

## The conversion of Cornelius.

### INTRODUCTION

Prior to His ascension, the Lord Jesus told His disciples:

'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'.<sup>1</sup>

In harmony with our Lord's stated programme, Luke traces through Acts 1 to 8 the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> through Judea, to Samaria.<sup>3</sup>

Luke then devotes the greater part of chapters 9 to 11 to recording *the conversion of two men*, whose experiences, under God, were to prove crucial to the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles; namely ...

(i) the conversion of *Saul of Tarsus*, God's chosen vessel, as the 'minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles'<sup>4</sup>, to bear the name of the Lord Jesus 'before the Gentiles';<sup>5</sup> and

(ii) the conversion of *Cornelius of Caesarea*, a devout centurion, who, together with his household, was chosen by God to be, in effect, the first-fruits of the gospel harvest among the Gentiles.<sup>6</sup>

As an indication of the importance of these two conversions, Luke includes detailed accounts of both no less than three times:

(i) The conversion of *Saul of Tarsus*: once as part of his (Luke's) own narrative,<sup>7</sup> and twice as later rehearsed by Saul (then Paul) himself; first, to the Jewish crowd at Jerusalem<sup>8</sup> and, second, to King Agrippa at Caesarea.<sup>9</sup>

(ii) The conversion of *Cornelius*: once as part of his (Luke's) own narrative,<sup>10</sup> and twice as later rehearsed by the apostle Peter himself; first, to 'those of the circumcision' at Jerusalem<sup>11</sup> and, second, to *the church* at Jerusalem at the so-called 'Council of Jerusalem'.<sup>12</sup>

In both accounts, we easily detect the interest of heaven from: (i) the knowledge of names,<sup>13</sup> and (ii) the detailed description of the respective dwelling-places.<sup>14</sup>

Both Saul and Cornelius were prepared by visions for the coming of someone who was to teach them. Both 'teachers': (a) were also prepared by visions, (b) were initially reluctant to do as told, (c) were confronted with repeated divine commands, and (d) then obeyed.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the conversion of Cornelius is given the most detailed coverage of any event in the whole apostolic era. In all, (a) *the vision of Cornelius* is related four times<sup>16</sup>, and (b) *the vision of Peter* is related twice,<sup>17</sup> with one further mention.<sup>18</sup> As we saw above, Peter later alluded to the events again at the so-called 'Council of Jerusalem'.<sup>19</sup>

### God's choice

It was at that so-called 'Council of Jerusalem' that Peter pointed out, 'God made a choice among you, that *by my mouth* the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe'.<sup>20</sup>

In a previous document,<sup>21</sup> I noted how God had:

(i) bypassed (a) 'Philip the evangelist',<sup>22</sup> and (b) Saul 'the apostle to the Gentiles',<sup>23</sup> both of whom had been in Caesarea (the home city of Cornelius),<sup>24</sup> and

(ii) had reserved for Peter the task and privilege of making known the gospel to Cornelius and his household.

I concluded that section as follows:

'We may or may not want to read into our Lord's words, spoken to Peter some years before, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven',<sup>25</sup> that He was indicating that it would be Peter who was to open the door of faith and salvation (i) to the Jews in Acts 2 and (ii) to the Gentiles in Acts 10.<sup>26</sup> But, most certainly, as Peter himself recognised, God had chosen him to be the one through whom the first Gentile household should be brought into the blessing of His salvation'.

Our first Bible reading consists of the opening nine verses of chapter 10.

## BIBLE PASSAGE 1

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

About the ninth hour of the day<sup>27</sup> he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius".

Gazing<sup>28</sup> at him, he was filled with fear and said, "What is it, Lord?"

And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is surnamed Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea".

When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they were on their journey and drew near to the city, Peter went up onto the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

## MEET CORNELIUS

In the first six verses of chapter 10,<sup>29</sup> Luke provides us with a quick snapshot of Cornelius, telling us briefly: (i) what he *was*, (ii) what he *did*, (iii) what he *saw*, and (iv) what he *heard*.

First, *what he was*. He was, Luke says, 'a centurion'.<sup>30</sup> It is interesting that the first Gentile with whom our Lord came into contact when He was in the world (as far as we know) was also a centurion, with reference to whose faith our Lord said, 'many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>31</sup>

But Cornelius was not only a centurion; he was also 'a devout man who feared God',<sup>32</sup> this latter expression marking him off as a Gentile who, though not a Jewish proselyte, believed and practised much of the Jewish religion, attending the local synagogue, and observing both the Sabbath and the ethical teachings of God's law. As such, he would have been familiar with the writings of the Old Testament prophets, which Peter takes for granted later.<sup>33</sup>

Second, Luke tells us *what Cornelius did*. The centurion demonstrated his faith in God by actions both man-ward and God-ward, by his *liberal giving* and his *regular praying*; he 'gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God'.<sup>34</sup> We should note that the servants of Cornelius later bore testimony to his moral and spiritual character, adding that he was highly respected by the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

Third, we are told *what Cornelius saw*; namely, 'in a vision an angel of God', who spoke to him.<sup>36</sup> That vision, he later told Peter, he received four days to the hour before he first met him.<sup>37</sup> Fixing his eyes intently on his celestial visitor<sup>38</sup> (who stood before him dressed 'in bright clothing'<sup>39</sup>) he was terrified,<sup>40</sup> exactly how the women at our Lord's tomb reacted when they saw two celestial figures standing by them 'in shining clothing'.<sup>41</sup>

Fourth, we are told *what Cornelius heard*. Firstly, that his prayers and his alms had gone up 'as a memorial before God'.<sup>42</sup> But the angel immediately made it clear that this did *not* mean that Cornelius was a saved man. It was rather that his noble character and conduct commended him to God as one who should be given the opportunity of hearing (and believing) the gospel; 'an angel ... said to him, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved"'.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, reading all three accounts of the conversion of Cornelius, we find that Luke is careful to stress that this devout, God-fearing, upright and generous man (who until then had lived according to the light he had) still needed to repent<sup>44</sup> and to believe in Jesus<sup>45</sup> if he was, by the Lord's grace,<sup>46</sup> to be saved,<sup>47</sup> to receive the forgiveness of sins,<sup>48</sup> the cleansing of heart,<sup>49</sup> the gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>50</sup> and eternal life.<sup>51</sup>

It was, then, in response to his earlier prayers that Cornelius was directed by God through His angel to the man who could proclaim the message by which he and his household could be saved.<sup>52</sup>

And, at the very time that Cornelius's servants neared their destination, that man was to be found in the self-same prayerful attitude on the rooftop of the house of Simon in Joppa<sup>53</sup> as Saul of Tarsus had

been at the house of Judas in Damascus.<sup>54</sup> For, consistent with the practice of godly saints of old, such as David<sup>55</sup> and Daniel,<sup>56</sup> Peter was praying at noon.<sup>57</sup>

At this point, we pick up the scripture narrative at verse 10.

