

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 10:1-33 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 10:1-33 ESV

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." 4 And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. 9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. 17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate 18 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." 21 And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" 22 And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." 23 So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me." 30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

STRUCTURE

- I. **God speaks to a Gentile about calling for Peter (10:1-8)**
 - a. Cornelius is introduced as a generous Gentile seeker (10:1-2)
 - b. An angel tells Cornelius to call for Peter (10:3-6)
 - c. Cornelius obeys by sending messengers (10:7-8)
- II. **God speaks to Peter about meeting with Gentiles (10:9-23a)**
 - a. God speaks to Peter in a visionary trance, preparing him for the messengers (10:9-16)
 - b. God speaks to Peter by the Spirit, connecting him with the messengers (10:17-23a)
- III. **God brings together these unlikely friends (10:23b-33)**
 - a. Peter and the messengers travel to meet Cornelius & Co (10:23b-24)
 - b. Cornelius displays his need for the gospel (10:25-26)

- c. Peter explains his reason for coming (10:27-29)
- d. Cornelius explains his reason for calling (10:30-33)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

In Acts 9, Luke introduced us to the Apostle to the Gentiles (Saul), and he reintroduced us to the Apostle who first opened the door to the Gentiles (Peter). By Acts 10, the story has fully prepared us for this ground-breaking, globe-rattling shift in God's dealings with mankind. The story is so important that Luke tells it (Acts 10), retells it (Acts 11), and then tells it again (Acts 15). After the garden, the flood, and then Babel, God had abandoned the nations to their gods, adopting Israel for Himself (Gen. 11-12; Deut. 32:8-9). By adopting Israel, God aimed to make her a conduit for blessing all nations. Unfortunately, Israel turned the blessing inward. Election became a badge for the Jews instead of a calling to bless nations.

The prophet Jonah epitomized Israel's failure to bless nations. God called Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, but he "fled from the presence of the Lord" by catching a ship in Joppa. The last thing Jonah wanted was for these barbaric enemies of Israel was to discover His mercy. The Assyrians (Nineveh belonged to Assyria) had grown famous for their torturous innovations. As Nahum the prophet would later complain about Nineveh, "who has not felt your endless cruelty?" (Nah. 3:19 NIV). Israel had. Jonah had. So he ran from the LORD and refused to preach to them until bizarre circumstances forced him to.

Peter, on the other hand, overcame his cultural biases. Luke tells the story in a way that reminds us of Jonah. Both Peter and Jonah received a call to evangelize nations; they both launched out from Joppa; they both were sovereignly guided. The difference is that Jonah "fled from the presence of the Lord," (Jonah 1:3) but Peter brought "the presence of God" (Acts 10:33) to Cornelius. By juxtaposing these biblical men, Luke reinforces his theme that God sovereignly overcomes human prejudices to spread the good news to the ends of the earth.

God's sovereignty is evident, first, throughout Jonah:

- God sent His word (Jonah 1:1; 3:1).
- God sent a wind (1:4).
- God sent a fish (1:17).
- God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out of its mouth (2:10).
- God saved the Ninevites (3:10).
- God appointed a plant (4:6).
- God sent a worm to eat the plant (4:7).
- God sent a wind (4:8).

Each of these events portrays God's sovereignty over all things, aimed toward the obedience of many thousands of Gentiles and one rebellious Hebrew prophet. Likewise, in the story of Peter and Cornelius, God's sovereignty plays a significant role:

- God sent Cornelius a vision at the hour of prayer (Acts 10:3).
- God sent Peter a vision while he was praying (10:9-10).
- God sent Peter a vision about food at a time for eating food (10:10-11).
- God appointed men from Cornelius to arrive immediately after this vision (10:17).
- The Spirit commanded Peter to welcome the men right when they arrived (10:19-20).

Overall, the entire story is portrayed as sovereignly guided by God. Had God not sent visions, a trance, angels, and human messengers, cultural biases would have never been overcome and the gospel would have remained a Jewish phenomenon. The good news is that *the good news* doesn't rely on our faithfulness. God ensures the spread of His message. People from every tongue, tribe, and nation will believe because Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:27).

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.

