

# The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

*Vance Havner*

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Text

Acts 10:1-23

Topic

Peter is prepared for his visit to the Gentile household of Cornelius by being invited three times to eat animals that were unclean to him as a Jew

Title

*Peter, Peter, Unclean Eater*

**Acts 10:1** There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

**Acts 10:2** a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

**Acts 10:3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

**Acts 10:4** 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.

**Acts 10:5** Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.

**Acts 10:6** He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

**Acts 10:7** 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.

**Acts 10:8** So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

**Acts 10:9** 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.

**Acts 10:10** Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance

Acts 10:11 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.

Acts 10:12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

Acts 10:13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

Acts 10:15 And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."

Acts 10:16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Acts 10:17 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 for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.

Acts 10:18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

Acts 10:19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

Acts 10:20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

Acts 10:21 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?"

Acts 10:22 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."

Acts 10:23 Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

## Introduction

Hebrew National might as well go out of business.

Founded in 1905 by a Jewish Romanian immigrant butcher, they produce kosher foods. In Hebrew the term kashér means *fit*. Kashér (or kosher) foods are those 'fit' for consumption by Jews according to the strict dietary laws of the Old Testament.

Hebrew National's famous slogan is, *We answer to a higher authority.*

Well, when you read in verse fifteen, **what God has cleansed you must not call common**, it is a declaration from that same Higher

Authority that there are no longer *any* dietary laws in effect. **All foods are certified kosher by God and therefore fit to consume.**

You might still want to buy Hebrew National products because of their quality . Just know that the dietary laws were never about which foods were healthier for you. They were about restricting your diet as a Jew to show that you were separate from all the other nations of the earth. You were chosen; everyone else was **common**. The foods you refused were merely a sign to the Gentiles of God's favor upon you.

God declared nothing is **common**! It goes way beyond food. He meant that there is no longer a spiritual separation between Jews and Gentiles. **Anyone can be added to His Church regardless of their earthly ethnicity.**

The importance of Peter's visit to Cornelius cannot be overstated. That's why so much space is given to it in the Book of Acts. All of chapter ten is devoted to it; the first eighteen verses of chapter eleven revisit it; the rest of the book is influenced by it; world history has been shaped by it.

Without in any way detracting from this monumental event, I also want to highlight its practical, day-to-day implications for us as believers living under its influence.

If we reduce the story to its simplest form and look for the heart of God in it two things emerge:

1. God heard a sinner who was seeking Him.
2. God prepared a saint to send for Him.

I'll therefore organize my thoughts around two points: #1 If You Are A Sinner Seeking The Lord He Will Send Someone To You, and #2 If You Are A Saint Sensitive To The Lord He Can Send You To Everyone.

#1 If You Are A Sinner Seeking The Lord  
He Will Send Someone To You  
(10:1-8)

It's hard for us to understand the earth-shaking events of this visit to Cornelius. It answers a question we never asked, *Can Gentiles be saved?* Up until this point, some ten years into the Church Age, the believers were mostly born-again Jews. There was a general understanding, left-over from Judaism, that Gentiles must convert to becoming Jews before they could be saved. Jews still had few dealings with Gentiles. They didn't eat with them or lodge with them. These events we are reading about are truly monumental.

**Acts 10:1** There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

Each Roman legion was made up of ten cohorts of six-hundred men. Each cohort was made up of six centuries of one-hundred men. Each century was commanded by a **centurion**. Think Master Sergeant and you'll get the idea.

Soldiers, and sailors for that matter, like to promote their own identity within their ranks. The squadrons at LNAS all have nicknames and mascots. Cornelius' men were the **Italian Regiment**. In an army that was comprised of men from all over the vast Roman Empire these guys were proud of their Italian roots. Their mascot, unearthed by archaeologists, was a cup of espresso encircled by flames. (Not!).

**Acts 10:2** a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Though his heart was seeking God, Cornelius was not saved. We know he was not saved because of what we read in chapter eleven:

**Acts 11:14** [Peter] will tell you words by which you and all your household **will be saved.**'

Cornelius was an unsaved sinner sincerely seeking after God. There are some theologies that would tell you it is impossible for a sinner to seek after God. Who are you going to believe – theologians or the Holy Spirit's inspired words?

**Acts 10:3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

**Acts 10:4** 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.

Often I've heard people say that God does not hear the prayers of nonbelievers. **Apparently He does hear them!**

God is interested in the heart. When He 'hears' a heart seeking after Him He acts to reveal Himself more-and-more to that person. Cornelius is an example of a man who lived up to the knowledge which God gave him. While this knowledge was not sufficient to save him, God insured that he would be given the additional knowledge of the Gospel.

God has given everyone on earth a conscience within them and creation around them. It is not enough to save them. But if a sinner will respond to them God will hear from Heaven and give them the additional knowledge they need to be saved.

**Acts 10:5** Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.

**Acts 10:6** He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

It's an obvious observation but we note that God knew the exact whereabouts of Simon Peter. God knows where you are. He can just as easily recommend you to seekers.

**Acts 10:7** 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.

**Acts 10:8** So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius immediately acted on the information he had received. God would thus draw closer and closer to him.

