

Gaining a World-Wide Vision

Acts 11:1-18

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Gaining a World-Wide Vision, Acts 11:1-18

(Acts 11:1-18) **Introduction:** what happened in this passage is of critical importance to church history. The event needs to be carefully studied by every church and body of believers.

1. The church's early vision: narrow and traditional (v.1-3).
2. God's will for the church's vision: a world-wide mission (v.4-15).
3. The church's response to God's will: the conviction of a world-wide mission (v.16-18).

1. (Acts 11:1-3) Church: the church's early vision was narrow and traditional.

Note two points.

1. The apostles and brothers, that is, the whole church, heard about Peter's preaching mission to the Gentiles and about their having received "the Word of God." The news was bound to travel fast, for it was unheard of that a Jew would fellowship and eat with an idolatrous Gentile. And to top it off, Peter had baptized the Gentiles without first requiring them to be circumcised.

Remember: most if not all the believers at Jerusalem were Jews. They were circumcised as small children and had been committed to the law of Moses since childhood. When they accepted Christ, they did not forsake their Judaistic religion. They saw Christianity as an extension of Judaism. In their minds Christ had only added new teachings to their existing law and religion.

Therefore, if a person wished to accept Christ, he had to become a Jew first...

- to be circumcised
- to commit himself to the law of Moses
- to observe all the ceremonies and rituals of Judaism

Once a person had done these things, that is, become a Jew, then and only then could he receive Christ and be baptized. Then and only then could he be accepted into the church. Peter had gone contrary to these beliefs and practices. He had...

- allowed Gentiles to receive the Word of God without circumcising them (Acts 11:1).
- broken the law of Moses by "**going in to the uncircumcised [Gentiles] and eating**" with them (Acts 11:3).

The news was bound to travel fast. The early believers, who were still loyal to their Judaistic religion, were shocked. The Jerusalem church was being shaken to its foundation. The basic belief of so many of the early believers—that Jesus had come only to enlarge and extend Judaism—was being challenged. Peter had to give an answer, and it had to be clearly explained and understood.

2. The circumcision *segment* of the church was especially aroused. Note that only "they of the circumcision contended with Peter." (**See Deeper Study #1, The Circumcision—Acts 11:2 at end of this study on notes page 7.**) The apostles and most of the Christian *brothers* felt no contention or divisiveness. They trusted Peter's walk with the Lord and felt sure that he would have an adequate explanation when he had the opportunity to share the experience.

The word "contended" (*diekrinonto* ^{PWS: 749}) means to stand against, to take an opposite position, to take sides against, to oppose, to create a cleavage, a division. It is creating strife, struggle, and discord. They readily and willingly opposed Peter, and the idea is that it was repeated; it went on and on; the issue was prolonged.

Again keep in mind the issue: Peter had carried the Word of God to the Gentiles and...

- ⇒ allowed the non-Jews to receive the Word of God without circumcising them (**Acts 11:1**).
- ⇒ had broken the law of Moses by "going to the uncircumcised [non-Jews] and eating" with them (**Acts 11:3**).

Thought 1. Note three striking lessons.

- 1) Some hang on to their religious form, ceremony, rituals, rules, and regulations. These are placed before the lives and salvation of men.
- 2) Note the true spirit of these legalists. Their spirits should have been rejoicing that some people were now saved and brought to the knowledge of Christ. Instead their spirits were full of contention and divisiveness because some religious practices were violated.
- 3) Prejudice, discrimination, rituals, and rules can blind us to God's purpose to reach out to *all* men in salvation. All men are to be reached no matter who they are. No church should exclude anyone. The church's mission is to reach both the dirty and the clean, both the lower and the upper class.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14**).**

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19**).**

"And the gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10**).**

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15**).**

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47**).**

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" ([Acts 1:8](#)).

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" ([Rev. 14:6](#)).

Thought 2. The disciple is called to do the Lord's will, to reach and evangelize the world. He often has to break tradition and buck the tide of doing things the way they have always been done. When he does, he can expect criticism and contention from the legalist and the traditionalist. Nevertheless, the true disciple of Christ remains faithful even as Peter did. He does what God says. He does all he can to reach out and share Christ with a world filled with desperate needs.

Thought 3. Some churches commit a *terrible* crime: they monopolize the gospel, seldom if ever sharing it. They take the gospel and keep it to themselves, shutting all others out, never reaching out to bring others in. They build barriers of exclusiveness and prejudice, shutting themselves off from the rest of the world.

