

# KINGDOM BREAKOUT: ACTS 10



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*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

Kingdom Breakout: Acts 10  
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## Introduction to Acts 10

God had been preparing His people for the events of Acts 10, gradually, here and there, pointing beyond the confines of ethnic Israel to the broader proclamation of the Gospel and the expansion of His Kingdom into the Gentile world.

The mission to Samaria and Philip's witness to the Ethiopian led the believers to look over the wall of Judaism into other cultures and peoples. God was getting ready for a major breakout of His Kingdom into the Gentile world, and He would use Peter to fling wide the door.

Acts 10 tells the story of the introduction of the Gospel to the Gentile world. It's full of drama, waiting on the Lord, and following each next step as the Spirit led the ongoing work of Christ into a new phase and dimension.

And it's a good thing this happened, too, because, as we shall see in Acts 11, those who were scattered by the persecution following the murder of Stephen were already beginning to lead Gentiles to the Lord.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view each one by [\*clicking here\*](#).

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 What's in a Name? (8)

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Read and meditate on Acts 10.1-8.*

The name game continues (last one, I promise). A powerful drama begins. In Luke's day, if your name was "Cornelius" it probably indicated you were a public servant of the Roman government. Just like today, if someone is nicknamed "Sarge" or "Cap'n" we pretty much know their occupation. For whatever reason, the name "Cornelius" seems to have been synonymous with "Roman government." As Richard Dreyfus might say (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*), "This means something!"

*For reflection*

1. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* lists 48 entries with the name *Cornelius* from this period, all government officials. Luke continues selecting stories that will create anticipation in his readers concerning what the Lord is doing in His ongoing work, and what lies ahead. Is the Gospel powerful to effect even people in *government*? How can that be?
2. We can see that God was at work in this Centurion, preparing his heart for the Gospel. He was what was called a "God-fearer," a Gentile believer in the God of Israel. He is described as devout, generous, and pious. How do you suppose his association with the Jewish religion had prepared his heart for the Gospel? Does God still prepare people for the ongoing work of Christ? In what ways?
3. God sent an angel to further prepare Cornelius for something really big, and he immediately complied with the angel's instructions, sending three people to Joppa in order to fetch Peter. Cornelius did not know why he was doing this. It's not necessary fully or perfectly to understand God's reasons for what He commands. If we understand *what* He commands us, that's enough. As Bonhoeffer explained in *Cost of Discipleship*, faith grows from obedience. By hearing and obeying God, Cornelius was further preparing his soul for the Good News of Christ and eternal life. In what ways is Cornelius a model for believers today?
4. Do we find it hard to believe that God is already at work in the world, beyond the pale of the Church, preparing men and women to hear the Gospel? Do you think God is doing this with any people in your Personal Mission Field? Could He be using *you* to help prepare them for the ongoing work of Christ? Explain.
5. Luke uses the story of Cornelius to prepare us for the spreading of the Good News all the way into Caesar's own household! God's preparation of Cornelius should encourage us to believe that God is preparing people for the Gospel still today. It should also lead us to plead with God's Spirit to *strive* with people (Gen. 6.3), and to God the Father to allow His glory to break through in unguarded moments, reminding the lost that He exists (Rom. 1.19-21; Rom. 2.14, 15). God is at work ahead of us, so that we need have no fear or hesitation in taking up the ongoing work of Christ in our own Personal Mission Fields. For whom can you pray today that God would *strive* with them and ready their hearts to hear the Gospel?

*Summary*

God is at work in the world in various ways, striving with people and preparing their hearts to hear the Good News. This should encourage us in our daily calling to the ongoing work of Christ. God used certain faithful Jews in Cornelius' case. How might He want to use you today?

*Closing Prayer*

O my God, make them like the whirling dust,  
Like the chaff before the wind!  
As the fire burns the woods,  
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,  
So pursue them with Your tempest,  
And frighten them with Your storm.  
Fill their faces with shame,  
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.  
Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;  
Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,  
That they may know that You, whose name alone *is* the LORD,  
*Are* the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83.13-18

## 2 Drama King

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Read and meditate on Acts 10.9-16.*

The day after Cornelius had his vision in Caesarea, Peter was on the roof of Simon's house in Joppa, probably observing the sixth hour of prayer (at noon), and he was getting hungry. God really knows how to get through to us.

*For reflection*

1. Peter is getting hungry. He is primed to eat. God knows it, and He uses this frame of mind to impart a dazzling but puzzling vision of His will. What in particular about this vision would have gotten Peter's attention?

