

**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**  
**NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY**

**PART ELEVEN - CHAPTERS 10 AND 11**

Persecution had opened the eyes of the first Christians to the world beyond their own immediate society which was waiting to hear of Jesus Christ.(chap.8) The conversion of the persecutor had prepared the man who would be the means, more than any other in his generation, to take the gospel to the remotest part of the earth,(chap.9) but before that enterprise could begin in earnest a psychological barrier had to be broken down, the barrier of Jewish prejudice against Gentiles. Chapter 10 describes how it happened. Cornelius represented all that Jews hated most. He was not just a Gentile but a Roman, the occupying power. Worse than that he was a soldier, one of the instruments of repression. Worst of all he was an officer. But never was a man more ready to be led to Christ(10:1,2) and God honoured his open heart(10:3,4) by telling him of just the man to help him.(10:5,6) Cornelius took his first step of faith by sending for Simon Peter.(10:7,8) Cornelius though a Roman was in effect an Old Testament believer trusting in what God had shown of Himself in the Old Testament but not yet knowing that Jesus was the one who would make God knowable. God plans that the whole world should hear the gospel through Christians, but He is not unjust and does not neglect to reveal Himself to anyone, anywhere, in any time whose heart is open.(Rom.1:18-20; 2:14-16; 10:18)

Peter, though a Christian, was still a Jew with all the cultural prejudices and hang-ups that go with any culture. God had to deal with those prejudices in a hurry because Cornelius' representatives were already on their way. The Lord did it by an illustration in the form of a vision of food. Peter was hungry but all the food in his dream was still 'on the hoof', running around alive, and banned from his diet according to the food laws in Leviticus 11. He found himself arguing with God about whether or not he could eat the banquet spread out in his mind.(10:9-16) Circumstances immediately made the meaning of the vision clear. A Roman officer wanted to know Jesus Christ. His conflict over food represented his inner conflict between Jesus' commission to all nations,(Matt.28:18-20) and his culture which told him to avoid non-Jews. The first evidence that his conflict was settled was his response to the Holy Spirit's prompting in identifying himself and giving hospitality to his Roman visitors.(10:17-23)

Peter probably did not know he was prejudiced against Romans until God showed him, just as we may be largely unaware of how closed our minds are to the possibility of God using us among people very different from us in race, class, age or custom.

Most Jews would have loved to have been worshipped by a Roman officer. It would have made up for some of their sufferings as a nation. We love to be regarded as superior as Christians. Peter showed how totally his prejudices had been broken down when he refused worship from Cornelius. They were both mere men for whom God cares.(10:24-29) Again he showed his lack of prejudice when he let Cornelius tell his story first so that he could begin to know him as a real person, not just a type.(10:30-33) Prejudice prevents us listening properly.

When he finally opened his mouth, Peter testified of the change in his own heart first,(10:34,35) then he set out to tell Cornelius what he needed to know. He acknowledged how much, to his surprise, Cornelius already knew that he did not need to hear again.(10:36-38) There were just 4 things Cornelius did not know - the cross, the resurrection, the fulfilment in Jesus of Old Testament prophecy concerning Christ, and the availability of forgiveness of sin. These Peter carefully explained.(10:39-43)

Peter's acceptance of Cornelius and his relevant presentation of the word of God produced a response of faith in the hearts of Cornelius and his friends. God immediately gave them the Holy Spirit in such a way that it was evident to Peter and those with him that He had given them no less than He gave to the first group of believers at Pentecost. When the new believers spoke with tongues they presumably did so in exactly the same way as in Acts 2, so that their hearers understood because they heard them speaking in their own languages.(10:44-48) The household and friends of Cornelius were presumably multilingual, Cornelius himself being Latin speaking.(10:1) Peter had six others with him(11:12) who may have included some of the overseas born Jews from the day of Pentecost. There would have been plenty of language barriers to break down.

In chapter 11 Peter faced a major reaction from the source he might least have expected.

11:1-3 Q.1 For what reason did some Jewish Christians criticise Peter? How had Jesus been criticised for similar reasons?(Matt.9:11) How had He answered? What forms does such criticism take for us today? What is the real reason people talk like this?

11:4-17 Q.2 How did Peter answer his critics? What was the place of (1) personal experience and (2) the Bible in his answer? How are we likely to react to such criticism? What can we learn from Peter's example?

11:15-17 Q.3 What did Peter mean by 'baptised by the Holy Spirit'? (I Pet.3:18-22) How did he explain what actually happened when Cornelius and his friends spoke in tongues?(Acts 2:6-11)

11:18 Q.4 What effect did Peter's answer have on his critics? What difference may we expect to see if we let the Lord in us handle criticism based on prejudice in a similar way? From where does repentance come? What part do we have in repentance?(Acts 2:37-40)

11:19-21 Q.5 "A large number who believed turned to the Lord." What were the reasons for this? How can we expect to see the same thing happen for us, for the same reasons?

11:22-24 Q.6 What was Barnabas' approach when he arrived to pastor the new church at Antioch? What were the immediate results of his ministry? What were his qualifications for ministry? What mistakes do new pastors often make in which they could learn from Barnabas' example?

11:25,26 Q.7 What can we learn about leadership training from Barnabas' relationship with Saul? What was their strategy in building the church? How did they earn the nickname 'Christians'? It was probably originally a term of abuse. What would we need to do in pastoral ministry for a church to be known as 'Christian'?