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Acts 10



Acts - Steve Gregg

In Acts 10, Steve Gregg explains how the story of Cornelius emphasizes the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom of God and the importance of evangelism in the church's mission. The passage highlights the theme of the inclusiveness of God's salvation message and how it extends to all people, regardless of their background or perceived "uncleanness". Peter's encounter with Cornelius shows the significant turning point in the acceptance of Gentiles in the church, which was previously mostly Jewish. In addition, Peter's impulsive behavior and objections to Jesus' teachings show that he still struggled, despite being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

We're turning now to Acts chapter 10. Acts chapter 10. One of the high points of the book of Acts occurred in the first part of Acts 9, where Saul was converted.

But after he spent a couple of weeks in Jerusalem, three years after his conversion, he went away to Syria and Cilicia, which is what he tells us in Galatians. Chapter 1, verse 17, although Luke says he went to Tarsus. Tarsus is in Cilicia, so there's no contradiction there.

And Paul was apparently there, or Saul as he was still called at that time, for at least a decade. Now, during that time, we turn back to Peter. And there are three stories about Peter that Luke gives us, which are really going to be the final stories in the book of Acts.

Not really. No, there's another story about Peter in chapter 12. But Peter is phasing out, and we don't have any real stories about Peter's ministry after these three stories.

And one of them was near the end of chapter 9, verses 32 through 35, where Peter healed a man who was lame in Lydda. And there, many, many people turned to the Lord. In fact, the way Luke puts it, all who were there, all who were in that city turned to the Lord.

I'm sure that we'd have to understand that is something of a hyperbole, although maybe not very much. You know, there are times in revivals of modern times that sometimes

practically whole towns were converted. And so it's very possible that that happened, though, of course, that wouldn't guarantee that, you know, five years later, everyone there would still be a Christian, because there'd be people coming and going and so forth.

But however many people really became a Christian, it apparently was a significant number in that town. And then in the next section of chapter 9, verses 36 through 43, we're told that Peter went to Joppa by request of the Christians there who had a saint among them who had died. And they asked Peter to come, and he raised her from the dead, Tabitha, also known as Dorcas in the Greek.

Now, at the end of chapter 9, Peter is remaining in Joppa for a while, perhaps ministering, but we're going to find him now going to Caesarea. But again, it'll be by request. Peter apparently went to Lydda, where he healed Aeneas on his own.

We don't read that anyone requested him to go. But his departure from Lydda to Joppa was because people from Joppa came and asked him to. And he stayed in Joppa until someone came from Caesarea and told him to come up there, about 32 miles to the north.

Now, that story is given to us in considerable detail, in fact, twice. Because it is the story about the first recognized by the church or by one of the apostles, the first recognized non-circumcised Gentile becoming a Christian. And this was very, very controversial in those days, as we shall see.

And because the remainder of the Book of Acts is going to emphasize Paul's activities ministering among the Gentiles, Luke sees this as a very important turning point. Of course, it is. Interestingly, it's not Paul who is instrumental in the first Gentile becoming a Christian.

You know, Paul in Galatians chapter 2 tells us that there was an agreement that he had with Peter and James and John that Paul and his team would go to the Gentiles, that they were apostles to the Gentiles, the uncircumcised. And that Peter, James, and John and their team were apostles to the circumcised. And yet, we find every time Paul goes into a new Gentile city, he goes first to the synagogues to evangelize the Jews that are there.

But he's almost always rejected there. And then he plants a church among the Gentiles. Peter, on the other hand, who's the apostle to the circumcised, is the one that God uses to introduce the first uncircumcised Christians.

Now, some people feel that this is a fulfillment of Jesus' statement to Peter in Acts chapter 16, that he said he would give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven. And one way that this has been understood by evangelicals for a long time is that this means that Peter would be instrumental in opening the kingdom to various groups. First of all, the

Jews on the day of Pentecost, we find him instrumental in Samaria, although Philip actually evangelized the Samaritans.

Philip did not go all the way in terms of administering the baptism of the Spirit. That was Peter and John who came and did that. So, the Samaritans, the Jews, and then the Samaritans, and now the Gentiles.

Peter has the privilege here of being the first to inaugurate Gentile church recognition. And so, some feel like this is what Jesus was alluding to when he said he would give Peter the keys to the kingdom, that Peter had the keys and he opened the kingdom first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans, then to the Gentiles. This is only one theory, a very common one among Protestants especially, and it may be true.

In any case, Peter is nearby and the centurion in question, who is the Gentile who will be converted, is also in Caesarea. But we know that that's also where Philip the Evangelist lived. And when it comes to evangelizing this man, this is not left to Philip to do, but to Peter who has to be sent for.

Let's read this, chapter 10. There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian regiment. Now, a centurion was an officer in the Roman army who had a hundred men under him.

A group of a hundred soldiers was called a century, and a centurion was the officer over a century, over a hundred soldiers. Six centuries would make up a cohort, and that would be, of course, six times 100, that'd be 600 soldiers would be a cohort. And then 10 cohorts would be a legion.

