



¹ There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, ² A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. ³ He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. ⁴ And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: (Acts 10:1-5)

Our Church of the Faithful Centurion in Descanso, CA. is doubtlessly named for Cornelius, for he was truly a faithful Centurion and a Gentile. Cornelius was both devout and courageous. For a Roman centurion to accept Christ could lead to severe penalties on the part of Cornelius from the Roman authorities; so a faithful devotion to Christ is quite complementary to courage and fortitude. His conversion and baptism resulted from an amazing set of circumstances. God sent an angel to direct the steps of Cornelius, and at the same time, a vision to Peter, who was averse to accepting Gentiles into the Church, to open Peter's eyes to the reception.

Now, all other scripture notwithstanding, the vision of Peter has nothing to do with the Levitical food laws. The vision was intended to demonstrate to Peter that he was wrong not to include Gentile believers in the Church of Christ! Let us examine that vision and its setting.

The Setting

⁷ And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; ⁸ And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. (Acts 10:7-8) A good commander will characteristically have devout and faithful subordinates as did Cornelius. Love and respect begets the same response from subordinates. Note that Cornelius does not question the angel's counsel, but responded without delay. Not only did the angel of God tell Cornelius Peter's name, but his whereabouts as well.

Peter's Vision

⁹ On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: ¹⁰ And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, ¹¹ And saw heaven opened, and a certain

vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: ¹²Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. ¹³And there came a voice to him, *Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.* ¹⁴But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. ¹⁵And the voice spake unto him again the second time, *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* ¹⁶This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. ¹⁷Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, ¹⁸And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. (Acts 10:9-18)

In order to open the eyes of Peter to the realization of the acceptance of all who will receive Christ into the Church, God sends to Peter a vision that God knows will be as repulsive to Peter as would the violation of the food laws by eating forbidden meats. God is not telling Peter to go out and eat unclean foods, but a lesson on the propriety of accepting Gentiles into the Church. The food laws were not given to condemn of sin, but rather to safeguard health. So Peter declares that he had never eaten unclean foods in his life. So God says, "If I have made a thing clean, it is clean to the uttermost; therefore the Gentiles, who were once afar off are brought near by the purchase of Christ." Peter does not yet fully understand the vision, but he shall understand in time. Peter has often experienced messages in threesomes. Remember that he denied Christ three times the night of the trial of Jesus. Later, Jesus asked Peter three times "*Lovest thou me?*" Now, to emphasize the authenticity of the message, the vessel descended and ascended three times. Peter is a bit dumbfounded for he knew that God was unchanging in His laws.

The vision begins to open Peter's eyes

¹⁹While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. ²⁰Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. ²¹Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? ²²And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. ²³Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. (Acts 10:19-24)

To a minister called of God, the Lord prepares the soil of the hearts of the people for his coming sermon. So Cornelius has gathered his household together along with his friends in readiness for Peter's visit. Cornelius and his household was new to the faith, and those who are recently come to Christ often go beyond reason in their efforts to worship and please God as evidenced by the following: *And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.* (Acts 10:25-26) We bow the knee to no man but Christ. This was Peter's first lesson to Cornelius. Cornelius shares fully with Peter the experience he has had over the appearance of the angel of God.

Peter's eyes opened fully

³⁴Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: ³⁵But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. ³⁶The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) ³⁷That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and

began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; ³⁸How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: ⁴⁰Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; ⁴¹Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. ⁴³To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:34-43 KJV) When Peter hears the account given by Cornelius, he finally understands the previous vision of unclean animals.

The Result

⁴⁴While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. ⁴⁵And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 10:44-45) When the soil is fertile and prepared for sowing, the Word will descend, when preached, deep into the heart of that soil and immediately spring up and bear fruit. This was the final and convincing proof that Peter needed to open his eyes conclusively.

The Evidence

⁴⁶For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, ⁴⁷Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? ⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. (Acts 10:46-48) The tongues spoken were miraculously spoken and not some contrived balderdash. It was a mystical language like unto that spoken at Pentecost which was understandable and even was even understood to magnify the name of the Lord. No man can forbid acceptance to the household of God those who bear the emblems and evidence of true faith just as no man could forbid any from entering the Ark of Noah for God, not Noah, closed the door thereof. ¹⁵And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. ¹⁶And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in. (Gen 7:15-16) There comes a day when God will close the door to salvation on this worldly society. Be sure you are safely in the Ark of Christ before that happens for none will afterwards be admitted to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.