

## REFLECTION GUIDE

### ACTS 10:1-48 | CONVERSION, CULTURE, AND THE CORE OF THE GOSPEL

#### KEY TERMS

**Caesarea** - An influential 1st century port city located about 30 miles north of modern-day Tel Aviv. Caesarea was the Roman capital of Judea and home to the Roman governors over the region.

**Cornelius** - Cornelius was a Gentile (non-Jew) who sought to follow Yahweh, the God of the Jews. He was a centurion, meaning he had command over a military force of about 100 men, and his troop was part of the Italian Cohort, which means they were recruited in Italy.

**Common/Unclean** - Jewish law given by God in the Old Testament established some animals as “clean” and thus suitable for human consumption, and others as “unclean,” and thus prohibited for human consumption (see Leviticus 11). This is one of the ways God used a physical thing (like food) to establish a spiritual truth (like sin).

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Rabbinic literature referred to tanners as “unclean.” Thus when Peter stays with Simon, a tanner, it might reveal that he had begun to allow for some contact with “unclean” things. However, Peter still had room to grow because he rejects God’s command to eat “unclean” animals (vv. 13-14).

#### BACKGROUND

While Peter is staying in Joppa with Simon, Luke introduces his readers to a man named Cornelius, a Gentile who follows Yahweh, the God of the Jews. While praying, Cornelius has a vision where an angel tells him to send men to Joppa to find Peter (vv. 1-8). While on their way to Peter, he himself has a vision in which Peter is told to kill and eat animals that were considered unclean by the Old Testament law (vv.9-26). Peter refuses and is confused, but the Spirit tells him that three men are looking for him and they were sent by God (vv. 19-20). Peter agrees to go to Cornelius and understands that the point of the vision was not just that Peter was allowed to eat “unclean” animals, but that Gentiles were welcome in God’s Church (i.e. nothing is “unclean” any longer). This leads Peter to preach the gospel to Gentiles in Caesarea and many believe and are baptized (vv. 34-48).

This is a very significant story in the book of Acts, as it paves the way for Jewish Christians like Peter to begin actively inviting Gentiles to trust in Jesus and become part of the Church. It is also significant that Peter says *truly I understand that God shows no partiality* (v. 34), which could also be translated as *I now realize how true it is that God shows no partiality*. In other words, God welcoming Gentiles into his plan of redemption in the world is not a new thing; Peter now understands that this was God’s plan from the beginning (see Genesis 12:3).

#### GOING DEEPER

Read Genesis 12:3, Exodus 19:5-6, and Deuteronomy 10:17-19. What do these verses reveal about God’s heart towards all nations? What do they reveal about Israel’s unique status and role in God’s plan of redemption? Read Revelation 7:9-10. What strikes you about this picture of the future of God’s Church? How is this a fulfillment of Genesis 12:3?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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#### LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 10:1-48. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What catches your attention? What is the main idea?
2. In Acts 10:9-23, how does God break down Peter's cultural preferences and/or prejudices? What is the meaning of the vision Peter receives?
3. Acts 10:1-8, 22, 34-35 present Cornelius as a good person who respects God and seeks to do good, yet that is not enough. What do these verses tell us about the importance of knowing Jesus and believing the gospel?
4. In verses 34-43, how does Peter's presentation preserve the core of the gospel message while removing any cultural wrappings?

#### LIVING THE WORD

5. In this passage, we see God showing the early church how to differentiate the gospel from Judaism as it entered Gentile culture. What are some specific ways that people in our day confuse the gospel message with the cultural trappings of a particular subculture in our society?
6. Why do you think that it is so difficult to differentiate our faith from our cultural preferences (verse 16 - Peter had to be told three times!)? Why is this critical to our spiritual growth?
7. Why does seeing the gospel spread to new places to convert new people to Christ actually encourage and deepen our faith? Have you experienced this before?
8. How does this study challenge you personally?