So 10 times 600 would be 6,000. There'd be 6,000 soldiers in a legion, 600 in a cohort, and 100 in a century. Now, in Palestine, there were no legions.

Rome didn't have any legions in Palestine. There were cohorts there, and the cohorts were made up of centuries, and a centurion was the officer over them. So he's a lesser officer, not among the highest ranking, but he's got a hundred men under him.

By the way, centurions figure significantly in both the Gospel and the Book of Acts. In the Gospel, Luke, along with the other synoptics, refers to Jesus healing the servant of a centurion. And the man was a Gentile, and Jesus commended him for his faith and said, I've not seen such faith in all of Israel.

So Jesus, speaking about a centurion, not this one presumably, was amazed at his faith. And then he went on to say, and many shall come from the east and the west, meaning Gentiles, and sit down in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the children of the kingdom, meaning Jews, will be cast out into outer darkness.

Jesus predicted that this centurion, not the one we're reading about here, but the one we

read about in Matthew 8, for example, whom Jesus was commending, that he would only be the beginning of floodgates of Gentiles coming into the kingdom to share in the blessing of Abraham, and that many Jews would not participate in it. The children of the kingdom would be cast out. So the first centurion we find in the Bible is commended by Jesus for his exceptional faith, and as a, we might say, the first fruits of a general Gentile harvest.

Now, we also find at the foot of the cross four centurions who were charged with crucifying Jesus, and they were just doing their job. They didn't know who Jesus was, but before the end of the day, one of the centurions, according to Matthew, said, surely this man was the Son of God. In Luke's version, he says, surely this was a righteous man.

But it's interesting that a centurion would be represented as recognizing Jesus as innocent or righteous, just like Pilate, the Roman governor, had, or even as the Son of God, when the Jews, who ought to have recognized the Messiah, did not recognize him as such. So we see in the Gospels these Romans, who are pagans, uncircumcised Gentiles, who are showing faith that is in contrast to the unbelief of the Jews. Now, Cornelius is the first centurion we meet in the book of Acts, but not the last one.

And especially in the latter story of Paul's trip to Rome, there's a centurion who is very favorably described by Luke as one who protected Paul from other soldiers and so forth who wanted to kill Paul. And the centurion was obviously very positive toward Paul. But again, the Jews were the ones who had arrested Paul and were trying to kill him.

So again, the Gospels and Acts portray centurions in a favorable light, although not all centurions, it's just that none are mentioned that it doesn't show in a favorable light. This one is exceptional. Just like the man that Jesus commended as having faith greater than all Israel that he had found, this man is a very devout man, and although his religion, his national religion, as a Roman, would be that of paganism, he was what we would call a God-fearer, what the Jews called a God-fearer, a man who is not a Jew and not a prostitute.

He did not become circumcised, and that's a key issue in this story, that he was not a circumcised man, but he was a devout man who cared about pleasing the God of the Jews as opposed to the gods of his heathen culture. Now, he is the commander of what's called the Italian cohort. So, or I should say, his century, his hundred soldiers were within the Italian cohort, so there would be five other centuries of soldiers in that cohort, too.

The Italian cohort would be soldiers that were recruited in Italy. Remember, the Romans governed much more than Italy. They governed the whole Mediterranean world, so a lot of the soldiers in the Roman army would be recruited from other Roman dominions, but these men were from Italy.

That's not particularly important for Cenote, I don't suppose, but Luke mentions it. He

says he's a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. Now, this man gave generously to the poor, and he prayed to God, and this would mean the real God, of course, the God of the Jews, the God of Abraham, and he prayed to him daily or regularly, always, and he not only had come to fear God, but he brought his whole family with him into a religious life honoring the God of Israel, and yet none of them had been circumcised.

And why somebody would love God that much at this point in time and not go all the way and get circumcised to become a Jew, I don't know, unless he had a sense, maybe that the Jews themselves didn't even understand. It's the matters of the heart more than of ritual that matter to the true God, and so maybe he realized that, you know, if he's worshiping God, you'd think, well, you'd think he'd want to get circumcised and become a full-on Jew, but he may have understood that the God he was worshiping didn't care that much about ritual, although the Jews thought he did, and we find that if that is Cornelius' attitude, he was right, because an angel comes to him at three in the afternoon about the ninth hour of the day. He saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, Cornelius, and when he observed him, he was afraid and said, what is it, Lord? So he said to him, your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

Now, here's a man who's not regenerating. This is a man who's not a believer, not a Jew. He doesn't know Jesus.

And yet, I mean, there are those who say that if a person is unregenerate, there's nothing they could do to please God, nor even to want to. There's a very strong form of Calvinism. Not all Calvinists would say it the same, but some very strong forms of Calvinism say that an unregenerate person, because they are dead in trespasses and sins, can't even want to please God.

And if they do appear to, as, for example, people of various religions appear to want to seek God, that that's not acceptable to God, that God is not. It's all selfish. It's not well motivated.

