

PART 14: GRACE FOR EVERY RACE

ACTS 9:32-11:18

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MAIN IDEA

The Mosaic Law (Old Testament) was exclusively for the Jews. However, tradition had taught them to keep separate from Gentiles (non-Jews) which created a deep-seated racial and religious intolerance in the early church. In this highly significant passage, God now reveals to Peter that the gospel (New Testament) is for all races. He shows this to Peter in two momentous ways:

- First, in the vision of the sheet containing many "unclean" animals, reptiles and birds.
- Second, the conversion of a Gentile man named Cornelius, who many Christians consider to be the first Gentile convert.¹

¹ Some Bible scholars believe the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) was the first Gentile convert while others claim he was possibly a mixture of Jewish and Gentile ancestry. Others believe Luke may have been the first Gentile believer in Jesus.

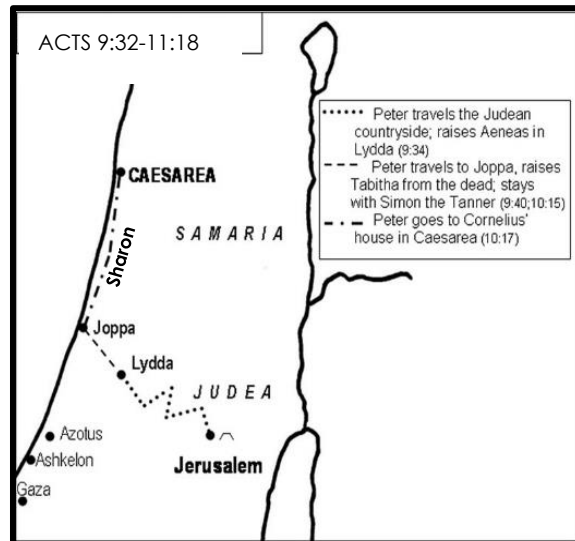
II. BACKGROUND

A. Characters

1. Aeneas: a paralytic for eight years, healed at Lydda by Peter.
2. Cornelius: A Gentile Roman Centurion of the Italian cohort (600 men under the command of six centurions).
3. Gentile: Racially a non-Jew.
4. Peter (Simon): The most prominent of the 12 disciples and an outstanding leader in the early days of the Christian church.
5. Simon: There are two Simons in this passage. One refers to Peter (Greek name) and one to Simon, the tanner.
6. Tabitha (Dorcas): a Christian woman disciple who lived in Joppa and made clothing to give to poor widows. When she died, Peter was summoned, and he raised her from death.

B. Locations

1. Lydda: A small town 30 miles NW of Jerusalem where Aeneas, the person with paralysis, lived.
2. Sharon: Not a town but the coastal plain between Joppa and Caesarea. Those living in this region saw Peter heal Aeneas and became believers in Jesus.
3. Joppa: the town where Peter raised Tabitha to life. While staying with Simon, the tanner Peter received the famous vision of the great sheet with all kinds of animals, which taught him that the gospel was intended for Jew and Gentile alike.
4. Caesarea: A coastal seaport town with a splendid harbor. It was the home of Cornelius, in whose house Peter first preached to the Gentiles.



III. SUMMARY

A. The healing of Aeneas (9:32-35)

1. Peter, in Judea, now travels northwest to the town of Lydda, where in the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of Jesus, he miraculously heals Aeneas, a man who had been paralyzed for eight years.
2. As a result of this miracle, all those living in Lydda, and the coastal plain of Sharon,

became believers in Jesus.

B. Tabitha is restored to life (9:36-43)

1. In the town of Joppa, Peter raised Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead, and as a result, many throughout Joppa became believers in Jesus.
2. Peter's miraculous healings were powerful signs of the salvation of Jesus, giving credibility to the gospel message. No other religion has this kind of power.

C. Peter and Cornelius (10:1-8)

1. At the town of Caesarea, Cornelius, a Gentile Roman Centurion and a devout man, was visited by an angel of God instructing him to send men to Joppa and get Peter, who had been staying with Simon, a tanner.
2. Cornelius sent two of his servants and a devout soldier to Joppa to find Peter.

D. Peter's vision (10:9-33)

1. In the meantime, while Peter was staying in the house of Simon the tanner, he went up to its housetop at noon (6th hour) to pray (10:9).
2. *"The meal was being prepared."* (10:10). In the Ancient Near East, when you eat with someone, it signifies that you are friends and that you share a common bond.
3. While on this housetop Peter fell into a trance, and saw a vision of the heavens opening up and something like a great sheet descending, filled with all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.
4. Peter is told to kill and eat these animals, to which he objects according to Jewish law (10:10-14).
5. The voice (God) tells Peter not to call unclean what God has made clean. At first, Peter did not understand the meaning of this vision (10:15-16).

E. Gentiles hear the good news (10:34-43)

1. Key verse: (Acts 10:34 NIV) *"Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.'"*
2. Next, Peter is taken to the house of Cornelius, where his relatives and close friends are gathered.
3. Peter explains the good news of Jesus Christ to these Gentiles (10:34-43).

F. The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles (10:44-48)

1. As Peter was telling them the good news about Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell (filled) on all who heard the word and began speaking in tongues (10:44-46).
2. The Jews who had come with Peter were amazed that the Holy Spirit was poured out on even the Gentiles who were now speaking in tongues (a kind of "Gentile Pentecost") and extolling God.
3. These new Gentile believers were then baptized with water (10:47-48).

4. The healing miracles performed by Peter and the speaking in tongues by these new believers (10:46) were meant to give credibility to the gospel and its' availability to all peoples and races.

G. Peter reports to the Jerusalem church (11:1-18)

1. Peter's fellow Jews in Judea had heard about how the Gentiles received the word of God but those of the "circumcision party" criticized Peter for eating with them (11:1-3).
2. Peter tells these Jewish believers everything that happened and how the Holy Spirit fell on these Gentiles when they heard the word of God.
3. This reminded him of John the Baptist's proclamation that someday all believers will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (11:4-17).
4. When they (most likely "the apostles and the brothers," 11:1) heard Peter, they fell silent and then gave glory to God for granting salvation to Gentiles (11:18).

IV.APPLICATION

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are to advance to gospel to all races but remember that it is God who changes hearts.

Where to Get More Information

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² The study guide used in this Monday Night Bible Fellowship series.