

Thoughts on Acts 10

The title of the chapter

We can ascribe a number of titles to this chapter. One that is obvious and useful is “the call and conversion of Cornelius according to the *purpose, power and prerogative* of God.” While this may satisfy a passing interest, we must acknowledge that there is a grand and larger purpose of God at work.

The spiritual themes in the chapter

There are a number of instructive themes that run through this passage of Scripture. For example.

- “Without faith it is impossible to please God. for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).
- God is not a respecter of persons.
- Being a good (religious) person does not merit salvation.
- The servant of God who is available for God will be enabled by God.
- A believer who says *Lord* – should never say “not so” to His word; a believer who says “not so” to His word, should not then call Him *Lord*.
- Remission of sins is through faith in Christ.
- Baptism accompanies and follows salvation.

The people in the chapter

- Cornelius, a prominent Gentile centurion.
- The household of Cornelius, a Gentile household.
- Peter, a devout and prominent Jew, the apostle of the circumcision (Gal 2:8).
- Peter’s companions – converted Jews.
- Simon the tanner, who, in the light of Leviticus 11 may well have been a Gentile.
- An angel of the Lord.

The divine titles in the chapter

- Lord – even the “Lord of all.”
- God – the Triune God
- Holy Spirit
- Jesus Christ – His earthly name and the Messiah
- Jesus of Nazareth – the name of His derision
- The Judge of the quick and the dead (those unrighteous living and the unrighteous dead at His appearing (2 Tim 4:1).

The division of the chapter

This chapter can usefully be divided into five parts.

1. The sovereignty of God and His *purposes* (verses 1–8)
2. The servant of God and his *preparation* (verses 9–22)
3. The servant of God and his *presentation* (verses 23–33)
4. The servant of God and his *preaching* (verses 34–43)
5. The sign and seal of God’s *promise* (verses 44–48)

The sovereignty of God and His purposes (vv 1–8)

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord?¹ And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.² And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.”

The events themselves

As the absorbing events of this chapter unfold, we see the sovereign purposes of God not just in regard to persons, but in regard to divine principles. The equality of Jew and Gentile in the Body of Christ was forged at Calvary. Yet, the outworking of this as a principle of truth required racial and religious distinctions to be broken down. Hence we get in chapter 2 the miraculously spoken Gentiles tongues, the conversion of the rival Samaritans in Acts 8 and, here in chapter 10 the conversion of a Gentile. All these things needed to be witnessed to pave the way for the testimony of the local church as the pillar and ground of truth and, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. For this cause Cornelius and Peter – two prominent men among the Jews must meet. In this, and here is the striking observation, their meeting and arrangements could not be the result of any conspiracy between them or any other persons. It was wholly the work of God and the moving of His Spirit. Before meeting with Cornelius, Peter knew nothing of the angelic vision given to Cornelius. We hear him say, “I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” And, when in Caesarea, Cornelius knew nothing of the preparation of Peter.

¹ The word “Lord” is the same as used by Saul on the Damascus Road in Acts 9 – *kurios* where it refers to the exalted Christ. Here it is used in the diminutive or lesser sense, because it is qualified by the expression “an angel.”

² The word “memorial” is the same word used when Mary anointed the Lord at Bethany. Her anointing was a memorial for her before God. (Matt 26:13; Mk 14:9). There was nothing expiatory or propitiatory (a sin bearing sacrifice or sin forgiving sacrifice) in the anointing of the Lord by Mary or in the works of righteousness by Cornelius. A memorial can never be ground for salvation.

The calling of Cornelius

Its timing – a matter of interest

The call of Peter took place at about the sixth hour (12pm), at a time of temple prayer, but at the time of day when the Jews cried “away with Him, we will not have this man to reign over us.” The call of this Gentile soldier took place at “about the ninth hour” (3 pm). It also coincided with a time of temple prayer; the time of day when the Lord died on the cross, when the veil of the temple was rent in twain and the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile broken down. These times coincide with the rejection of Christ by the Jews and the acceptance of the Gentiles with the Jew in Christ.³

It is also instructive that the call or vision given to Cornelius came before that of Peter. It was, we suggest, the needed prior preparation of a receptive heart and mind. As in the case of Lydia, the Lord opened the heart of this seeking soul to receive further light unto salvation.

