

Bible Study #13

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Administrative Information

- The Bible Study Class will be presented in the parish hall every Tuesday morning from **9:30 A.M. until 11 A.M.** from now until **May 19, 2015** except for the following Tuesdays related to a holiday:
 - Nov 11, 2014 – Veteran’s Day
 - Nov 25, 2014 – Thanksgiving Week
 - **Dec 23, 2014 – Christmas**
 - **Dec 30, 2014 - New Year**
 - Mar31, 2015 – Holy Week
- The same class will be given every Tuesday evening from **7:30 until 9:00 P.M.** in the parish hall
- Contact info (703) 644-5873; email roberteward3@verizon.net
- Inclement weather decision will be based on Fairfax County Public School announcements

Summary from last week

- The conversion of Saul at Damascus
 - Struck down by the light and blinded
 - Restoration of sight by Ananias
 - The reluctance of the Christians in Damascus to accept Saul' new teaching
 - The threat against Saul's life and his departure (for 3 years)
 - The arrival of Saul in Jerusalem and the reluctance of the Church community in accepting Saul until Barnabas champions him
 - His rejection by the Jewish Hellenist community

Summary (Cont)

- Saul's transfer to Tarsus
- Peter's move to *Lydda* and the healing of Aeneas the man who had been paralyzed for eight years
- The raising of Dorcas from the dead and his move to the house of Simon a tanner at Joppa

Acts 10

- **Acts 10:1** “*At **Caesarea** there was a man named **Cornelius**, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort*”
 - Luke begins this story by discussing a man in **Caesarea** named **Cornelius**
 - Cornelius’ name ends in “us,” a Latin ending not Greek (“os”)
 - Therefore, he is a Roman and not a Greek
 - Many Roman soldiers were Greeks from Syria which was helpful during the occupation because they spoke Aramaic and Greek
 - He is a centurion in charge of a cohort of 100 men (normally the Romans sent a cohort under a centurion to deal with any problem within a city)
 - A legion would be an army made up of many cohorts
 - Caesarea (Maritima - by the sea) was a Latin (Roman) city

Caesarea-Maritima

- Caesarea means “City of Caesar”
- Founded by Herod the Great
- Much more important than **Caesarea-Philippi** (of Philip the Tetrarch, one of the sons of Herod the Great) where Peter declares Jesus as the Messiah in north-central Galilee
- Major Roman port city on the Mediterranean coast
- Center of the Roman Empire in Palestine
 - Jerusalem was irrelevant from a military standpoint to the Romans as they had establish the *Pax Romana* throughout the region
- All troop ships to and from Rome docked there
- Pontius Pilate would have transition to and from Rome through that city

Caesarea-Maritima (Cont)

- Contained many pagan temples
- The most Gentile (pagan) city residing within the Holy Land
- The “Las Vegas” of the 1st century although it most likely was 100 times more immoral
 - Crime, temple prostitution, gambling and worse
- A few Jews from the region might ask their buddies if they wanted to go to Caesarea for the weekend!
- A Pharisee would never tolerate such an idea as it would be the most offensive thing he could imagine

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Most 1st century Jews hated all Roman soldiers who occupied their homeland
- And they would have really hated the “centurions”
- Working with the Greek Syrian troops was more tolerable to the Jews than dealing with the Roman troops
 - **Cornelius** was a Roman centurion in charge of the **Italian cohort!**
- He is reminiscent of the Centurion in **Lk 7:1-10** who built a synagogue for the Jews
- Luke gives us all these details to prepare us for what he is about to reveal:
 - The beginning of the fulfillment of **Acts 1:8** where the Apostles are to take the Good News to the ends of the earth!

Who was a 1st Century Jew

- **Jew**

- A child born of a Jewish mother from the tribe of Judah, Benjamin or Levi and lived under the Law of Moses
- If a male, he was circumcised on the 8th day
 - Hebrew – lived in Jerusalem or Judea – spoke Aramaic & Hebrew
 - Hellenist – lived in the diaspora – spoke Greek

- **Proselyte**

- A pagan who converted to Judaism, and if a male he was circumcised, and obeyed the Law (was without the blood line)

- **God fearer**

- A pagan who believed the laws of Israel but was not circumcised and/or kept the Kosher laws

