Question 39 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 10:21.

His alms and prayers are accepted before God.

This statement should not be taken as a direct statement of God. It has been used for generations to prove too much—that no prayer of any sinner will ever be heard of God. It should be understood only in connection with what was uttered: God does not use sinners to heal the eyes of the blind and if He were not of God He could do nothing (John 9:31-34). To take this as proof that no sinner will ever get any kind of prayer answered is erroneous, for God has heard sinners in all ages and will always do so if they pray the right kind of prayers.

¹²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:554). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹³ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts10.htm>

Examples of Hearing Sinners:

1. Jacob for prosperity (Genesis 28)
2. Israel for deliverance (Judges 3:9,15; Judges 6:7-10; Judges 10:6-18; Judges 20:18-28)
3. Ahab for mercy (1 Kings 21:25-29)
4. Manasseh for mercy (2 Chron. 33:9-13)
5. Sinner woman for pardon (Luke 7:36-50)
6. Publican for pardon (Luke 18:9-14)
7. Nobleman for healing (John 4:49-53)
8. Cornelius and house for salvation (cp. Acts 10:1-6 with Acts 11:14-18; Acts 15:7-13)¹⁴

He has not promised sinners any particular answer other than forgiveness if they repent (1 John 1:9), but if God in His goodness chooses to hear other prayers of sinners, that is His privilege and no statement of a blind man can tie His hands.

Clarke: Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial—Being all performed in simplicity and godly sincerity, they were acceptable to the Most High. Come up for a memorial: This form of speech is evidently borrowed from the sacrificial system of the Jews. Pious and sincere prayers are high in God's estimation; and therefore are said to ascend to him, as the smoke and flame of the burnt-offering appeared to ascend to heaven. These prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God: this is a manifest allusion to the meat-offering, which, in Leviticus 2:16, is said to be **אֶזְכָּרָה** *azkerah*, a memorial, (speaking after the manner of men), to put God in remembrance that such a person was his worshipper, and needed his protection and help. So the prayers and alms of Cornelius ascended before God as an acceptable sacrifice, and were recorded in the kingdom of heaven, that the answers might be given in their due season.

He was afraid. At the suddenness and unexpected character of the vision.

Barnes: What is it, Lord? This is the expression of surprise and alarm. The word *Lord* should have been translated *Sir*, as there is no evidence that this is an address to god, and still less that he regarded the personage present as the Lord. It is such language as a man would naturally use who was suddenly surprised; who should witness a strange form appearing unexpectedly before him; and who should exclaim, "Sir, what is the matter?"

BBC: In the Old Testament as well God looked out for many Gentiles who were seeking him, whether or not they had yet become full converts (e.g., Joshua 6:25; 2 Samuel 12:9-10), and revealed himself to individuals other than Abraham's descendants (Genesis 5:24; Numbers 22-25). "Memorial" (Acts 10:4) may be the language of sacrifice (Leviticus 2:2), which would be fitting for prayers offered during the time of sacrifice in the temple.

God saw Cornelius's sincere faith. His prayers and generous giving were a "memorial offering before God," a sacrificial offering to the Lord. God answers the sincere prayers

¹⁴ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

of those who seek him by sending the right person or the right information at the right time.

Thy prayers and thine alms—The way in which both are specified is emphatic. The one denotes the spiritual outgoing of his soul to God, the other its practical outgoing to men.¹⁵

McGee: 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.¹⁶

Acts 10:5

And now send men to Joppa, and call for *one* Simon, whose surname is Peter:

Joppa is about 30 miles away, south of Caesarea.

The difference between Cornelius and many religious people today is this: he knew that his religious devotion was not sufficient to save him. Many religious people today are satisfied that their character and good works will get them to heaven, and they have no concept either of their own sin or of God's grace. In his prayers, Cornelius was asking God to show him the way of salvation (Acts 11:13–14).

In many respects, John Wesley was like Cornelius. He was a religious man, a church member, a minister, and the son of a minister. He belonged to a "religious club" at Oxford, the purpose of which was the perfecting of the Christian life. Wesley served as a foreign missionary, but even as he preached to others, he had no assurance of his own personal salvation.

On May 24, 1738, Wesley reluctantly attended a small meeting in London where someone was reading aloud from Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. "About a quarter before nine," Wesley wrote in his journal, "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." The result was the great Wesleyan revival that not only swept many into the kingdom, but also helped transform British society through Christian social action.¹⁷

¹⁵Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 10:4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:555). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁷Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 10:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Acts 10:6

He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

[**Simon the tanner**] a tanner was despised. [If a girl was betrothed to a tanner without knowing he was a tanner, the betrothal was void.] His house had to be at least 50 cubits outside the city.

[**He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side**] God knows the addresses of His people.

[**oughtest to do**] What was it that Cornelius ought to do? Hear and believe the gospel (Acts 10:22,32).

Clarke: What thou oughtest to do—From this it appears that matters of great moment had occupied the mind of Cornelius. He was not satisfied with the state of his own soul, nor with the degree he possessed of religious knowledge; and he set apart a particular time for extraordinary fasting and prayer, that God might farther reveal to him the knowledge of his will. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus, and had been perplexed with the different opinions that prevailed concerning him, and now prayed to God that he might know what part he should take; and the answer to this prayer is, “Send to Joppa for Simon Peter, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.” This clause, so explanatory, is wanting in almost every MS. and version of note. Griesbach and some others have left it out of the text. But see Acts 11:14, where it stands in substance.

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!¹⁸

Acts 10:7

And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

household (of 3) shared...

Clarke: And a devout soldier—It has already been remarked that Cornelius had taken care to instruct his family in Divine things; and it appears also that he had been attentive to the spiritual interests of his regiment. We do not find that it was then, even among the Romans, considered a disgrace for a military officer to teach his men lessons of morality, and piety towards God, whatever it may be in some Christian countries in the present time.

¹⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:555). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Barnes: A devout soldier. A pious man. This is an instance of the effect of piety in a military officer. Few men have more influence; and in this case the effect was seen not only in the piety of his family, but of this attending soldier. Such men have usually been supposed to be far from the influence of religion; but this instance shows that even the labours and disadvantages of a camp are not necessarily hostile to the existence of piety. Comp. Luke 3:14.

ESV: Cornelius sent two of his most trusted **servants** and a **soldier**, whose description as being **devout** likely indicates he was a God-fearer himself.

Acts 10:8

And when he had declared all *these* things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

[**Declared all these things**] he apparently explained to them, they must have been devout also.

He sent them to Joppa—It is interesting, that from Joppa, Jonah was sent to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh; and from the same place Peter was sent to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles at Caesarea.

Spurgeon: The tanner's trade was greatly despised, but this did not prejudice the centurion. Better to learn the way of God from one who lodged with a poor tanner than remain in ignorance. Meanwhile God was preparing Peter to comply with the centurion's request.

Acts 10:9

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

[**sixth hour**] This was 12:00 noon.

Barnes: About the sixth hour. About twelve o'clock at noon. The Jews had two stated seasons of prayer—morning and evening. But it is evident that the more pious of the Jews frequently added a third season of devotion, probably at noon. Thus David says, Psalms 55:17 "Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud." Thus Daniel "kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed," Daniel 6:10,13. It was also customary in the early Christian church to offer prayer at the third, sixth, and ninth hours. Clem. Alex. as quoted by Doddridge. Christians will, however, have not merely *stated* seasons for prayer, but they will seize upon moments of leisure, and when their feelings strongly incline them to it, to pray.

Peter must be overcoming some of his prejudices as he is staying with a tanner.

[morrow] Caesarea was about 35 miles north of Joppa and could not be reached in one day. Cornelius received the vision at 3:00 p.m. (Acts 10:3); so if they started on the journey shortly after that they would reach Peter by noon (cp. Acts 10:23-24).

[housetop to pray] Houses had flat roofs on which people retired to pray and relax.

Clarke: On the morrow, as they went on their journey—From Joppa to Caesarea was about twelve or fifteen leagues; the messengers could not have left the house of Cornelius till about two hours before sunset; therefore, they must have traveled a part of the night, in order to arrive at Joppa the next day, towards noon.—Calmet. Cornelius sent two of his household servants, by way of respect to Peter; probably the soldier was intended for their defense, as the roads in Judea were by no means safe.

Clarke: Peter went up upon the house-top to pray—It has often been remarked that the houses in Judea were builded with flat roofs, on which people walked, conversed, meditated, prayed, etc. The house-top was the place of retirement; and thither Peter went for the purpose of praying to God. In Bengal, some of the rich Hindoos have a room on the top of the house, in which they perform worship daily.

BBC: Caesarea was about thirty miles north of Joppa. If Cornelius's messengers left even immediately after 3 p.m. (Acts 10:3), they must have traveled part of the night on foot, or (less likely) Cornelius must have found horses for them to ride, because here they approach Joppa by noon ("the sixth hour"—KJV, NASB). Thus their task must be urgent.

The flat rooftops were used for drying vegetables and for prayers. If one reclined under a canopy, the rooftops were cooler even at midday than the poorly ventilated rooms of most Palestinian homes (although this home may be larger than most; cf. Acts 10:17). Noon was not a regular hour of prayer (Acts 3:1), so Peter prays in addition to the traditional hours followed by many of his contemporaries.

Acts 10:10

And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

BBC: Even Palestinian Jews most lenient in other regards kept kosher. Thus this vision would present a horrifying situation for any first-century Palestinian Jew (and the vast majority of foreign Jews as well): God commands Peter to eat all these unclean, forbidden creatures. Hungry he may be (Acts 10:10), but he is not *that* hungry!

[trance] A state in which one seems to be unaware of his surroundings, focused only on the subject of the vision (Acts 10:11-16).

Clarke: He became very hungry—It seems that this happened about dinner-time; for it appears that they were making ready, dressing the victuals for the family. The dinner among the ancients was a very slight meal; and they had no breakfast: their supper was

their principal meal. And, in very ancient times, they ate only once in the day. Supper was the meal at which they saw their friends, the business of the day being then finished.

