

An Impenetrable Spiritual Wall is Broken

After describing Saul's astonishing conversion, Luke shifts his focus back to the ministry of Peter, specifically the miraculous signs that accompanied his preaching. Taking advantage of the newfound climate of peace and blessing following Saul's departure for Tarsus, Peter was on the move! Peter was relatively unknown outside of Jerusalem, although the scattered church would have known him. But something was needed to add to his credentials as an apostle among the Gentiles.

Bow in Prayer: "We thank You Gracious Father, that from Your perspective there is always the potential for reaching every person with the wonderful news of Jesus Christ! Open our eyes that we may behold the magnificent work You are doing through Your servant, Peter."

1. ***Read*** the entire section we are studying this week from Acts 9:32-11:18. Try to keep the larger picture in mind as we begin to study the individual sections. Having the "big picture" of God's expansion of the Gospel in view will inspire and excite you!
2. ***Locate*** Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea on Map 1.

Acts 9:32-43—Peter visits Lydda and Joppa.

Peter begins a traveling ministry intended to strengthen and encourage believers scattered throughout Israel. First he visits the saints at Lydda, a predominantly Jewish community about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

3. ***Review*** Acts 9:32-35 and ***read*** John 5:5-13. How is the account of Peter healing Aeneas like Jesus' healing the invalid at the pool of Bethesda?

This is an example of what C.S. Lewis called a "miracle of reversal" in which the effects of sin and the fall are reversed and a glimpse of the new creation is given. It is meant to convey the nature of what Jesus had ultimately come to do—restore a broken, cursed creation.

4. How did the crowd respond to each of these miraculous healings?
5. When comparing the *results* of these two events what lessons do they teach God's people?

6. How was God working behind the scenes to get Peter to Joppa (Acts 9:38)?
7. What do you observe about the faith of the “two men” from Joppa, who with urgency asked Peter to “come at once?” What do you learn about Peter’s faith as you observe this event?

Picture the sadness that Luke describes in 9:39 as Dorcas’ friends are weeping over her loss.

8. Describe what happened in that “upstairs room,” as Peter dropped to his knees in prayer.

We wonder what went through Peter’s mind when he saw her eyes open and her lungs expand and take in air! An astonishing miracle took place that day in Joppa through the Holy Spirit infused words of Peter!

9. What was the result of this work of God?
10. In what way was Dorcas making a powerful impact in her community (9:36)? How does her Godly example convict you? Motivate you to greater sensitivity and action?
11. The experience with Dorcas is the first time Peter has been involved in raising someone from the dead. How might this help prepare him for what happens in chapter 10?

*Notice that Peter stays with a leather-worker named Simon. Since Simon worked with the skins of dead animals, most self-respecting Jews would not step foot into his home because Jewish law considered it an unclean job. Yet Peter is enjoying Simon’s hospitality. **This may have been the first sign of Peter’s openness to Gentiles.***

12. **Reread** Acts chapter 10 through the lens of Acts 1:8. This is one of the most important sections in the book of Acts.

Acts 10:1-8—The introduction of Cornelius, a Gentile.

13. a. Give a brief character sketch of Cornelius from Acts 10:1-8 and verse 22.
- b. In spite of all his virtues what is Cornelius still lacking?
- c. What evidence is there in the character of Cornelius that the Holy Spirit is working in him (verse 2)?
- d. How did God prepare Cornelius for Peter (10:3-8)? What instructions did the Lord have for Cornelius?

It is difficult for us to grasp the impassable gulf that existed in those days between Jews and Gentiles (even God-fearing Gentiles). No orthodox Jew would ever enter a Gentile home, let alone sit down and eat a meal prepared by Gentile hands, which included food considered ritually unclean. It has been suggested that Acts chapter 10 is as much about the conversion of Peter from racial prejudice as it is about the conversion of Cornelius. It took several “hammer blows of revelation” before Peter understood.

Acts 10:9-23—God prepares Peter. Scan Leviticus chapter 11 to understand Peter’s mindset before witnessing the vision. Then thoughtfully ***review*** Acts 10:9-23.

14. In what remarkable way is Peter prepared for Cornelius?
15. At what point do you think Peter really “got it?” Examine verses 9-23 with this in mind. Explain your answer.

Acts 10:24-48—Peter, a Jew, enters a Gentile's home.

16. When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, what evidence is there that Cornelius expected God to work (10:24-26, 33)?

Ponder this unfathomable scene: *Peter is facing a room full of Gentiles who want to hear about Jesus—Wow! **Read** verses 34-43 aloud in a spirit of worship and praise!*

17. What is the message that God had for Cornelius?

18. What happened while Peter was still preaching that confirmed the salvation of Cornelius and his household (verses 44-48)?

We cannot possibly overestimate the importance of what took place in Cornelius' house that day. If you are a Gentile believer, you can trace your spiritual heritage to a first-century Roman centurion from Caesarea!

Begin to memorize Acts 10:34-35. Ask God to make you open to knowing, loving and sharing your relationship with Jesus with people of other ethnicities and cultures.

19. In what ways do you need grow in relating to people of other backgrounds, cultures and races? What step will you take this week to begin that growth process?
20. Can you think of a time when the Lord sent someone to you or arranged circumstances in such a way that your needs were met and the other person also learned more of God's truth? If so, share this with your group.