They're not interested in doing it for the glory of God, which is the only good motive for worshiping God. It's sometimes argued that everyone who's not a Christian is incapable of worshiping God for anything other than base motives. Well, there's no mention of his base motives here.

The angel is sent from God and says, your prayers and your good deeds are come up as a memorial, like a sacrifice offered to God. It certainly gives the impression that God was favorable toward them. That the man was worshiping God in a way that was acceptable, but not enough to save him, because no one can be saved by their good works.

They have to be saved by Christ. But just like Jews in the Old Testament of the faithful

remnant. This man was a Gentile who was on the same plane, it would appear, as the faithful remnant of the Jews prior to knowing Jesus.

And so he is given the opportunity to hear about Jesus. And the angel says, now send men to Joppa and send for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea.

He will tell you what you must do. And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Now remember, that's where Peter was lodging. That's where he had raised Tabitha from the dead. And he had not departed from there.

He's now staying there for a while. And so this is a trip of 32 miles these three men had to make. Two of them were simply servants of his.

And one of them was a devout soldier. So apparently even one of his soldiers had become devout, probably through his influence. This man was not only godly in terms of his own orientation, but his family had come around.

And even some of the soldiers under his command, apparently at least one, had come on to share his faith. So this is a pretty amazing person. You know, what's interesting is that the angel didn't preach the gospel to him.

The angel is there. Why not just tell him about Jesus while he's there? Why make him send three men on a two-day journey, at least, to another town and bring a man back another two days so that he could preach them? The angel's there. Why not just preach the gospel? Well, the fact that he did not indicates that it is not to angels that God has entrusted the task of evangelism.

If it was, then the world would have been better evangelized by now. It's the church that has given the task, and the church has sometimes been a little bit negligent. Certainly, when Jesus gave the Great Commission, he was not telling them to do anything that couldn't have been done within a few hundred years at the very most.

Maybe a few generations only. But the church has not regularly, you know, been very missions-oriented. It was in the first century, and it has been at a few times, especially the Catholic Church sent Jesuits out to China and Japan and places like that in more recent centuries.

But then with William Carey and with the Moravians and people like that in about the 17th and 18th centuries, then the Protestants got on the ball and began to send missionaries out to the world. But that's like, you know, 1,500 years after Christ. That's a

little slow in getting off the dime there.

The church has not been as diligent as one might wish in evangelizing the world. If God was not leaving it to the church and assigning that task to angels, I got a feeling they would have done it much quicker. And we might say, well, why didn't he have angels do it? Well, the angels aren't assigned to that kind of task.

It's through the seed of Abraham that God intends to bless the nations. The seed of Abraham is a man, Jesus. And it's through people who are incorporated into Christ as his church, as his body, that God wants his work to be done on earth.

Why? It hasn't been as efficient as if angels had done it, but that's obviously there are factors that incline God to keep it this way, because it must be very important for him that the church be his agency on earth, not angels. And this also shows us another thing, and that is that God is not only concerned about individual salvation. If it was just a matter of getting Cornelius saved, the angel could have witnessed to him and then Cornelius could be saved and they'd be done with it.

But he would never have been recognized by the church. He would have been saved. When he would die, he'd go to heaven.

But Peter, or at least some apostles, had to be there to witness this so that they would recognize he belongs to the church over which they have oversight. This is no doubt also why Philip was not sent to Cornelius. Philip lived across town from him.

Philip wasn't evangelist, but this was a key conversion that was going to be controversial, and it needed someone of no less stature than Peter in the church to make it recognized by the church that these Gentiles can now be in the church. And so Peter had to come and witness what would happen. But you see, again, if God only wanted people to get saved and go to heaven, and that's all his whole program was, then getting the man saved would have been easier.

Again, Philip could have come if the angel didn't want to do it, or God didn't want the angel to do it. But getting Peter in there meant that Peter's—he's the same guy who had to come check up on what Philip had done in Samaria. The introduction of Samaritans was kind of a radical step, and for that to be officially recognized needed Peter and John to go and check it out.

And that is probably also why Peter went to Lydda and Joppa also, and was following Philip's footsteps, you know, saying, okay, Philip evangelized these cities, although those cities probably only Jews were converted, and that wasn't very controversial. But this would be. And so Peter had to be there, and even Peter was going to get in trouble with the others in Jerusalem after he did this, until he explained it.

But these three men were sent down to Joppa. Now the scene changes. The scene one in

this story was in Caesarea.

Now we shift our view to Joppa, where Peter is. And by the way, Joppa is the same town from which Jonah launched to sea to escape his obedience to God. He was sent to Nineveh, and he got on a ship to go the other direction to Tarshish.

So Joppa is the place from which the disobedient prophet who was sent to the Gentiles in Nineveh went the wrong direction. But Joppa is also the launching point for Peter to go and bring in Gentiles for the first time into the church. It's maybe a coincidence, since there's a limited number of seaports that could be used, but it's just an interesting one, I think.

