

Acts 10:1- 48 ~ Teacher's Lesson An Italian Pentecost

Introduction: The news recently reported the death of a Muslim physician (Nabeel Qureshi) who had converted to Christ and had become an evangelist and apologist for Christianity. Qureshi said that God found him through “investigations, dreams, and visions.”¹ Today we will read about similar occurrences in Acts 10, as we study a strange case of double vision, a game of Simons Says with eternal consequences, and watch perplexed Peter ponder pigs! All this led to an Italian Pentecost.

One key to understanding the book of Acts concerns Jesus' promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the church to be His witnesses. **Read 1:4-5, 8.**

True to Jesus' promise, the coming of the Spirit happened during the Jewish feast of Pentecost. The unmistakable sign of this coming was that they all supernaturally spoke in foreign languages (tongues). The unbelieving Jewish people saw this. After Peter preached to them, they understood its significance, resulting in the salvation of thousands of people. Peter offered them the same gift of the Holy Spirit. **Read 2:1-6, 38.**

Simon Says

******What did an angel tell Cornelius to do (10:1-8)?** An angel appeared in a vision and instructed Cornelius to send men to bring Peter to his house. It was to be a game of “Simon Says” with eternal consequences!

It is interesting that the angel did not tell Cornelius to go to Peter, but rather to send for him. Neither did the angel simply give Cornelius the Gospel. God predestines the end (salvation) but He also predestines the means (us telling others about Jesus).

Caesarea: Caesarea is about 30 miles up the coast north of Joppa. It was the center of government for the Roman administration of Judea.²

According to 10:1, what did Cornelius do for a living? He was in the Roman army, a centurion of the Italian Cohort. These guys were the real deal, true Romans from Italy!

What was a centurion (10:1)? A centurion was an officer who commanded one hundred men (thus he title; cent, century, centurion).

What was a cohort (10:1)? A cohort was a group of about 600 men.³

1. What did Luke tell us about Cornelius' beliefs (10:2)? *Compare 11:2-3.* By “devout man”, Luke meant that Cornelius was to some degree a Gentile convert to Judaism (though he had

¹ “Dispatches: Human Race, Died”, World Magazine, October 14, 2017, 10.

² Marshall, 194.

³ Johnson, 85.

stopped short of submitting to circumcision, 11:3). He was a man who truly feared God and was known within Judaism for both his generosity and for prayer.

2. Why did Luke mention that it was in the ninth hour that Cornelius saw this vision (10:3)? *See back to 3:1.* The ninth hour was 3 p.m., the set hour of prayer for the Jews back then.⁴ This is yet another evidence of his devotion to Jehovah God.

3. Simon the tanner's house was by the sea (10:6). Why would a tanner want a house by the sea? Why do we need to know that he was by the sea? Tanning involved terrible odors and the wind from the sea would help blow them away (and inland for everyone else to enjoy!). The men looking for the tanner's house had only to follow the aroma in their noses. That he was by the sea made him easy to find.

Spiritual Double Vision

******The next day, back in Jaffa, Peter had his own vision, not once, but three times. What vision did Peter see three times (10:9-16)?** In a trance, he saw a sheet coming down from heaven full of both clean and unclean animals, and he was told to eat both types.

4. What does it matter that Peter was hungry (10:10-13)? The vision itself had to do with food. Peter's hunger heightened the vividness of the vision.

5. Why did Peter not want to eat these animals (10:14)? *See Leviticus 23.* The animals were unclean according to Mosaic Law and therefore not to be eaten. They weren't kosher! Based on Mosaic Law, Peter was right to object. However, the new covenant in Christ changed things significantly. Peter was slowly realizing the Law of Moses was made obsolete and that he was now under the Law of Christ.

Application: Sometimes we put God in a box of our own limitations. Spurgeon said: "Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise may the Lord set you on fire, and consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety."⁵

How did the heavenly voice answer Peter's objection (10:15)? *See Mark 7:18-19.* The voice said not to call unclean that which God had called clean. Though Peter did not have ears to hear it at the time, Jesus had already declared all foods clean:

ESV Mark 7:18-19 . . . Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

6. What insight do New Testament writers offer about religious dietary regulations? *See Romans 14:14, Colossians 2:16-17, 20-22.* The New Testament make it clear that the things of

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, 2103.

