

>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 18 <<<<<<<

- 1) At this point, we now move back to the apostles in Jerusalem, specifically, some highlights of Peter's continuing ministry.
- 2) I make this comment to draw attention to the fact that we see these incidences but we must realize that they are not all that Peter did.
- 3) There are I am sure, many, many things that not only Peter but all of the apostles accomplished in these early days that are not reported in what we have here.
- 4) I think it would be good if we could think of these incidents as examples – important as they are, they are not the whole story.

Acts 9:32–35 (NIV)

- 1) This was a time after the dispersal of the Church caused by the stoning of Stephen and the persecution which followed.
 - 2) Peter was traveling about the area checking on the various members of the church who had relocated because of that.
 - 3) These two instances take place in Lydda and Jappa.
 - 4) Lydda was a fairly large town and commercial center.
 - a) Predominantly Gentile in population.
 - b) It was at an intersection of highways connecting Egypt to Syria and Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast, to Jerusalem.
 - 5) We really don't know anything else about the man Aeneas beyond his condition and Peter's healing.
 - 6) As with many of these healings and miracles performed by the apostles, large numbers of folks were brought to the Lord because of them.
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- 1) The next thing that apparently occurs on Peter's trip is the raising of one of the disciples (a woman by the name of Dorcus or Tabitha) who lived in Jappa.

Acts 9:36–43 (NIV)

- 2) Jappa is about 10 miles from Lydda. This means the trip for those coming to get Peter and the return journey would be about 6 to 10 hours each way on foot.
- 3) These folks had prepared her body for burial since it was customary for the body to be buried before sundown, there was a real stretch of faith in their eyes when they called for Peter.
- 4) This is interesting also from the perspective that, as far as we know, to this point in the life of the church, there has been no one raised from the dead.
 - a) There were incidents in Jesus' time here but, none that we know of since.
- 5) Again, one wonders what Peter was thinking as he approached the situation.
 - a) He simply prays, addresses the woman, and then after she opens her eyes and looks at him he takes her by the hand and presents her, back alive to her friends and loved ones.

- b) A true miracle showing the power of the Trinity working through the apostles and what was happening in this early time of the Church.
- 6) Once again, we see the indirect results of the miracle – the coming of many to the Lord.
- 7) Peter stays in Joppa, one assumes, working with, and teaching those who had just been added.
- 8) It is interesting to note here exactly who Peter is staying with.
 - a) The man named Simon was a tanner.
 - b) As a tanner, he was basically in a continuous state of uncleanness due to his contact with dead animals.
 - c) Bruce Barton comments on this:

This occupation involved contact with dead animals, and Jewish law considered it an “unclean” job. Peter was already beginning to break down his prejudice against people who were not of his kind and customs that did not adhere to Jewish religious traditions. This would set the stage for what is reported in the next chapter.

- 9) Of course, what Barton is referring to in this last statement is the famous incident of Peter going to Cornelius’ family as directed by God.
- 1) So, the stage is set for the next big item in the early church’s history – the bringing of Gentiles into the church.

Acts 10:1–8 (NIV)

- 2) Cornelius was first, as Luke describes, a “God fearing man.”
- 3) Not only he himself, but his family as well.
- 4) He was generous giving to those in need.
- 5) As I studied this, it was unclear at first if he is a “proselyte” or not.
 - a) If he was, then he is likely following the Jewish traditions to the best of his ability.
 - b) Again – not really known??
 - c) There were/are two types of proselytes:

A ***"righteous proselyte"*** is a gentile who has converted to Judaism, is bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the Jewish religion, and is considered a full member of the Jewish people. The proselyte is circumcised as an adult (*milah l'shem giur*), if male, and immerses in a *mikvah* to formally effect the conversion.

A ***"gate proselyte"*** is a resident alien who lives in the Land of Israel and follows some of the Jewish customs.^[10] They are not required to be circumcised nor to comply with the whole of the Torah. They are bound only to conform to the Seven Laws of Noah (do not worship idols, do not blaspheme God's name, do not murder, do not commit fornication (immoral sexual acts), do not steal, do not tear the limb

from a living animal, and do not fail to establish rule of law) to be assured of a place in the world to come.

