

What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts

What If We Invite ALL To Follow Jesus?

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts — What If We Invite ALL To Follow Jesus?

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Acts 10:1-48

Introduction

We might expect Luke to continue the story of Saul after reciting the glowing report of the growing church in Acts 9:31, and how "peace" finally came when the storm of persecution ended. Expectations have been raised in the mind of the reader that Saul will plunge forward with his destined mission to the Gentiles communicated to him in Damascus. But none of that happens immediately.

Instead, the apostle Peter reappears along the coast of the Mediterranean in towns like Lydda and Joppa (Acts 9:32-43), where he engages in miracles of healing (Aeneas) and raising the dead (Tabitha-Dorcas). Luke thereby continues the story of Peter that he broke off in 8:25 when that apostle returned from Samaria to Jerusalem. Aeneas the paralytic and Tabitha (a.k.a. Dorcas) add their stories to the growing chronicle of God's mighty deeds among the followers of Jesus. It is somewhat unusual to name the beneficiaries of such miracle accounts,¹ at least in the practice of ancient narratives.

The town of Lydda is actually the Old Testament place called "Lod," referenced in 1 Chronicles 8:12, Ezra 2:33 and Nehemiah 11:35. Purple dye products were traded here (1 Maccabees 11:34; Josephus, *Wars*, ii.19.1; iii.3.5; iv.8.1; *Antiquities*, xx.6.2).² Along with Joppa, it belongs to the Plain of Sharon known for its rich grazing fields (Isaiah 65:10), extending northward to Mount Carmel. The whole region had strong political and economic importance within the Roman Empire.³

Joppa is the modern-day Jaffa within the vicinity of Haifa. Egyptian tribute lists mention it as early the 15th century B.C.E. Mentioned in the Old Testament (Joshua 19:46; 2 Chronicles 2:16; Ezra 3:7; Jonah 1:3), it was once located inside Philistine territory. Control passed back and forth between Israel and Syria until the time of Jesus. The Greek population was large.

There are similarities between the work of Peter and that of Jesus (Luke 5:17-26), as well as the Old Testament prophets (Elijah/Elisha, 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:19-27). The second miracle, raising Tabitha from the dead, anchors Peter's authority and reminds the reader of the power of the risen Jesus through Peter's work. This is especially necessary at this juncture, since Luke will go on to tell how Peter opened the door for the Gospel to move beyond Judaism and invade the world of the pagan Gentiles. That transition was no small matter, and anyone hearing about it needed the assurance that it had the full authorization of God.

In this last regard, a curious parallel exists between Peter and the Old Testament prophet Jonah. You will recall how Jonah the Hebrew was sent by God to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh at the heart of Gentile world power. Jonah resisted and went down to Joppa (Jonah 1:3) to get a ship bound in the opposite direction from Jonah's commission! This fact could not have escaped Luke's attention as he crafts his story about Peter who ends up, of all places, in Joppa where he would not only raise Tabitha from the dead but receive a strange vision with direct relevance to the future Gentile mission. Both Jonah and Peter are reluctant respondents to their respective

¹ Witherington, p.327.

² Bruce, p. 210.

³ Wall, p.161.

unusual missions. We are left with the impression that this fresh change in direction is not due to either man, but to God!⁴

The decisive role of Jesus in the life of his church is underscored by Peter's words to Aeneas: "Jesus Christ heals you" (9:34; also, 3:6; 10:38; 28:8). The underlying Greek word for "heals" is actually either an aorist or perfect form, establishing the immediate and lasting nature of the miracle. It also connects the healing with words spoken by Yahweh to His ancient people Israel as they traveled from Egypt to Canaan: "I am Yahweh who heals you" (Exodus 15:16). Through the continuing work of Jesus by his apostles, Jesus renews the covenant with Israel and brings covenant blessings into the lives of people like Aeneas. Peter doesn't even acknowledge his own role as "proxy" for the man's healing, but gives all the glory to Jesus alone.

In both the case of Aeneas (9:34) and Tabitha-Dorcas (9:40), the instructions "rise" or "arise" appear in the text, usually translated by the words "Get up!" These are variant forms of the verb *anaistēmi*, a familiar term in relationship to Jesus rising from the dead. This further explains why Peter tells Aeneas "Jesus Christ heals you," because Jesus is the risen Lord he "raises" up those who are sick by virtue of his resurrection. So powerful is the visible effect of these persons "arising" that "all the residents...turned to the Lord" (9:35).

Tabitha-Dorcas is explicitly called "a female disciple" (Greek: *mathētria*, the feminine form of the word). This speaks volumes about the emerging role of women in the early Christian communities. Even Paul will refer to a person called "Junia" in Romans 16:7 as being "among the apostles." Luke has a special interest in reporting the active presence of women as he tells his story of the emerging church (see the examples in Acts 1:14; 12:12-17; 9:36-42; 16:11-15; 18:1-3; 18:19-26; 17:4, 12, 34).⁵ Tabitha's devotion could be seen by the "fullness" of her "good works" (9:36) which included help for the poor, a distinguishing mark of the Christ community at its inception, as well as an explicit command of Jesus. Her death led to an appeal for Peter to come from Lydda to Joppa, a journey of some ten miles to the northwest. At first, the mourners grieve, showing Peter the things Tabitha had made. He patiently listens but then puts them out of the room so that he might pray for her and speak the words of resurrection life. Each detail of the story reflects a deeply personal encounter: "Tabitha, get up;" she opened her eyes; seeing Peter she sat up; he took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Luke proceeds to tell us that Peter then called the others and "presented her to them alive."

The transition passage to this week's readings is 9:43 in which Peter stays in Joppa for an extended period of time after he raises Tabitha. His temporary lodging is with "a tanner named Simon." Several commentators point out the significance of this living arrangement. The Jews thought the profession of preparing skins to be "unclean" work.⁶ Jewish authorities wrote that tanners were "despised because of their ongoing uncleanness caused by their trade, not to mention the bad smell associated with the tanning process."⁷ Why is this significant? Here is Peter staying in the house of a man who practices an unclean trade, yet Peter will object when God asks him to eat unclean animals in the vision of chapter 10 — to which we now turn in our study.

Cornelius and Peter: A Tale of Two Visions

Students of the Bible frequently call Acts 10 "The Gentile Pentecost." Others underscore the "conversion" of *both* Peter and Cornelius — that word being understood, of course, in distinctive ways for each. Luke, ever the skillful historian, set the stage for what he now reports. The "heavenly vision" given to Saul foreshadows the coming outreach to Gentiles, moving beyond the borders of national Israel (Acts 9:1-31). Then, as we have noted in our introduction, Peter's ongoing work at the borders of Israel reaffirm his authority as an apostle *outside of Jerusalem*. By placing Peter in Joppa, on the seashore toward the west, Luke strategically orients his readers to accept what he is about to tell them in chapter 10.

⁴ S. Wilson, *The Gentile and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, SNTMS 23 (Cambridge, 1973), p. 177.

⁵ Consult Witherington's *Women in the Earliest Churches*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 156-57.

⁶ Bruce, p. 214.

⁷ Witherington, p. 333. He cites rabbinic works: *m. Ketub. 7:10*; *b. Pesah 65a*; *Qidd. 82b*. Also Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p. 310.

We know how important this story is to Luke: he tells it three times! In this respect, his rhetorical strategy is similar to his three-fold telling of Saul's story. After relating the events as they unfolded in Acts 10, the writer recounts them in Acts 11:1-18 and in summary form in Acts 15:7-9. When we combine the story of Saul with the events of Acts 10, it becomes clear that God is undertaking a fresh movement of His kingdom, this time to "the ends of the earth." These stories are bunched together for the maximum effect of communicating that truth.

Outline

1. The Vision of Cornelius (10:1-8).
2. The Vision of Peter (10:9-16).
3. Messengers of Cornelius to Peter at Joppa (10:17-23a).
4. Peter at the House of Cornelius (10:23b-33).
5. Good News for Gentiles: Peter's Sermon (10:34-43).
6. Holy Spirit for Gentiles: God's Gift (10:44-48).

Note: The "Big Idea" team chose to place the final point of this outline in next week's study. We mention here for the sake of completeness, but will wait until our next *Notes* to address it.

