

Acts 058
Gentile Salvation, Part 3
Acts 10:16b-23a
November 6, 2024
Dr. Andy Woods

We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts. This chapter that we are looking at is a big deal, because this chapter represents the conversion of the first Gentile of the Church Age: A man named Cornelius. Cornelius, in Caesarea, had a vision. He had a hunger for God, and then he had a vision that someone was going to come to him and give him the gospel.

About 30 miles south of Caesarea is the person that is coming: A man named Simon Peter who is in Joppa. He simultaneously gets a vision—both visions coming from God—that he is supposed to go up north and interact with this man, Cornelius, and ultimately lead him to Christ. Peter's vision was a sheet with animals in the sheet. He was told to arise and eat. He was hungry, so he was prepped for that command. He says some of the most famous words in the Bible: "By no means, Lord" (Acts 10:14).

He is a devout Jew, and he had been under the Law of Moses, which stood for 1,500 years. This idea of setting aside the Law and the Pharisaical tradition allowing him to interact with Gentiles was taboo. He is given this vision, in it he is told very clearly that in so many words, "The age of the Law is over. We are now in the age of the church."

"This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky" (Acts 10:16).

The age of the Law is now over. What does it mean that the age of the Law is over? One thousand five hundred years earlier at Mount Sinai, which is a long time, God gave the Mosaic Law to the Nation of Israel. The Mosaic Law was not given to the Nation of Israel to redeem them. They had already been redeemed, as they were brought out of Egypt and passed through the Red sea. Their redemption had already been accomplished, and their salvation had already been accomplished as well. Because they had applied the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts, they were exempted from the tenth plague that came upon Egypt that killed all of the firstborn. That is really the plague that broke Pharaoh's will, causing Pharaoh to release the Nation of Israel from 400 years of bondage.

How did they get into 400 years of bondage in Egypt? The Book of Genesis, particularly the Joseph story, tells us all about that. They had already been redeemed. They came to Mount Sinai, and they were given the Mosaic Law. It is really important to understand that the Mosaic Law was not there to redeem them. It was not to redeem a people. Rather, the Mosaic Law was given to a redeemed people. It was showing them, as God's people that are now redeemed, here is how you are to act—here is how you are

to act towards God. Those are commandments one through four. Here is how you are to interact with each other. Those are commandments five through ten. Here is how you are to worship God. That is what the instructions in the Mosaic Law, involving the tabernacle, were designed to show them.

Our salvation history is basically the same thing. God saves us by grace, by faith alone. Then He brings us into the walk of sanctification, teaching us as redeemed people how we are supposed to live. Sanctification, obedience, and your growth in Christ do not redeem you, but it teaches us how God's redeemed people are to live.

The same thing is happening with Israel. They are redeemed. They are brought to Mount Sinai, not to redeem them, but to show them through the Mosaic Law how God's redeemed people are to act. Ten commandments in the Law with 613 commandments total in the Law of Moses, which basically amplify or explain the big ten or the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, are the central feature. The 613 supporting commandments are applying the Decalogue to daily life.

As God's redeemed people, how do you relate to God? Commandments one through four. How do you relate to each other? Commandments six through ten. How do you worship God? The tabernacle explains that. Once you have all that down, how are God's people supposed to interact with the nations all around them? That is where they are told that they are now a kingdom of priests. They are, according to the Mosaic Law, God's ambassadors, God's representatives to the rest of the nations. The Mosaic Law gave them that whole explanation.

There is about a two-month period (Exodus 19:1) after they have come out of Egypt. In other words, their redemption has been accomplished. There is a two-month period between this and making their trajectory to Mount Sinai to receive His Law. In the Bible, there is a clear distinction between initial salvation and then sanctification. As they are moving from Egypt to Sinai, they are complaining against God every step of the way. You are dealing with people that are saved but do not know how to act. The Mosaic Law taught them how to act; it taught them how to behave.

