

CHAPTER 6

The Good News Goes to the Gentiles (Acts 9-11)

In our study of the book of Acts, we have already seen how the good news went to the Jews (Acts 2:5; also see Chapter 1 in these notes). In Chapter 5 of these notes we saw how the good news went to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5,12,14). Now we want to learn about the first time that God's good news of salvation went to the Gentiles.

In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples before He went back to heaven, and He told them **where** He wanted them to be His witnesses: "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be WITNESSES unto Me both..."

1. IN JERUSALEM--the starting point (see Luke 24:49)
2. IN ALL JUDAEA--the home of the JEWS
3. IN SAMARIA--the home of the SAMARITANS
4. UNTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH"--the home of the GENTILES

Acts 1:8

God Worked Miracles Through Peter

The first part of Acts chapter 9 talks about Paul (Saul) and how he was saved. The last part of Acts chapter 9 talks about Peter and how God used Peter in a special way.

What city did Peter visit (Acts 9:32)? _____ Can you find this city on a map? This city was located about 30 miles away from Jerusalem (northwest of Jerusalem). It was not too far from the Mediterranean Sea.

In this city Peter found a man who was a paralytic. This means he was paralyzed and could not move parts of his body. Because of this he was bedridden. How long had he been paralyzed (Acts 9:33)? _____ Have you ever been sick in bed for several days or even for a whole week? How would you like to be in bed for eight years (about 400 weeks)?

On this day a great miracle was performed. Who made this man healthy and whole? Did Peter or did Someone else (Acts 9:34)? _____ When the people living in and around this city saw this man who was healed, did they turn to God or did they turn away from God (Acts 9:35)? _____

This healing was followed by an even greater miracle. It's one thing to be sick or paralyzed, but it's quite another thing to be DEAD!

In the city of Joppa there lived a believer named Dorcas (Acts 9:36). She was a woman who was full

of G_____ W_____ (Acts 9:36), and she did all that she could to help the poor and needy. What did she do for the needy widows (Acts 9:39)?

_____ Dorcas reminds us that we too should "do _____ unto _____ men," especially to believers (Galatians 6:10).

The city of Joppa was only about ten miles from the city of Lydda where Peter was. Joppa was located right on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Many hundreds of years earlier Jonah had gone to this same city to find a ship so that he could flee from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:3).

Dorcas became very sick; then what else happened to her (Acts 9:37)? _____ The believers knew that Peter was close by and so they sent for him and told him to come to Joppa right away. Peter came and went to the upper room where the dead woman was lying. Peter told everyone to leave the room; then what was the first thing Peter did (Acts 9:40)?

_____ God did another amazing miracle through Peter. God raised Dorcas up from the dead, and Peter presented her _____ (Acts 9:41). As a result of this mighty miracle many people _____ in the Lord (Acts 9:41). The same God who gave physical life to Dorcas is the same God who is also able to give eternal life to all those who will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (John 6:47; 5:24).

Peter remained in the city of Joppa with a man whose name was _____ (Acts 9:43). Peter's name was also Simon (Acts 10:5) so we need to be careful not to get the two men confused. Simon Peter stayed at the home of Simon the T _____ (Acts 9:43).

What was a tanner? A tanner was a person who worked with animal skins and hides to make leather. This was a "smelly" business (working with the skins of dead animals). Simon used water in his work, so he lived right by the _____ (Acts 10:6). Most Jews looked down upon people who were tanners because they would handle some animals that the Jews considered to be unclean.

Cornelius the Gentile

Cornelius was a man who lived in the city of Caesarea (Acts 10:1). This city was also located on the Mediterranean Coast north of Joppa. Can you find it on a map? Cornelius was a centurion which means that he was in charge of 100 soldiers.

The most important thing to remember about Cornelius is this: HE WAS A GENTILE. What is a GENTILE?

A GENTILE is a person who is not a Jew. A Jew is a person who can say, "I am a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!" A Gentile cannot say this. Cornelius was not a Jew; he was a Gentile.

The Jews were God's special, chosen people. God had given the Jews wonderful spiritual blessings. God gave them the law of Moses. God made covenants with them. God gave them wonderful promises. God sent His prophets to them. God dwelt in their midst, and even the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, was a Jew (Romans 9:3-5).

The Gentiles did not have these spiritual blessings. In Ephesians 2:12 we are told that the Gentiles

were "without Christ...having no H _____ and without G _____ in the world." In 1 Thessalonians 4:5 they are described as those who do not know _____. Cornelius was not a Jew; he was a Gentile.

But Cornelius was a man who F _____ God (Acts 10:2). He was a man who wanted to know God and please God. He wanted to do good deeds and help the poor and needy. He was a man who prayed to God often. Cornelius was a **God-seeker**. He was not saved, but he was seeking to be saved and he wanted to be saved (see Acts 11:14).