2. We as readers know where this is headed. Luke has us on the edge of our seats. We want to holler out at Peter, "It's OK!" or "Watch this! Watch this!" but we just have to wait for him to get in on the story at the same depth we are. This is really good writing, no? A sheet is let down before Peter, teeming with all kinds of unclean animals, and he is instructed to have at 'em. But he demurs, good Law-keeping believer that He is. God was about to take the ongoing work of Christ into a new phase and dimension, and He chose to use this vision to prepare the way. Is there a place for art, drama, poetry, and so forth in helping to prepare people for the Gospel? Or to prepare Christians for taking their place in the ongoing work of Christ? Explain.

3. Then the Lord gives His approval and explanation of what He has commanded, repeating the whole episode three times. The best art lines up with God's purposes and plans. The experience still leaves Peter wondering within himself about the meaning of all this (v. 17). Why? Why was this such a struggle, and how do you think Peter must have been feeling? Do you ever feel this way about sharing the Gospel with someone whom you consider to be not a likely candidate for believing?

4. Why didn't God just give a verbal explanation to Peter like He did to Cornelius? Why all this drama? God often used artistic forms to declare His will and manifest His glory – even to prepare His people for new stages of His relationship with them. If we have no place in our lives for the arts, for poetry, for fine music, for novels and stories, plays and operas, for contemplating the creation, we're cutting yourself off from areas of divine self-disclosure that God routinely loves to employ. Not all arts, of course; however, especially those wrought under the skilled hands of believing artists, God can use to make Himself and His glory known. The arts may "tell it slant," as Emily Dickinson explained, but they tell it powerfully, with vision, and with lots of room to discover applications. How would you describe the role of the arts in your own discipleship at this time?

5. What role do the arts play in your church, either in preparing people to take their place in the ongoing work of Christ, or in reaching out to your community?

*Summary*

In this story God can be seen doing something He did frequently in the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus. He is redeeming the arts and putting them to use in the service of the Gospel.

God is the drama King, and King of all the arts. He used them, and so should we. What is it about the arts that makes them such a powerful resource for the Kingdom of God? Why do Christians in our day tend not to engage the arts in their discipleship or mission?

*Closing Prayer*

You are fairer than the sons of men;  
Grace is poured upon Your lips;  
Therefore God has blessed You forever.  
Gird Your sword upon *Your* thigh, O Mighty One,  
With Your glory and Your majesty.  
And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, *and* righteousness;  
And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.  
Your arrows *are* sharp in the heart of the King's enemies;  
The peoples fall under You.  
Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever;  
A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your kingdom.  
You love righteousness and hate wickedness;  
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You  
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.  
All Your garments *are scented* with myrrh and aloes *and* cassia,  
Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.  
Kings' daughters *are* among Your honorable women;  
At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.  
Listen, O daughter,  
Consider and incline your ear;  
Forget your own people also, and your father's house;  
So the King will greatly desire your beauty;  
Because He *is* your LORD, worship Him.

Psalm 45.2-11

### 3 Act 2, Scene 2

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Read and meditate on Acts 10.17-23.*

The plot thickens. In act 1, Cornelius had a vision, then explained it to some servants and sent them on a mission to find Peter in Joppa. Now we come to scene 2 of act 2, which follows immediately on Peter's vision.

*For reflection*

1. We left Peter perplexed about what he had seen, just as men arrived inquiring as to his whereabouts. Now comes a verbal revelation from God (v. 19), but only so much, not the whole story. Peter didn't know why he was to go with these men, no more than we can know everything we might like about what God intends for us each day. Faith requires obedience only for the *next* step. How do you apply this "next step" principle to your daily walk with and work for the Lord?
2. God is the only one who needs to know how it all works out. The men explained that Peter was to come to the home of Cornelius and speak. About what? Was there some problem with him being out of Jerusalem? Had authorities there sent to Cornelius to call and bring him back? What "words" was he supposed to give? How do you suppose Peter was feeling at this moment? Do you ever feel this way, when you think about sharing the Gospel with someone?
3. It will take an "Aha!" moment for Peter to connect scene 1 with scene 2, but that will only happen in act 3, as God's little drama reaches its denouement and the plot comes fully out in the open. Peter reckoned, "Better sleep on this for a night" (v. 23). And they did. Peter wasn't delaying; he was preparing. How do you prepare for the possibility of sharing Gospel words with someone each day?
4. God is sovereign in the work of advancing His Kingdom. He uses many people in various tasks to achieve particular ends. Every player in this little drama had a role in the redemptive work of God, just as every member of the Body of Christ has something to contribute to the ongoing work of the Lord in our own day. What do you expect to contribute to the ongoing work of Christ today?
5. What have you learned thus far in Acts 10 about God's work in the Gospel and yours? What does God do? What should you be doing? What "next steps" make for being always ready to explain the hope that is within you to someone who might ask (1 Pet. 3.15)?