Its manner

Unlike Saul on the Damascus road who encountered the exalted Christ, Cornelius was arrested by “an angel of the Lord.” God made His will known through a vision and a voice. This is not the way of things today. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:17).

The conversion of Cornelius

The conversion of Cornelius is the direct outcome of a number of events, for instance:

1. Calvary. The rending of the temple veil upon the death of Christ which signified an end to Judaism and righteousness according to the law; the breaking down of the middle wall of partition which enables Jew and Gentile to stand equal before God in righteousness through Christ; the provision for the one new man in Christ comprising Jew and Gentile.
2. The Lord’s prophecy in John 10:16. “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [the Jews]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold [flock], and one shepherd.”
3. The declaration of Simon in the NT at the Lord’s birth, as prophesied by Isaiah: “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6 cf Luke 2:32).
4. The Day of Pentecost. The miraculous sign of Gentile languages spoken by the disciples.

We can also identify the pivotal place of the conversion of Cornelius by going *forward*. For example:

1. **Luke 2:32:** “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (see too Acts 13:47).

³ Both calls corresponded to the time of prayer (of which there were three – the third, sixth and ninth hours, 9 am, 12 noon and 3 pm respectively, Dan 6:10).

2. **Acts 11:** The Jews at Jerusalem. “Forasmuch then as God gave them [the Gentiles] the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”
3. **Acts 15:7-9:** The Jerusalem conference. “And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”
4. **Romans 11:** The “wild olive” branches (Gentiles), grafted into the place of blessing.
5. **1 Corinthians 12:13:** “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”
6. **Galatians 3:28:** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”
7. **Ephesians 2:11-14.** “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”

Such then, is the vitality of this conversion. It is one of many instructive occasions where the Old and New Testaments intertwine (refer to the diagram at the end of this outline).

Cornelius

We noted he was a Gentile soldier. We read that he was a devout man of prayer and alms giving, one who had a good reputation among the Jews. This was no small thing given that the Jews had little regard for the Romans or for the Gentiles. He was *nationally* a Gentile; *occupationally* a Roman centurion and *spiritually* a just man before men.

But what was his spiritual position before God?

Some say he was “born again,” that is, he had “life” having been converted before he met Peter, evidenced by his devotion and dependency upon the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They claim that it was upon meeting Peter that he was “saved,” thereby raising a distinction between rebirth and salvation – life and *then* light. We cannot fully dismantle this incorrect doctrine here, save to compare Cornelius with another devout man who was also a seeker of truth – Nicodemus. To him the Lord declared, “You must be born again.” Some speak of a period of

“doctrinal transition,” but surely we take our principle of truth from the conversion of the thief on the cross at Calvary. It was the case with him and the rule for all after him, that “he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 Jn 5:12). Let us be very clear. Rebirth and salvation as taught in Scripture are simultaneous.

There is no doubt that Cornelius was a worshipper of the one true God. He was a religious man who revered Judaism. He was a Jewish proselyte but not a *proselyte of righteousness*, which required circumcision and certain baptisms or washings (Heb 6). We know this because in verse 28 he is referred to as belonging to the “uncircumcised.” He was what is called a “ger toshav,” a *proselyte of the gate*, one who observed the traditions of the Jews.⁴

In short, Cornelius was a “religious man” who did the “works of righteousness” in accordance with the law, and had a measure of light. To this he was obedient. His goodly intentions were acceptable as a memorial before God, in so far as the prayer of the upright is God’s delight (Pro 15:8). And so God rewarded him with a greater measure of light which, in this dispensation is acquired through faith in Christ. This raises a vital lesson to us. If we have been given a measure of light, then unless we walk in it we will not benefit from further light. We may hear of it; but we will be unable to walk according to it. We forgo the blessing of “obedient faith.”

The servant of God and his preparation (vv 9–22)

“On the morrow, as they [the men from Cornelius] went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city [Joppa], Peter [in Joppa] went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.”

⁴ A "gate proselyte" is not required to be circumcised nor to comply with the whole of the Torah, but to conform to the laws of Noah (i.e., refrain from idolatry, blasphemy, murder, fornication, stealing, eating a live animal). In this he would be considered among the Jews as a man of righteous works and assured a place in the world to come.

