

ACTS *THE SPREAD OF THE CHURCH*

Good News For All

Acts 10-11:18

Acts 10 records a significant shift in the direction and focus of the gospel message. The gospel message up to this point had been centered on Jewish believers, then it expanded to include Samaritans as well, but in Acts 10 all walls of separation were broken down as the gospel spreads to gentiles. Up to this point the gospel had appeared to be good news for some, but in Acts 10 it is made clear that the gospel is good news for all who will believe!

- **Scene 1: A Divine Intervention** **10:1-8**
And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God." **Acts 10:4**
- **Scene 2: A Divine Vision** **10:9-16**
And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." **Acts 10:15**
- **Scene 3: A Divine Appointment** **10:17-48**
Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In Truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." **Acts 10:34-35**
- **Scene 4: A Divine Reception** **11:1-18**
When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." **Acts 11:18**

The book of Acts continues to unfold God's love for His creation by providing a way of salvation for all who will believe without regard for ethnicity, geography, political affiliation, economic status or any other label by which we might be identified. The gospel is the good news that Jesus died for all, and all who believe will be forever saved from their sins!

Big Idea

The Gospel is for
Every Man, Woman and Child

Acts 10:1-8

1–8 The first scene in this complex story begins with an introduction of *Cornelius, a centurion*. This was a position of some limited authority. He served in the *Italian Regiment* of which we know little. A regiment or ‘cohort’ of 600 soldiers was divided into six ‘centuries’, with a centurion as the head of each.

Although he was a Roman soldier, *he and all his family were devout and God-fearing*. The term ‘God-fearers’ appears to have been frequently used for a class of people who believed, and to some extent followed, the Jewish religion without being full converts to Judaism (see 13:16, 26; 17:4, 17 for this sense; the phrase ‘worshipper of God’ is probably referring to the same phenomenon; 16:14, 18:7). ‘Fearing God’ could also be used to describe someone as merely religious (so 2:5), but would seem redundant in this sentence if that was all it meant here. In short, this man and his family were not Jews nor Jewish converts, but were also no longer pagans worshipping other gods.¹

The importance of this event is seen in the fact that Luke recounts it three times—here in Acts 10, again in chapter 11, and finally in 15:6–9.²

10:2. From the description of Cornelius as **devout** (*eusebēs*, used only here and in v. 7; 2 Peter 2:9) **and God-fearing** (“righteous and God-fearing,” Acts 10:22), it can be inferred he was not a full-fledged proselyte to Judaism (he had not been circumcised, 11:3), but he did worship Yahweh. Evidently he attended the synagogue and to the best of his knowledge and ability followed the Old Testament Scriptures.

¹ Conrad Gempf, “[Acts](#),” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1081–1082.

² Stanley D. Toussaint, “[Acts](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 379.

Nevertheless, he had not entered into New Testament salvation (cf. 11:14).³

10:3–6. The time reference, **3 in the afternoon**, may refer to a Jewish time of prayer (cf. 3:1). If so, the Lord approached Cornelius by means of **an angel** while he was at prayer (cf. 10:9). Later Cornelius called this angel “a man in shining clothes” (v. 30).⁴

Acts 10:9-23

The vision itself was a strange one. A bundle was let down containing all kinds of living creatures: *four-footed animals ... reptiles of the earth and birds of the air* make up the three classifications of the whole animal kingdom (see the Noah story; Gn. 6:20). There were, therefore, animals there that a Jew could not eat, by the food laws (see Lv. 11; 20:25). Thus the command that came, *Kill and eat*, caused Peter to protest his innocence (cf. Ezk. 4:14). The voice replied *Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*. The whole interchange was repeated twice more—Peter was no stranger to triple repetition (Jn. 13:38; 21:15–17).⁵

That **Peter** prayed morning and evening may be assumed, for those were normal times of prayer. In addition he prayed at **noon**. Prayer three times a day was not commanded in the Scriptures, but Peter followed the example of pious men before him (cf. Ps. 55:17; Dan.

³ Stanley D. Toussaint, [“Acts,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 379.

⁴ Stanley D. Toussaint, [“Acts,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 379.

⁵ Conrad Gempf, [“Acts,”](#) in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1082.

6:10). Peter **went up to the (flat) roof to pray**; this would have given him privacy.⁶

When God commanded **Peter to eat** of these animals, his response was, **Surely not, Lord!** Significantly his refusal (“surely not”) was *mēdamōs*, a more polite and subjective term than *oudamōs* (“by no means,” used only in Matt. 2:6). This was the third time in Peter’s career that he directly refused God’s will (cf. Matt. 16:23; John 13:8).⁷

Acts 10

44–48 Peter had not even finished speaking when the Gentiles’ response was confirmed by the giving of the Holy Spirit, evidenced by their *speaking in tongues and praising God*. This was taken by *the circumcised believers* present, as well as, later, those in Jerusalem (11:15–18), as a sign that these people should be accepted into the body of Christ—and apparently such a strong sign was needed, for the believers present *were astonished* that the Holy Spirit could come *even on the Gentiles*. As in the story of the eunuch (8:36), there is a curiously negative question about their baptism, *Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?* This indicates that there might have seemed to some a possible objection: that the people to be baptized were not yet full Jews (see 11:18: ‘no further objections’).⁸

Acts 11

⁶ Stanley D. Toussaint, [“Acts,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 380.

⁷ Stanley D. Toussaint, [“Acts,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 380.

⁸ Conrad Gempf, [“Acts,”](#) in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1083.

11:1–18 The final scene in this story took place later, in Jerusalem. Having *heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God ... the circumcised believers criticised* Peter for visiting and eating with non-Jews. Peter’s defence and their response make clear that they were also unsure about whether Gentiles could become Christians without also becoming Jews. Peter told them everything that had happened; and the fact that Luke records this in full when it is a repetition of 10:9–48 is a measure of its importance in his eyes.

Peter saw the gift of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius as *the same gift as he gave* the apostles at Pentecost (17). The reasoning was that if God had baptized these people with the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus showing divine acceptance in the company of the redeemed, who could possibly withhold baptism with water and deny them earthly fellowship (8:36; 10:45)? To do so would have been to *oppose God*. With such words the circumcised believers were convinced, and had *no further objections*. Once again the phrase *even the Gentiles* occurs—it was still a surprise to them. Who would have thought that God would grant *even the Gentiles repentance unto life*?⁹

⁹ Conrad Gempf, [“Acts,”](#) in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1083.