

## Acts Chapter 10

In this chapter, we meet a gentile named Cornelius, who is the member of a group called the “Italian Band” (or regiment). He is called a devout, God fearing man, and he shows himself to be so, throughout this narrative. Apparently, while not circumcised, he (and his house) observes prayer in the Jewish fashion, and “gave much alms to the poor”. God bestows a special honor on this Roman centurion.

One day “about the ninth hour” (three o’clock), he is given a vision of an angel by God. In this vision, the angel commends him for his prayer and generosity, and instructs him to send men to seek out the apostle Peter in Joppa, at the house of Simon the tanner. Cornelius demonstrates his obedience to the Lord, by immediately doing so, as soon as the angel had departed.

The next day, as the two men were drawing near to Joppa, Peter had a vision of his own. On the rooftop of the house of Simon the tanner, while hungry and praying, Peter had a vision of (clean and?) unclean animals being let down in a sheet from heaven. In the vision, God commanded Peter to eat of the unclean animals. Peter, being Jewish, refuses, saying that he has “never eaten anything unclean”. God then tells Peter, not to call what he has cleansed unclean. This same vision repeated itself three times.

While he is pondering the vision, the men sent by Cornelius show up at the gate, asking for him. The Holy Spirit tells him of the men, and instructs him to go with them without hesitation. After allowing them to stay the night, Peter goes with them the next day.

When they arrive at Cornelius’ house in Caesarea the next day, Cornelius falls at Peter’s feet to worship him. Peter quickly corrects Cornelius’ misconception, saying, in essence “I am a man, just like you”. The two men exchange testimonies of how they arrived there (there visions), and Peter gives an interpretation of his vision; that God shows no favoritism.

Then Peter gives Cornelius a summary of the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius and “all who were listening to the message”. They immediately began to speak in tongues, and praise God. Peter then commands that they be immediately baptized, and he and the Jewish followers from Joppa stay with Cornelius for several days.

Throughout the narrative we see a message of equality pronounced. First, in Cornelius, we see that God honors his faithfulness. Despite the fact that God had made a covenant with Israel, and the Jews considered Gentiles

unclean, the beginning of this chapter seems to bear instruction that God honors faithfulness, not race. This is further reiterated by Peter later when he says “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” This seems to be teaching that not only now (at this time) but also in the past, God did not acknowledge a difference according to race, but according to ones heart. Indeed, this is verified by the manner in which the gentile converts received the Holy Spirit. It is identical to the accounts of the Holy Spirit falling upon Jewish converts.

While this appears to be an un-noteworthy event in today’s society, at this time in history, this was a huge revelation. According to Jewish custom, Jews were not allowed to associate with gentiles, whom they considered “unclean”. They were not allowed to enter there house, touch them, etc. With this occurrence, God abolishes all such elitism.

Taking this one step further, we could say that all people of all times who were “faithful and righteous” were equally a part of the same family of God. Division according to race (i.e. the covenant made with Israel), although *demonstrated* through Israel, was actually open to all. This idea is actually supported by the Old Testament, which provides for Jewish converts. Furthermore, it substantiates the idea that God is concerned with the spiritual condition of a person, rather than exterior customs and ritual. While this may be drawing a bit too much out of this text, it certainly bears further study, and is the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

We also see, once again, the early church practice of immediate baptism. Throughout the book of Acts, baptism always immediately follows a profession of faith, and while not expressed in so many words here, appears vital.