

## **Peter Receives a Vision**

**Text:** Acts 10:9-16, 17-23

### **Introduction:**

Our text, last left us in Caesarea, at the home of a God-fearing gentile, who was an upright man, who gave alms to the people, and prayed consistently. He was a centurion (a ruler over a hundred Roman soldiers), named Cornelius. And as he was praying, during the hour of prayer, he saw a vision of an angel, who had come to tell him that his alms and prayers have come up as a memorial before God. And that he was now to send for the Apostle Peter, who would come there, to tell him all that he must do, concerning his salvation. And so, Cornelius sent two of his household servants and a devout soldier, to get Peter.

However, there is one major dilemma that could hinder their progress. Cornelius and his family (and the messengers for that matter) were all gentiles! And Jews do not have fellowship with uncircumcised, unclean gentiles. Well, as the Lord would have it, that is about to change. In Christ, all sinners are welcomed into fellowship with God and His people, regardless of their ethnic background and ceremonial circumstances. The dietary laws and circumcision have served their Old Covenant purpose, in preserving and separating the Jewish people, until the Christ should come. But this New Covenant transition, of uniting the Jews and Gentiles together into one body, was a major undertaking, especially from the standpoint of the Jews, who have learned to repulse all that was unclean, in accordance with the Mosaic laws. And so, Peter would likewise, receive a special vision of his own, preparing him to receive Cornelius's messengers, and to go to preach salvation unto his household, welcoming them into the fellowship of Christ's church. [Note, the significance of a double vision given, in such difficult circumstances, Paul and Ananias, and now Cornelius and Peter].

### **I. Peter Receives a Vision**

"The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour" (vs. 9).

In our God's perfect timing and providence, Peter goes up on the roof top (not an uncommon thing to do then) to pray, as Cornelius's messengers draw near to the city. It is noon. [Again, just quickly note how often God meets with His people, when they are praying]

"Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance..." (vs. 10).

Again, in God's providence, in preparation for the specific vision that Peter would receive, Peter is hungry. And, as the servants are preparing the afternoon meal, Peter falls into a trance, as the Spirit carries him off to receive a vision.

"...And saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth" (vs. 11).

And so, Peter sees this large sheet, held at the corners, being lowered down to the earth, right before him. And what is on this sheet?

"In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air" (vs. 12). All kinds of animals were inside this large sheet. And very clearly, these animals were animals which the Jews were forbidden to eat, according to the Mosaic dietary laws. They were unclean, and the Jews, from birth, were taught to repulse them, and to eat only those foods, which their law had deemed clean. And so, the very hungry Peter, is met with a feast of animals that were ceremonially unclean to him. And why?

"And a voice [indeed, the voice of God] came to [Peter], "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (vs. 13). "Peter, you are very hungry. Here is a feast of meat for you! Go, kill them, and eat! Satisfy your hunger with these!"

And Peter responds, quite shockingly, but also quite tellingly, in a way that non-Jews could hardly appreciate. "But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean" (vs. 14).

Now wait a minute! Did Peter just say, "No," to God?! How in the world could anyone refuse a direct command of God, in any respect, ever?! Well brethren, see here a very telling fact: The transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant was no easy matter for the Jews! Again, consider how repulsed Peter was toward anything unclean. From birth, in accordance with his proper training, Peter was taught to hate and repulse such foods. So much so, that he could not even imagine, for a moment, breaking that ceremonial tradition, even if *God* Himself should command him to do so. This had nothing to do with taste or even general appearance.

These foods were distinguishing marks, which set the people of God apart from the gentiles, who were unclean and filthy to the Jews. And so, Peter refuses.

"And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed (declared clean) you must not call common" (vs. 15).