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" ([Acts 10:34](#)).

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" ([Acts 15:8-9](#)).

"But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God" ([Romans 2:10-11](#)).

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" ([Romans 10:12-13](#)).

"And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" ([Ephes. 6:9](#)).

"I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" ([1 Tim. 5:21](#)).

"Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" ([James 2:4](#)).

"He will surely reprove you, if ye do secretly accept persons" ([Job 13:10](#)).

2. ([Acts 11:4-15](#)) Missions— Evangelism— Church, Vision: God's will for the church's vision was a world-wide mission. Peter reached out to the contentious. He explained as clearly and straightforwardly as he could. He simply shared what had happened. The outline below is sufficient in reviewing the experience (see [Acts 10:1-48](#), **DEEPER STUDY #2, page #9**). But note what Peter stressed: **God's will is a world-wide mission**, the door of salvation is to be thrown open to the whole world (Gentiles). The stress is upon God's intervention: God acting, moving, revealing, and making His will clear. Peter stressed...

- a trance and vision *from God* ([Acts 11:5](#)).
- a vessel or platter descending *from heaven* to him ([Acts 11:5](#)).
- the *Lord speaking* to him ([Acts 11:7-8](#)).
- the *Lord commanding* him three times ([Acts 11:10](#)).
- the vessel ascending back *into heaven* ([Acts 11:10](#)).
- the *supernatural timing* in the arrival of Cornelius' servants ([Acts 11:11](#)).
- the *Holy Spirit's instructing* him to go to the Gentiles ([Acts 11:12](#)).
- the *angel's visit* to the Gentile and his instructions to send for Peter ([Acts 11:13](#)).
- the *Holy Spirit falling* on the Gentiles even before he had finished ([Acts 11:15](#)).
- the *Holy Spirit fell* on the Gentiles just as "on us" ([Acts 11:15](#)).
- the *Holy Spirit fell* just as the Lord promised ([Acts 11:16](#)).
- *God gave* the Holy Spirit to Gentiles just "as He did to us" ([Acts 11:17](#)).

Now note four things.

1. Everything that happened to Peter in opening the door to the Gentiles was of God, initiated and controlled by God. Peter was merely the instrument God used. It was God's will, God's work, God's activity, God's carrying of the gospel to the world (Gentiles), not Peter's.

2. There were six witnesses to what happened, each one verifying that the event was all of God. And note: they were Jewish believers themselves.

3. The words "**nothing doubting**" (*mēden diakrinanta* ^{PWS: 2711}, [Acts 11:12](#)) mean making no distinction. God tells Peter in no uncertain terms, "Go with them [the Gentiles] making no distinctions."

Thought 1. The same command is given to all believers of all generations. Believers are not to make distinctions, not to discriminate in proclaiming the gospel. What an indictment against so many! How many *withdraw* from the poor? How many do not reach out to people of other races and social classes? (**For verses, see note above—**[Acts 11:1-3](#).)

4. Note the amount of space and detail given by the author (Luke) to this event. He stresses the event more than any other in the book of Acts. Add to it the long discussion and chapter dealing with the same subject in [Acts 15](#) and its importance becomes even more significant. The importance of God's will, that the gospel be preached to the whole world, can never be overstressed.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" ([John 3:16](#)).

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" ([Mark 16:15](#)).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" ([Acts 1:8](#)).

3. ([Acts 11:16-18](#)) Missions— Church, Vision: the church's response to God's will was the conviction of a world-wide mission.

1. There was Peter's conviction. He was convinced of three clear *truths*.

- a. The Lord's promise was fulfilled in the Gentiles; the Gentiles were being baptized with the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:5](#); [John 14:26](#)).

Thought 1. Note a significant point: Peter saw that the most significant of the two baptisms (the baptism of water by John and the baptism of Jesus) was the baptism of Jesus, that is, the baptism of the Spirit. He was clearly saying that this was what he saw and understood.

- b. Peter was convinced of another truth: he could not withstand (stand against) God. The Greek is emphasized, "I, who was I that I could withstand God?" Peter had absolutely nothing to do with giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's doing, and one thing is sure: no man is going to stop God from doing what He purposes to do. It was God's will that the door of salvation be swung open to the Gentiles and God was doing it.
- c. It is not circumcision—not some ritual, not some ceremony, not religion—but belief that caused the Holy Spirit to enter a life. "**God gave them [the Holy Spirit]...[they] who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ**" ([Acts 11:17](#)).

