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Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius

The Gentiles are Saved

Through the Preaching of Peter

10: 23b-48

38-42 AD

Peter goes to the house of Cornelius DIG: Given Peter's experience in 10:9-23 and what you see of Cornelius here, what do you imagine each man was feeling as they greeted one another? Jews regarded even people like Cornelius as pagans, unless they took on the yoke of the Torah (15:7-11). Knowing that, what would verse 28 have meant for Peter? For Cornelius? Why is the story of Cornelius so important in verses 28, 34-35 and 43? What is the main point in Peter's speech? How does that compare with his speeches in 2:36-39 and 3:17-23? From these sermons, what do you see as central to the Gospel message? In light of the astonished reaction of the Jews in verse 45, what was the purpose of the Gentiles speaking in tongues? How does this reinforce the private vision of Peter in 10:9-23?

REFLECT: Using this story, how would you respond to the question, "Can people who have never heard the gospel be saved? If your answer is "yes," why then did God send Peter to preach (also see 11:4)? If it is "no," how do you explain verses 34-35? Toward what types of people do you feel prejudiced? How has that evolved? What evidence is there that the lesson of Peter's vision has broken through to you with respect to these people? Consider the makeup of your Messianic community or church. Are there some types of people who would just assume that your place of worship is not for them? What could you change to remove those barriers?

The next day Peter got up and went with them (10:23b). Centuries previous to this, another **Jew** had come to **Joppa** with another a solemn message from **Ha'Shem** (see the commentary on **Jonah**, **to see link click [Aj](#) - The Word of the LORD came to Jonah: Go to Nineveh and Preach Against It**). **Jonah** took a ship from **Joppa**; however **he** ran from **God's** call, and **he** did not share **ADONAI's** heart for the lost. **Peter**, however, was willing to re-examine **his** traditions and prejudices in light of **God's** word, and **he** shared

ADONAI's heart for the lost. Are you a **Jonah** or a **Peter**?²²⁶

And six Jewish brothers from Joppa accompanied him (10:23b and 11:12). This was a very wise decision on **his** part so **they** could serve as witnesses, which **they** would in **Chapter 11** when **Peter** is confronted by the Jewish believers concerning **his** claim that salvation had come to **the Gentiles**. In obedience to the command **he** received in **his vision**, **Peter** returned to **Caesarea** with **the two servants and the soldier Cornelius** had sent. This seemingly insignificant decision on **Peter's** part becomes extremely important later in the story.

The following day he entered Caesarea. Two worlds were about to collide, as seven devout orthodox **Jews** were about to meet a **houseful** of pious **Gentiles**. A milestone had been reached. Meanwhile, **Cornelius was waiting for them** in faith, **and he had** not been idle. Eagerly anticipating what **Peter** had to share with **him**, **he had called together his** Gentile **relatives and close friends (10:24)**. Although **Cornelius** knew about the Jewish attitudes towards **Gentiles**, **he** had no doubt that **Peter** would show up.

The rabbis taught that entering the house of a Gentile would defile you. The very dust of a Gentile house was unclean and defiled by contact. It was regarded like a grave, or like the putrescence of death - unclean, defiled, and defiling everything that it touched.



As Peter entered, he showed that **his** heart and mind had changed, and that **he** had learned the lesson of **his** vision (see [Bf - Peter's Vision](#)). **Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet** to welcome **him**, and also to honor **him** as **God's** messenger, **but** not to **worship** (as some versions have translated it). As a **God-fearer**, **Cornelius** would have known better. **Yet, Peter's** response of **pulling him up**, saying: **Stand up! I too am just a man**, shows that **he** misread what **Cornelius** did as an act of idolatry to be expected from

a pagan (10:25-26).²²⁷ Notice that **Peter**, this so-called first “Pope” would not allow anyone to bend **his** knee to **him**.

Talking with him, Peter went inside and found an expectant group of **Gentiles gathered** anxious to hear the interpretation that **Cornelius** had seen (10:27). This was very important. There is no record that **ADONAI** had commanded **Cornelius** to assemble those **people**, yet **their** presence was evidence of divine providence using the will of **Cornelius**. If only **Cornelius** had been saved, the Messianic Community in **Yerushalayim** may have considered **him** merely an abnormality. **But**, since a group of **Gentiles** were saved, **the Jews** would have to accept that **God** was including **the Gentiles** into Messiah’s Community.²²⁸

Then, **Peter** needed to explain why **he**, a devout **Jew** (who was also a believer), entered the house of a **Gentile**. So, **he** explained the message **he** received in the vision, realizing the **YHVH** wasn’t only talking about food. Addressing this group of **Gentiles**, **he said to them**, “**You yourselves know that it is not permitted by the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**) **for a Jewish man to associate with a non-Jew or to visit him (John 4:9, 18:28; Acts 11:2-3, 22:21-22; Galatians 2:12)**. That was the standard by which **Peter** had lived **his** life. **Yet**, **Peter** said: **God has shown me that I should no longer call Gentiles unholy or unclean. Peter** had grasped the analogy between **the unclean food** and **the Gentiles**. **Both** had been declared *kosher*. **So** based upon the vision, **I came without objection when I was sent for. But**, **he** was still unsure why **he** was present at **Cornelius’ house**, so **he** asked, “**What is the reason why you sent for me**” (10:28-29)?

