

## Building Bridges

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### Acts 10:1-21

The Book of Acts vividly tells the story of how the Good News of Jesus Christ spread all over. Here are some of the early events:

- **Stephen**, the deacon, preached to the High Court of the Jews. He was martyred by stoning.
- **Philip** the deacon, went to the Samaritans. He preached to them, and they accepted Christ. Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid hands over them and they received the Holy Spirit.
- **Saul** met Jesus on his way to Damascus.
- **Ananias** of Damascus prayed over Saul after his conversion. Saul was on fire for Christ after that.
- **Philip** was led to desert where he met the **Ethiopian eunuch**. Philip explained to him the Word of God, and the Ethiopian man converted and got baptized.
- **Saul** stayed three years in **Arabia and Damascus**. While God was shaping his faith, I assume he did not stop from preaching. As we read, he went to Jerusalem...

In Galatians (1:18) Paul explains that Saul went to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter.

No one trusted Saul. His reputation was bad. **Barnabas** (which means the son of the encourager) one of the Jerusalem disciples, did his part: “**But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles**”... and explained what had happened to Saul...

- **Saul** has been given the green light to do ministry in Jerusalem...
- Saul is reaching out to Hellenistic Jews, (Greek influenced Jews)...
- **Peter traveled outside of Jerusalem** to two cities. He went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in **Lydda**. He healed a paralyzed man called **Aeneas**.
- Peter traveled to **Joppa** (ten miles between two cities) there he healed a dead disciple called **Tabitha** (in Greek her name was **Dorcas**). “Tabitha, get up.” She was alive... The Bible says Tabitha had a ministry for the poor. “**This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.**” (Acts 9:42 NIV)

Wow, the Spirit of the Lord is working, overtime... among all nations, not just among the Jews...

In Chapter 10 we go to another city, **Caesarea**. God is going to shape Peter, and we will see the Good News of Jesus Christ spreading more.

**At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. <sup>2</sup> He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. <sup>3</sup> One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”**

**<sup>4</sup> Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked.**

**The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”**

**<sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. <sup>8</sup> He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa. (Acts 10:1-8)**

Let us look to the map where is **Caesarea**.

We are moving to places out of the comfort zone of the Jews.

“The city is a seaport on the Mediterranean coast that was rebuilt by Herod the Great and named after Caesar Augustus. It was the center of the Roman administration of the province of Palestine and ‘served as a showpiece for Roman culture’;<sup>1</sup> it even had a temple dedicated to Caesar. The Jews hated Caesarea, calling it ‘**the daughter of Edom**,’ and ‘would often speak of it as though it were no part of Judea.’<sup>2</sup> The population there had more Gentiles than Jews. According to Josephus, riots between these two groups sparked off the Jewish war against Rome in A.D. 66.<sup>3</sup> Josephus also claims that the entire Jewish population of 20,000 in Caesarea was massacred in A.D. 66.”<sup>4</sup>

Why in the world God’s Spirit is going to this city?

Let me open here an important observation.

Please travel with me to the OT. God chose Israel to be light to the nations. God also asked Israel to **set themselves apart from the other nations and from false gods**. The Israelites had strict rules about living a holy life. “What is clean, what is unclean, what to touch, what not to touch, what animal they can eat, what they cannot eat and so on...” Yet instead of being humble and trusting God in their life, the Israelites felt privileged.

“The tragedy was that Israel twisted the doctrine of election into one of favoritism, became filled with racial pride and hatred, despised Gentiles as ‘dogs’, and developed traditions which kept them apart.”<sup>5</sup>

They are the chosen ones. When privilege feeds one’s pride, wow, then it is dangerous.

“Us”, and “them”.

And believe me, the church falls in this trap as well, us and them, the insider and the outsider.

**Illustration:** When I was serving in Lebanon, in one of our churches we had free examination by a doctor concerning some disease. There was big line for this examination. Someone came to me from my parish and said she needed to be treated differently. She was from “the family of faith.”

### **God is teaching an important lesson to Peter.**

-Go to the Samaritans... (chapter 8); Peter learning from deacon Philip...

-Go to **Joppa**. The harbor city has history. **Jonah** escaped from there.

Was Peter called to go places he did not want to go? The Bible does not tell that. Is God preparing Peter to reach out to places where people are not “His People?” Yes...

In fact, the last verse in chapter 9 says, the Israelites that **Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon**. That occupation is not acceptable for a Jew. Tanner’s workers need to touch dead animals, which was a taboo for the Jews.

