

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twelve
Acts 9:32-10:16

Day One

32 As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. 34 "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. 35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

v. 32 – Now that there was peace in the Church, Peter was free to travel and visit the saints. While I say “church,” there was no church as such. They didn’t refer to themselves as the church, but were rather the believers who met together to pray and worship Jesus. The church was a concept that developed much later.

v. 33 – **I wonder why Luke chose to tell us about this miracle?** Perhaps to show that God’s strategy for evangelism remained the same at this point. One of his followers would perform a great miracle, which would open the people to hear what they had to say, at which point the Lord would open their hearts, and they would repent and turn to the Lord, at which point they were baptized. **Is there anything to be learned here for modern church planting strategies?** My only thought would be that God knows how to attract a crowd. We need to let Him do that by whatever means He chooses.

v. 34 – Notice what Peter said: “Jesus heals you.” Not “I heal you” or even “be healed.” The focus was on Jesus. If we are to succeed, we must put the focus on Jesus in all that we do. Yet Jesus can’t do it by Himself, for He has chosen to work in and through His body. So while God is doing the work, we must make the introductions, so to speak. I must teach on purpose, for example, but Jesus is the one who shows each person his or her purpose. We truly are in partnership with the Lord for work and ministry, as Paul wrote:

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

You are God’s fellow or co-worker. Don’t minimize or inflate the importance of your role, but realize that God can’t do it without you because that is how He’s chosen to accomplish His work of the Church.

v. 35 – What results! Jesus healed one man through Peter’s word and the whole region turned to the Lord! That reminds me of God’s promise in the book of Psalms:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which

yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).

Is what you are doing prospering? Or are you putting a spin on inadequate results? If you aren't getting the results that you expected or hoped for, and you've been at it for some time, it's time to do a serious assessment. For that, you may want to enlist the help of someone who isn't as close to the work as you are, so that you can be objective.

Day Two

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

v. 36 – Tabitha had a purpose to do good and help the poor. She wasn't a woman of prominence, nor did she perform public acts of healing or evangelism. She simply took care of the less fortunate in her community. Yet here God honors this woman by including her in this book, which for the most part focuses on the great heroes of the early Church. When you function in your purpose, it may not be center stage for all to see, but God sees. What's more, He will honor you in His own way for your work and diligence.

v. 37 – I'm not sure if the believers were looking to bring her back to life, but it seems like they put her body in a holding area, so to speak, until they got in touch with Peter. Jews bury their dead quickly, so holding her body seems highly unusual. Faith without action is always useless, so if they had faith to bring her back, they had to do something to make that happen. The first thing they did was not complete the burial process; that seems pretty basic. **What basic step can you take today to walk out what you believe? It doesn't have to be dramatic or public; it just has to be consistent with what you believe.**

v. 38 – I don't know if these believers had a relationship with Peter, but they went anyway. Tabitha's faithful friends sought out the best known of Jesus' disciples for help. They went straight for the top, so you have to admire their courage. **What could you do if you had courage and weren't afraid of being rejected or of being told "no"?** James wrote about this when he said:

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:2-3).

What do you want that you don't ask for? What do especially want to do that will bless others, and for which you haven't asked? Why are you afraid to ask the Lord for these things? What are you going to do about it?

v. 39 – Notice the evidence of Tabitha's abandonment to her purpose. There are many who talk about what they are going to do one day, but Tabitha did it. When Peter came—and it's amazing that he did come—he saw the proof of this woman's commitment to the Lord and her fellow saints. **If you had to produce evidence of such commitment, what would you show? What witnesses would you call that would testify to your help to others in good times and bad? If you were "accused" of serving God's people, would there be enough evidence to "convict" you and find you "guilty?" If you were gone, would the saints miss you as they missed Tabitha?**

Day Three

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. 42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

v. 40 – Peter was so moved by what he saw that he sent everyone out of the room so he could pray. The focus of this story is usually Peter, who performed a great miracle. But I like to put the spotlight on Dorcas, who attracted so much love and attention from her friends that they just couldn't accept her death. And Peter was so impressed by the hole that she left in the community that he brought her back to life to finish her work.

What can you do today to resurrect someone who isn't functioning in their full capacity? Can you touch them? Pray for them? Encourage them? Loan or give them some money?

v. 41 – There are many who are willing to pray, but not to give a helping hand. Not only did Peter pray, but he helped Dorcas to her feet. What a remarkable scene that must have been! The saints had brought Peter to Tabitha, but I'm not sure what they expected to happen. Now their beloved sister was back from the dead and they must have been overjoyed. My objective is to bring that same kind of life wherever I go. I want my visits to churches to be special times when I impart my gifts and receive encouragement in return, just as Paul wrote to the Romans:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1:11-13).

