

Acts 10

The book of Acts records a spiritual *paradigm shift*. God's spirit began doing a significant and observable work in men's lives. It seems to be breaking out in unusual places with unusual people. The prior era of reaching the world through the Jews has timed out and died. God is re-injecting a new spiritual pulse into humanity. I believe that as individuals and as nations, that God has to continuously provide spiritual CPR rescue breaths to all of us. We just naturally move towards destructive lifestyles.

There is a biblical interpretation concept that is known as dispensationalism. That is the idea that God pours himself out (reveals himself) in different ways in different eras of time. In this chapter, we are seeing an emphasis on the gospel finding better reception among the Gentiles. God does not stop trying to reach the Jews. The Jewish approach to connecting with God (in general) has fallen well short. They were too self-assured. Faith in God had become a slogan, but not a reality. The whole Jewish religious system had become an idea without a reality. It morphed into human logic, and it completely misrepresented God. The best examples of faith that Jesus could point to were Gentiles and people outside of Israel. Judaism had become corrupted and compromised.

Read Acts 10:1-8: We are seeing how the church-age, Spirit-filled saints do not resemble the old dead religion. They are talking continuously with God; and taking immediate action. Religion is a rote exercise resulting in contemplation, but faith is about immediate action and it is all in the moment and *off script*.

No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse.¹⁷ Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:17-18)

Religion is like a funeral dirge. It can be hard to stay awake and pay attention. The Spirit-led life is like improvisational jazz. Like any tree, diseased wood always becomes dead wood...which infects everything connected to it. The problem with dead religion is that it eventually becomes demonic.

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.
(Matthew 12:30)

Much of the Jewish priesthood and bible teaching rabbis were influenced by the devil. God's stated priorities had given way to manmade additions and loopholes. The old system had died. God was just like a team logo to some of these people. Their actions were based on institutional loyalty more than seeking God's mind on all matters. God had moved out of the temple (so to speak).

*18 Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.*¹⁹ And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight.

When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. (Ezekiel 10:18-19)

We are given examples of how unlikely believers were used to play an important role in the spreading of the gospel.

We see how this Roman centurion became a great faith example. It is incongruous at that time to think of a Gentile Roman soldier as a saint. The Holy Spirit is full of surprises. Jesus generally spoke highly of centurions.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion based in Caesaria; which was the Roman administrative center of Judea. A centurion was usually in charge of 80-100 soldiers. By definition he was part of larger organizations than his own. Each cohort had 480 soldiers and each legion had 4,000-6,000 men. He was in charge; but he recognized that he was also a man under authority.

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, ⁶ saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." ⁷ And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go, ' and he goes; and to another, 'Come, ' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this, ' and he does it. ¹⁰ When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! (Matthew 8)

Centurions were given considerable authority; and chosen for their creativity and ability to adapt to conditions in the field. They were the opposite of disconnected office administrators. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen organizations fail because of the disconnect between the field and the office. Rome held a firm central control, but the Romans realized that more authority held by field fighters would become a significant advantage as the Roman Empire became enormous. A centurion had to legitimately come up through the ranks as a soldier. He led from the front as an example of valor, fighting technique and loyalty to the cause. This leadership style prevented orders being given for *no-win* battles. There are so many ideas that can come from management that only work on paper. Not so with centurions. Centurions were multi-faceted and responsible for everything. They had to provide supplies and provisions and protect and train their own men. They were caretakers of Rome's most valuable asset...their loyal fighting men. If you lost a lot of soldiers in battle, you were seen as a poor trainer or a bad strategist. You would also lose the support and zeal from your men.

Why are we taking a scriptural detour to examine this Roman centurion? He was a believer; and his whole family was devout. That was uncommon in Israel at that time. He was praying at 3:00; which is the hour of evening prayer. He was very generous to the poor as well. He was a man of continual prayer. God is telling us to be a centurion type of believer rather than a

Pharisaical type of believer. We are to be about creating solutions, not to become critics. Let's compare a centurion-style believer to a pharisaic type of believer.

Jesus characterized Pharisees as piling burdens on men without lifting a finger to help. Centurions were the first to face the consequences and inconveniences of their directives to others. Pharisees were characterized as hypocrites; but Romans inspired others by their own actions...not empty or braggadocios self-promotion. The Kingdom does not need dead weight.