Peter's preparation as the Lord's servant began well before this event as we know from the gospels. This occasion marks his exercise of the keys to the kingdom. In regard to this ministry we observe the following special aspects.⁵

1. **A timely prayer:** Verse 9: "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." (The sixth hour as noted was about 12 pm and marked the beginning of the darkness that covered the land when the Lord died). Peter expected others to see to household matters. This was not a case of him shirking an obligation. Rather, it was his responsibility and calling to devote his energies elsewhere – in prayer and ministry. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude" (Acts 6:2-5). There are those called into teaching and those called to be helps – the work of the latter is not any less honouring to God. All fields of service are to be cooperative and dependent on each other. "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28).

We note too, that there is no mention here (or anywhere in Scripture) of tongues as a prayer language being used to communicate with God. Peter's special revelation was not due to some special prayer language.

2. **A particular principle:** Peter was a devout Jew who found it hard to shed the ways of Judaism, which embraced the vital distinction between Jew and Gentile. This distinction as we have noted, was opposed to the truth that in Christ there is no such distinction. The mists of racial prejudice and legalism had to be vaporized, so that Peter and the world come to know that what God has cleansed we must not call common or unclean. This was the essential lesson of the great sheet and the vessel containing food that to the Jewish mind was unclean. God had opened the way for redeemed Gentiles and Jews to stand before him in righteousness through faith in Christ.

The nature of the equality

It is vital to understand that this equality is not one where the Gentile is brought alongside the Jew; but one where both Jew and Gentile are equal before God in a place that neither previously had – the one new man in Christ. We have it in verses 34-36. "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a

⁵ Peter was never given the keys to the "Church." He was given the keys to the *kingdom*. *Christ* is the Builder of His Church and there are no "keys" associated with this. The church however was built on the *principle* or *truth* of Peter's confession. "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).

truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted [acceptable] with him" (Acts 10:34). "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all)", (Acts 10:3).

Cornelius was a Gentile who did the "works of righteousness" and this was an "acceptable thing" before God. His salvation of course depended wholly on his belief in Christ (v 45). "To him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

3. **A new profession.** We have this in Acts 11: 15-18: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto **us** [the Jews], who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

In plain terms, Peter had to shed the baggage of Judaism. It is sad to see the saints of God carrying baggage from their past lives! Why is this sad? It is because baggage has a friend called *bondage*! We can identify three relics that are sometimes found in the baggage of believers.

Symbolism: There are converts from the orthodox religions of the world who adorn their homes and their person with crucifixes and icons (images of Christ, images of the Madonna and Child etc). We are not speaking here of things such as a symbol of a cross used in a presentation; neither would we fail to recognise the artistic genius in works such as Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper." What is in view is the use of symbols in our personal lives as part of our *profession*. There is the ever present danger that these symbols can become objects of assurance, faith and worship. We are to be living epistles read and known among all men.

Shadows: There are today Jewish converts to Christ who still keep the Passover and such like; who choose to live under the law, that law which was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. They are like the Galatians of old. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you [fearful for you], lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal 4:10-11). Some believers observe occasions such as Christmas and Good Friday. Note the term "observe" rather than "celebrate," which is a different matter. We are to observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of each week. It is a biblical appointment. In regard to the celebration of things and things no so appointed, let each one come to their own determination. "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom 14:5).

Christianity in its pure form is presented in God's Word. There we see no personal symbols, for none are needed; and there we see too that pure Christianity does not dwell in the shadows of the OT. It

dwells in the liberty of the light which is in Christ. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1).

Sectarianism masquerading as multiculturalism

The local assembly should never seek to be multicultural. Multiculturalism – a much coveted political and social reform, seeks to highlight and preserve cultural distinctions. It contradicts the theme of this chapter, and all passages of Scripture that speak of our oneness in Christ – the unity of the Body. This unity must be reproduced locally. We truly rejoice when we have believers within the assembly from many nations, often identified by their unique apparel, appetites and accents. It is proof positive of the rich harvest that comes from that great commission of Christ – “go ye into all the world [nations].”