From that point in time, the Nation of Israel had been under the Mosaic Law for 1,500 years, which is a very, very long time. Consequently, the Dispensation of the Law, which starts in Exodus 19, is the longest dispensation in the Bible. It stretches all the way to Acts 1. Jesus is really the last major player in that dispensation. Jesus' ministry took place under the Dispensation of the Law. Jesus was born under Law. The reason Jesus is the last major player in that particular dispensation is because He is the only one that has ever kept the Law in its entirety and in perfection.

Now that the Nation of Israel had rejected Jesus as their King, we are now moving into a new dispensation: The Dispensation of the Church. It started in Acts 2 and stretches all the way to God taking the church to heaven in the Rapture. The church, in that new dispensation, is no longer under the Mosaic Law. That is what is being communicated here to Peter.

Let me give you a few verses that tell us that we are not under the Mosaic law today:

"But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because the glory of his face, fading as it was" (2 Corinthians 3:7).

When Paul uses the word "fading" to describe the Dispensation of the Law, he is explaining that the Law of Moses was never intended to be a permanent fixture.

"How will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed, what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away [the Law of Moses] was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory" (2 Corinthians 3:8-11).

What he is saying is: Now we are in the ministry of the Church Age, which is more glorious than the Law of Moses, which is fading and has faded. That is a great verse to demonstrate that the Law of Moses—even though Peter had been under it with his people for 1,500 years—was never intended to remain forever. This is the lesson Peter is having to learn here. He does not want to let go of the Law of Moses. It is really all he knew; it is really all the Nation of Israel knew for 1,500 years.

"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

As members of the church, we are not under the Law of Moses in any way, shape, or form. We are under a completely new system. This is how people today unfortunately handle this: They take the Law of Moses and they divide it into three parts.

There are the civil provisions which deal with stoning to death and violators of the Law, as in Numbers 15. They come to Moses and they say, "We found a guy that was picking up sticks on the Sabbath. What should we do?" Moses says, "Gather rocks and throw them at the guy till he is dead." Those are the civil, punitive portions of the Law.

Next, there is another section of the Law called the ceremonial or, better said, sacrificial portions, like the Book of Leviticus and the animal sacrifices. They say that is phase two of the Law. Then they go to the Ten Commandments, where it says things like, "Do not commit murder, do not covet, do not commit adultery," and they will say these are the moral provisions of the Law.

What people do today is take the Law of Moses and divide it into three parts: the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral. They say that we are not under the civil portions anymore as members of the church; we are not under the ceremonial portions of the

law anymore as members of the church, because Christ's death rendered animal sacrifice as unnecessary, but we are under the moral provisions of the Mosaic Law.

Most churches that you go to will teach it that way—the threefold division of the Law. They will say that we are under the moral provisions of the Law. That is a problem. The first reason that is a problem is that the Law never divides itself into those three categories. Those three categories that I just gave you are completely and totally man-made. You go through the Law of Moses—the Book of Exodus, the Book of Leviticus, the Book of Numbers, the Book of Deuteronomy—and nowhere does Moses say, "Here is the moral stuff. Let us pay attention here. All right, I am finished with the moral; let us talk about the civil. I am finished talking about the moral; let us talk about the civil. I am finished with the civil; let us talk about the ceremonial or the sacrificial." When people get into this threefold division of the Mosaic Law, the first thing you have to understand is that they have made up something that the Bible does not give us.

The problem with putting the church under any part of the Mosaic Law is that once you are under a millimeter of the Law, you are under the whole thing. You cannot say, "I am going to go under this part, but not that part. I am going to go under the moral part, but not the civil part or the ceremonial part." The Law of Moses itself is a package deal. Remember what the Book of James says?

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10).

When you hear a preacher say that we are under the moral part of the Mosaic Law today, but not the civil part or the ceremonial part, you are automatically dealing with a division that is arbitrary.

Once you put any of your body under the Mosaic Law—once I take this little finger here, my smallest finger, my fingernail—once I put my fingernail under the Mosaic Law, any part of it, I am under the whole thing because God gave the Mosaic Law to the Nation of Israel as a package deal. Take it or leave it.

