



## God's Grace is Extended to the Gentiles Acts 10

### Introduction

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon Jesus' apostles in a manner which was clearly seen by all the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-6). On that same day, about three thousand Jews heard the gospel preached. They repented, were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38 and 41). After preaching for some time to the Jews in Jerusalem, the believers were forced to leave the city to escape persecution (Acts 8:1). They dispersed to outlying regions of Judea and Samaria but they continued to preach the gospel. As a result, the Samaritans, who were of mixed ethnic and religious background, received the good news of Jesus Christ, were baptized in His name, and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:4-17). Soon after that an Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile proselyte to Judaism, had heard the gospel message, believed, and been baptized (8:26-39). Now the grace of God would be extended to the Gentiles.

By God's grace, Saul had turned from persecuting Christians to preaching the gospel, and God had appointed him a minister to the Gentiles. However, before Saul would be sent to the Gentiles, the door to this ministry was opened by Peter. God used two separate visions to bring Cornelius, the God-fearing Gentile, and Peter, the preacher together. Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius, his family, and friends. They listened, believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized. The way was now open for the expansion of the gospel to *the end of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

### Outline of Acts 10

- I. Cornelius' Vision - Acts 10:1-8
- II. Peter's Vision - Acts 10:9-16
- III. Peter Travels to Caesarea - Acts 10:17-33
- IV. The Holy Spirit is Poured Out Upon the Gentiles - Acts 10:34-48

### I. Cornelius' Vision - Acts 10:1-8

Cornelius was a Roman centurion who lived and worked in the predominately Gentile city of Caesarea which was the Roman capital of Palestine. As a centurion, Cornelius was in charge of 100 soldiers (a century) in the *Italian Regiment*, a unit of the Roman army consisting of 600 men. Centurions were men who had risen through the ranks of the army and were usually Roman citizens and hard-working men of good character.

#### A. A God-fearing man - Acts 10:1-2

Cornelius was a *devout man*, evidenced by the fact that he prayed to God, fasted (10:30), and generously gave alms, meaning that he was charitable to the poor. He was a Gentile who followed the moral teachings of the Jewish law and worshiped God but was not circumcised, and therefore not a proselyte to the Jewish religion.

#### B. Appearance of an angel - Acts 10:3-8

It was the ninth hour, around 3:00 p.m. This was the time of the evening sacrifice, a time devout men devoted to prayer. As Cornelius prayed (Acts 10:30), an angel appeared to him in a vision, calling him by name.

##### 1. Cornelius' response - 10:4

Although Cornelius was afraid, he spoke respectfully to the angel, calling him *lord*, acknowledging him as a heavenly visitor. In 10:30, Cornelius describes him to Peter as a man in bright clothing.

##### 2. The angel's message - 10:4-6

The angel told Cornelius his prayers and alms had ascended as a *memorial* before God. God had not disregarded Cornelius' prayers and alms, but had accepted them as a sweet aroma. (See Leviticus 2 where the offerings were to be burned as a *memorial* offering before God to be a sweet aroma to Him.) God had heard Cornelius' prayers (10:31) and He had seen that his charity to the poor was given with a pure heart and a right attitude. Thus his prayers and alms were a *fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God* (Philippians 4:18). *God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name* (Hebrews 6:10).

The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa to find the apostle Peter who was staying with Simon, the tanner. Peter would tell Cornelius what to do next.

##### 3. Cornelius' obedience - 10:7-8

Cornelius immediately called two of his trusted household servants and one of the soldiers, also a God-fearing man, who served under him. He explained the angel's instructions and sent them off to Joppa, about 33 miles south of Caesarea.

**II. Peter's Vision - Acts 10:9-16**

God prepared Peter to receive the men from Caesarea by showing him a vision. A Jew would never enter the home of a Gentile because they were considered to be uncircumcised *dogs* (Matthew 15:22-27). If Peter was to go to Cornelius, God had to pave the way.

## A. A time of prayer - Acts 10:9-10

It was the following day around noon when the men approached Joppa and began to look for the house where Peter was staying. At the very same time, Peter went up to the flat roof of Simon the tanner's house to spend time in prayer. He became hungry, but the meal was not yet ready. While he waited, he *fell into a trance*; literally *an ecstasy came upon him*. What followed was a waking vision similar to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6, Daniel's in Daniel 8 and 9:21, Paul's in 2 Corinthians 12:2, and John's in Revelation 1:10.

## B. The vision - Acts 10:11-16

Peter saw heaven open and something that looked like a large sheet coming down to earth. As it came near, he saw that it contained all kinds of four footed animals, reptiles, and birds.

## 1. The voice - 10:13-15

As he beheld the vision, a voice spoke, *Rise Peter; kill and eat*. Peter's response was vehemently negative. He had been raised a proper Jew, and even though he was a Christian, he was still a good Jew. He had never eaten an animal which was unclean (as designated in Leviticus 11), and clearly did not plan to do so now. In refusing the voice, Peter was obeying the Jewish law. His intentions were good, but he was being disobedient. Obedience to God always supersedes your good intentions and your own understanding!