The principle before us is to do with assembly testimony and its ground. The local assembly is not to meet on the *basis* of culture or racial identity; its charter is to testify to the truth that was impressed upon Peter’s heart in a roof-top vision, that the Church comprises believers from all cultures and races, who are one in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. Anything else may trumpet an attractive *union*, but it can never testify to the living *unity* in Christ. We have – of *necessity*, a representation of this blessed unity in the home of Cornelius in Caesarea, well before Paul was inspired to unfold it doctrinally in his epistles. How contrary and tragic it would have been if the Jews set up a “Hebrew-speaking” assembly in Caesarea!

4. **A prescribed path.** Peter was not left to his own devices or reasoning as to the next step in his work for the Lord. The Spirit went before this prayerful and dependant servant, sending him to Caesarea (north of Joppa on the coast). It was Peter going to Cornelius rather than Cornelius going to Peter. This is the way of evangelism and missionary service. Peter, like Moses of old was given companionship and direction in his work, the way was prepared for him and his ministry.

The Lord will always direct the path of His servant and He will go before and prepare the field for sowing. Here in Acts 10 it is Peter going to the house of a Gentile in Caesarea. In John 21 we have the principle in a larger picture. It was again Peter, but then a net cast on the right side of a ship striving for fish in the sea of Tiberias. “And He [the Lord] said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes” (Jn 21:6). It was not that they had the wrong type of boat or the wrong type of net; they had the wrong location. An evangelist or teacher may have the right message and method, but all is in vain if hearts are unprepared. We see this wonderfully illustrated in the divine preparation of Jonah and Nineveh. “So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD” (Jonah 3:3).

The servant of God and his presentation (vv 23–33)

“Then called he them in, and lodged them [in Joppa]. And on the morrow Peter went away with them [to Caesarea], and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near

friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And 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, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”

At least four things mark the servant of God and his presentation in regard to the men from Cornelius.

1. First we have Peter’s *hospitality*. We read of Peter that he “called he them in, and lodged them” (v 23).
2. Second, we see his *humility*. Doubtless the prominence of Peter in the divine revelation and the reverence given to him by the men from Caesarea, could well have given rise to the flesh. But no! Peter, in Christ-like manner is quick to take the place of a humble servant of God and dispel any notion of superiority. He puts them at ease! He would converse *with* them and not carp *at* them. He stood *among* them and not *over* them.
3. Third, we mark his *honesty*: He spoke his mind and delivered the plain counsel of God. “And he said unto them, ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?”
4. We see his *haste* in that he had no reluctance or procrastination in responding to the call. I came “unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for.” Let us guard against the attitude of “not now Lord” as well as the attitude, “not so Lord.”

The servant of God and his preaching (vv 34-43)

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all.) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of 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 slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him

openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Peter came with a *message* and not a sermon. His message met the occasion in terms of its *content* and *audience*. This is always the case when the Spirit leads.

We note the following:

1. The audience comprised the unsaved Gentiles and converted Jews. The former were told of the *antidote* to sin and judgment through faith in Christ; the latter were required to express their collective *amen* to it. Our presence at the Gospel meeting provides that looked-for collective “amen!” How blessed was Paul’s commendation to the Thessalonians. “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad” (1 Thess 1:8).
2. The content of Peter’s message suited the occasion. Contrast his message to the Jews in chapter 3 with the message to the Gentiles here in chapter 10. There are no protracted references to the OT patriarchs and prophets. In chapter 3 it was “ye men of Israel.” We ought to be aware of the nature of the audience when preaching the Gospel, using words easily understood and scripture passages relevant to the occasion. Even hymns need to be properly selected. It is odd to hear hymns about Christian sanctification sung at Gospel meetings, where the focus should be upon the sinner and the need for salvation.
3. Hearts were prepared both to receive the message, to deliver it and to bear witness to it. This is what we pray for in the Gospel prayer meetings; that the heart of the unsaved is receptive and the heart and mind of the preacher is led by the Spirit and, further, that the believers will come together to bear testimony to the message. It is deeply disappointing to find that where there is often near full attendance at the Lord’s Supper, yet only a few consistently gather to support the public preaching of the way of salvation. What are the unsaved to conclude by this?
4. Despite a mixed audience in the house of Cornelius (believers and unbelievers), the gospel was preached. And, when it is preached it should be done as if a person is hearing it for the first time which may be their last time. The former compels simplicity; the latter demands urgency.

