

# ACTS CHAPTER 10

## CORNELIUS, PETER, AND THE CONVERSION OF GENTILES

### A. God speaks to Cornelius about Peter.

#### 1. (Acts 10:1-2) Cornelius, a Gentile who served God.

**There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.**

a. **A certain man in Caesarea:** Caesarea was a predominately Roman city on the shores of the Mediterranean in Judea. It was the headquarters of the Roman governor of the province of Judea.

Archaeologists have discovered a stone from a building in Caesarea inscribed with the name *Pontus Pilate*.

b. **Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment:**

Cornelius was an officer in the Roman Army. A patriotic Jew of that day would naturally dislike or even hate him.

i. “Thirty-two such Italian cohorts were stationed in the different provinces of the empire. They were made up of Italian volunteers and were considered the most loyal Roman troops.” Because he

was such a loyal servant of the oppressors of Israel, most every patriotic Jewish person of that day would naturally be prejudiced against Cornelius.

c. **A devout man and one who feared God**: Yet, Cornelius was **a devout man**; a man **who feared God**, who **prayed to God always** and who **gave alms generously** to those who were in need.

i. “As a typical Roman he had been exposed to the Roman gods — Jupiter, Augustus, Mars, Venus, etc. — but found they had been exposed to the enlightened concepts of Judaism and had become devoutly monotheistic.”

ii. Cornelius was in the category of what the Jews called *God-fearers* (**one who feared God**). These were Gentiles who loved the God of Israel; they were sympathetic to and supportive of the Jewish faith. Yet they stopped short of becoming full Jews in lifestyle and in circumcision.

iii. Jewish people of that time respected and appreciated these God-fearing Gentiles, but they could not really share their life and homes and food with them, because they were still in fact Gentiles and not full Jewish converts.

d. **And prayed to God always:** Because of the way the life and heart of Cornelius is described, we see a man who obviously had a real relationship with God. At the same time, he was not a part of the mainstream of Jewish life.

## 2. (Acts 10:3-6) God sends an angel to tell Cornelius to get Peter.

**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 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.”**

a. **About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision:** We are not told specifically here that Cornelius was praying, but it was the **ninth hour** (3:00 in the afternoon). This was a customary time of prayer for Jews. Also, as Cornelius related the incident to Peter in Acts 10:30, he specifically said he was praying (*at the ninth hour I prayed in my house*).

b. **He saw clearly in a vision an angel of God:** This was not a dream, nor did an angel physically appear to Cornelius. This was **a vision** that came in the “mind’s eye” of Cornelius. At the same time, it was so vivid that Cornelius would later say, *a man stood beside me in bright clothing* (Acts 10:30).

c. **Cornelius!** It is significant that God spoke to Cornelius directly, even calling him by name. It is also significant that Cornelius responded with a healthy fear of the heavenly and holy (**he was afraid**). This shows that Cornelius had a real relationship with God.

d. **Send for Simon whose surname is Peter:** Probably, Cornelius didn’t even know who Peter was. But he knew that he should do what God told him to do, and he could trust that God was speaking to this one named **Peter** also (**He will tell you what you must do**).

e. **He will tell you what you must do:** God sent an angel in a vision to Cornelius, but He used a *man* to preach the gospel to him.

i. “Angels may help to connect men with God’s appointed preachers, they are never allowed to do more.”

**3. (Acts 10:7-8) Cornelius obeys God’s command and sends for Peter.**

**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.**

- a. **Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier:** Apparently, the faith of Cornelius was contagious and there were those of his **household** and under his command who also honored the God of Israel.