What spiritual gifts do you have that could make others strong? Do you have enough contact with the gifts of others to benefit from their fellowship?

v. 42 – I have often said that Tabitha brought a great revival to her village, yet she never preached a message herself. Instead, she was faithful to her purpose and heaven watched and moved on her behalf. I like to think that if Dorcas were alive today, she would have a sewing machine that would constantly be in use to bless other people. **What can you do that could be a constant blessing to other people?** There are too many who are concerned that they can't witness, but Tabitha was a witness not by what she said but by what she did. The answer to successful witnessing isn't a seminar about techniques of evangelism; it's a seminar about being who you are and then making your presence felt in your community. **Do you agree?**

v. 43 – It is my understanding that a tanner's home wasn't the best place to stay. A tanner treated leather and other fabrics with dyes and chemicals. That made their shops a pretty smelly place. A lot of times we are waiting to release our gifts or serve the Lord until conditions are right. Here was a man who practiced hospitality but he wasn't the one you would have thought to be the one to do so. **What are you waiting to do until conditions are right or improve? Can you do something in that area today?**

Day Four

10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 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!" 4 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.

v. 1 – It isn't logical to think that Cornelius was the very first Gentile convert. My opinion is that Luke and the Spirit wanted to show us what a difficult time the apostles had breaking out of their narrow-mindedness. Yes, Peter was going to the Greek world before this, but it was to work with Greek-speaking Jews. Now the Spirit wanted the apostles to fulfill what He had told them to do earlier in Acts:

“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).

Plus, Luke always wrote with a Roman audience in mind, so I think he wanted to show that the Lord loved all of Roman society, even the military.

v. 2 – Cornelius was a good man. He prayed and gave regularly, as did his entire family. What are you doing to help the poor? There are so many verses that speak to this critical issue, yet I find myself hardened toward the poor more often than not. But God cares passionately for them, and He wants us to feel the same. How many poor people are in your life right now? What can you give to help them?

v. 3 – Cornelius was probably praying as was the Jewish custom at about 3 pm. There is something to be said for regular prayer breaks. It is of note to me that the Muslims incorporated this habit, but Christians have not, perhaps not wanting to be legalistic. I think I could use some of this legalism where prayer is concerned. It seems that God “uses” these times to reveal Himself to His people, as He did here, in Acts 3:1, Luke 1:11 and Daniel 9:20. **Why don’t you try this today? Take a five-minute prayer break at noon, 3 pm and 9 pm. Write down what you hear or sense during these breaks.**

This angel called Cornelius by name. There is certain revelation that is meant for everyone and then sometimes God has a message just for you. Not everyone else can hear or see it, just like when Saul was on the Damascus road. I’m sure there were other believing Gentiles in Caesarea at the time, but God chose Cornelius as the vessel to help Peter break out of his Jewish box. **What is God saying to you?**

v. 4 – As I’ve stated before, angels are awesome beings. Almost anyone who saw one in the Bible was afraid. But even in fear, Cornelius asked the right question—“What is it, Lord?” God never appears to someone without a specific purpose in mind. I think too many want God to appear or speak so they will feel better. I don’t think God necessarily wants us to feel better, but rather to do His bidding. **Are you hungry for God to speak or reveal Himself to you? Are you ready to do what He reveals?** If not, then He may not come.

But the angel gave an awesome introduction. He stated that Cornelius’ faithfulness in prayer and giving had come up before the Lord as a memorial of sorts. When God was looking to open the door to the Gentile world, He chose faithful Cornelius. God always sees and He never forgets. Don’t be discouraged today. God has been watching you and He has taken notice of your obedience. In the fullness of time, He will reward you!

Day Five

5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." 7 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. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

v. 5 – The angel could not preach the good news to Cornelius; he could only direct him to the man who could. It is interesting to me that the angel didn’t bring this message to Peter, but to Cornelius. Peter had a vision, but it was symbolic and indirect. Cornelius’ message was direct and to the point. God was working with Peter, accepting him where he was in his thinking but not willing to leave him there. **Are you growing in your wisdom and understanding in the things of God?**

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great

endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:10-13). This was partly the reason that I returned to school when I was 37 and earned my doctorate—I had stopped growing in the knowledge of God! It took me eight years to finish, but I needed the discipline and content that the school program offered. Today I read or listen to 80 books every year, because I want to keep increasing in my knowledge of God—who He is and how He works. I'm not implying that you must go back to school to grow in the knowledge of God; I am saying that you must do whatever is necessary to keep growing.

v. 6 – God always knows where you are! You can't run or hide, nor do you ever escape His loving care. The angel told Cornelius where Peter was staying.

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you (Psalm 139:8-12).

I am grateful that God always knows where I am, both physically and spiritually. He can find me when He needs me and help me when I'm lost.

v. 7 – Cornelius didn't waste any time. God had spoken to him, but he didn't even know what Peter was going to do for him. He just knew that God wanted them to get together. **Is there anyone that you feel you need to connect with, but you aren't sure why? Do what Cornelius did: He did his part to make their meeting happen as quickly as possible.**

v. 8 – Cornelius didn't keep this vision to himself, wondering whether he was seeing or imagining things. He had faith in God and spoke accordingly. **Do you believe that you can hear from God? I do. But I don't put my faith in my ability to hear or see, but rather in God's ability to make Himself known to me. Where is your faith in regard to hearing from God?**

Day Six

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

v. 9 –God is a great administrator and organizer, the best I have ever seen. He is always on time and budget, and He carries out every project with perfect planning and execution. First, an angel appeared to Cornelius. Now that his servants were on their way to find

Peter, He spoke to Peter to prepare him for the events that were to take place and the visitors he was to receive.