2. There was the church's conviction: God grants repentance to all men.

Note three significant points.

- a. **Repentance is the gift of God and of the Holy Spirit.** If there should be no God, no Holy Spirit, there would be no opportunity to repent. Since both God and the Spirit do exist and are actively working to save men, there is such a thing as repentance. Men have the privilege of repenting, of actually turning from their sin to God. Note what God expects of men: not religion, not some ritual or ceremony, not social standing or success, not race or knowledge, but repentance.

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 2:38](#)).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" ([Acts 3:19](#)).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" ([Acts 8:22](#)).

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" ([Acts 17:30](#)).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" ([Isaiah 55:7](#)).

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" ([2 Chron. 7:14](#)).

- b. **Repentance is unto life; that is, it leads to life.** Abundant life and eternal life are the end, the consummation, the experience of repentance. The person who repents experiences life immediately, and lives on experiencing life to the fullest—forever. He never has and never will taste death.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" ([John 3:16](#)).

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" ([John 3:36](#)).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" ([John 5:24](#)).

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" ([John 11:25-27](#)).

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" ([Galatians 6:8](#)).

- c. **God has thrown open the door of salvation to the world (Gentiles).** This is the church's first *magna charta of missions*, its first stamp of approval to world-wide evangelism. (Note: the battle is far from over. Selfishness and self-centeredness are difficult to erase from depraved human nature. The battle had to be constantly fought in the early church, and the struggle has continued on down to the present time. How many churches and believers still resist world missions and evangelism either through simple neglect and unconcern or through direct opposition?)

"Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage" ([Matthew 22:9](#)).

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" ([Mark 16:15](#)).

"Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" ([Luke 9:60](#)).

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" ([Luke 19:10](#)).

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" ([Luke 24:47](#)).

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" ([John 20:21](#)).

"Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" ([Acts 5:20](#)).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" ([2 Tim. 4:2](#)).

NOTES PAGE ON CIRCUMCISION

DEEPER STUDY #1

(Acts 11:2) The Circumcision— Judaizers— Legalists: these were Jews who professed Christ but still hung on to their Judaistic religion, in particular to the rite of circumcision and to the law of Moses ([Acts 5:1-35](#), esp. [Acts 5:1, 24-29](#)). They believed a man became a Christian...

- by first becoming a Jew. The man was to be circumcised, embrace Judaism in all its rituals and ceremonies, and begin to obey the laws of Moses,
- then the man could accept Christ as his Savior.

In the mind of the circumcised, Christianity was a mixture of Judaism and the teachings of Christ. The law was just as important as Christ and Christ was no more important than the law. They failed to grasp...

- that Christ was the fulfillment of the law.
- that Christ had kept the law perfectly, thereby becoming the Ideal Man, the Perfect Pattern of what every man should be.
- that Christ was not only the embodiment of the law, but so much more—the very embodiment of God Himself, the Ideal Man, the Perfect Pattern to whom *all men* were to look for their salvation and standard.
- that Christ, as the Son of God and as the Ideal Man and the Perfect Pattern, is the One to whom *all men* are now to look and obey.

Some Jews were impressed with Christ and professed Him, but they were never able to understand or else were unwilling to accept Christ as the fulfillment of the law and as the Savior of *all men*. Therefore, they never turned to Christ alone, never broke away...

- from their legalistic religion.
- from requiring men (Gentiles) to become Jews before they could become Christians.

This was the great battle the church had to fight in its beginning. It was the great problem that faced God: how to break the church away from its Judaistic roots and from excluding and shutting out the other people of the world (Gentiles). This had always been the problem with the Jews—the problem of keeping the Gentiles away from God and the glorious salvation God had planned for all men. Now, since Christ had come, God had to lead the early church away from the Judaistic approach, away from making a man become a Jew before he could accept Christ. This was not the will of God. He sent Christ into the world to save all men, not just the Jews. The message had to be carried to all men. God had to break the early Jewish believers away from their legalism, away from their...

- making distinctions between themselves and others.
- making others become religionists before accepting Christ.
- discrimination against others.
- building barriers and walls for others to cross (legalistic rules).
- being separatists and divisive.
- prejudices and bigotry.