—"Caesarea... Cornelius... centurion... Italian Cohort":

- The city was Roman, it was named after a Roman Caesar, Cornelius was a Roman name, he served in the Roman army as a high-ranking official over a “cohort” (consisting of six “centuries” of 100 men, or 600 men), and he was connected to Italy, the location of Rome’s capital, which was also called Rome.
- Everything about this introduction screams, “Rome!” Rome thought it had conquered Israel’s king by snuffing out His life on a Roman instrument of torture. Pilate washed his hands, and Caesar strutted about the empire. Meanwhile, Jesus sat enthroned at the Father’s right hand as the true “Caesar” of heaven and earth.
- In this story, the real king is about to pick off one of His enemy’s main leaders—a captain in the Roman army.

—“devout man who feared God with all his household”:

- Despite his pagan background, Cornelius was a God-fearer. This does not suggest that he actually knew the Lord. Not until Peter preaches does God actually save him (10:34ff). However, Cornelius was a seeker of God who ascribed to the Jewish religion. Religiously, he was like an unsaved Jew; culturally, he was Roman. This guy was an anomaly.
- The “household” of Cornelius will later receive salvation (10:44; 11:14).
- God has always had a heart for households. God didn’t just save Noah from the flood but Noah’s household; God didn’t just save Lot from Sodom but Lot’s household; He didn’t just save Abram from Babylon but Abram’s household; He didn’t just save Rahab from Jericho but Rahab’s household.
- This same idea is present in the New Testament. He saves the household of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and Crispus. When the jailer asks how to be saved, Paul says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, you and your whole household” (16:31). The missionary strategy of the early church was not to extract people from their communities and put them in a church community. Instead, it was to implant the gospel into existing communities, which became churches.
 - Convergence pursues this strategy of church planting locally and globally. However, it isn’t easy to replicate in urban, western contexts because our individualistic culture is not communal. Most people have few friends. Statistically, America is one of the loneliest nations on earth. For this reason, churches in the West tend to create communities because prior ones barely existed, if at all.
- I’m reminded of 1 Cor. 7:14: “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” This verse does not mean that households automatically receive salvation but rather that they are “holy”—that is, set apart. God sets our family members apart for special encounters with grace. As I like to say, He places our families in the “splash zone” of grace.
- O Lord, save our families!
- The last thing I’ll note about this verse is that “with all his household” displays the respect his family showed him as the “paterfamilias”—a Roman term for “head of household.” As it went with the father, so it went with the family. Ancient cultures generally operated this way by custom. Modern cultures do not respect fathers as heads of household, but countless studies magnify the significance of the father’s role. Even when we don’t respect dads, the ancient rule holds true in another sense. As it goes with the father—whether present or absent—so it goes with the family.
- Fortunately, God in His grace can visit broken homes and become the “Father to the fatherless,”—thus, accounting for the gaps our modern families too often feel.

—“gave alms generously to the people and prayed continually to God”:

- Just like Dorcas cared for hurting widows by meeting their physical needs—and as a result encountered God’s power—Cornelius provided generously for the poor and encountered God’s power.
- Cornelius is like a “Gentile Dorcas.” Dorcas had a Gentile name but also a Hebrew one, indicating an Abrahamic bloodline. Cornelius had no such ancestry, but his character and religious devotion matched that of Dorcas. The parallel reinforces that God is no respecter of persons. He shows no partiality. Instead, He pours out grace on whosoever He will. In this case, He pours out grace on two individuals who are religiously devout and socially conscious.

- If you want God to hear your cries, hear the cries of the poor. Some verses along these lines:
 - [Psa 41:1-3 ESV] 1 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. Blessed is the one who considers the **poor**! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; 2 the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. 3 The LORD sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health.
 - [Pro 19:17 ESV] 17 Whoever is generous to the **poor** lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.
 - [Pro 21:13 ESV] 13 Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the **poor** will himself call out and not be answered.
 - [Pro 22:9, 22-23 ESV] 9 Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the **poor**. ... 22 Do not rob the **poor**, because he is **poor**, or crush the afflicted at the gate, 23 for the LORD will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.
 - [Pro 28:27 ESV] 27 Whoever gives to the **poor** will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.
 - [Pro 29:7, 14 ESV] 7 A righteous man knows the rights of the **poor**; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge... 14 If a king faithfully judges the **poor**, his throne will be established forever.
- God sees the hearts of unbelievers, and He even hears their prayers. I'm reminded of the time I spent a whole summer playing basketball to make the seventh-grade team. I had hardly played ball before that, but my quick progress impressed those friends of mine who'd spent their whole lives on the court. They told me that I would make the team and probably even the A-team. When tryouts arrived, I laid it all on the wood floor of Harwood Junior High. The bell rang to conclude the school day, and Coach Moody posted the list of names on the wall. I scanned it with a fast-beating heart. I missed my name, so I read it more carefully. Still not there. I reread it, conscious of the kids crowding around me, doing the same thing. I didn't make the A-team. I didn't make the B-team either. Worse, kids I outperformed (in my slightly biased estimation) had made the list. I went home and did not just cry. I bawled. I did not know the Lord, but I felt so desperate I didn't know what to do. So I prayed: "God, this is probably impossible because I already didn't make the team, but would You please change Coach's mind and have him put me on it?" A week passed by. As if to intensify my torture, those who did not make the team had to run cross-country. One day, Coach passed me in the locker room after a long run. Then he stopped and turned toward me. He said, "Rowntree—listen. You did a good job out there and were right on the line for making the team. As it turns out, I found an extra jersey. How would you like to join us this season?" Despite not knowing Jesus, the Gospel, or how to be saved, God heard and answered my prayer. He does the same for unbelievers all across the world. I only wish I had responded by worshiping Jesus. Despite my spiritual slowness, God, in His sovereignty, used this event and several others to soften my heart for the encounter that saved me at 17.

