

“God Is No Respecter of Persons”

Acts 10–14; 15:1–35

Lesson
30
Summary

Scripture Summary:

An angel ministers to Cornelius—Peter in a vision is commanded to take the gospel to the Gentiles—Gospel taught by witnesses—Holy Ghost falls upon Gentiles. God grants the gift of repentance to Gentiles—Disciples first called Christians at Antioch—Church guided by revelation. Martyrdom of James—An angel frees Peter from prison—The Lord slays Herod by disease—The Church grows. Saul and Barnabas called to missionary service—Saul, now Paul, curses a sorcerer—Christ came of the seed of David—Paul offers the gospel to Israel, then to the Gentiles. Persecution attends spread of gospel—Paul heals a cripple; he and Barnabas hailed as gods—Paul stoned, revived, preaches—Elders ordained. Great dissension arises at Antioch concerning circumcision—Apostles at Jerusalem decide the issue.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

The Imagery of Sight, Sound, and Motion: A powerful part of doctrine and history being studied in this lesson includes “sight” – something we should be able to see; “sound” that carries the doctrinal message and “motion” that gives us a time frame of hours of the day and travel time. From time to time, social norms in gospel living have been updated. This is usually depends on the readiness of God’s children to comprehend and adhere to changes. Unfortunately, mankind’s sense of earthly time or timing may obscure the heavenly meanings of God’s timing or His eternal clock. “ . . . reckoning of God’s time, angel’s time, prophet’s time, and man’s time . . . ” (Doctrine & Covenants 130:4-5)

Peter Receives Revelation to Make a Change: The time finally came for all worthy people to receive the covenants of the Gospel. The time frame enveloping Cornelius’ “ninth hour of the day” vision to send for Peter from Jaffa, Peter’s vision in Jaffa with instructions for him to go to Caesarea, and then Cornelius recounting his vision to Peter as he arrived at Caesarea is a three nights and three days chiasmus. The center point is Peter’s vision of salvation for all. Note that Cornelius’ “ninth hour of the day” vision corresponds to the time when Jesus “gave up the ghost” at the ninth hour of the day. Three nights and three days later He completed the atonement, providing salvation for all.

Transitioning “The Times of the Jews” to Include “The Times of the Gentiles” – Socially Difficult: When Jesus chose His disciples, He sent them to teach first the Jews and then the Gentiles. Yet, to this day, Jews feel that the Torah (law) was for them only and that Gentiles had a different standard (the Noahide laws). The term used for the Jews or Children of Israel was “the people” and non Jews (non Israelites) were referred to as “Gentiles.” “ . . . It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:46) “ . . . Christ should . . . show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:23)

Another Transition is Coming – a Chiasmus: “And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.” (1 Nephi 13:42)

Peter’s Vision of the Sheet (A Talith): It was the sixth hour of the day (noon), Simon Peter apparently was praying (religious Jews pray three times a day, covering their heads and using a special prayer cloth, a *talith*, over their shoulders). During his prayer, Peter saw a sheet with knitted or knotted corners—maybe like the typical Jewish prayer shawl, a *talith* with its knotted corners – filled with all sorts of common or unclean foods. Today, this would be called unkosher. An angel commanded Peter to eat of those foods, contrary to Jewish dietary law. The vision was a contrast in symbolism: the *talith* used in the temple as a holy garment, its 613 knots and strings symbolizing the laws given by Moses, was now filled with foods forbidden by the Law of Moses. Visions really do contain pictures and sounds that convey vital information.

Vision of Cornelius: Connecting Peter’s vision with Cornelius creates an even clearer picture. On the previous day some thirty-five miles to the north at Caesarea, a Roman centurion named Cornelius received a vision at the “ninth hour” of the day (about 3:00 P.M.) to send for Peter in Jaffa to teach him the truth. Incidentally, the time to travel the distance of thirty-five miles would take the better part of two days, or at least an overnight journey.

Unkosher Becomes Kosher: Cornelius’s invitation to Peter arrived just as Peter was contemplating the meaning of the unusual vision of “unkosher” foods he had just been commanded to eat. He lodged his Roman guests overnight, then

departed with them to Caesarea—which required another overnight stay. When Peter arrived to visit in the house of the Roman Cornelius, again contrary to Jewish law and custom, he related that God had now included the Gentiles as well as changed the food laws of Israel (showing Israel's singularity). “. . . in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” (**Acts 10:34-35**) Not just Israelites, but all peoples were able to become children of the covenant. The time frame of three nights and three days is a reminder of Jehovah saving Jonah at Jaffa, who was saved from a watery grave after three days – and sent to Gentile Ninevah. Now, Peter came from Jaffa came to Gentile Caesarea after three days to teach Cornelius that the Jesus rose from his grave after three nights and on the third day His atonement saved all – Jews and Gentiles!

Revelation to Peter – a Chiasmus – Paralleled by Revelation to President Spencer W. Kimball: The scriptural report of the Peter and Cornelius is written in a chiasmus: First is Cornelius's vision; next we learn of Peter's vision, when Peter arrives in Caesarea, the vision of Cornelius is repeated. The center point is the revelation to Peter: “Salvation is for all people.” Gentiles being able to become full covenant members at the time of the Apostle and Prophet Peter was similar to “all worthy people” receiving priesthood blessings at the time of President and Prophet Spencer W. Kimball. “Priesthood limitation on blacks was changed by revelation . . . We are under the dictates of our Heavenly Father, and this is not my policy or the Church's policy. It is the policy of the Lord . . .” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Pages 448*) The marvelous proclamation that Priesthood blessings were available for all worthy members is quoted as follows from the *Doctrine & Covenants -- Official Declaration 2* (emphasis added): “. . . extend to every worthy member of the Church all of the privileges and blessings which the gospel affords.” “. . . We want only the thing that thou dost want, and we want it when you want it and not until . . . Finally we had the feeling and the impression from the Lord, who made it very clear to us, that this was the thing to do to make the gospel universal to all worthy people.” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Page 448-449*)

The Challenge of Change: Just as in Peter's time, there are those who find change, even prompted from the Lord, difficult to understand. Through various visual travel experiences that the ensuing chapters in the New Testament teach the same “sound doctrine” that salvation is for all, to the ends of the earth. Adjustments in the Word of Wisdom and the social acceptance of non-Israelites into the House of Israel actually amplify the responsibility of those who were first to share their blessings with everyone, as they are fulfilling a sign of the times.

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