What I am trying to communicate to us—and this is what God is seeking to communicate to Peter—is that today we are not under any aspect of the Mosaic Law whatsoever. The Mosaic Law was given to the Nation of Israel only (Psalm 147:19-20). It was not given to any other group. It was not given to the church. It was not given to any nation. It was given only to Israel. All of that to say: We are not under the Mosaic Law today.

People say, are we under the Ten Commandments today? Not as they are expressed in the Mosaic Law. If we were to put ourselves under the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Law, we have to go under all of the Mosaic Law. We have to stone to death Sabbath breakers; we have to stone to death witches, homosexuals, and people involved in incest. By the way, we should not even show up to church on Sunday. We ought to come on Saturday, and we ought to come bringing an animal to sacrifice. I

noticed none of you brought an animal with you into the sanctuary today. Why not? Because there is an understanding that we are not under the Mosaic Law at all.

If you want to go under a little bit of it, automatically you are under all of it. The Book of James says:

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10).

You are hearing me clearly when I am telling you we are not under the Mosaic Law today; we are not under the Ten Commandments today.

A lot of you are saying, "Whoopee! I am not under the Ten Commandments. That means I can go out and murder people and violate all the Ten Commandments, right?" No, because we are under a different legal code. That legal code is called two things in the New Testament: The law of Christ and the law of the Spirit. The same word "law" or "nomos" is used in both passages to describe the legal system that we are currently under, which has nothing to do with the Law of Moses.

"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

It does not say, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the Law of Moses," because we are not under the Law of Moses.

"For the law of the Spirit of the life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Romans 8:2).

What law are we under today? You can call it different names: It is the law of Christ or the law of the Spirit. Now, the law of Christ, the law of the Spirit, looks like the Law of Moses at certain points, but it is not the same thing. You will notice that in our legal system, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated. The only commandment that is not repeated is which one? The Sabbath command.

Because nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated a lot of people get confused and say, "Do you know what? Those commandments are exactly like the Law of Moses commandments, so we must be under the Law of Moses." But similarity is not the same thing as equality. I have two cars in my garage. They look a lot alike. They both have steering wheels and a steering column and brakes and seat belts and glove compartments, but I can guarantee you that those two cars are not the same. They look similar, but similarity is not the same thing as equality.

What system are we under today that looks like the Law of Moses, but is not the Law of Moses? If you go under any portions of the Law of Moses, you are under the whole thing. What system are we under today? You can call it the law of the Holy Spirit or the law of Christ.

Going under the law of the Holy Spirit or the law of Christ does not justify you. What justifies you is faith alone in Christ alone. Once I am saved, why should I submit myself to the law of Christ or the law of the Spirit? You cannot grow as a saved person unless you are walking under the right legal system.

In our legal system, God gives us empowerment for obedience when we rely upon Him, moment by moment in the walk of obedience. Do not confuse similarity in the New Testament with the Law of Moses to say that we are under the Law of Moses, because we are not. Most theologians mess this up by saying we are under the moral part of the Mosaic Law, but not the other parts. That is not a correct view. We are under a new system entirely.

It is like the difference between California and Texas. I am from California, but I moved to Texas. Both legal systems have the same kinds of laws on their books. For example, there are criminal penalties for stealing something. If I steal something in California, I am in trouble under California law. If I steal something in Texas, I am not in trouble under California law. I might want to be in trouble under California law, because they are a little bit more lenient about things like this than Texas. But the truth of the matter is, if you steal something in Texas, you do not get prosecuted in California; you get prosecuted in Texas, even though Texas and California both have laws on their books against stealing. See how it works?

Once I changed my residence from California to Texas, I put myself under a completely and totally different legal system that looks like the California legal system at some points, but at the same time, it is an entirely different system. That is the difference between the Law of Moses versus the law of the Spirit, or a synonym for the law of Christ, that we are under now. You are not under the Law of Moses at all, even though the law that we are currently under looks like the Law of Moses at points. You are under a completely new and different legal system.