Clarke: He fell into a trance— An ecstasy fell upon him. A person may be said to be in an ecstasy when transported with joy or admiration, so that he is insensible to every object but that on which he is engaged. Peter's ecstasy is easily accounted for: he went up to the house-top to pray: at first he felt keen hunger; but, being earnestly engaged with God, all natural appetites became absorbed in the intense application of his soul to his Maker. While every passion and appetite was under this Divine influence, and the soul, without let or hinderance, freely conversing with God, then the visionary and symbolical representation mentioned here took place.

Barnes: And he became very hungry. From the connexion, where it is said that they were making ready, that is, preparing a meal, it would seem that this was the customary hour of dining. The Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans, however, had but two meals, and the first was usually taken about ten or eleven o'clock. This meal usually consisted of fruit, milk, cheese, etc. Their principal meal was about six or seven in the afternoon; at which time they observed their feasts. See Jahn's Bib. Archae _ 145.

Acts 10:11

And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

[great sheet] a vast "tarpaulin."

[four corners, and let down to the earth] Let down from heaven by four corners and filled with clean and unclean creatures, illustrating that God wills to save both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:34-35; Acts 11:1-18; Acts 15:7-13).

Clarke: And saw heaven opened—His mind now entirely spiritualized, and absorbed in heavenly contemplation, was capable of discoveries of the spiritual world; a world which, with its plenitude of inhabitants, surrounds us at all times; but which we are incapable of seeing through the dense medium of flesh and blood, and their necessarily concomitant earthly passions. Much, however, of such a world and its economy may be apprehended by him who is purified from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and who has perfected holiness in the fear of God. But this is a subject to which the enthusiast in vain attempts to ascend. The turbulent working of his imagination, and the gross earthly crudities which he wishes to obtrude on the world as revelations from God, afford a sufficient refutation of their own blasphemous pretensions.

A great sheet, knit at the four corners—Perhaps intended to be an emblem of the whole world and its various nations, to the four corners of which the Gospel was to extend, and to offer its blessings to all the inhabitants, without distinction of nation, etc. Four often represents the whole world in other scriptures, common expressions we hear are the four compass points, from where the four winds blow, four seasons, and others.

Barnes: As it had been. It is important to mark this expression. The sacred writer does not say that Peter literally saw such all object descending; but he uses this as an imperfect description of the vision. It was not a literal descent of a vessel, but it was such a kind of representation to him, producing the same impression, and the same effect, *as if* such a vessel had descended.

Acts 10:12

Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

Lev 11, read Levitical laws of clean and unclean.

Clarke: All manner of four-footed beasts, etc.—Every species of quadrupeds, whether wild or domestic; all reptiles, and all fowls. Consequently, both the clean and unclean were present in this visionary representation: those that the Jewish law allowed to be sacrificed to God, or proper for food; as well as those which that law had prohibited in both cases: such as the beasts that do not chew the cud; fish which have no scales; fowls of prey and such others as are specified in Leviticus 11:1, etc.

In regards to Clarke's commentary there were no creatures from the sea mentioned in Peter's vision.

Barnes: Wherein, This particular vision was suggested by Peter's hunger, Acts 10:10. It was designed, however, to teach him an important lesson in regard to the introduction of all nations to the gospel. Its descending from heaven may have been an intimation that that religion which was about to abolish the distinction between the Jews and other nations was of Divine origin.

LAN: According to Jewish law, certain foods were forbidden to be eaten (see Leviticus 11). The food laws made it difficult for Jews to eat with Gentiles without risking defilement. In fact, the Gentiles themselves were often seen as "unclean." Peter's vision meant that he should not look upon the Gentiles as inferior people whom God would not redeem. Before having the vision, Peter would have thought that a Gentile Roman officer could not accept Christ. Afterward, he understood that it was his responsibility to go with the messengers into a Gentile home and tell Cornelius the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Notice that there were all manner of beasts, all kinds of birds, and all kinds of bugs, however also notice that there was nothing from the sea which is full of unclean things.

JNTC: Leviticus 11 specifies that only those four-footed animals that chew the cud and have split hoofs are *kosher* ("fit") for Jewish people to eat. No reptiles are allowed, and permitted birds are listed by name. In Kefa's vision **all kinds** of creatures appeared, including those that are non-*kosher* or *treif*. The word "*treif*" means "torn" and actually

refers to animals slain by predators and not slaughtered in accordance with Jewish practice;¹⁹

Acts 10:13

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

[**kill, and eat**] Literally, sacrifice and eat. Since Jews and Gentiles were represented by the animals, showing how God would also save the Gentiles, it was Peter's duty to preach to both. God was illustrating and emphasizing to Peter that the middle wall of partition was broken down. Already about eight years had gone by and the gospel had been withheld from Gentiles (Ephes. 2:14-16). It was time now to bring both into one fold under one shepherd (John 10:16; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Clarke: Rise, Peter, kill and eat— Sacrifice and eat. Though this verb is sometimes used to signify the slaying of animals for food, yet, as the proper notion is to slay for the purpose of sacrifice, it appears to me to be better to preserve that meaning here. Animals that were offered in sacrifice were considered as given to God; and, when he received the life, the flesh was given to those who offered the sacrifice, that they might feed upon it; and every sacrifice had in it the nature of a covenant; and covenants were usually made by eating together on the flesh of the sacrifice offered on the occasion, God being supposed to be invisibly present with them, and partaking of the feast. The Jews and Gentiles are certainly represented by the clean and unclean animals in this large vessel: these, by the ministry of the Gospel, were to be offered up a spiritual sacrifice to God. Peter was to be a prime instrument in this work; he was to offer them to God, and rejoice in the work of his hands. The spirit of the heavenly direction seems to be this: “The middle wall of partition is now to be pulled down; the Jews and Gentiles are called to become one flock, under one shepherd and bishop of souls. Thou, Peter, shalt open the door of faith to the Gentiles, and be also the minister of the circumcision. Rise up; already a blessed sacrifice is prepared: go and offer it to God; and let thy soul feed on the fruits of his mercy and goodness, in thus showing his gracious design of saving both Jews and Gentiles by Christ crucified.”

Acts 10:14

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

[**Not so, Lord**] is an oxymoron (a self-contradictory phrase).

To an observant Jew, to eat a Levitically unclean animal is unthinkable (Col 2:14, 16, 17).

¹⁹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:12). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

[**common or unclean**] Defiled and forbidden by the law (Mark 7:2; Leviticus 11; Deut. 14).

Clarke: Common or unclean—By common, whatever was in general use among the Gentiles is to be understood; by *ακαθαρτον*, unclean, every thing that was forbidden by the Mosaic law. However, the one word may be considered as explanatory of the other. The rabbins themselves, and many of the primitive fathers, believed that by the unclean animals forbidden by the law the Gentiles were meant.

Barnes: I have never eaten, In the Old Testament, God had made a distinction between clean and unclean animals. See Leviticus 11:2-27, Deuteronomy 14:3-20. This law remained in the Scriptures, and Peter pleaded that he *had never* violated it, implying that he could not now violate it; as it was a law of God, and as it was unrepealed, he did not dare to act in a different manner from what it required. Between that law, and the command which he now received in the vision, there was an apparent variation; and Peter naturally referred to the well-known and admitted written law.

BBC: 14-16. In another vision half a millennium before, God had similarly called Ezekiel, a priest, to eat something unclean, and he had offered the same protest; God's response was but a small improvement (Ezekiel 4:13-15). Jewish people had preferred death to eating unclean (nonkosher) food in the time of the Maccabees; thus Jewish readers would be appalled that God would require anything so disgusting (from the perspective of cultural cuisine) and impious. The point of the vision, that God can declare anything clean, applies to the Gentiles Peter is about to meet (Acts 10:28; Acts 15:9). Repetition of a revelation is not unusual (1 Samuel 3:4-10).

While his host was preparing the noon meal, Peter fell into a trance during which he was commanded to kill and eat all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds. The problem was that the animals were mixed: clean and unclean beasts were gathered together (see Lev. 11). Jewish people were taught from childhood never to touch or eat any animal that was unclean. However, here Peter was being commanded by God to do just that. Three times God corrected Peter's resistance with the words, **what God has cleansed you must not call common**. Food may have been his first consideration, but Peter would soon understand the greater message. The vision was a sign from heaven that Jews were no longer to call Gentiles unclean. From that point on, these two groups would be on equal footing before the Father. God was breaking down Peter's prejudices.²⁰

Acts 10:15

And the voice *spoke* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

[**cleansed, that call not thou common**] God had not yet saved Gentiles by the gospel, but was on the verge of doing so. He first had to teach Peter that He wanted to save

²⁰ The Nelson Study Bible

Gentiles—He was, after all, sovereign. He now wanted the church to know that Gentiles are just as good as Jews when both are cleansed from sin; that there is to be no distinction in races in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Col. 3:11); and that both Jews and Gentiles are to make one body in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Ephes. 2:14-22).

Clarke: What God hath cleansed—God, who made at first the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, has a right to remove it, whenever and by whatever means he pleases: he, therefore, who made the distinction, for wise purposes, between the clean and the unclean, now pronounces all to be clean. He had authority to do the first; he has authority to do the last. God has purposed that the Gentiles shall have the Gospel preached to them: what he therefore has cleansed, “that call not thou common.”

Barnes: What God hath cleansed. What God hath pronounced or declared pure. If God has commanded you to do a thing, it is not impure or wrong. Its use is lawful if he has commanded it. Perhaps Peter would have supposed that the design of this vision was to instruct him that the distinction between clean and unclean food, as recognized by the Jews, was about to be abolished, Acts 17. But the result showed that it had a higher and more important design. It was to show him that they who had been esteemed by the Jews as unclean or profane—the entire Gentile world—might now be admitted to similar privileges with the Jews. That barrier was to be broken down, and the whole world was to be admitted to the same fellowship and privileges in the gospel.

