

The importance of this event is seen in the fact that Luke recounts it in Acts 10, 11, and 15:6–9.

(1) **The vision of Cornelius (10:1–8).** 10:1. By separate visions both Peter and **Cornelius** were prepared for this momentous happening. Cornelius was a **centurion**, a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers, in **the Italian Regiment**, consisting of 600 soldiers. Centurion Cornelius became one of the first Gentiles after Pentecost to hear the good news of Jesus Christ's forgiveness.

10:2. From the description of Cornelius as **devout** (*eusebēs*, used only here and in v. 7; 2 Peter 2:9) and **God-fearing** ("righteous and God-fearing," Acts 10:22).

10:3–6. The time reference, **3 in the afternoon**, may refer to a Jewish time of prayer. The Lord approached Cornelius by means of **an angel** while he was at prayer. Later Cornelius called this angel "a man in shining clothes" (v. 30). **Cornelius** responded to **the angel** by asking, **What is it, Lord?** Perhaps "Lord" (*kyrie*) here means "Sir." This soldier's piety was evidenced by his **prayers** and generous giving **to the poor** (cf. 10:2). The angel instructed him to send for **Simon ... Peter** at the home of **Simon the tanner** (cf. 9:43).

10:7. **When the angel who spoke to him had gone**, the centurion **called** three of his men—two **servants** and a military aide, also a **devout man**. Undoubtedly these three had been influenced by Cornelius' devotion.

10:8. **He told them everything that had happened.** Related to the Greek participle used here (*exēgēsamenos*) is the English noun "exegesis." The verb means he "explained" everything.

The three went off **to Joppa**, some 33 miles south of Caesarea (v. 24), to bring Peter back to Cornelius.

(2) **The vision of Peter (10:9–16).** 10:9. That **Peter** prayed morning and evening may be assumed, for those were normal times of prayer. In addition he prayed at **noon**.

10:10–12. While **hungry**, Peter **fell into a trance** in which God gave him a vision of a **sheet coming down to earth with all kinds of ... animals ... reptiles ... and birds**.

10:13–14. When God commanded **Peter** to **eat** of these animals, his response was, **Surely not, Lord!** Significantly his refusal ("surely not") was *mēdamōs*, a polite and subjective term.

Peter knew from the Law that he should not eat **unclean** animals (Lev. 11). But could he not have killed and **eaten** the clean animals and left the unclean? Probably Peter understood the command to include them all.

10:15. **Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.** In retrospect Peter must have recognized that Jesus as the Messiah cleansed all goods from ceremonial defilement.

10:16. Why did Peter refuse **three times** to eat the unclean foods? It indicated emphasis, and revealed certainty and truth. Peter was being scrupulous beyond the will of God. His intentions were good, but he was being disobedient. Also, was there some link here with Peter's threefold denial (John 18:17, 25–27) and with his three affirmations of his love for the Lord? (John 21:15–17)

(3) **The visit of the messengers (10:17–23a).** 10:17–22. In marvelous timing and by the coordination of the sovereign God the three messengers and **Peter** met.

The men ... from Cornelius spoke highly of him (cf. vv. 2, 4) and conveyed to **Peter** their purpose.

10:23a. **Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.** Since Peter had been waiting for his noon meal (cf. v. 10), he undoubtedly now shared it with his visitors.

(4) **The visitation of Gentiles (10:23b–43).** 10:23b. By the time **Peter** and his guests finished lunch it must have been too late to start back to Caesarea that day. **The next day** they began the almost-two-day trip. (Cornelius' emissaries had left Caesarea after 3 P.M. one day [vv. 3, 8] and arrived at noon two days later [vv. 9, 19]. Cf. "four days ago" in v. 30.)

Peter took with him **some of the brothers from Joppa**. Christian workers often went out by twos. In this debatable situation at least six people accompanied Peter (11:12). So there would be seven witnesses to attest to what would transpire.

10:24. **Cornelius** was so confident that Peter would come and he was so expectant of Peter's message that he **called together his relatives and close friends**.