## BIBLE PASSAGE 2

And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.

And there came a voice to him: 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat'.

But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean'.

And the voice came to him again a second time, 'What God has made clean, do not call common'.

This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

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 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there.

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them'.

And Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?'

And they said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation,<sup>58</sup> was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say'.

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.<sup>59</sup>

## PETER'S VISION

What Peter saw in his lunchtime trance/vision<sup>60</sup> is self-explanatory, as is the Lord's command which Peter heard.<sup>61</sup>

### In threes

But I cannot help noting, in passing, that this is the last of three occasions on which we read of Peter's using the word 'never' when addressing the Lord:

(i) In the Upper Room: 'You shall never wash my feet'.<sup>62</sup>

(ii) On the way to Gethsemane: 'I will never be made to stumble'.<sup>63</sup>

(iii) At the house of Simon the tanner: 'I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean'.<sup>64</sup>

On each occasion, Peter received a much-needed correction from the Lord.<sup>65</sup> And later (i) he did have his feet washed,<sup>66</sup> (ii) he did stumble,<sup>67</sup> and (iii) he did eat non-kosher food.<sup>68</sup>

And it is worth noting that, here in Acts 10, (i) heaven's command, (ii) Peter's objection, and (iii) heaven's correction were repeated, each occurring three times.<sup>69</sup>

I suppose that, over time, Peter must have become used to things happening in threes. For, not only (i) had he accompanied James and John on *three* special occasions during our Lord's public ministry (I refer, of course, to their presence at the house of Jairus,<sup>70</sup> on the Mount of Transfiguration,<sup>71</sup> and in the Garden of Gethsemane<sup>72</sup>), but, (ii) alongside a fire of coals<sup>73</sup> at our Lord's so-called trial before the Sanhedrin, he had been challenged *three times* about his association with 'Jesus of Nazareth', and had denied Him *three times*,<sup>74</sup> and, (iii) alongside another 'fire of coals', had been required to affirm *three times* his love for the Saviour.<sup>75</sup>

But although, as I said, both Peter's vision-trance<sup>76</sup> and the Lord's command to him<sup>77</sup> were self-explanatory, it is important that we understand:

(i) why *Peter* responded as he did ('By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean'),<sup>78</sup> and

(ii) why *the Lord* responded as *He* did ('What God has made clean, do not call common').<sup>79</sup>

## PETER'S OBJECTION

Why, we may well wonder, did Peter react so passionately, refusing to kill and eat the mixed-bag of creatures<sup>80</sup> lowered down before him, even though he was hungry 'and wanted something to eat',<sup>81</sup> and in spite of having been clearly instructed to do so by a voice from heaven?<sup>82</sup>

### (i) From the beginning

To answer this question properly we need to refer to the opening chapters of our Bible. At the beginning, man was given permission by the Lord God to eat only herbs and fruit,<sup>83</sup> although He (the Lord God) stressed at the outset that, with one notable exception, man was at liberty to eat freely of every herb and tree.<sup>84</sup> As yet, man had no permission to eat animal flesh, of any kind.

But all that changed after the Great Flood, immediately following which God told Noah that 'every moving thing that lives' ('every beast of the earth, every bird of the heavens, everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea') 'shall be food for you. As I gave you the green plants', God said, 'I give you everything'.<sup>85</sup> From that time on, man had God's express authority to eat whatever animal flesh he wished.

Already a distinction existed between animals which were 'clean' and animals which were 'unclean'. This distinction regulated the number of each 'kind' which were to be taken into the ark, either *seven pairs* or just *one pair* respectively.<sup>86</sup> But the distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean' was not linked in any way with man's diet. The distinction seems rather to have been associated with which animals were acceptable by way of sacrifice to God,<sup>87</sup> and, possibly, which animals were suitable for domestic use.

### (ii) The Law

The law which God gave to Israel through Moses affected radically His people's eating habits. For at Sinai the Lord forbade His nation to eat many of the creatures which mankind had eaten freely up until that time.<sup>88</sup>

And this He did to teach them a very important lesson. They (Israel) had been separated from the other nations to enjoy a special relationship with God, and to carry out a special role among the nations.<sup>89</sup> It was essential, therefore, that they kept themselves pure from the moral and spiritual pollution of the Gentile nations around them – from the sexual immorality, religious idolatry, injustice, incest and demonism which were rife throughout the heathen world.<sup>90</sup>

With this in view, God's people were forbidden to intermingle with the pagan nations around, and it was here that the food laws came in. These laws were there, not so much to make social mixing with the Gentiles difficult (although, since Israel was not permitted to eat the same food as its Gentile neighbours – whether or not that food had been offered to idols – these laws certainly did this) as to act mainly as a constant reminder to God's people that they were separated to the Lord, and that they were, at all times and at all costs, to avoid the moral and spiritual uncleanness of the Gentiles.

And, because He (the Lord) had separated them from the nations around, they were to observe their own, unique and God-given, food laws, separating the clean beast and bird from the unclean.

And the Lord backed up these food laws by appeals to Israel's calling:

(i) Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make yourselves unclean ... *I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy*, for I am holy.

This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.<sup>91</sup>

(ii) *I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves*

detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean.

You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.<sup>92</sup>

Well, *that* was clear enough!

### (iii) The example of godly saints of old

As you can imagine, in future centuries godly Israelites took the observance of these food laws *very* seriously indeed.

Take the example of the prophet **Ezekiel**. Over half a millennium before Peter's vision, God had called the prophet to eat food which was unclean as an acted parable of the way in which Israel would be compelled to eat unclean food during their forthcoming exile among the Gentile nations.<sup>93</sup>

You will not be surprised to read that, initially, Ezekiel had registered much the same protest and objection as Peter was to:

'Ah, Lord God! Indeed, I have never defiled myself from my youth till now ... *nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth*'.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, in the Greek Old Testament, the prophet's opening words are identical to those of the apostle, 'By no means, Lord':<sup>95</sup>

(i) '*By no means, Lord* God of Israel: surely my soul has not been defiled with uncleanness ... from my birth until now; neither has any unclean flesh entered into my mouth'.<sup>96</sup>

(ii) Peter said, '*By no means, Lord*; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean'.<sup>97</sup>

Peter was, therefore, in good company when he insisted that he had 'never eaten anything that is common or unclean'.