*Summary*

You have to step back a bit from this story of Cornelius and Peter to appreciate all that God had done and was doing to bring us to act 3. Meditate on Cornelius in Caesarea (I'll resist the "name-game" temptation with that place name). Then meditate on Peter arriving in Joppa. How can you see that God was at work, preparing each man for what will happen next. Do you believe God is at work in you and in the people in your Personal Mission Field like this? Explain.

*Closing Prayer*

The LORD *is* high above all nations,  
His glory above the heavens.  
Who *is* like the LORD our God,  
Who dwells on high,  
Who humbles Himself to behold  
*The things that are* in the heavens and in the earth?  
He raises the poor out of the dust,  
*And* lifts the needy out of the ash heap,  
That He may seat *him* with princes—  
With the princes of His people.  
He grants the barren woman a home,  
Like a joyful mother of children.  
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 113.4-9

## 4 So, Here We Are

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Read and meditate on Acts 10.24-33.*

Act 3: Cornelius catches Peter up on why he's been summoned to Joppa. Being cautious, Peter explains that he really has no business being in the home of a Gentile, except that God had shown him that, at least on this occasion, it was OK. Tension builds. Cue quivering strings. Peter still doesn't get it, but he will.

*For reflection*

1. How thoughtful of Cornelius to gather a group of family and friends for the occasion – more of God's sovereignty at work. We see the piety and humanity of both Cornelius and Peter as they meet, the one bowing as to worship, the other lifting him and saying that he is just a man. Clearly, God arranged this meeting. Peter is making some progress in understanding the Lord's will in this situation. How can you see that in verses 26-28?
2. Cornelius explains what has given rise to this occasion, as Peter listens intently, doubtless reflecting on his own experience two days previous. Cornelius still doesn't know what Peter has been summoned to tell him, but he and his family and friends are all present, like some scene out of Agatha Christie, for the *reveal* that Peter will provide. And Peter still doesn't know why he's there (v. 29). How can you see that God is at work here, not only in the *external* circumstances, but in the *hearts* of each of these men? Does God need to work in your heart in any way, to prepare you for the ongoing work of Christ?
3. Evangelism is a process, not an event. Sometimes opportunities for sharing the Good News will crop up unexpectedly, with people you would not consider to be likely candidates for hearing about Jesus. Would it help us to be ready for any such situations, if we prepared daily in prayer? Explain.
4. The ongoing work of Christ, advancing His Kingdom against the kingdom of darkness and the Lie, is also a process. We don't need to know the whole story of what God wants to do with us; we just need to know what's next, what God requires of us today, in this moment. Because, as we obey every *next step* the Lord shows us, the drama of redemption moves forward toward some exciting denouement in our lives or in the life of someone who needs to know the Lord. Would you say that this describes your mindset as you go out into your Personal Mission Field each day? Why or why not?
5. How do you discern the Lord's *next steps* for each day of your walk with Him? What is the role of Scripture in this? Of prayer? Of *listening* for the Spirit's leading? Of working to get to know and care about the people in your Personal Mission Field?

*Summary*

So, here we are, the principal players in the drama have met and begun to get acquainted. And still, neither one knows why they are here, except that God has spoken to each. What are you learning

from this story about how to approach working your Personal Mission Field for the ongoing work of Christ?

*Closing Prayer*

Gracious *is* the LORD, and righteous;  
Yes, our God *is* merciful.  
The LORD preserves the simple;  
I was brought low, and He saved me.  
Return to your rest, O my soul,  
For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.  
For You have delivered my soul from death,  
My eyes from tears,  
*And* my feet from falling.  
I will walk before the LORD  
In the land of the living.  
I believed, therefore I spoke,  
“I am greatly afflicted.”  
I said in my haste,  
“All men *are* liars.”  
What shall I render to the LORD  
*For* all His benefits toward me?  
I will take up the cup of salvation,  
And call upon the name of the LORD.