3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." 4 And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

—"ninth hour": three in the afternoon, which we observed in Acts 3:1 is "the hour of prayer." This is no coincidence. At the hour of prayer, God flings wide heaven's gate to all peoples. Prayer is how we turn the world upside down.

—"he saw clearly in a vision": Prayer is also the time when God speaks to us. God speaks to those who speak to Him. This is because He wants a friendship. Friends talk to each other. We'll observe the same phenomenon later when God speaks to Peter during prayer.

—"an angel of God": Angelic appearances in Acts –

- [Act 5:19-20 ESV] 19 But during the night an **angel** of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

- [Act 8:26 ESV] 26 Now an **angel** of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.
- [Act 12:7, 23 ESV] 7 And behold, an **angel** of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. ... 23 Immediately an **angel** of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.
- [Act 27:23 ESV] 23 For this very night there stood before me an **angel** of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,

—In Acts 5 and 12, we observe jail-breaking angels; in Acts 8 (and 10-11, with Cornelius), mission-sending angels; in Acts 12, a judging angel kills Herod; in Acts 27:23, Paul experiences a life-saving angel. In each case, angels serve God and God's people. Hebrews 1:14: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"

—"your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God":

- Again, it's striking that God would say this about one who doesn't know Jesus. But God observes the earnest seeking of those who don't know Him, and then He mercifully sends them a witness.
- Schreiner: This is "OT sacrificial language and means God has heard and taken note of his good works and requests (Lev. 2:2; Ps. 66:19-20; Phil. 4:18) and also juxtaposes Cornelius with the Israelites' cry in Egyptian slavery (Ex. 2:23)."
- Schreiner (quoting Keener): "The alms of this Gentile were accepted by God in lieu of the sacrifices Jews offered at the temple. 'In other words, God had acted to break down barriers between Jew and Gentile by treating the prayers and alms of a Gentile as equivalent of the sacrifice of a Jew.'"

—"send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter":

- The angel could have easily relayed the gospel to Cornelius, but God intends for it to be imparted by human vessels, not angelic ones. Angels can pass the ball, but we must shoot it. Angels can set up divine appointments, but we must open our mouths.
- "Joppa": Luke probably alludes to Jonah. Observe:
 - Jonah 1:1-3: "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.' But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to **Joppa** and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD."
 - When God sends Jonah to the Gentiles, he refuses and runs from "the presence of the LORD." Joppa provides the dock from which the disobedient prophet launches out. In contrast, in the present story, Joppa provides the key for Gentiles to find Jesus. Unlike Jonah, Peter obeys God promptly. When he arrives, Cornelius says, "Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that the Lord has commanded you." Jonah runs from God's presence, but Peter brings it to the nations, turning the home of Cornelius into a "new temple." This is a Gentile Pentecost.

—"bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner":

- The parallel wording in this sentence seems intentional, almost poetic. Luke did not need to mention Peter's other name, Simon. It appears that Luke wants us to compare the two Simons. Jesus changed the name of the first Simon to Peter, which means rock, making him the rock of the church (incidentally, that does not mean Jesus ordained Peter as the first pope). The "rock" is lodging with the "tanner." A tanner would have handled dead animals and thus been unclean. Symbolically, then, Simon Peter is the first "living stone" in God's new temple; Simon the tanner represents uncleanness. Through Peter, Jesus expands His temple into unclean territories.
- Stott (quoting Knowling): Peter "seems to show that [he] was already in a state of mind which would fit him for the further revelation of the next chapter, and for the instructions to go and baptize the Gentile Cornelius."