The sign and seal of God’s promise (vv 44–48)

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”

In this portion we have a *conversion*, a *confirmation*, a *challenge*, a *conviction* and a *communion*. The order is instructive and repeated throughout the NT (Acts 2, 9).

A conversion

The conversion of the Gentiles in Acts 10 was not in any way another Pentecost. Pentecost was a once for all event never to be repeated. There the Church, the Body of Christ came into existence by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All those who are saved after this incorporation are “added” to the Body, as were the Gentiles here in Acts 10. It was accomplished in response to the message from Peter – faith in Christ.

A confirmation

The Jews require a sign (1 Cor 1:22). “And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (v 45). The gift or *indwelling* of the Holy Ghost was evidenced by the tongues. The “pouring out” refers to that which was within being brought out externally, the Spirit’s empowering and filling. Here the indwelling and the filling were simultaneous as they were in Acts 2. The tongues were not used to *pray* to God; as at Pentecost they were used to *magnify* God.

A challenge

“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (v 47). Peter’s question was rhetorical. He knew that none could deny the Gentiles baptism.

A conviction

“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (v 48). These converted Gentiles submitted to the Lord’s ordinance of baptism. In this they gave outward testimony to the truth that the Lord of their *salvation* was also the Lord of their *lives*. Note, the conviction to be baptised followed a personal confession of Christ. Both are conscious decisions and thus exclude wrongful practices such as infant and household baptism.

The communion

“Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (v 48). Communion or fellowship follows conversion and baptism. What a blessed and redolent testimony – Gentile and Jewish baptised believers as one in Christ having daily fellowship in the house of Cornelius. We rightly speak of the radical change in Paul’s life as the result of a divine revelation on the Damascus road. But let us not underestimate the dramatic change in the life of Peter as a result of the divine revelation given to him on a roof-top in Joppa. Both led to an unfolding of complementary truth concerning the Church. In Acts 9 it was on account of the aggravation of the church by a *prosecting* Jew – one Saul of Tarsus, who through divine grace became a wise master builder who laid the foundation (1 Cor 3:10-17). In Acts 10 it was on account of the composition of the church to be confessed by a *prejudicial* Jew – one named Simon Peter. Accordingly, through Paul we get much to do with the church, its purity and

preservation. Through Peter we get much to do with the priesthood and pilgrimage of the one new man in Christ, which was brought out by Paul.

Some specific aspects in the chapter

The Lordship of Christ

Verse 36. “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:).”

In the larger view, Christ owns all as Lord; but not all own Him as Lord. Here in Acts 10 Christ is said to be “Lord of all.” The context confines the term “all” to refer to Jews and Gentiles. Saved Jews and Gentiles belong to Christ and are thus subject to Him. This is what Lordship means – ownership and subjection. When we *refer* to Christ as Lord He is honoured in regard to His *title*. When we *obey* Him as Lord He is owned in regard to His *entitlement* – we render what is due to Him as Lord. A simple example will illustrate this distinction. If I were to meet the Queen of England I would address her using her proper title, “Your Majesty.” In doing this I honour her status and position as my sovereign. My obedience to her – which is her entitlement, declares my subjection to her as Queen. Then there is the supreme example seen in God the Father and His Beloved Son. On earth the Son honoured the Father by using that unique and proper title, “my Father” (for us it is “our Father”). When doing the Father’s will (which He always did), the Son in obedient subjection expressed the fact that He owned God as His Father and was subject to Him.

There is an associated principle here. It is proper to pray to the Father through the Son. But when we do, let us use the Son’s title that glorifies the Father – Lord! One day all will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philpp2:11).

The resurrection of Christ

Verses 40–41. “Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us.”