Acts 10:16

This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

[**thrice**] Three times to confirm it (2 Cor. 13:1). For the greater certainty, and to make the deeper impression on the apostle’s mind.

[**heaven**] The vessel was let down from heaven, signifying the will of God to save both Jews and Gentiles. It was taken up into heaven, signifying that both Jews and Gentiles came from God and both would return to God through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ephes. 3:14-15).

Clarke: And the vessel was received up again into heaven—Both Jews and Gentiles came equally from God; and to him, both, by the preaching of the Gospel, shall again return.

Spurgeon: Do not wonder if you have to teach children many times the same thing, for even an apostle needed to have his lesson repeated three times.

Acts 10:17

Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

[**doubted**] Greek: *diaporeo* (GSN-1280), perplexed as to meaning.

Clarke: While Peter doubted—the men—stood before the gate—In all this we find an admirable display of the economy of Providence. Cornelius prays, and has a vision which prepares him to receive instruction from Peter: Peter prays, and has a vision which prepares and disposes him to give instruction to Cornelius. While he is in doubts and perplexity what the full meaning of the vision might be, the messengers, who had been dispatched under the guidance of an especial Providence, came to the door; and the Holy Spirit gives him information that his doubts should be all cleared up by accompanying the men who were now inquiring for him. How exactly does everything in the conduct of Providence occur; and how completely is everything adapted to time, place, and occasion! All is in weight, measure, and number. Those simple occurrences which men snatch at, and press into the service of their own wishes, and call them providential openings may, indeed, be links of a providential chain, in reference to some other matter; but unless they be found to speak the same language in all their parts, occurrence corresponding with occurrence, they are not to be construed as indications of the Divine will in reference to the claimants. Many persons, through these misapprehensions, miscarrying, have been led to charge God foolishly for the unsuccessful issue of some business in which their passions, not his providence, prompted them to engage.

Barnes: Behold, the men, We see here an admirable arrangement of the events of Providence to fit each other. Every part of this transaction is made to harmonize with every other part; and it was so arranged, that, just in the moment when the mind of Peter was filled with perplexity, the very event should occur which should relieve him of his embarrassment. Such a coincidence is not uncommon. An event of Divine Providence may be as clear an expression of his will, and may as certainly serve to indicate our duty, as the most manifest revelation would do; and a state of mind may, by an arrangement of circumstances, be produced, that shall be extremely perplexing until some event shall occur, or some field of usefulness shall open, that shall exactly correspond to it, and shall indicate to us the will of God. We should observe then the events of God's Providence. We should mark and record the train of our own thoughts, and we should watch with interest any event that occurs, when we are perplexed and embarrassed, to obtain, if possible, an expression of the will of God.

Pondering the vision (10:17-23)

Peter is puzzled about the meaning of the vision, with its strange mixture of living things, and the odd commands from the voice (10:17). While Peter is mulling over what he has seen, the emissaries from Cornelius arrive at Simon's home. They stop at the gate, shouting to the occupants, asking whether Peter is staying there (9:17). This little scene with Gentiles calling out from beyond the gate reflects exactly the situation the vision is meant to correct.

Devout non-Jews such as those who came from Cornelius probably understand that Jews do not want any close association with Gentiles. Thus, it would be rude for them to come to the door of a Jew's home, with the desire of being allowed inside. But at the exact moment of the exchange at the gate, the Holy Spirit says to Peter: "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (10:20). The fact of the Spirit having to encourage Peter not to be hesitant reveals his reluctance to associate with Gentiles.

By now, however, Peter begins to suspect that God is making some purpose known to him, so he invites the men into the house as his guests (10:23). (No doubt, this occurs with the tanner's permission, since Peter himself is a guest.) The men explain they are here at the request of Cornelius, emphasizing that he is "a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people" (10:22). More than this, they say that Cornelius has not decided on his own to contact Peter, but an angel from God told him to do so.²¹

Acts 10:18

And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

Being knowledgeable about Judaism themselves (Acts 10:2), Cornelius's messengers "call out" rather than simply going up to the house to enter (Acts 10:28), although as representatives of a Roman centurion they could surely have done so with impunity under Roman custom.

Acts 10:19

While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

Not only did he have a vision, but the Spirit was talking to him.

[Spirit said unto him] The Holy Spirit prepared Cornelius, telling him to send for Peter. While this took place He dealt with Peter to make him willing to obey, even to go to Gentiles. God again worked with both persons concerned as in the case of Saul and Ananias (Acts 9:10-20). When God is in a matter such harmony of His dealings is evident.

[Behold, three men seek thee] Three personal acts of the Holy Spirit:

1. Sent an angel to Cornelius and gave him a vision (Acts 10:3-7,22,30; Acts 11:13)
2. Gave Peter a vision (Acts 10:9-16; Acts 11:5)
3. Spoke to Peter and gave him explicit instructions (Acts 10:19-20)

²¹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts10.htm>

JNTC: Kefa was still puzzling over the meaning of the vision he had seen Kefa's mind was still on the vision. What could it possibly mean? Would God, who established his covenant with the Jewish people and gave them an eternal *Torah* at Mount Sinai, and who is himself unchangeable (Malachi 3:6), change his *Torah* to make unclean animals *kosher*? This is the apparent meaning, and many Christian commentators assert that this is in fact the meaning. But they ignore the plain statement a few verses later which at last resolves Kefa's puzzlement, "God has shown me not to call any person unclean or impure" (v. 28&N). So the vision is about persons and not about food.

God has not abrogated the Jewish dietary laws. Yeshua said, "Don't think that I have come to do away with the *Torah*" (Mt 5:17–20). The specific issue of whether Yeshua abolished *kashrut* has already arisen at Mk 7:19&N; the conclusion there is that he did not. In Kefa's vision the sheet lowered from heaven contained all kinds of animals, wild beasts, reptiles and birds; yet I know of no Bible interpreters who insist that eagles, vultures, owls, bats, weasels, mice, lizards, crocodiles, chameleons, snakes, spiders and bugs must now be considered edible. God specifies in Leviticus 11 what Jews are to regard as "food." Later, the way in which the laws of *kashrut* fit into the New Covenant is clarified for Kefa and for us (Ga 2:12b&N, 14b&N).²²

Holy Spirit, Mission—The Spirit sometimes guides the church in specific ways to accomplish its world mission. The Spirit clearly told Peter to go with the three messengers from Cornelius. This event is important in two ways. First, since Pentecost Peter had been the outstanding spokesman for the church, so it was particularly important that the Spirit guide him. Second, Cornelius was the first Gentile to become a Christian, and it was crucially important for the church to realize its mission included Gentiles as well as Jews and Samaritans. The Spirit was leading the church, represented by Peter, over what is perhaps the single most important threshold it would ever have to cross—the racial barrier. The Spirit seeks to break down every barrier which would prevent us from witnessing to any person who does not trust Christ.²³

Acts 10:20

Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

Acts 10:21

Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

[what is the cause wherefore ye are come?] This is question 40 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 10:29.

²² Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:17). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

²³ Disciple's Study Bible Notes

Which were sent unto him from Cornelius—this clause is wanting in almost every MS. of worth, and in almost all the versions.

Clarke: What is the cause therefore ye are come?—He still did not know the full import of the vision; but being informed by the Holy Spirit that three men were seeking him, and that he should go with them, without scruple, he instantly obeyed; and finding them at the door, desired to know why they sought him.

Acts 10:22

And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

[to hear words of thee] This is the expressed purpose of the Holy Spirit in arranging for Peter to go to Cornelius (Acts 10:6,22,32-44; Acts 11:14; Acts 15:7). Preaching the gospel is God's method of saving people (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Acts 8:4; Romans 1:16; Romans 10:9-17; 1 Cor. 1:17-24; 1 Cor. 2:1-16; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

Cornelius the centurion, They gave him the simple relation which they had received from their master.

To hear words of thee—they did not yet know however what these words would be.

BBC: Although many stories tell of Jewish teachers talking with Gentiles, strict Jews would not enter a Gentile's house or allow a Gentile in theirs. Thus Peter faces a problem in being invited to Cornelius's house. Although more lax Jews would probably not object (Acts 10:23a), Peter has to be concerned about stricter elements within the Jewish church, which eventually included even Pharisees (Acts 15:5).

Acts 10:23

Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Two visions bring together 2 men 30 miles apart. 10 men journeyed: 2 household servants and a soldier; the apostle Peter; 6 Christian Jews (11:12). 10 is the number of witness: Boaz in Ruth, etc.

[**And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him**] See note, "Acts 10:9. Peter took six witnesses with him, as he knew he would have to give account to the church for his action (Acts 10:45; Acts 11:1-18; Acts 15:7).

Clarke: Then called he them in, etc.—They had already walked a long journey in a short time, and needed refreshment; and it was thought expedient they should rest that night with Simon the tanner.

Clarke: Certain brethren from Joppa—They were six in number, as we learn from Acts 11:12. It was necessary that there should be several witnesses of the important transactions which were about to take place; as on no slight evidence would even the converted Jews believe that repentance unto life, and the Holy Spirit, should be granted to the Gentiles.

Barnes: And lodged them. They remained with him through the night. Four days were occupied before Peter met Cornelius at Caesarea. On the first, the angel appeared to Cornelius; on the second, the messengers arrived at Joppa, Acts 10:9; on the third, Peter returned with them, Acts 10:23; and on the fourth, they arrived at Caesarea, Acts 10:24,30.

BBC: Pharisees and other pietists were concerned about impure table fellowship; lodging Gentiles overnight, no matter how exhausted the guests may have been, contradicted strict Jewish piety. Eating with them was forbidden on the principle that they were evil company (Jubilees 22:16—see glossary entry for Jubilees). Perhaps Simon, being a tanner, is less concerned with strict rules; although most of his customers were probably Jewish, Joppa was a mixed town and his was a profession despised by strict pietists anyway. (Even later rabbis allowed some short-term business contacts with Gentiles and recognized that some shops employed both Gentile and Jewish workers.) But Peter's vision probably has something to do with the treatment the guests receive.