7. Peter Defends His Gentile Mission: Jerusalem (11:1-18).

The Vision of Cornelius (10:1-8)

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

"At Caesarea"

Where would such a fresh mission to the Gentiles begin? We read that it began in Caesarea, a significant Greco-Roman port located on the Mediterranean. Two Caesarea's appear in the New Testament. The other one is Caesarea Philippi, named after Herod Philip as his chief residence and capital city.⁸ The one in question here is sometimes called Caesarea Maritima, emphasizing its location on the seacoast. This Caesarea was the work of Herod the Great who constructed it where an older Phoenician-Greek town once stood (Straton's Tower) (22-10 B.C.E.). He named it to honor Caesar Augustus. From Josephus (*Wars*, 1.408-415) we learn that it was thoroughly Hellenistic and meticulously planned as a grid system of markets, theaters and streets. The harbor bore the name "Augustus" in its Greek form: *Sebastos* and was the largest harbor constructed in the open sea occupying some 100,000 square meters. Northern and southern breakwaters (called "moles") were constructed from lime and volcanic ash imported from Italy, perhaps requiring some forty five shiploads each bearing 400 tons! Unique methods of construction made possible the pouring of this material into sea, forming the breakwaters. Unfortunately, a combination of factors led to the eventual demise of the harbor: poor adherence of the "concrete" and a seismic fault-line which cut across the breakwater. A tsunami may have hammered the harbor during the second century, though the known effects are indecisive. By the sixth century, the harbor was unusable. In the meantime, Herod's harbor rivaled that of Cleopatra's Alexandria and it became an important commercial advantage for Israel.

In addition, Caesarea was home to the Roman governors who ruled Palestine after the annexation of Judea in 6 C.E., and Pontius Pilate was among them. Vespasian, the military leader who spearheaded the effort to contain

⁸ As LaMoine DeVries points out, Caesarea Philippi was "Located in northern Palestine on the lower range of Mt. Hermon..." By contrast, Caesarea Maritima was at sea level on the coast to the northwest. *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 207-208.

the revolution in 66-70 C.E. received acclamation in Caesarea as Emperor following a period of turbulence in Rome after Nero's death. The town was also known for its system of sewers and drains beneath the streets, as well as a theater and amphitheater — the latter famous for its chariot races. Herod dedicated a Temple to Augustus containing huge statues of Augustus and the goddess Roma. Sticking out into the sea was the governor's praetorium where Paul was finally taken before he left for Rome.⁹

Cornelius

He had an honorable military name, this man called Cornelius. The Romans knew the story of Cornelius Sulla who, in 82 B.C.E., liberated 10,000 slaves who immediately adopted his family name (*nomen*). Appian in his *Civil Wars* wrote:

To the plebeians he added more than 10,000 slaves of proscribed persons, choosing the youngest and strongest, to whom he gave freedom and Roman citizenship, and he called them Corneli after himself. In this way he made sure of having 10,000 men among the plebeians always ready to obey his commands (I.100).

Therefore, we likely have a family name (a descendent of the "Cornelii" as above) in Acts 10:1 rather than either a first name (*praenomen*) or nickname (*cognomen*). Cornelius probably had ties to the earlier Cornelius. Luke calls him a *ekatontarchēs*, that is, a centurion officer responsible for 100 men. The closest modern equivalent would be a non-commissioned officer. Commenting on the character of centurions, the historian Polybius wrote:

Centurions are desired not to be bold and adventurous so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive or start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard-pressed to stand fast and die at their post.¹⁰

From Matthew's Gospel we learn of Jesus encountering a centurion:

⁵ When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, ⁶ "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." ⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment (Matthew 8:5-13).

These words foreshadow the events of Acts 10 in which the Gentiles will recline at table with the Hebrew Peter and the others members of the Christ community. Recall also that a centurion stood by the cross when Jesus died and bore witness to the manner of his death and the circumstances surrounding it (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).

Our English translations refer to Cornelius as a member of "the Italian Cohort," based on the Greek work *speira* (also the Latin *cohors*) which meant 1/10 of a legion and, in theory, had roughly 600 men. According to scholars, "it was not uncommon for Roman soldiers to be transferred from service in a legion to help shape up an auxiliary unit in the provinces. That Cornelius is living with his kin in Caesarea may suggest, however, that he was a provincial."¹¹ Evidence from the period supports the presence in Syria (the overseeing province for Palestine) of an auxiliary called *cohors II Italica ciuium Romanorum* around 69 C.E. The Jewish King Agrippa I, between 6 and 41 C.E. had his troops in Caesarea (see Josephus *Antiquities*, xix.9.1ff) belonging to a cohort of Caesar and Augustus. Scholars lean toward a date before 41 for the story of Cornelius in light of these facts.

⁹ Kenneth G. Hollum, "Caesarea," *Eerdman's*, pp.206-207. Also, K.G. Holum, et. al., *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea*, New York, 1988.

¹⁰ *The Histories*, vi.24.

¹¹ Witherington, p.347. Also, Sherwin-White, *Roman Law and Roman Society*, p. 156. Further information appears in Millar's *The Roman Near East*, p. 44. An excellent article about contemporary military matters was written by T. R. S. Broughton, "The Roman Army," *The Beginnings of Christianity* (London, 1920-33), 5:441-443.

The terms *eusebēs* ("pious") and *phoboumenos ton theon* ("God-fearing") describe Cornelius in 10:2. Similar language appears in 10:22; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; and 18:7. Josephus wrote about similar persons in his *Antiquities* (xiv.16, 26). These expressions may be quasi-technical phrases in *Acts* applied to Gentiles who were *not proselytes* (full converts to Judaism, circumcision and all), but who embraced much of the Jewish faith, including belief in one God, renunciation of idols, attendance at synagogue, Sabbath observance and kosher. Some contemporary writers like Juvenal (*Satires*, xiv.96-106) poked fun at Gentiles who kept Sabbath, avoided pork, and then later discovered their sons converted completely to Judaism!¹² This implies that the father, in this instance, did everything *but be circumcised*, and this is no doubt the meaning of "pious and God-fearing" Gentiles as Luke ascribes these descriptors to Cornelius.

Further, Cornelius showed generosity to the needy and exhibited a life of prayer. Acts of generosity by "God-fearing" Gentiles were often directed toward the Jewish people, as in the case of the centurion in Luke's Gospel:

³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue" (Luke 7:3-5).

The operative words are "he loves our nation" and "built us our synagogue." This last praiseworthy action is notable, costing the centurion no small sum of money. Presumably, Cornelius was just such a man.

How long he practiced his piety, we are not told. However, he must have had an established reputation, based on the language used to describe his commitment to the Jewish faith, though still a Gentile. But then "one day," Luke tells us, he has a vision at the "ninth hour" (that is, three in the afternoon). At that time of day, the Jews had a regularly scheduled time of prayer, and we are safe in assuming Cornelius was at prayer when the vision came to him. The Greek says *eiden en horamati phanerōs ...aggelon tou theou*. The modifying word "clearly" is a revelatory expression implying that what he saw revealed something to him. That is, it was unambiguous and highly illuminating, opening his eyes in new ways.

Luke freely includes angelic appearances in his narratives. His Gospel begins with two visitations: one to Zechariah and the other to Mary (Luke 1). A "host" of angels appear to shepherds (Luke 2).¹³ These beings function as messengers (the root meaning in both Hebrew and Greek), warriors, musicians and protectors. The prophetic books like *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* associate them into special class: cherubim and seraphim. *We can be confident that when an angel shows up, God is doing something new or remarkable*. Since Cornelius was himself a soldier, one wonders if the angel had the appearance of a warrior such as appeared to Joshua in the Old Testament just before the invasion of Canaan. This is conjecture, of course. Nonetheless it is somewhat unusual for angels to appear to Gentiles.

As in previous vision narratives, the messenger of God addresses the centurion by name: "Cornelius!" Fear follows such angelic appearances, and it true in this case. Usually the messenger assures the troubled soul with words like "Fear not!" as in the case of the angel to shepherds (Luke 2:10), or the angels at the empty tomb of Jesus to the women (Matthew 28:5). In this case, the angel merely accepts the submissive response of Cornelius, "Who is it Lord?" and proceeds to bring him good news. In effect, the angel tells him that his piety has "come up before God as a memorial offering." The underlying Greek is *eis mnēmosunon* and refers to that aspect of a Jewish meal offering (Hebrew: *minḥāh*) consumed by fire on the altar so that it might be presented to God. Though Cornelius himself would not be allowed such sacrificial privileges as a God-fearer but not a

¹² The full quotation reads: "Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds, and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating swine's flesh, from which their father abstained, and that of man; and in time they take to circumcision. Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practise and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses committed to his secret tome, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcised to the desired fountain. For all which the father was to blame, who gave up every seventh day to idleness, keeping it apart from all the concerns of life" (Translated by G. G. Ramsay).

¹³ A full list of references to angels in Luke: Luke 1:11, 13, 18f, 26, 30, 34f, 38; 2:9f, 13, 15, 21; 4:10; 9:26; 12:8f; 15:10; 16:22; 20:36; 22:43; 24:23; Acts 5:19; 6:15; 7:30, 35, 38, 53; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:7ff, 15, 23; 23:8f; 27:23.

circumcised Jew, what the angel tells him is simply that his piety counts as just such a sacrifice. The Old Testament affirms this possibility (Psalm 141:2) as does the apocryphal book of *Tobit* (12:12). Similar texts can be found in the New Testament (Philippians 4:18 and Hebrews 13:15ff).