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:2** *“a devout man who **feared God** with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God.”*
 - How could Cornelius fear God?
 - This is a beautiful dichotomy
 - This character seems impossible to a Jew in the 1st century
 - Luke is telling us that he is **not making this up** but that it obviously proves the God is the author of history
 - These details are here for a very important reason

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Luke has just informed us that **Cornelius** was the most pious man one can imagine as he was a “**God-fearer**”
 - A gentile who had almost converted to Judaism but had not been circumcised or practices the Kosher laws
 - This was a political decision because it gave them the protected status granted the Jews
 - Since the time of Alexander the Great those who practiced the Jewish faith were protected by the Greeks
 - This stemmed from a dream about the High Priest that Alexander experienced just before he was about to capture Jerusalem

Acts 10 (Cont)

- As he approached the city the High Priest came out and he recognized him from his dream
- He then realized that the gods had shown him that Jerusalem must be a holy city and it with its people must be left alone
- Alexander spared the city and only required that the people pay their taxes (tribute)
- Eventually Jerusalem also received this special status under the Roman Empire
 - A treaty was reached between the Romans and the Jewish people during the Maccabean era

Acts 10 (Cont)

- The Romans were not concerned about the religion of conquered people as long as they did not cause any trouble
- Only when they caused political unrest did the Romans crack down with a persecution
- Everyone in the empire except for the Jews were polytheists
- The Romans saw the Jews as being strange but they let them alone since they were living in a back-water part of the Empire
- So think about how difficult it was for Cornelius to go from a polytheist Roman religion to become a Jewish God-fearer within the monotheistic Judaism
 - Most likely this would have ended his chances for promotion within the Roman Army

Acts 10 (Cont)

- In summary Cornelius is a:
 - Roman soldier who, as a God-fearer, has converted to Judaism
 - Strict monotheist, therefore, rejecting the polytheism of Rome
 - Believer in Abraham to such an extent that he give alms to the local people and synagogue
 - Proselyte at the door
- The information in **Acts 10 through 15** is critical to the understanding of the Pauline Epistles, for without it we will not understand the Letters to the Romans and to the Galatians
 - This discussion is at the core of what Luther misunderstood

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:3** “About the **ninth hour of the day** he saw clearly in a vision an **angel** of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius’. And he stated at him in terror” (Remember angels in the Bible are not representations of cupid)
 - The Jews prayed at:
 - 6 AM - morning prayer
 - 9 AM
 - 12 - noon
 - 3 PM
 - 6 PM – vespers
 - These are the same hours the Muslims use
 - Cornelius is praying at the 9th hour which would be at 3 PM
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Acts 10 (Cont)

- An Old Testament encounter with an angel was a frightening experience and most feared for their lives
- To them an angel was a scary looking semi-divine being who was way more powerful than they were
- The language is also reminiscent of how the Sanhedrin looked intently at the angelic face of Stephen

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:4- 8** *“And he stared at him in terror, and said, ‘What is it Lord? And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ...he called two of his servants and a devout soldier... and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa”*
 - It appears that Cornelius has converted his entire household to include his wife, children, grandparents and uncle or aunt living in the house and his household servants
 - Thus the two servants and devout soldier he sends to Joppa were most likely God-fearers
 - He had not converted his entire cohort *

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:9** “The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, *Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour*”
 - Peter’s vision happens the next day at the time Cornelius’ men were arriving before the house of Simon, a tanner
 - Houses at that time were made out of rock or mud bricks in a cube shape with a doorway and maybe a couple of windows
 - There would be a flat roof on the top of the cube made of logs covered with some sort of thatching (tile if one was wealthy)
 - This was an area (like a patio today) where one could go outside and enjoy the breeze
 - It was also frequently used as a storage area or a place to dry fruit
 - Usually there were stairs going up the side of the house to the roof

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Peter went up there to pray in the cool quiet breeze at the 6th hour (12 noon)
- What would happen if one tried to pray on a roof at noon?
 - He would smell lunch as the women were cooking below in the house
- Peter is praying while the women are cooking lunch and the smells are coming up to him on the roof while he is trying to pray and then he falls into a trance!