Peter's companions are no doubt brought partly to serve as witnesses that he behaves properly (Acts 10:45; cf. Deut. 17:6; Deut. 19:15).

Contingent goes to Caesarea (10:23)

Peter must now be doubly impressed that something of importance – something inspired by the Holy Spirit – is happening with the Gentile Cornelius. He wholeheartedly agrees to go with the men. The next day Peter starts out for Caesarea, 30 miles away. He takes some of the disciples living in Joppa with him. We learn later that the contingent consists of six people (11:12). They are identified as "circumcised believers," which is to say they are Jewish Christians who follow the traditions of the Torah (10:45). In retrospect, this proves a wise move, as Peter will later be severely criticized by the Jerusalem church for meeting with Cornelius (11:3). The six will be important witnesses to the operation of the Holy Spirit in this momentous event.²⁴

²⁴ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts10.htm>

Acts 10:24

And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

[**called together his kinsmen and near friends**] Cornelius had no doubt brought up his family in all the truth he had, teaching the same to his friends. Hence, they were ready to be saved (Acts 10:44).

Clarke: His kinsmen and near friends— His, relatives, and his necessary friends; but the Syriac makes an epithet as well and thus the passage may be read, his kinsmen, his domestics, and his friends. It appears that he had collected the whole circle of his intimate acquaintance, that they also might profit by a revelation which he expected to come immediately from heaven; and these amounted to many persons; see Acts 10:27.

BBC: Had they left around sunrise, after the Gentiles had lodged in his house overnight (NASB “he arose”—Acts 10:23), and walked without stopping, they would have arrived at Cornelius’s house that evening. “The following day” here means that they all stopped for overnight lodging along the way (Acts 10:30), presumably in a mixed town (perhaps in Apollonia, just under halfway along the Mediterranean coast). That Cornelius is patiently “waiting” (NASB, TEV) for them means not only that he trusted his servants not to run off but also that he is eager to hear Peter’s message. The term translated “relatives” (NASB, NIV) can also mean “countrymen” and probably does here.

Spurgeon: It was a journey of thirty miles, but no doubt the apostle and his six brethren had sweet fellowship on the road, and found kind companions in the three attendants.

Acts 10:25

And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

Obeisance misunderstood (Eastern custom) however, Peter refused.

Clarke: Fell down at his feet, and worshipped him—As Peter’s coming was announced by an angel, Cornelius might have supposed that Peter himself was an angel, and of a superior order; seeing he came to announce what the first angel was not employed to declare: it was, probably, in consequence of this thought that he prostrated himself before Peter, offering him the highest act of civil respect; for there was nothing in the act, as performed by Cornelius, which belonged to the worship of the true God. Prostrations to superiors were common in all Asiatic countries. The Codex Bezae, and the later Syriac in the margin reads this verse differently from all other MSS. and versions; thus, But as Peter drew nigh to Caesarea, one of the servants ran before, and told that he was come: then Cornelius leaped up, and met him, and, falling at his feet, he worshipped him. This is a very remarkable addition, and relates circumstances that we may naturally suppose did actually take place.

BBC: Greco-Roman paganism believed not only in gods but in semidivine men, often sons of the gods, who had supernatural powers (Acts 14:11; Acts 28:6). One would offer obeisance to gods by falling at their feet and worshipping them, as Cornelius does to Peter here. Cornelius should know better (Acts 10:2) than to treat Peter with such reverence; perhaps he intends only a special form of homage, which a servant of Jesus finds inappropriate (cf. Luke 22:25-27).

McGee: We can see that Cornelius had quite an influence on his family and friends. He has called them together for this occasion. Also we can see that Cornelius is still a pagan, a heathen. When he is instructed by an angel to send for Simon Peter, he concludes that this man must really be important; so he falls down and worships Peter.

It is interesting to see Simon Peter's reaction to this. Friend, Simon Peter would never have let you get down to kiss his big toe. He just wouldn't permit it.²⁵

Acts 10:26

But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

[took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man] A rebuke to any man who receives men kneeling down before him or permits them to kiss his feet. This is not the Christian spirit (Acts 10:25-26; Acts 14:11-18; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9). Cornelius had been brought up a pagan and was accustomed from boyhood to seeing divine honors rendered to heroes. He no doubt thought Peter was an angel of a higher order, being sent for by an ordinary angel. It was not strange then that he would bow to Peter.

I myself also am a man—"I am not an angel; I am come to you simply, on the part of God, to deliver to you the doctrine of eternal life."

This act of worship could have caused Peter to become arrogant. After all, a Roman centurion was bowing before him. Instead, Peter pointed Cornelius to Christ. We too should remember our mortality whenever we are flattered or honored, and use the opportunity to give glory to God. However we still see this same behavior, many bow to the Pope, Obama bowing to the King of Saudi Arabia.

JNTC: Fell prostrate at his feet to welcome him, also to honor him as God's messenger, but not to "worship" him (as some English versions have it). As a "God-fearer" Cornelius would have known better—like Rabbi Akiva's wife, who prostrated herself and kissed his feet when he returned after twelve years' *yeshivah* study but certainly did not worship him (Talmud, Ketubot 63a). However, Kefa's response, "**Stand up! I myself am just a man,**" shows that he misread what Cornelius did as an act of

²⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:556). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

idolatry to be expected from a pagan: the fisherman from the Galil had probably never had such a thing happen to him before.²⁶

Acts 10:27

And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

Quite a group was forming: Peter's 10 and Cornelius' gang. Remember a Jew is not even supposed to enter the house of a Gentile.

And as he talked with him—Cornelius had met Peter at some short distance from his house, and they conversed together till they went in.

Acts 10:28

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Shows Peter finally understood the vision, he broke the code.

[but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean] Peter now understood why he had received the vision at Joppa. God has showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean (Acts 10:28,34-35; Acts 11:17-18).

Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing, He addressed the whole company, among whom, it appears, there were persons well acquainted with Jewish customs; probably some of them were Jewish proselytes.

But God hath showed me, He now began to understand the import of the vision which he saw at Joppa. A Gentile is not to be avoided because he is a Gentile; God is now taking down the partition wall which separated them from the Jews.

Barnes: Any man common or unclean. Acts 10:14. That no man was to be regarded as excluded from the opportunity of salvation; or be despised and abhorred. The gospel was to be preached to all; the barrier between Jews and Gentiles to be broken down; and all were to be regarded as capable of being saved.

Devout Jews would not enter into idolaters' homes lest they unwittingly participate in idolatry; they apparently extended this custom to not entering any Gentile's home. It was considered unclean to eat Gentiles' food or to drink their wine; although this purity regulation did not prohibit all social contact, it prevented dining together at banquets and made much of the Roman world feel that Jews were antisocial. Cornelius is undoubtedly

²⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:25). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

accustomed to accepting reluctant (Acts 10:22) snubs, so Peter's statement in Acts 10:28 would mean much to him.

McGee: Peter stepped into the house. What a step that was! It was the first time that Peter had ever been in a gentile house. He still is really a little baffled at God's command to go there.

He violates the first rule of homiletics when he begins his message with an apology. What he says is not a friendly thing to say. In fact, it is an insult. In essence, he said, "If you really want to know how I felt about this, well, I just didn't want to come. I've never been in the home of a Gentile before. Never before have I gone into a place that is unclean!" But he does go on to add, "Even though I have never before been in an unclean home, God has told me not to call any man unclean. We are all sinners and we are all savable." How would you feel, especially if you are a lady who is a house-keeper, if some visitor came into your home and his first words were, "I am coming into your home, which I consider dirty"? You wouldn't exactly respond with a warm, friendly feeling, would you? Yet this is the substance of what Simon Peter said.

Because God had showed him that there was neither clean nor unclean, he continues his message.²⁷

JNTC: You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. Before examining whether Jews did in fact keep themselves aloof from Gentiles, take note of Kefa's careful word choices. He does not use "*ethnê*," the usual New Testament word for "Gentiles" and equivalent to Hebrew *Goyim*; for it could be interpreted as having a deprecatory nuance (Mt 5:47N). The word here is "*alophulos*," "someone who belongs to another tribe," used only here in the New Testament. Also the word "*athemitos*," used only twice in the New Testament, does not mean "unlawful, forbidden, against Jewish law," as found in other English versions, but rather "taboo, out of the question, not considered right, against standard practice, contrary to cultural norms."

It is not difficult to find evidence in Jewish sources for what these Gentiles were "**well aware**" of, that although nothing in Jewish law says that Gentiles themselves are **common or unclean**, many of their products and practices were regarded as conveying ritual impurity or were for other reasons forbidden to Jews. At one point the Mishna says, straightforwardly, "The dwelling-places of Gentiles [literally, "Canaanites," meaning Gentiles in the Land of Israel] are ritually unclean." (Ohalot 18:7)

Most of Mishna tractate 'Avodah Zarah ("Idol Worship") is devoted to limiting the contacts Jews may have with Gentiles (literally, "idol-worshippers"). For example, according to chapter 2, Jews may not remain alone with Gentiles, leave cattle at their inns, assist them in childbirth, suckle their children, do business with them when they are travelling to idolatrous festivals, drink their milk or vinegar or wine (which is why there is such a thing as "*kosher* wine"; the *Tanakh* says nothing about it), or eat their bread or oil or pickled vegetables or (in the Gemara on this section) their cooked food. The Bible

²⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:557). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

itself limits Jews to *kosher* food (Leviticus 11), slaughtered according to Jewish law (Deuteronomy 12:21), on which the tithe has been paid (Leviticus 22:15). In the Gemara, Sanhedrin 104a says that King Hezekiah, by inviting heathens into his house to eat at his table, caused his children to go into exile. However, the Mishna regards table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles as not unheard of, since one section commences with the phrase, “If an Israelite was eating with a Gentile at table,” before stating a law about which wine may be drunk on such an occasion (‘Avodah Zarah 5:5).