No doubt assured by the angel's words, Cornelius receives his fresh "orders," not from an imperial commander but from heaven itself! He is to send some of his men to Joppa to fetch Simon Peter. These instructions include the equivalent of a street address: "the tanner Simon's house by the sea." Nothing more is explained on this occasion. The angel merely gives the orders to send for Peter, but does not communicate further truth from God. Angels are servants who prepare the way for "those who will become heirs of salvation," according to Hebrews 1:14, but they do not replace the ministry of human messengers of the Good News. It is far better for Cornelius to receive that message from Peter than from the angel. Indeed, God does not "subject the world to come" to angels but to human beings (Hebrews 2:5-6). Angels serve human beings; human beings do not serve angels.¹⁴

Cornelius didn't need a further lecture about "doing his duty," for he was, after all, a good soldier, the member of a respected cohort. He knew that God was, after all, his true commander, and that even though he was not given all the details of his assignment *in advance*, he implicitly trusted the divine chain of command. On the other hand, as a good commander himself, he confided the contents of his vision to three trusted personnel on his staff: two orderlies (Greek: *oiketēs*, within his household) and one "devout soldier" (Greek: *stratiōtēn eusebē*). The word "devout" reminds us of the adjectives used to describe Cornelius himself earlier in the chapter.¹⁵ Perhaps some of his military family shared his "God-fearing" devotion, and it is to these he turns for this crucial mission — the most important one of his entire career.

The Vision of Peter (10:9-16)

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

If Cornelius had his vision at three in the afternoon of the "first day," he likely sent his messengers on their way the following morning to make the thirty-mile journey from Caesarea to Joppa, traveling military-style by horseback. This coincides with Peter's vision which Luke describes next. The coinciding of this vision with the near arrival of the envoys suggests God's providence in the whole affair. The reader is struck by the impeccable timing of the incident.

The "housetop" (Greek: *dōma*) no doubt had a canopy to shade Peter from the noonday sun as he observed the "sixth hour" time of prayer (see Psalm 55:17 and Daniel 6:10; also, the *Didache* speaks of prayer three times a day: 8:3). While praying, he was struck by unusual hunger pangs as expressed in the rare word *prospeinos*, an expression found elsewhere only in a first-century physician, Demosthenes.¹⁶ Luke heightens our awareness of Peter's physical distress (hot sun, hunger) and combines this with his prayers. The result is that "he fell into a trance." A familiar Greek expression, *ekstasis*, lies behind the word "trance," the idea of being "outside

¹⁴ One reason why the book of *Hebrews* was written was to correct a fallacy about the role of angels within the Christian community. Even within Judaism there was a tendency toward the "worship of angels" (Colossians 2:18), and the inspired writers of the New Testament wanted to make the role of angels crystal clear to stave off that error.

¹⁵ On these various military fine points, see Bruce, p. 216

¹⁶ Bruce, p.217.

himself," as the root form, *existatai*, suggests (see also 2:7, 12; 8:9, 11,13; 9:21; 10:45; 11:5; 12:11, 16 22:17). Usually a deep sense of amazement accompanies this experience.¹⁷

As we have noted in previous studies, the expression "he saw heaven opened" denotes a special form of revelation from God. It also reveals a connection between heaven and earth not ordinarily experienced. Recall Stephen's vision in chapter 7 or the vision of Jacob in the Old Testament where he witnessed the ladder from heaven to earth (Genesis 28:12). The book of *Revelation* also uses this language (4:1; 19:11). Jesus predicted to his disciples that they would "see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man," an explicit allusion to Genesis 28. What Peter *has* is no ordinary vision, but one which transports him into the very presence of God. However, what Peter *sees* completely baffles him and provokes resistance, in much the same way as the vision of Ananias in chapter 9, asking him to help Saul, led to his objections.

At the heart of the vision is the "letting down" of something which looked like a giant "sheet." The Greek of this passage has a number of twists and turns: *katabainon skeuos ti hōs othonēn megalēn tessarsin archais kathiemenon epi tēs gēs*. The word *skeuos* should be translated as "vessel" or "container," though it usually gets treated as simply "a thing." What Peter sees "coming down" is a container which had the appearance of a great piece of cloth (*othonē*). Extra emphasis is placed on its "four corners," a phrase which is commonly associated with the *whole world*. Originating as it does *in heaven*, as it descends *on earth* it assumes this world-wide aspect. What Peter is about to learn is that the meaning of this whole symbolic complex reveals the will of God *as it is in heaven but now must take shape on earth* (compare the similar phrase in the *Our Father*).

Contained in the sheet is a collection of creatures which reflects the threefold division of the animal kingdom as described in Genesis 6:20 (also, Genesis 1:20, 24). There is a mixture of both ceremonially "clean" and "unclean" animals, indiscriminately presented to Peter on the sheet within the vision (see Leviticus 11:1-47). According to Jewish understanding, unclean animals would cause clean ones to become unclean merely by the association — much as Gentiles might make Jews unclean by their dealings together in the public market. The question of *kosher* foods occupied Second Temple Judaism to a considerable degree. Jesus encountered such scruples and commented on them (Mark 7:19), as did Paul (Romans 14:13-14, 20; 1 Corinthians 10:19). Certainly the long history of famous Jewish characters was marked by a consistent keeping of the food laws, as in the case of Daniel (1:8-16) and Tobit (1:10-13). Questions of Jewish identity attached themselves to this issue, with the more radical Pharisees pressing the point as a boundary marker for preserving Israel's national faith against creeping Hellenization and paganism. Paul would fight this battle as evidenced by such passages as Galatians 2:11-14, 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14.

Of course for Peter, the vision went well beyond just a debate about kosher. When he is commanded to "rise" (from the root *anistēmi*) and eat, he objects, calling the animals "impure" (*koinon*, literally, "common") and "unclean" (*akatharton*). One is tempted to see a double meaning in the familiar command "rise," for Luke is using the same word Peter himself spoke when healing Aeneas and raising Tabitha! In this case, Peter is called upon to "rise" literally so that he might also rise in a deeper sense: to the enlarged mission of God for Gentiles — the "four corners" of the earth! Why does Peter resist? Perhaps he thinks God is testing his resolve, even as he finds himself lodging in the house of one who pursues an unclean profession!¹⁸ We might also have an echo of earlier encounters Peter had with the earthly Jesus. One incident comes to mind when Jesus told his disciples

¹⁷ Thayer, in his *Lexicon*, notes: "...a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, alienation of mind, whether such as makes a lunatic (Deut. 28:28; Plutarch, *Sol.* 8), or that of the man who by some sudden emotion is transported as it were out of himself, so that in this rapt condition, although he is awake, his mind is so drawn off from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms and images lying within, and thinks that he perceives with his bodily eyes and ears realities shown him by God."

¹⁸ Witherington, p. 350.

about his own journey to the cross. Peter objects strenuously¹⁹ with the words, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22), words characterized by the Gospel writer as a "rebuke" (see also Mark 8:33). Immediately Peter is confronted by Jesus as "setting your mind on the things of man...not God" (Matthew 16:23) — this after he utters the words, "Get behind me, Satan..." Comparing this exchange with the visionary encounter of Acts 10, we are led to see the connections. Once more Peter is called upon to enlarge his understanding of what God is doing in the world.

The correcting voice from heaven rebukes Peter with, "Do not call anything common that God has made clean" (10:15). The word of God has spoken in ways which challenge Peter's traditional understanding of kosher. But, as he will shortly discover, kosher in this case is about *people* not *food*. The vision doesn't dwell on the later debate about table fellowship affected by failure to keep kosher. Rather, it concerns Peter's views of the how Gentiles should relate to Jews in the restored Israel of God.

The events of the vision take place *three times* (10:16), followed by the sudden removal of the visionary props which are "taken back to heaven." The symbolism is hard to miss. Peter's past had been marked by events taking place in units of "three": 1) Peter denied Christ three times (Mark 14:30 and parallels); 2) Christ spoken words leading to Peter's restoration three times (John 21:15ff). Now on this occasion, the vision reiterates three times, so that for the reader of all the Gospel material and *Acts* there is now a 3 x 3 symmetry to Peter's experience of *change*. We might accurately speak about Peter's "conversion" as a result of the vision, much as we saw such a change take place in Saul in chapter 9. The two men were vastly different, but both needed to undergo a visionary experience which would alter their understanding of the height, length, depth and breadth of God's love for the whole world, including for Gentiles (Ephesians 3:18). Both men needed to reach the same conviction. Both men underwent profound conversions.

