

Thoughts on Acts Ten

God once told Jeremiah, *"As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you"* (Jeremiah 7:16). This pronouncement against Judah was because God had determined that Judah was going into Babylonian captivity. Their sinful behavior could not be excused. In Babylon, God told Ezekiel, *"even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves," declares the Lord GOD*" (Ezekiel 14:14). What caused God to take this position against His chosen people? The answer is in prophets' writings. *"Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear"* (Isaiah 59:2). And Ezekiel indicates the entire population was guilty (Ezekiel 18:23-24)."

In Acts 10, we read of a Gentile, a member of the Roman army, a man charged with directing a portion of the occupation force over God's people. God listened to this man's prayer. Unlike faithless Israel, Cornelius was what the Jews called a "God Fearer." Luke describes him as *"a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually"* (Acts 10:2). We often forget that God gave a special law to Israel and all other people still had an obligation to learn and obey the knowledge given to the patriarchs. The same God and rules were worshiped and observed by Abraham, Melchisedec, Joseph, and many others.

Jesus fulfilled all previous commands given to the patriarchs and The Law of Moses. Because Jesus fulfilled those requirements, new requirements were necessary for all people, both Jew and Gentile. The gospel of Christ had been spread through the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Syria to the Jews only. The time was right for the message to go to the Gentiles. The prayer of a God-fearing Roman was answered when an angel was sent to his house. The angel appeared to Cornelius to inform him of what he needed to do. The angel's message was simple, *"Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter"* (Acts 10:4-5).

Although (Isaiah 9:1) is quoted by Jesus (Matthew 4:14-16), and Jesus had gone into Gentile territory, Peter needed an intense series of visions and events to convince him to go to the Gentiles. The first vision, shown three times, demonstrated that God no longer considered many things unclean and unacceptable to Him. To have *"all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air"* (Acts 10:12) set before him caused disgust at the sight. But to be told to kill and eat, Peter repeated what he had told Jesus before, a negative with different words. See (Matthew 16:22) and now, *"Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean'"* (Acts 10:14). The voice responded, *"What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy"* (Acts 10:15). This vision and command were repeated three times for emphasis that things have changed.

The lesson was unclear to Peter until the Spirit spoke to him with instructions. *"While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself'"* (Acts 10:19-20). Peter now understood that he was to go with them without questioning if they were Jew or Gentile. The first significant change was Peter inviting Gentiles into a Jewish home and then traveling with them (Acts 10:23). Second, He entered the house of a Gentile and ate with them.

We might draw dozens of lessons from the discussion between Peter and Cornelius, but one statement is paramount in the events of those four days. Because of the visions he received and the voice he heard, Peter said: *"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him"* (Acts 10:34-35). God had always accepted the people who honored and worshiped him. It was the Jewish traditions that rejected those that wanted to know God. Jesus charged the Jews with *"invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that"* (Mark 7:13). The time had come to overcome a tradition of separation and spread the word of God equally to all nations.

As a final confirmation that God wanted the gospel to go to the nations, The Holy Spirit descended on the assembled gentile believers. Speaking in tongues proved to the Jews who came with Peter that baptizing these gentiles, who believed that Jesus is the Christ, was God's will. The sign was for Jews, not those who had just heard and believed. Peter will say much about this by the time of the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15.

Do we need a sign to accept and carry the word to others?