As another example of the care which the devout Jew took over what he ate, we recall the resolve of **Daniel** that he would 'not defile himself' with food which came from Nebuchadnezzar's table, even though that food was undoubtedly the very best which the food suppliers of Babylon could provide.<sup>98</sup>

And the same intense loyalty to God and His food laws can be illustrated from the period between the Old and the New Testaments. For, in **the days of the Maccabees**, many godly Jews preferred actual martyrdom to eating ceremonially unclean food, when the Syrian king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, required that they eat swine's flesh.<sup>99</sup>

With such examples in mind, we can understand, to some extent, why Peter objected so passionately to the demand that he kill and eat meat which God's law classed as '*unclean*'.

I say, 'to some extent', because, as our second Bible Passage makes clear, heaven had its answer ready: 'What God has *made clean*, do not regard as common'.

## THE LORD'S RESPONSE

But **when**, we may well ask, had God '*made clean*' that which He had *once* emphatically declared to be unclean?

I believe that He had done it on an occasion about two years into our Lord's public ministry, when, following His controversy in Galilee with Pharisees and scribes 'come from Jerusalem' on the subject of defilement,<sup>100</sup> He had emphasised to His disciples that nothing which enters into a man (no food, that is) could 'defile him'.<sup>101</sup>

'In saying this',<sup>102</sup> Mark added, 'He *made* (or 'declared') all foods *clean*',<sup>103</sup> where the word translated 'made clean' is the same as that used by the voice from heaven which came to Peter, 'What God has *made clean*, do not call common'.<sup>104</sup>

As Mark points out, our Lord, by implication, was setting aside the food laws which He had laid down at the giving of the law, and, on account of which, over the centuries, His people had been prepared to suffer and, if necessary, to die.

One commentator goes as far as to describe this passage, 'when it was first spoken', as 'well-nigh the most revolutionary passage in the New Testament'.<sup>105</sup>

Our Lord was concerned with the uncleanness of man's heart and made the point forcibly that food entering the body could not defile a man morally or spiritually, for it reached his stomach, not his heart. In doing so, the Saviour made it clear to His disciples that it was ***solely God's earlier prohibition*** on eating certain kinds of food which caused eating those foods to defile a man, ***not the nature*** of the food itself.

But it is obvious (from Acts 10) that, up to that time, *Peter* had not grasped the significance of what Jesus had said. And it is equally obvious (from Acts 11) that neither had ***the other disciples***.<sup>106</sup>

One notable Bible scholar has commented as follows:

'Many have asked how Peter could be so dense, considering the fact that, according to Mark 7. 19, Jesus had already uttered a saying declaring all foods clean. But it is far from clear that His disciples understood the ramifications of Jesus' utterance at the time. Mark is writing later ... long after the Cornelius episode; and, reflecting on what Jesus said, Mark<sup>107</sup> perceives the implications in Jesus' words that were not grasped at the time'.<sup>108</sup>

As we noted a little earlier, ***in one sense***, Peter's life-long refusal to eat food once declared by God to be unclean was most commendable. But, ***in another sense***, Peter, of all men, should now have known better.

For we know from Matthew's account that it had been *Peter* whose request for clarification<sup>109</sup> had prompted the Lord to expand on His declaration that *nothing* which goes into a man can possibly defile him.<sup>110</sup> And it was the Lord's clarification which carried with it the implication that all foods were effectively 'clean'<sup>111</sup> and, therefore, available to be eaten.

### **Peter and the Gospel according to Mark**

I believe it highly likely that Peter was the guiding influence behind the gospel according to Mark. Apart from evidence in the New Testament itself of a close personal relationship between the two men,<sup>112</sup> many early Christian writings bear clear witness to Peter's influence.<sup>113</sup>

I suggest that Peter not only pondered the significance – and meaning – of his vision at Joppa<sup>114</sup> but that, in the light of what that vision taught him, he also thought back later on what our Lord had said about food's not defiling a man, and came to the conclusion that the implication of our Lord's teaching was that:

- (i) not only could so-called 'unclean' food not defile a man personally,
- (ii) but also that it could no longer do so ceremonially either, and that, therefore, the distinction between so-called 'clean' and 'unclean' food no longer applied.

I suggest, therefore, that it was this realisation of Peter which led (through his close relationship with Mark) to the explanatory comment in Mark's Gospel, 'In saying this, He made all foods clean'.

It was Peter's fellow-apostle, Paul, who wrote some time after:

In later times some will depart from the faith ... commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Because every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified ('set apart to sacred use') by ***the word of God*** (to no small extent, as I see it, by the teaching of our Lord as recorded in Mark 7 and by the heavenly voice addressed to Peter in Acts 10) and prayer.<sup>115</sup>

But here in Acts 10 Peter's only concern was, of course, with the meaning of the vision and its relevance to his present situation. And so we now pick up the threads of the story.

### **THREE MEN AT THE GATE**

Peter's perplexity<sup>116</sup> was removed by the timely arrival of the three men from Cornelius, together with the Spirit's command that he should not hesitate to go with them: as the Spirit said, 'I have sent them'.<sup>117</sup> There can be no doubt that it was then, when the Spirit commanded him to accompany the three men', that Peter grasped the significance of his vision.

Note carefully the sequence of events which the apostle outlined to Cornelius later:

'God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without objection'.<sup>118</sup>

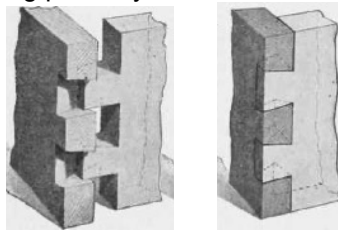
That is, Peter is saying, he had accompanied the men because (and *only* because) he then understood, by means of the vision, the error of regarding any man as 'common or unclean'.

Given the announcement by the Spirit of the timely arrival of the three men, it was a short step (i) from Peter's realising that, as had been made clear by his vision, *food eaten by Gentiles* was now to be regarded as clean, (ii) to him realising that *Gentiles themselves* were now to be regarded as clean also.

And this because, if *the purpose* of the former God-appointed distinction between clean and unclean foods had been to express Israel's separation from the other nations (and, as we saw earlier, it had!<sup>119</sup>), then *the removal* of that distinction clearly indicated that the spiritual 'middle wall of partition' which separated Jew from Gentile had also been removed.<sup>120</sup>

### God's clock keeps good time

I deliberately used the expression '*timely arrival of the three men*' twice above, because, surely, we cannot fail to observe the wonderful working of the sovereign Lord who, in His good providence, co-ordinated everything to perfection ... dovetailing perfectly ...



