



Acts 10

An OCF Bible Study

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What do we know about centurions? Centurions were noncommissioned officers of the Roman army. They each commanded 100 soldiers, and had about the same level of authority as a captain in the United States Army. Every reference to centurions in the New Testament is positive. These men were “the backbone of the Roman army.”

Cornelius was a common Roman name. What do we know about Cornelius?

- He was a career military officer, a leader, devout.
- He was a God-fearer, i.e. a Gentile, not circumcised, perhaps he continued to eat Gentile food, attended and supported the synagogue, kept the moral laws, i.e. the 10 Commandments, gave generously, prayed to the God of Israel.

What was God’s perspective on Cornelius (v. 4)? His generosity to the people and his continual prayers were recognized and acknowledged by God, which is an indication that his heart was right before God.

What message did the angel bring? God has heard and God was pleased. Now go get Peter.

Was Cornelius saved? He was a good man who did the right things. However, he had not received the Holy Spirit. He believed in the God of the Jews but didn’t understand the truth about Jesus. He wasn’t legitimately saved until he received the Holy Spirit (v. 44).

What did Peter see in his vision (vv. 11-12)? The sheet contained all kinds of four-footed animals, both clean and unclean, as described in Leviticus 11.

What message was God conveying to Peter using the sheet illustration? These animals are all suitable for eating. How did Peter respond to the Lord’s command to “kill and eat?” No way!

Why was the sheet lowered three times (v. 16)? Peter’s strong Jewish dietary prejudices were an obstacle to ministering directly to Gentiles (who were on their way to visit him). His biases were so strongly ingrained that God repeated the vision twice to make sure Peter would be able to comprehend the magnitude of this cultural change. Imagine Peter’s reaction upon seeing an unclean animal in the sheet—like a pig for example!

What was the immediate meaning of the vision?

- Jesus did away with the clean/unclean distinction of food: It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person (Matthew 15:11).
- God was getting rid of the dietary laws of the Old Covenant. He was preparing to usher in the New Covenant with its lack of dietary restrictions: Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body. (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) (Mark 7:18-19, New International Version).

Unclean food was at or near the top of the list of basic issues that alienated Jews from Gentiles. The Lord’s decree that the animals in the sheet were now considered clean freed Peter from the social and cultural stigma of entering a Gentile’s home and eating with him (vv. 25-28).

Cornelius may have been a Gentile but how did the Jews regard him (v. 22)? As a righteous and God-fearing man. It says a lot about a person’s character when the “opposition” respects him.

Application: Our opposition includes the worldly, secular people around us including those who are openly opposed to Christianity. Like Cornelius, what are some ways we can get our “opposition” to respect us?

Peter extended an invitation to his Gentile visitors to come into his house and be his guests (v. 23). What did that say about Peter? The vision he had previously seen had started to become clear and he was able to put it into play with his Gentile visitors.

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What further application of the vision became apparent to Peter (v. 28)? It was not just about food/animals but applied to Gentiles as well. In saying “I should not call anyone common or unclean,” Peter understood that the vision was primarily about people. But the principle still related to food. We understand believers are no longer under any obligation to keep a kosher diet. What we eat or don’t eat doesn’t make us any more right with God.

Application: Peter crossed cultural boundaries because God led him to do so. His heart was willing to follow God into strange places/settings that were out of his comfort zone.

Why did Peter outline Jesus’ career for his listeners (vv. 37-43)? Peter’s listeners here were Gentiles. He was not in Jerusalem; he was in Caesarea. He needed to make sure they understood the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ—who He was and what He had done.

The Holy Spirit interrupted Peter (v. 44). This is the first time since Chapter 2 at Pentecost that we have seen speaking in tongues. Why was that important at this time? This was the first public Gentile conversion experience. To be seen as valid, it had to come as close as possible to duplicating the Jewish experience. A different experience could potentially set up two different Christian churches. Unity in this early church was critical.

God gave His Spirit to individuals from both groups, Jews and Gentiles, solely because of their faith in Jesus Christ (11:17). The Gentiles did not need to become Jewish proselytes, experience baptism in water, undergo circumcision, turn from their sins, or even say they were willing to turn from them. Note that Spirit baptism took place here without the laying on of an apostle’s hands... the important point was the connection between faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from any external Jewish rite, and Spirit baptism.

Why were Peter’s fellow Jewish believers astonished (v. 45)? To find that Gentiles were included in this new community of believers. This amazed Peter’s Jewish companions because it proved that God was not making a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers regarding His acceptance of them. Remember that previously Samaritans had been included (8:14) and now the Gentiles—two groups that had formerly been despised by the Jews. This had to be a challenging pill for the Jews to swallow.

Why was it important that the Jewish believers be there? There needed to be eye witnesses among the common believers, not just the leaders. The followers needed to see for themselves, for the sake of the entire Jewish Christian community, that the Gentiles had been included in the community of believers.

What happened in Cornelius’ house was “the Pentecost of the Gentile world.” By pouring out His Spirit on these Gentiles, God showed that—in His sight—Jews and Gentiles were equal. The Jew had no essential advantage over the Gentile in entering the church. God observes no distinction in race when it comes to becoming a Christian. The sign of this, for the benefit of the Jews, was that He enabled those to whom He gave the Spirit to speak in tongues.

With Cornelius’ conversion, God made a public statement, as He had at Pentecost, that He was doing something new—namely, forming a new body of believers in Jesus. In chapter 2 He showed that this body would include Jews, and in chapter 8 Samaritans and Ethiopians, and in chapter 10 He clarified that it would also include Gentiles. The sole prerequisite for entrance into this group (the church) was faith in Jesus Christ regardless of ethnicity, an issue which had separated Jews from Gentiles for centuries.

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