So Cornelius declared: **Four days ago at this hour, I was praying minchah** (the ninth hour) **in my house. Suddenly, a man stood in front of me in shining clothes. He** said: **Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your tzedakah remembered before God. Therefore send to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is also called Peter. He is staying in the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea. So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Cornelius** thanked **Peter** for breaking Jewish custom. **Now then**, in light of all this, **we are all here before God to hear all that you have been commanded** (Greek: *prostasso*, referring to *a military order*) **by the Lord (10:30-33)**. As a military man, **he** understood a military order demanding obedience. **He** was ready to receive **his** orders from **the Lord**.

So Peter and **Cornelius** both had been sovereignly prepared by **YHVH** and had responded obediently to **His** directions. All was ready for **Peter’s** gospel presentation, which would

result in the salvation of **Cornelius, his relatives and close friends**.²²⁹ **Peter** could have no better-prepared audience than this.

And **he** was quick to seize it. Then **Peter opened his mouth**. The phrase “to open one’s mouth,” is used when something of great significance is to follow (**8:34**). Then **he** began by smashing what remained of the barrier separating **Jews** and **Gentiles** with **his** fresh insight. The truth of **Yeshua’s** words: **I have other sheep, which are not of this fold (John 10:16)**, had become reality for **him**. Actually, this should not have been something new to any **Jew** because **God** said to **Abraham: I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the [Gentile] peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3)**.

Abraham needed to be more than a recipient; **ADONAI** said that **Abraham** would **be a blessing (12:2b)**. Therefore, with every top line blessing comes a bottom line responsibility. As **he** was **blessed**, **he** would become **a blessing** to others. This promise has justifiably been regarded as one of the first promises of the coming **Savior**, who would bring salvation to **all nations**. **God** had long ago made it clear that **the Savior** would be born into the human family as **the Seed of the woman (3:15)**, and now it became clear to **Abram** that this would be accomplished through **his** own family.²³⁰

You would think that **Peter** might have realized this sooner. **He** had spoken the same words on **Solomon’s Colonnade** after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate (**3:25**): **And all the [Gentile] peoples of the earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3b)**. However, the reality of that had not sunk-in until **his** vision from **the Lord** (see **Bf - Peter’s Vision**). **Abraham** was to become a channel of **blessing** to *the whole world* - not just **the Jews**. This would extend to **the Gentiles (Romans 11:11-24)**. **The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you” (Galatians 3:8)**. **They** are the ones to whom **Abraham** would be **a blessing**. This is the one promise that goes beyond **Yisra’el** and would be reaffirmed to all the patriarchs, later it is reaffirmed to **Abraham** in **22:15** and **18**, it is reaffirmed to **Isaac** in **26:3-4**, and to **Jacob** in **28:14**. This **blessing** would be accomplished through **the seed of Abraham, the Messiah**. As the prophets pointed out, it is through **Him** that **the Gentiles** will receive spiritual **blessings (Isaiah 42:1, 6, 49:5-6 and Amos 9:11)**.

But finally, **Peter** really **understood** what **Abraham** meant, overcame **his** cultural prejudices, was obedient to **his** vision and immediately cut to the heart of the matter when

he said: I truly understand that God is not one to show favoritism, however, in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him (10:34-35). Some have misunderstood this verse to be teaching universalism, that YHVH accepts all who are sincere on the basis of their works. **Yet,** that is obviously inconsistent with biblical teaching and absurd. If **Cornelius** and the others were already saved, what was **Peter** doing there preaching that only through the name of **Yeshua** can souls be saved **(10:43)? Peter** is simply expressing the reality that **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** is at work in the heart of the sinner **(John 16:8-11; Acts 11:18; Second Timothy 2:25)**. In other words, **God** had worked in **Cornelius'** heart **so** that he sought to know and obey **God**, and when he heard the saving truth of the gospel, **he** eagerly responded.²³¹

Then **Peter** turned to the main theme of the gospel, namely that salvation comes through **Messiah Yeshua** to anyone from any nation. **You know the Word** (Greek: logos) **He sent to Bnei-Yisra'el, proclaiming shalom through Messiah Yeshua, He is Lord of all - both the Jews and the Gentiles** as well. Caesarea was the seat of Roman government in Judea, **so Peter** could affirm to **Cornelius** and **the others** that **you yourselves know the message that has spread throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the immersion that John proclaimed.** Then **Peter** summarized the life and ministry of **Yeshua Messiah.** **You know how God anointed Yeshua of Natzeret with the Ruach ha-Kodesh and power to do His work** (in fulfillment of **Isaiah 61:1-3**) - **how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him (10:36-38).**