## **B. Peter's vision of the great sheet.**

### **1. (Acts 10:9-10) Peter on Simon the Tanner's housetop.**

**The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.**

- a. **As they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray:** As God spoke to Cornelius, and as Cornelius sent the messengers to call Peter, God also spoke to Peter himself.

i. Typically, this is how God operates. He speaks to several people about a matter, not just one. Then confirmation is provided, and out of the mouth of two or three witnesses a word is established.

ii. “Two men are thirty miles apart. They must be brought together. In order that they may meet, while Joppa is busy with its trade, and Caesarea with its great shipping interests, and will know nothing of what is going on; God within the shadows keeping watch above His own, sends the angel to Caesarea, and grants the ecstatic trance in Joppa. They were thus brought together.”

b. **Peter went up on the housetop to pray**: In that culture, the **housetop** was normally used as a sort of patio. There was nothing strange about Peter going **up on the housetop to pray**.

c. **Then he became very hungry**: This often happens during prayer; distractions in our body come as we try to direct ourselves to God. However, God used these very distractions to speak to Peter, as **he fell into a trance**.

## 2. (Acts 10:11-16) Peter's vision.

**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 have 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.” This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

a. **All kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air:** Peter saw all sorts of kosher and non-kosher animals prominently displayed on a sheet-like background (**a great sheet bound at the four corners**). Then, Peter heard a command: **Rise, Peter, kill and eat.**

i. When Peter *became very hungry and wanted to eat* during prayer, he no doubt regarded it as a distraction. Yet, God used it by speaking to him through a vision regarding food. His hunger perhaps made him pay more attention!

b. **A voice came to him:** We don’t know exactly what this was like for Peter. It is rare for God to speak in an audible voice. More often, God speaks to our inner man. As a vision can be “seen” by the “mind’s eye,” even so we can “hear” the voice of God with the “mind’s ear.”

i. “God does not need sound waves to fall on an ear drum to speak to a man. When it pleases him to do so, he can speak directly to one’s mind where all sound waves are finally interpreted.”

c. **Rise, Peter, kill and eat:** This obviously went against Peter’s commitment as a Jew, which was to never eat anything except kosher foods. Certainly, among the **all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air** there were non-kosher animals included.

d. **Not so, Lord!** Peter’s response was both absurd and yet typical of us. He said “no” to his **Lord**. The only legitimate answer to a request from our **Lord** is “yes.”

i. Peter had a bad habit of telling Jesus “no” ([Matthew 16:22](#), [John 13:8](#)). Compare Peter’s response to God (**Not so, Lord!**) with Cornelius’ response to God (*What is it, Lord?*). On that day, it seemed that Cornelius was more responsive to God than Peter was.

ii. Peter had pretty much put God in a box of limitations, and now God was going to shake Peter up to change his thinking. He can do the same for us. “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.” (Spurgeon)

iii. Peter was saved, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and Peter had been greatly used by God. At the same time, Peter was still Peter. God didn't use him because he was perfect, but because he was in the right direction and he was available. We often fall into the trap of thinking that we must be perfected until God can really use us.

e. **And a voice spoke to him again the second time:** God responded clearly to Peter. **What God has cleansed** (declared clean) **you must not call common** (impure, unholy, unacceptable to God).

i. In Old Testament thinking, there was the *holy* and the **common**. The *holy* was made **common** when it came into contact with something common and could only be made *holy* again through a ritual cleansing. When something was made holy it was

called *consecration*; when it was made common it was called *deseccration*.

ii. At this point, Peter believed that God spoke only about food. But shortly, God showed Peter that He was really getting at another point.

f. **This was done three times**: For deep emphasis, God repeated this vision three times. Peter was to regard this as important.

i. “By the time the drama had been acted out the third time, Peter must have begun to get the idea that God was trying to tell him something, even though he did not know exactly what it was.”