... His revelations to Cornelius and Peter so that:

(i) at the very time when Peter was praying and seeing his vision, the men from Cornelius were approaching the city,<sup>121</sup> and

(ii) at the very time when Peter was puzzling over the meaning of what he had seen, the men arrived at the house where he was staying, timing too improbable for coincidence.<sup>122</sup>

Note, please, that, first, *Cornelius* prayed and had a vision, which prepared him to *receive* God's message *from* Peter, and that, second, *Peter* prayed and had a vision, which prepared him to *give* God's message *to* Cornelius.

God had been wonderfully working at both ends, much as He had in the previous chapter with Saul and Ananias.<sup>123</sup>

And I note also that, in our chapter, Peter's vision came twenty-one hours after that of Cornelius.<sup>124</sup> For, had it come earlier, and had Cornelius's servants not arrived on cue, in all likelihood Peter would not have understood the significance of the vision.

### Joppa; a prophet and an apostle

And so, Peter, with nine companions in all,<sup>125</sup> left Joppa.

It had been from the very same location, many centuries before, that the prophet Jonah<sup>126</sup> had taken what proved to be (to say the least!) a rather eventful Mediterranean cruise,<sup>127</sup> in his foolish attempt to run away from the mission on which God had sent him.<sup>128</sup>

And I suspect that, if it had not been for his vision and the 'timely arrival' of the men from Cornelius, *Peter* would have been as reluctant to preach to the Gentiles at *Caesarea* as *Jonah* had been to preach to the Gentiles at *Nineveh*. But, in the event, the preaching of both men resulted in dramatic cases of repentance and salvation for those Gentiles to whom they had been sent.<sup>129</sup>

### BIBLE PASSAGE 3

For the sake of space, and reluctantly, I leave you to read the passage from Acts 10. 24 to Acts 11. 18 for yourself.

## PETER'S MESSAGE: THE GOSPEL (OF MARK) IN A NUTSHELL

Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household<sup>130</sup> was a marvellously comprehensive message. Indeed, given what we noted earlier about Peter's 'guiding influence' on the Gospel according to Mark,<sup>131</sup> we are not surprised to find that the second gospel follows exactly the same structure as did his sermon; taking up the story at Jesus' baptism by John<sup>132</sup> and continuing through to His resurrection.<sup>133</sup>

Nor should we miss Peter's insistence that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of all the key events:

*'We are witnesses* of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to *witnesses* chosen before by God, *even to us* who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead'.<sup>134</sup>

It is no exaggeration to say that Peter could well have claimed of the whole of our Lord's earthly ministry and of His bodily resurrection (in words which he wrote later concerning His Transfiguration, 'we did not follow cleverly devised myths ... but we were eyewitnesses'.<sup>135</sup>

But here I must, so to speak, fast forward the video.



## THE UNFINISHED SERMON

Moving on from his declaration that he and his fellow-apostles were 'witnesses',<sup>136</sup> Peter appeals to the 'witness' of others, namely, to the 'witness' of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>137</sup>

They, Peter asserts, 'bore witness' that, through the Lord Jesus, 'everyone' (Gentile, as well as Jew) 'who believes' would receive the forgiveness of sins.

Peter later reports that it was when he said this that:

(i) his Gentile audience 'believed'<sup>138</sup> and

(ii) 'God ... bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, putting no difference between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith'.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, 'no difference' ('no distinction') was very much the watchword of a gospel which addressed the needs of Jew and Gentile equally.<sup>140</sup>

It was, then, '*while Peter was still speaking*', that 'the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard'.<sup>141</sup> '*As I began to speak*, the Holy Spirit fell<sup>142</sup> on them' was the preacher's own recollection of what happened.<sup>143</sup> Clearly, Peter had intended to say more; he 'had hardly begun his address before the gift of the Spirit descended'.<sup>144</sup>

It is possible that Peter would have expected the gift of the Spirit to have followed either water baptism (as in Acts 2)<sup>145</sup> or the laying on of his hands (as in Acts 8).<sup>146</sup> But, if so, he soon learnt that God had other ideas! For 'he was interrupted by a wondrous thing. The Spirit of God, *as with a Divine impatience*, set aside both messenger and message, and fell on these uncircumcised'.<sup>147</sup>

What a great way to bring a gospel message to a close!

## PETER'S QUESTIONS

I want to note the *two questions* which Peter asked following this pouring out of the gift of the Holy Spirit on *Gentile* believers in an identical manner (and accompanied by the same supernatural evidence<sup>148</sup>) as the Holy Spirit had been poured out on *Jewish* believers at Pentecost.<sup>149</sup>

(i) Peter's first question was addressed to 'those of the circumcision' *from Joppa*, who reacted to new *Gentile* converts speaking in tongues<sup>150</sup> in much the same way as the multitude at Jerusalem had reacted when they witnessed new *Jewish* converts speaking in tongues ... with 'amazement'.<sup>151</sup>



To these six brethren,<sup>152</sup> Peter posed the first question:

'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptised,<sup>153</sup> who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'<sup>154</sup>

In effect, 'Can anyone refuse baptism *in water*<sup>155</sup> to those on whom God has bestowed baptism *in the Spirit*?' 'The greater had been bestowed; could the lesser be withheld?'<sup>156</sup>

(ii) Peter's second question was addressed to 'those of the circumcision' *at Jerusalem* who remonstrated with Peter because, following the conversion of the household of Cornelius, he (Peter) had accepted their invitation to spend a few days with them and therefore 'ate with them'.<sup>157</sup>

(It is sadly ironic that the man who now defended himself against the criticism of the brethren at Jerusalem for the supposed offence of eating with Gentiles should years afterwards stand condemned before the brethren at Antioch for the very real offence of refusing to eat with Gentiles!<sup>158</sup>)

To these brethren,<sup>159</sup> Peter posed the second question:

'If, therefore, God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>160</sup> who was I that I could withstand God?'<sup>161</sup>

I was struck by one paraphrase of verses 17b and 18:

"'Who was I, then, to try to *stop God!*" When they heard this, they *stopped their criticism and praised God*'.<sup>162</sup>

You can't 'stop' God, but you can 'stop' your criticism!

They replaced their *criticism* with *praise!* Now, *that* is an example worth following!

## THE SONS OF NOAH

It was the author of the Book of Acts who, in his earlier volume, recorded the gospel agenda set by the Risen Lord; 'that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to *all nations*'.<sup>163</sup> Those words '*all nations*' remind me of the closing verse of Genesis 10:

'These are the families of *the sons of Noah* ... in their nations, and *from these the nations spread abroad* on the earth after the flood'.<sup>164</sup>

Noah, of course, had only three sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth.<sup>165</sup>

It may not be coincidence, therefore, that, as has often been pointed out, Luke records:

(i) in Acts **8**, the conversion of the *Ethiopian eunuch* (in all likelihood, a descendant of *Ham*);

(ii) in Acts **9**, the conversion of *Saul of Tarsus* (certainly, a descendant of *Shem*); and

(iii) in Acts **10**, the conversion of *Cornelius* (a descendant of *Japheth*).