—"by the sea": this reinforces the Jonah connections.

—"two of his servants and a devout soldier": these people "attended him," for Cornelius was a man of rank. The "devout" soldier also seemed to share Cornelius's spiritual ardor.

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.

—"The next day, as they were on their journey": God perfectly timed Peter's visitation.

—"Peter went up... sixth hour to pray":

- Cornelius received his vision at the hour of prayer, and he received it because he "prayed continually." Now God sends Peter a vision while praying.
- The "sixth hour" was not an official prayer time. We don't need to pray at "official" times. It's better to pray continually.
- The "sixth hour" was lunchtime. Peter will receive a vision about eating while waiting for food. God timed the vision about food for the time of food.
- Schreiner (quoting Ambrose): "Moses received the law when he was fasting, and so Peter, when he was fasting, was taught the grace of the New Testament."

—"trance": Paul tells us about a trance in 22:17. See below.

- [Act 22:17-21 ESV] 17 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a **trance** 18 and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' 19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' 21 And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"
- Just like Peter, Paul "fell into a trance" while "praying." Do you want more supernatural experiences? Talk to God often.
- In both Acts 10 and 22, the trance includes visionary elements but also audible and verbal interaction with the Lord. A trance seems to fall under the umbrella of visionary experiences, but it is stronger than most visions. It includes auditory interaction, and it is a state one can "fall into," like Paul in the above verses.

—"saw the heavens opened": Jesus ascended into heaven, and now "the heavens opened." Luke thus emphasizes Christ's involvement. Later in the interaction, Peter will address the "Lord," and this usually references Christ in Acts and throughout the New Testament. Jesus continues to guide His church from the right hand of God in heaven.

—"something like a great sheet descending... four corners":

- We have seen the Spirit descend on Pentecost as a result of Christ's ascension; now, we observe a sheet descend for a "Gentile Pentecost," resulting from Christ's ascension.
- Why a "sheet"? We don't know, but its existence requires "four corners," which is relevant to the rest of the vision. Throughout Scripture, "four corners" represent the ends of the earth (Isa. 11:12; Rev. 7:1; 20:8). It's like saying, "from the north, south, east, and west"—the four points of a compass. Even before God verbalizes anything, the vision already communicates that the Spirit will soon baptize "the ends of the earth."
- Schreiner (quoting Chrysostom): the sheet is "a symbol of the whole world."

12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

—"animals and reptiles and birds of the air":

- This reminds us of Gen. 1:24-25, 30-31: "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—**livestock and creeping things and beasts** of the earth according to their kinds.' And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good... And to **every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life**, I have given

every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

- This also reminds us of Gen. 9:1-3: "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon **every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.** Into your hand they are delivered. **Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything."**
- The story of Noah uses similar language to what we find in creation because Genesis portrays the flood's aftermath as a "new creation." Initially, God "gave you the green plants," but now, "I give you everything." All foods were clean under Noah.
- This flashes forward to our present scene. For a time, under Moses, God had declared some foods unclean. This served its purpose in its season. It taught Israel that a difference exists between profane and sacred, unholy and holy. Since God is holy, He defines the difference. The Mosaic law belongs to holy Scripture, and we must submit to its authority. However, we apply it differently in light of Jesus. During His earthly life, Jesus "declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19). The morning star had already begun to rise during His earthly ministry; after Pentecost that light extended to all nations. Like a new Noah, Jesus inaugurated "new creation." He rose on the third day, Sunday, which was really the first day of a new week—the week of new creation. When we place our faith in Jesus we become "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), and Jesus extends His creative work through us by "the ministry of reconciliation" (5:18). Gradually, the gospel expands to "the four corners" of the earth until Jesus returns, and He consummates His "new creation project" by declaring two powerful statements with the same breath: "Behold, I am making all things new" (21:5) and "It is done" (Rev. 21:6).
- Now that we can place this brief verse in light of its canonical context, we can discern the purpose of this story. The story reveals that Jesus is our new Noah, who restores creation. He does so in three steps:
 - First, Jesus saved us from the flood of judgment through His life, death, and resurrection. The wooden beams of the ark remind us of the Cross. By it, Jesus makes a "new creation" out of us.
 - Second, Jesus saves the world from the flood by commissioning us with the ministry of reconciliation. Just as God commanded Noah to be fruitful and multiply, He commands us to make disciples. In both cases, God intends for His people to reach "the four corners of the earth" with His message.
 - Third, Jesus will save the world by returning to judge and finally restore it, making all things new.
- But how does this fit with the animals in the above verse, which God now calls "clean"? God's intention was never to save just a tiny plot of land in the Middle East or a small population associated with it. From Genesis 1, God's focus was the whole world. When the world rejected Him, He flooded it and started over—a new creation. Again, He commissioned Noah to "be fruitful and multiply"—intending that his descendants spread across the earth and fill it with the knowledge of God. When they instead gathered at Babel, God forced them out by confusing their speech. He then chose Abram and promised to bless his descendants, but not as an end, in and of itself. He blessed Israel to bless nations. In this way, our forefather in the faith would become "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). Our present verse and section reveals how God never abandoned His original design for the world to submit to His benevolent reign. In Jesus, our New Noah, God's dream has begun realization. All foods have become clean, just as all people have been granted—on equal footing with Jews—entry into God's new world.