That is the right way to think about our responsibilities in obedience. God is holding us accountable, not to the Law of Moses, but He is holding us accountable for our growth, to our submission to the law of the Holy Spirit and the law of Christ. That is a big deal. If you do not get that down, you will be confused your whole Christian life.

Most pastors, preachers, teachers, and theologians have this whole thing messed up where they are trying to put the church back under the Law of Moses by saying that we are under the moral parts of the Law of Moses. No, we are not under any part of the Law of Moses; we are under a completely different and independent legal system as Christians.

This is the learning curve that Peter is going through when he sees the vision of the animals in the sheet, and he is told to arise and eat. He says, back to the Lord, "Not so, Lord." He does not really understand or want to understand that he is under something completely and totally different in terms of his system now. "Eating things today that

contradict the Law of Moses is not a problem, Peter, even though you are a devout Jew and you are just learning about this new system and the only thing you have ever known or your nation has ever known is the Law of Moses for 1,500 years."

Having said all that, I am going to really confuse you, as if I have not already. There is nobody that taught this concept more aggressively than the Apostle Paul. It is Paul who said, "We are not under law, but we are under grace" (Romans 6:14). Yet there are times in the Book of Acts where Paul is going to submit himself to the Law of Moses, when he has spent all this time telling us we are not under the Law of Moses.

Let me show you four times in the Book of Acts where this happens. The first time it is in Acts 16:3, as Paul is moving out onto his second missionary journey. He has someone joining him named Timothy.

"Paul wanted this man [Timothy] to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3).

If we are not under the Law of Moses, why in the world would Paul take Timothy and have him circumcised? That is example number one.

Example number two:

"Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow" (Acts 18:18).

This is no big deal. We all need a haircut, right? But this says *"In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow."* What vow would that be? It is called the Nazarite vow. You will find a reference to it in Numbers 6. I believe we have got some characters in the Bible that went under the Nazarite vow: Samson, being one. It was a commitment to God under the Mosaic Law that you were going to serve God in a special way. You had to abstain from certain things, and one of the things you had to do was to get your hair cut (Numbers 6:2, 5, 9, 18).

Paul is so clear on this topic that we are not under the Mosaic Law, so what in the world is he doing putting himself through his haircut under Numbers 6. Numbers is part of the Torah, the Mosaic Law.

Example number three:

"For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible on the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16).

The day of Pentecost, as you know, is one of the Levitical feasts. It is the last spring feast. The feasts come from Leviticus 23, which comes from the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law, again, consists of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is sometimes called Torah, the first four or five books of Hebrew Bible. If Paul is so clear that we are not under the Law of Moses anymore, what in the world is he doing trying to get to Jerusalem as fast as he can, so he can celebrate one of the Levitical feasts mandated by the Law of Moses?

Levitical Feasts (Leviticus 23)			
Feast	Season	Purpose	Type
Passover	Spring	Redemption	1 Cor 5:7
Unleavened Bread	Spring	Separation	John 6:35
1 st Fruits	Spring	Praise	1 Cor 15:20
Pentecost	Spring	Praise	Acts 2:1-4
Trumpets	Fall	New Year	Matt 24:31
Atonement	Fall	Lev 16	Zech 12:10
Booths	Fall	Wilderness provision	Zech 14:16-18

Here is example number four:

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each of them" (Acts 21:26).

Did you see what Paul just did here? He offered an animal sacrifice. If anybody is clear on the completed work of Jesus Christ making animal sacrifices null and void, it was the apostle Paul, but here he is issuing an animal sacrifice.