Two points should be noted. First, throughout most of the period covered by the *Tanakh* the main way in which the Jewish people rebelled against God was by going after idols. Although the *Tanakh* requires Jews to treat well the Gentiles in their midst, Jews who go after Gentile ways risk being cut off from their people and God’s promises. This is why Nechemyah insisted that Jewish men divorce their Gentile wives (Nehemiah 13:23–31). By the Second Temple period, when the majority of Jews lived in Gentile environments (that is, in the Diaspora), and Israel itself was ruled by Gentiles, the threat from assimilation to Jewish identity, in both its national and its religious aspects, had become even stronger. Thus, while obedience to the details of the ritual impurity laws was not widespread, the overall tone of life in Jewish society vis-à-vis Gentile society did indeed produce the kind of self-imposed separation from Gentiles of which Kefa speaks.

Second, while I had no difficulty finding passages in Jewish writings supporting the assertion that Jews kept themselves separate from Gentiles, I have quoted selectively from the Talmud in order to make the point. During the Middle Ages such selective quoting was abused by Christian authorities, with dire results for the Jewish communities of that time. People were not taught that the Talmud, like the ocean, contains a little of everything, but that it teaches xenophobia and downgrades non-Jews. Passages teaching the equality of all persons before God were overlooked, as were those upholding high and impartial ethical standards. This biased portrait of Judaism inflamed professed Christians to carry out acts of violence against Jews; for the same reason thousands of copies of the Talmud were burned.

But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean. If Jewish law made Gentile products and practices unclean, it would have been only human, all too human, for people to have extended the description, “unclean,” to Gentiles themselves. Such attitudes would have been not so much taught as caught, absorbed from the total milieu; and the influence of these attitudes would have quickly become pervasive. This is why it took direct intervention from God to shake Kefa loose from them.

Also, as explained in vv. 17–19, this verse proves that the meaning of Kefa’s vision had nothing to do with abrogating the laws of *kashrut*.

With this statement and its expansion in vv. 34–35 Kefa puts his dealings with Cornelius and his friends on a new footing: a barrier that both sides might have thought insuperable, that would have made true spiritual communion impossible, is removed altogether.²⁸

²⁸Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:28). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 10:29

Therefore came I *unto you* without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

[I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?] This is question 41 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 10:47. He had asked the messengers (Acts 10:21), and now asked for still more facts, hoping to find the cause of these strange events of the last three days.

Clarke: I ask—for what intent ye have sent for me?—Peter had been informed of this by the servants of Cornelius, Acts 10:22; but, as all the company might not have been informed of the circumstances, he, as it were, invites him to tell his story afresh, that his friends, etc., might be the better prepared to receive the truth, which he was about to dispense, in obedience to his Divine commission.

McGee: 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.²⁹

Acts 10:30

And 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,

[ninth hour] This was 3:00 p.m.

[bright clothing] All appearances of God and angels have been in brightness and white clothing. Appearances in darkness and gray or dark clothes are satanic.

Clarke: Four days ago I was fasting until this hour—It was then about three o'clock in the afternoon; and it appears that Cornelius had continued his fasts from three o'clock the preceding day to three o'clock the day following; not that he had fasted four days

²⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:557). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

together, as some supposes for even if he did fast four days consecutively, he ate one meal on each day.

Acts 10:31

And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

[Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God] There is no contradiction between what the angel said here and in Acts 10:4. Could he not have used both expressions? God usually makes His will known by repeating the message two or three times to confirm it (Acts 10:16; 2 Cor. 13:1).

Clarke: Thy prayer is heard—See the note on Acts 10:4. Cornelius prayed, fasted, and gave alms. It was in this way he looked for salvation; not to purchase it: a thought of this kind does not appear to have entered into his mind; but these were the means he used to get his soul brought to the knowledge of the truth. The reader must recollect that in the case of Cornelius there was no open vision; he used the light and power which God had already given; and behold how mightily God increased his gifts! He that hath, i.e., that uses what he has, shall receive; and no man can expect any increase of light or life, who does not improve the grace already given.

Acts 10:32

Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of *one* Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

It must be kept in mind that all this information was given by an angel about a man Cornelius perhaps never heard of. The instructions giving name, address, and other information were verified when followed through. The only way to test leading and revelations today is to see if they are in harmony with the Bible. Those that are not can be dismissed without any further test and that without fear of missing the will of God (1 John 4:1-6; Deut. 18:22).

Acts 10:33

Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

[to hear all things that are commanded thee of God] This is the only thing a congregation or even an individual has the right to expect from a man of God. The people were all waiting for the preacher, and every heart was filled with expectation; they waited as before God, from whose messenger they were about to hear the words of life.

Cornelius tells him, "I really don't know why I sent for you, except that God told me to send for Simon Peter. You must have some message for me."

Spurgeon: The best kind of congregation a preacher can have. Bogatzky says, "These words should be inscribed on all our church doors and pulpits, that men may consider well wherefore they ought to be in the house of God." Peter's congregation was unbroken--"we are all here;" it was devout--"present before God;" it was attentive--"to hear all things;" it was teachable, for they desired to know "all things that are commanded thee of God." We should always go to divine service in this spirit.

Acts 10:34

Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

Twenty-two Doctrines in Peter's Sermon (Dake)

1. God is impartial (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephes. 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17)
2. Two conditions of acceptance:
 - (1) Fear God (Acts 10:35; Luke 12:5)
 - (2) Work righteousness by obeying the gospel program (Acts 10:35; James 1)
3. Christ sent of God to Israel (Acts 10:36-37; John 1:11; John 3:16-20; Matthew 10:6; Matthew 15:24)
4. Christ is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Acts 2:36)
5. Christ came preaching peace (Acts 10:36; Acts 3:15; Luke 2:14; John 14:27)
6. The gospel dispensation began with John the Baptist (Acts 10:37; Matthew 11:11; Luke 16:16; Acts 1:21-22; Galatians 3:19-29)
7. God gave Jesus Christ the fullness of the Spirit (Acts 10:38; John 3:34)
8. The twofold program of the gospel: preaching and confirming it (Acts 10:36,38; Matthew 4:23-25; Hebrews 2:3-4; John 14:11)
9. Power comes along with the Holy Spirit anointing (Acts 10:38; Acts 1:8; Luke 10:19; Luke 24:49; Mark 16:15-20; John 14:12)
10. Satan, not God, is the cause of sickness (Acts 10:38; Luke 10:19; Luke 13:16; John 10:10; Matthew 4:23-24; Matthew 10:1-8)
11. Christ was approved of God by signs and wonders (Acts 10:38; Acts 2:22; John 3:2; Matthew 4:23-24; Matthew 8:17; John 14:11)
12. It is God's will to heal (Acts 10:38; Matthew 8:17; 1 Peter 2:24; John 10:10; John 14:12; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 10:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; James 5:14-16; 3 John 1:2)
13. It is God's will to heal all if conditions are met (Acts 10:38; note, "Matthew 13:58; Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 17:20; Matthew 21:22; Mark 9:23; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 10:19; John 10:10; John 14:12-15; John 15:7,16; John 16:23-26; James 5:14)
14. Special witnesses were chosen of Christ's life from John's baptism on, so a true record could be made of all things (Acts 10:39-41; Acts 1:22; Acts 3:15; Acts 5:32)
15. Crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 10:39; Acts 2:23; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30; 1 Peter 2:24)
16. Physical resurrection of Jesus (Acts 10:40; Acts 2:24-27; Luke 24:39; 1 Cor. 15)

17. Christ's physical resurrection fully attested (Acts 10:40-41; Acts 1:3; *John 21:14, note)
18. The great commission to preach and confirm the gospel (Acts 10:42; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:4-8)
19. Christ is ordained by God to be judge of all (Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31; John 5:22)
20. Both the dead and the living will be judged (Acts 10:42; Rev. 20:11-14; Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15)
21. Christ was the subject of the prophets (Acts 10:43; Acts 3:21; Luke 24:44; John 5:39)
22. Faith in Christ necessary for salvation (Acts 10:43; Acts 2:38; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9-10)

Clarke: God is no respecter of persons—He does God esteem a Jew, because he is a Jew; nor does he detest a Gentile because he is a Gentile. It was a long and deeply rooted opinion among the Jews, that God never would extend his favor to the Gentiles; and that the descendants of Jacob only should enjoy his peculiar favor and benediction. Of this opinion was St. Peter, previously to the heavenly vision mentioned in this chapter. He was now convinced that God was no respecter of persons; that as all must stand before his judgment seat, to be judged according to the deeds done in the body, so no one nation, or people, or individual, could expect to find a more favorable decision than another who was precisely in the same moral state; for the phrase, respect of persons, is used in reference to unjust decisions in a court of justice, where, through favor, or interest, or bribe, a culprit is acquitted, and a righteous or innocent person condemned. See Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16, 17; 16:19. And as there is no iniquity (decisions contrary to equity) with God, so he could not shut out the pious prayers, sincere fasting, and benevolent alms-giving of Cornelius; because the very spring whence they proceeded was his own grace and mercy. Therefore he could not receive even a Jew into his favor (in preference to such a person) who had either abused his grace, or made a less godly use of it than this Gentile had done.

LAN: Perhaps the greatest barrier to the spread of the gospel in the first century was the Jewish-Gentile conflict. Most of the early believers were Jewish, and to them it was scandalous even to think of associating with Gentiles. But God told Peter to take the gospel to a Roman, and Peter obeyed despite his background and personal feelings. (Later Peter struggled with this again—see Galatians 2:11-14.) God was making it clear that the Good News of Christ is for everyone! We should not allow any barrier—language, culture, prejudice, geography, economic level, or educational level—to keep us from telling others about Christ.

The radical change in Peter's attitude toward other ethnic groups is a case of almost instant release from prejudice. He lapsed but one time as far as the Scriptures show (Gal 2:12). This experience for Peter (and others) was necessary in spite of Jesus' ministry to Gentiles, which Peter surely witnessed (Matt 8:5-13).