Psalm 116.5-13

## 5 Aha!

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Meditate on Acts 10.34-38.*

“OK, now I’ve got it.” Peter finally puts it all together – Cornelius’ vision, his vision, his being sent for in Joppa. It all falls together in one sweet “Aha!” moment for the chief of the apostles. He blurts out what to him is the conclusion of all this: God’s salvation is available to people from all nations, people who fit the criteria of saving faith (fear God, obey His Law).

*For reflection*

1. God is not a God of partiality, and it took a large, lavish vision from on high for Him to sink this notion deep into Peter’s soul. Peter proceeded on to report the historical facts behind the meaning of his visit. God sent Israel to proclaim peace through Jesus Christ. Is it important that our proclamation of the Gospel be rooted in real events and real history? Explain.
2. Peter can’t resist a little pique in the presence of this Roman Centurion: “He is Lord of all” (v. 36). But wait: Isn’t Peter getting ahead of himself? Shouldn’t he let this Roman first come to Jesus as *Savior*, and then maybe sometime later urge him to receive Jesus as *Lord*? Explain.
3. The facts of Jesus’ earthly ministry would have been familiar to the people in Caesarea. They would have heard of Jesus, about the good works He did, and the extraordinary power of God that was upon Him. Peter emphasized the larger, spiritual backdrop for the work Christ began to do, and that was now ongoing – to overthrow and replace the dominion of the devil with good works and healing by the Spirit of the Lord. Peter was getting revved up, and we can feel his own enthusiasm growing as the lights came on in his soul and the prospects for the Gospel grew larger than ever in his mind. Peter is unabashedly “spiritual” in proclaiming the Gospel. Do you think we should be more like this when we talk about our faith with others? Explain.
4. There are important lessons for us in witness-bearing in this situation. Start with the conclusion: You can be saved. Ground the whole in historical realities, not just your own experience or opinion. Get Jesus and His Lordship into the account early and often. Let people know what’s available, what the basis of it is, and Who is making such an offer to outcasts such as we. How does your approach to sharing the Gospel compare with what we see Peter doing in this story?
5. Peter is doing something quite extraordinary in sharing with this Gentile in his home. There will be ramifications. But how can we see, in Luke’s account thus far, that God has been preparing for this moment? How can you see, in your own life with Christ, that He is preparing you to share the Good News with the people to whom He sends you?

*Summary*

Peter did not hesitate to proclaim the Gospel, once he understood the situation for what it was. We need more of Peter’s understanding, boldness, and resolve in our own work of evangelism. How can Christians encourage one another to be more like Peter in our witness for the Lord?

*Closing Prayer*

But I will sing of Your power;  
Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning;  
For You have been my defense  
And refuge in the day of my trouble.  
To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises;  
For God *is* my defense,  
My God of mercy.

Psalm 59.16, 17

## 6 Whoever Believes in Him

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Read and meditate on Acts 10.39-43.*

Peter adds himself into the historical data of the Gospel. He and his companions are witnesses. They testify of the facts. They report the promise. They relate their own experience. They warn of the consequences of not obeying. They explain the way to be saved. That's what witnesses do. Right?

*For reflection*

1. Peter's Gospel includes the righteousness of Christ (good works) and the sacrificial atonement of the Lord (taking our debt upon Himself). It also includes the resurrection, for this is the key to the promise of forgiveness and life, and the warning of judgment to come. How about the Gospel as *you* present it? What are the main points you want to make sure to proclaim?
2. For Cornelius, a civil servant, the idea that there was a "judge" higher than Caesar (we note that our story takes place in Caesarea, anticipating things to come) would have seemed as novel as saying there was another "lord" besides the Emperor. Should we expect the Gospel to sound novel or even strange to the people with whom we share it? Why? But is the Gospel powerful to overcome this strangeness? Explain.
3. Peter understood how to explain the Gospel in terms relevant to this Roman magistrate and soldier. He wanted to be crystal clear about what the Gospel is and what it requires. But he also supported his witness with reference to the prophecies concerning Jesus in the Old Testament, before explaining how one comes to gain the forgiveness Jesus provides. How would you use the Old Testament and the New Testament in helping someone to understand the Good News?
4. Peter is the master evangelist. We note that he didn't prepare this particular message. The Lord gave it to him, just as He had promised He would (Lk. 21.12-15). Peter had spent the last several years preparing, so that he would be ready when needed (1 Pet. 3.15). Certainly Peter knew all the elements of the Gospel, but the Spirit gave Him just the words he needed on this occasion, with this person and his family and friends. Peter's witness flowed from his experience, his learning, and his sense of calling from the Lord. What does this suggest about *our* witness for Christ?
5. In order to see the Spirit work like that in us, we need to (1) be willing to go where He sends us, (2) be familiar with the broad outlines of the Gospel, and (3) initiate conversations with the people in our Personal Mission Fields in ways relevant to them and their interests and needs. God will do the rest. With whom can you initiate a conversation about spiritual matters today? What will be your opening line? Pray that God will lead you like He did Peter.