⁵ Guzik, accessed October 08, 2017.

Moses were only shadows of the reality we have in Christ. No food is now ceremonially unclean.

ESV **Romans 14:14** . . . nothing is unclean in itself . . .

7. Why was the vision repeated three times (10:16)? Peter was slow to accept the shocking implications of the message, so it was repeated for emphasis and importance. 1,500 years of Mosaic Law had come to an end.

Perplexed Peter Ponders Pigs

******What further instructions did the Spirit have for Peter (10:17-23a)?** As Peter pondered the meaning of the sheet vision, the Spirit told Peter to go with the men because He had sent them.

8. The meaning of the sheet vision was clear enough. What was Peter still pondering (10:17-19)? The surface message of being free to eat unclean foods was obvious; Peter pondered its deeper significance.

Timing: As Peter was sitting there perplexed, there came a shout (!) at the gate from the three men Cornelius has sent. What a “coincidence”! Peter was soon to fathom the vision’s meaning.

9. The Spirit told Peter not to hesitate to go with the men (10:20). Why would he have hesitated otherwise? See *10:28a*. Jews simply did not hang out with Gentiles, in large part because it involved eating their food.

Hospitality: Peter evidently did not mind inviting the Gentiles to be his guests and eat his kosher food, but he normally would not have stayed in their homes and eaten their food.

******10. According to Peter himself, what is the deeper meaning of the vision he had (10:23b-29)?** See *Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11*. This truth about unclean foods now being clean parallels the truth that formally unclean people (non-Jews) are to now be considered clean.

ESV **Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

ESV **Colossians 3:11** . . . there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised . . . but Christ is all, and in all.

Application: There was a time in the South when blacks were expected to go to their own churches and not attend white churches. Our churches should be open to anyone from any ethnic group who believes in Jesus.

Progressive Revelation: It finally dawned on Peter that God wanted him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Throughout history, God revealed truth to His people as they were able to

comprehend and accept it. It was the same with the deity of Christ; only slowly, slowly did they understand who Jesus really was. This is called progressive revelation. The apostles knew that Jesus wanted them to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth (1:8), but they imagined they were only to take it to the *Jews* living in the ends of the earth! For example, Jesus had earlier said:

ESV **Matthew 10:5-6** These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles . . . but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

ESV **Acts 11:19** Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

11. Why did Cornelius fall down and worship Peter (10:25)? Maybe he thought Cornelius was an angel. In any event it shows Cornelius knew Peter's message was from the Lord. Cornelius was primed and ready to hear the good news Peter brought.

12. The three men who came to get Peter had already told him why (10:22b). Since Peter already knew perfectly well why Cornelius sent for him (10:22b), why did ask what they wanted (10:29)? It certainly heightened the dramatic effect! Maybe Peter thought there was some message in addition to the Gospel that God wanted them to hear.

******13. In 10:30-33, how did Cornelius answer Peter's question (10:29)?** He repeated about the angel and asked Peter to declare everything he had been commanded by the Lord to tell people (i.e., the Gospel!). Luke repeated this over and over because it is an important lesson and a pivotal point for the church

******What message had Peter been commanded to preach (10:34-43)?** Jesus commanded Peter to preach that Jesus is the One appointed by God to judge the world and that Jesus is the One predicted by the prophets, and that everyone who believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness of his sins, 10:42-43.

14. According to 10:34-35, what did Peter understand the sheet vision to mean? Peter repeated that he understood loud and clear the message that God accepts anyone who fears Him, regardless of that person's ethnic background. It is hard to believe, but God can even save Italians.

What did Peter mean in 10:36 when he said that Jesus is Lord of all? See 10:42. One thing it means is that Jesus has authority from God the Father to judge all peoples.

ESV **Acts 17:30-31** . . . God . . . commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

15. How could the gospel be summarized from 10:36-43? The gospel is that Jesus, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit by God and given the power to do good and heal the demonized, was put to death via crucifixion. Despite this, God raised Jesus on the third day and He appeared to the apostles, even eating and drinking with them. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins.

