

Chapter Ten

Chapter 10

- The passage begins in Acts 10:1,2 stating, “Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, who gave gifts for the needy generously to the people, and always prayed to God.”
- Where the text describes Cornelius as “one who feared God” it is actually translating the Greek word “phoboumenoi” meaning “God-fearers”. This term does not merely reflect a person’s morality as such. It does not mean, “He is a God-fearing man.” It was a legal and technical term for a specific type of gentile who was drawn to the worship of the God of Abraham but chose to not undergo formal ritual conversion to “become a Jew”, a practice, by the way, entirely man-made without any Scriptural foundation. These “God-fearers” were already conversant with the Torah and observant of its

teachings, including the food laws of Leviticus 11.

- Quite possibly, the only reason Cornelius opted for this intermediate status of God-fearer instead of full ritual conversion was his military position. Certainly, the politics of his “converting” would have been an issue for him and his future with Rome. Without a doubt, any leader in the Roman army could not be perceived as having divided loyalties.
- Verse 3 states that this gentile was praying “at about the ninth hour of the day”.
 - The ninth hour of the day corresponded to 3:00 in the afternoon.
 - What is the significance of a gentile praying at the same time as the afternoon sacrifices at the temple?
- During his prayer, Cornelius receives a vision in response to his prayers.
 - What does it mean that his prayers are apparently heard and answered before the text describes his coming to faith in the Messiah?
- In verses 5-6, what is Cornelius instructed to do?

- In verses 7-8, did he do what he was instructed to do?
 - Why is obedience significant?
 - What might have been the outcome if he had failed to follow through with the direction given to him?
- In verses 9-14, we read about the experience Peter had on the rooftop of the house where he was staying.
 - Was this experience reality or was it a vision?
 - According to verse 10, was the food already prepared or not?
- The test Peter was challenged with was whether or not he would adhere to the written Torah to respond to the question of eating unclean food.
 - For Peter, the only source of definition of what is “common or unclean” was the Torah.
 - Did Peter pass the test?
 - Is there any evidence that he ever ate anything, let alone unclean food?
- Verse 15 has often been used to claim that God changed

His rules about eating unclean foods.

- Is there any mention of food in verse 15?
- What do you think it refers to?
- Verse 17 demonstrates that “Peter was very perplexed in himself what the vision he had seen might mean.”
 - After three repetitions of the vision, Peter still did not understand its meaning.
 - It is apparent that Peter did not conclude that it was now okay to have a pork sandwich for lunch.
- Verse 19 relates that while Peter was still “pondering the vision”, the Spirit informed him about the three men sent from Cornelius and to go with them, “doubting nothing”.
- Verses 21-23 show Peter’s obedience to the Spirit by going with the men to visit Cornelius.
 - Why is obedience significant?
 - What might have been the outcome if he had failed to follow through with the direction given to him?

- Verses 24-26 show the reception of Peter by Cornelius.
 - What did Cornelius do that was considered inappropriate?
 - What was Peter's response?
 - Is there a lesson in humility here that could teach current spiritual leaders today?
- Verse 28 is Peter's "Aha!" moment.
 - Peter's declaration that they "know" how it is an "unlawful thing" for a Jew to have interaction with a gentile betrays the source of that tradition of men. Nowhere in the Torah is such a "law" found. Israel was always destined to be a light to the gentiles. There is nothing about gentiles that needs to be avoided. The only separation involves pagan beliefs and practices, but never the people themselves.
 - There is nothing in the Torah about restricting a Jew from having fellowship with or entering the home of a gentile. Peter was struggling with the common prejudice of the day that arose from the man-made Eighteen Measures against contact with gentiles.

- The significant statement by Peter that “God has shown me that I shouldn’t call any man unholy or unclean” is a full and satisfying answer to the meaning of Peter’s vision. Peter had passed the test regarding the food challenge by applying the correct standard, the Torah, instead of man-made traditions. Here, God is asking Peter to follow suit in applying the same standard, the Torah, to the issue of acceptance of gentiles instead of the traditions of men he was previously in bondage to.
- If Peter clearly states that his understanding of the vision is that “God has shown me that I shouldn’t call any man unholy or unclean”, then why do you suppose that theologians and Bible teachers reject Peter’s own interpretation and teach that the vision was about God changing the food laws?
- Peter’s use of the word “therefore” in verse 29, clearly shows that his “coming without complaint when I was sent for” is to be understood as the resolution to the tension of his prejudice against gentiles that he was struggling with and that the vision resolved.
- Verses 30-33 recount the vision given to Cornelius and his subsequent obedience and readiness to hear the

message from Peter.

- How important is a heartfelt readiness and openness to the gospel in terms of effectiveness?
- Do you think the prior prayers of Cornelius might have prepared his heart to receive the gospel?
- Peter begins his message in verse 34 by declaring “Truly I perceive that God doesn’t show favoritism, but in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”
 - This new understanding, based on the vision given to him, was a radical departure for Peter as well as the others with him.
 - Peter is revealing his comprehension of the prior vision as God having cleansed these gentiles through faith and that Peter should therefore not consider them unclean.
- Verses 35-43 include Peter’s gospel message to the crowd assembled to hear him.
 - In verse 37, Peter states that “you yourselves know what happened”. This group of gentiles who were

“God-fearers” and connected to the temple were in a prime position to have heard the accounts of Yeshua and his passion.

- In verse 39, Peter is adding his credentials of the story as having been an eyewitness to the events. How does this give him even more credibility with his hearers?
- In verse 43, Peter explains that “All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins.”
 - According to Peter, the principle of sins being forgiven through faith in the Messiah is found in all the writings of the prophets. Can it be then said that this knowledge of saving faith is only confined to the linear time period called the “New Testament” era?
- In verse 44, we see the Holy Spirit falling upon all those who heard the word, while he was still speaking.
 - What do you make of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit acting in such a fashion?
 - Was there time for laying on of hands?
 - Was there time for baptism?

- Was there time for the Rabbinic ritual created for the conversion of gentiles?
- The message is clear that the only element required of anyone, Jew or gentile, for their salvation is placing faith in the work of Messiah.
- In verse 45, "They of the circumcision" refers to that group of Jewish believers who had been taught that gentiles needed to undergo the man-made Rabbinic ritual in order to be saved. We will see this issue resolved later in Acts 15.
- In verse 47, Peter follows the logic of what has just occurred.
 - What was his conclusion?
 - When Peter stated that "They have received the Holy Spirit just like us" does this establish the matter that there is no difference between Jew and gentile regarding access to God through faith in His Messiah?