

# **“A Major Change In Direction”**

## **Acts 10:1-23**

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**Teaching Aim:** To explore a major change of direction within the church as we come to **Acts chapter 10**. To recognize God’s sovereign choice of a God-fearing Roman centurion named Cornelius to be the point man as the Lord opens the door of the church to the Gentiles. To understand the change of mind that had to take place in Peter before he would use the keys of the kingdom of heaven for the Gentile believers. To recognize Peter had previously used these keys to open the door for both the Jews (**Acts 2**) and the Samaritans (**Acts 8**); now God would use him to open the door of the kingdom of heaven for the Gentiles as well (**Acts 10**).

### **DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)**

#### **Part I: An angelic visit to a Roman centurion in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-8)**

1. As we come to **Acts chapter 10**, we find a major change taking place in the direction of the early church. Up until this time, the main focus of any evangelist outreach was toward the Jews, and only recently to the Samaritans. Through the vision Peter had in **Acts 10**, the evangelist efforts of the church would begin to turn towards the Gentiles. What office did Cornelius hold as a Roman soldier (**vs. 1**)? What can we learn about him from **verse 1**?
2. Where was Cornelius stationed (**vs. 1**)? What do you know about this city? (See Bible Dictionary) What can we learn about Cornelius from the four characteristics shared in **verse 2**? What are “*alms*?” (Hint: Search online) Even with so many outstanding qualities, Cornelius still needed Jesus. Why are the following three Bible verses useful in sharing the gospel message with others today? (See **Rom. 3:23; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; John 3:16**)
3. What extra ordinary step did God take to ensure Cornelius and those in his household would hear the gospel message (**vs. 3**)? What time of the day did Cornelius’ vision take place? What additional information can we learn about the visiting angel from **Acts 10:30**?
4. What was the reaction of this powerful Roman military leader to the visitor in his house (**vs. 4**)? Why do you think Cornelius reacted this way? What message did the visitor bring to Cornelius? Was this a troubling message or a message of reassurance?

5. What instructions were given to Cornelius in **verses 5-6**? What facts do we learn from these verses? What was the purpose of the men going to Peter? Note: Do you find it unusual that they were sent to Peter when Philip was most likely already in Caesarea? Why? According to **Acts 11:13-14**, what message did the angel bring to Cornelius?
  
6. Being a man of authority in the Roman military, what did Cornelius do at the departure of the angel (**vs. 7**)? Why do you think he chose these men? Do you think the soldier may have also been a God-fearer like Cornelius? How do you think they responded to his command?

## **Part II: Peter's rooftop vision from God while praying in Joppa (Acts 10:9-16)**

1. When did the three men set out on their journey from Caesarea to Joppa (**vs. 9**)? What was happening at the same time that the men drew near to the city? Why was Peter on the roof? What time of the day did this event take place? How many times during the day did the Jewish people set aside to pray? (See **Dan. 6:10**)
  
2. What was Peter thinking about as he went on to the roof (**vs. 10**)? How would God use Peter's hunger to teach him an important lesson? What happened to Peter as he went into prayer? Was this normal, or supernatural?
  
3. What unusual vision did Peter experience in **verse 11**? Note: The Greek word for "*sheet*" is the same word that is used for the large sails found on tall ships. How many corners did this large sheet have? What did Peter see happening in his vision?
  
4. What was in the middle of the great sheet (**vs. 12**)? Why would this sight cause concern for Peter? In understanding this vision, it is important to remember that Peter was hungry, he was looking for something to eat. Why would having a selection of clean and unclean animals be so troubling to Peter? (See **Lev. 11:24-26, 41-44; 20:25-26**)
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6. As Peter pondered his vision, he heard a voice saying, *“Rise, Peter; kill and eat”* (**vs. 13**). Peter was stunned, he recognized the voice as the Lord’s. Why would Peter be stunned at this command? Note: From the time Peter was a child, he had always been taught to obey the dietary laws of the Old Covenant and to not eat unclean foods. So, why the change? Because Peter was now under the New Covenant of grace, not the Old Covenant of the law. Jesus died, was buried, and now had risen from the dead. It was a brand-new day.
7. How do we find Peter responding to the command from God in **verse 14**? We should note that this is the third time Peter has fought against the will of God. What were the circumstances surrounding the other two occasions? (See **Matt. 16:22-23; John 13:8**) How many times have you said no to God when He asked you to do something?
8. Did God let Peter have his way when he refused to follow His command (**vs. 15**)? What did God do? What have your experiences been like when you’ve fought against God in the past? Who will ultimately win?
9. The lesson Peter was learning was of much greater importance than clean and unclean animals, this was a lesson about clean and unclean people. What can we learn from the following Scriptures? (See **Eph. 2:14-18; Rom. 10:4**). Peter shouldn’t have been surprised that the day would come when the dietary laws would be set aside, after all, Jesus had laid the foundation for it in His public ministry. (See **Matt. 15:11**) The dietary laws were part of setting the Jewish people apart and preparing them for the coming of Messiah.
10. In **Mark 7:14-23**, Jesus detailed a deeper meaning to us. What is it? How should we receive our food today? (See **1 Tim. 4:3b-5**) Do you lead your family in thanksgiving at mealtime? What can we learn about food and drink from **Rom. 14:19-23**?