(Boice)

**3. (Acts 10:17-20) God makes Peter aware of the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius.**

**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 for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking**

**you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.”**

a. **Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision**

**which he had seen meant:** When the vision ended, Peter did not have it all figured out. That came in time, and it came as God spoke to Peter through the visitors just arriving at his door.

b. **The Spirit said to him:** Previously, in [Acts 10:13](#) and [10:15](#), it was simply said that a *voice* spoke to Peter. Now, we are told that **the Spirit** spoke to Peter. This was God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, speaking to Peter.

c. **Three men are seeking you...go down and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them:** At this point, God *has not* told Peter that his visitors were Gentiles. Normally, a godly Jew like Peter would not associate in this manner with Gentiles. Knowing this, and knowing Peter’s previous resistance (*Not so, Lord!*), God simply surprised Peter with the knowledge that these men were Gentiles. All Peter needed to know was that the Spirit said, **“I have sent them.”**

**4. (Acts 10:21-23) Peter goes with the messengers back to Caesarea to see Cornelius.**

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*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

a. **Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius:** Peter must have been shocked when he opened the door and saw two servants and a soldier ([Acts 10:7](#)) at his door. He would have known immediately that they were not Jews, and he would have wondered why God told him to go with them and why God had sent them.

i. The idea that God could send and use Gentiles was entirely new to Peter. God was expanding Peter’s mind and heart.

b. **To summon you to his house, and to hear words from you:** The messengers from Cornelius came with an invitation. Peter was to go to the house of Cornelius, who wanted **to hear words from you**. Of course, this was an invitation Peter couldn’t pass up — or could he?

i. A Gentile — worse yet, an officer in the Roman army — wanted to hear the gospel from Peter. Peter never did anything like this before! How will he respond?

c. **Then he invited them in and lodged them:** We can see the change in Peter's heart by the way **he invited them in and lodged them. Lodged them** is literally "to entertain as a guest." Peter didn't just coldly give these Gentiles visitors a room; he entertained them as welcomed guests, and he did this against every custom of the Jewish people of that day.

i. "Normally a Jew would have said, 'Well, it is nice to meet you, but we need to stay out here in the street. You can't come inside.' Or he might have said, 'If you go down the street a little way, I think you'll find an inn where you can stay.' No orthodox Jew would have invited Gentiles into his house. He would not have sat down at the same table with them. He would not have had fellowship with them. It was forbidden."

ii. By entertaining these Gentile guests, Peter went against the customs and traditions of Israel, but not against God's Word. Possibly, at this very moment, God flooded Peter's heart with an

understanding that though the Old Testament said God's people were not to become like their pagan neighbors, it also said God wanted His people to become a light to their neighbors who didn't know the true God.

iii. "I think angels watched that house that night, with the despised tanner a fellow-disciple, the great apostle, the three Gentiles as they lodged there." (Boice)

d. **On the next day Peter went away with them:** Peter reached out in love to his Gentile neighbors, in obedience to what God told him to do.

i. **Some brethren from Joppa accompanied him:** "I suppose he anticipated what was to happen and the misunderstanding and opposition that would result, and he judged that whatever God was leading him into it would be good to have some of the other Jews along to verify the outcome." (Boice)

ii. "Centuries ago another Jew had come to Joppa with a solemn message from his God, which he was commissioned to bear far hence to the Gentiles. Jonah, the prophet, took a ship from Joppa and refused obedience to the divine call."

iii. Jonah ran from God's call, thinking he could get away from the Lord, and he did not share God's heart for the lost. Peter was willing to re-examine his traditions and prejudices in light of God's word, and he shared God's heart for a lost world. Some are more like Peter, some more like Jonah.

## C. The meeting between Cornelius and Peter.

### 1. (Acts 10:24-26) Peter comes to Cornelius' house.

**And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."**

a. **Cornelius was waiting for them:** Cornelius had a lot of faith in God. He waited for Peter to come, knowing that since God motivated him to call Peter in the first place, God would bring the plan to completion.

i. Cornelius sent servants to get a man he had never met, so that he could meet this unknown man. He only knew that the man was a pious Jew, who by tradition would have nothing to do with a Gentile

such as Cornelius. Despite all that, **Cornelius was waiting for them** in faith.

b. **Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped**

**him**: Cornelius didn't know Peter but must have thought him to be a special man of God, so he **fell down at his feet and worshipped**