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:10-12** *“And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth”*
 - It seems strange to hear about a sheet filled with animals dropping out of the sky! So What is Peter seeing here?
 - Peter would have seen such a sheet at least three times per day
 - When a meal was prepared by the women they would enter the main room and place a square sheet on the floor
 - Then they would place the dishes of food and bread in the center as the sheet
 - The men would come in and recline or sit around the four sides of the sheet
 - This would be done three times a day

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Peter's vision, while he was on the roof in prayer smelling the food being prepared, was an image of a table being fully set coming down out of the sky
 - The only problem was that **it contained animals** that were considered "**unclean**" according to the kosher laws
 - It included all kinds of animals, reptiles and birds of the air which would have meant hawks and eagles which were specifically unclean
 - Look at what it says next

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:13-16** *“And there came a voice to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat. But Peter said, ‘No Lord for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean”*
 - Although Peter speaks of keeping kosher here, we will see that later on he will not do this all the time
 - At this point he tells God that he cannot eat some of those animals
 - Peter could not simply eat the clean animals as it was believed that anything unclean touching clean would make that unclean
 - This is the kosher issue that will be developed for the rest of **Acts and the Epistles of Paul**
 - Remember that the God-fearers were gentiles who had converted to Judaism

Acts 10 (Cont)

- They worshipped Yahweh but were still seen by the Jews as being unclean as they had not been circumcised or kept Kosher
- In a certain sense they were seen as “unclean” Jews
- They were people of God and people of faith and yet unclean according to the Law
- Peter’s vision happened **three times** indicating **completion and/or perfection** *

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:17-20** *“Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, ...stood before the gate*
 - Peter was wondering what this vision meant
 - It meant that a bunch of unclean God-fearers (people of God) have just arrived at his front door
 - Look at the logic here:
 - These gentiles arrived and called out and asked if Peter was there
 - Then Peter is told to rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation as they have been sent to him by the Holy Spirit (speaking in the 1st person – “I have sent”)
 - Thus Peter finally understands that God is calling him to overrule the Jewish prohibition against associating with Gentiles

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Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:21-23** *“And Peter went down to the men and said, ‘I am the one you are looking for, what is the reason for your coming?... by then some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.”*
 - Can you hear, the introduction of a little tension here?
 - There is certainly some tension in these words
 - The guys outside the door are God-fearers but they know that the Jews do not like them
 - The Jews were happy that the God-fearers had accepted Yahweh but they would not want them to be touched by them as they were unclean
 - They must have wondered why they had refused to take the final step and become proselytes

Acts 10 (Cont)

- So they were not accepted by the Jews as Jews even though they had chosen to worship the God of the Jews
- When these God-fearers entered the small village of Joppa you can imagine how the people in the village looked at them as everyone knew that they were gentiles
- So these guys go to the house of Simon a tanner and ask for Peter to come out and talk to them
- Peter arrives and they invite him to accompany them to Caesarea (Las Vegas!)
- Can you imagine this situation?

Acts 10 (Cont)

- So the next day Peter, along with a few of his buddies, go with these men to Caesarea
 - Peter did not go alone as he took some Jewish Christians from Joppa with him who were circumcised and kept Kosher
 - Remember the Jews did not stop being Jews just because they accepted that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah
 - For them it did not mean that everything Jewish was over
 - And now they are on their way to Caesarea (Las Vegas) *

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:24** *“And on the following day they entered Caesarea. “Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends”*
 - Can you imagine what Peter and his companions must have thought as they entered Caesarea?
 - It would be like one of us walking down the strip at Las Vegas in the middle of the night!
 - There would have been prostitutes on every corner and outside of every temple of Zeus and Venus
 - They could smell the pagan sacrifices
 - There were Roman soldiers on every corner

Acts 10 (Cont)

- This would have been a nightmare for them
- Then they arrive and **enter the house of Cornelius**
- Inside the house there was Cornelius, his buddies and many additional stinking uncircumcised unclean, unkosher Gentiles
- Under the Law no Jew would have been allowed to walk through that door
- His buddies might have asked Peter if they should really be going in there and what if they touch something unclean

Acts 10 (Cont)

- They had no idea of what might happen in that house
- So imagine Peter and four or five Jewish Christians entering that house which no Jew had any business entering
- But there was some sort of divine activity happening here and that is why Peter figured that he had to go in

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:25** *“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him”*
 - This does not mean that Cornelius worshiped Peter
 - It meant that he gave him homage, he honored him
 - Most likely he bent down on one knee in respect
 - Notice that Peter (like Paul will do later) reminded Cornelius that he was a man like him and not a deity