The voice corrected Peter: *What God has cleansed and pronounced clean, do not you defile and profane by regarding and calling common and unhallowed or unclean* (Amplified Bible). *The abolition of barriers was pressed home in the vision with special reference to Jewish food restrictions, but Peter soon learned that its range was much wider. Perhaps, as he thought about the vision, he remembered hearing similar words on an earlier occasion, though he had not then grasped their import. No doubt he was present when his Master, in debate with Pharisees and scribes, insisted that it is not what goes into someone's stomach that conveys defilement, but what comes out of one's heart* (Mark 7:14-19). *This was in effect an abrogation of ceremonial food laws and much else of the same character, but it was not until later, as a result of his experience on the roof at Joppa, that Peter appreciated this* (The Book of the Acts, F. F. Bruce).

## 2. The repetition of the vision - 10:13:16

God repeated the vision three times for Peter to confirm and establish the lesson in Peter's mind .

**III. Peter Travels to Caesarea - Acts 10:17-33**

With the vision fresh in his mind, Peter responded to a divine invitation. God prepares His people beforehand for what He is calling them to do. Peter's call now came through the Holy Spirit and through Cornelius' men.

## A. The call from the Holy Spirit - Acts 10:17-20

Still on the rooftop, Peter was pondering the meaning of the vision when the Holy Spirit revealed that three men were outside the house looking for him. The Holy Spirit ordered Peter to get up, go downstairs, and go with them without reservation.

## B. The call from Cornelius' men - Acts 10:21-22

Peter obeyed the Spirit's call to go down. He introduced himself to Cornelius' men and asked why they had come. Their answer was very convincing.

## 1. Cornelius the centurion had sent them - 10:22a

They described Cornelius as a *just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews*.

## 2. Cornelius had received divine instruction - 10:22b

God had sent a holy angel to instruct Cornelius to send for Peter and to hear what Peter had to say.

## C. Peter's response - Acts 10:23

Peter invited the Gentile men in and they spent the night. This was a beginning of the breaking down of the racial and religious barrier between them. The next day, Peter took six (Acts 11:12) of the disciples from Joppa and they all started out for the house of Cornelius.

## D. Peter meets Cornelius - Acts 10:24-29

The next day they arrived in Caesarea and went to Cornelius' house.

## 1. Peter's reception by Cornelius - 10:24-25

Cornelius was so confident that Peter would come and so filled with anticipation, he had invited all his relatives and close friends to be present when Peter arrived. Cornelius met Peter at the door and *fell down at his feet*

and worshiped him. The word *worship* here means to honor, and Cornelius was probably showing the homage he felt was due a messenger from God. He did not realize that his focus was not to be on the messenger, but upon the Subject of the message. Is your own focus fully upon Christ, or have you been sidetracked to honor mere mortal men and women such as an evangelist, your pastor, Bible study teacher, mentor, or some sports hero or political figure? The only One worthy of your homage is the Lord!

#### 2. Peter's introduction of himself - 10:26-29

Peter lifted Cornelius to his feet explaining that he was not worthy of such regard. He was merely a man just like Cornelius! He then went inside with Cornelius and found that there were many people waiting for him — all Gentile friends and relatives of Cornelius. Peter began by reminding them that according to the established Jewish custom (for it was not God's law), a Jewish man was not permitted to keep company with or visit a Gentile. However, God had shown him that he should not call any man *common or unhallowed or (ceremonially) unclean* (Amplified Bible). That is why he had willingly come when he was sent for. Now he asked why they had sent for him.

#### 3. Cornelius presents his case - 10:30-33

Cornelius told Peter about the vision, the instructions to send for him, and the promise that Peter would speak to him. Cornelius and Peter had both done as they had been commanded. Now as they were brought together, all those gathered in Cornelius' house wanted to hear what God had commanded Peter to say.

Peter's audience was prepared to hear. *A prepared preacher and a prepared congregation make a wonderful team* (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament, Warren W. Wiersbe). Do you prepare your heart and mind before going to church or to Bible study so that you are ready to receive the message your pastor or teacher has been given by God? Do you pray that your pastors and teachers will be open to receive their message from God and speak only what God has commanded and not just whatever they want to say?

### **IV. The Holy Spirit is Poured Out on the Gentiles - Acts 10:34-48**

Peter *opened his mouth* and delivered a sermon which resulted in welcoming Gentiles into the body of Christ and opening the way for the gospel to go *to the end of the earth* (1:8). The gospel is the *power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek* (Gentile) (Romans 1:16).

#### A. Peter preaches to the Gentiles - Acts 10:34-43

Peter now understood the full meaning of the vision so he unhesitatingly preached the gospel to the Gentiles. He presented the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with an appeal to believe on Him for the forgiveness of sins.

