Peter and Cornelius: The Door Opened to the Gentiles

Bible Stories Anthology — Acts 10–11

Copyright 2026

Distribution of this study as is in its entirety is permitted & encouraged.

Author: John Lobota

Research Assistant: Claude Cowork

papertiq@bellsouth.net

> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Two Men, Two Visions, Thirty Miles Apart

In Caesarea, the Roman capital on the coast, a Roman army officer was praying at three o'clock in the afternoon. He was not a Jew. He had never been circumcised. By the customs of the day, no devout Jew would set foot in his house or eat at his table. Yet he prayed to the God of Israel every day, and gave generously to the Jewish poor. That afternoon an angel stood in his room and told him to send for a man named Simon Peter, who was staying at a tanner's house by the sea in Joppa.

The next day, at noon, on a rooftop in Joppa, Peter was praying and hungry. He fell into a trance and saw a great sheet let down from heaven, full of animals the Law of Moses called unclean. A voice said, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Peter refused. Three times. And while he sat puzzling over what it meant, there was a knock at the gate: three men from a Roman officer's house, asking for him.

What happened next changed the history of the world. For the first time, the gospel was preached to a household of Gentiles — and before Peter had even finished his sermon, God poured out the gift of holy spirit on them, exactly as He had on the apostles at Pentecost. The door that had been closed for centuries was thrown open. And Peter, the man who had said "Not so, Lord," had to explain to the church in Jerusalem why he had gone in and eaten with the uncircumcised.

The Setting

When. Some years after Pentecost — probably around the end of the 30s A.D. Saul had been converted and sent home to Tarsus, and **"then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria"** (Acts 9:31). Peter was travelling among the churches of the coast. At Lydda he had healed a paralysed man named Aeneas, and at Joppa he had raised a woman named Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead (Acts 9:32-42).

Joppa. An ancient port on the Mediterranean (today's Jaffa, beside Tel Aviv). It was from Joppa, eight hundred years earlier, that the prophet Jonah had tried to sail away rather than preach to the Gentile city of Nineveh (Jonah 1:3). Peter's own father was named Jonah — Jesus had called him **"Simon Bar-jona"** (Matthew 16:17), "son of Jonah." Now another son of Jonah was in Joppa, about to be sent to the Gentiles.

Simon the tanner. Peter was lodging **"with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side."** Tanners turned the skins of dead animals into leather, work that meant constant contact with carcasses. The trade was smelly, and many strict Jews regarded it as unclean; tanneries were usually kept at the edge of a town. That Peter was staying there at all shows that God was already loosening his old scruples.

Caesarea. About thirty miles north of Joppa, a magnificent harbour city built by Herod the Great and named in honour of Caesar Augustus. It was the headquarters of the Roman governors of Judaea and the base of Roman troops — a thoroughly Gentile city.

Jews and Gentiles. The Law of Moses set Israel apart from the nations, and among other things it divided animals into **"the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten"** (Leviticus 11:47). Over the centuries, the teachers of the Law had built a wall of custom on top of it: a devout Jew would not enter a Gentile's house or eat with him, for fear of being defiled. On the morning Jesus was brought to Pilate, the priests would not even enter the governor's hall, **"lest they should be defiled"** (John 18:28).

The administration. The age of grace had begun at Pentecost, and Peter had said then that the promise was **"to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call"** (Acts 2:39). But so far the gospel had gone only to Jews, Samaritans, and proselytes. No one yet understood that uncircumcised Gentiles could receive the gift of holy spirit just as they were.

The Story, Told Faithfully

A Devout Centurion

> **Acts 10:1** *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,*
>
> **Acts 10:2** *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

"A centurion of the band called the Italian band." A centurion commanded about a hundred soldiers. A "band" (Greek *speira*) was a cohort of several hundred. An inscription shows that a cohort of Italian volunteers was stationed in Syria later in the century. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army — hard, experienced men.

"A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house." Cornelius was what the Jews called a *God-fearer*: a Gentile who worshipped the God of Israel, went to the synagogue, kept the hours of prayer, but had not become a full convert by circumcision. And it was not only Cornelius — his whole household feared God.

"Which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." "The people" means the Jewish people. Like the centurion in Capernaum of whom the Jewish elders said, **"he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue"** (Luke 7:5), Cornelius loved Israel and its God.

He was devout, generous, prayerful and respected. And yet he still needed to hear the gospel. Good works and sincere prayer had brought him to the door; they could not bring him through it.