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:26-27** *“But Peter lifted him up, saying ‘Stand up; I too am a man....and he saw many persons gathered; (This was not the original deal Cornelius.) and he said to them,”*
 - Think about this scene
 - If you were Peter and had an opportunity to preach to a packed house of Gentiles what would you say?
 - I am happy that you have gathered here today, and that you have asked me to come, and now I will preach to you the message that will save you stinking souls!
 - Or something like that

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:28-29** *“You yourselves know how **unlawful** it is for a **Jew** to associate with or to visit any one of another nation... and I ask them why you sent for me”*
 - Look at Peter’s hesitation here
 - Remember the tension that exists at this point
 - Yet Peter recognized that he should no longer call any person profane or unclean
 - Where is the call for baptism?
 - Sebastian reminded us that he is not trying to be hard on Peter at this point, rather his emphasis was on the understanding of the early church at this time
 - We are looking at this instance in hindsight

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Most likely we would have felt and done the same thing if we had lived in that time
- Sebastian is trying to place us in the worldview of the early Church so we can understand why Peter and the new Christians were so hesitant to invite the Gentiles into the “New Way”
- Only when we understand this setting will we be able to appreciate the Pauline epistles especially Romans and Galatians
- The issue in question can be heard in Peter’s voice right here
- There is a great deal of tension which we will experience all over Romans and Galatians *

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:30-33** *“And Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold a man stood before me in bright apparel, saying, Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God... to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord”*
 - Peter! Remember that Jesus said to them “go and baptize all nations, not just the Jews, all nations in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them all that I have taught you”

Acts 10 (Cont)

- At this point the church had **not baptized a single God-fearer**
- This was because the church was full of Jews and Jewish Christians
- And the church was facing the same tension that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles
- After the resurrection people did not wake up and be different than before
- The tension we see happening here is similar to what we witnessed between the Hebrew and Hellenist Christians discussed in **Acts 6**

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Thus the early church inherited the tension between Jewish Christians and the God-fearers who were seen as being unclean
- The Christians, like the Jews, did not even want to be touched by them
- So God prompts *Cornelius* to remind Peter about the mission that is for all nations to be baptized and teach them all that Jesus taught him *

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10: 34-35** *“And Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I perceive that God show no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”*
 - This seems odd to them for they did not know this before God showed Peter through his vision that somehow God-fearers were accepted by God
 - This makes total sense because they were not circumcised and therefore were understood to be unclean, but God is God and He can do whatever he wants!

Acts 10 (Cont)

- What does “you know” mean?
- We do not know for sure
- It might be idiomatic speech or a reference to the conversation God had with Cornelius or some of the folks in the house who had heard about Jesus
- But, after the baptism of Jesus John the Baptist preached how God had **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth
 - Christ means the anointed (Messiah in Hebrew)
 - Was Jesus not the Christ or God before his baptism?

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Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:36-37** *“You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea....*
 - *Of course he was, but the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism even though he had the Spirit within himself before this event as he was always the 2nd person of the Trinity*
 - *From his incarnation in his human nature he was indwelt by the Spirit*
 - *We see this in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke where his conception takes place by the presence of the Holy Spirit*

Acts 10 (Cont)

- *But what is happening at his baptism is the visual public announcement or revelation that he is the anointed one by the Spirit and therefore the Messiah, Christ and thus the one to restore all things*
- *Peace here means more than the absence of conflict but the fullness of relationship with God and enjoyment of his covenant blessings*
- *Peace was part of Israel's messianic expectation:*
 - *God would guide our feet into the path of peace (Lk 1:79)*
 - *At the birth of Jesus the angels announced peace to those on whom his favor rests (Lk2:14)*
 - *The cry of peace by the people upon Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem (Lk 19:38)*

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:38-41** *“how he went about doing good and healing all that were opposed by the devil, for God was with him....they put him to death by hanging him on a tree (They did that but) God raised him from the dead on the third day ...after he rose from the dead*
 - Peter is telling them that Jesus had a real body (a resurrected body) after the resurrection
 - Spirits and ghosts did not have a body and could not eat or drink
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Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:42- 43** *“And he commanded us to preach to the people... everyone who believes (look at this language) receives forgiveness of sins through his name”*
 - We have heard Peter use this same language before (**Acts 2:28**)
 - “And Peter said to them repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins”