The next day, as they went on their journey, they drew near to the city. Peter went up on the house to pray about the sixth hour, which would be noon. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat.

But while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord, for I've never eaten anything common or unclean. And a voice spoke to him again the second time, What God has cleansed you must not call common or unclean. This was done three times, and the object was taken up into heaven.

Now, Peter's praying at noon, which is one of the Jewish hours of prayer, and the Jewish Christians at this point were still following to some degree the Jewish calendar and the customs. And three times a day, nine o'clock at noon and three in the afternoon, the Jews would have prayer. And that's what time at noon Peter was praying.

He was hungry, although this was not a normal eating time for people at that time. They would eat breakfast and then they did again later in the afternoon. They didn't usually have a noon meal like we do.

So but someone was cooking, maybe, I don't know, for the evening meal. He might have smelled food. We don't know.

But the point is that he was hungry. And then he had a vision that related to eating, just like Jesus when he was tempted in the wilderness. He fasted for years.

The Bible says he was hungry. And then the devil came and said, turn these rocks into bread. A sort of temptation related to eating.

In this case, Jesus was not tempting him, but commanding him to eat something.

However, what was presented to him as an option to eat were animals of all kinds. Now, I don't know if they're clean animals in there, but there were certainly unclean ones.

These in the field, you know, it's obvious that they're creeping things that include reptiles and such. And these things were unclean to the Jew. And Peter, although he'd been, you know, a Christian for many years since Pentecost, was still keeping a kosher diet at this point.

He had not yet broken free from the Jewish customs of diet. And so he said, I've never eaten anything unclean. I think this is interesting because, for one thing, what he says is very much like what Ezekiel said.

In Ezekiel 4.14, when God told him to eat his food baked over human dung, which would be definitely ritually unclean. And Ezekiel said, Lord, no, Lord, I've never defiled myself with anything unclean like that. And so God actually modified the instructions for him and said, OK, you can cook it over cow dung instead.

But in Ezekiel 4.14, we see Ezekiel answering God almost exactly as Peter answers Jesus here. But this is not the first time Peter has objected to something Jesus said. At Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16, that's when Jesus first told the disciples that he must be crucified.

And Peter objected, not so, Lord, this shall not happen to you. And that's the time when Jesus had to say, get behind me, Satan. You're an offense to me.

You're a stumbling block to me because you do not savor the things of God, the things of man. That's in Matthew 16.22. Peter said, not so, Lord. Here Jesus is saying what's happening.

Peter says, nope, that's not going to happen. Now, of course, it's kind of stupid for a disciple to say to Jesus, I know you're wrong about that, Jesus. But he's simply showing his emotion.

He's simply showing his, in his mind, his loyalty to Jesus. Oh, Lord, you know, come on, you're just getting a little morose here. Are you just a little depressed? I realize, you know, popularity has gone down a little bit recently, but it's not that bad.

You're not really gonna be crucified. Certainly we'll stand with you. We won't let that happen.

I mean, Peter is simply trying to express his loyalty because Jesus is predicting something that Peter is very uncomfortable with, obviously. And there was another time when he objected to Jesus doing something. That was, of course, in John chapter 13, when Jesus came around to wash his feet.

In John 13.8, he said, no, Lord, you'll never wash my feet. He's such an extremist. Jesus said, if I don't wash your feet, you have no part with me.

If you don't, then wash my head and my body too, my whole self. And Jesus said, no, you've already been bathed. You don't need to be washed except for your feet.

Let's be reasonable here. But the interesting thing is, Peter is so impulsive. He speaks out even to contradict Jesus.

And he does it before he realizes that's what he's doing. I'm contradicting Jesus. But he's just so impulsive.

It's interesting here that he still is, even after he's filled with the Holy Spirit. You know, we see great changes in Peter after Pentecost. Peter's a meek and, well, not meek, but cowardly, we could say, individual before Pentecost.

He thinks he's a hero. You know, even if I die, I'll never betray you, Jesus. And then as soon as a girl says you are one of them, he says, I never heard of him.

No, I never knew the man. And, you know, Peter is cowardly until he's filled with the Spirit. Then he's bold.

And his boldness is often commented on. So he's a changed man in some respects, but not every respect. Regeneration doesn't change everything about your temperament.

And one of the things is he's impulsive. He speaks out quickly without thinking, without even realizing, hey, I'm contradicting Jesus here. That doesn't make sense.

But he did it. And this is kind of the same way he behaved before, when Jesus was there with him. So I've never eaten anything unclean.

Now, the ramifications of this have come to my mind recently when I was talking to Roman Catholics. Because Roman Catholics believe that at the Last Supper, when Jesus said, this bread is my body and this cup is my blood, that Jesus was saying, this bread is literally becoming my body, as you hear me speak. And this cup is literally becoming my blood.

And that ever since then, these words of institution, as they call it, turn the bread and the wine of communion into the body and blood of Jesus. Now, by the way, there's nothing in the Bible that says that happened. And by the way, at the Passover meal where Jesus said that, already the traditional ritual of the Jews already had similar language.

