

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 10: PREACHING IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA, PART 3 (ACTS 9:31-10:23)

The persecution of the church resulted in the gospel spreading beyond Jerusalem. Now, the main aggressor of this persecution (Saul) had turned to the Lord and was preaching the gospel! Consequently, he was now experiencing persecution and was sent off to Tarsus.

THE CHURCH CONTINUES TO GROW (ACTS 9:31-43)

9:31. The gospel had spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and even Galilee (though Luke has not recorded this previously). The church experienced a time of peace (perhaps from persecution). The church was also being strengthened (built up spiritually), through the word of God (Acts 20:32). The disciples throughout these regions were living in the fear of the Lord (leading them to obedience, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) and were encouraged by the Holy Spirit (certainly including the Divine revelations from the Spirit; 1 Corinthians 14:3). So, despite the efforts that had been made against the church, the church continued increasing in numbers!

9:32-35. Luke now returns to a primary focus on the work of Peter, as he was traveling from place to place. He came to the city of Lydda (about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem, in the plain of Sharon). There, he found a man (Aeneas) who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. Peter told him that Jesus Christ healed him, and to get up and make his bed (perhaps putting away his mat that he had been unable to put away for eight years). Immediately, he got up! Then, Luke records that all those living in Lydda and Sharon (the plain of Sharon) saw this man who had been healed and turned to the Lord!

9:36-43. In Joppa (about 10 miles northwest of Lydda), there was a disciple named Tabitha (Aramaic; "Dorcas" in the Greek). This disciple of Jesus was always doing good works and acts of charity for the poor. But, she became sick and died while Peter was in the area of Lydda. Her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room (perhaps for a period of mourning or expecting Peter to come). Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard Peter was there (and perhaps about Aeneas's healing) and sent two disciples to urge Peter to come immediately. Peter came to the upstairs room where they had laid

Dorcas's body. As he entered, he was greeted by widows Dorcas had helped and impacted, weeping over her and showing Peter the robes and clothes she had made for them. After sending them all out of the room, Peter knelt down, prayed, and said to the body, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. Peter then helped her up by the hand and presented her alive to the saints and widows. This miracle became known throughout Joppa, and many believed and turned to the Lord! Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with Simon (likely a leather tanner by occupation).

CORNELIUS'S VISION (ACTS 10:1-8)

10:1-2. Up to this point, those who had obeyed the gospel were either Jews, Samaritans (part Jewish), or Gentiles who had converted to Judaism (proselytes). However, the gospel was to be preached so that all people (even those with no connections to Judaism) could be saved (Acts 2:16-21; Isaiah 2:1-4; Mark 16:15-16). Now, Luke introduces a Gentile man (Acts 11:1-3) in Caesarea (about 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem) named Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion (non-commissioned officer over 100 soldiers) who was part of the Italian regiment/cohort (likely 600-1,000 soldiers; perhaps a cohort that originated in Italy). Cornelius was a devout and God-fearing man (evidently worshiped God and may have kept some of the Mosaic Law without fully converting to Judaism), along with his household. He did many good deeds for (gave generously to) the Jewish people and was devoted to praying to God. Yet, as we will see, this religious Gentile man and his family were not yet saved.

10:3-8. About 3 PM (the ninth hour), while Cornelius was praying (v. 30), Cornelius saw a vision of an angel of God (in dazzling clothes, v. 30), who addressed him by name. Looking at him intently with awe and terror, Cornelius asked what the angel wanted (note the term "Lord" was probably used in a sense of respect). The angel said Cornelius's prayers and acts of charity had ascended as a memorial offering to God. Thus, these things had pleased God and, evidently, prompted God to remember Cornelius by giving him the opportunity about to be given. He was told to send men to Joppa to find Simon Peter (who was still staying with Simon). The angel revealed Simon would speak a message that would save them (Acts 11:13-14). After the angel left, Cornelius sent two household servants and a devout soldier from those who served him to Joppa after he explained everything to them.

PETER'S VISION (ACTS 10:9-16)

10:9-16. The day after Cornelius's vision (as Cornelius's servants were approaching the city), Peter went up on the roof of the house to pray (typically a flat roof and a place that would offer solace) around noon (the sixth hour). As he was hungry and wanted something to eat, he fell into a trance while food was being prepared. In a vision, Peter saw something that resembled a large sheet being lowered by its four corners from heaven. There were all sorts of animals in it, including those that would have been considered unclean for Jews (Leviticus 11). A voice told Peter to get up, kill, and eat. However, Peter said he had never eaten anything that had been declared unclean under Mosaic Law. Still, the voice declared that he was not to call anything impure that God had made clean. The instruction was repeated three times, then the object was suddenly taken into heaven. In this, God definitively pronounced the change of dietary laws under the new covenant (Mark 7:14-23; Romans 14:14; 1 Timothy 4:1-5).

PETER TRAVELS TO CORNELIUS (ACTS 10:17-23)

10:17-23. Peter was greatly confused about what the vision meant. Just then, the men Cornelius sent arrived and were calling out to see if Peter was there. While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Holy Spirit told Peter about the men looking for him and instructed Peter to go with them without doubt, since the Spirit had sent them to find Peter. Note that one of the major barriers to fellowship between Jews and Gentiles was dietary laws that caused Jews not to eat with Gentiles (Acts 11:2-3; Galatians 2:11-13). However, this barrier had now been removed and Peter was to have no reservations about going with them. Peter identified himself to the men and they informed Peter about Cornelius (a centurion, upright, God-fearing, with a good reputation among the Jewish nation) being given a Divine direction through an angel to call Peter to his house so he could hear a message from Peter (Acts 11:13-14). Peter gave them lodging for the night before leaving for Caesarea the next day (plus six brothers with him, Acts 11:12).

CONCLUSION

The gospel continued to spread with the aid of the miracles God was working. Now, God had worked to connect Peter and Cornelius. Despite being a Gentile, Cornelius was about to have a great opportunity given to him that impacts all Gentiles today!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What was happening in the church throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee?

How did people respond to the gospel in Lydda and Sharon?

What impact had Dorcas made through her service?

How did people respond to the gospel in Joppa?

How is Cornelius described and what did he need?

What was revealed to Cornelius in his vision?

What was revealed to Peter in his vision?

Why did Peter (a Jew) agree to travel to Cornelius (a Gentile)?

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