Peter's speech (10:34-43)

Peter begins to speak to the group about the importance of Jesus' work in repentance and conversion. This speech is similar in content to the one he gave

on Pentecost (2:14-40). As with all the sermons and speeches in Acts, we are here reading only a summary of what Peter says. No doubt Peter's message contains examples that illustrate his main points. Peter probably includes illustrations of Jesus' healing and power, similar to those found in the Gospels.

The speech follows a familiar pattern, which we now expect from Luke's summaries. In this case, Peter begins by describing John the Baptist's mission, and then the work of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem. The speech moves into a discussion of the crucifixion and resurrection. Peter says that the apostles are witnesses to these facts, and are commanded to preach the gospel of peace. He also talks about the judgment to come, but especially that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43).

This speech probably represents a summary of the standard apostolic preaching to Jews and Gentiles attending synagogues who are familiar with the Old Testament message. The Synoptic Gospels follow this general pattern in presenting their material on Jesus' ministry. (Acts gives us only two examples of the form of apostolic preaching to purely pagan audiences. One is at Lystra (14:14-18) and the other at Athens (17:23-31). In such cases, the speaker needs to explain who the one true God is before moving on to his purpose in Jesus Christ.)

As devout people, Cornelius and the others are familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, the hope of a Messiah and the kingdom of God. They may well be aware that a man named Jesus performed miracles, attracted a following, and was killed. Peter suggests that they know something of "the message God sent to the people of Israel" and "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ" (10:36-37). In several ways, then, Cornelius and his family are prepared for what Peter is telling them.³⁰

Acts 10:35

But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Clarke: **But in every nation he that feared him, etc.**—In every nation he who, according to his light and privileges, fears God, worships him alone, (for this is the true meaning of the word), and worketh righteousness, abstains from all evil, gives to all their due, injures neither the body, soul, nor reputation of his neighbor, is accepted with him. It is not therefore the nation, kindred, profession, mode or form of worship, that the just God regards; but the character, the state of heart, and the moral deportment.

Barnes: **But in every nation,** This is given as a reason for what Peter had just said, that God was no respecter of persons. The sense is, that he now perceived that the favours of God were not confined to the Jew, but might be extended to all others on the same

³⁰ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts10.htm>

principle. The remarkable circumstances here, the vision to him, and to Cornelius, and the declaration that the alms of Cornelius were accepted, now convinced Peter that the favours of God were no longer to be confined to the Jewish people, but might be extended to all. This was what the vision was designed to teach; and to communicate this to the apostles was an important step in their work of spreading the gospel.

Barnes: In every nation. Among all people; Jews or Gentiles. Acceptance with God does not depend on the fact of being descended from Abraham, or of possessing external privileges, but on the state of the heart.

Barnes: And worketh righteousness. Does that which is right and just. This refers to his conduct towards man. He that discharges conscientiously his duty to his fellow-men, and evinces by his conduct that he is a righteous man. These two things comprehend the whole of religion, the sum of all the requirements of God-piety towards God, and justice towards an men; and as Cornelius had showed these, he showed that, though a Gentile, he was actuated by true piety. We may observe here,

(1.) that it is not said that Cornelius was accepted on account of his good works. Those works were simply an evidence of true piety in the heart; a proof that he feared and loved God, and not a meritorious ground of acceptance.

(2.) He improved the light which he had.

(3.) *He embraced the Saviour when he was offered to him.* This circumstance makes an essential difference between the case of Cornelius, and those who depend on their morality in Christian lands. They do *not* embrace the Lord Jesus, and they are, therefore, totally unlike the Roman centurion. His example should not be pleaded, therefore, by those who neglect the Saviour, for it furnishes no evidence that *they* will be accepted, when they are totally unlike him.

ESV: in every nation. Not just among Jews. **acceptable to him.** The word used here (Gk. *dektos*, “acceptable, welcome”) does not refer to legal justification before God (for which the NT uses Gk. *dikaioō* and related terms), nor is Peter talking about the basis for justification. Rather, the question here is whether God's favor is made available to Jews only (“partiality,” v. 34) or is now available to Gentiles also (those “in every nation”). **fears him and does what is right.** This expression summarizes the behavior of someone whose life is pleasing to God. Although Peter does not explicitly mention saving faith (as he will in v. 43), it would likely be included or implied in the meaning of these two terms in this context (see note on v. 2). After all, faith is trusting God and responding to him.

Acts 10:36

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

[**peace by Jesus Christ**] This could be understood as the message of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles and between them and God (Ephes. 2:14-16; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2

Cor. 5:14-21). Because of this, He is Lord of all and no respecter of persons; and will save all on the same terms (Acts 10:34-37,43).

Clarke: The word which God sent, etc.—Few verses in the New Testament have perplexed critics and divines more than this. The ancient copyists seem also to have been puzzled with it; as the great variety in the different MSS. sufficiently proves. A foreign critic makes a good sense by connecting this with the preceding verse, thus: In every nation he that feared him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him, according to that doctrine which God sent unto the children of Israel, by which he published peace (i.e. reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles) by Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all; and, because Lord of all, both of Jews and Gentiles, therefore he must be impartial; and, because impartial, or no respecter of persons, therefore, in every nation, whether Judea, Greece, or Italy, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

JNTC: 36–43 The points of Kefa’s sermon to these God-fearing Gentiles: Yeshua is sent by God and is still alive. He will be the final judge of all human beings. The *Tanakh* points to him. Those who trust in his mercy will be forgiven their sins **through his name**, that is, because of who he is and what he has done.³¹

Acts 10:37

That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

Clarke: That word—ye know—This account of Jesus of Nazareth ye cannot be unacquainted with; because it has been proclaimed throughout all Judea and Galilee, from the time that John began to preach. Ye have heard how he was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and of the miracles which he performed; how he went about doing good, and healing all kinds of demoniacs and, by these mighty and beneficent acts, giving the fullest proof that God was with him. This was the exordium of Peter’s discourse; and thus he begins, from what they knew, to teach them what they did not know.

St. Peter does not intimate that any miracle was wrought by Christ previously to his being baptized by John. Beginning at Galilee. Let us review the mode of Christ’s manifestation.

1. After he had been baptized by John, he went into the desert, and remained there forty days.
2. He then returned to the Baptist, who was exercising his ministry at that time at Bethany or Bethabara; and there he made certain disciples, viz., Andrew, Bartholomew, Peter, and Philip.
3. Thence he went to the marriage at Cana, in Galilee, where he wrought his first miracle.
4. And afterwards he went to Capernaum in the same country, by the sea of Galilee, where he wrought many others. This was the manner in which Christ manifested

³¹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:36). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

himself; and these are the facts of which Peter presumes they had a perfect knowledge, because they had been for a long time notorious through all the land.

Acts 10:38

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

[anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost] Isaiah 11:2; Isaiah 42:1-5; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 3:16.

[power] One can be filled with, and have various degrees of anointings and measures of the Spirit, and not have power to do the works of Christ.

[oppressed] Greek: *katadunasteuo* (GSN-2616), to overpower or exercise hard control over one; to use power against one (Acts 10:38; James 2:6; cp. Luke 13:16; John 10:10; 2 Cor. 12:7; Rev. 2:10).

Clarke: God anointed Jesus of Nazareth—Here the apostle refers to Christ as the promised Messiah; for, as Messiah signifies the anointed one, and Christ has the same signification in Greek, and the Messiah, according to the prophets, and the expectation of the Jews, was to work miracles, Peter proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, and refers to the miracles which he wrought as the proof of it. This delicate, but forcible allusion is lost by most readers.

BBC: “Doing good” is literally “benefacting”—the sort of thing a ruler, deity, or some other powerful person would do when bestowing gifts or mercy on those of lower status. Depending on how much Cornelius knows about Judaism, he may recognize that anyone anointed with the Holy Spirit in his own time would be considered extraordinary by his Jewish contemporaries.

The word *Messiah* means “Anointed One”; so when Peter said, **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth** he was saying, “God declared Him the Messiah” (cf. Isa. 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 4:27). This declaration occurred at the Lord’s baptism (cf. Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). Isaiah spoke of the Anointed One performing great deeds (Isa. 61:1-3), and as Peter declared, **He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.**³²

cf. *confer*, compare

³²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:381). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Acts 10:39

And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

Clarke: We are witnesses of all—In this speech St. Peter may refer, not only to the twelve apostles, but to the six brethren whom he had brought with him.

Clarke: Whom they slew—As the truth of the resurrection must depend on the reality of the death of Christ, it was necessary that this should be stated, and shown to rest on the most indubitable evidence.

ESV: The cross is referred to as **a tree**, making a clear connection with the use of the same word (Gk. *xylon*) in the Septuagint translation of Deut. 21:23, “cursed by God is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” Jesus was put in a position that the OT says is “cursed by God,” thus taking on himself the penalty for sin. See Gal. 3:13.

Acts 10:40

Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly;

[openly] Greek: *emphanes* (GSN-1717), to be openly seen by all present. Used only here and in Romans 10:20.

Clarke: Him God raised up the third day—He lay long enough under the power of death to prove that he was dead; and not too long, lest it should be supposed that his disciples had time sufficient to have practiced some deceit or imposture; and, to prevent this, the Jews took care to have the tomb well guarded during the whole time which he lay there.

Acts 10:41

Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

This simply means He did not appear to the ungodly multitude that slew Him. He did not make a show of Himself and gloat before His enemies that their crucifixion did not profit them in getting rid of Him. This would have caused more confusion and rebellion. He chose witnesses whose testimony was impeachable and who would risk their very lives to preach what they had seen and heard. Multitudes were never called to witness any fact for God. Even in giving the law, God chose only 74 men to see Him in person (Exodus 24:1-11). The multitudes that heard His voice begged that it not be heard any more, it was so terrible (Deut. 5:22-33; Hebrews 12:18-21). Christ never did withhold Himself from some and appear to others in the same crowd. All saw Him or none, even to more than 500 men at once (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

Clarke: Not to all the people—In the order of Divine providence, the public were to be no longer instructed by Jesus Christ personally; but it was necessary that those who were to preach redemption in his name should be thoroughly furnished to this good and great work; therefore, the time he spent on earth, after his resurrection, was devoted to the instruction of his disciples.