I like to bring this up to my amillennial brethren who criticize a literal interpretation of Bible prophecy in the Millennium on the grounds that, according to Ezekiel 40:48, there is going to be a rebuilt Jewish temple one day in the Millennial Kingdom with animal sacrifices. You would not believe the hysteria people go into when you explain this to them, that there are going to be animal sacrifices again one day. "What do you mean? Did not Paul tell us that animal sacrifices are null and void?" There is a way to put that together with the finished work of Jesus not chipping away at the finished work of Jesus. I know there is a path because Paul himself, who talked more about the finality of Christ's work than anyone else, issued an animal sacrifice in Acts 21:26.

If we are right that we are not under the Law of Moses, but under the law of the Spirit or the law of Christ, what in the world is Paul doing here? There are four clear times in the Book of Acts where he went back and put himself under the Law of Moses: Acts 16:3, circumcision; Acts 18:18, the Nazarite vow; Acts 20:16, the day of Pentecost; Acts 21:26, the issuing of an animal sacrifice. Was Paul contradicting himself? "You are not under the Law of Moses," and he keeps putting himself back under the Law of Moses.

What is the answer? You might take your Bible and go over there is 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. That is the answer. What does Paul say here?

"To the Jews I become as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those under the Law; to those who are without the law, as without the law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I become weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

Paul would never put himself under the Law of Moses for justification or sanctification. In fact, if you were to tell Paul, "You need to go under the Law of Moses to be justified," he would fight you tooth and nail on that. Paul never put himself under the Law of Moses to be justified or to be sanctified. He never put himself under the Law of Moses to be saved or to grow as a Christian.

Then why did he do it? He did it to avoid being an offense. It is really hard to reach the Jews when your lifestyle violates their law. How do you preach the love of Christ to someone that you are simultaneously offending? What Paul would do to those of weaker understanding is he would volitionally put himself under the Law so they would not be offended at him. He thought, "If they were not offended at him, they are at least giving me a fair hearing of the truth of the gospel, because I am not going to get very far with these people if I am simultaneously offending them by flagrantly violating their law." That is why Paul did it. He did it for purposes of evangelism. He never did it for justification; he never did it for sanctification. But if it would gain him a hearing by avoiding an offense, then he would put himself under the Law of Moses volitionally.

Churches are really funny places. There are some churches that you can go into, and if you are not wearing a suit and tie behind the pulpit on a Sunday morning and you are the preacher, people are offended at that. There are other churches that I have been to where if you put on a suit and tie on a Sunday morning, they are offended. So what do you do in that kind of circumstance when people have those beliefs and you want people to be open to your message? If you have got a big hang up about a suit and tie, then I will put the suit and tie on. I will put the monkey suit on. I am not putting the suit and tie on because I think I have to put a suit and tie on to be a Christian, or to grow as a Christian. If it is going to involve you listening to me and not being offended, then I will put the suit and tie on.

Now, if you have some big hang up about how a pastor, in a more contemporary environment, should not wear a suit and tie. Then I will take the suit and tie off, and I will put something else on. If you want me to go casual, I will go casual. If you want the Hawaiian shirt, I will do the Hawaiian shirt. I will basically do whatever I have to do so you will at least listen to what I am going to say, because you are not going to really listen to what I am going to say if you are offended by something like that.

"I will accommodate myself," is what Paul is saying. That is why he put himself under the Law of Moses at times. He never did it for justification. He never did it for sanctification. In fact, he wrote whole books of the Bible against that—Romans and Galatians—attacking over and over again the idea that you have got to go under the Law of Moses to be justified or sanctified. When it came to this issue of avoiding an offense, then, "Yes, I will go back under it."

Unless you understand that, you are going to look at the Book of Acts as if it is contradicting itself. Why does Paul teach so aggressively against going under the Law when he keeps going under the Law? He is not doing it for justification; he is not doing it for sanctification; he is doing it to avoid an offense. That is why he does it (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

"...I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save win some" (1 Corinthians 9:22); "to those who are under the Law, as under the Law" (1 Corinthians 9:20); "to those without the law, as without the law..." (1 Corinthians 9:21). "I do not care; just listen to my message. You cannot listen to me if my lifestyle is offending you; you are not going to listen to what I am saying. You are going to focus on the offense."