*Summary*

Peter did not allow long-standing taboos or inbuilt fears to keep him from sharing the Good News with this Gentile in his home. He trusted God and rested in His Spirit to say just what was needed, right when it was called for. How can you become more like Peter in your witness for Christ?

*Closing Prayer*

I will extol You, my God, O King;  
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.  
Every day I will bless You,  
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.  
Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
And His greatness *is* unsearchable.  
One generation shall praise Your works to another,  
And shall declare Your mighty acts.  
I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,  
And on Your wondrous works.  
*Men* shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts,  
And I will declare Your greatness.  
They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness,  
And shall sing of Your righteousness.  
The LORD *is* gracious and full of compassion,  
Slow to anger and great in mercy.  
The LORD *is* good to all,  
And His tender mercies *are* over all His works.  
All Your works shall praise You, O LORD,  
And Your saints shall bless You.  
They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,  
And talk of Your power,  
To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,  
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.  
Your kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom,  
And Your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.

Psalm 145.1-13

## 7 The Sovereignty of God in the Gospel

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Luke 24.27

*Meditate on Acts 10.44-48.*

Peter doesn't even get to the invitation before the Spirit does what only the Spirit can do – bring people to new life in Christ (Jn. 6.63; Gal. 4.4-6). Talk about surprise endings!

*For reflection*

1. The Spirit fell upon those who were hearing, and they immediately began to speak in tongues. This demonstration served two purposes. First, it established identity with Peter and those who were with him, since this had been their experience as well. Second, it confirmed the moving of God's Spirit to the Gentiles all at once. Should we always expect such a response to our witness? Explain.
2. The leaders in Jerusalem would not have to send a delegation later on to see whether Peter's preaching "took." Here was the evidence of it, right in front of them. Peter rushed to bring the blessing of baptism to these Gentile believers. Baptism, as a sacrament, is a *sign* and *seal* of the Lord's grace. In what ways? What does it "sign" and what does it "seal" to those who submit to it?
3. Meanwhile, those who were with Peter were filled with wonder. Wow! Right in front of their eyes God saved those they would have regarded as the least likely people ever to come to the Lord. God is sovereign in the work of the Gospel. He doesn't reveal everything to us, but He does give us clear instructions concerning our role in His work. Peter's readiness, obedience, and discernment must be ours as well, if we are to fulfill our calling as messengers in the ongoing work of Christ. How does this apply to your witness for Christ?
4. God is sovereign in the progress of the Gospel and His Kingdom. But we are responsible to hear God's instructions and follow them explicitly, day by day. God doesn't reveal His will through visions or dreams, not normally, anyway. But His Word is sufficiently clear: "You shall be My witnesses." Now we know what that requires. Will you pay attention to where God is sending you each day? And will you make the most of every opportunity to talk with others about Jesus?
5. What is one thing you could do, beginning today, to improve the consistency and effectiveness of your witness for the Lord, and to demonstrate your confidence in God, as sovereign over His Good News?

*Summary*

The curtain comes down to a house filled with joy, wonder, and anticipation. It's the same story we've seen over and over again in the book of Acts. Why do we experience so little of this story in our day?

*Closing Prayer*

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!  
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,

For we have been brought very low.  
Help us, O God of our salvation,  
For the glory of Your name;  
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,  
For Your name's sake!  
Why should the nations say,  
"Where *is* their God?"

Psalm 79.8-10

*For reflection or discussion*

1. How is it apparent to you that God is working today to prepare lost people for the Gospel, and His people to proclaim it?
2. What do we mean by saying that God typically leads us only to our *next steps* in sharing the Good News? How do you expect to see this in your life?
3. How can we prepare daily to make sure we're ready, like Peter was, when opportunities to share the Good News arise?
4. What should local churches be doing to prepare their members for working their Personal Mission Fields as witnesses for the Lord?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 10?

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word to the way we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31). What have you encountered of God's glory in our reading and meditations in Acts 10? How has He shown Himself to you more clearly? How can this help you live more consistently for His glory in the daily details of your life? What have you learned about yourself from Acts 10 to help you in being a witness for the Lord?

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