—On one hand, Peter should have remembered that Jesus had already declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). On the other hand, all of us struggle to part with deep-seated cultural values. Peter probably considered his resistance a sign of holiness, which explains why God must rebuke him and even repeat the process three times. God is patient. "Israel" means "wrestles with God." God could very easily wipe any of us out, but He humbles Himself to let us "wrestle it out" with Him. He does that with Peter here. He does it with all of us. It always makes me marvel.

—Stott: “The main subject of this chapter is not so much the conversion of Cornelius as the conversion of Peter.” Peter had to receive the revelation that God has made Gentiles co-heirs in the new covenant through the blood of Christ.

17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate 18 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them."

—“Peter was inwardly perplexed... Peter was pondering the vision”: Peter displays how we interpret prophetic phenomena. We don't just wait for God to explain it in a neat, explanatory, paragraph. No, we ponder it. We mull over it with an ear open to the Spirit. Interpretations must be sought. God observes Peter's meditation, and at that precise moment, the Spirit speaks (10:19).

—“Now while Peter... And while Peter”: at the exact moment when Peter felt perplexed by the vision, the men from Cornelius arrived; at the exact moment when Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit commanded him to go with them. These “coincidental” timings reflect God's sovereignty in spreading the gospel message through human messengers.

—“what the vision that he had seen might mean... the Spirit said to him”:

- First, God spoke to Peter through a vision; then, God spoke to Peter directly through the Spirit. God speaks in a variety of ways. I'm reminded of Job 33: 14: “For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it.” Despite the multiple ways God aims to break through to us, we often do not perceive it. Sometimes we endure times when God is less vocal, but sometimes He's speaking, and we fail to perceive it.
- We don't know whether the Spirit spoke this audibly or whether it came to Peter as a whisper in his spirit. Either way, God spoke it clearly.
- God doesn't reveal everything at once. First, He speaks through a vision, but then by the Spirit. God usually reveals Himself by process and not an instant download. He leaves us a breadcrumb trail, requiring us to rely on Him for the next step. In this way, we grow in our ability to hear, trust, and obey, and our friendship with Him deepens.
- When God communicates “back-to-back” messages, we should consider whether they relate to one another, as we observe here. The vision about food and the Spirit's message about people are one. They relate to each other because the Mosaic law necessitated a diet that alienated Gentiles. Jesus fulfilled the law, so obedience no longer requires us to sacrifice animals, eat certain animals, or keep a Jewish calendar. These “boundary markers” alienated Gentiles, but Jesus erased those distinctions.
- Schreiner (quoting Polhill): “It is simply not possible to fully accept someone with whom you are unwilling to share in the intimacy of table fellowship. The early church had to solve the problem of kosher food laws in order to launch a mission to the Gentiles. Purity distinctions and human discrimination are of a single piece.”
- Schreiner: “This is why the Cornelius episode is a breakthrough text. Already there has been a Gentile conversion (the eunuch), but here an apostle realizes Jewish Christians can accept Gentiles as Gentiles.”

—“without hesitation”: God commanded Peter to ignore his cultural reasons for rejecting the invitation. Sometimes, God will require us to break social conventions.

—“for I have sent them”: God spoke to Peter with a vision. God spoke to Peter by the Spirit. And God sent these three men. God sovereignly extends the gospel. We just get to be part.

