

Lesson 10
Acts 9:32-10:48
Peter's ministry in Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea

Memory Verse: "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." (Acts 10:36 NIV).

Luke continues to record the church's expansion beyond Palestine to the "uttermost parts of the earth" (1:8). The Ethiopian eunuch took the gospel to Africa, but he became a Christian in Judea. We will read of people becoming Christians in places farther from Jerusalem and Judea.

As Jerusalem had been the Palestinian centre for the evangelization of Jews, Antioch of Syria became the Hellenistic centre for Gentile evangelization in Asia Minor and Europe. The gospel spread increasingly to Gentiles, which Luke emphasized in the early sections of Acts.

While God is preparing Paul for the Gentile mission ahead, he is also broadening the vision of Peter and other church leaders. Peter moves out from Jerusalem and visits some of the Christian groups that had sprung up in the semi-Gentile coastal plain area where Philip has preached earlier (cf. 8:40). At Lydda he heals a paralysed man (9:32-35) and at nearby Joppa he raises a woman to life. In both places news of the miracles spread and many people believe (9:36-42). By staying with a person whose trade the Jews considered unclean, Peter demonstrates a more relaxed attitude towards former Jewish restrictions (9:43).

John Stott observes: "The miracles portrayed Peter as an authentic apostle of Jesus Christ, who performed "the signs of a true apostle." Similar miracles had endorsed the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha. Four factors support this suggestion. First, both miracles followed the example of Jesus. Second, both miracles were performed by the power of Jesus. Third, both miracles were signs of the salvation of Jesus. Fourth, both miracles caused everyone to turn to the Lord."

We then find that the gospel also went to "Europe" by way of the Roman occupation of Israel. In the Roman regiment based in Caesarea is a centurion named Cornelius, a man who is such a sincere God-fearer that all his household follows his faith. In response to his expressions of faith and acts of kindness, God promises to send Peter to tell him the good news of Jesus Christ by which he can be saved (Acts 10:1-8; cf. 11:14).

First, however, God wants to teach Peter certain lessons. God gives him a vision to show him that the old Jewish food laws are of no further use. There is no longer a distinction between clean foods and unclean foods, and therefore Peter, as well as every other Christian, is free to eat all foods (Acts 10:9-16). While Peter is thinking about the meaning of the vision, God tells him to go to Caesarea to meet the Roman/Italian, Cornelius (Acts 10:17-23a). By the time Peter left for Caesarea the next day, he has learnt the meaning of the vision. If certain kinds of food are not unclean, neither are certain kinds of people unclean. Peter is not to be afraid of mixing with Gentiles (Acts 10:23b-29).

Let's learn from three episodes of Peter's ministry in the maritime plain of Palestine (Acts 9:32-43) and in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-48).

Scriptural Reading: Acts 9:32-43; 10:23-48

Things to learn: 1) A Great Miracle 2) A Greater Miracle 3) The Greatest Miracle

Questions

Q1. How much do we know about the healing of Aeneas at Lydda which was a great miracle from Acts 9:32-35?

Q2. The raising of the dead, Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43) was considered a greater miracle than that in Lydda. What is the significance of this event?

Q3 Chapter 10 is pivotal in the book of Acts, for it records the salvation of the Gentiles. Show how the dramatic process had been drawn out in this chapter and implications for believers today