- d) According to sources I read the Righteous Proselyte was considered to a Jew in every way.
 - e) However, it is unclear whether the Gate Proselyte was still considered a Gentile or not.
 - f) Other possible examples of “Gate Proselytes” might be.
 - i) Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:29-38
 - ii) The Canaanite woman in Mt. 15:22-28
 - g) As we will see in a bit (Ch10:28), Peter, on entering Cornelius’ house still considers him to be a Gentile – God fearing or not – Gate Proselyte or not!
- 6) One must of course wonder how his faith came about.
- a) The only reasonable explanation is that he had in some way been searching for something beyond the polytheistic norm of the Roman society.
 - b) Perhaps, despite the normal animosity between the Jews and the occupying Roman soldiers, he had gotten to know a devout Jew and had come to know God through that connection.
 - c) Obviously only speculation, however, the facts are what they are.
 - i) Not only he but his family were believers in the one true God.
 - ii) And he was living a life that proved he understood what God wanted of him.
 - d) As to how long he had been of this persuasion, we have no way of knowing.
 - e) Long enough to get God’s attention in the best sort of way.
- 7) Cornelius, whom God was about to bring to a knowledge of His Son, lived in Caesarea.
- 8) To help us understand a bit more about Cornelius and his position in life, we need to look a little closer at Caesarea.
- a) It was the capital of the Roman province of Judea.
 - b) It was an important city located about thirty miles north of Joppa.
 - c) Being an important city and the home of the procurator, it demanded a large Roman garrison for protection and control.
 - d) A legion consisting of 6000 men at full strength was stationed there.
 - i) The legion was divided into 10 cohorts of 600 men each.
 - ii) Each cohort consisted of 6 units and a centurion was in charge of each of these 6 units of 100 men each.
 - iii) Cornelius was one of these 60 centurions.
 - iv) These centurions were considered the backbone of the Roman army.
 - v) All that being said, we can see that Cornelius was not a major figure.

- (1) Probably could consider him basically a working man.
 - (2) However, in his position, his sphere of influence was large.
 - (3) One would have to assume that if God noticed the way Cornelius was living and was truly pleased then others perhaps noticed his way of life as well.
 - vi) Once he knew God, he was called to be different in the same way we are in our lives as God's children.
- 9) As Cornelius experienced this encounter with the angel, it is very short and puzzling.
- a) Since it was three in the afternoon, we might assume Cornelius may have been in prayer.
 - b) As we look at Cornelius' response, it was almost like, in his eyes, the angel was considered a superior officer.
 - i) The angel simply gives him directions and without hesitation and without so much as a question of any kind, he carries out those directions.
 - ii) This is absolutely the military way – “mine is not to reason why it is but to do or die!” as the old saying goes.
 - c) So, off his three designated persons go – one soldier and two trusted servants.
 - i) From the timeline we see in the next section of scripture, they were likely walking.
 - ii) This distance would take about 11 hours in each direction.

1) Meanwhile, in Joppa we have other things happening...

Acts 10:9–16 (NIV)

- 2) Peter was hungry so, naturally, this was a good time for the Lord to bring this vision to him.
- 3) Here is a situation that absolutely says that Peter, and for that matter, probably the rest of the Jews who had become believers were still keeping many of the traditions of the law.
 - a) They were obviously believers in the Christ the one true Messiah but, they were still seeing themselves as Law abiding Jews – believing and practicing the Law as they had known it throughout their lives.
 - b) The dietary requirements were a part of that Law which are brought into focus here.
 - c) Evidently, only the animals that God had, at the writing of the Law, considered unclean for the Jewish people are Shown in this sheet like affair.
 - d) This is of course what brings Peter's reaction.
- 4) Verses 14 and 15 are a pivot point in the life of the Christian community as it was at that time.
- 5) 14 clearly states that what Peter sees is what God had declared “impure or unclean.”
- 6) – 15 with equal clarity is saying that God is declaring all these things “clean” thus removing the need for Peter to be concerned about eating them.
- 7) Did Peter immediately get up and go out and find a ham sandwich to eat – NO!

- 8) Even with the vision being repeated 3 times, he was trying to figure out exactly what all this really meant.
 - a) Even if he did totally understand, he would likely not immediately be comfortable eating any of these previously “unclean” things.
- 9) God set these dietary rules forth in Lev for a reason.
 - a) Obviously, in some cases it was health concern but He clearly states in Lev 20, the exact reason and, that reason will also have a bearing on exactly what is getting ready to happen.

Leviticus 20:25–26 (NASB 2020)

²⁵ You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird, or by anything that crawls on the ground, which I have distinguished for you as unclean. ²⁶ So you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have singled you out from the peoples to be Mine.

10) There are two key phrases in this passage:

“you shall not make yourselves detestable”

and

“I have singled you out from the peoples to be Mine”

- 11) From the first phrase, the real reason for the dietary regulations was that of keeping themselves from becoming detestable to God.
- 12) By the second phrase, this idea carries over to keeping themselves separate from other peoples of the world.
 - a) Something God has always emphasized to the Jewish people. The broad overarching category of the “other people” was simply the Gentiles.
- 13) So, with that in mind, we can see that very quickly, the vision takes on even a more significant meaning than just food.
 - a) We are looking at a change in the way the Jew looks at themselves – as unique and set apart.
- 14) In my mind, this could have been very disconcerting to the Jew.
 - a) This was one concrete marker of differentiation.
 - b) With these restrictions gone, the idea of “I have singled you out from the peoples to be Mine” might have been gone.
 - c) Purely supposition on my part but this melding, loss of uniqueness, could have been one of the reasons there was such a push by the Jewish brethren to force the Gentiles to follow the Laws of circumcision and the like.