As an aside, I am fascinated to note that, in each of his three 'conversion' narratives, Luke provides precise details of key geographical directions which form essential parts of each story:

(i) The angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert'.<sup>166</sup>

(ii) The Lord said to Ananias, 'Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul'.<sup>167</sup>

(iii) The angel said to Cornelius, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodges with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea'.<sup>168</sup>

## AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE

There can be no doubt that the salvation and baptism of the household of Cornelius mark an extremely important milestone in the Book of Acts. For, immediately following Luke's lengthy account of that event (which occupies all of 66 verses, from Acts 10. 1 to Acts 11. 18),<sup>169</sup> we read:

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, *preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them* were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, *when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists*, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then *news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem*.<sup>170</sup>

Having reminded Theophilus (and all other readers) that, previously, the word of the gospel had been preached 'to no one but the Jews only', Luke shifts the focus to Antioch in Syria, the third largest city in the Roman world.<sup>171</sup>

His reference back to the activity of the believers who had earlier been scattered from Jerusalem is highly significant, because it provides the background and foil for his account of the next stage in God's great gospel programme – that of the Gentile mission – for which, to a great extent, the city of Antioch was to provide the springboard.

And it was God's own undeniable activity<sup>172</sup> in the conversion of one Gentile household (that of Cornelius) which prepared 'the church in Jerusalem' for that 'next stage'.

And it was that 'stage' (the Gentile mission) which, probably some ten years later, resulted in the gospel's reaching Europe.<sup>173</sup> And the rest, as is often said, is history.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In closing, let us remember that we, '*Gentiles in the flesh*', once suffered a seven-fold spiritual disadvantage:

(i) called 'Uncircumcision' ... (ii) without Christ ... (iii) aliens from the commonwealth of Israel ... (iv) strangers from the covenants of promise, (v) having no hope ... (vi) without God in the world ... (vii) far off.<sup>174</sup>

But, '*now in Christ Jesus*' we 'have been brought near by the blood of Christ',<sup>175</sup> to share with believing Israelites:

(i) reconciliation 'to God in one body through the cross',<sup>176</sup>  
(ii) 'peace',<sup>177</sup> and  
(iii) 'access by one Spirit to the Father'.<sup>178</sup>

Truly, it should take our breath away that, through the gospel, we are 'no longer strangers and foreigners, but *fellow-citizens*'<sup>179</sup> ... now, *fellow-heirs* of God's riches, *fellow-members* of Christ's body, and *fellow-partakers* of God's promise.<sup>180</sup>

Well does the apostle Paul quote the opening words of Psalm 117, 'Praise the Lord, *all you Gentiles!*'<sup>181</sup>

And well might you and I, as saved Gentiles, praise Him and '**glorify God for His mercy**'<sup>182</sup> towards us!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Acts 1. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 1-7.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 8. 1-25.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 15. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 9. 15.

<sup>6</sup> 'James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simon hath declared how *God at the first did visit the Gentiles*, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets', Acts 15. 13-15. The Cornelius episode in Acts 10 was a major breakthrough. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 was a rather private and isolated event which played no role in the mainline history of the Christian church. I suspect that Luke had learned about the eunuch's conversion direct from the mouth of Philip, Acts 21. 8 ('we ... the house of Philip the evangelist') with Acts 8. 26-39.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 9. 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 22. 3-11.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 26. 9-19.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 10. 1-44.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 11. 5-17.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 15. 7-11.

<sup>13</sup> 'Saul', Acts 9. 4; 'Ananias', Acts 9. 10; 'Cornelius', Acts 10. 3; 'Peter', Acts 10. 13.

<sup>14</sup> 'The street called Straight, and at the house of Judas', Acts 9. 11; 'He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea', Acts 10. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 9. 10-17; Acts 10. 10-23.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 10. 3-6, 22, 30-32; 11. 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 10. 9-16; 11. 4-10.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 10. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 15. 7-11.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 15. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Pages 9 and 10 of 'The conversion of Saul of Tarsus: the sequel', attached to Malcolm's Monday Musings dated 22 February 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 21. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Rom. 11. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 8. 40; 9. 30

<sup>25</sup> Matt. 16. 19.

<sup>26</sup> 'As at Pentecost Peter had used the keys of the kingdom of heaven to admit Jewish believers, so now he used them to open a door of faith to Gentiles. The coming of the Spirit upon them was manifested by outward signs, as at Pentecost', F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: the Greek text with introduction and commentary*, pages 227-228.

<sup>27</sup> 'The stated times for prayer were (1) at daybreak, the time of the morning sacrifice, (2) at the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.), the time of the evening oblation, (3) at sunset', F. F. Bruce, *ibid.*, page 103.

<sup>28</sup> 'A favourite word of Luke, who is responsible for 12 out of its 14 New Testament occurrences; it "is used by the medical writers to denote a peculiar fixed look" (Hobart, p. 76)', F. F. Bruce, *ibid.*, page 71.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 10. 1-6.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 10. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 8. 11. Peter had good cause to remember that centurion, because the healing of the centurion's servant occurred immediately before the healing of his own mother-in-law, Matt. 8. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 10. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 10. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 10. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 10. 22; cf. the good report given by the local Jewish elders to the centurion at Capernaum, Luke 7. 3-5. Interestingly, the centurion at Capernaum deterred the Lord Jesus from entering his house, Luke 7. 6, whereas Cornelius invites and welcomes Jesus' agent and servant into his, Acts 10. 22, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 10. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Acts 10. 30-31.

<sup>38</sup> 'ὁ δὲ ἀτενίσας, and when he had fastened his eyes on him', J. R. Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles (Cambridge Greek New Testament)*, page 109.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 10. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Acts 10. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Luke 24. 5. The same Greek word ('ἐμφοβος') is used to describe the human reaction of fear in both instances.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 10. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 11. 13-14; cf. 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him', Heb. 11. 6. It is significant that the angel refers the seeker to a human witness for a knowledge of how he can be 'saved' but does not himself communicate the gospel to him. An angel could direct a preacher to one who needed to hear the gospel, Acts 8. 26, and an angel could direct one who needed to hear the gospel to a preacher, Acts 10. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Acts 11. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 15. 7, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 15. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Acts 11. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 10. 43.