That is why, going back to the Acts 16:3 where he had Timothy circumcised, Paul wanted this man to go with him, and he took him and circumcised him *"because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek"* (Acts 16:3). Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. So as to not offend the Jews, Paul had him circumcised, because that might be a question a Jew might ask: "Is this guy that is on your missionary trip circumcised? If not, how can I listen to what he has to say? Because I am offended by him."

So Paul says, "Let us just fix that problem right now. Let us let us go under the Law partially." To be justified? No way, Jose. To be sanctified? No way, Jose. To avoid an offense? Absolutely.

Notice what Arnold Fruchtenbaum says here on this:

"However, there are two dangers that must be avoided by a believer who voluntarily keeps the commandments of the Law of Moses. One danger is the idea that by doing so he is contributing to his own justification and sanctification. This is false and should be avoided. The second danger is

in expecting others to keep the same commandments that he decided to keep. This is equally wrong and borders on legalism."¹

"Hey, let us go to a Hebrew synagogue where they go back and they celebrate all these various feasts. Hey, pastor, let us go over there and do that." "That would be neat. I would probably learn a lot by going back under that system." "Yeah, but, Pastor, we need to do this to grow in Christ." Stop right there. "We need to do this to be justified." Stop right there; you went too far.

You want to keep some of the commandments of the Law of Moses? You just go right ahead and do that. A lot of people want to celebrate the Jewish feasts that are given in Leviticus 23. Can you do that as a Christian? Absolutely. Go, right back under and celebrate the Jewish feasts. However, when you do it, you need to avoid these two issues.

The whole Book of Galatians is written against people doing that—going back under the Law of Moses. They thought they had to go back under the Law of Moses to grow as a Christian. Paul wrote the whole Book of Galatians to say, "No, you are under the law of the Spirit, not the Law of Moses." That is how you grow as a Christian.

Let us go back under some parts of the Law of Moses to learn about the feast. Great. As long as we are not doing it for justification and sanctification, you have freedom in Christ to do that. But if I do it and say that everyone else has to do it, no. That is another problem Arnold Fruchtenbaum brings up. That borders on legalism. This issue of going back under the Law of Moses volitionally has become a big issue in our day because of the Hebrew Roots movement.

Let us go back under the Law of Moses volitionally? Fine. Let us do it to be justified? No. Let us do it to grow in Christ, arguing that unless I do it, I cannot grow in Christ? No. Let us go back under it and say everyone else has to go under it as well? No.

Paul taught the law of Christ and the law of the Spirit as something completely and totally independent from the Law of Moses, which we are not under anymore. Why did Paul keep going back under the Law of Moses in the Book of Acts? He did it to avoid an offense. He did not do it for purposes of justification or sanctification.

What is being revealed here in Acts 10? "Arise, kill, and eat," means Peter is being instructed that the Law of Moses has been set aside. He is having a hard time with the learning curve.

That was my introduction. How does all of this apply? We come to Acts 10:17-23. The three Gentiles arrive in Joppa and we see Peter's perplexity. Why is he perplexed? Because he has just been told by God to set aside something that the Nation of Israel has been practicing for 1,500 years.

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 237.

Cornelius' Salvation (Acts 10:1-11:18)

III. Vision's Application (10:17-23a)

- A. Three Gentiles arrive in Joppa (17-18)
 - 1. Peter's perplexity (17a)
 - 2. Three Gentiles arrive (17b)
 - 3. Three Gentiles inquiry (18)
- B. Spirit's command to Peter (19-20)
 - 1. Peter's pondering (19a)
 - 2. Spirit's command (19b-20)
- C. Peter's inquiry (21-23a)
 - 1. Peter's self-identification and question (21)
 - 2. Three Gentiles answer (22)
 - 3. Lodging of three Gentiles in Joppa (23a)

"Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be" (Acts 10:17).