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Let's review what is going on here:
 - Peter had a vision that is related to Cornelius
 - He knows that somehow even though he still does not want to get too close to these guys they are accepted by God as part of the people of God
 - They are acceptable to him and so they are God-fearers
 - So what does he preach to them?
 - The fact that the Messiah has come, Jesus was anointed, he is the Messiah, and the Jews killed him but God raised him from the dead
 - And that it is by him who is the judge of heaven and earth and is the absolute ruler of all
 - This is the basic gospel message, but something is missing

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Cornelius and his friends were not baptized
- What is missing in Peter's speech is the language of baptism
- Why had Peter not raised Baptism before this as there had been plenty of opportunities up to this point to baptize God-fearers?
 - There were God-fearers all over Jerusalem
 - Judea, Samaria and Galilee were full of God-fearers
 - Why had they not baptized some of them?
 - For the same reason the Jews did not want to go near these guys
 - They were seen as unclean, un-circumcised and their status before God was not very clear

Acts 10 (Cont)

- The Jews thought that it was nice that they no longer worshipped tree stumps and rocks and were worshiping the God of Israel but they had not finished signing all the paperwork
- So the Christians were asking the same questions and thus reasoned that they could not baptize a God-fearer since up to that point they had only baptized circumcised and kosher Jews
- They also believed that the Messiah was the King of Israel and thus one did not baptize non-Israelites into the kingdom
- This was a major stumbling block for the early church and the Jews at that time as they could not figure out the status of these guys in the eyes of God
- But Peter had a vision that indicated that they were acceptable to God but he did not know what they were meant to do with them
- So now let's look at what God answers for him *

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:44** *“While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word”*
 - One usually received the Holy Spirit via Baptism and Chrismation
 - This normally comes through the sacrament of initiation process: Baptism, Confirmation, 1st Holy Communion
 - One comes into the Church through Baptism and Chrismation
 - Traditionally this occurred at the same time along with 1st Holy Communion
 - It is still done this way in many Eastern Churches
 - Here the Holy Spirit merely fell down on them even though they had not been baptized

Acts 10 (Cont)

- Why did this happen here?
 - It happened because the early church was hesitating at this point in baptizing gentiles
 - They were not sure what to do with these people
 - So God shows them what to do for the God-fearers
 - God pours the fruit of baptism upon them without the water of baptism to show the church that God-fearers could be baptized

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:45-46** *“And the believers (the Christian Jews) from among the **circumcised** who came with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God”*
 - What does being circumcised have to do with anything?
 - It has everything to do with it
 - Here we have Peter and five Christians guys who came with Peter from Joppa who are amazed that the Holy Spirit has been poured out even on these gentiles
 - They thought this was disgusting and it made no sense to them
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Acts 10 (Cont)

- They were awestruck as they wondered what was going on
- They thought that all they were going to do was come with Peter who was going to preach to these guys and then they would leave
- But now look what just happened
- So look at what Peter says next

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:47** *“Then Peter declared, ‘Can anyone **forbid** water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’”* (as the Apostles did at Pentecost)
 - Was anyone forbidding this before this event?
 - Absolutely, as they had never baptized a single God-fearer at this point
 - But now they have a difficult situation: you have God-fearers all over the place who are full of the Holy Spirit
 - God has baptized them
 - So Peter asks if anyone can not forbid water for baptizing these people

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Acts 10 (Cont)

- Peter is saying that God has treated them just as he treated us Apostles at Pentecost who were circumcised and kosher
- It is obvious that God makes no distinction based on circumcision and Kosher laws
- Remember that they heard these people speaking in tongues just like Pentecost
- They were speaking in different languages and tongues just like at Pentecost
- The Pentecost story all over again

Acts 10 (Cont)

- **Acts 10:48** *“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days”*
 - To be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is the same issue we talked about before
 - It is only discussed in Acts
 - This is most likely to contrast the baptism of John the Baptist with the Christian or sacramental baptism
 - Thus we see the Trinitarian baptism in the name of the Father and the son and the Holy Spirit

Transition

- Three of the most important chapters in Acts are:
 - Acts 10
 - Acts 11
 - Acts 15
- We will now turn and look at Acts 11