**him**. This reaction was understandable, though wrong. Peter

corrected Cornelius by saying, **“Stand up; I myself am also a**

**man.”** If Cornelius should not give such reverence to Peter, neither should Peter receive it.

i. Significantly, whenever in the Bible worship is offered to men or to angels (as in [Revelation 19:10](#)), it is refused. But Jesus received such worship freely ([Matthew 8:2](#); [9:18](#); [14:33](#); [15:25](#); [28:9](#)). This proves that Jesus is more than a man, and greater than any angel ([Luke 4:8](#)).

ii. In the great St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, there is a huge statue of Peter, where people come and kiss the toe of the statue. This is undue and inappropriate reverence towards any man or angel. We might almost wish that Peter would visit the cathedral named after him and kindly correct such people.



iii. Peter and Cornelius honored each other. Peter honored Cornelius by coming all the way from Joppa to see him. Cornelius honored Peter by bowing low before him. They did just as Paul would later write, *in honor giving preference to one another* (Romans 12:10).

iv. “Peter refused both to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog.”

## 2. (Acts 10:27-29) Entering Cornelius’ house, Peter explains why he came.

**And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore, I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?”**

a. **He went in:** This is one of the shortest, yet most important passages of this section. Peter actually entered the house of a Gentile, something that Jewish customs and traditions strictly prohibited. By entering a Gentile’s home, Peter showed that his heart

and mind had changed, and that he had learned the lesson of the vision of the great sheet.

i. “The principle subject of this chapter is not so much the conversion of Cornelius as the conversion of Peter.”

b. **Then he said to them:** Peter had to explain why he, a godly Jew (who was also a Christian) had entered a Gentile’s house. So, he explained the message he received in the vision, realizing that God wasn’t only (or even primarily) talking about food in the vision (**I should not call any man common or unclean**).

i. In saying **“I should not call any man common or unclean,”** Peter understood that the vision was about people, not food. But the principle still relates to food. We understand believers are not under any obligation to keep a kosher diet. How we eat may be better or worse from a health perspective, but it doesn’t make us any more right with God.

ii. Jesus spoke of this principle: *Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?* (Mark 7:18-19).

iii. Paul knew this principle: *I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself* (Romans 14:14).

Therefore he could conclude, *Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink...which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ* (Colossians 2:16-17).

iv. Yet the connection between unclean persons and unclean foods was important. The idea of unkosher *food* was closely connected to the idea of unkosher *people*. “It was largely because of their lack of scruples in food matters that Gentiles were ritually unsafe people for a pious Jew to meet socially.”

c. **Therefore I came**: This confirmed it. If Peter had not received this vision, he would have never traveled with these Gentile messengers. God had to prepare Peter’s heart with the vision before Peter would come.

### 3. (Acts 10:30-33) Cornelius explains why he sent for Peter.

**So 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, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to 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 commanded you by God.”**

a. **I prayed in my house:** Undoubtedly, Cornelius prayed either generally to draw closer to God, or specifically that God would send the Messiah. God would answer this prayer through the gospel Peter brought to Cornelius.

b. **I was fasting:** The *intensity* of his prayer was evident. He sought after God so intensely that for a time, food became less important. He sought God diligently and God revealed Himself to Cornelius.

c. **Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms are remembered in the sight of God:** It is interesting to note that though Cornelius was not a Christian in the sense that he was not yet regenerated or born again, yet in this case God **heard** his prayers and **remembered** his generosity to others.

d. **Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God:** Peter was living a preacher’s dream. His audience was attentive and well-prepared by the Holy Spirit.

i. The message Peter was about to preach had great *preparation*.

Peter was prepared by the Holy Spirit, and those at Cornelius' house were prepared to hear the message Peter brought. Our blessing is greatly increased when we prepare ourselves to hear the word of God.

ii. "When you go to church, do you want to receive a good message? If so, the best way is to come with a prepared heart. I know that the preacher must be prepared too. But when God prepares the messenger as well as those who are to hear him, then tremendous things happen."

