

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Week 3 Acts 10-11:17

Introduction

This story centers around God individually visiting and reconciling Jewish and Gentile believers to the new world of Christ.

10:1-8 Luke introduces a new character named Cornelius, a centurion of Rome who also happens to be a Gentile who worships God. He lives in Caesarea, not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi, but is still a primarily Gentile city. Despite being a hated soldier of Rome, Luke writes that he “feared God with all his household,” gave generously, and prayed to God (v.2). The “feared God” statement implies that Cornelius has affection or reverence for the Jewish God, but was not a proselyte, or someone who fully adopts Judaism and all of its practices.¹ One day at 3pm, he is visited by an angel of God who tells that his “prayers and (his) alms have ascended as a memorial before God (v.4).² God tells him to send men to the city of Joppa and bring a man named Simon but called Peter (Πέτρος), the Greek name for Rock. Cornelius was frightened but complied with the message.

10:9-23 The narrative shifts to Peter's perspective. Peter goes up to the rooftop to pray at noon. While up there, he falls into a trance and sees a strange vision involving a dining sheet coming out of heaven, held together by its four corners, and resting on the ground. This sheet has on it all kinds of animals, ceremonially clean and unclean. Levitical Law listed a series of animals that the Israelites, God's representatives on the earth, were forbidden to eat.³ These rules exist to keep the nation of Israel “holy” or set apart from its neighbors. A voice from heaven then commands Peter to kill and eat these things. Peter is aghast at this and refuses the command. God then says, “What God has made clean, do not call common (v.15).” Peter awakens from this trance naturally confused but is interrupted by Cornelius's men at the gate. Upon prompting by the Spirit, Peter goes down and speaks to the men, for them to ask Peter to visit their master's house and listen to what Cornelius has to say. Peter connects this request to dine in the house of an unclean man with the unclean animals in the vision and, upon the prompting of the Spirit, accepts.

10:23-29 The next day Peter leaves with some of his associates to the house of Cornelius. Upon entering, the centurion bows down and begins to worship Peter only to earn Peter's rebuke. Peter then speaks to the congregation about how it is “unlawful” for a Jew to “associate with or visit anyone of another nation (v.28).” This is not against Levitical Law, but of the Rabbinic Law to protect the Jew against diminishing their traditions.⁴ Nevertheless, Peter continues that, “God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean (v.29).” Peter interprets the dream that God has commanded that the followers of Jesus should not call the Gentiles unclean. They should mingle and dine with them. The vision, therefore, was to remove the restrictions surrounding the Jews refusing to mingle with Gentiles. The tablecloth then

¹ Cornelius is described as a φοβούμενος in Acts 10:22. See Bromiley, Geoffrey M. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1985.

² Within this sentence, two ideas being communicated. Cornelius's prayers and alms are described as a μνημόσυνον (memorial) which is the same word used in the Septuagint for sacrifices (Lev. 2:2, 5:12, 6:15). Cornelius's prayers are being described as acceptable sacrifices to God.

³ Leviticus 11

⁴ See Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 35 through 38 for a discussion about these things. It was even considered that a residue of “unclean” foods could remain on a knife that cut Jewish food (Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 39a:12).

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represents Jews and Gentiles as the unclean and clean animals with the four corners representing the four corners of the earth.⁵ These animals are all allowed to ascend into heaven to be with God. In a similar fashion, as part of God's redemptive plan, He intends to bring in all nations from all corners of the world to be a part of the family of God. Through the Church, God invites all the nations to take part in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.⁶ Through the Resurrection and the Spirit, God is bringing in the Gentiles to participate in the family of God.

10:30-43 After Peter finishes the revelation given by God, Cornelius presents his vision to the group and asks Peter what he has to say to them (vv.30-33). Peter continues his understanding of the vision, that not only should the followers of Jesus eat with Gentiles, but rites like baptism and the message of Jesus can be instructed to them. Peter gives a speech concerning his experience with Jesus and his ministry, ending with his death and resurrection and the commission given to the apostles. This speech is almost certainly a truncated version of Peter's speech that Luke transcribes. Luke does include a few key things: Jesus being anointed with the Spirit by God (v.38), his early ministry of doing good and innocence (v.38), his death and resurrection (vv.39-41),⁷ and his commission to the apostles (vv.42-43). These events are the essence of all of the Gospels, creating a link between these Gentiles and the message of Jesus. Peter's speech is also the first recitation of the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles.

10:44-11:18 During this speech, the "Holy Spirit fell" on the Gentiles in the room who began to speak in tongues and to praise God (vv.44-46), confirming Peter's statement in verses 10:34-35. The Jewish believers were "amazed" at this happening, as they had evidently believed that the Holy Spirit would remain only with the Jewish believers. This arrival of the Spirit causes Peter to ask for water to baptize the people who received the Spirit (vv.47-48). This is alarming to later people of the "circumcision party," Jews who believed the full law of Moses should apply to Gentile converts (vv.11:1-3). Peter reiterates his vision again, concluding with the arrival of the Spirit to Gentile believers and implying their baptism. This revelation causes the apostles to become silent before saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life (v.18)." These Gentiles are a part of God's movement and family.

Conclusion This story is included to show just how far this movement is expected to go. The message of Jesus of repentance and forgiveness of sins is not solely kept with the Jews but can extend to the Gentiles, where even the Gentiles can be expected to have an aspect of God dwell within them. It is worth noting that in Galatians 2:11-14, Paul confronts Peter for not eating with Gentiles in Antioch. Perhaps Peter reverted to old habits in a foreign Gentile city, but it stands as a warning of how easy Peter was able to slip back into excluding "unclean" people and a warning to the Galatians and everyone else who lives as a Christian. All of these stories show how the church was built around sharing meals with friends and strangers and how the kingdom of God grows one meal at a time.

⁵ See Isaiah 11:12.

⁶ See Revelation 21

⁷ Luke uses the term "tree" in verse 39 to allude to Deuteronomy 21:23, where the text describes a man who has committed a crime and is hung on a tree to die. This contrasts between Jesus' innocence and the people who ordered this punishment.