<sup>49</sup> Acts 15. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Acts 10. 45; 15. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Acts 11. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Acts 10. 31; 11. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Acts 10. 6, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Acts 9. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Psa. 55. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Dan 6. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Acts 10. 9.

<sup>58</sup> The servants of Cornelius and the devout soldier confirm the testimony given to Cornelius in verses 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> Acts 10. 10-23.

<sup>60</sup> Acts 10. 10-12 ('trance'), 17 and Acts 11. 5 ('vision').

<sup>61</sup> Acts 10. 13.

<sup>62</sup> John 13. 8a.

<sup>63</sup> Matt. 26. 33.

<sup>64</sup> Acts 10. 14.

<sup>65</sup> John 13. 8b; Matt. 26. 34; Acts 10. 15.

Consider the following analysis:

'Before Jesus' death, (Peter) rejected the idea of Jesus' crucifixion (Matt. 16. 22); he refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet (John 13. 8); he denied that he knew the Master (John 18. 15-18, 25-27).

Afterward, even in a vision-experience, Peter saw himself refusing the heavenly voice with a characteristically oxymoronic response to the Lord's command: "By no means, Lord" (Acts 10. 14, ESV). Admittedly this was a different context. Peter was called to preach the gospel to a group of Gentiles (the God-fearers in the house of Cornelius, centurion in the Italian Regiment). To a faithful Jew, that would have seemed outrageous—like eating the flesh of an unclean animal. Peter's every instinct was to refuse the Lord, just as he had done before and would, apparently, do again (see Gal. 2. 11-14).

What was going on in Peter's life that he could say, "No, Lord"? At the heart of the issue lay Simon Peter's struggle to come to terms with both the cross and its implications. *All of his moments of refusal seem to have involved an inability to grasp what the gospel really means*, S. B. Ferguson, 'In Christ alone', page 179.

<sup>66</sup> John 13. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Matt. 26. 69-75.

<sup>68</sup> Acts 10. 48; 11. 3. Cf. Gal. 2. 12.

<sup>69</sup> Acts 10. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Mark 5. 37-38.

<sup>71</sup> Mark 9. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Mark 14. 33

<sup>73</sup> John 18. 18.

<sup>74</sup> John 13. 38, with Mark 14. 72.

<sup>75</sup> John 21. 9, 15-17.

<sup>76</sup> Acts 10. 11-12.

<sup>77</sup> Acts 10. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Acts 10. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Acts 10. 15.

<sup>80</sup> 'Fish are not mentioned, perhaps because the vessel was not represented as containing water, although fish

also were divided into clean and unclean, Lev. 11. 9; Deut. 14. 9', R. J. Knowling, 'The Acts of the Apostles (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*)', page 254.

Lev. xi. 9, Deut. xiv. 9.

<sup>81</sup> Acts 10. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Acts 10. 11-13 with Acts 11. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Gen. 1. 29.

<sup>84</sup> Gen. 2. 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> Gen. 9. 2-3.

<sup>86</sup> Gen. 7. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Gen. 8. 20.

<sup>88</sup> Lev. 11. 1-47.

<sup>89</sup> Num. 23. 9; Exod. 19. 5-6.

<sup>90</sup> Lev. 18. 24-28.

<sup>91</sup> Lev. 11. 44-47.

<sup>92</sup> Lev. 20. 24-26. Cf. Exod. 19. 5-6; Num. 23. 9; Lev. 18. 3, 24-28.

<sup>93</sup> Ezek 4. 9-13.

<sup>94</sup> Ezek. 4. 14.

<sup>95</sup> 'Μηδαμῶς, Κύριε'.

<sup>96</sup> Ezek. 4. 14 LXX.

<sup>97</sup> Acts 10. 14.

<sup>98</sup> Dan. 1. 8.

<sup>99</sup> 1 Macc. 1. 41-63; in particular, 'many in Israel were fully resolved and confirmed in themselves not to eat any unclean thing. Wherefore *they chose rather to die, that they might not be defiled with meats*', 1 Macc. 1. 62-63. Cf. 2 Macc. 6. 18.

<sup>100</sup> Mark 7. 1-16. 'Galilee was very Jewish in religious outlook and practice, and ... it is dubious to make strong distinctions in these matters between Galilee and Judea. ... The discovery of ritual washing pools ... and other evidence of observance of clean/unclean food practice are key evidence', L. Hurtado, 'Jesus of Galilee', accessed at ... <http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/23/jesus-of-galilee/>, referencing Sean Freyne, 'Jesus of Galilee: Implications and Possibilities', pages 395-403.

<sup>101</sup> Mark 7. 17-18.

<sup>102</sup> Possibly understand as, 'The effect of this saying was ...'.

<sup>103</sup> This is how (in line with – in substance – the Revised Version, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Version and the New International Version, among many others) I believe Mark 7 verse 19 should be translated.

[Technical note: As I see it, there can be little doubt that the masculine ('καθαριζων'), and not the neuter ('καθαριζον'), is the correct reading. The apparatus in the UBS Greek New Testament quotes 'καθαριζων' as being the reading in: κ. A, B, L, W, X, D, θ, 0274, f1, f13, 28, 565, 579, 892, 1071, 1216, 1241, 1342, 1424, Maj-part (E, F, G, H, S), Co, Or, Chr, GrNy etc.. Over against this weight of ancient evidence, the Western Text and the other oldest manuscripts which give the neuter reading, date no earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century!]

Compare the following comments:

(i) 'The most approved reading here is undoubtedly the masculine (καθαριζων), and not the neuter (καθαριζον) ... Accepting, therefore, the masculine as the true reading, the only possible rendering is that which makes this last clause a comment by the evangelist upon our Lord's previous words, in which he indicates to the reader that our Lord intended by this illustration to show that no food, of whatever kind, when received with thanksgiving, can make a man unclean. The clause must, therefore, be connected with the preceding words, by the introduction of the words, in italics, "*This He said, making all meats clean*". The passage, thus rendered, becomes a very significant exposition of what has gone before', E. Bickersteth, 'Mark (The Pulpit Commentary)', on Mark 7. 19.

(ii) 'A note added by a teacher or editor who has realised that in the preceding words the Lord had really abrogated the distinction between clean and unclean food', H. B. Swete, 'The Gospel according to Mark'.

(iii) "If "not that which enters into the mouth defile the man, but that which proceeds out of the mouth", and especially when, according to Mark, the Saviour said these things "making all meats clean", manifestly we are not defiled when we eat those things which the Jews who desire to be in bondage to the letter of the law declare to be unclean', Origen, 'Commentary on Matthew', Book XI, Section 12.