However, note this: all through the history of the church, extending from the early church up to the present time, there have been some who have refused to follow Christ *alone*. They have laid the burden of the law (legalism, becoming a religionist, a Jew) upon people. They are known as the circumcision, the Judaizers, or in modern terms, the legalists or religionists.

"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised [undergo a ritual] after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" ([Acts 15:1](#)).

"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised [undergo a ritual], and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment" ([Acts 15:24](#)).

"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" ([Galatians 2:4](#)).

"As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised [undergo a ritual]; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision [a ritual] availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" ([Galatians 6:12-15](#)).

DEEPER STUDY #2

A World-Wide Ministry—Breaking Down Prejudice, [Acts 10:1-33](#)

[\(Acts 10:1-33\)](#) **Introduction:** prejudice and partiality exist. From the beginning of time prejudice has existed ([Cain and Abel, Genesis 4:1](#)). Prejudice is everywhere in the world—in every nation, state, city, and neighborhood. Prejudice (discrimination) even exists within families between parent and child, brother and sister, family and relatives. Feelings toward and against people are a tragic reality.

Note several facts about prejudice.

1. There are at least two basic reasons for prejudice.

- a. People differ. They differ in nationality, color, beliefs, religion, speech, looks, behavior, ability, energy, position, status, social standing, possessions, wealth, birth, heritage. Prejudice arises when people feel they and their differences make them better than others.
- b. Mistreatment causes prejudice, both mistreating others and being mistreated. When a person mistreats others or is mistreated by others his nature is immediately aroused to become prejudicial and judgmental. The mistreatment that gives rise to prejudice covers a wide range of behavior: ignoring, neglecting, joking, gossiping, opposing, cursing, abusing, fighting against, persecuting, passing over, segregating, enslaving.

2. The present passage strikes a fatal blow against prejudice. It shows forever that Jesus Christ has erased all prejudices and barriers between people. Jew and Gentile are now one in Christ Jesus. This is the subject of the present passage. However, before launching into the passage, some background will be helpful in understanding just what is happening and the significance of it.

The Jews, like all other people of the earth, had developed their own laws and customs; and every Jewish child was born and reared in the environment of those laws and customs. They, like all other people, were steeped in their own nationality and looked upon other people with suspicion.

However, there were two factors which made the Jewish prejudice run deeper than most.

1. The Jewish people had always been mistreated, enslaved, and persecuted much more than the other people of the world. Through the centuries the Jewish people had been conquered by army after army, and by the millions they had been deported and scattered over the world. Even in the day of Jesus they were enslaved by Rome. Their religion was the binding force that kept Jews together, in particular their belief that God had called them to be a distinctive people (who worshipped the only true and living God) and their rules governing...

- the Sabbath
- the temple
- intermarriage
- worship and cleansing
- diet, what foods they could and could not eat

Their belief and their rules kept them from alien beliefs and from being swallowed up by other people through intermarriage. Their religion was what maintained their distinctiveness as a people and as a nation.

Jewish leaders knew this. They knew that *their religion* was the binding force that held their nation together. Therefore, they opposed anyone or anything that threatened or attempted to break the laws of their religion and nation.

2. The Jews misread and misinterpreted God's Word and purpose for them. God had called Abraham and given birth to the Jewish nation for one primary purpose—that they might be His people, His witnesses, His missionaries to the rest of the world. God had given the Jews His Word and instructed them to take His Word to the world and tell them about God. They were to bear witness that God *is*—God does exist—and that men are to worship and serve Him and Him alone.

It was here that Israel failed. Instead of proclaiming God and His Word of righteousness and morality to the world, Israel separated itself from the world, hoarding and claiming that God and His law were theirs and theirs alone. They became *separatists*, extremely prejudiced, building barriers and partitions between themselves and the other people of the world (Gentiles).

Prejudice became so deep-seated that attitudes such as these were adopted:

- ⇒ They called other people "dogs."
- ⇒ They would have no contact with a Gentile unless absolutely necessary, and then after contact, they had to go through a religious ceremony to be cleansed.
- ⇒ They would not help a Gentile woman who was giving birth lest another Gentile be born into the world.

It was into such a world that the church was born, a world of prejudice, the prejudice...

- of Jew against Gentile.
- of Gentile against Jew.
- of Gentile against Gentile.

How was God going to overcome and break down the walls and barriers of prejudice that had been built up through the centuries of history? How was He going to get His church, His people to break away from their Jewish roots and reach out to the whole world?

