

Acts of the Apostles

Week 12: Acts 10:1-23a

* We will return to Acts 9:32-43 in week 14.

Cornelius has a vision and calls for Peter (10:1-8).

- Cornelius was a Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea (v 1).
 - o Centurions commanded eighty to one hundred men.
 - o The Italian Regiment was originally made up exclusively of Roman citizens but later included men of other nationalities.
 - o A centurion was a position of high esteem awarded to men of virtue, self-discipline, and obedience to authority.
 - o Caesarea was a major Roman port city and was the provincial capital.
 - o Philip first preached the gospel in Caesarea (Acts 8:40) and served as a stopping point on Paul's first escape from angry Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 9:30).
- Cornelius and his family were also God-fearing (v 2).
 - o Roman soldiers were noted for showing religious devotion to their standards (flags) above all other deities.
 - o Cornelius stands out as one who has begun to worship the Jewish God.
 - o His behavior (almsgiving, prayer, etc.) speaks to the genuineness of his faith.
- Cornelius has a vision while during the dedicated Jewish time for afternoon prayer (vv 3-6).
 - o An angel calls out his name (v 3).
 - o He responds with both fear and openness (v 4).
 - o The angel notes that Cornelius' prayers and his almsgiving have come up to God as a memorial offering (v 4).
 - o The angel commands Cornelius to call for a man named Peter who is saying in Joppa (vv 5-6) a full day's journey by horse from Caesarea. The angel does not say why he is to send for Peter.
 - o Cornelius immediately obeys.

Peter also has a vision (10:9-23a).

- On the next day, as Cornelius' men are heading to Joppa, Peter also has a vision during a special time of prayer. Regular hours of prayer were 9 am and 3 pm (v 9).
- The Bible notes that Peter was hungry, and while he was waiting on the food, he fell into a trance (v 10).
- Peter saw heaven open and something like a sheet descended from heaven including all kinds of animals including reptiles and birds.
- Then he heard a voice say, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."
 - o Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:3-20 catalogue all the animals that Jews are forbidden to eat. This included some of the animals on the sheet.

- The point of the food laws was to help separate Jews from their neighbors. Erasing the food laws might lead to the erasure of Jews as a people.
- Kosher food laws were not inherent in creation. Genesis 9:3 declared, “Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you.”
- Peter forcefully reacts to the voice’s command by asserting that he had never eaten anything impure or unclean and would never do so (v 14).
 - Peter’s declaration echoes Ezekiel 4:13-14 and follows the example of Daniel (Daniel 1:8-16). Peter clearly believes he is being faithful to God by refusing to eat these foods.
 - The intertestamental period was replete with examples of Jewish heroes refusing to defile themselves with Gentile food.
 - In *Jubilees* 22:16 (A book written in the 2nd century BC), Isaac says to Jacob, “And you also, my son, Jacob, remember my words and keep the commandments of Abraham, your father. Separate yourself from Gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable.”
- The voice speaks a second time chastising Peter for calling something unclean that God has made clean.
 - The threefold presentation of the vision (v 16) emphasizes that God is speaking and is to be believed.
 - The fact that the sheet ascends back into heaven (v 16) also stresses the fact that this is a word from God.
 - If it was God that first declared these foods to be unclean, God can likewise declare them clean.
- While Peter was wondering about the vision, the men from Cornelius showed up at the gate of the house where Peter was staying (v 19-20).
 - Peter’s interaction with them reminds the reader that God is at work bringing Peter and Cornelius together.
 - They men explain that they have come on behalf of Cornelius, a centurion who is respected by the Jews for his righteousness even though he is a Roman.
 - Peter invites these Gentile men into his house (v 23) indicating that he has understood the message of the vision to be about more than food.

Sources

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