Messengers of Cornelius to Peter at Joppa (10:17-23a)

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

Visions don't always yield immediate understanding, but instead provide the framework for interpreting events that follow. Human understanding requires a rich environment of symbols. That is why language and intelligence support each other. We may often read the Bible and see perplexing ideas, but then something happens to us which sheds light on the sacred text and we exclaim, "So that's what that Scripture meant!" In a certain sense, Peter's mind was being supplied with a rich supply of powerful symbols through his vision of the descending sheet of cloth, gathered at its four corners. While this is fresh on his mind, the messengers from Cornelius suddenly arrive. It's much like the experience of Philip and the eunuch in chapter 8: the reader of the text, perplexed at its meaning, is suddenly being followed by a man who has the interpretation.

For Peter, the elements of his understanding include: the vision, the arrival of the messengers, the words of the Spirit, and the information supplied by the messengers. We are especially interested in what the Spirit tells Peter: "Three (there's that number again!) men are looking for you. Rise (used once more) and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." The verbal connection between "Rise" as used here and "Rise and eat" as applied to the sheet-vision is obvious. By rising and going with the messengers, Peter will actually be fulfilling the command spoken to him in the vision to "rise and eat."

¹⁹ Consider the "prophetic protests" of figures like Moses (Exodus 3), Ezekiel (4:14), and Jeremiah (1:5-7). This may actually be a sign of spiritual character, however, since the person called to be a prophet does not aspire to the office on his own accord but only because God has called him.

The Spirit's instructions include the words "Rise up" (used again) and "go down" (from *katabainō*, "to descend" in the passive form, "be brought down"). Peter's movements at this point symbolize the fundamental change taking place in his life. Because the risen Lord raises up Peter, Peter himself must *rise up* and in humility *go down* to meet his Gentile visitors. Something of the Gospel is seen in his actions: the heavenly Son in the form of God, lays aside his glory and humbles himself. Even so, Peter, living in the rarefied air of his former Judaism rediscovers what it means to be part of God's people "walking humbly with" his God. This is, indeed, what the Lord "requires" of him (see Micah 6:8). Perhaps his experience on the rooftop that day was intended to teach him this important lesson. Peter can no longer live under the canopy of a narrow Judaism whose audience excludes those "other sheep" whom Peter himself was called to "feed" (compare John 10:16 with John 21:15ff). It might have been a comfortable thing for Peter to lodge in the house of Simon the Tanner, on the borderline of Jewish notions of purity, but quite another for him to acknowledge that God's program for world redemption reached out to the centurion whose messengers stood before him.

Obedient to his own "heavenly vision," Peter "goes down" (10:21). His words to them are immediate and without hesitation: "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" The Greek is forceful and direct, as it states Peter's identity and poses his question: *idou egō eimi hon zēteite. Tis hē aitia di' hēn pareste?* Literally, "See! I am [the one] whom you seek. What [is] the reason (cause) on account of which you are present?" The Holy Spirit's previous instructions to Peter guided the way he approached his mysterious guests. He placed his trust in what the Spirit told him. Here is a clear case of Peter being "filled with the Holy Spirit," that is, "controlled" by the Spirit in what he did and said. Though Peter did not know firsthand who these people were or what their mission might be, he allowed the counsel of the Spirit to direct him.

Can this be the same Peter who cowered by the charcoal fire outside the judgment hall where Jesus was held — the man who denied even knowing Jesus with the words "I know not the man!?" Notice the contrast: here he boldly proclaims "I am the one you seek." He makes no attempts at concealment. Compare the words of Jesus himself in Gethsemane: "I told you I am he. So if you seek me, let these men go" (John 18:8). Peter had been one of those "men" who slipped into the night after a comical attempt at heroism. But now, in this new setting, listening to the voice of the Spirit, Peter rises to the occasion, having "come down" from his canopied rooftop.

Perhaps we also glimpse a bit of *Jonah the prophet* in the story.²⁰ Having delivered his fiery sermon to the people of Nineveh, Jonah retreated to the hillside to see what God would do. While there, a leafy plant sprouted up and spread itself over Jonah's head, protecting it from the beating sun. Then suddenly, the plant died and Jonah was left to curse his situation (see Jonah 4). For *Peter*, Joppa was a place of real triumph: he had raised Tabitha-Dorcas from the dead and then took lodging in the house of a small businessman "by the sea." When it got hot, he could take his leave to the covered rooftop where the sea breeze blew and he could pray in solitude while others prepared the noonday meal for him. Pretty good life, Peter! But not for long. The vision, the Spirit's commands, and the presence of the three mystery visitors tore away Peter's comforts and dragged him into the reality of God. Faced with this "great interruption," Peter opens himself up to new possibilities with the

²⁰ Robert W. Wall (in his "Peter, 'Son' Of Jonah: The Conversion Of Cornelius In The Context Of Canon," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987), pp. 79-90) provides a good survey of the literature in support of the Jonah/Peter parallels. "...we can locate parallel *and sequential* catchwords which go beyond mere coincidence and suggest that it was the intent of the evangelist [Luke] to place the conversion of Cornelius against the backdrop of Nineveh's conversion..." He offers six points to bolster this claim: 1. there is continuity of location: Joppa (Jon. 1.3; Acts 9.43), where God directs his reluctant messengers to preach to the *goyim*; 2. their hesitancy is dismantled only after God intervenes (great fish/vision), its significance symbolized by the number three (*treis/tris*: Jon. 2.1 [LXX]; Acts 10.16); 3. God commissions them by verbal revelation to arise and go (*anastēthi kai poreuthēti* (Jon. 3.2); *anastas... kai poreuou* [Acts 10.20]) and deliver the Word of God to the Gentiles; 4. the Gentiles believed (*empisteuō/pisteuō*: Jon. 3.5; Acts 10.43) in the Word and were forgiven; 5. the conversion of Gentiles resulted in a *hostile response* (Jon. 4.1; Acts 11.2; cf. 10.14); 6. in God's rebuttal of it Job 4.2-11; Acts 11.17-8; cf. 15.13-21).

loaded question: "Why have you come?" Asking such a question made him vulnerable to new vistas of God's purpose in Peter's life.²¹

In their reply to Peter's question, the three men identify themselves as envoys of Cornelius. They describe their commander much as Luke does at the beginning of the chapter, but they add this important statement of clarification: "...who is respected by all the Jewish people." (10:22a). The Greek word translated "respected" is *martuoumenos* taken from the root *martureō* which means "to bear witness," but in this instance it is in the passive form, thus the idea of "be affirmed, attested, confirmed, approved." Anybody hearing about a Roman centurion from Caesarea would have huge questions about whether he was friend or foe to God's people. No love was lost between the Roman military and the Jewish nation. By contrast, this man Cornelius had *firmly proven himself* "righteous, God-fearing, and devout." Peter's guests wanted to make sure that he understood that, no doubt anticipating his concerns to the contrary. Peter was, after all, among those who felt the bitter hand of Jerusalem's persecution of the Jesus movement. He didn't need to be paranoid to fear that the Temple establishment had enlisted Roman auxiliaries to enforce their designs against the church. Had they not used the Romans to enforce their will against Jesus? Why not now? A little suspicion about emissaries from a Roman centurion in Caesarea, the seat of Roman power in Israel, would be natural. And so the three seek to allay Peter's anxieties about their reason (*aitia*, 10:21) for seeking him.

If their testimony about Cornelius is insufficient, they had the additional story about being "directed by a holy angel" (Greek: *echrēmatisthē hupo aggelou hagiou*). Louw and Nida (28:39) explain that the word translated "directed" means "to make known a divine revelation, to make known God's message, to reveal a message from God" (see New Testament usage: Matthew 2:10, 27; Luke 2:26; Hebrews 8:5; 11:7; 12:25; Romans 11:4). F.F. Bruce cites the Greek papyri with the parallel meaning, "to give a divine warning."²² The care with which Luke chooses this word may imply how clearly Peter understood it: Cornelius had received a divine revelation which corresponded to the vision he himself had received. There could be no doubt that the Holy Spirit was moving, and Peter needed to respond.

The angel, Peter learns, "told him [Cornelius] to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say..." (10:22b). The manner in which Cornelius treats Peter is similar to how the ancients regarded "holy men" in general. The social conventions of inviting a person to one's house under these unique circumstances spoke highly of Peter's standing in Cornelius' eyes. Of course, we have the opposite situation in the passage cited above from Matthew 8:8 where the centurion in that case said to Jesus: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed." The difference lies with the words of the angel to Cornelius and the directions of the Holy Spirit to Peter. In this present case, it is imperative that Peter enter the house of this Gentile soldier, since the issue at stake is about Gentiles becoming part of the people of God.

