

Two Visions – Acts 10:1-23

By Pastor Jeff Alexander

Introduction

1. God promised to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham (Genesis 12:3).
 - a. In preparation for this, God focused exclusively on one nation, Israel (Deuteronomy 10:14-22; 26:19; 28:1).
 - b. The purpose of God was to gather into one all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:10).
 - c. This purpose includes bringing people of every nation into union with Christ (Psalm 72:11, 17; 86:9; Isaiah 2:2; 49:1, 6; 52:10, 15; 55:5; 60:3).
 - d. The inclusion of Gentiles into the body of Christ was regarded a mystery (Ephesians 3:3-10). The mystery is that there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile: both have equal standing in the New Covenant community (Ephesians 2:11-22).
2. This section in Acts is very important in documenting the opening of the church to the Gentiles:
 - a. Jesus commissioned His disciples to be witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).
 - b. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached that the promised gift of the Spirit would be poured out upon *all* flesh (Acts 2:17, 39), implying both Jews and Gentiles.
 - c. The salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch, a Gentile proselyte.
 - d. The salvation of Saul of Tarsus to become the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:16).
 - e. The preparation of Peter to bring the gospel message to a Gentile centurion in Caesarea.
3. Background information
 - a. Caesarea was the Roman provincial capital of Palestine.
 - b. Cornelius is called a “God-fearer” but not a proselyte to Judaism (v. 28).
4. This stage of the gospel expansion is so radical and so revolutionary that God used supernatural means to bring it about—two visions.

I. Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile (vv. 1-8)

- A. His version of personal history (v. 1)
 1. He was a Roman soldier stationed in Palestine with his family.
 2. He was an upright man, well respected in the Jewish community (v. 22).
- B. His veneration for God (v. 2)
 1. He was a devout man, fearing God and leading his family to do the same.
 2. He was a generous man, giving alms to the people.
 3. He was a regularly praying man.
- C. His visitation from God (vv. 3-8)
 1. The messenger of God (an angel) came to him during his prayer time at the evening oblation (ninth hour), terrifying him.

2. The message of the angel was that God recognized his devotion and almsgiving.

II. Peter, a Reluctant Jew (vv. 9-23)

A. The three visions on the roof

1. The content of the vision

- a. An unseemly distraction—Peter became extremely hungry. In this condition, he fell into a trance.
- b. An unlikely array of animals, birds and insects, both clean and unclean, was let down on a sheet.

2. The command of the Lord

- a. God's contradictory order: "kill and eat"
- b. Peter's bewildered reaction: a possible test? (v. 14)
- c. The Lord's correction of Peter's concern
- d. Peter's continued perplexity

B. The three visitors at the door

1. The Spirit informed Peter that three men from Caesarea were seeking him and that he should accompany them without hesitation.
2. They informed Peter that an angel prompted Cornelius to summon Peter from Joppa to hear the gospel at his mouth.

Lessons

1. The significance of this incident cannot be overstated. The church of Christ is the most important thing in the salvation and restoration of the fallen world. In a real sense, there is no salvation outside of the church. Jesus died for the church (Acts 20:28). The New Covenant is the hope of the world.
2. God has not abrogated His requirements established under the Old Covenant. Circumcision is still required, not of the flesh but of the heart (Romans 2:28, 29; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11, 12). Purity and holiness are still required (2 Corinthians 7:1; James 4:8; Ephesians 4:24; 1 Thessalonians 4:4, 7; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 3:11). Obedience is still required (Romans 1:5; Hebrews 5:9). The Spirit of God enables us by grace to fulfill all that He has planned for us.