Truncated: Luke gave a truncated version of what Peter said. For example, no record was made by Luke of Peter saying anything about the atonement Jesus accomplished on the cross (but he did record about the forgiveness of sins through faith), nor did he mention the deity of Christ. In any event, the essence of the message is here.

A Roman Pentecost

******What happened right in the middle of Peter's sermon (10:44-48)?** As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon his audience. They obviously came to faith as soon as they heard the gospel, and immediately the Spirit was poured out on them.

Application: Even though Cornelius was a man who sought God, prayed and gave alms, he still sinned and needed the salvation that comes only through Jesus. No one is too bad to be saved and no one so good he does not need to be saved.

16. Why were Peter's friends amazed when the Holy Spirit came upon these people (10:45)? They were amazed because the Holy Spirit was poured out "even" (10:45) on Gentiles. They were prejudiced. Even Jewish Christians had a hard time imagining God's favor toward Gentiles.

17. How did the Jews know that these Gentiles had actually received the Holy Spirit (10:46)? See 2:1-6. Just as the Jews had done at Pentecost, the Romans were speaking in tongues and extolling God. God caused these believing Gentiles to have the same experience as the believing Jews. This was to show that God considered them to be equal in Christ (there is neither Jew nor Gentile).

Purpose of Tongues: One purpose of tongues with the Jews at Pentecost and now here with the Gentiles of Caesarea was as a sign to demonstrate the reality of the coming of the Spirit in fulfillment of Jesus' promise. With Cornelius, it was God's way to demonstrate beyond doubt to the Jews that God had accepted the Gentiles as genuine card-carrying members of the New Covenant.

Was it necessary for Peter to lay hands on the Gentiles before they could speak in tongues (10:44)? The Gentiles spoke in tongues without any laying hands on them. The same was true for the believing Jews at Pentecost.

Application: Some Charismatics wrongly claim that the reason all Christians do not speak in tongues is because no one with the gift has laid hands on them yet.

18. Is it normative that every Christian who has received the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues? Why? See 1 Corinthians 12:30, 14:5 (compared to 7:7 & 12:30). This is only the second time in Acts that someone has spoken in tongues. The purpose of the Italian Pentecost was to convince the Christian Jews that God had accepted the Gentiles as equal members of the new covenant community. By no means does the book of Acts even come close to recording that everyone who received the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues.

The only other book in the New Testament that mentions speaking in tongues is 1 Corinthians. Whereas Acts is historical record, Corinthians is direct, intentional instruction. It is clear from Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians that tongues is indeed a gift of the Holy Spirit but it is also clear that not everyone has been given this gift (12:30).

ESV 1 Corinthians 12:30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Paul wrote that he wished they all could speak in tongues (14:5):

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:5 Now I want (*thelo*) you all to speak in tongues . . .

However, he knew not everyone would have this gift. Similarly, he earlier wrote that he wished they all had the gift of singleness, even though he recognized that not everyone has this gift either (7:7):

ESV 1 Corinthians 7:7 I wish (*thelo*) that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

What question did Peter ask the circumcised believers in 10:47? He asked who could refuse them baptism.

What answer did Peter expect to his question (10:47)?

19. What reason did Peter give for baptizing these people (10:47)? The Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jews had earlier.

What did Peter command the Gentile believers to do in 10:48? He commanded them to be water baptized.

Application: Scripture commands that believers be baptized. It is the first act of obedience a new believer takes. There is something about water baptism that shames the devil and gives glory to God.

What does it mean to be baptized in the "name" of Jesus (10:48)? It signifies the full revelation of all Jesus did and taught. Being baptized in Jesus' "name" means the person is completely identified with Jesus.⁶

So What?

⁶ Kistemaker, 401.

20. What truths about God's involvement in salvation does Cornelius' conversion illustrate? God prepared both Cornelius and Peter for their evangelistic encounter. When we witness, we are not alone. God is working behind the scenes in the lives of the elect to bring them to faith. Don't be discouraged in your evangelism!

21. What application might Acts 10 hold with regard to who we include in our witnessing efforts? We should never place anyone beyond the reach of being saved. You never know who the elect are. There are elect among ISIS soldiers, in the highest ranks of the communist party in China, among Hindu radicals who persecute believers, in the Mafia, and even in your neighborhood, school, or work place.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
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