Between chapters 1 and 6 of Acts we have a number of explicit references to the resurrection. Between chapters 1 and 5 inclusive, there are explicit references to God “raising up” His Son (Acts 2:24; 2:32; 3:15; 3:26; 4:10; 5:30). In addition, between chapters 1 to 4 inclusive we get other plain references to the Lord’s resurrection (Acts 1:22; 2:31; 4:2; 4:33). The next explicit reference to it is in chapter 10 in verses 40–41. With this in mind we observe the following:

The resurrection and the Gospel

First, we note the importance of presenting the resurrection of Christ when the Gospel is preached. “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor 15:14). Christ’s resurrection is testimony to God’s glory in holiness and power and it is the ground of our

hope in salvation. The resurrection is used consistently in this way in the opening chapters of Acts. It provides a refuge for the unsaved soul and a refrain to the redeemed heart.

Let us digress a little to observe that there is one occasion up to this point in Acts, where the resurrection is notably absent. Notably, because it is one where we would expect it to take centre stage – Stephen’s address before the Sanhedrin Jews in Acts 7. Upon realising this and upon a closer inspection of that address, there appears to be yet another absence – the altar. We have the throne – the throne of judgment, but no altar.

In the gospel messages of Scripture we get both the throne and the altar (and we are mindful here of Isaiah 6). The throne is the place from which judgment against sin is pronounced. “The LORD hath prepared His throne for judgment” (Ps 9:7). The altar is the place where salvation from sin and judgment is provided. In Acts 10 we have the Gospel presented, and we see the throne and the altar in verses 42–43. “And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead [the throne]. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins [the altar].”

So why do we only get the throne – the throne of judgment in Stephen’s address in chapter 7? It is because these Sanhedrin Jews were intractably “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.” They had “resisted the Holy Ghost,” and were irretrievably condemned. Stephen’s address delivered the final verdict. “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers. Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

This brings us to the Lord’s parable in Luke 16, which gives us further insight as to why the resurrection and the altar are absent in Stephen’s indictment of the Jews. To the rich man who was irreversibly consigned to Hades, Abraham declared, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Indeed, we note the malicious untruths made against the earlier testimony of Stephen (and Christ before him). “We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place [i.e., the temple].”

The closing scene in Acts 7 is therefore divinely consistent. It is no longer Christ ascending on the cloud as in Acts 2; but heaven opened and Stephen sees Christ the Son of Man above the clouds in heaven itself. He is standing at the right hand of God. He stands in His exalted glory as the Victor, the same One who will sit upon the throne of judgment – who will judge the “quick and the dead” declared here in chapter 10 (c.f. Rev 1). The unrighteousness of the Jews that was manifested in the death of Stephen will not go unpunished.

Even so! And here we pause to be thankful that we have a God whose heart is given to “even so.” “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; “even so” by the

righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom 5:18). "That as sin hath reigned unto death, "even so" might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21).

May we suggest that there is an "even so" implicit in the Christ-like appeal from the dying Stephen? "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Upon this martyr's plea the throne of judgment becomes a throne of grace. God raises up a mighty evangel of grace from among the Jews, one who was of the tribe of Benjamin, as a raving wolf consenting to Stephen's death. He was a man named Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1; 9). This man devoted his life and even gives it to bear witness to the truth, that Christ was "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness." How? By His resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4). It was Paul who declared, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Phpp 3:10).

The importance of the third day

We encounter the expression "the third day" in a number of passages in Scripture. In each case it marks a significant event. In the NT we have it mentioned some 14 times in regard to the Lord's resurrection. The Lord was raised up on the *third day* which coincided with the divinely ordained Feast of Firstfruits, that feast which gave God the first produce of the harvest. And so we have in First Corinthians 15:20, the spiritual harvest in regard to the saints of God. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept"; and in verse 23, "but every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

The bodily resurrection of Christ

Verse 41. "Who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Luke gives us a further insight. "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them" (Lk 24:41-43).

The Lord's eating and drinking is recorded to show that He rose *bodily*. His resurrected form was not a Theophany, an emanation or a transfiguration. It was the *Man* Christ Jesus raised bodily from among the dead.

"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

It is the bodily resurrection of Christ that declares the vindication of God's holiness and grounds our hope. It declares the defeat of *sin* and of *death*. "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom 6:9). And so we have, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:21). "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor 15:55).

ACTS 10 – The Conversion of Cornelius: Some OT and NT Links



