



*Acts of the Apostles*  
**A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BOOK OF ACTS.**

**WEEK 7**

CLASS BY PASTOR GLYN NORMAN

## The Conversion of Cornelius Acts 10-11:18

### 1. Cornelius' Vision (10:1-8)

- v2 “devout and God-fearing” – a near-proselyte to Judaism (an almost-Jew), a deeply religious man
- having realized the bankruptcy of paganism sought to worship a monotheistic God, practice a form of prayer and lead a moral life
- Question: if you became a Christian later in life, what “bankrupt” thing did you turn from? What was supposed to satisfy but didn’t?
- he is a noble and spiritually sensitive person: makes him primed for God’s next action
- v3 the vision happens in broad daylight: vision or angel? Does it make a difference? Real?
- v4 What is it Lord? (polite address but here with worshipful overtones?) His prayers have risen as a memorial to God (a way of saying God had noticed him and was paying attention)
- v5-8 Specific instructions are given (to avoid getting the wrong Simon) and Cornelius acts with instant obedience

### 2. Peter's Vision (10:9-16)

- v9-13 “Though Peter was not by training or inclination an overly scrupulous Jew, and though as a Christian his inherited prejudices were gradually wearing thin, he was not prepared to go so far as to minister directly to Gentiles.” EBC, 387. A special revelation is necessary. He probably took shade under an awning, became hungry and drowsy, fell into a trance and saw a vision. Did God use what was around as the “props” for the vision... was the sheet like the awning or a boat’s sail, was the vision about food because he was hungry; was his inner confusion about the nature of Jewish/Gentile/Christian relations at the back of his mind... and this all played together?
- Question: visions are usually an uncommon way of hearing from God. What is the means by which you usually “hear God?” Are there certain practices that get you into a state of receptivity to God? What are they? What is the most unusual way God has spoken to you?

- v14 Peter is shocked. Though not overly scrupulous, he has probably abided by the basic dietary restrictions of Leviticus 14 which distinguished the clean quadrupeds (chew the cud/cloven hooves) from the animals to be considered unclean. This is “an unholy mixture!”  
Group Question: Can you think of prohibitions that were given to you as a young Christian, that you later discovered have no biblical basis?

Peter recognizes somehow the voice of Jesus but is still appalled by the idea.

- v15-16. Do not call anything impure God has made clean. This vision is laying the ground for a different perspective on Jewish/Gentile relations.

### **3. Messengers from Cornelius arrive at Joppa (10:17-23a)**

- v17-20 The Spirit speaks clearly to Peter.
  - Angel of God that appeared to Cornelius (10:3-6; 22, 30, 11:13)
  - “the voice” that spoke to Peter (10:13-15; 11:7-9)
  - “the spirit” that urges him to go with them (10:19-20)

Similar to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian – some interplay between angel/Spirit of God/risen Christ.

- v21-23a Peter receives them as his guests (presumably with Simon the Tanner’s permission) and they tell him the story

Question: Have you ever had an encounter with an angel, or someone you believed to be an angel?

### **4. Peter’s reception by Cornelius (10:23b-33)**

- Jewish law prohibited a Jew from associating with Gentiles (though there were provisions for business partnerships) but such encounters would make the Jews ceremonially unclean
- it was forbidden for a Jew to accept Gentile hospitality, but the vision moves Peter to accept: “I should not call any man impure or unclean.”
- a ready and receptive audience

### **5. Peter’s Sermon in Cornelius’ House (10:34-43)**

- a summary of the apostolic preaching, similar to his sermons in 2:14-40 and 3:11-26, and is notable for saying much more about Jesus’ pre-crucifixion ministry

Question: in your thinking about Jesus, do you focus more on his death and what that accomplished or on his life and how he related to people and God?

- Peter is sweeping away centuries of racial prejudice (God’s “I have a dream.”)
- three main components to this speech:
  - a revelatory aspect (God has made it clear)

- emphasis on the proclamation to the people of Israel first
- the gospel is to go wider to the Gentiles, as God is “Lord of all” – was previously a pagan title for a deity, but is “repurposed” by the early Christians
- remember, this speech is only a summary – he probably gave examples of Jesus’ acts of kindness and healing
- the offer of radical inclusion: v43 “EVERYONE who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins”

## **6. The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:44-48)**

- the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message (maybe particularly after his last statement) This phrase struck like a thunderbolt as they realized this was for them too. This is the “Pentecost of the Gentile world.”
- by this gift of the Holy Spirit, God is validating his acceptance of the Gentiles as they come to believe
- this speaking in tongues was not probably other languages but “ecstatic speech” as Paul describes in 1 Cor 12-14. This was probably given as a sign for the Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter, and for other Jewish believers as they heard the story and needed evidence of God’s acceptance of these Gentiles.
- they are baptized, without having any prior in-depth relationship with Judaism

## **7. The response of the Jerusalem Church (11:1-18)**

- this news caused great alarm and suspicion among the Jerusalem church: Peter had approached the Gentiles directly and brought them to Christ without going via Judaism!
- we already know what trouble could be brought to the church in how the Jewish crowd stoned Stephen... how would they react when they heard about this? What little goodwill the church might have would be destroyed by this news.
- this action by Peter has serious implications for the future of the nascent church in Jerusalem. Has he created a “Christianity-light” with no reference to Judaism?
- Peter defends himself with a retelling of the events, with focus on:
  - the divine initiative that prompted these events (both for him and Cornelius)
  - his inability and unwillingness to withstand God
- when they hear the whole story, they are convinced and astonished: “even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”