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## **I. Outline and Structure**

- Once again, this week's lesson covers a lot of ground. Certainly much more than we can cover in class. However, I do think it is worth while to look at the big picture. So let's take a look at an outline of the reading for this lesson. Once again, this outline is far from perfect or definitive, but I do think it allows us to think about the big picture.
  
- ***Outline of Acts 9:32–15:35:[1]***
  - A. Peter as a Missionary (9:32–11:18)
    - a. Miracles in Lyddia and Joppa (9:32–43)
    - b. The Conversion of Cornelius and His Household (10:1–11:18)
      - i. The Vision of Cornelius (10:1–8)
      - ii. The Vision of Peter (10:9–16)
      - iii. Reception of the Messengers (10:17–23)
      - iv. Proceedings in Cornelius' House (10:23–48)
      - v. Peter's Accounting at Jerusalem (11:1–18)
  
  - B. Between Jerusalem and Antioch (11:19–12:25)
    - a. The First Church of the Gentile Mission (11:9–30)
    - b. Herod's Persecution and Peter's Escape (12:1–25)
    - c. Saul's Confrontations in Jerusalem (9:26–40)
  
  - C. The First Missionary Journal of Paul (13:1–14:28)
    - a. Prelude to the Journey (13:1–3)
    - b. A Contest Won by Paul in Cyprus (13:4–12)
    - c. Mission and Rejection at Pisidian Antioch (13:13–52)
      - i. Mise-en-scene and Sermon (13:13–43)
      - ii. Beleaguered Missionaries Turn to the Gentiles (13:44–52)
    - d. Mixed Reception in Central Asia Minor (14:1–20)
      - i. Iconium (14:1–7)
      - ii. Lystris and Derbe (14:8–20)
    - e. Return to Antioch (14:21–28)
  
  - D. The Jerusalem Conference and Resolution (15:1–35)
    - a. Prehistory (15:1–5)
    - b. Peter's Appeal to Precedent (15:6–12)
    - c. James' Confirmation and Amendments (15:13–21)
    - d. Resolution (15:22–29)

e. Aftermath (15:30–35)

- *After reading this material, what parts stuck out or resonated with you? What themes were developed in these chapters? Did you notice any themes that were carried forward from the first 9 chapters of Acts?*
- *How would you summarize all of the material? Do you see a unifying theme or themes?*
- *Why the focus on both Peter and Paul? What is Luke trying to teach us? What parallels does Luke present about Peter and Paul (in this lesson and throughout the book of Acts)?*

## II. Cornelius and Peter

### A. Back to Chapter 9

- My outline for this lesson actually starts with the end of chapter 9 (which is not part of the lesson reading). However, I think the material at the end of chapter 9 is an important backdrop to the actions of Peter and the events of chapters 10–11. At the end of chapter 9 Luke swings the narrative back to Peter (from Paul) with two stories:

1. Peter heals a paralytic man named Aeneas in Lyddia. Read Acts 9:32–35:

(32) And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. (33) And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. (34) And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. (35) And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

2. Peter raises Tabitha from the dead. Read Acts 9:40–43:

(40) But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. (41) And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. (42) And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. (43) And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

- *Why does Luke take time to tell these stories before telling the story of Peter and Cornelius? How are they connected? Do you think these stories are an important backdrop to the events of chapters 10 and 11?*
- *Do you think it is important that Luke mentions location so much in these stories? Luke mentions Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa? Is this an important connection? Why is it*

*important that we, the reader, know these events happened in different locations? In these locations?*

- *What about Simon the tanner? Why mention his occupation?*
- *How do you think these verses are related to the summary and transition verse in Acts 9:31?*

(31) Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

*Why does Luke include this summary and transitional statement? Do you think it is connected in any way with what will happen shortly (at least in terms of Luke's retelling of these stories)?*

### ***B. Cornelius' Vision***

- Read Acts 10:1–8:

(1) There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, (2) A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. (3) He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. (4) And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. (5) And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: (6) He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. (7) And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; (8) And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