For Peter to "enter the house" of the centurion was its own problem. In fact for Peter to invite these three men to spend the night was far less problematic than Peter's future visit with Cornelius,²³ since that would raise all sorts of issues about purity, kosher and table fellowship — all major markers within Second Temple Judaism, particularly in the eyes of the right-wing Pharisees. Yet, Peter was not entirely "in the dark" even under these circumstances. Had not Jesus himself ventured this way when he ate with tax collectors and "other sinners," and thus giving powerful examples to his disciples of how they ought to treat such persons (Matthew 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). Luke himself recorded Jesus' parable of the "Great Banquet" (Luke 14:16-23) where

²¹ Additional insight into the Jonah/Peter connection: Simon Oxley, "Certainties transformed: Jonah and Acts 10:9-35," *Ecumenical Review*, 56 no 3 JI 2004, pp. 322-326.

²² Bruce, p. 220.

²³ Witherington, p. 351. He references Jubilees 22:16 and Joseph 7:1 from extra-biblical Jewish literature. See also A.E. Harvey, *The New English Bible: Companion to the New Testament*, Oxford, 1970, p. 437; Andrew E. Arterbury, "The ancient custom of hospitality: the Greek novels, and Acts 10:1-11:18," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 29 no 1 Spring 2002, pp. 53-72.

the invitation of the host did not discriminate between those who belonged *inside* and those who were *beyond* the gates of the city. As two scholars observe:

But Jewish dietary laws would impugn both host and guests at such a meal. Although the disciples had heard this parable and had seen Jesus behave according to its tenets, sharing table companionship with tax-collectors and sinners, and accepting a drink from a Samaritan woman, the lesson had not gone home. The apostolic communities continued to observe Jewish customs without being troubled by their full implications. They tried to steer a middle course between rigid exclusivism and Christ's all-inclusive commandment to love. But there came a point when they had to face up to the consequences of Jewish observance. Peter was the protagonist.²⁴

Peter at the House of Cornelius (10:23b-33)

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man."²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered.²⁸ And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean."²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."³⁰ And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.'³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.'³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

"He rose....," Luke tells us, continuing the pattern of *bodily postures* in parallel with *spiritual movements*. Peter's journey is one in which he "went away with them [Cornelius' messengers]." The Greek uses a form of the verb *exerchomai* in the aorist tense, suggesting a decisive action. He does not go "out from them," something we might expect in a strictly separatist attitude, but instead "with them" (*sun autois*). Peter takes along "brothers" from Joppa, no doubt as familiar faces, but also as witnesses to what would transpire once he arrives in Caesarea. Even Peter, at this early stage, must have surmised the momentous nature of this coming visit and what it could mean for the Christ community. He could not risk having the event thinly documented. According to Peter's later report to the Jerusalem believers, there were six brothers in this group who traveled with him (Acts 11:12). "The next day" would have been the *third* day since these events started to unfold. Of course, this timetable adds a certain concreteness to the story, giving the sense that God's plan is "unfolding" through time and not all at once.

The size of the group (ten in all) no doubt slowed their travel, and they did not arrive in Caesarea until the "following day," that is, the *fourth* day. By then, Cornelius had assembled a diverse company of people at his house. Throughout the book of *Acts* the "household" (*oikos* and *oikia*) is an important unit for evangelization and for expressions of God's power (see 2:2, 46; 5:42; 9:17; 10:22; 11:12-14; 16:31-32; 18:7-8; 20:20). The "house" becomes the place where themes of "goods, hospitality, friendship and worship" appear. Households consisted of more than blood-relations, but included confidants, servants, employees, and clients.²⁵ In Acts 10:24 Cornelius includes all of these, but also his "close friends" (*anagkaious*), that is, those with whom he was quite intimate and familiar. The close connection between this Greek word for "friend" and its other meaning of "necessary" implies that perhaps these persons were of vital importance to Cornelius: indispensable associates. The mere fact that Peter's host gathers such a group of people *in advance of his arrival* speaks volumes about the faith and confidence this Gentile had in the original vision of the angel.

All of this climaxes with the royal welcome Cornelius gives Peter: he falls at Peter's feet in reverence. The Greek word used to describe this gesture of high regard is *proskuneō*, commonly applied to a deity, i.e. worship. However, in the ancient world, such a posture might also symbolize how the person regarded the *one sending this messenger*. That is, the way Cornelius received Peter represented the way he received the God who sent

²⁴ Anne Primavesi and Jennifer Henderson, "The Witness of the Holy Spirit,"

²⁵ Robert W. Wall, *Acts* in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume X, p. 164.

Peter. Seeing this ranking military leader, who commanded soldiers for Rome in Israel, bowing before Peter gives us pause. What an extraordinary scene! Here stands a man accustomed to asking others to do him favors, as we read in Matthew 8:9 with regard to the "other centurion": "And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." As Bruce points out, "The verb is used of paying homage to someone of whom a favour is being asked," and he cites Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 18:26 and 20:20 in support.²⁶

Not wanting the audience to misconstrue the meaning of this reverent posture, Peter asks that his host "stand up," appealing to their common humanity without mitigating rank: "Also I myself human am!" from the Greek statement: *kai egō autos anthrōpos eimi*. Similar language is used in Revelation 19:10 and 22:9 where creatures refuse to accept worship from each other out of deference for God.

The Greek word "stand up" is none other than the word *anistēmi* which we have been tracking throughout this narrative and translated as "rise" or "rise up." There must not be a difference in *posture* since they are both *human*. Peter is also communicating the heart of the message he is about to deliver. These two men are not treated differently in the eyes of God, and that is why they must *stand together* in precisely the same fashion. Luke underscores this further with the phrase, "talking with him, Peter went inside..." (10:27a). The underlying Greek expression for their "conversation" is *sunomileō*: we might say they shared a "homily." They speak as equals. Louw and Nida note that this verb suggests "to converse with someone, including a clear implication as to *reciprocal* response." That is, conversation where there is genuine "give-and-take," and one does not talk down to the other during the exchange. They *stand together* so that they might *speak together*.

Once inside the house, Peter encounters "a large gathering of people" (Greek: *heuriskei sunelēluthotas pollous*). Literally "he found already assembled many..." The verb *sunerchomai* appears in the perfect tense implying that the assembling process had already taken place even before Peter arrived on the scene. How long had they been waiting? Is this not a remarkable sight?! Would not Peter have discerned the Holy Spirit *already at work* in the gathering together of so many persons?

Peter does not delay his reaction. "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him" (10:28). Put simply, he tells them: "I'm not suppose to be here!" The Greek text does not actually speak about "law" at all, though the translations are inclined to suggest that intention. Rather, the Greek word is *athemiton* which comes close to the English idea of *taboo*. "Not allowed" grasps the sense of the word based on its root form. Bruce comments:

Not that all intercourse with Gentiles was absolutely prohibited, but all such intercourse rendered a Jew ceremonially unclean, as did even the entering of a Gentile house (cf. Jn. xviii.28) or the handling of articles belonging to Gentiles. The most ordinary kinds of food, such as bread, oil, or milk, coming from Gentiles, could not be eaten by a strict Jew, not to speak of flesh, which might have been offered in sacrifice to idols...and which in any case still contained blood. It was thus a very difficult thing for Jews to travel in foreign lands (cf. Jos. Vita 3). And of all intercourse with Gentiles, the most intolerable was sitting at meat with them (cf. xi.3).²⁷

To this we add the command found in *Jubilees 22:16*, "Keep yourself separate from the nations, and do not eat with them; and do not imitate their rituals, nor associate with them."

But Peter quickly juxtaposes what God has commanded him: "I should not call any man impure or unclean" (10:28b). At last, Peter has made the connection between the vision and the case of Cornelius and his household. Though kosher is relevant, the vision pertained not to food but to people in this context.²⁸ Grasping this fact, Peter is telling his audience, "I do not consider you to be impure or unclean." Peter may still think that food can have that distinction based on Torah, but he can no longer allow the food laws to contaminate his

²⁶ Bruce, p.221.

²⁷ Bruce, p. 222.

²⁸ Chris A. Miller, "Did Peter's Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or the Menu?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 159 no. 635 JI-S 2002, pp. 302-317.

understanding of human beings, especially the room full of "seekers" standing before him! To turn a certain popular saying on its head, Peter is saying, "You are *not* what you *eat*! You may eat pork but that doesn't make you swine!" Peter hastens to add that, once sent, he went without objection. The Greek term for "objection" is *anantippētos*, that is, pertaining to what cannot be spoken against, in this case, what God had told him! And Peter had a track record of "speaking against" when he should have "spoken for" God. Had not Jesus called Peter *Satan*, the adversary, the "enemy"?