<sup>104</sup> Acts 10. 15.

<sup>105</sup> William Barclay, 'Mark (Daily Study Bible)' on Mark 7. 14-23. Cf. 'It was a revolutionary declaration by Jesus', 'Robertson's Word Pictures', on Mark 7. 19.

<sup>106</sup> 'You went in to uncircumcised men *and ate with them!*' Acts 11. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Personally, as I make clear in the following section, ‘Peter and the Gospel according to Mark’, I suspect that it was Peter’s realisation, rather than Mark’s, which led to the explanatory comment..

<sup>108</sup> D. A. Carson, ‘*For the love of God (Volume 2)*’, 23 July. Accessed at ... <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/loveofgod/2013/07/23/judges-6-acts-10-jeremiah-19-mark-5/>.

<sup>109</sup> Matt. 15. 15; cf. Mark 7. 17.

<sup>110</sup> Matt. 15. 17-18; Mark 7. 18-19a.

<sup>111</sup> Mark 7. 19b.

<sup>112</sup> Acts 12. 11-12; 1 Pet. 5. 13.

<sup>113</sup> See, for example, the following seven quotations:

(i) *Justin Martyr* (A.D. 103-165). ‘The Apostles in their memoirs, which are called Gospels, have handed down what Jesus enjoined them to do ... He changed the name of one of the apostles to **Peter**; and ... it is written in his memoirs that this so happened ...that he changed the names of two other brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means sons of thunder’ (a reference to **Mark** 3. 17).

(*Apology* 1. 67; *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, 106.3.)

(ii) *The Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark* (A.D. 160-180). ‘He (**Mark**) was **Peter**’s interpreter. After the departure of Peter himself, he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy’.

(iii) *Papias* (writing in the first third of the 2nd century). ‘And the presbyter said this: **Mark** having become the interpreter of **Peter**, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered’.

(*Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., iii. 39.*)

(iv) *Irenaeus* (writing in the late 2nd century). ‘**Mark**, the disciple and interpreter of **Peter**, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter’.

(*Against Heresies*, 3.1.1)

(v) *Tertullian* (A.D. 160-220). ‘That which **Mark** published may be affirmed to be **Peter**’s whose interpreter Mark was’.

(*Against Marcion*, 4. 5)

(vi) *Clement of Alexandria* (A.D. 150-215). ‘The Gospel according to **Mark** had this occasion. As **Peter** had preached the word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that **Mark**, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it’.

(*Eusebius, Church History*, VI. 14. 6)

(vii) *Origen* (A.D. 185-254). ‘The second (Gospel) is by **Mark**, who composed it according to the instructions of **Peter**, who in his Catholic epistle acknowledges him as a son’.

(*Eusebius, Church History*, VI. 25. 5)

There is also considerable *internal* evidence of Peter’s influence within Mark’s Gospel itself.

<sup>114</sup> Acts 10. 17, 19.

<sup>115</sup> 1 Tim. 4. 1-5. In context, ‘and prayer’ signifies the giving of thanks for the food.

<sup>116</sup> The verb, ‘perplexed’ is ‘in the imperfect tense, so Peter is seen lingering over what might be going on. As he is trying to figure it out, the emissaries arrive at the gate of Simon the tanner’s house’, Darrell L. Bock, ‘Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary), on Acts 10. 17-18.

‘While Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean ... while Peter was pondering the vision’, Acts 10. 17, 19. Note: “ὥς δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ διηπόρει”, “now while he was much perplexed in himself”. *διαπορέω* implies “to be thoroughly at a loss, and not to know which way to turn”. It is used (Luke 9. 7) of Herod’s perplexity about Christ, when men said that John the Baptist was risen from the dead’, J. R. Lumby, *op. cit*, page 213.

<sup>117</sup> Acts 10. 17-20. ‘*The Spirit* said to him, “Behold, three men seek you ... **I** have sent them”, Acts 10. 19-20. This clearly indicates the personality (if not also, the deity) of the Holy Spirit; cf. ‘*the Holy Spirit* said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which **I** have called them”, Acts 13. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Acts 10. 28-29.

<sup>119</sup> Lev. 20. 24-26.

<sup>120</sup> Eph. 2. 14.

<sup>121</sup> Acts 10. 9. From shortly after 3 pm (Acts 10. 3) to around noon the next day was a relatively short time to cover roughly thirty miles. But the travellers were two able-bodied slaves and a Roman soldier – who would have been used to marching.

- <sup>122</sup> Acts 10. 17. 'Cornelius saw the angel in the afternoon of the first day, and gave the three messengers their instructions. If they set out on horseback, they would arrive at Joppa (about 30 miles from Caesarea) about noon, the time of Peter's vision', F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, page 217.
- <sup>123</sup> I noted in a previous document (pages 2 and 3 of 'The conversion of Saul of Tarsus: the sequel', attached to Malcolm's Monday Musings dated 22 February 2021) some of the detailed parallels which exist between the almost simultaneous preparation (i) of Cornelius and Peter, by means of complementary visions and (ii) of Saul and Ananias, also by means of complementary visions.
- <sup>124</sup> 'About the ninth hour of the day', Acts 10. 3; 'the next day ... about the sixth hour', Acts 10. 9.
- <sup>125</sup> Acts 10. 7-8, 23; 11. 12.
- <sup>126</sup> Jonah 1. 3b.
- <sup>127</sup> Jonah 1. 4-17.
- <sup>128</sup> Jonah 1. 1-3a. 'Jonah was the clearest Old Testament example of a reluctant, nationalist Israelite missionary to the Gentiles', Craig Keener, *Acts: an Exegetical Commentary*, page 1730. Both Jonah and Peter were told, 'Arise and go'; Jonah 3. 2; Acts 10. 20.
- <sup>129</sup> Jonah 3. 6-10; Acts 11. 14, 18.
- <sup>130</sup> Acts 10. 34-43.
- <sup>131</sup> Under the heading, 'Peter and the Gospel according to Mark' on page 6.
- <sup>132</sup> Mark 1. 2-8; Acts 10. 37.
- <sup>133</sup> Mark 16. 6-7; Acts 10. 40-41.
- <sup>134</sup> Acts 10. 39-41.
- <sup>135</sup> 2 Pet. 1. 16.
- <sup>136</sup> Acts 10. 39-41.
- <sup>137</sup> Acts 10. 43. In all, Peter appealed to three witnesses:  
(i) God bore witness to the Lord Jesus, Acts 10. 36-38;  
(ii) the apostles bore witness to Him, Acts 10. 39-42; and  
(iii) the prophets bore witness to Him, Acts 10. 43.  
Cf. the principle stated in Deut. 17. 6; 19. 15; Matt. 18. 16; 2 Cor. 13. 1; 1 Tim. 5. 19; Heb. 10. 28.
- <sup>138</sup> Acts 15. 7.
- <sup>139</sup> Acts 15. 8-9.
- <sup>140</sup> Compare Rom. 3. 22 (with verse 9) and Rom. 10. 12.
- <sup>141</sup> Acts 10. 44. Cf. 'Before he (Abraham's servant) had finished *speaking*, that behold, Rebekah ... came', Gen. 24. 15, and 'while He (the Lord Jesus) was still *speaking*, Judas... came', Mark 14. 43. Now, 'while Peter was still *speaking*', the Holy Spirit came!
- <sup>142</sup> As suddenly as 'the fire of the Lord fell', 1 Kings 18. 38.
- <sup>143</sup> Acts 11. 15.
- <sup>144</sup> J. R. Lumby, *op. cit.*, page 224.
- <sup>145</sup> Acts 2. 38. Although 'Peter might well have been uncomfortable granting baptism [to Gentiles] had the Spirit not pre-empted him', Craig Keener, *op. cit.*, page 1811.
- <sup>146</sup> Acts 8. 14-17.
- <sup>147</sup> W. M. Furneaux, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 164.
- <sup>148</sup> Acts 10. 46 with Acts 2. 4.
- <sup>149</sup> Both questions were unanswerable, and both questions contained an identical Greek verb; namely 'to forbid, refuse or prevent' ('κωλύω'), Acts 10. 47 (translated 'forbid' in both KJV and RV); 11. 17 (translated 'withstand' in both KJV and RV).