John Stott says, “but Peter disregarded this, which 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 instructions to go and baptize gentile Cornelius.”<sup>6</sup>

Peter is learning something new... let us explore:

- Who was **Cornelius**:

-**Centurion, captain over 100 soldiers**

-**He and all his family were devout and God-fearing.**

-**He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly...**

- **Caesarea**, a gentile city (few Jews) ... It was the Roman capital of the province of Judea.

- There was a friction between Gentiles and Jews in this city.

**-God's choice is not a Jew, but a Gentile.** And not just any Gentile, he is a **commanding officer** of the **occupying army** whose brutality was relentless!

-God has been preparing Cornelius. He is a genuine God-fearer, who worships Israel's God and supports their community. Like Tabitha in the previous chapter, his generous heart makes him a respected leader in his home and a treasured member in the Jewish community.

**-Cornelius was man of prayer.**

Prayer is an opening of the mind and heart to God; without prayer nothing we can do, often I said this. By the way, "in Luke's two volumes there are seven instances when prayer sets the stage for significant spiritual encounters."<sup>7</sup>

What was the answer of the prayer? Go get Peter who is in Joppa.

**-Peter sees a vision in his prayer:**

**About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.<sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.<sup>11</sup> He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.<sup>12</sup> It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.<sup>13</sup> Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."**

**<sup>14</sup> "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."<sup>15</sup> The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."<sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.**

**<sup>17</sup> While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.<sup>18</sup> They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. (Acts 10:9-18 NIV11)**

God is preparing Peter, my friends. Before the delegation arrives to get Peter, God prepared Peter. How?

It is noontime, and Peter goes to the roof for prayer. He is hungry. God sends food, animals, clean and unclean....hmmm

A voice commands him to "rise, sacrifice and eat!"

Peter rejects, his rejection is in obedience to God's law (Lev. 10:10)

This happens three times...

Daniel refused to be defiled by the king's food in Babylon (Dan 1:8–12).

God's answer: **Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.**

We need to be careful how we read this.

God is preparing Peter to be ready to meet a gentile man called Cornelius.

This does not mean everything is permissible, and that all the laws were wrong, and that God is saying, "break the laws."

"With the coming of Christ, the radical symbolization of the dietary laws becomes obsolete, because the gift of the Spirit transcends the symbols, purifying the heart in a New Creation. In Jesus the Messiah of Israel, God has broken down the barrier wall between Jews and Gentiles, humiliating both categories in order to reveal God's mercy to both."<sup>8</sup>

**<sup>19</sup> While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup> So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." <sup>21</sup> Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"**

**<sup>22</sup> The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." <sup>23</sup> Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. (Acts 10:19-23 NIV11)**

God prepares Peter for his next move.

**Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" (v. 21)**

Peter got up and went down the stairway and found those messengers who were calling his name. He is with them on same level, and after hearing why they came, he invited them to his house. (most likely they will be invited for food)

Do you recall Peter's last encounter with the resurrected Jesus:

Jesus was preparing breakfast for his disciples.

Jesus was by the sea when he asked Peter three times, "**Do you love me?**"

Peter said, "Yes." Then what was Jesus' command?

**"Feed my lambs..." "Take care of my sheep...." "Feed my sheep." (John 21:15–17)**

With Jesus we have NEW Covenant with God.

Peter is going out of his comfort zone. God is teaching him about the Kingdom of God. In fact, all these preparations opened Peter's eyes to see that the Kingdom of God is beyond his small Jewish world.

When God calls, we respond and act, and invite, and lead people, all nations, all colors, all backgrounds, to Jesus...

### **Application**

Let me remind you that in the first chapter of Acts, before leaving this earth, Jesus said:

**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8 NIV11)

Well, it is not easy to apply this, when we have preferences, prejudices, barriers of nations, races, colors and so on...

What is your barrier? What kind of prejudices do you struggle with?

Peter needed a drastic message from God to get rid of his prejudices about distinctions among people. I need help from God to remove those prejudices and try to humbly listen to God, obey His command and reach out to all, to the ends of the earth.

1. “Caesarea,” *The Biblical World*, ed. Charles F. Pfeifer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 154. From Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 319

2. Williams, Acts, 184. *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 319

3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.8.7–9; *Wars of the Jews* 12.13.7;14. 4–5; in Josephus, *Complete Works*, 422–23; 483–84. *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 310

4. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.18.1; in Josephus, *Complete Works*, 492. *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 319

5. John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, The World*, p 185

6. *ibid*, P184

7. Darrell Bock lists seven examples in Luke and Acts where prayer sets the stage for spiritual encounters (Luke 3:21–22; 6:12–16; 9:18–22, 28–31; 22:39–46; Acts 1:14; 13:1–3). Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Backer Academic, 2007), 387.

8. N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone: Part One*, p 164.