In the traditional Seder, the host would say this bread is the bread of affliction of our fathers in Egypt. He didn't mean it literally turned into that bread that they'd eaten, or that suffering that they'd had 1,400 years earlier. He, of course, meant this bread

represents the suffering in Egypt.

Now Jesus said, no, now it represents my suffering. This is my body broken for you. So, I mean, the disciples, of course, would understand him when he says this is my body, this is my blood, that he's speaking in the traditional Passover manner.

Is means represents, and we talk that way too. If I showed you a picture of my children and said this is my oldest here and this is my youngest, and these two live in Hollywood and this one lives in New Orleans or whatever. I'm saying this is my oldest daughter here, but it's really just a piece of paper, a colored piece of paper that has an image of her on it.

It's not really her. My daughters are three-dimensional, not two-dimensional. They are not flat on a piece of paper.

But you wouldn't think it's strange that this is my oldest daughter, this is my oldest son here, and these are my middle daughters and my youngest son. Saying this is simply means this is a representation of them. Or when you're showing someone on a map how to get somewhere, saying this line here, this is Interstate 5. No, it isn't.

It's an ink mark on a piece of paper. Interstate 5 is made of pavement. But when you say this is Interstate 5 and this is this street and this is that street, we know how that means it represents.

And when Jesus said this is my body, this is my blood, it's clear he meant this represents. But one way we know that the disciples recognized that Jesus wasn't being literal is that Peter didn't speak up and say not so, Lord. Imagine if Peter actually believed that Jesus was asking him to drink real blood and eat real human flesh.

Peter would have been aghast, and yet we don't find him raising any objection at all. And if Peter did believe that every time he took communion, he was really drinking the blood of Jesus, this would be unclean. He would not say at this point years later, I've never eaten anything unclean.

He'd be acclimated to it. If he felt he'd really been literally eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus all those years, he would have by now long come to terms with the fact, I guess we don't have to remain kosher, you know, because eating human flesh is not kosher and drinking blood is not kosher of any species. And yet he's pointing out that after even years of taking communion as a Christian, he has never yet consumed anything that would be regarded by the Jews as unclean.

And these animals were them. Now, Jesus says to him, what I have cleansed, don't you call common, or he means don't call it unclean, meaning that I have cleansed what I'm asking you to eat here. Now, among other things, that would prove, if anyone wondered, that Christ does not want us to think of any animals as unclean.

He has cleansed them. He commanded Peter to eat them. Now, of course, it was only a vision, but it still is a vision that had content and had meaning.

And Jesus himself had said it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out. And Mark, in Mark chapter 7, quoting Jesus there, says, Thus he declared all foods clean. And Paul, no doubt influenced by that statement of Jesus, in Romans 14, 14, said, I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself, but to him who thinks it unclean, it is unclean.

Now, Jesus is the one who declared all foods clean. Peter hadn't gotten the memo, I guess, yet. It's not that he hadn't heard it.

It takes things, it takes a while for it to sink in, I guess. Paul got it earlier, I think, than Peter did. But Peter gets it here, but only after three tries.

He makes the same mistake three times, or two times at least. And then the third time, you know, I guess it gets through his thick head, you know. So, he's, but that thick head, he's scratching it, I'm sure.

Like, why is Jesus telling me to eat these unclean things? Now, as he's going to realize, as we'll see as the chapter goes on, when he realizes he's being told to go into the home of a Gentile, that the unclean animals correspond to people whom the Jews consider to be unclean. In this case, uncircumcised people. And Peter was not supposed to regard as unclean persons that God accepts, even if the Jews did not.

Even if Jewish law would have relegated these Gentiles to, you know, being lost, God accepts them. Don't call them unclean. Now, one of the reasons, of course, Jews did not go into the homes of Gentiles, and it was a custom, not a law of Moses, that they not do so, but they knew that Gentiles had things in their houses and served food that was unclean.

And Jews would not generally eat at the table with Gentiles because Gentiles would have food that was not kosher. So, as Peter was also going to be asked to go into the home of a Gentile and eat there, and he did, he actually ate with Cornelius, as it turns out, it would be necessary for him to realize that he doesn't have to worry about what's served to him, what God has cleansed. That would include food.

He would not have to regard as unclean. I mean, he could eat with the Gentiles, but more than that, it's the people that he's not to regard as unclean. And I personally believe that all those laws of clean and unclean foods in the Old Testament, they are ritual laws, and ritual laws are symbolic by nature.

Most of them point toward Christ directly. I mean, the Passover and the sacrifices and so forth. The clean and unclean laws seem to represent clean and unclean people.

And this vision would be an example where God uses that correspondence to make a point with Peter that he's got to not call any people Gentiles, any group of people unclean in themselves. We see Paul, I think, taking that view in 2 Corinthians 6, when he says, do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. What's that coming from? That language comes from Deuteronomy, I believe, where the law says do not plow with an ox and an ass together.