One day at about 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, God sent a message to Cornelius through an angel (Acts 10:3-6). The angel said that Peter would come and tell Cornelius what he should do to be saved. God knew that Peter was going to visit Cornelius even before Peter knew this!

Peter's Rooftop Vision

On the next day Cornelius sent three men to Peter who was still in Joppa. While they were traveling God wanted to teach Peter an important lesson. Before Jesus went back to heaven, He had told His disciples (including Peter) to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to _____ creature" (Mark 16:15, see also Matthew 28:19-20). But at first, the disciples did not preach to everyone. They only preached to Jews (and later preached to the Samaritans). Up to this point they had not really brought God's good news to the Gentiles. How could God help Peter to understand that the gospel message was to go to all men?

At noon time Peter went up to the housetop to pray (Acts 10:9). In the land of Palestine, the housetops were flat and there was a flight of stairs on the outside of the house which led up to the housetop. People would often go to the housetop to rest and relax. Peter went to pray.

Peter became very _____ (Acts 10:10). It was lunch time and he was starved! Suddenly God did an amazing thing. Peter went into a trance and he saw a remarkable vision. He saw a great S _____ (Acts 10:11) and in this sheet were all kinds of animals including beasts, creeping things and birds (Acts 10:12). What did God tell Peter to do (Acts 10:13)?

_____ Was Peter hungry? Did he do what God said? _____ Peter refused to eat any animal that was unclean (Acts 10:14). God did this three times (Acts 10:16) so that Peter would never forget what God was teaching him.

In the law of Moses (see Leviticus chapter 11) there were certain animals which God told the Jews not to eat (these were unclean animals, such as the pig—verse 7). Also, there were certain animals which God told the Jews that they could eat (these were the clean animals, such as sheep). God wanted them to learn to make a difference between what was clean and what was unclean. God wanted them to learn that they were His special people and that He had made them holy and clean (Leviticus 11:44-45). The Gentiles who lived all around the Jews were unholy and unclean, and God did not want the Jews to live as they did (Leviticus 18:3). God wanted them to know that there was a difference between God's people (those who were clean and holy—the Jews) and those who were not God's people (those who were unclean and unholy—the Gentiles).

As soon as Peter had seen this vision, who arrived at Simon the Tanner's house (Acts 10:17)? _____ Peter soon learned that these men were sent by God (Acts 10:14) and that God had told Cornelius to send for Peter (Acts 10:22). Was Peter willing to go and see this Gentile man (Acts 10:23)? _____

Peter Meets Cornelius

Cornelius was not the only one waiting for Peter. He had also invited his relatives and close friends so that they could listen to Peter also.

What did Cornelius do when he first met Peter (Acts 10:25)?

_____ Did Peter want him to do this (Acts 10:26)? _____ Who is the only Person who should be worshipped (Revelation 22:9; Matthew 4:10)? _____ Peter did not want Cornelius to think that he was some great person. Only God should be worshipped, not any person. Peter wanted Cornelius to come to know the Greatest Person of all--Jesus Christ! Usually Jews would have nothing to do with Gentiles. They would not keep company with them and they would not eat with them (see Acts 10:28 and 11:3). But Peter met with this group of Gentiles. Did he learn the lesson that God taught him (Acts 10:28)? _____

Peter had an eager audience. They were all ready to hear God's message from the lips of Peter (Acts 10:33). They wanted to hear about a Great Saviour and a Great Salvation.

Notice the very first thing Peter told them: "Of a truth, I perceive that God is no R_____ of P_____" (Acts 10:34). What does this mean? The expression "**respector of persons**" comes from a Greek word which means "**to receive (someone's) face.**" In other words, it means to act differently towards a person because of his face or his outward appearance or his external **circumstances** (the situations that a person finds himself in that he really cannot help and that he really cannot change). If I am a respector of persons then this means that I make a difference in the way I treat a person because of **outward things** (things that are not the most important) such as the way he looks, the way he dresses, the color of his skin, the country he is from, his family background, his religious background, how rich he is, how popular or famous he is, how powerful he is, and so forth (see James 2:1-9).

God does not reject a person just because he is from a nation other than Israel or just because he is not a Jew. God looks at a person's heart (1 Samuel 16:7), and God could see that Cornelius and those with him were GOD-SEEKERS. They wanted God and God wanted them!