As an **apostle,** **Peter** confirmed that all **they** heard about **Yeshua's** ministry was true: **We are witnesses to all He did, both in the Judean countryside and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree** (see the commentary on [Galatians Bk - Cursed is Everyone Who Hangs on a Tree](#)), yet **God** raised Him up on the third day and caused Him to be visible not to all the people (**Isaiah 65:1**), but to us, witnesses who were chosen beforehand by **God.** **We ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.** **God's** choice to reveal the risen **Yeshua** to only 500 believers (**First Corinthians 15:5-8**) does not excuse unbelief, because there is enough evidence to convince a reasonable and open-minded person. Besides, there is never enough proof for unbelief. **And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to testify that He is the One ordained by God as Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him - that everyone who puts his trust in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name (10:39-43).**

Yeshua will either be everyone's **Deliverer** or **Judge.**

These were the points of **Peter's** sermon to these **God-fearing Gentiles: Yeshua** is sent by **God** and is still alive. **He** will be the final judge of all human beings. The TaNaKh points to **Him**. Those who trust in **His** mercy will be forgiven their sins **through His name**, that is, because of who **He** is and what **He** has done.²³²

While Peter was still speaking these words, Cornelius and his entire household believed in **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**, and as a result, **his** speech was dramatically interrupted. As **Cornelius** and the other **Gentiles** believed, **the Ruach ha-Kodesh fell on all those hearing the message** (see [The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith](#)). **All six of the circumcised believers who came with Peter** from Joppa were astonished, because **the gift of the Ruach ha-Kodesh had been poured out even on the Gentiles**. That the congregations of **God** were not exclusively **Jewish** must have come as a complete shock to **them**. Yet, **they** could hardly deny what was happening since **they were hearing them speaking in different languages and magnifying God** (nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of **tongues** is anything other than human **languages**).²³³ This passage does not teach that **speaking in languages** is normally to be expected with the coming of **the Ruach**. **The Spirit of God** granted it on this occasion as visible proof that **Peter** did indeed hold **the keys to the Kingdom**, and **ADONAI** did indeed indwell those **Gentiles (10:44-46a)**. It should be noted that here, as through **Acts**, **speaking in languages** is a group, not an individual, phenomenon.

The same thing happened here that happened in **Samaria**. This was a time of transition. Had there been no visible evidence of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, **Peter** and the others would not have been as quickly convinced that **Gentiles** were now a part of the body of **Messiah**. As it was, **the Jewish believers** saw an irrefutable demonstration that those **Gentiles** were **in Messiah (Ephesians 1)**. **Peter** immediately concluded that **they** should be **immersed (10:47)**. Obviously **Peter** was equating receiving **the Spirit of God** with salvation. **The Gentiles** had received the same **Ruach ha-Kodesh** who had come to **the Jews**. The norm is to receive salvation and reception of **the Spirit of God** at the same time.²³⁴

A closer look at the keys to the Kingdom: At **Caesarea Philippi** **Peter** declared that **Yeshua** was **the Messiah, the Son of the living God**. In response, **Jesus** said: **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ex - On This Rock I Will Build My Church](#)). Whenever the words **key** or **keys** is used symbolically in the Bible, it always symbolizes the authority to open or close doors (**Judges 3:25; First Chronicles 9:27; Isaiah 22:20-24; Matthew 16:19a; Revelation 1:18, 3:7, 9:1 and 20:1**). **Peter** will be responsible to open the doors of **the Church**. **He** has a special role in the book of **Acts**. In the Dispensation of the Torah, humanity was divided into two

groups, **Jews** and **Gentiles**. **However**, in the Dispensation of Grace, because of what went on in the intertestamental period, there were three groups of people, **Jews**, **Gentiles** and Samaritans (**Matthew 10:5-6**). **Peter** would be the **key** person (pun intended) in bringing in **the Jews (Acts 2)**, **the Samaritans (Acts 8)**, and **the Gentiles (Acts 10)** into **the Church** by receiving **the Holy Spirit**.

Once **he** opened the door it stayed open.