You don't put a yoke over a clean animal and an unclean animal. You don't bind into one team clean and unclean. Now, in the Old Testament, it was animals.

An ass is an unclean animal. An ox is a clean animal. Paul takes it to people.

You are a clean person. You're a Christian. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

They're not clean. And so I think that throughout the New Testament, the concept of clean and unclean animals, as the Jews would see them, is shown to correspond in New Covenant spiritual reality with persons, certainly in this case. And so Peter's still not sure what's going to happen here.

And it says in verse 17, Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry at Simon's house and stood before the gate. So that was timely. These guys had traveled two days to get there, and it's just as they are coming to the gate and inquiring for him that Peter's had these visions.

They're fresh in his mind. He's puzzling over them. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

And while Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise, therefore, and go down to go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius and said, Yes, I am he whom you seek.

For what reason have you come? And they said, Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear words from you. Then he invited them in and lodged them, apparently overnight, because it was late enough in the day that they wouldn't make much progress traveling that night, that afternoon. On the next day, Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

As we'll find in chapter 11, there were six of them. So it's a company of ten people traveling from Joppa to Caesarea. The three delegates from Cornelius, Peter himself, and six others who were from the church in Joppa who would witness what was going on.

So when these people said, There's this guy named Cornelius. Okay, Peter's first reaction would be, Oh, a Gentile, unclean. But then he just remembered, Oh, wait, Jesus just said three times, Don't call unclean who have cleanse.

And they said, He's a just man. He's a devout man. He loves God.

He fears God. And an angel told him to send for you. Well, I think Peter's starting to get the message as he's making that trip to Caesarea that this is what his vision was about.

I don't think he was so dense as to miss that at this point. Verse 24. And the following day they entered Caesarea.

Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. So he had a house full apparently. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.

But Peter lifted him up saying, Stand up. I myself am also a man. Now this, if Peter was just starting to come to terms with going into the house of a Gentile, this must have been at least one final put off to him.

That Gentiles bow down too readily to people and to statues and things like that. Jews, you know, they hate that. They hate that about Gentiles.

You don't bow down to anyone except Yahweh. You don't worship anyone but God. And here Peter walks in and Cornelius bows down before him.

Peter, I think, is probably a little bit put off by this. He says, I don't think Peter is just being humble. Oh, don't give me any credit.

I'm not God. I think he's saying, Get up. You're not supposed to be down worshipping a man.

I'm not God. I'm a man like you. Now by the way, in Revelation chapter 19, even John, who is a Jew and not an idolater, finds himself so overwhelmed in the presence of the revelations that he's been given that he falls down at the feet of the angel.

And the angel says, Get up. Don't worship me. This happens twice.

John does this twice. Once in Revelation 19 and once in Revelation 22. So I guess even a Jew, even a Christian Jew, might make that mistake.

Of course, an angel may be more impressive than a man, may be more temptation to worship an angel. But still it's not okay. Only God is to be worshipped.

Which is all the more significant when you realize that Jesus allowed people to worship him and never rebuked them. One of the ways that we know that Jesus was self-

consciously God among us is that he didn't apparently feel uncomfortable being worshipped by people. Peter felt very uncomfortable about it.

He knew he was just a man. You don't worship. You don't bow down before just a man.

Then he said to them, You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man like myself to keep company with or go into another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Now that's obvious.

Those are the words of Jesus to him in the vision. Don't call anyone unclean that I've cleansed. So he says, God has shown me that I shouldn't call any man unclean.

In the vision, Jesus seemed to be talking about animals. But Peter recognized that the correspondence between the vision and the reality was that the animals represented men, whom, as a Jew, Peter would normally have regarded as unclean and would not have gone into his house. Therefore, I came without objection as soon as I was sent for.

I asked then, For what reason have you sent me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour. And at the ninth hour, I prayed in my house. And behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.

Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon at Tanners by the sea. When he comes, he will speak with you.

So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now, therefore, we are all present before God to hear all the things that God commanded you by God. So Peter's now getting the whole picture.

Okay, he's supposed to preach to these people. He hadn't been told that before, but I think he probably would have been inclined to do it anyway. But he says, We're all here to listen.

What a willing audience of people who were not even Jewish to listen to a message about the Jewish God and his messenger Peter and what Peter had to say. So Peter opened his mouth and said, In truth, I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation, whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him.

Now, accepted by him cannot mean has experienced Christian salvation. But it means that at some level, God has a favorable attitude toward them, enough, at least as in this case, to give them a chance at salvation. If a person is a pagan and does not fit this qualification, who does not fear God and does not work with righteousness, then God is not, you know, he doesn't see that person as perhaps a good candidate.

It's important to note that salvation is more than just justification. Abraham was justified

by faith, but he never became part of the body of Christ because that hadn't come about yet. It's not even clear whether Abraham had the indwelling Holy Spirit.

He apparently did not. There's no mention of it in Scripture. There are things about Christian salvation that go beyond what Abraham and the faithful Jews in the Old Testament had.