##### 1. Salvation is open to all - 10:34-36

Racial and religious prejudice had been ingrained in the Jews for centuries. Peter had been raised in a Jewish society which considered themselves God's chosen people. The Gentiles were, *Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world* (Ephesians 2:12). But now, after seeing the vision, hearing the voice, and meeting Cornelius, Peter was fully convinced that *God shows no partiality* (10:34). Now those *who once were far off* could be *made near by the blood of Christ* (Ephesians 2:13).

##### a. Those from every nation may be accepted - 10:35

The requirements for acceptance are fear (reverence) of God and doing what is right. Both are reflective of one's heart attitude toward God. No one is accepted by God because of any works he or she might have done and no one is righteous in God's sight except by faith in Christ *Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Hebrews 11:6). (See also Philippians 3:9).

##### b. Jesus Christ is Lord of all - 10:36

This was a revolutionary concept. God was reaching out not just to the Jews but to all people through Jesus Christ, the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6).

##### 2. Salvation is through Jesus Christ - 10:37-43

The Gentiles who listened to Peter at Cornelius' house that day already knew that God had sent Christ to preach peace with God to the children of Israel, first in Galilee and then in Judea. They had heard how John the Baptist had preached a baptism for the repentance of sins and that God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power at the time He was baptized by John (Luke 3:21-22). They had heard how Jesus had done good and healed those who were oppressed by the devil. They knew that the Jews had killed Jesus by *hanging on a tree*.

- a. Peter was a witness to all of this - 10:37-39

Peter's authority in preaching came from the fact that he was a witness to all that Jesus had done.

- b. Peter was a witness to Christ's resurrection - 10:40-41

Peter was not only a witness to the ministry and murder of Jesus, he was also one of those chosen to see Him after God had raised Him from the dead. He had shared food and drink with Christ after His resurrection.

- c. Peter was commanded to preach the message of salvation - 10:42-43

As one who had been with Christ during his ministry and been a witness of the resurrection, Peter, along with the other apostles, had been commanded to preach the message of salvation. He was to testify that judgment is coming and Jesus Christ was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. However, He was not ordained only to be Judge, but also to be Savior. The prophets also were witnesses that *Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins* (See Isaiah 53:5, 6,11).

#### B. Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit - Acts 10:44-46

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.* The Gentiles believed the word as it was spoken by Peter and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. The apostle Paul (Saul) later wrote: *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles* (1 Corinthians 12:13).

##### 1. Gentiles speak in tongues - 10:44-46

The evidence of the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues just as the apostles had done on the Day of Pentecost (See Acts 11:15.). They also *magnified God* just as the apostles had done when they spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost (*speaking the wonderful works of God*, Acts 2:11). What began at Pentecost had now been extended to the Gentiles. The Gentiles' speaking in tongues actually served a twofold purpose: it bore witness to the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit and also to the truth of what Peter had preached.

##### 2. Jews are *astonished* - 10:45-46

Those who had accompanied Peter from Joppa were Jewish believers, *the circumcision*. They were *astonished* when they heard the Gentiles speak in tongues. It had never entered their minds that the Gospel would be

extended to the Gentiles.

#### C. Gentiles are baptized - Acts 10:47-48

Baptism with water followed baptism by the Holy Spirit for Cornelius and his household. This was a very natural and appropriate response to God's giving the gift of His Holy Spirit.

##### 1. Peter's command - 10:47-48

Peter's question, *Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized...* is rhetorical. It was obvious that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit just as the believing Jews and Samaritans had. He commanded that Cornelius and the other new believers be baptized. The question is, if Cornelius and his friends had not given evidence of the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues, would Peter have taken the initiative to have them baptized? *As things were, God had plainly accepted them, and Peter had no option but to accept what God had done. In justifying his action a few days later, he asked, "Who was I to hinder God" (11:17) The Book of the Acts, F. F. Bruce).*

##### 2. Cornelius' request - 10:48

Cornelius, his family, and his friends had heard about Christ but they had a hunger and thirst for more so they invited Peter to stay with them for a few days. It is only natural for those who have been saved to want to know more and have more of the Lord. No matter how long you have been a Christian and no matter how much you have learned and experienced as a believer, it is a natural thing for you to desire more and more. Hopefully, that is one of the reasons you are now involved in this Bible study.

#### **Applications**

1. God prepared Peter beforehand to go and preach to Cornelius, the Gentile. How is God now preparing you for some future ministry?

2. Even before he placed his faith in Jesus Christ, Cornelius was a religious man. This shows that it is possible to be religious and still not be saved. What about you? Are you just going through the motions of religion — going to church, praying, studying the Scripture, giving, serving — without having an intimate personal relationship with the One who was ordained by God to be *Judge of the living and the dead* (10:42)? If you have any doubts about your own salvation, please ask your discussion leader for a Disciplers' Confidence Letter which explains clearly what it means to be saved.

3. Do you have a passion to know more about the Lord Jesus and draw nearer to Him? What will you do to actively seek a closer relationship with him?