He could not make sense of this vision. It did not make any sense to him. He saw the animals in the sheet; he heard the command three times; he did not understand completely and totally why this was happening. He is in a state of perplexity. He has a revelation, but he needs an explanation. As he is in this state of perplexity, the Gentiles dispatched from Caesarea by Cornelius to fetch Peter and Joppa, arrive. At the point of his greatest consternation, the explanation is now arriving.

"Now Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate" (Acts 10:17).

If you go back to Acts 10:7-8, Simon had sent these men from Caesarea to fetch Peter at Joppa:

"When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa" (Acts 10:7-8).

Peter is trying to figure out what this vision means, and Cornelius' messengers sent from Cornelius to Joppa now arrive, at the critical moment of Peter's perplexity. When they arrive, they ask a question:

"and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who is called Peter, was staying there" (Acts 10:18).

They were dispatched from Caesarea to Joppa; they were told to find a man at a tanner's house named Simon. That gets a little tricky, because there are two Simons in the same house (Acts 9:43). So they were told to get Simon Peter. They are to bring Simon Peter from Joppa back to Caesarea, to give Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christianity, the gospel.

Then you see in Acts 10:19-20 the Holy Spirit's command to Peter. First of all, you see Peter's pondering:

"While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you'" (Acts 10:19).

While he thought on the vision—and he did not fully understand it—the Holy Spirit is communicating to Peter that, "These three men are looking for you to give you a fuller explanation of what you have seen, and to take you from Joppa to Caesarea." Then the Holy Spirit gives Peter a command:

"...the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself'" (Acts 10:19-20).

You will notice it is not one of these things where the three men show up in Joppa, where Peter is staying, and say, "God told me to tell you." God is working on both ends. The three men are coming due to a vision that Cornelius received. Yet, at the same time, the Holy Spirit is working on Peter's end, telling him to receive these three men. This is the normal pattern of God. He works on both ends.

When people come to you and say, "God told me to tell you"—does that ever happen to you? "Here is God's plan for your life. God told me to tell you what His plan for your life is, coming from me." When someone does that to you, usually the right answer is, "Not so fast. If it really is from God, then He will communicate that to me on my end." God is working on Cornelius' end, and He is working on Peter's end simultaneously. It is just a normal pattern of God.

"But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings..." (Acts 10:20).

"Go ahead, Peter, and go with them. Do not doubt."

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5-8).

In other words, when God reveals something to us, our human temptation is to doubt it. Maybe it is true, maybe it is not. Here Peter had received a clear communication from God. He is told to step out in faith and follow what God has told him to do without any reservations, without any misgivings.

There is something called the paralysis of analysis, where we want to analyze everything, eight ways to Sunday. God is saying, "I have given you a clear word; act on it. Stop doubting." There are some things in the Bible that are crystal clear, and I do not have to sit and have a debate about whether it is true or whether it is not. What I need to do is step out in faith and obey. Essentially, that is what Peter is being commanded to do here by the Holy Spirit.

Peter makes an inquiry or a question. You see that in Acts 10:21-23. First, Peter identifies himself and then offers a question:

"Peter went down to the men and said, 'Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?'" (Acts 10:21).

Peter identifies himself: "I am the target. I am the one that is now supposed to go with you from Joppa to Caesarea." Then he asks a real simple question: *"What is the reason for which you have come?"* Why are we going?" These three Gentiles dispatched from Caesarea, give Peter an answer:

"They said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear a message from you'" (Acts 10:22).

These three Gentiles, dispatched from Cornelius in Caesarea, give a description of Cornelius. First of all, he was a centurion. Who was the Book of Acts written to? Theophilus, who was a centurion (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1)). Both accounts—prequel and sequel, Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts—are written to a Roman centurion who is having doubts about whether Christianity is for him, because he is a Gentile. Could you imagine him reading this story and seeing how God moved heaven and earth to get the gospel to Cornelius, who also was a centurion? That is why this story is included. Think of the edification value to Theophilus.