11. How many times did God issue the command for Peter to rise up, kill and eat, for what God has cleansed you must not call common (**vv. 15 & 16**)? Why did God repeat Himself three times? It is important for us to remember that the law was just a picture of things to come, the reality is found in Christ. (See **Gal. 3:24; Col. 2:16-17**) How does the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ along with the arrival of the New Covenant change everything?
12. Peter had been prejudiced against the Gentiles for a very long time, it was engrained in him since birth. Are we guilty of still being prejudiced in the church today? If so, what are some ways that we see this being manifest. What are some ways that we can help people of other nationalities and colors to feel at home in church today? Are you willing to reach out?

### **Part III: A providential appointment timed by God (Acts 10:17-23)**

1. As we come to **verse 17**, Peter was stunned. What was the meaning of the vision he had just witnessed? As Peter was pondering his vision on the roof, what happened downstairs (**vs. 17**)? Note: Did you catch the perfect timing of the arrival in the providence of God?
2. Who do we find the three men looking for in **verse 18**? As we come to **verse 19**, who was speaking to Peter? What instruction did the Holy Spirit give to Peter (**vs. 20**)? Peter would now have the opportunity to put this new lesson into practice and immediately went downstairs to meet the men (**vs. 21**). What question did Peter ask his three visitors?
3. How did the three Gentile men respond in **verse 22** to the question, "*For what reason have you come?*" What details can we learn about Cornelius and the reason for their visit from this verse?
4. What unusual step did Peter take in **verse 23**? What made this so unusual? Was it Jewish law or Jewish tradition that kept the Jewish people from inviting Gentiles into their homes? Who did Peter end up in trouble with over his interaction with the Gentiles? (See **Acts 11:1-3**) Why is it important for us to remember, "*The Scriptures and the Scriptures alone are the authority for what we believe?*" What are some modern traditions that cause Christians to stop loving each other over? Is the Lord pleased when division happens?

5. What did Peter do on the next day according to **verse 23b**? How many Jewish witnesses did he take with him? (See **Acts 11:12**) Why? (See **Deut. 19:15**) Why was it so important for Peter to have these witnesses with him, double the required amount?
6. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes: *"Peter's vision was not about food or animals; it was about people. Through the remainder of **Acts 10** Luke will show why God repealed the dietary laws. It was to show that the unclean were being gathered together and made clean by Christ. We all start this life unclean, and in some respects we are still unclean, but if we have confessed Christ and put our hope and trust in Him alone for salvation, then He is in us and we are in Him. If that relationship exists in your life right now, do not let anybody call you unclean, because God has declared you clean. That is what justification is all about."* What is it about **Acts chapter 10** that makes this teaching especially important to you today?

#### **MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!***

- The Roman centurion Cornelius was a God-fearer, a believer in Yahweh with ties to a Jewish synagogue, but he had not undergone the right of circumcision yet.
- Cornelius' faith inspired his entire family to follow him into Judaism and later Christianity.
- During biblical days, the housetop was a popular place for the Jews to worship God and pray.
- As Peter prayed, he fell into a trance and God revealed a remarkable truth to him.
- The sheet descending from heaven was carrying food in Peter's vision, filled with both clean and unclean animals.
- Peter was stunned when God instructed him that it was okay to eat unclean animals, this went against everything he had previously learned and believed.
- In this case, the animals were symbolic of people, both clean (Jews) and unclean (Gentiles).
- The lesson for Peter was that the church of Jesus Christ will be comprised of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, there is to be no distinction, together they are the church.