21 And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" 22 And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." 23 So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

—“Cornelius, a centurion”: again, emphasizes his Roman connections.

—“upright... God-fearing... Jewish nation”: again, emphasizes his affinity for Judaism.

—“what you have to say”: despite his worship of Israel’s God, he does not yet know God in a personal way. He must hear what Peter has to say—the gospel.

—“So he invited them in to be his guests”: Peter welcomes Gentiles into his home. He will soon be welcomed into theirs. God opens the door to Gentiles through doors of hospitality. The gospel spreads from home to home, as we open our tables and lives to the world.

24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”

—“called together his relatives and close friends”:

- Earlier, we observed the influence of Cornelius as the head of his household. Here, we see that his network extends even further.
- Cornelius is a “person of peace.” Jesus lays out the concept in Luke 10:4-11: “Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’”
- The “person of peace” in Luke 10 is the one who opens his/her home, provides for the disciple hospitably, displays spiritual hunger, and (implicitly) opens his/her relationships to the messenger. The “house” in Jewish culture consisted not just of doors and walls but of people. It generally extended beyond immediate family.
- This is a powerful way of sharing the gospel. Don’t just evangelize individuals; find the person of peace—the hungry, hospitable person with a vast social network. The gospel is spreading like wildfire globally through those who have learned this secret from Jesus and the apostles.

—“fell down at his feet and worshiped him”:

- As a God-fearer, Cornelius should have known better. This action displays his spiritual ignorance and need for the gospel.
- Stott: “Peter refused both to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog.”
- This is one of several occasions in Acts where one is thought divine on account of divine power at work:
 - Peter has to tell people it wasn’t by his power or piety that God healed the lame man (Acts 3)
 - Peter has to tell Cornelius not to worship him (Acts 10).
 - Paul and Barnabas have to tell pagans not to make sacrifices to them (Acts 14).
 - Paul survives a snake bite, and pagans consider him a god (Acts 28).
 - What if the modern church walked in such power that we consistently had to remind people that we were mere mortals?

27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

—“unlawful”: the NASB renders this “forbidden,” which is a broader word, suggesting that the problem for Peter was not one of Scripture but tradition. The “law”—Scripture—never forbade Jewish and Gentile interaction. The tradition did, however.

—“God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean”:

- Peter now understands the vision that formerly perplexed him. The interpretation came to him as he pondered it and followed the breadcrumb trail.
- Unclean animals symbolized “unclean” Gentiles, as any Jew would have labeled them.

- Does this mean that the vision has nothing to do with food? No. There is a primary and secondary meaning. The primary meaning related to unclean people, but the secondary meaning concerned unclean food. The two intersect, as explained above.

—“I ask then why you sent for me”: Despite having received a vision, a message from the Holy Spirit, a holy coincidence (people arriving at precisely the right time), a message from an angel (first received by Cornelius but conveyed by now to Peter)—Peter still does not know why he is present. God continues requiring Peter to follow the clues. Seeking hearts are willing to do so.

30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

—“bright clothing”: new detail, not mentioned in the prior telling of this story.

—Cornelius repeats the message from the angel. Luke did not have to record this. He could have just paraphrased. The repetition suggests emphasis. Luke wants us to know with certainty that the door opened to the Gentiles because of God’s sovereignty. It was not Peter’s insistence. On the contrary, Peter had been hesitant and resisted the divine hand. By portraying Peter’s insistence in the opposite direction, Luke thus emphasizes how active God was in this.

—“in the presence of God”:

- Jonah fled the presence of God—abandoning his call to Gentiles—by catching a ship in Joppa. Peter pursued the presence of God—proclaiming the gospel to Gentiles—by setting out from Joppa. Jonah represents Israel’s inward focus, which Peter initially clung to. But God, in His sovereignty, thrust Peter into Gentile territory, just as He did with Jonah. The difference is that the story of Jonah concludes with an unrepentant Jewish prophet, but Peter turns from his initial resistance and continues with his mission.
- The “presence of God” language also reminds us of Stephen’s speech (Acts 7), where he repeatedly points out that God doesn’t bind Himself to a place—like the temple—but rather to a people by covenant. Gentiles will no longer be “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12) but instead they will be “brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13).
- Because of God’s sovereign work through Peter, Gentiles can enjoy God’s presence and become part of His new creation.
- The house of a Gentile becomes the house of God!