Notice again that Peter had regular times of prayer, similar to the traditions of the Muslims today. While I deplore legalism, there is much to be said for such discipline and regularity. Peter made himself available to God on a regular basis and so did Cornelius. God knew He could speak to these men because they made themselves available to Him a few times each day. **Why not experiment a few days this week with this practice and see if you can make it a regular discipline? I think I will join you in this, for I certainly could use more discipline and regularity in my prayer life.**

v. 10 – Peter was hungry and God used this hunger first to move him to pray and secondly as the theme of the vision Peter had. Peter went to the rooftop to be alone so he could pray. While there, he fell into a trance. Peter was a rough and tumble fisherman, but now he was having a mystical, spiritual experience. There are many who are afraid of such experiences, and consider them odd and “spooky.” I think at times, however, God must suspend senses for us to receive from Him. What you see and hear can fool you sometimes and aren’t to be trusted. That is why He uses dreams to speak to us. When our natural “defenses” are at rest, He can speak directly to our heart. **It would be a great study for you to look at all the times that God used dreams and visions to speak to His people. Even the book of Revelation is the record of a vision. Why not consider such a study in the near future?**

v. 11 – Luke had to receive this information directly from Peter. Luke was a doctor and a scientist and he was thorough in his research and methodical in his presentation. Luke also used the best Greek in the New Testament. God uses who you are in your work for Him. People always say, “More of you, Lord, and less of me.” I agree in principle, but I also think that “More of you, Lord and more of me” has its place. God wants to use who you are because He created you to be who you are. It’s true that sin has tainted our personality and thinking. But the answer isn’t to eliminate who we are, but to eliminate the sin so that we can be the best “who we are” possible. **Does that make sense to you? What have you tried to eliminate that is an important part of who you are? I have said many times that God is often more comfortable with our humanity than we are. Is that true in any area for you?**

v. 12 – God showed Peter various members of His animal kingdom. I wonder if Peter saw any new animals or if he was familiar with all the creatures that were in this sheet? I ask that because very often God can’t show us things unless we are roughly familiar with them in the first place. For instance, if there had been a computer in that sheet, Peter would not have known what it was. My point is that we should always be learning and expanding our knowledge of many things so that God can use them to speak to us and in turn we can teach others. That is why I read history, biographies, quantum physics, devotionals and secular leadership books. I want to expand my mental world so that God can have more to use when He wants to reveal or speak something to me.

What are you doing to expand your intellectual or mental world? Are you growing as a person? As a leader? As a disciple? If not, what are you prepared to do to correct that situation?

Day Seven

13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." 16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

vs. 13&14 – It is of note that the Lord didn't confront Peter's prejudice against Gentiles directly. Instead He couched it in terms of unclean foods. Notice the difference between Cornelius' response, which was obedient and immediate, and Peter's, which was hesitant. Peter responded like the vision was a trick, trying to get him to do something ungodly or against his principles. Yet Peter knew it was the Lord speaking to him. So Peter said two words that should never go together—"no" and "Lord." You can never tell the person who is Lord of your life "no." Yet Peter did.

I will never be able to understand the power that Jewish tradition and culture played in the life of the apostles. They had a command to go forth, but they went forth only to Jews with limited exceptions. This was so powerful that it caused them to delay their obedience to God's directives. **That is the power that culture can play in any of our lives. So that leads to my next question: Where has culture exerted such pressure on you that you find it difficult or even impossible to obey God? Can you identify that pressure? Is it materialism? Fear of cancer? Affiliation with the position of a certain political party?**

Peter could unequivocally state that he had never eaten anything unclean. He was faultless where the dietary laws were concerned. But what had been of paramount importance to him wasn't at all important to God. **Where are your values out of line with God's? When you identify any such areas, can you guess who must change?**

v. 15 – Peter was given an important principle, but it was going to be up to him to apply that principle in his life. God didn't come out and say, "Listen, you don't like Gentiles and are prejudiced against them. If that continues, your usefulness to Me will be limited. So repent of your bias and get right with Me and that part of My creation." God didn't do that. It was up to Peter to make that connection. **Where do you need to make a connection where God's principles are concerned? Where do you need to grow in your understanding of God and His requirements for you?**

v. 16 – This was such an important lesson that the vision was repeated three times for emphasis and clarity. But notice that there was no judgment or condemnation in the lesson for Peter. God is so merciful and gracious! He is just, kind and gentle. *Lord, show me where I'm missing You, where I fall short of Your love and mercy. Confront the*

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strongholds of my culture that are in my life. Make me a representative not of my culture but of the culture of Your kingdom, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.