

Acts 10-12

For all Christians throughout the world that are not Jewish Christians, chapter 10 of Acts is perhaps the most important chapter in Acts, if not the whole of the New Testament. This is the point when the Holy Spirit directs Peter to a Gentile and then jumps in and makes it clear that by divine intervention and invitation, Gentiles are to be included fully in God's kingdom. Not by some sort of inclusion by first being added to the Jews and thence to Christ, but directly. This is a new and dramatic action by God which, although foretold by the prophets, no-one would have seen that God was going to open the door to non-Jews so directly and easily. For this we should be eternally grateful.

If Satan cannot ruin the church through direct opposition and persecution, nor divide it by ethnic or some other distinction, nor distract it by non-essentials, then one way he often tries to weaken it, is by attempting to raise another sort of barrier that ring-fences the experience of God through the Holy Spirit, making the faith a "private" religion. Through prejudice, by selfishness, lack of thought or some other weakness, we can all too easily hold on to what we have rather than giving generously to anyone, forgetting that God has opened the door to anyone to come to faith, from any background. There are no barriers in Christ. All are welcome.

Read Acts 10.1-8

What do we know about Cornelius?
Why is what happened so remarkable?

Read Acts 10.9-23

Why is the vision so shocking to Peter?
Why does God show it three times?
What do you think Peter would have initially made of this vision?
What is Peter's next shock?
Do you think that by this time Peter was getting the point of the vision?

Read Acts 10.24-48

How does Peter react when he arrives and what is going on inside Peter do you think?
Why does Peter begin his speech in this way?
What do we learn about Cornelius in vv.30-33?
What is the substance of Peter's speech from v.34 onwards?
What is so significant about v.44?

Read Acts 11.1-18

As Peter tells others about these events what extra do we learn from these verses?

Read Acts 11.19-30

Why do you think others were telling non-Jews the Good News about Jesus?
What do we learn about Barnabas here?

Read Acts 12.1-18

Meanwhile what is going on back in Jerusalem?
What do we learn here about asking in prayer and faith?

Read Acts 12.19-25

Why do you think that Luke tells us about Herod's death?

Reflect on the importance of Cornelius's conversion and therefore yours.