An Angel at the Ninth Hour

> **Acts 10:3** *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.*
>
> **Acts 10:4** *And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*
>
> **Acts 10:5** *And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:*
>
> **Acts 10:6** *He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*
>
> **Acts 10:7** *And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;*
>
> **Acts 10:8** *And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.*

"About the ninth hour of the day." About three in the afternoon — the hour of the evening sacrifice and prayer at the temple (Acts 3:1). Cornelius was keeping the Jewish hour of prayer in his own house in Caesarea.

"Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." A *memorial* was the portion of an offering burned on the altar so that its smoke rose up to God (Leviticus 2:2). Cornelius could not offer sacrifices at the temple. But God said his prayers and his gifts had risen before Him like an offering. God had noticed.

"Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter." Notice what the angel did *not* do. He did not preach the gospel to Cornelius. God has given that work to men and women, not to angels. The angel's job was to connect Cornelius with a man who could tell him **"words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved"** (Acts 11:14).

"He called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier." Cornelius obeyed at once — and sent men who shared his faith.

A Sheet Let Down From Heaven

> **Acts 10:9** *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:*
>
> **Acts 10:10** *And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,*
>
> **Acts 10:11** *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:*
>
> **Acts 10:12** *Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*
>
> **Acts 10:13** *And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*
>
> **Acts 10:14** *But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*
>
> **Acts 10:15** *And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

> **Acts 10:16** *This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.*

"Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." Noon. Houses had flat roofs reached by an outside stair — a quiet, open place to pray, looking out over the sea.

"He became very hungry… he fell into a trance." The Greek word is *ekstasis*, from which we get "ecstasy": a state in which the mind is taken out of its ordinary awareness to receive a vision. God met Peter's hunger with a vision about food — but it was not really about food.

"A great sheet knit at the four corners." A large linen cloth, gathered at the corners like a bag, let down from heaven. In it were **"all manner of fourfooted beasts… and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air"** — clean and unclean mixed together.

"Rise, Peter; kill, and eat."

"Not so, Lord." Here is a figure of speech worth noticing — two words that cannot stand together. If He is *Lord*, one cannot say *not so* to Him; if one says *not so*, one is not treating Him as Lord. Peter had done this before: when Jesus foretold His death, Peter "began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord" (Matthew 16:22). Ezekiel, too, once protested to God about eating what defiled (Ezekiel 4:14). Peter was a faithful Jew. He had kept the food laws all his life. **"I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean."**

"What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." "Common" meant ordinary, unholy — not set apart for God. God, who gave the food laws, was now declaring that what He had cleansed must not be called unclean.

"This was done thrice." Three times, so that Peter could not dismiss it. Peter had denied the Lord three times; the risen Lord had asked him three times, "Lovest thou me?" (John 21:15-17). Now three times God pressed a lesson on him that went against everything he had been raised to believe.

Three Men at the Gate

> **Acts 10:17** *Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,*
>
> **Acts 10:18** *And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.*
>
> **Acts 10:19** *While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.*
>
> **Acts 10:20** *Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.*
>
> **Acts 10:21** *Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?*
>
> **Acts 10:22** *And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.*
>
> **Acts 10:23** *Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.*

“While Peter doubted in himself what this vision… should mean.” He did not yet understand. God’s timing was exact: at the very moment Peter was puzzling, the men were at the gate.

“The Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.” God, by the gift of holy spirit within Peter, told him what he could not have known.

“Go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.” “Doubting nothing” — not arguing, not making distinctions. The word (*diakrinomenos*) means to discriminate, to make a difference. Peter was not to make a difference between these Gentiles and anyone else.

“Cornelius the centurion, a just man… of good report among all the nation of the Jews.” The servants spoke well of their master — and pointed out that even the Jews respected him.

“Then called he them in, and lodged them.” Peter’s first step: he gave Gentiles a room in the house for the night. The lesson was sinking in.

“Certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.” Six of them, we learn later (Acts 11:12). Peter wanted witnesses.

“I Myself Also Am a Man”

> **Acts 10:24** *And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*
>
> **Acts 10:25** *And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.*
>
> **Acts 10:26** *But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.*
>
> **Acts 10:27** *And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.*
>
> **Acts 10:28** *And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*
>
> **Acts 10:29** *Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?*

“Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.” He was so sure God would send Peter that he gathered everyone he cared about to hear him.

“Fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.” The Greek word *proskuneō* means to bow down and do homage — the way a person might honour a king. Cornelius, overwhelmed, bowed before God’s messenger.

“Stand up; I myself also am a man.” Peter would not accept it. The angel in Revelation said the same to John: **“See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant”** (Revelation 19:10). God’s messengers point to God, not to themselves.

“Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation.” “Unlawful” here (Greek *athemitos*) means *forbidden by custom*, not by any command in the Law of Moses. The Law never forbade a Jew to visit a Gentile; the tradition of the elders did.

“But God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” Now Peter understood the vision. It was about *people*. The sheet full of unclean animals was a picture of the Gentile nations, and God had cleansed them.

Four Days Ago

> **Acts 10:30** *And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,*
>
> **Acts 10:31** *And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*
>
> **Acts 10:32** *Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.*
>
> **Acts 10:33** *Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

“Four days ago.” By the way days were counted then (including the first and last): the vision on day one, the servants reaching Joppa on day two, the journey on day three, arrival on day four.

“A man stood before me in bright clothing.” Cornelius calls the angel a *man* — angels in scripture often appeared in human form.

“Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” Could any preacher ask for a better audience? A house full of people, ready and waiting, **“before God,”** to hear everything.

No Respecter of Persons

> **Acts 10:34** *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:*
>
> **Acts 10:35** *But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*
>
> **Acts 10:36** *The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)*
>
> **Acts 10:37** *That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;*
>
> **Acts 10:38** *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.*

“Peter opened his mouth” — a Hebrew **idiom** for beginning to speak at length and with weight.

“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” A “respecter of persons” is someone who plays favourites — who judges by face, nation or rank. “I perceive” means Peter was grasping it as he spoke: God does not favour Jews over Gentiles.

“In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” Not that good works save — Peter was about to preach the way of salvation — but that God welcomes anyone, from any nation, who comes to Him in reverence.

“Preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:).” Peace between God and men, and — though Peter did not yet see all of it — peace between Jew and Gentile. Jesus is Lord *of all*, not of Israel alone.

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.” Here Peter states plainly who Jesus is and how He did His works. *God* anointed Him. He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil — **“for God was with him.”** Sickness and oppression are the work of the devil; healing and deliverance are the work of God, done through the man He anointed.

> **Acts 10:39** *And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:*
>
> **Acts 10:40** *Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;*
>
> **Acts 10:41** *Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*
>
> **Acts 10:42** *And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.*
>
> **Acts 10:43** *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

“Whom they slew and hanged on a tree.” “Tree” is the word for wood — the cross. Moses had said a man hanged on a tree was under the curse (Deuteronomy 21:23). Jesus took the curse for us.

“Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God.” The risen Christ did not appear to everyone, but to chosen witnesses — **“who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.”** The resurrection was not a vision; they shared meals with Him. Forty days later He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:3, 9).

“Ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.” “Quick” means *living*. God has appointed the risen Jesus to judge the living and the dead.

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” *Whosoever*. Jew or Gentile. Believe, and receive.

While Peter Yet Spake

> **Acts 10:44** *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*
>
> **Acts 10:45** *And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.*
>
> **Acts 10:46** *For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,*

“While Peter yet spake these words.” Peter had not finished. As he said the words, “whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” his hearers believed — and God did not wait. No laying on of hands. No water. No circumcision. **“The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.”**

“They of the circumcision which believed were astonished.” Peter’s six Jewish companions could hardly believe it. **“On the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.”** “Poured out” — the same word used of Pentecost (Acts 2:17, 33).

“For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.” How did they know the Gentiles had received the gift? They *heard* it. The Gentiles spoke in tongues and magnified God, just as the apostles had at Pentecost when they spoke “the wonderful works of God.” Speaking in tongues was the outward sign that could not be argued with. God Himself had shown that He accepted uncircumcised Gentiles.

Can Any Man Forbid Water?

> **Acts 10:47** *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*
>
> **Acts 10:48** *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*

“Can any man forbid water?” Peter’s first thought was water baptism — the custom by which a Gentile convert was received. But God had already done the thing that mattered: they had **“received the Holy Ghost as well as we.”**

“He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” As this series understands it, “baptized in the name of the Lord” here names the new birth itself, which had just taken place, rather than a water rite. Notice that Luke never reports water being used, and when Peter later defended himself in Jerusalem he did not mention water at all — he quoted Jesus’ words contrasting water with holy spirit (Acts 11:16). Many sincere Christians read this verse as describing water baptism, and the question is not one to divide over. What is beyond question is what God did: He gave these Gentiles the very same gift.

“Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.” And Peter stayed — in a Gentile house, eating at a Gentile table.

Contended With Him

> **Acts 11:1** *And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.*
>
> **Acts 11:2** *And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,*
>
> **Acts 11:3** *Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*

“They that were of the circumcision contended with him.” Some of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were upset — not that Gentiles had believed, but that Peter had **“wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.”** Their complaint was about the table.