<sup>150</sup> It was a type of the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, whose alienation had for ages been symbolised by differences of language, Gen. 11. 6-9.

<sup>151</sup> 'ἐξίστημι', Acts 2. 12; 10. 45. 'The Jewish observers are here able to recognize the phenomenon from its parallel with the analogous Jewish experience of the Spirit first reported at Pentecost', Craig Keener, *op. cit.*, page 1812.

<sup>152</sup> Acts 11. 12.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. 'And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders (the Greek word, 'κωλύω'; the same as is translated 'forbid' in Acts 10. 47) me from being baptised?'"', Acts 8. 36.

<sup>154</sup> Acts 10. 47.

<sup>155</sup> 'He commanded them to be baptised', Acts 10. 48. 'Peter seems to have refrained from baptizing converts, and we know that St Paul did so, and the latter indicates a reason which may have influenced all the Twelve to appoint others to baptize, lest factions should arise, and men sever the Christian unity by calling themselves by the name of some one of the Apostles. Compare 1 Cor. 1. 13-16', J. R. Lumby, *ibid.*, page 220..

<sup>156</sup> R. J. Knowling, *op. cit.*, page 262.

<sup>157</sup> Acts 10. 48; 11. 3. Note the following comments of expositors:

(i) *Shocking!* 'We miss how shocking this narrative would have been in a first-century Jewish context and perhaps even to God-fearing Gentile believers in Luke's day: a Galilean fisherman claims, on the basis of a dream and his interpretation of it, that God has reversed one thousand years of teaching from Scripture', Craig Keener, *op. cit.*, page 1824.

(ii) *The last straw!* 'Entering a Gentile house was bad enough (Acts 10. 28), but eating with them was the last straw. The favour which the apostles had enjoyed in Jerusalem was no doubt largely due to their strict adherence to the law; Stephen's attitude had gravely imperilled this favour, but it was just too bad that the leader of the Twelve should thus compromise their position. (It is probably no accident that, shortly after this, Agrippa I killed James and imprisoned Peter to please the Jews (Acts 12. 1-3.))', F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, page 230.

(iii) *Explain yourself!* 'The complaint is expressed more likely as a statement rather than as a question. It almost has the force of "You went in and ate with Gentiles, so what about it! Explain yourself". Thus verse 2 says that they criticized him', Darrell L. Bock, *op. cit.*, on Acts 11. 3.

<sup>158</sup> Gal. 2. 11.

<sup>159</sup> Interestingly, Peter doesn't name Cornelius. But, given the very specific accusation levelled at Peter, it is most likely that everyone already knew the identity of the man and his household.

<sup>160</sup> Note that the gift of the Holy Spirit followed faith; cf. John 7. 39; Acts 15. 7-9; Eph. 1. 13.

<sup>161</sup> Acts 11. 17.

<sup>162</sup> The 'Good News Bible', also known as 'Today's English Version'.

<sup>163</sup> Luke 24. 47.

<sup>164</sup> Gen. 10. 32.

<sup>165</sup> Gen. 5. 32; 6. 10; 10. 1.

<sup>166</sup> Acts 8. 26.

<sup>167</sup> Acts 9. 11.

<sup>168</sup> Acts 10. 5-6. One expositor ventures the comment, 'Given that Simon was a tanner, odour might have also aided their quest', Craig Keener, *op. cit.*, page 1775. A case, perhaps, of being '*led by the nose*'?

<sup>169</sup> 'Acts 10. 1 to 11. 18 is the longest single narrative in Acts', Ajith Fernando, '*Acts (NIV Application Commentary)*', page 317.

<sup>170</sup> Acts 11. 19-22.

<sup>171</sup> See Thomas Constable, '*Expository Notes on the Bible*', on Acts 11. 20.

<sup>172</sup> This is stressed by Peter when he recounted what had happened; Acts 11. 15-17; 15. 6-9.

<sup>173</sup> Acts 16. 9-12. 'Philippi is a city that was formerly called Datus, and before that Crenides, because there are many springs bubbling around a hill there. Philip fortified it because he considered it an excellent stronghold against the Thracians, and named it from himself, Philippi. It is situated on a precipitous hill ... There is another hill not far from Philippi which is called the Hill of Dionysus ... between these hills ... lay *the main pass from Europe to Asia*', Appian of Alexandria, 'Civil Wars', IV, 105-106), accessed at ...  
[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Appian/Civil\\_Wars/4\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Appian/Civil_Wars/4*.html).  
See also <http://www.dovhost.com/grace-books/BakerI03.pdf>, pages 18-20.

<sup>174</sup> Eph. 2. 11-13.

<sup>175</sup> Eph. 2. 13.

<sup>176</sup> Eph. 2. 16.

<sup>177</sup> Eph. 2. 17.

<sup>178</sup> Eph. 2. 18.

<sup>179</sup> Eph. 2. 19.

<sup>180</sup> Eph. 3. 6.

<sup>181</sup> Rom. 15. 11.

<sup>182</sup> Rom. 15. 9.