What follows is a question from Peter to Cornelius in the hearing of the whole crowd. Everyone is treated to a public conversation, a special form of rhetorical exchange in which the speakers' questions and answers benefit those who listen. Peter asks his new friend, "May I ask why you sent for me?" The gist of the Greek sentence is: "Accordingly (*oun*) I am inquiring (*punthanomai*) [as to] what reason (*tini logō*) you have summoned me (*metapempomai me*)." Though Peter and Cornelius established a spirit of mutual conversation earlier, the tone of this sentence feels formal and official. It may well be that Peter is acknowledging, thereby, his own respect for Cornelius. A word like "summon" used in the aorist tense suggests an official invitation from a person of importance. Peter honors that formality by making his own "inquiry." The net effect on the audience would be dramatic. They would witness an exchange between persons regarded with respect in which their "man" is affirmed by Peter's treatment of him.

That inquiry leads to a full explanation from Cornelius, who gives an historical account of what transpired over the course of some four days:

1. I was in my house praying at the ninth hour (same time as we are gathered here).
2. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me.
3. He told me God had heard my prayer and remembered my gifts to the poor.
4. He asked me to summon you, Simon Peter, from Joppa.
5. He told me you were a guest in the house of Simon the Tanner by the sea.
6. I sent for you immediately.
7. You, Peter, have come, and that is good!
8. We are now all here in the presence of God waiting for you to tell us everything God commanded you to tell us.

From a literary perspective, with Cornelius having told his story, an *inclusio* or envelope has been formed in the text of Acts 10:1-33. Luke ends up as he began: with the story of Cornelius told once and now again. Certain rhetorical elements shape this account, including this *narratio* of Cornelius. In terms of Hebrew literary forms, we might also note that this looks like an *historical prologue* of a covenant document, telling how God had already worked to bring about this great encounter between Peter and the household of Cornelius. That prologue will get extended further as Peter *tells the story of Jesus* for the benefit of his audience. Already Cornelius knows that God has covenant interest in him since the angel referred to God's action toward him as a "remembering." That term has strong connections to the covenant, implying God's fulfillment of His own obligations to His covenant partner, Israel. When God "remembers" in the Old Testament, it is not because he previously "forgot" but because he reaffirms the promises He made to His people. So with Cornelius who is about to become His new covenant partner from among the Gentiles!

Good News for Gentiles: Peter's Sermon (10:34-43)

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

By introducing Peter's sermon with "opened his mouth and said" (*anoixas de Petros to stoma...*), Luke attributes a weightiness and importance to what the apostle says (compare this with Acts 8:35 and Matthew 5:2 which introduces the Sermon on the Mount). The first statement in this authoritative utterance is a fresh thesis which Peter puts forth. He prefaces this affirmation with the words, "I now realize..." based on the Greek verb *katalambanō* which has the meaning "to acquire, with the implication of significant effort, to attain, to obtain, to take." In the middle voice, as it is used here, the idea is "to realize, understand, learn, see, find." It appears in the present tense, suggesting that Peter finds himself squarely in the middle of a fresh discovery. What he tells his audience is a *newly acquired understanding*, as this verb implies, so that the significance of his original vision grows by the hour! We might say something like, "It's just now dawning on me..." At the heart of this growing awareness is:

1. God does not show favoritism.
2. By that I mean, he accepts men in every nation who hear him and do what is right.

That is, Peter tells them something like, "You need to know where my head is on this question of accepting Gentiles like yourselves. Well, here's the scoop: God doesn't play favorites among the nations of the world. What matters to him is not DNA but open ears and obedient hearts. There are no other preconditions. And that's a real shocker to a fellow like me!" The force of the phrase "in every nation" (Greek: *en panti ethnei*) can't be overestimated. While Peter knew he had an audience on the day of Pentecost which *lived* in every corner of the Roman Empire, he also knew that they were *all Jews* come to the feast. That Jewish identity is absent in Caesarea as he faces an audience of 100% Gentiles gathered around their patron, the great Cornelius, centurion of Rome. Moreover, this Cornelius who was not a fully vested Jew, but a God-fearer instead, was still a decent man who practiced the righteous life with reverence and devotion to God and who expressed his faith through generous gifts to the poor — even among the Jews. And he could be all of that and not be circumcised or keep kosher! Here was a true revelation. Paul would have similar reflections in Romans 2:14-16.

What follows is the proclamation of the Jesus story, the Good News that Jesus of Nazareth is Israel's Messiah, but also, Lord of the World. In this "address" Peter provides the core of early Christian preaching in a "nutshell" and does so more extensively than he did previously in *Acts*. Scholars point out that the sermon of Peter found here looks a great deal like the general outline of Jesus found in *Mark*.²⁹ Students of the Bible sometimes use the term *kerygma* ("proclamation") to refer to this announcement about the person and work of Jesus. When we examine all the places in *Acts* where this proclamation appears, the results are impressive (Acts 10:36ff; 13:23ff; 13:13ff; 4:10ff; 5:30ff; compare with 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; 15:3-7). If any of our readers wonders what we mean when we speak of the "Gospel" (Greek: *euaggelion*), they should read these various passages at one sitting to get the full impact of the content.

The following summarizes the essential content of Peter's sermon:

First, he offers a concise statement of the message itself calling it...

1. **The word [God] sent to the offspring of Israel (10:36a).** That is the *logos* for the present family of national Israel. This comes very close to the familiar language of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets: "The word of the Lord came to..." (Genesis 15:1; 1 Samuel 15:10; 2 Samuel 7:4; 1 Kings 6:11; Isaiah 38:4; Jeremiah 1:2; and elsewhere). *Logos* terminology dominates the opening of John's Gospel where this term means the same thing as Jesus, God's Son. When God sends his "word" to Israel in this sense, it implies that a new work of God is about to take place. Jesus comes to Israel as God's prophet, as well as God's Son, *declaring* His word and *being* His word-made-flesh.
2. **Good News of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of All (10:36b).** Cornelius would have heard these words somewhat differently than a Jewish audience might have experienced them. "Good News" is what a Roman Emperor might make possible by some notable decree or action. "Peace" is what Rome

²⁹ So, Bruce, p. 224; Dodd, *Expository Times* xliii (1931-32), pp. 396ff; Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*.

claimed to offer the whole world: *Pax Romana*, "the peace of Rome," maintaining order and defeating all enemies of the state. Telling this loyal centurion that someone other than the Emperor brings Good News of Peace was plainly not a politically correct thing to do! Yet, Peter must be faithful to his message. The centurion had asked him to deliver the message which the angel announced he should bring to Cornelius. Peter was obeying God *and* this noble commander simultaneously. The heart of the message is two-fold: Jesus is Israel's Messiah *and* Jesus is Lord of the World. It is this last statement which catapults Peter into uncharted waters. He might well have believed that Jesus was "Lord of All," but faced with the prospect of bringing Gentiles into the newly restored people of God, those words took on radically new meaning. Facing Cornelius and his household, a human face was being placed over the word "All." As Peter gazed into the expectant eyes of that household, what did he see? Perhaps he saw the sheet coming down from heaven once more, filled with *all sorts of people*, and among them the household of Cornelius. Standing before them, Peter finally realized he had obeyed the vision, as he "rose" to address them, and tell them that Jesus was Lord of All.

3. Peter's sermon takes a geographical turn as he relates what happened **throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached (10:38)**. Like Mark's Gospel, the story begins with John the Baptizer and then proceeds with the itinerant ministry of Jesus in specific places throughout the land of Israel. The *form* that ministry would take, Peter continues to explain:
 - a. **Jesus of Nazareth God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.** In the Greek, although the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth" is the object of the verb "anointed," Luke places it first for emphasis. Had Cornelius listened to the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures as a God-fearer, he would no doubt have made the connection between "Holy Spirit" and familiar texts like Isaiah 61:1 where the Messiah is anointed by the Spirit in order to perform mighty deeds for Israel. Luke himself made this an important centerpiece of his Gospel (Luke 4:17-21) as Jesus begins his public ministry. The word for "power" is *dunamis*, the same word found in Acts 1:8 which described the power given to the apostles so that they might do their missionary work. The emphasis of *dunamis* is on what is *achieved* by the special *enabling*. Jesus was *able* to do these things because of the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. **This Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.** Messiah does good works which take the form of healing. Peter portrays the healing ministry of Jesus as a *contest of power*. That is, sickness is a form of oppression by the *diabolos*, a personal spiritual agency waging war against the human race. Not unlike the enemies of Rome, the *diabolos* (Hebrew: *hasatan*) threatens the well-being of "peace" (Hebrew: *shalōm*) among God's people Israel. Even as centurions like Cornelius were charged with "keeping the peace [*Pax Romana*]," so also Jesus came to defeat the enemies of God and restore "peace" in His kingdom. Such a narrative would impress Cornelius who knew what it meant to give orders and have them carried out; to exert power and have it achieve some great result. This Jesus of Nazareth appears, by Peter's account, to be a great warrior who has been victorious over the ultimate enemy of human beings who "hurls" himself against them (Greek: *dia + bolos*).
 - c. **He did this because God was with him.** The Greek is quite clear: *hoti ho theos ēn met' autou*. The language implies more than the simple fact that God *accompanied* Jesus when he went about doing good or healing. Certainly God accompanied many people throughout history, enabling them to be prophets, kings, warriors, and the like. This statement comes closest to the Old Testament designation, *Immanuel*, "God with us," a phrase applied to Jesus in Matthew 1:22-23, a fulfillment of Isaiah's (7:14) Messiah prophecy. Scholars sometimes refer to "early primitive Christology." By this fancy phrase they mean what early followers of Jesus believed about him, using language as best they could to express truth which went far beyond their own understanding. No, we don't hear Peter saying that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, although nothing he says here denies that fact. Rather, such language as "God was with him" comes closest to saying, "When we saw, heard and followed Jesus, it was as if we saw, heard and followed God." And of course, that's precisely what they were doing whether they gave full expression to it or not. To Cornelius, such a statement would likely have meant that God was present in the work and ministry of Jesus.