And here, brethren, is the critical point, which God would seek to get across to His people; indeed, the very glorious emphasis of just how far the cleansing power of the cross has reached! God has removed the repulsion of the heathen, by way of the cross! They are sanctified in Him, and they are welcomed into the Kingdom, through the sanctifying power of Christ's blood! You see, what Peter does not yet realize, and that which he is about to realize in the upcoming events, is that none of this is about food. Indeed, the purifying of unclean foods is a mere picture of the real matter. The sanctifying of unclean animal meat, is the small thing, pointing to the far bigger thing, namely, that God is bringing the gentiles into His Church, regardless of their ceremonial condition. The great ceremonial barrier, which God had set up, until the Messiah should come, so as to preserve His line through the Jews, was now being removed, since the Messiah has arrived. And, by means of His death, the Messiah has fulfilled all of the ceremonial laws, such that they are no longer required, as a means of maintaining fellowship with the people of God! The uncircumcised will have intimate fellowship with the circumcised! The "pork and vulture and snail" eaters will fellowship under the same roof with Jews! And furthermore, both groups, together, will go where no man has ever gone before; not merely into their respective courts of limitation in the earthly tabernacle, but rather, into the Most Holy Place of God's heavenly tabernacle, as often as they like! What the Jews saw in Old Covenant glimpses and shadows, *all*, in Christ, would see full blown! This, Peter needed to grasp, not merely by intellectual ascension, but in experience and practice. What God has cleansed, don't dare call unclean! And, so powerful was the natural hardness and resistance in Peter's heart, in this regard, that God sent him the same vision three times, so as to establish the reality in the utmost and certain of terms!

We are told in verse 16, "This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again."

Again, God firmly established this reality with Peter, by giving him the same vision three times. [Pharaoh receives the vision, indicating the coming drought in Egypt, from two different angles, so as to put an exclamation point on the certainty of the event. Here, Peter receives the

same vision *three* times!]. God's accepting of the gentiles, in Christ, is most definitely certain! And brethren, here we are further assured of the incomprehensible power of the Gospel, and the unsurpassable value of Christ's shed blood, in the saving of sinners! Is there anyone beyond the reach of God's saving grace in Christ?!

"Now while Peter wondered (was perplexed) within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate" (vs. 17).

Peter is baffled and perplexed by the visions that he has just received, and recognizing that God is teaching him something beyond "food," he attempts to discover their primary intent. And again, in God's perfect providential timing, he is preparing to lead Peter to the meaning. Cornelius's messengers have just arrived at Simon's gate (at the house, within which, Peter was staying). Having prepared Peter for this meeting, God will now work toward leading Peter to grasp the whole package of what these visions entail. [Revel over how God reveals truth, at times, even to His Apostles. He could have been more blunt with Peter, but He gradually leads Peter to the truth. Take note, brethren, of the importance of constantly reading through ALL of God's Word. He reveals things to us, at just the right moments, and our living contexts, may and will serve to bring to mind, very timely applications. But, what if we are not in the Word and prayer, daily?]

"**And they called and** asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them" (vs. 19-20).

[Note here, a good description of what it means to "meditate upon God's Word." It simply means to think upon it; to wrestle with it, as Peter does here, as opposed to just merely reading the words and moving on...etc]. The men arrive, and the Spirit instructs Peter to go with them, doubting nothing. For, He has sent them. [Notice, the Spirit's part in sending the messengers via Cornelius. He is personal, and He is personally involved in the unfolding of the divine will]. [Notice as well, how the Spirit still leaves Peter's questions concerning the vision, and even why he should go with these men, temporarily unanswered. Peter is simply to obey God, trusting that all will be made clear in due time. Faithfulness to God's Word, must even

precede our understanding, at times. "Three men are here, go with them, doubt nothing that they say, I have sent them...end of story for now."

"Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, 'Yes, I am he whom you seek, for what reason have you come?' (vs. 21)

Peter goes down to the men, and he attempts to get some information from them, concerning the nature of their mission. Again, even the Apostle Peter had to progressively learn God's will and plan. God gave Him enough instructions, concerning what Peter was to do, but the purpose in all of this, was still developing (from Peter's standpoint), and he still was confused about the visions! Obedience, sometimes, comes before clarity! Obedience, at times, will come with confusion! We still must obey! The secret things belong to God, unless and until He chooses to reveal any of them to us.

"And they said, 'Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you" (vs. 22).

The messengers now tell Peter why they are there, explaining the vision, which their master had received, and the command given, to call for Peter to come and preach to him. Being commanded by the Holy Spirit to go with the men, and to doubt nothing of their message, Peter now has his present mission in front of him. He will go to preach to Cornelius, the gentile, and his family.

"Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him" (vs. 23).

Peter invites *gentiles* in to lodge with him for the night, in submission to the Holy Spirit's orders. And on the next day, he heads out with them to Caesarea. And he takes some of the brethren from Joppa with him. They will serve to be critical witnesses, to all that takes place, and this will help support Peter, when he moves forward to baptize *gentiles*, who evidence the Holy Spirit's power, in them!

AMEN!!!