Clarke: Witnesses chosen before of God—That is, God chose such men to attest this fact as were every way best qualified to give evidence on the subject; persons who were always to be found; who might at all times be confronted with those, if any such should offer themselves, who could pretend to prove that there was any imposture in this case; and persons who, from the very circumstances in which they were placed, must appear to have an absolute conviction of the truth of all they attested. The first preachers of the Gospel must be the witnesses of its facts; and these first preachers must be put in such circumstances as to demonstrate, not only that they had no secular end in view, nor indeed could have any, but also that they should be able to evince that they had the fullest conviction of the reality of the eternal world, and of their Master's existence in glory there; as they carried their lives continually in their hands, and regarded them not, so that they might fulfill the ministry which they had received from their Lord, and finish their course with joy.

But why was not Christ, after his resurrection, shown to all the people!

1. Because it was impossible that such a thing could be done without mob and tumult. Let it only be announced, "Here is the man who was dead three days, and who is risen from the dead!" what confusion would be the consequence of such an exposure! Some would say, This is he; others, He is like him; and so on; and the valid testimony must be lost in the confusion of the multitude.
2. God chose such witnesses whose testimony should be unimpeachable; the men who knew him best, and who by their depositions in proof of the fact should evidently risk their lives. And,
3. as multitudes are never called to witness any fact, but a few selected from the rest, whose knowledge is most accurate, and whose veracity is unquestionable, therefore, God showed not Christ risen from the dead to all the people, but to witnesses chosen by himself; and they were such as perfectly knew him before, and who ate and drank with him after his resurrection, and consequently had the fullest proof and conviction of the truth of this fact.

Some Greeks seem to have believed that heroes or gods who had founded cities visited them but remained invisible. But Peter has no thought here of Jesus' remaining selectively invisible; rather, he comes only to those whom God had chosen.

JNTC: Pinchas Lapide is unique among Orthodox Jewish scholars in that he believes Yeshua's resurrection was an historical event, that it actually took place. Why, then, is he not a believer? Because, he says, the resurrection was **seen, not by all the Jewish people, but by relatively few witnesses**. In contrast, he points out, the entire Jewish people saw God descend on Mount Sinai and consequently said, "We will do and we will hear" (Exodus 24:7). Joseph Shulam's comment: Even though they did all see God at Sinai, they didn't follow him but slipped right back into idolatry; in other words, their

profession of loyalty did not produce it. My comment: God's choice to reveal the risen Yeshua to only a few does not excuse disbelief, because the evidence is sufficiently weighty to convince a reasonable and open-minded person (see 1C 15:5-8&NN).³³

Acts 10:42

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

[commanded us to preach] Seven commands to preach: (Dake)

1. Jonah, to Ninevah (Jonah 3:2)
2. Apostles, to Jews (Matthew 10:7)
3. Apostles, to all people (Matthew 10:27)
4. Apostles, to the world (Mark 16:15)
5. A would-be disciple (Luke 9:60)
6. Apostles, to the people (Acts 10:42)
7. Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2)

Great Bible Preachers: (Dake)

1. God (Galatians 3:8)
2. Noah (2 Peter 2:5)
3. David (Psalm 40:9)
4. Solomon (Eccles. 1:1-12; Eccles. 7:27; Eccles. 12:8-10)
5. Jonah (Jonah 3:2; Luke 11:32)
6. John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1)
7. Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:23; Luke 4:18-21)
8. Twelve apostles (Matthew 10:7; Mark 6:1; Mark 16:20)
9. Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2,5)
10. Philip (Acts 8:5,12,25)

[ordained] Greek: horizo (GSN-3724), translated limited (Hebrews 4:7); determine (Acts 11:29; Acts 17:26; Luke 22:22); determinate (Acts 2:23); declare (Romans 1:4); and ordain (Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31). It means to mark out the boundaries or limits; determine to bring about; appoint, or ordain to a work.

[Judge] Greek: krites (GSN-2923), judge (Matthew 5:25; Matthew 12:27; Luke 11:19; Luke 12:58; Luke 18:2,6; Acts 13:20; Acts 18:15; Acts 24:10; James 2:4; James 4:11). Used of God and Christ (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:8; Hebrews 12:23; James 5:9).

[quick and dead] Living and the dead. The word "living" refers to those who are now alive but who will die and be among the dead at the future judgment of the dead. There will be a judgment of the living nations at the second coming (Matthew 25:31-46). This will be a representative judgment of the people of the nations that will be

³³Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:40). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

mobilized against Jerusalem to battle when Christ comes (Zech. 14:1-5). Not all people of all nations will be there. It will be the armies of the nations. Many in the interior of certain countries will not even know of this battle or of the second coming until it is over and the saints take over the whole world after the second coming (Isaiah 66:19-21).

Clarke: And he commanded us to preach—By thus assuring them that Jesus Christ was appointed to judge the world, he at once showed them the necessity of subjection to him, that they might stand in the day of his appearing.

Clarke: The Judge of quick and dead—The word quick we retain from our ancient mother tongue, the Saxon, *to live*, and from this our quicks, quick-set hedges, fences made of living thorns, etc. By quick and dead we are to understand:

1. All that had lived from the foundation of the world till that time; and all that were then alive.
2. All that should be found alive at the day of judgment, as well as all that had died previously.

Acts 10:43

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Note that Peter is talking to a Gentile group, he is opening the door to them!

Peter's speech is interrupted...Gift of Praise. There was a manifestation of the supernatural and the Gentiles were included!

[**remission of sins**] Matthew 26:28; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Acts 5:31; Acts 10:43; Acts 13:38-39; Ephes. 1:7; Ephes. 2:1-9; 1 John 1:9.

Clarke: To him give all the prophets witness—See Isaiah 9:6; 52:7; 53:5, 6; 59:20; Jeremiah 31:34; Daniel 9:24; Micah 7:18, etc.; and Zechariah 13:1. As Jesus Christ was the sum and substance of the law and the Mosaic dispensation, so all the prophets bore testimony, either directly or indirectly, to him; and, indeed, without him and the salvation he has promised, there is scarcely any meaning in the Mosaic economy, nor in most of the allusions of the prophets.

Clarke: Remission of sins—The phrase, means simply the taking away of sins; and this does not refer to the guilt of sin merely, but also to its power, nature, and consequences. All that is implied in pardon of sin, destruction of its tyranny, and purification from its pollution, is here intended; and it is wrong to restrict such operations of mercy to pardon alone.

BBC: Many prophets had messianic prophecies, but only a few of them (e.g., Isaiah 53) directly connected the Messiah and the forgiveness of sins. Peter probably means this in a

general sense: all the prophets testify of forgiveness through God's grace, which will be provided in the time of the Messiah (c.f., e.g., Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Peter made it clear that Christ's ministry results either in judgment (v. 42) or salvation (v. 43). The key phrase is, **Everyone who believes in Him**. This Greek construction consists of a present participle with an article, which is almost the equivalent of a noun (in this case "every believer in Him"). The key element in salvation is faith, belief in Christ. This message of **forgiveness of sins** (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) **through** faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26).³⁴

Acts 10:44

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

[**heard the word**] The typical gospel message of Acts 10:34-43.

Clarke: While Peter yet spake—It is not very likely that the words recorded by St. Luke are all that the apostle spoke on this occasion; but, while he continued to discourse with them on this subject, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word; and his descent was known by their being enabled to speak with different kinds of tongues. In what manner this gift was bestowed we cannot tell; probably it was in the same way in which it had been given on the day of Pentecost; for as they spake with tongues, which was the effect of the descent of the Spirit as flaming tongues on the heads of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, it is very likely that the same appearance now took place.

BBC: Interruption was a common literary device; when enough has been said, the author allows the speaker to be interrupted. (Of course, it happened in real life as well as in literature; public speakers were often interrupted by individuals in the crowd.) "Fell upon" is equivalent to "filled" here (cf. 2 Chron. 7:2-3).

JNTC: Had Kefa and company not seen for themselves that the Holy Spirit came on these non-Jews exactly as on themselves, with the manifestation of speaking in other languages (2:4), they would not have immersed them. As with Kefa (vv. 9–29), it took a supernatural act of God to dislodge their resistance to bringing Gentiles into the Body of the Messiah, accomplished and symbolized by immersion. Cornelius and his friends were the first full Gentiles to enter the Messianic Community without becoming Jews first.³⁵

v. verse

cf. *confer*, compare

e.g. *exempli gratia*, for example

³⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:381). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁵Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 10:44). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 10:45

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

[they] The six Jews and Peter (Acts 10:23; Acts 11:12).

[the circumcision] The Jews are referred to every time this term is used (Acts 10:45; Acts 11:2; Romans 3:30; Romans 4:9-12; Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:7-12; Phil. 3:3; Col. 4:11; Titus 1:10).

[because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost] This was why the Jews were astonished. They did not believe that God would ever give the Spirit baptism to Gentiles as He gave the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 10:47; Acts 11:15-17; Acts 15:8-9).

Clarke: They of the circumcision—were astonished—Because it was a maxim with them that the Shechinah or Divine influence could not be revealed to any person who dwelt beyond the precincts of the promised land. Nor did any of them believe that the Divine Spirit could be communicated to any Gentile. It is no wonder, therefore, that they were amazed when they saw the Spirit of God so liberally given as it was on this occasion.

BBC: 5-47. Most Jewish teachers felt that the Spirit inspired only the most pious with divine utterances, or that the Spirit would mark God's people in the future age. Gentiles obviously could not receive the gift if God had not accepted them, so he clearly *had* accepted them—even without circumcision.

LAN: Cornelius and Peter were very different people. Cornelius was wealthy, a Gentile, and a military man. Peter was a Jewish fisherman turned preacher. But God's plan included both of them. In Cornelius's house that day, a new chapter in Christian history was written as a Jewish Christian leader and a Gentile Christian convert each discovered something significant about God at work in the other person. Cornelius needed Peter and his gospel to know the way to salvation. Peter needed Cornelius and his salvation experience to know that Gentiles were included in God's plan. You and another believer may also need each other to understand how God works!