> **Acts 11:4** *But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,*
>
> **Acts 11:5** *I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:*
>
> **Acts 11:6** *Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*

> **Acts 11:7** *And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.*
> **Acts 11:8** *But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.*
> **Acts 11:9** *But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*
> **Acts 11:10** *And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.*
> **Acts 11:11** *And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.*
> **Acts 11:12** *And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:*
> **Acts 11:13** *And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;*
> **Acts 11:14** *Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

"Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them." He did not argue. He told the story, in order, exactly as it had happened. It is the same story Luke has just told us — and repeating it this way tells us how important it is.

"Words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." Only here do we learn what the angel told Cornelius Peter would bring: words of salvation.

> **Acts 11:15** *And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.*
> **Acts 11:16** *Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.*
> **Acts 11:17** *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?*
> **Acts 11:18** *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

"The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." *As on us.* Peter put the Gentiles' experience beside Pentecost: the same gift, the same way, the same sign.

"Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." In his defence Peter did not say, "and then I baptized them in water." He remembered Jesus' words setting water baptism and baptism with holy spirit side by side (Acts 1:5), and he knew which one God had given.

"God gave them the like gift as he did unto us." The *like* gift — the same, equal.

"What was I, that I could withstand God?" A question that answers itself — the figure of speech called **erotesis**. Who could argue with God?

"They held their peace, and glorified God." The objections stopped. **"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."**

Years later, when the question came up again at a council in Jerusalem, Peter said, **"God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith"** (Acts 15:8-9).

Christians First at Antioch

> **Acts 11:19** *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.*
>
> **Acts 11:20** *And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.*
>
> **Acts 11:21** *And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

At the same time, some of the believers scattered by the persecution after Stephen's death reached Antioch in Syria, the third-largest city of the Roman world. Most preached only to Jews. But some men from Cyprus and Cyrene spoke to **"the Grecians"** — here meaning Greek-speaking Gentiles — **"and a great number believed."**

> **Acts 11:22** *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.*
>
> **Acts 11:23** *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*
>
> **Acts 11:24** *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*
>
> **Acts 11:25** *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:*
>
> **Acts 11:26** *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

"When he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad." Barnabas could *see* grace — in changed lives.

"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul." He went and got the man God had chosen to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." "Christians" — *Christianoi*, "Christ's people," "those who belong to Christ." It was probably a name given by outsiders, and it appears only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). In the first city where Jews and Gentiles worshipped side by side as one church, people needed a new name for them. They were not a Jewish sect any longer. They were Christ's.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

Lord of all. The One Peter preached to Cornelius is "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36) — the Messiah not of Israel only but of every nation. God had promised Abraham, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3), and had said of His Servant, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Anointed, crucified, raised, ascended, Judge. Peter's short sermon to Cornelius is the whole gospel: God anointed Jesus; He went about doing good; He was hanged on a tree; God raised Him the third day; He

was taken up; God has ordained Him Judge of the living and the dead; and through His name, whosoever believes receives remission of sins.

To the Grace Administration

The middle wall broken down. What began in Cornelius's house was later fully revealed to Paul: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Ephesians 2:13-14). "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6). Peter opened the door; God later showed Paul the whole house.

No difference. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). "There is neither Jew nor Greek… for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Food and the believer. The vision was about people, but its lesson reaches the table too. Jesus had already said that food cannot defile a man, because it enters the stomach and not the heart (Mark 7:18-19). Paul wrote, "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving" (1 Timothy 4:4). Believers today are not under the food laws of Moses.

The gift and the sign. In Cornelius's house, as at Pentecost, receiving holy spirit was shown by speaking in tongues. It was the evidence that convinced Peter's companions and the church in Jerusalem.

Old habits die hard. Years later, at Antioch, Peter drew back from eating with Gentile believers when strict Jewish believers arrived, and Paul "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Galatians 2:11-14). Even an apostle who had seen the vision could slip back into old prejudice. Scripture tells the truth about its heroes.

To the Topic of Prejudice

- **God does not play favourites.** "God is no respecter of persons."
- **Don't call unclean what God has cleansed** — any person, of any nation.
- **Sincere people still need the gospel.** Cornelius was devout and generous, and he still needed to hear of Jesus.
- **God goes ahead of us.** He prepared Cornelius before He sent Peter.
- **Walk into the house.** Peter could not have reached Cornelius from the gate.
- **Tell what God did.** When challenged, Peter told the story in order, and let the facts speak.

The Main Takeaway

God showed Peter, in a vision and in a Roman officer's house, that He is no respecter of persons: the same gift He poured out on the apostles at Pentecost He poured out on uncircumcised Gentiles who simply believed — and no one could withstand God.