God was teaching Peter that His salvation was to be shared with all men. Notice how well Peter learned this lesson:

1. Does God only accept the Jews who fear Him or does He accept those in *every* nation who fear Him (Acts 10:35)?

2. Is Jesus Christ Lord of only the Jews or is He Lord of all (Acts 10:36; compare Romans 3:29)? _____

3. Who receives forgiveness of sins--only the Jew who believes or "whosoever" believes (Acts 10:43)? _____

The Gentiles Become Part of God's Church

Cornelius and those with him really believed the message which Peter preached. God knew that they believed in their heart, and God did a wonderful thing! He gave them the Holy Spirit and made them part of the body of Christ (Acts 10:44-45; compare 1 Cor. 12:13). Peter spoke of this wonderful event later in Acts 15:7-9. The door of salvation was now open to the Gentiles and they became members of Christ's church:

1. In Acts chapter 2 the Jews became members of the Church.
2. In Acts chapter 8 the Samaritans became members of the Church.
3. In Acts chapter 10 the Gentiles became members of the Church.
4. Today whoever believes in Christ becomes a member of the Church.
5. Are **YOU** a member of the Church? Are **you** saved?

Cornelius found the "God he was seeking! Was he baptized in water (Acts 10:47-48)?

_____ Did Peter stay with these new believers to help them and strengthen them (Acts 10:48)?

Peter's Mission is Questioned by the Jews

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, there were certain Jews who felt that Peter was wrong in preaching God's Word to the Gentiles and eating with them (Acts 11:1-3). But Peter told them the whole story from beginning to end (Acts 11:4-17). When Peter had finished telling them all about Cornelius, they realized that God had done a wonderful thing (Acts 11:18). It wasn't really Peter who had reached out to the Gentiles, it was GOD! God worked in and through Peter.

God's good news is for all people everywhere, regardless of nationality. If you are a PERSON, then who you are, where you are from, or what color skin you have does not matter. God has a message of salvation for you. What if the early believers had refused to go to the Gentiles with the message of salvation? What if they had preached only to Jews? Would the history of the church have been quite different? Think about the local church that you attend. Are most of the people from a Jewish background or from a Gentile background? _____

Are **YOU** thankful that God opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles? _____

Note: Are there any kinds of meat or food which are considered unclean for believers today (1 Tim. 4:3-4; Rom. 14:14)?

A True Example of Love as Demonstrated by the Early Moravian Missionaries

Definition of Love: I desire God's highest and best for the person I love and I am willing to suffer great personal sacrifice in order to make this possible.

Example of Love: The Lord Jesus Christ Himself: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).

The following is written by Robert McCheyne, 1813-1843 [Memoirs of McCheyne by Andrew A. Bonar, Moody Press, 1978 edition, pages 40-41]:

The most striking example of self-devotedness in the cause of Christ of which I ever heard in these days of deadness, was told here last week by an English minister. It has never been printed, and therefore I will relate it to you, just as I heard it, to stir up our cold hearts, that we may give ourselves to the Lord.

The awful disease of leprosy still exists in Africa. Whether it be the same leprosy as that mentioned in the Bible, I do not know, but it is regarded as incurable, and so infectious that no one dares to come near the leper. In the south of Africa there is a large lazarus for lepers. It is an immense space, enclosed by a very high wall, and containing fields, which the lepers cultivate. There is only one entrance, which is strictly guarded. Whenever anyone is found with the marks of leprosy upon him, he is brought to this gate and obliged to enter in, never to return. No one who enters in by that awful gate is ever allowed to come out again.

Within this abode of misery there are multitudes of lepers in all stages of the disease. Dr. Halbeck, a missionary of the Church of England, from the top of a neighboring hill, saw them at work. He noticed two particularly sowing peas in the field: The one had no hands, the other had no feet—these members being wasted away by disease. The one who wanted [lacked] the hands was carrying the other who wanted [lacked] the feet upon his back, and he again carried in his hands the bag of seed, and dropped a pea every now and then, which the other pressed into the ground with his foot; and so they managed the work of one man between the two. Ah! how little we know of the misery that is in the world! Such is this prisonhouse of disease.

But you will ask, who cares for the souls of the hapless inmates? Who will venture to enter in at this dreadful gate, never to return again? Who will forsake father and mother, houses and land, to carry the message of a Saviour to these poor lepers? Two Moravian missionaries, impelled by a divine love for souls, have chosen the lazarus as their field of labor. They entered it never to come out again; and I am told that as soon as these die, other Moravians are quite ready to fill their place. Ah! my dear friends, may we not blush, and be ashamed before God, that we, redeemed with the same blood, and taught by the same Spirit, should yet be so unlike these men in vehement, heart-consuming love to Jesus and the souls of men?

Robert Sumner, editor of The Biblical Evangelist, after reading McCheyne's account, added this note:

I visited a leper colony one time about an hour's drive into the jungle out of Manaus, about 1000 miles up the Amazon. The pastor had been cured and there after a cure you could leave. His wife, however, was a hopeless case and he refused to leave because he wouldn't leave her. That was love, too!