They were justified, which means that God forgave them when they died. There'd be no obstacle between them and God, so they could be saved, in that sense. But they didn't experience the aspects of salvation that came about through Pentecost.

And, in fact, Jeremiah 31 tells us that there'd be some innovative things that God would do in the new covenant that were not done previously. He would write his laws in the inward parts. He would remember their sins and iniquities no more.

He would cause them all to know him from the least to the greatest. And so there were aspects of salvation in the new covenant that simply were unknown in the Old Testament, although people in the Old Testament could be justified by faith. David was.

Moses certainly was. We're specifically told that Abraham was. And I think that Hebrews 11, which gives us a catalog of saints in the Old Testament, every one of them, by faith, did something.

And I think it's been suggested this justification by faith in the sight of God has always been how God has done things. By faith, Abel offered a better sacrifice. By faith, Enoch walked with God.

By faith, Noah built an ark. By faith, Abraham left his homeland. By faith, he offered Isaac, and so forth, all the way through the Old Testament.

The writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 tells us that all these Old Testament people were obedient to God and right with God because of their faith. So salvation in the sense of justification by faith is not a new phenomenon with the coming of Jesus. There was always a faithful remnant in Israel that would be justified by their faith.

But there are aspects of Christian salvation, which include being born again, having the Holy Spirit live within you, and knowing God internally, as opposed to like Abraham had God appear to him about maybe a dozen times in 100 years of walking with God. So, I mean, Abraham was a friend of God, but he still, as far as we know, only met with God a relatively few times in a long life. But we have God living inside of us.

This is certainly a greater privilege in the New Testament. Salvation in Christ is greater than the aspects of salvation that could be experienced by people prior to Christ. Cornelius, perhaps, since his heart was as it was, was viewed by God the same way that any Jew of the faithful remnant would have been looked at.

Now, when I say, but he wasn't circumcised, but God never really required circumcision for salvation. He required circumcision for inclusion in the Abrahamic family, but people like Noah were never circumcised. Enoch, as far as we know, and Abel, they weren't circumcised.

And they were saved by faith. Circumcision, let me tell you what Paul said about Gentiles and circumcision. If you look at Romans chapter 2, verse 25, Paul said, For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law, but if you're a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

Now, verse 26, Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will his uncircumcision not be counted as circumcision? He's saying it will be. If an uncircumcised man lives the righteous life that God asked the Jews to live, but he's not circumcised, as far as God's concerned, he'll be counted as circumcised. And, of course, in the end of this chapter, verse 28, it says, For he is not a Jew who's one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who's one inwardly.

And circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God. So Paul says, you know, being a Gentile, being uncircumcised, who's to say that God cares if they're circumcised or not, in terms of their heart? If their heart is circumcised, then physical circumcision isn't mandatory. And so I think we could argue that in terms of God's evaluation of a man, Cornelius was already in a state that was comparable to that of a faithful Jew prior to the coming of Christ.

He feared God. He was doing what he knew to do to serve God. And so Peter says, it doesn't take a Jew to be acceptable to God.

People in every nation who fear God and do what is right are acceptable to him. Now, I'll tell you this. When I learned to do evangelism in the Baptist church growing up, and also in evangelical circles outside the Baptist church, where I've been for a long time, I read books on evangelism.

I went to, you know, Billy Graham Crusade evangelism courses because I was a counselor to Billy Graham Crusade in Anaheim when I was 15, and I had to go through the courses of that. You know, no matter who I read or who I heard, I was always told, the way you evangelize, and you see this in the four spiritual laws of Bill Bridge also, you have to first let people know they're sinners. They won't want the medicine if they don't think they're sick.

They're not going to be interested in salvation by grace unless they know how damned they are without Christ. And so, of course, the formulaic evangelistic method of evangelicals has often been, you first got to go through the Romans road. You start in Romans 3, 23, is it, or 26? And, you know, all have sinned and come short of the glory of

God.

And then Romans 6, 23, you know, the wages of sin is death, and eventually, you know, none will be justified by the law. So it says in Romans 10, 9, you know, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved. You know, you go through the process.

This is a formulaic kind of evangelistic effort, but it always begins with all have sinned. Now, all have sinned. But it's interesting that Peter, I was reading this several years ago, and I think, Peter, you don't know how to do evangelism.

You don't come into a sinner's house and say, you're acceptable to God. No, the first thing you have to know is that they're not acceptable to God, that they, until they know Jesus, they're going to hell. Peter didn't really get around to ever saying that.

He starts off by saying, you know, you fear God. You're seeking to please God. You're not a Jew.

You're a Gentile. You're uncircumcised. But, you know, you don't have to be a Jew to be acceptable to God.

People in every nation who do this are accepted. At least he, if their heart is right, he accepts what they're doing. That doesn't mean they earn their salvation that way.

No one earns salvation. Okay, and then he says, in verse 36, The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. Perhaps sticking he is Lord of all in here is a way of saying not just the Jews.

Peter understands this better than ever now. He's not just the Lord of Israel. He's the Lord of Gentiles.