Pharisees loved the respect that came with the title. Centurions were too busy seeing to supply-chain issues, training and intel gathering and public PR to be bothered with all of that ego nonsense. It is the difference between doers and talkers. A centurion strives to achieve the solution; but a Pharisee is only about rules; frequently with no concerns for realistic solutions.

God honored Cornelius by sending an angel to him. Like Daniel, his prayers were being heard in heaven.

Then behold, a hand touched me and shook me on my hands and knees. ¹¹ And he said to me, "Daniel, you who are treasured, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand at your place, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. ¹² Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. (Daniel 10)

Cornelius's prayers were not empty platitudes. The angel could have been an answer to his prayers. He was ready to take action to benefit his family and his community. His own men were inspired by Cornelius and became saved and devout followers. We are to inspire others by our actions even more than by our words. I can relate to that style of leadership. I have been in countless situations where people may not have been too anxious to hear what I had to say; but they did take note if I did something that inspired them.

There are a number of seemingly incongruous things happening here. Cornelius is told by God to bring Peter to his house. Peter is staying at the tanner's house. A tanner is, according to the Mosaic law, an unclean man because he is in contact with dead animals all day long. In fact, this whole story is about historically out of bounds stuff: Gentiles associating with Jews, unorthodox avenues and distributors of the gospel, unclean people, etc.. Peter was staying in Joppa; which is associated with Jonah. Jonah was known to be closed-minded about Gentile salvation. God used Jonah, despite his protests. He held his anger towards certain Gentiles until God changed

his heart. Like Jonah, Peter would see a massive blessing if he allowed God to tweak his views on salvation.

Read Acts 10:9-33: The means and methods of evangelism and discipleship are changing across the board. The ‘holy’ men designated to carry out God’s plans were not holy, so God had to reach further out into society. God’s ultimate plan was to include the Gentiles in his plan for salvation. Unfortunately, the Jews never got squared away themselves, to even be in a position to bring in Gentiles to God’s Kingdom.

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³ and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴ Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ ⁵ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶ And the rest seized his servants, treated them ^{la}s spitefully, and killed them. ⁷ But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ ¹⁰ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. (Matthew 22)

Peter is praying in the sixth hour; which is the noon time of prayer (and lunch). He is given a new menu (so to speak). Previously, Moses taught that the Jews were not to associate with the unclean and unholy. That meant people and food. were considered unhealthy. Idolatry was synonymous with being a Gentile. Now God is showing Peter some broader choices on preaching and healing. All of the restrictions were off. The Jews historically thought that the Gentiles were just firewood for hell. This includes the Samaritan half-breeds.

God has erased that stigma, and he is demanding forgiveness and acceptance to the lost and the least in society. Peter has an immediate door opened to minister to Gentiles. There is a group of Gentiles seeking bible teaching in the front yard waiting for him. God gave a double-confirmed dream, reinforced by a group of men sent by an angel.

We need to make sure that we also have all of the right confirmations from God. That does not mean that some well-meaning member of your church can send you to India to be a missionary because God told them that you need to go. God has to confirm it with you, and it also needs to square with scripture. Taking an adventure of faith is also a helpful tool to vet this notion. Take steps to obey; and look for confirmations along the way.

Peter was probably surprised to see a gathering of Gentiles seeking God. They were so happy that he came that they were kneeling to him. Peter quickly put a stop to that. We should never allow people to hold us in too much esteem. Paul warned us not to put fellow believers under a microscope. You will come away disillusioned every time.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. (2 Corinthians 5:16)

All of the appreciation and glory have to go to God.

Read Acts 10:34-48: Peter ties it all together by laying out the big picture of salvation. God sent his message to the Hebrews, that the whole world would connect with Jesus (God's promises) and find life in him. The apostles and disciples are witnesses to the salvation plan to the Hebrews and now, also the salvation plan to the Gentiles and the church. He adds that all of the prophets pointed to Jesus. That confirms that we should be looking for more than the immediate context of all of the prophecy. Many prophecies have double or triple confirmations.

God confirmed that this confusing journey Peter has been on was correct. The Holy Spirit confirmed that this is what God will honor and bless. The idea of Gentile converts was subject to some wrangling between the apostles; so it was good that Peter witnessed it first hand.