As we proceed through the book of **Acts** we will be comparing the way salvation comes to **the Jews**, **the Samaritans** and **the Gentiles**, showing, as was the case with the way **Yeshua** healed, there is no set order. **Acts is a transitional book and a historical book, and you can't establish doctrine based upon history. You base doctrine on clear theological statements. The historical facts can illustrate the doctrine but they cannot develop doctrine on their own.**

The gift of **languages (tongues)** can be seen four times in the book, **Acts 2**, **Acts 8**, **Acts 10** and **Acts 19**. There is no set order leading up to immersion by **the Spirit** and subsequent **speaking in tongues**. Here in **Acts 2** with salvation coming to **the Jews**, the order was first repentance, then water immersion, and then receiving **Spirit** immersion by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** as evidenced by **speaking in languages**. In **Acts 8** with salvation coming to **the Samaritans**, the order was this, first **they** believed, then came water immersion, then **the apostles** arrived, next **they** laid **their** hands on **the Samaritans**, and then **they** received **Spirit** immersion by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** as evidenced by **the speaking in languages**. Again, you don't build doctrine on history. Keep this order in mind and we will see how it was different with **the Samaritans**, **the Gentiles** and **John's disciples**. Here in **Acts 10** with salvation coming to **the Gentiles**, the order was first belief in **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**, the spirit immersion by **the Ruach** as evidenced by **the speaking in languages**, and finally, water immersion.

To understand the differences in the four appearances of languages in **Acts**, we will ask six questions as we come to each passage. **However, the one key common element in all four cases is that languages (ie tongues) are for the purpose of authentication.**

1. Who received it? Cornelius, his household and his friends (10:24 and 44).

2. What were they? They were **Gentiles (10:1)**. There was a far greater rift between **Jews** and **Gentiles** than between **Jews** and **Samaritans**. At least the Samaritans believed in the five books of Moshe and they were circumcised. **Yet Gentiles** were neither. So it was easier for **Jews** to accept that **Samaritans** could be saved than it was for them to believe that

Gentiles could be saved.

3. What were the circumstances? As a result of special revelation, **Peter** went into the home of a Gentile to present the gospel. And while doing so **the Ruach fell on them**, resulting in the outbreak of **tongues (10:44 and 46)**.

4. What was the means? As in **Acts 2**, the means was direct. There was no laying on of hands as in **Acts 8** with **the Samaritans**. The reason was that with **the Gentiles**, there was no danger of them setting up a rival Church as it was with **the Samaritans**. It was necessary for **the Samaritans** to recognize the authority of **the apostles** so that they would not set up a rival Church in opposition to the Messianic Community.

5. What was the purpose in this context? The key is to realize that the gift of languages for **the Gentiles**, like **the Jews** and **the Samaritans**, was for authentication. For **the Gentiles**, **tongues** authenticated that the message of **Peter** was true; for **the Jews**, **tongues** authenticated that **Gentiles** were on equal spiritual footing with **them** and could be saved. And later **Peter** would use this very experience as the evidence to defend **his** actions first, to **the believing Jews** in **Tziyon** (see [Bh - Peter's Report to Jerusalem](#)), and later **Peter** used this experience to prove to the Messianic Community that **the Gentiles** were saved by faith apart from circumcision (see [Bs - The Counsel at Jerusalem](#)).

6. What were the results? First, it opened the door of salvation to **the Gentiles**, preparing the way for Paul's ministry. Second, **Gentiles** were recognized as being truly saved by the **apostles**, other Jewish believers and the leadership of the Messianic community.

Here, as always in the B'rit Chadashah, **immersion** follows salvation. If **Peter** and **company** had not seen for **themselves** that **the Ruach** came upon those **Gentiles** exactly as on **themselves** of speaking in other **languages (2:4)**, **they** would not have **immersed them**. Then **Peter** declared: **Can anyone refuse water for these to be immersed, who have received the Ruach just as we Jewish believers did** (the Greek construction demands a negative answer)? As with **Peter**, it took a supernatural act of **God** to dislodge **their** resistance to bringing **the Gentiles** into **the Body of Messiah**. **So he commanded them to be immersed in the name of Messiah by the Jewish brothers** who had accompanied **him**. Those **Gentiles** were not saved by being **immersed**; they were **immersed** because **they** were saved. Thus, **Peter** involved **the Jews** from **Joppa** in that historic moment, knowing that when **they** reported back to **Jerusalem**, **he** would need all the support **he** could muster. Then **Cornelius** and **his** fellow converts **asked Peter to stay**

for a few days (10:46b-48). The desire for the fellowship of believers is the mark of genuine saving faith. **Lydia** expressed the same desire after **her** conversion **(16:15)**.²³⁵ This inevitably involved table fellowship, which now presented no problem for **Peter**. It would, however, constitute a major difficulty for more conservative Jewish believers in Tziyon.

The inclusion of **the Gentiles** as equals in the Messianic Community was historic. The last barrier had fallen. **Peter** later described this great experience: **Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose from among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the message of the Good News and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them by giving them the Ruach ha-Kodesh - just as He also did for us (15:7-8).** The way was thus opened for the spread of the Way throughout the Roman Empire through the tireless effort of Rabbi Sha'ul/Paul.