- Luke takes us 32 miles up the coast from Joppa to Caesarea.[2] "[W]e are introduced to a man with the good Roman name of Cornelius, belonging to a non-commissioned officer class who were the backbone of the Roman army." [3]
- *Do you think it is significant or important the Cornelius had a vision in addition to Peter? Does it remind you of any other events in Acts?*
- Luke informs us Cornelius vision is first. *Do you think the order is significant?*
- *What does the text tell us about Cornelius? Do you think the details are important or incidental?*

- Some scholars have suggested the Cornelius might have been attracted to Judaism but didn't want to take on the full rigors of Judaism. The phrase translated as "feared God" suggests this because this is a technical term used by Luke meant to convey the preceding.[4][5] Additionally, "Cornelius synagogue connection seems to be indicated by the observance of the appointed 'ninth-hour' prayer." [6] *Do you think this is an important detail? Does it change how you understand these events at all?*
- *In verse 3 we find out that Cornelius, "saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him." What do you make of that language? Are you surprised by any of the details?*
- *Is any of the language or details of verses 3–6 surprising?*
- I guess the aspect that most intrigues me is that the angel doesn't explain anything. The angel only gives commands. *Do you think this is important? What does it remind the reader of?*

### **C. Cornelius' Vision**

- Read Acts 10:9–16:

(9) On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: (10) And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, (11) And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: (12) Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. (13) And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. (14) But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. (15) And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. (16) This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

- Luke informs us that this vision happens while Cornelius' messengers are traveling to meet Peter. *Why is this an important detail? What does it remind the reader of?*
- *What parallels or connections do you see between the two visions? How are they similar? How are they Different? Are the differences important?*
- One parallel that I noticed is that neither Peter or Cornelius seemed to be seeking direction about this matter (at least not immediately before it happened). *Do think that is true? If so what does it emphasize?*
- *Does the vision remind you of any other scriptures? Does it remind you the creation account in Genesis (1:24)? Why an allusion to the creation account?*

- *Does anything seem missing from the vision?*

#### ***D. Reception of the Messengers***

- Read 10:17–23:

(17) Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, (18) And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. (19) While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. (20) Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. (21) Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? (22) And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. (23) Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

- *What does it mean that Peter doubted himself?* The NRSV (a modern translation) renders it as follows:

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen ...

*Which makes the most sense in this context? Doubted? Puzzled?*

- *Do you think it is important that the men knock at the gate in verse 18, but in verses 19–20 the Spirit tells Peter the men are seeking him? Did Peter not hear them knock? What does it emphasize?*
- Loveday Alexander points out the phrase translated as "doubting nothing" in the King James Version and "without hesitation" in the NRSV is ambiguous. It could simply mean "without distinction." [7] *What do you think of the possibility? Do you think it fits here in this story? Would this have been meaningful to the original readers of Acts?*

#### ***E. Cornelius and Peter***

- Read Acts 10:23–33:

(23) Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. (24) And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius

waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. (25) And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. (26) But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. (27) And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. (28) And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. (29) Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? (30) And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, (31) And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. (32) Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. (33) Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

- *Does this pericope seem very detailed? Does it seem like the action slows down? Why? How does this affect us, the reader?*
- *Do you think it is fair to say the God's plan is being revealed gradually? Do you think this is an important part of the story? Do you think this is a generalizable principle?*
- *How does Peter figure out that his vision was about people and not food? What role does the journey to Caesarea play in this process? Is there a generalizable principle here?*
- *Is it an important detail that Peter figures out the implication or meaning of his vision before finding out about Cornelius' vision?*
- *Why does Luke include a retelling of Cornelius vision? How does it affect the reader? Why not summarize or say the Cornelius told Peter about his vision? Do you think it is an important part of the build-up to Peter's speech?*

(34) Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (35) But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. 36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) Acts 10:34–36

*What did Peter learn from this experience about the nature of the gospel? What can we learn from this story?*

## Endnotes

1. Adapted from Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 725–726.
2. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1041.
3. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1041.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1041.
5. Jim Faulconer, *Feast Upon the Word Blog*.
6. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 745.
7. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1041.