4. Now comes the critical affirmation: **We are witnesses of everything he did.** To be among the *martures* meant that the apostles had first-hand knowledge of everything Jesus did throughout all the places he went (10:39). Such language echoes Acts 1:8 and the commission Jesus gave to Peter and the other apostles. Peter took this to heart when later he penned 2 Peter 1:16-19:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses** of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

We might imagine how this played with Cornelius, a man who had sent countless soldiers on reconnaissance missions and expected them to bring back carefully supported information about troop movements, enemy vulnerabilities, and simple threats to Empire security. Accurately reported facts mattered to such a man. As Peter lays out the case for Jesus of Nazareth, he makes crystal clear that he gives an eyewitness account of everything.

5. **They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen** (10:39b-41). Matters of public execution mattered to men like Cornelius since centurions often found themselves in charge of crucifixion details, and just such a person managed the events on the day Jesus himself was executed (see Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39-45; Luke 23:47). Since the Gospel writers make much of the unnamed centurion's role, we are left to wonder if Peter might have suspected that Cornelius knew the man in question. We don't know for sure, but by telling the story in this way, Peter leaves the door open for Cornelius to investigate. The role of the Roman military at the tomb cannot be ignored either. We know that orders were sought from Pilate to guard the tomb, and soldiers kept watch until an earthquake left them senseless. Such events might well have traveled among the ranks (Matthew 27:62-66; 28:4).

Here are events which are open to examination, Peter tells his audience, including the fact that after his death Jesus was *seen to be alive*. That claim ordinarily would be met by pure cynicism: Greco-Roman ideology viewed death as a release of souls from bodies and did not think that persons who died ever came back from the dead. N.T. Wright has carefully chronicle all the relevant literature pertaining to this fact in his well-written (though lengthy) book, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.³⁰ Knowing this, Peter does not shrink back from this lynch-pin claim of the whole Christian message. Without the resurrection, there is no Messiah Jesus and no Lord of the World.

God selected a few, the apostles — Peter and his associates — to bear witness to these facts, Peter tells his audience. Jesus was not seen by all the people, but only by this group who "ate and drank" with him after he rose from the dead (10:41). Telling Cornelius about a limited field of witnesses did not weaken Peter's argument: it strengthened it. Centurion's knew only too well the dangers of mobs and crowds, ginned into a frenzy by would-be Messiah's who played on the fears and angers of the masses. Nothing good ever came of such agitators — *lestēs*, brigands — who wanted to kill Roman soldiers by ambush along the rugged mountain passes of Judea. By contrast, the story Peter told was about a different kind of leader, one whose life, death and resurrection had credible grounding in the testimony of those who had reason to know. To eat and drink with such a person *after death* proved the apostles were not dealing with a ghost or mere apparition.

6. **He commanded us to preach.** Anything having to do with giving "commands" would get the attention of someone like Cornelius. Luke uses the familiar word for issuing military orders: *paraggellō*. Peter's host had his superiors, and he himself had his subordinates. Command structure shaped his life as a centurion. Peter is telling Cornelius that he and the other apostles are *under orders*. What are they?

³⁰ N.T. Wright, *the Resurrection of the Son of God*, Minneapolis, 2003. In Part I, Section 2, "Shadows, Souls and Where They Go: Life Beyond Death in Ancient Paganism" (pp.32-84), the author exhaustively explores this topic with generous sources and footnotes.

- a. **To preach to the people.** Here is the *kerygma* we have already identified as the earliest proclamation about Jesus.
- b. **To testify (bear witness) that Jesus is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.** This proclamation takes the form of a solemn witness. The Greek word for "witness" is stronger in this case than previously. Luke uses *diamarturomai*, intensifying the root word with the pronoun prefix *dia*. Louw and Nida explain the term this way: "to make a serious declaration on the basis of presumed personal knowledge" (33:223). In classical usage, the notion of "protest" shapes the nuance of this word. This suggests an environment of opposition and resistance when the Gospel takes its stand. Considering that the word for "witness" and that for "martyr" derive from the same Greek root, we can understand this additional connotation of "witness *for* and witness *against*." A certain seriousness surrounds this statement, and for good reason: God has appointed Jesus as "judge" in a most unique and unequalled sense. He is judge of "the living and the dead."

In what sense does Peter use the word "judge"? Luke employs the term *kritēs* which lies at the root of the word "critic" and "critique." In classical contexts, the Greeks spoke of "the decider" when choosing this expression. "Umpire" and even "interpreter of dreams" are other senses in which it appears in the literature. The work of the law court, whether Jewish or Roman, was to provide a remedy for an injured party. Theft, assault, rape, and murder each contributed their own offences to a typical case. No juries of one's peers sat in such courts, but the decision fell to one or more "judges" who literally had "to decide." Having reached a decision about the case — its facts and grievances — the "judge" must put things right, alleviating the grievance, remedying the injury, and restoring something called "justice" (Latin: *iusticia*; Greek: *dikiasunē*). When the parties first arrived at court, things were literally "out of joint;" things were "not right." The *order of society* was gravely at risk when such disorder prevailed. The work of the *judge* was not complete until he made the best of fixing what was broken.

The Christian Gospel declared that the world, starting with Adam, was *not right*, and things had gone horribly wrong with God's good creation. For centuries, the Creator God had been seeking remedy for his fallen and badly damaged creation. The grand names of Hebrew history — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David — represented persons with whom this God, who called Himself Yahweh, had covenant relationship. What had happened in recent years brought Israel face-to-face with their own predicament, as they sought one solution after another through the various sects of Judaism. Rome, in the eyes of most Jews, was part of the problem. But then, suddenly, this Jesus of Nazareth burst on the landscape of Jewish history and announced through his *kerygma* that God was once more becoming king among His people. In and through the work of this Jesus, God was starting afresh His lengthy project of *putting the world to rights* — of making things as they should be once more.

But Israel was puzzled by this Jesus. He did not do what they thought he should. His teachings opened wide the doors of Zion to all sorts of people — some whom the Pharisees thought were permanently banned from covenant life. He told stories with plots which ran afoul of what the leadership thought: runaway sons welcomed home, Samaritans looking more pious than priests, and kings who had gone away for a very long time suddenly returning to their nations. Then justice did a nasty thing to this Jesus: Roman justice nailed him to a cross — the best justice which Rome could give the one who was Messiah of Israel and Lord of the World. But the story did not end there. God raised up this Jesus, making him victorious over death — that is, in the words of Peter's sermon, making him "Judge of the living and the dead."

7. Now comes the clincher. **All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (10:43).** That's what good judges do: they make sure that "sin" is properly addressed and that persons who are living under its oppression are released from it. At heart, that's the true meaning of "forgiveness" (Greek: *aphesis*, to cancel a debt, to release a prisoner). When the work

of God's Judge is finished, no longer does the grievance hang over the head of the aggrieved, but rather it is canceled and remedied. Through the cross of Jesus, God proved Himself the trustworthy and faithful Creator of the human race. The cross is the supreme evidence of God's infinite love for the whole human race. The prophets predicted the coming of this Jesus; the apostles, like Peter now proclaim it. At this juncture, Peter reaches a critical turn by declaring that "everyone who believes in" Jesus receives the benefits of God's forgiveness, he actually issues the invitation — the call to respond. Having heard the blessed word "everyone" (*panta*), something is kindled in the hearts of Peter's audience, and to that development we now turn.