That is the point of the present passage. The doors of God's salvation are about to be gloriously swung open to the people of the world. Every man will soon have the wonderful privilege of hearing the marvelous message proclaimed: God is love and has sent His dear Son into the world that the world might be saved and not perish. The present passage shows how God broke through the prejudicial environment and customs of his dear servant, Peter, and led him to swing open the door to a Gentile soldier who was desperately crying out to God.

The story is one of the great stories of history, and it should be studied by all people everywhere. A study of this event shows that God has broken down the barrier of prejudice between men racially and religiously, and that He means and intends them to be erased forever—in the name of His dear Son who came to show that God loves all men and wishes all men to be saved.

The subject of the passage can be titled: "The Breakdown of Prejudice" or "The Opening of the Door to the Gentiles." The door could not be opened until the existing prejudices were dealt with; therefore, the story deals mainly with the breaking down of the prejudices between the Gentile Cornelius and the Jewish minister Simon Peter.

Because of the length of the story and *its significance*, the event is divided and dealt with in three parts.

[Part 1: The Breakdown of Prejudice \(Acts 10:1-33\).](#)

[Part 2: The Message to be Preached to the World \(Gentiles\) \(Acts 10:34-43\).](#)

[Part 3: The Holy Spirit Given to the World \(Gentiles\) \(Acts 10:44-48\).](#)

1. (Acts 10:1-8) Prejudice— Jew vs. Gentile— Seeking God: the breakdown of prejudice in the Gentile, Cornelius. Note: it is God who breaks down prejudice. Prejudice is so deep-seated in the heart of man, only God can erase it and reconcile man.

1. Cornelius was a soldier, a military officer, a Centurion in the Roman army. The Italian band simply means that all the soldiers (100) under his command were from Italy. Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea. This is important to note, for Caesarea was a Gentile city, a place in which strict Jews would never set foot, not if preventable.

2. Cornelius had an unusual reverence for God.

He was...

- a devout man: one who worshipped the true and living God.
- a God-fearing man: one who sensed the presence of God in the world and knew he was responsible to God to live righteously, justly, and morally toward all men.
- a benevolent and charitable man: one who gave to charity, and note he gave "much."
- a praying (*deomenos* [PWS: 3001](#)) man: the word means *begging of God*. Note that he prayed *always*.

The point is this: Cornelius was totally unlike most of the Gentiles of his day. He was not worshipping false gods. The Scripture says he worshipped and "**prayed to God**" (*tou theou*). In Greek this means the true God, the only living and true God.

Cornelius had done two things.

- a. He had looked at nature and at the world around him and seen that there was bound to be one God who had created all things.

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse"
[\(Romans 1:20\).](#)

- b. He had looked at Jewish religion (Judaism) and seen that it was head and shoulders above all other religions in...

- its worship of one God.
- its teachings of righteousness and justice and morality.
- its religious practices such as praying three times daily. (Note his praying at the Jewish ninth hour, which today is 3 p.m.)

But note: Cornelius did not become a Jewish worshipper. He was not circumcised ([Acts 11:3](#)). He would never consent to becoming a Jewish convert. He could learn from them and their religion, but he would never become one of them. The prejudice existing within his own heart, existing

between Gentile and Jew was too great to overcome. (We must always remember, prejudice is too great to overcome in the flesh of natural man.)

3. Cornelius was given a vision from God.

Note five points.

- a. Cornelius was in prayer when the vision came.
- b. The vision involved an angel bringing a message from God.
- c. Cornelius "looked on" (*atenisas* [PWS: 2399](#)), that is, fastened his eyes, gazed, focused his attention; he was startled, frightened.
- d. Cornelius realized the angel of God was a messenger from God ([Acts 9:30](#), "bright clothing"). He addressed him as "Lord."
- e. The message to Cornelius was twofold.
 - 1) His prayers and charity had come before God as a memorial.
 - 2) He was to send men to Joppa to see Peter and ask him what to do. Now note a critical point: despite Cornelius' enormous reverence and faithful service for God...
 - he was still not doing enough.
 - something else was missing.
 - one thing was still lacking.

Note another fact as well: Cornelius was aware he still lacked something, very aware of the fact. *He had asked God what he still needed.* Despite all his reverence and good works, he still felt a lack, an emptiness; and he was begging God to fill that emptiness, to show him what he *still* had to do.