Notice here (Acts 10:22) that Cornelius is described. We have already had descriptions of him. He is a devout man; he feared God; he is generous; he is prayerful (Acts 10:2). You can add to the list here: He is a righteous man; he is God-fearing; he is well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews. Maybe that is why God is moving heaven and earth to get this man the gospel. This man, a Roman Gentile, is blessing the Nation of Israel.

Genesis 12:3 means what it says and says what it means, going back to the time of Abraham:

*"And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed"*
(Genesis 12:3).

God said to Abraham, "I will bless anyone that blesses the Nation of Israel." Here is this man named Cornelius blessing the Nation of Israel to the point where he is actually well spoken of by those within the Nation of Israel. Maybe that is the reason God, in turn, got the gospel to Cornelius, because He is making good on His promise that He will bless those who bless the Nation of Israel.

There is another guy in the Gospel of Luke that gets blessed by Jesus. How come?

"For he [this Gentile] loves our nation and it was he who built our synagogue" (Luke 7:5).

Here is a Gentile in Luke's Gospel, the prequel, who is blessed by Jesus. The reason Jesus blesses him is because that man had blessed the Nation of Israel by helping them build their synagogue. What you are seeing in all of these things is the outworking of the ancient principle that God spoke, 2,000 years before the time of Christ, to the patriarch Abraham, when He said, *"I will bless those who bless you"* (Genesis 12:3).

Cornelius is a centurion; he is righteous; he is a God-fearer; and he is a blessing of the Jewish people. This is the man that is now going to receive the gospel through the mouth of Peter, coming from Joppa to Caesarea.

"So he invited them in and gave them lodging" (Acts 10:23).

They are coming down from Caesarea to Joppa to fetch Peter. Peter is not caught off guard by this, because God is working on both ends. God tells Peter, "They are coming and you need to obey them and go with them." So when they show up, Peter expects to see them. What is going to happen next is Peter is going to leave Joppa and go to Caesarea, where he is going to take his keys—remember, Jesus said to Peter, "You have the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19)—he is about to turn the key, and he is about to lead the first Gentile to Christ, just like Peter turned those keys in Acts 2 and led the first Jews to Christ, and just like Peter turned those keys in Acts 8 and led the first Samaritans to Christ.

The same thing is about to happen, not with a proselyte or a convert to Judaism, but a full-fledged Gentile who happened to be blessing the Nation of Israel. Peter is going to take those keys, and he is going to turn them one more time, and he is going to lead Cornelius to Christ. Once these doors are open, they stay open.

As this door opens, now, Paul the Apostle will move center stage because his function is to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We know that from Acts nine. But Paul cannot move in that ministry until Peter opens the door. Why does Peter have to open the door?

Because Jesus gave Peter the keys. He did not give them to any other apostle; Peter has to be the one that leads these first groups to Christ. As the doors open, they stay open.

Look how God opened the door to lead this first Gentile to Christ. It is amazing what God did. He dispatched an angel; He dispatched men from Caesarea. He was working on both ends of the communication spectrum. This is why Peter, who is experiencing all of these things, is going to say this:

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

How could the Apostle Peter boldly say that God is not willing *"for any should perish but for all to come to repentance"*? Because he is on the ground floor as God is moving heaven and earth to get the gospel to Cornelius. When Peter writes these words about three decades later, he is obviously writing with real conviction, because he was on the ground floor as he was being used of God to get the gospel to Cornelius.

Now that the visions have been applied, we will pick it up next week with the Caesarean ministry (Acts 10:23-33). Peter is going to turn the keys leading to the first Gentiles salvation in the Church Age (Acts 10:34-43). The Holy Spirit is going to fall upon the Gentiles here, just like it fell upon the Jews in Acts 2 (Acts 10:44-48).

Then Peter is going to have to go to Jerusalem to explain the whole thing to the church leadership, because they, being Jewish, really do not think that a Gentile could get saved. "Peter, you are going to have to get hauled into the principal's office to explain to us, did this really happen or not?" Peter will give his testimony there.