

Peter Visits Cornelius

Acts 10:1-44

This passage begins at the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Caesarea, the headquarters for the Roman occupation of that area. As a centurion, Cornelius would have been in charge of a unit of about 100 men and would have been considered a man of noble character. For a non-Jew to have been considered God-fearing meant that Cornelius followed the Jewish religion to some degree, possibly to the greatest extent he could as a non-Jew. His vision of the angel at about three in the afternoon likely means that he was following Jewish religious practices since that was a regular time of prayer for the Jews. And it is to his credit that when an angel of God spoke to him, he didn't hesitate to do what he was told.

Peter's vision came to him as he was praying at noon—another of the regular times of prayer for Jews. Peter, too, was following normal Jewish religious practices. Another of these practices was the strict adherence to the dietary restrictions spelled out in Leviticus 11. Many of the forbidden animals described there were included in the sheet suspended before Peter in his vision. Being told to kill and eat such animals shocked Peter. And then the whole scene was repeated twice to fully convince Peter of its validity. We don't know if Peter refused to believe the first two times or if God simply repeated the vision for the sake of absolute confirmation.

The challenge to Peter's beliefs didn't end when the sheet disappeared. It was obviously no coincidence that Cornelius' servants appeared just as Peter's vision ended. Peter was thinking through the meaning of his vision when he was summoned to go to the house of a non-Jew who said an angel had told him to send for Peter to hear what he had to say. And God made it clear to Peter that the servants' arrival was connected to what God was trying to teach him. God told him that the men were there, that he had sent them, and that Peter was to go with them. It became apparent to Peter that the vision had much wider implications than the food Christians were to eat.

By the time he arrived at Cornelius' house, Peter had apparently sorted out the meaning of his vision. Though Jewish regulations forbade him to enter a non-Jew's home (as he himself states in Acts 10:28), Peter went right inside with Cornelius and many other non-Jews gathered there.

Peter's proclamation in Acts 10:34-35 seems logical and appropriate to us now, but it stunned the non-Jews gathered there and possibly revolted the Jews who had come with Peter. Considering non-Jews to be fully accepted by God was a new concept for Jews, who believed that their status as "chosen people" granted them special favor before God.

Peter took a huge risk in following God's leading to reach out to Cornelius and his family. The Jewish Christians were likely appalled by his actions. In fact, when he returned to Jerusalem, he had to explain his actions and describe how God had directed them. Only then did the Christians there open their hearts to allow that non-Jews could become Christians (Acts 11:1-18).

Peter set an example for us by taking advantage of an opportunity to tell someone unexpected about his faith. We dare not ignore that example; rather, we must be willing to tell anyone who is interested about what God has done for us through Jesus.

Devotion for Teachers

The One Thing: Friendship with Jesus is not an exclusive clique—all people are welcome. You can tell others about your friendship with Jesus and change lives while you're at it!

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: Do you know a Cornelius? Someone seeking God or searching for spiritual truth? How can you be like Peter and point that person to Jesus? Write the name of your "Cornelius" on a sticky note, and post it near your bed. Each time you see it, pray. Be ready to respond when God prompts you to take action.