- **God sees sincere seekers**, and sends someone to them.
- **"Not so, Lord" is a contradiction.** If He is Lord, obey.

- **What God has cleansed, do not call common.**
- **The gospel is for whosoever believes**, in every nation.
- **God gives the same gift to all who believe**, and shows it plainly.
- **Don't let tradition stand in the way of God.**
- **Glorify God when He does something new.**

For Our Learning — The People

- **Cornelius.** A Roman centurion of the Italian cohort at Caesarea; a devout God-fearer, generous and prayerful; the first Gentile convert recorded in Acts to receive holy spirit without first becoming a Jew.
- **Cornelius's household, kinsmen and friends.** Those he gathered to hear Peter, who all received the gift.
- **The two servants and the devout soldier.** Sent by Cornelius to Joppa.
- **The angel.** Sent to Cornelius to tell him to send for Peter.
- **Simon Peter.** The apostle who had preached at Pentecost; given the vision of the sheet; sent to preach to the first Gentile household.
- **Simon the tanner.** Peter's host in Joppa, whose house was by the sea.
- **The six brethren from Joppa.** Jewish believers who went with Peter and witnessed the outpouring.
- **They of the circumcision.** Jewish believers in Jerusalem who objected to Peter eating with Gentiles.
- **Men of Cyprus and Cyrene.** Unnamed believers who first preached to Gentiles at Antioch.
- **Barnabas.** Sent from Jerusalem to Antioch; "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith"; went to Tarsus to find Saul.
- **Saul.** Brought by Barnabas to Antioch, where they taught for a whole year.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Centurions and cohorts.** A centurion commanded about a hundred men; a cohort was several hundred.
- **God-fearers.** Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel and kept many Jewish customs without being circumcised.
- **The hours of prayer.** The third, sixth and ninth hours — about 9 a.m., noon and 3 p.m.
- **Flat roofs.** Used for rest, work and prayer, reached by outside stairs.
- **Tanners.** Workers who prepared animal skins; their trade was considered unclean and kept to the edge of towns.
- **The food laws.** The Law divided animals into clean and unclean (Leviticus 11).
- **Jews and Gentile houses.** Custom forbade a devout Jew to enter a Gentile's house or eat with him (John 18:28).
- **Counting days.** Days were counted inclusively — "four days ago" included the first and the last.
- **Bowing down (proskuneō).** A gesture of homage given to kings and great men, as well as to God.
- **Antioch.** Capital of the Roman province of Syria, the third city of the empire after Rome and Alexandria.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Simile** — a comparison using "as." "As it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners" (10:11).
- **Oxymoron** — two ideas that cannot stand together, set side by side. "Not so, Lord" (10:14).
- **Metaphor** — speaking of one thing as another. The sheet of unclean animals pictures the Gentile nations (10:28).
- **Idiom** — "Peter opened his mouth" (10:34), began to speak; "respecter of persons" (10:34), one who shows favouritism; "quick and dead" (10:42), the living and the dead.
- **Metonymy** — one thing put for another closely related. "Hanged on a tree" (10:39), the tree (wood) for the cross; "the circumcision" (10:45; 11:2), for Jewish believers.
- **Erotesis** — a question asked to make a point. "Can any man forbid water…?" (10:47); "What was I, that I could withstand God?" (11:17).

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Cornelius was devout, generous and prayerful** — and still needed to hear the gospel to be saved (11:14).
- **The angel did not preach the gospel.** He told Cornelius to send for Peter.
- **The vision was about people**: "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28).
- **The rule against entering a Gentile's house was custom**, not a command of the Law of Moses.
- **Peter refused to be worshipped**: "I myself also am a man."
- **God anointed Jesus** with holy spirit and power, "for God was with him."
- **The Gentiles received holy spirit while Peter was still speaking** — before any laying on of hands or baptism.
- **They spoke with tongues and magnified God.**
- **Peter's defence in Jerusalem does not mention water**; it quotes Jesus' contrast of water with holy spirit.
- **The objectors "held their peace, and glorified God."**
- **Believers were first called Christians at Antioch.**

God's Will and Intent

- **God wants all nations to be saved**, and He shows no favouritism.
- **God hears the prayers of sincere seekers** and sends them the truth.
- **God works through people**, sending His servants to tell the gospel.
- **God cleanses what He chooses**, and His people must not call it common.
- **God gives the same gift to all who believe**, and makes it plain for all to see.

- **God overcomes the prejudice of His own people**, step by step.
- **God makes one family out of Jew and Gentile** in Christ.