4. **Cornelius was obedient to the heavenly vision and instructions.** He sent two trusted household servants and his most trusted military orderly to find Simon Peter. Cornelius would seek the answer to his heart's need from a Jew.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" ([Matthew 7:21](#)).

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" ([John 7:17](#)).

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" ([John 15:10](#)).

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" ([Rev. 22:14](#)).

2. ([Acts 10:9-22](#)) Prejudice— Jew vs. Gentile: the breakdown of prejudice in the Jew, Simon Peter. The servants from Cornelius had almost reached the city of Joppa where Peter was. They would be approaching Peter soon with the request to visit and help Cornelius. However, Peter was not ready...

- to welcome these men.
- to return with them to visit Cornelius.
- to stay and share in the home of Cornelius.

Why? Cornelius was a Gentile and Peter was a Jew. There was deep-seated racial discrimination between the two. Welcoming and visiting and sharing in the homes of each other was out of the question. And on top of that, there was a religious difference, a

difference that was even more deeply seated in Peter's mind than the racial difference. Peter was just not ready for these Gentile men to approach him with the request to visit Cornelius the Gentile, not yet.

But God was ready. And it is God who makes the difference. God can break down prejudice. God can reconcile the Jew to the Gentile and the Gentile to the Jew. God can reconcile man to man; He can bring peace to men and between men. Note these facts.

1. Peter prayed often every day. This is seen in the fact that he was praying about the sixth hour (12 noon Jewish time). This was one of the three prayer hours practiced by Jews. Peter got alone and prayed at least three times daily.

Peter was such a man of prayer that God could intervene in his life and direct him, give him specific instructions. It was while he was praying that God spoke to Peter.

2. Peter was a mere man, very human. Despite his being the leader of Jesus' apostles—the great apostle to the Jews, a man of great spiritual maturity and depth, a great servant of the Lord, a minister highly esteemed—Peter was still just a man, a man who hungered and thirsted, ached and hurt, was weak and frail, prejudiced and too often wrong just like the rest of us.

The point is this: being saved and spiritually mature and called to serve God did not make Peter perfect. It did not free him from need and lack, nor from sin. Peter as a mere man was subject to hunger just as all men, and subject to the prejudices of his environment just as all men—subject to the prejudices until God changed him. And praise God, He was about to change Peter's prejudice against us, the Gentiles! If God had not changed him and his prejudices, we would still be lost and without Christ in this world.

3. Peter experienced a trance. The Greek says that "a trance [an ecstasy] came upon him"; that is, he was transported out of himself (*egeneto ep' ekstasis* ^{PWS: 1467}). His mind was so concentrated, so focused that Peter lost all sense of the world around him. He was swallowed up in the thoughts of God, transported mentally out of this world. It is something like a daydream, but a daydream so concentrated and focused that all contact with one's surroundings is completely lost. It is a time of ecstasy in the presence of the Lord, receiving His Word, whatever He has to say to one's heart.

- a. The trance (ecstasy) was of heaven. Peter saw heaven open. Peter's prejudice was encrusted and hardened. He had never known anything but prejudice within his environment except what Christ had demonstrated. *Peter did not think or know that he was prejudiced. He thought he was only standing against the unrighteousness and injustices of men, that he was to ignore and have nothing to do with ungodly and unjust men.* If Peter was to change and begin to reach out to the heathen, the ungodly and unjust, he had to know that the instructions were from heaven, from God Himself.
- b. The vessel or platter (plate) upon which a meal was served was huge.
 - ⇒ It was a large receptacle, so large it looked like a large sheet (*othonen*), which in the Greek means linen cloth. This probably means it was white.
 - ⇒ The huge vessel or platter had four corners that were knit, that is, that were held by four ropes and let down from heaven, descending to earth and being sat before Peter.
 - ⇒ The vessel or platter contained all manner of animals.

- c. The instruction to Peter was, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat."
- d. Peter refused, for the animals were common and unclean according to the laws of Jewish religion. Note the enormous spiritual struggle Peter was going through.
- e. Peter was clearly corrected: "What God has cleansed, that call not unclean."
- f. Peter experienced the event three times and then the trance ended with the platter being received up into heaven.
- g. Peter was perplexed. While Peter was thinking about the trance and wondering what it meant, the men arrived downstairs and asked for him.
- h. Peter's sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leadership is clearly seen from this point on.

Note: it was the Holy Spirit who...