#### **4. (Acts 10:34-43) Peter's short sermon to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house.**

**Then 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. The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ; He is Lord of all; that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 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. And we are witnesses of all 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 the 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, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be 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.”

a. **In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality:** This is the foundation for Peter’s understanding that the gospel should now go forth to Gentiles. This statement goes completely against the prevailing Jewish thought at that time that God certainly did show partiality, towards the Jews and against the Gentiles. In essence, many Jews of Peter’s day thought that God loved the Jews while hating the Gentiles.

i. According to William Barclay, it was common for a Jewish man to begin the day with a prayer thanking God that he was not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. A basic part of the Jewish religion in the days

of the New Testament was an oath that promised that one would never help a Gentile under any circumstances, such as giving directions if they were asked. But it went even as far as refusing to help a Gentile woman at the time of her greatest need — when she was giving birth — because the result would only be to bring another Gentile into the world.

ii. If a Jew married a Gentile, the Jewish community would have a funeral for the Jew and consider them dead. It was thought that to even enter the house of a Gentile made a Jew unclean before God. Ancient Jewish writings tell us of a Gentile woman who came to a rabbi. She confessed that she was a sinner and asked to be admitted to the Jewish faith. “Rabbi,” she said, “bring me near.” The Rabbi refused and simply shut the door in her face.

iii. But the Gentiles could give as bad as they got from the Jews. Gentiles despised Jews as weird traditionalists and believed that they were evil plotters who worshipped pigs. After all, they thought, Jews refused to eat pork, so they must worship pigs!

iv. All of this changed with the spread of the gospel. Christianity was the first religion to disregard racial, cultural and national limitations.

v. When the Jews showed this kind of partiality they were not being faithful to God's heart as revealed in the Old Testament. The idea that God shows no partiality is also stated in [Deuteronomy 10:17](#) and [2 Chronicles 19:7](#): *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe* ([Deuteronomy 10:17](#)).

b. **But in every nation whoever fears Him and works**

**righteousness is accepted by Him:** Peter's point was not to imply that men like Cornelius were already right with God and don't need to become Christians. Instead, the point is that they need not feel excluded from God because of their national background.

i. We often think God sees color; He only sees the heart. God does not see economic status; He only sees the heart. He doesn't see nationality or ethnic group; He only sees the heart.

c. **He is Lord of all:** This is a powerful phrase, showing the deity of Jesus. Peter could never say this if Jesus were not (and is not) God. Furthermore, **He is Lord of all** — meaning both Jew and Gentile.

d. **Whom they killed by hanging on a tree...Him God raised up on the third day:** Notably, Peter's preaching to the Gentiles was essentially the same as his preaching to the Jews. He presented the



person and work of Jesus Christ, with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus and our responsibility before God in light of these things.

i. Peter didn't have one sermon for one group and another sermon for another. *All* people needed to be saved by coming to a living faith in a living Jesus Christ.

ii. Peter's sermon was a wonderful (if brief and perhaps condensed by Luke) explanation of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth:

- Jesus was baptized in identification with humanity.
- Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power.
- Jesus went about doing good and healing, delivering those oppressed by the devil.
- Jesus did this with the power of God, for God was with Him.
- Jesus did these things in the presence of eyewitnesses.
- Jesus was crucified.
- Jesus was raised from the dead, resurrected in view of many witnesses.

- Jesus commanded His followers to preach the message of who He is and what He did.
- Jesus is ordained by God to be Judge of the entire world.
- Jesus is the one foretold by the prophets.

iii. **Even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from**

**the dead:** “Peter stresses eating and drinking with Christ because that is a way of saying that Christ’s was a real resurrection.”

iv. **He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify**

**that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living**

**and the dead:** “The apostle was not long in his address before he came to the doctrine of the judgment of all men by Jesus Christ. He says that he was commanded to preach it, and therefore he did preach it.”

e. **Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins:** The brief sermon concluded with an understanding of the *broadness* of God’s promise of salvation. Note it carefully: **Whoever believes!** Jew or Gentile; slave or free; white or black; good or wicked; rich or poor — **whoever believes.**