10:25–26. When **Peter** arrived, **Cornelius** prostrated himself before the apostle in worship. The verb *prosekynēsen* means “he worshiped” and is here translated **in reverence**. **Peter**, refusing this kind of obeisance, urged Cornelius to **stand up**, for, **he said, I am only a man myself**.

10:27–29. **Peter** was well aware of the consequences of fellowshiping with Gentiles in their homes (cf. 11:2–3), but he had learned the lesson of the vision well. The command to eat unclean animals meant he was **not to call any man impure or unclean**. So he **came without protest**.

10:30–33. After **Cornelius** recounted the circumstances that brought **Peter** to his house he said, **Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us**. What a divinely prepared audience!

10:34–35. These words of **Peter** were revolutionary. They swept away the prejudice and indoctrination of generations of Judaism. In the Old Testament the Jews were God’s Chosen People, the special recipients of His promises and revelation. Peter stated that God’s program was reaching the world through the church.

There is considerable debate about Peter’s words that God **accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right**. This does not teach salvation by works because a person’s first responsibility before God is to fear Him, which is tantamount to trusting Him and reverencing Him. Furthermore, God’s acceptance of such people refers to His welcoming them to a right relationship by faith in Christ (cf. Acts 11:14).

10:36–37. Peter then outlined the career of **Christ** (vv. 36–43), the sovereign **Lord of all**, through whom **God sent ... the good news of peace**. Bible students have often observed how this parallels the Gospel of Mark almost perfectly. Mark began with John’s **baptism** and traced the ministry of the Lord Jesus from **Galilee to Judea** to Jerusalem and finally to the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the Great Commission.

10:38. The word *Messiah* means “Anointed One”; so when Peter said, **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth** he was saying, “God declared Him the Messiah” (cf. Isa. 61:1–3; Luke 4:16–21; Acts 4:27). This declaration occurred at the Lord’s baptism (cf. Matt. 3:16–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–34). Isaiah spoke of the Anointed One performing great deeds (Isa. 61:1–3), and as Peter declared, **He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil**.

10:39–41. Peter affirmed that he and his associates were personal eyewitnesses of all Jesus **did**. **They**, that is, **the Jews ... killed Him by hanging Him on a tree**, an ignominious form of execution. Earlier Peter had told Jews **in Jerusalem**, “You killed the Author of life” (3:15); to the rulers he said, “You crucified” Him (4:10); and to the Sanhedrin he replied, “You killed” Him “by hanging Him on a tree” (5:30). And Stephen too told the Sanhedrin, “You ... have murdered Him” (7:52). On five occasions in Acts, the apostles said they were **witnesses** of the resurrected Christ (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:30–31). After Christ’s resurrection the disciples **ate and drank with Him** (cf. John 21:13). This was proof that the resurrected Lord Jesus was no bodiless phantom and it explains how Christ was **seen** (Acts 10:40).

10:42–43. Peter made it clear that Christ’s ministry results either in judgment (v. 42) or salvation (v. 43). The key phrase is, **Everyone who believes in Him**. This Greek construction consists of a present participle with an article, which is almost the equivalent of a noun (in this case “every believer in Him”). The key element in salvation is faith, belief in Christ. This message of **forgiveness of sins** (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) **through** faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25–26).

(5) The vindication by the Spirit (10:44–48). 10:44–45. Peter’s message was rapidly concluded by the sovereign interruption of **the Holy Spirit** who **came on all** those **who heard Peter’s message** about Jesus and believed. **The six** (cf. v. 23; 11:12) **circumcised believers ... were astonished** (*exestēsan*; “they were beside themselves”; cf. 9:21) at this evidence of equality of **Gentiles** with Jewish believers.

10:46. The sign which God used to validate the reality of Gentile salvation was **speaking in tongues**.

10:47–48. **Peter** quickly discerned at least three theological implications of what had happened: (1) He could not argue with God (11:17). (2) Cornelius and his household, though uncircumcised (11:3), were **baptized** because they had believed in **Christ**, as evidenced by their receiving **the Holy Spirit**. The order of these events was believing in Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and being baptized in water. (3) The reality of Cornelius’ conversion was confirmed by Peter’s staying with him several **days**, probably to instruct him more fully in his newfound faith.¹

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 379–382.