God is not willing that any should perish. If a sinner will seek after Him, He will see to it he or she receives more-and-more information. I can't explain how it all works, all over the globe, in every tribe and tongue. But I see it illustrated clearly and powerfully here in the story

of Cornelius. Yes, this was a pivotal moment in spiritual history. But it also reveals the heart of God towards every seeker.

**We might say that God is seeker-sensitive!** Not in the sense we use the term today – of those who water-down the Gospel so as to not offend anyone. God seeks them to reveal Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and raised from the dead on their behalf.

If your system of theology leads you to suppose or propose that God cannot be sought after, or that He does not hear the sinner, then abandon it and remain biblical.

## #2 If You Are A Saint Sensitive To The Lord He Can Send You To Everyone ( 9:43 & 10:9-23)

We left Peter in Joppa. The last verse of chapter nine reads,

**Acts 9:43** So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Simon the tanner was a born-again Jew. Still it was a big deal that Peter stayed with him. Since tanners worked with hides and came into contact with carcasses and blood they were considered ceremonially unclean by Jewish law. You would be considered unclean by your proximity to them. By 'unclean' we mean you would not be permitted to participate in ceremonies and sacrifices.

Peter was willing to stay with the tanner. He was no longer bound-up by Jewish ritual law. Or was he?

**Acts 10:9** 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.

**Acts 10:10** Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance

**Trance** is a word that has too many occult connotations for us. It's from the Greek word for *ecstasy* – not the drug, either! Suffice it to say that Peter was in a heightened spiritual state as he battled hunger and sought to keep his mind fixed upon the Lord.

**Acts 10:11** 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.

**Acts 10:12** In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

The significance of this, as we'll see in a moment, is the mixture of animals. They were of the kind both *permitted* and *prohibited* by Old Testament dietary laws.

In passing I want to emphasize that there is nothing spiritual about particular foods. You can eat anything you want!

**Acts 10:13** And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

**Acts 10:14** But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

Never in his life had Peter eaten forbidden foods. When served to him, even by God in a vision, he refused even to handle them.

It's been correctly pointed out that it is a contradiction to say, **Not so, Lord!** You can say, *Not so!* But as soon as you say *Lord* you are submitting to His every command.

**Acts 10:15** And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."

Remember: The Jew thought in terms of chosen versus **common**. They were chosen by God. Everyone else was not – everyone else was **common**. Their restricted diet was never about health and fitness. It was about separation. It was a way of promoting the understanding they were chosen and Gentiles were **common**.

**Acts 10:16** This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Why three times? If you were Peter it would seem strangely familiar:

1. He had denied the Lord three times once before! Now here he was saying **Not so, Lord!** three times.
2. After the resurrection, Jesus met with Peter and three times asked him if he loved Him.

These triplets of denial followed by restoration were a romantic reminder to Peter of the Lord's love for Him.

**Acts 10:17** 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 for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.

Did God mean for Peter to open up a non-Kosher deli? The full ramifications of the vision were not yet clear. The knock on the gate below would begin to clear things up.

A Roman soldier and two servants were at the gate. If Simon the tanner or his wife answered the gate they would have been freaked-out! It's never good news if the authorities are at your house unannounced.

**Acts 10:18** And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

**Acts 10:19** While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

**Acts 10:20** Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

*God has great timing!* We accuse Him of being late when He is always right on time.

God still speaks to you. The Holy Spirit indwells you and can impress upon you and influence you God's directives and direction.

- being changed to bring change -

**Acts 10:21** 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?"

**Acts 10:22** 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."

It was starting to come together for Peter. The vision obviously had something to do with the visit from these Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles had no social dealings; but here were three men who would need food and lodging. And if Peter was to go with them the next day it meant he, a chosen Jew, would need to enter the house of a **common** Gentile.



**Acts 10:23** Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

It was huge that they all sat down together. Any Star Trek fans here? It would have been like the uncomfortable dinner between the Star Fleet officers and the Klingon's in *The Undiscovered Country*.

Looking ahead we know that God is going to save Cornelius and his household. When He does the vision fully comes together for Peter. It goes far beyond anything he might have thought or imagined:

1. The sheet represented the Church.
2. The clean animals were the chosen Jews, previously under the Law.
3. The unclean animals were the common Gentiles, previously excluded by the Law.
4. All of them were now equal and chosen.
5. All were in the Church and would be taken to Heaven when Jesus returned.

Monumental. Pivotal. Historic. This little bed-and-breakfast at Simon the tanner's house, and then the visit to Cornelius' house, would forever alter the course of the world.

At its heart is God's heart. We've already seen God is seeker-sensitive. Those who are seeking Him need someone sent to them. That someone cannot be an angel; it must be a man or a woman.

It can be **you!** It *will* be you if you observe two very simple things:

1. First we saw both Cornelius and Peter regularly practicing spiritual disciplines. Cornelius gave generously and prayed often. Peter was in Joppa also in prayer. Keep yourself in a place spiritually where God can use you. Be ready as if you are on-call. Practice the spiritual disciplines of giving, fasting, and praying.
2. Second, stay busy serving. Peter was in Joppa on a short-term mission. He was thus accessible to the Lord to be sent to Caesarea. God is looking for servants who are already busy serving Him.