**5. (Acts 10:44-48) God-fearing Gentiles are filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized.**

**While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed 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, 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 a few days.**

a. **While Peter was still speaking these words:** Salvation came when each one of these Gentiles responded to Peter’s message with believing faith in their hearts, so that they were actually born again as they listened and believed. “Oh that the Spirit of God would in the same manner interrupt us!”

i. While listening to Peter, these people made a *secret* and *invisible* transaction in their hearts with God, by setting their faith in Jesus Christ.

ii. The moment of a person's salvation isn't necessarily when they raise a hand or come forward at an evangelistic invitation. It is more likely at the moment they surrender to God and embrace with trust Jesus in the sincerity of their hearts.

iii. Peter allowed the Holy Spirit to interrupt his sermon. The Holy Spirit was doing the greater work in the hearts of those listening, and Peter went with the flow. He stopped and called for their baptism.

iv. These were likely not the first Gentiles to trust in Jesus and be born again. Gentiles had probably received salvation in the eight years since Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)). But those Gentiles were saved as they embraced Judaism as well as Christianity. Gentiles may have received salvation before this, but they were saved as Jews, not as Gentiles.

v. All before this, a Gentile could certainly trust in Jesus as Messiah and receive the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won for them at the cross. Yet in doing so, he would first have to become a Jew — and then continue on in the Jewish ritual law. They would wear certain coverings for their head in church, they would eat only kosher foods,

they would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the feasts, and they would observe dozens of ceremonial laws and rituals.

b. **The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word... they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God:** Their filling with the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the demonstration of spiritual gifts. This was a filling with the Holy Spirit in two senses: First, in the sense that He indwells and abides in every believer; second, in the sense of a special empowering with gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit.

i. When they spoke with tongues, it was to **magnify God**, not to teach men. The audience was God, not man, as is consistent with the principle of [1 Corinthians 14:2](#).

ii. This was unique. It was not common in the Book of Acts or in subsequent Christian experience for those who were not previously converted (born again) to instantly be born again and receive such evident spiritual gifts. Yet it was good and even necessary on this occasion, to show that they received *the exact same Spirit, the exact same blessing* as the apostles and first followers of Jesus did on the morning of Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)).

iii. “The Gentiles are brought into an exactly parallel position, not merely with normal Jews (or even Samaritans) who had believed on Jesus, but with the apostles themselves.”

c. **Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished:** The Jewish Christians present were amazed. They may have understood that God was now starting to love the Gentiles, but who would have thought God would fill Gentiles with the Holy Spirit in the same manner and degree as the Jews?

i. Peter made the point clearly when he noted that they **received the Holy Spirit just as we have**. It wasn't just that God loved or blessed the Gentiles that **astonished** them. It was that God loved and blessed the Gentiles just as He loved and blessed the Jews, and He did it *while they were still Gentiles*.

d. **He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord:** This showed their full acceptance into the community of those who followed Jesus. Their baptism showed they were accepted as Gentile followers of Jesus.

i. This entrance of Gentiles into the church was not a new plan, but something promised long before. The Old Testament looked for the day when a light would shine in the darkness of the Gentile

world: *Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* (Isaiah 60:1-3)

ii. God promised Abraham and his descendants that the blessing that came through him would extend to all nations (Genesis 12:1-4). Here, we see Jesus — the greatest blessing from Abraham — extended to the nations.

iii. Remember Jesus' promise of *other sheep, not of this fold* in John 10:16. Jesus also promised, *if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself* (John 12:32).

iv. The first Gentile Jesus dealt with in His public ministry was a Roman centurion from Capernaum. When Jesus healed that centurion's servant, He declared *that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 8:5-13).

v. We should also see that Cornelius was an undoubtedly good man; yet he needed Jesus. Even good people, who are respectful

towards God, still need to come to Jesus as their Lord and Savior and put all their trust in who Jesus is and what He did for them.