- told him the men were downstairs.
- told him to go "with them" (Peter did not yet know they were Gentiles).
- told him to "doubt nothing": do not waver, wonder, hesitate, question the thing to be done.
- told him that He, the Holy Spirit, had sent the men after him.

Note: Peter did not yet know the men were Gentiles. But the Holy Spirit had just told Peter exactly what to do. Peter could not question this fact. Peter was now ready to have his prejudice against Gentiles erased. Note also: Peter did not yet know the meaning of the trance. This would be made clear later.

- i. Peter received the Gentile servants. He obeyed the Holy Spirit, did exactly what the Spirit said. Peter even *lodged* them, an unheard of thing. (As a point of humor, imagine the kosher food they had that evening.)

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" ([Matthew 13:16](#)).

"Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" ([Psalm 25:5](#)).

"Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path" ([Psalm 27:11](#)).

"Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness" ([Psalm 143:10](#)).

3. ([Acts 10:23-33](#)) Lessons: the confrontation and lessons learned by the Jew and the Gentile, the prejudiced of the world.

1. The preparation by Peter. He took six Jewish believers, orthodox Jews, with him ([Acts 10:45](#); [Acts 11:12](#)). Peter knew he was treading troubled waters by associating with Gentiles; he sensed he would need witnesses to what he was doing. Therefore, he was preparing himself against attack ([Acts 11:1](#)).

2. The preparation by Cornelius.

Note...

- He was expectant, excited, eagerly waiting for their arrival.
- He had "called together his kinsmen and close friends." There were many present.

Note also the faith of Cornelius. He *knew* Peter would be coming, that God would fulfill His Word ([Acts 10:6](#)) and do what He had promised.

"The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate" ([Psalm 34:22](#)).

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" ([Psalm 37:5](#)).

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" ([Isaiah 26:4](#)).

Thought 1. Cornelius was already witnessing by bringing people to hear the messenger from God.

3. The confrontation of the Jew and the Gentile, two men humbled by God.
 - a. Cornelius had been humbled by the vision from God. He had been mulling over the experience for four days now, being humbled and prepared more and more to receive the Jewish messenger. When he confronted Peter, he was so humbled he prostrated himself before Peter in an act of deep reverence.
 - b. Peter demonstrated humility as well. It was the custom to bow before men of high honor, showing reverence and respect for them. But God had humbled Peter too. Peter forbade the act, disallowed it. No man is to be idolized or revered in the sense of being held in awe. Peter rebuked Cornelius: "I myself also am a man."

Thought 1. Jesus accepted such reverence and worship ([Matthew 2:11](#); [Matthew 8:2](#); [Matthew 9:18](#); [Matthew 14:33](#); [Matthew 15:25](#); [Matthew 20:20](#); [Matthew 28:9, 17](#); [Luke 5:8](#)), and He accepted it from Peter himself ([Matthew 8:2](#); [Luke 5:8](#)). But Peter says no man is to bow or reverence another man, no matter who they are. We are all mere men, each one saved by God's wonderful grace.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 18:4](#)).

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" ([Romans 12:3](#)).

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" ([Phil. 2:3-4](#)).

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" ([1 Peter 5:5](#)).

4. The lesson learned by Peter. Peter now knew that no man was common or unclean. He now knew...

- that Christ had abolished the distinction between Jew and Gentile.

- that Christ had abolished the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile.
- that Christ had abolished *all* distinctions between men, whether racial, social, or some caste system.

No man was to treat any other man with anything but love and care, mercy and forgiveness, concern and compassion. Peter's prejudice was wiped out, erased, and overcome. It had been overcome by God. The door of salvation was about to be thrown open to the Gentiles forever.

Note Peter's reference to how it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile ([Acts 10:28](#)). This law was not in the Scripture. It came from the Scribal law.

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" ([Matthew 5:45](#)).

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" ([Romans 10:12](#)).

"But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me" ([Galatians 2:6](#)).

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" ([Galatians 3:27-28](#)).

"And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" ([Ephes. 6:9](#)).

5. The lesson learned by Cornelius was threefold.

- a. The man who truly seeks God moves God. Cornelius declared that God answered his prayer.
- b. The man who seeks God must listen to God and obey God. Cornelius declared that he listened and did exactly what God said, and that he did it immediately ([Acts 10:33](#)).
- c. The man who seeks God must be receptive to the Word of God.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" ([Acts 17:11](#)).

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" ([1 Thes. 2:13](#)).