Acts 10:46

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

[For they heard them speak with tongues] This is why they knew the Gentiles had received the same Spirit baptism that they had received about eight years before at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11; Acts 10:44-48; Acts 19:1-7). This experience proves that the Holy Spirit baptism may be given to men at the time of their conversion, as in the case of Paul (Acts 9:17-18). It also can be received long after conversion as in the case of the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11), the Samaritans (Acts 8:12-23), and the Ephesians

(Acts 19:1-7). This also proves that it can be received before water baptism, as in the case of Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17), the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11), the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-23), and the Ephesians (Acts 19:1-7).

Clarke: And magnify God—They had got new hearts as well as new tongues; and, having believed with the heart unto righteousness, their tongues made confession unto salvation; and God was magnified for the mercy which he had imparted.

Acts 10:47

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Baptism in water was an act of profession, not to be confused by the giving of the gifts or the “baptism of the Spirit.”

[Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?] This is question 42 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 11:17. The question is, shall we baptize these Gentile converts who have been born again, whose sins are already remitted, and who have received the Spirit baptism as we did at Pentecost? Or, shall we not baptize them? Here and in the case of Paul (Acts 9:17-18) it is clear that sins were remitted and the Holy Ghost given before water baptism. If water baptism was essential to the remission of sins, shall we accuse God of getting ahead of His own program? Or shall we be more sensible and accept God's work of forgiveness without water baptism?

Clarke: Can any man forbid water—These had evidently received the Holy Ghost, and consequently were become members of the mystical body of Christ; and yet St. Peter requires that they shall receive baptism by water, that they might become members of the Christian Church. In other cases, they received baptism first, and the Spirit afterwards by the imposition of hands: see Acts 19:4-6, where the disciples who had received only the baptism of John were baptized again with water in the name of the Lord Jesus; and, after even this, the apostles prayed, and laid their hands on them, before they were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. So we find that Jesus Christ had his water baptism as well as John; and that even he who gave the baptism of the Holy Ghost required the administration of water baptism also. Therefore the baptism of the Spirit did not supersede the baptism by water; nor indeed can it; as baptism, as well as the supper of our Lord, were intended, not only to be means of grace, but standing, irrefragable proofs of the truth of Christianity.

Acts 10:48

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

[he commanded them to be baptized] Since no man could "forbid water" baptism to these new converts and newly Spirit-baptized people, Peter commanded them to be baptized as all converts should be—not to save the soul, but as an answer to a good conscience and an outward testimony of an inward work (1 Peter 3:21; 1 John 5:6-8).

[in the name of the Lord] Not in the name of Jesus only, but simply "by the authority of the Lord" who authorized to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Christ authorized to baptize in the name of all three members of the Godhead (1 John 5:7) and not in His name only, which ignores the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Clarke: To be baptized in the name of the Lord—That is, in the name of Jesus Christ; which implied their taking upon them the public profession of Christianity, and believing on Christ Jesus as their Savior and Sovereign; for, as they were baptized in his name, they professed thereby to be his disciples and followers.

Clarke: Then prayed they him to tarry certain days—They felt the necessity of farther instruction, and prayed him to continue his ministry a little longer among them; and to this he no doubt consented. This was properly speaking, the commencement of the Christian Church, as composed of Jews and Gentiles, partaking of the same baptism, united under the same Head, made partakers of the same Spirit, and associated in the same aggregate body. Now was the middle wall of partition broken down, and the Gentiles admitted to the same privileges with the Jews.

1. GOD is wonderful in all his works, whether they be works of creation, providence, or grace. Every thing proclaims his power, his wisdom, and his goodness. Every where we learn this truth, which is indispensably necessary for all to know who desire to acknowledge God in all their ways that "there is nothing which concerns their present or eternal welfare in which God does not interest himself." We often, to our great spiritual detriment, lose sight of this truth, because we think that the MAJESTY of God is too great to be occupied with those common occurrences by which we are often much affected, in things which relate, not only to our present, but also to our eternal interests. This is impossible; for God is our father, and, being every where present, he sees our state, and his eye affects his heart.
2. Let the reader examine the chain of Providence (composed indeed of very minute links) brought to light in the conversion of Cornelius, the instruction of Peter, and opening the door of faith to the Gentiles, and he will be convinced that "God has way every where, and that all things serve the purposes of his will." We have already seen how particularly, both by gracious and providential workings, God prepared the mind of Cornelius to receive instruction, and the mind of Peter to give it; so that the receiver and giver were equally ready to be workers together with God. This is a general economy. He who feels his want may rest assured that, even then, God has made the necessary provisions for his supply; and that the very sense

of the want is a proof that the provision is already made. Why then should we lose time in deploring wretchedness, for the removal of which God has made the necessary preparations? Mourning over our miseries will never supply the lack of faith in Christ, and very seldom tends even to humble the heart.

3. As the eye of God is ever upon us, he knows our trials as well as our wants; and here, also, he makes the necessary provision for our support. We may be called to suffer, but his grace will be sufficient for us; and, as our troubles increase, so shall the means of our support. And even these trials and temptations will be pressed into our service, for all things work together for good to them that love God, Romans 8:28.
4. We must beware neither to despise outward rites in religion, nor to rest in them. Most people do either the one or the other. God gives us outward helps, because he knows we need them. But do we not sometimes imagine ourselves to be above that which, because of our scantiness of grace, is really above us? We certainly may over-rate ourselves, and under-rate God's bounties. He who is taught by the Spirit of God will be saved from both.

Baptism was used as a public declaration of conversion; see comment on *Acts 2:37-38. Peter's lodging at a Gentile home for several more days would compound the offense to Jewish piety but drives home Peter's lesson (Acts 10:28).

Barnes: And he commanded them, Why Peter did not himself baptize them is unknown. But it *might* be, perhaps, because he chose to make use of the ministry of the brethren who were with him, to prevent the possibility of future cavil. If they did it themselves, they could not so easily be led by the Jews to find fault with it. It may be added, also, that it seems not to have been the practice of the apostles themselves to baptize very extensively. This was left to be performed by others.

McGee: 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 (Acts 11:17–18). In Acts 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 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.³⁶

³⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:559). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ESV: To be **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** (see also 2:38; 8:16) is not different from being baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Even though different words are used here in Acts, the meaning is the same because in biblical usage a person's “name” represents the person's character, everything that is true about the person. The “name” (character and attributes) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the same as the “name” (character and attributes) of Jesus Christ. In fact, in Matt. 28:19, the word “name” (Gk. *onoma*) is singular, indicating that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share one “name” (i.e., one character). To be baptized into that name is a sign of identifying with that name and taking on Christ's character, as well as committing to live one's life from that point on as a representative of that name. **remain for some days**. Peter's willingness to stay with them likely involved his sharing meals with the Gentiles, a bold step for one who formerly was so concerned about clean and unclean foods (see also notes on Gal. 2:11–21).

A new direction

We should state once again what the Cornelius event means to the church. Not only can Gentiles be accepted into the church as Gentiles, it means that they can also be directly evangelized. They can become disciples in every sense of the word without having to become fully observant Jews. The Spirit baptizes people, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, into one body, the Israel of God (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The Jewish believers seem to understand this — that God accepts the Gentiles as they are. This is indicated in the fact that no one seems to suggest that Cornelius should be circumcised. However, the issue of circumcision for Gentile believers plagues the church for decades to come. As well, the question of whether Gentiles should live like Jews in such things as their eating habits will also continue to trouble the church.

Cornelius does not ask to be baptized. Nor does the church (Peter) ask him if he is interested in fellowshiping with the body of believers, hoping for a later conversion. From start to finish, God is operating his salvation upon Cornelius, who has little role in this part of the story except to accept what God is doing. William H. Willimon correctly says:

Cornelius is surprisingly passive in this story, as if he is someone who is being swept along, carried by events and reacting to actions quite beyond his power to initiate or control. This is the way it is with repentance. It is more than a decision we make (‘since *I* gave *my* life to Christ’; ‘since I took Jesus as *my* personal Savior’) or some good deed we offer to God; repentance is the joyful human response to God’s offer of himself to us. (*Acts*, page 100)

In fact, all conversion accounts in Acts begin with God’s initiative through the Holy Spirit. God is always pictured as the One who begins and completes the process of repentance.

God is the chief actor in all Lukan accounts of conversion. Even the smallest details are attributed to the working of God. Conversion is not the result of skillful leadership by the community or even of persuasive preaching or biblical interpretation. In many accounts, such as those of Philip's work with the Ethiopian, the mysterious hand of God directs everything. In other stories, such as the story of Peter and Cornelius, the church must be dragged kicking and screaming into the movements of God. Manipulation, strategic planning, calculating efforts by the community aimed at church growth are utterly absent. Even our much beloved modern notions of "free will" and personal choice and decision appear to play little role in conversion in Acts. Conversion is a surprising, unexpected act of divine grace. (Willimon, page 104)

Luke's story is about how the gospel reaches Rome, and Cornelius plays no further role in that story. He leaves Luke's account as abruptly as Ananias does. Johannes Munck observes that "the narrative about Cornelius seems, from an historical point of view, to be left hanging in midair as a detached fragment" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 107).

We would like to know more about Cornelius' subsequent history. How does he live out his life as a Christian? Does he continue to serve in the military? Does he get caught up in the church's squabble over whether Gentiles should live like Jews, and what is his reaction? But Luke tells us nothing further about Cornelius, except that Peter stays with him for some time (10:48). Then the apostle goes to Jerusalem to answer his critics, and Cornelius becomes lost in the mist of history. Luke has interests other than recounting the converted life of Cornelius. He wants to tell the story of how God opens salvation to the Gentiles. Once he tells that tale, Luke moves on to narrate other events that show the growth of the church, and the gospel being preached further afield.³⁷

³⁷ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts10.htm>