That's why he's evangelizing them. The word you know. Now, the word you know suggests that Cornelius' family, Peter assumes, have heard something about Jesus.

They don't know the gospel, but they've heard about him. He was, after all, a sort of a splash not many years earlier in the region. Jesus had been known throughout Galilee and Judea and even Samaria as a miracle worker, as a preacher.

Of course, there were many, you know, sort of migrant preachers and things like that. And maybe some of them were reputed to have miracles done. Not everyone would pay that much attention.

But Peter assumes they've heard of Jesus. He says that word which you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached. He assumes Cornelius also knows who John was, John the Baptist.

It says, How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. Now, he healed all that were oppressed by the devil. Is he referring to sickness or demon possession here? Well, he doesn't say.

He uses the word healed, which has led many people to think that he's talking about sickness. And therefore, they would say Peter is telling us that sickness is oppression from the devil rather than just an organic problem. It's demonic.

And Jesus healed people, and that was healing them from the oppression of the devil. On the other hand, exorcisms are also referred to as healing. For example, in Matthew 12, when Jesus exorcised a demon from a man who was dumb and blind, it says he healed him by casting the demons out.

So he could be referring to exorcisms. It doesn't really matter. The point is that Jesus' ministry was countering the work of the devil very efficiently, showing that he was God's agent to deliver people from what Satan had done to harm them.

And he says, We are witnesses of all these things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day and showed him openly, not to all people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, meaning the people of Israel, and to testify that it is he who was ordained by God as the judge of the living and the dead.

To him, all the prophets witness that through his name, whoever believes in him will receive remission of sins. So justification by faith is at least in this sermon. If you believe in him, you'll have remission of sins.

And Peter didn't get any further. He actually intended to say more. How do we know that? Because when he gives account of this in chapter 11, and he's telling the people back in Jerusalem about this story, he says in verse 15, chapter 11, 15, And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

Well, actually, the Holy Spirit, he said quite a few things before the Holy Spirit fell, but apparently he intended to say a lot more. He thought he was just starting his sermon. As he began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell.

We know how much he said. And then we read of the Holy Spirit falling in verse 44. As Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word.

And those of the circumcision who believed, meaning those six men who came with Peter from Joppa, were astonished as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, Can anyone forbid water to these, or

that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Then they asked him to stay on for a few days. Now, this was so radical, but God had to show Peter, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it was okay for Gentiles to be saved. This is, apart from the Day of Pentecost, this is the only recorded case in the Book of Acts of people being filled with the Spirit without the laying on of hands.

I'm not saying there weren't other cases in the first century. I'm just saying, in terms of the record, we have five recorded cases of people being baptized with the Spirit. Three of them were through the laying on of hands.

One of them was Pentecost, which was a unique case. And this is the only other case where there was no laying on of hands. Why would that be? Well, I don't think Peter would be very quick to want to lay hands on.

They're Gentiles. They're dirty. Sure, he'd just been told not to call them unclean, but that was just, I mean, he's still adjusting here.

And so God lays his hands on him. So God shows Peter, I accept these people. He pours out his Spirit on them.

And as Peter said, when he's given an answer about this in chapter 11, he gave them the Spirit the same as he gave us at Pentecost. It's like this is the Gentile Pentecost. And they heard them speak with tongues.

And, of course, Peter then could not deny. And the other Jews, Jewish Christians with him, were astonished that Gentiles could possibly have the Spirit of God. And so Peter said, who could deny water to them? Now, it's interesting.

There are some people who say you're not saved until you're baptized. These people were clearly saved and they weren't water baptized. On the other hand, there's some people who say water baptism isn't all that important as long as you're saved.

But the first thing Peter said, get these people baptized. You know, the balance here, people seem to go toward extremes in error. One error is saying that no one can be saved unless they've been baptized.

Well, these guys were saved and they were unbaptized. But the other error is to say baptism is not very important. The fact that Peter said, OK, they're saved, baptize them.

He commanded them to be baptized right then. And this act of baptizing them was the formal introduction of these people into the community of saints, which up to this point had been all Jewish. And there had been hundreds of thousands of Christians, all Jewish.

And this is the first time that Peter even conceived of baptizing into the church, into the

body of Christ, people who are not Jewish and not proselytes. And so we don't have time to go further on this, but the story can be told again here. The story of the angel coming to Cornelius, we heard twice, once from Luke's account, then Cornelius giving the account.

We're going to hear it again in chapter 11. The whole story we're going to hear in detail again in chapter 11. We won't have to comment on everything then.

But obviously, this story is important to Luke that he gives the whole story twice, which seems a little bit superfluous. But this is something that Luke wants us to not miss, that this is a major turning point, having worldwide ramifications. If not for this or something like this happening, something comparable to it happening, the worldwide church would just be Jewish.

And every one of us who wished to become a Christian would have to become a Jew first. And this, we see, remained controversial even up to chapter 15. But we're not going to get there anytime real soon.

We're going to stop there, and we'll take chapter 11 next time.