Holy Spirit for Gentiles: God's Gift (10:44-48)

44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

"One of the regular features of these narratives about conversions is that God takes charge of the situation, even interrupting an apostle, to bring someone new into the fold (cf. 17:32; 22:22; 23:7; 26:24)."³¹ When the Spirit "falls" on the household of Cornelius, he falls on "all who heard the word." The spontaneous nature of this event further confirms that this movement is of *God* and not from *human design*. The Holy Spirit literally takes charge *once the word of the Gospel has been proclaimed*. We sometimes speak about the "order of salvation" (*ordo salutis*): the sequence of events leading up to a person's salvation. What we observe in the conversion of Cornelius and his household is a pattern which begins with 1) a person truly seeking God, having lived up to the light he already had; 2) someone directed by God's messenger to find the preacher, Peter; 3) Peter's proclamation of the Gospel and offer of forgiveness of sins; 4) the sudden coming of the Holy Spirit. Of special importance in this case, is that Gentiles *who had not been circumcised* received the "gift of the Holy Spirit." The dramatic shift in salvation history had taken place, and the old sign of the covenant was being supplanted by the fresh gift of God.

The rationale for bringing the six witnesses from Joppa is hereby vindicated. They are "amazed," Luke tells us as he chooses the Greek word *existēmi*, "to be outside oneself with surprise and amazement." The authentication takes the form of the same signs present at Pentecost so that Peter and his companions could be assured that *the same Holy Spirit had come on the Gentiles as came on them*. Recall how Peter spoke of Pentecost in terms of Joel 2, employing the words, "*this* (referring to the Pentecost signs) is *that*...(referring to the prophecy from Joel 2)." A similar alignment occurs here in 10:47. Peter might just as well have said, "*This* (what happened to Cornelius) is *that* (what happened to Peter and the believers at Pentecost)." Any future debate about what actually happened in Caesarea that day would be silenced by the testimony of not only Peter but also the six who could corroborated his testimony.

Taken by surprise, but wanting to do God's will, Peter takes a deep breath, sizes up the situation and declares: "How can we withhold baptism from these who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" His "orders" to baptize were undoubtedly given to the six who came with him from Joppa since they were already baptized believers (Luke described them earlier as *pistoi*, "believers," a common designation after Pentecost for those with the Holy Spirit who had been baptized.). Having the circumcised believers help administer water baptism would bolster Peter's claim soon made in chapter 11 when he would be questioned about his actions in Caesarea. By inviting them to participate, Peter was wisely acquiring their "ownership" of this new ministry to the Gentiles.

³¹ Witherington, p. 359.

When Peter offered the forgiveness of sins and then water baptism to the Spirit filled Gentiles, he was saying in effect, "you can have, here and now, what you normally get through the Temple cult. Anybody inviting those who wished to do so to pass through an initiatory rite of this kind was symbolically saying: here is the true Israel that is to be vindicated by YHWH. By implication, those who did not join in had forfeited the right to be regarded as the covenant people."³² Since the Gentiles in Cornelius' household were "God-fearers" but not full-blown converts to Judaism, they were denied the Temple cult entirely. However, here is where Peter's sermon is Good News indeed: by receiving the Holy Spirit and passing through the ritual waters of baptism, these Gentiles become publicly included among the restored people of God where the Temple becomes entirely irrelevant to their salvation. This must have felt strange to Peter whose earliest ministry as a Christian apostle after Pentecost was spent in the Temple. The distance from Jerusalem to Caesarea has proven far indeed!

Closing Comments

For our closing reflections on this week's text, I turn to Julius Scott whose thoughtful essay on Acts 10 uncovers the significant challenges faced by Jewish Christians, like Peter, as they sought to understand the meaning of the Gospel in their own time. In his conclusion he writes:

What place were contemporary (first-century) Jewish traditions, attitudes and observances to have in the new faith? These were issues rooted in a second commonwealth Judaism that resulted in deficiencies in at least three areas: its doctrine of God, its doctrine of Christ, its eschatology. It held to an aberration of the true nature and work of God that promoted and sustained a blatant ethnocentricity. As long as this misunderstanding persisted, the Jewish Christians faced an insurmountable barrier in fulfilling the purpose of God that "all the nations shall be blessed." It took visions, heavenly voices and a clearer understanding of the statements and implications of the OT Scriptures to establish the truth that "God is not a respecter of persons." Furthermore they needed to comprehend more fully the implications of the fact that Jesus Christ is "Lord of all" and the nature of the altered eschatological situation introduced with the dawning of the new age.

Isolation, protectionism, and claims of national or ethnic superiority and privilege are often symptoms of inherited disorders derived from cultural and/or racial background. They involve personal and community interests that may blind the afflicted to the truth of God and hinder fulfilling the implications of that truth in thought and action. Underlying Luke's account of Peter's dealings with Cornelius are the very real problems faced by first-century Jewish believers because of their Jewish circumstances and traditions. It shows how these problems were dealt with head-on and appropriately in the experiences of Peter and his associates.

Modern cross-cultural missions, like the Gentile mission of old, must proceed from a proper theological understanding that is firmly rooted in Scripture. The theological understanding and also traditional attitudes and convictions must constantly be reevaluated and corrected against an ever-expanding knowledge and appreciation of the content and implications of the Bible.

Many cultures and races met along the road from Joppa to Caesarea. The traveler could not isolate himself from them. Luke makes it clear that as early Christianity moved along that coastal highway, both geographically and theologically it distanced itself from its original exclusivistic and protectionistic environment. The road led to the threshold of Cornelius' house and the open door of faith for all nations. The same journey lies before all Christians in all times and places.³³

At times we have applied to phrase "Lord of *all*" in highly personal and private ways, referring to Jesus as Lord of our individual time, talent and treasures. However, the experience of Acts 10, as Scott correctly observes, calls us to see Jesus as "Lord of all *people*" and thus draws our thinking outside this narrower private boundary. Christ died for *all* and therefore we must regard *all* as potentially part of God's world-wide family. This is especially true for Western Christians who sometimes regard their historical achievements as signs of God's special favor. In this they are clearly mistaken, and the form Christianity takes when built on these assumptions

³² N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 160.

³³ J. Julius Scott, Jr., "The Cornelius Incident In The Light of Its Jewish Setting," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, (December 1991), pp. 483-484.

is itself mistaken. Western Christianity must follow the coastal highway in its theology of mission until at last it arrives gladly at the threshold of Cornelius' house.

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: *What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts — What If We Invite ALL to Follow Jesus?*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts — What If We Invite ALL to Follow Jesus?*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. The persecution which scattered the Christ followers placed Peter in western Israel. As background to this week's study, read Acts 9:32-43 to catch up with his activities and then briefly describe his ministry. What two towns does he visit? Where does he assume temporary residence? Do you see special significance in his new "address"?
2. Assuming the following section divisions, label each one to create an outline of this week's readings: 10:1-8; 10:9-16; 10:17-23a; 10:23b-33; 10:34-43; 10:44-48.
3. Who is the key figure in 10:1-8, and what is his vocation? How important is this role? Compare him with a similar person Jesus met in Matthew 8:5-13.
4. Why does the angel appear to Cornelius? How important are such "visitations" in the Bible (see Luke 1 and 2)? What is a "vision" and how would you explain what happened to Cornelius when he had his?
5. Under what circumstances does Peter have his vision in 10:9-16? Compare Peter's experience with that of Cornelius. What is important about the three-fold repetition in Peter's case (see Mark 14:30 and John 21:15ff)? To what does Peter object as his vision unfolds? Why?
6. Who prepares Peter for the coming of messengers from Cornelius? How important is this forewarning? How does Peter respond when they arrive? What assurances does Peter have based on what the visitors tell him?
7. According to 10:23b-33, what sort of reception does Peter receive from the household of Cornelius when he arrives in Caesarea? What important statement does Peter make to his hosts which reveals a change in his outlook about Gentiles?
8. Make a simple outline Peter's sermon is found in 10:34-43, noting the key points. Using this sermon as the basis, define the word "Gospel (Good News)." What important affirmations about Jesus does Peter make? What does it mean for Jesus to be "judge of the living and the dead" (10:42)? At what point does he "give the invitation"?
9. What happens while Peter is still delivering his sermon? Why is this significant? What role did the house of Cornelius play in this unexpected event?
10. Why do you suppose the Jewish believers were "amazed" that God gave His Spirit to the Gentiles who heard the Gospel?
11. How does Peter react to the sudden events described in 10:44? What relationship does the coming of the Holy Spirit have to the receiving of water baptism?
12. Based on your study of Acts 10, what major development has taken place in the life of the largely Jewish Christian community? What challenges do you think the original Christians and the newcomers will face as they fellowship with each other?
13. In what ways did these events change the life of Peter? Of Cornelius?