

# **BIB204 NT2 Early Church**

Unit 3a

Peter and Cornelius

Presented by the



**LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE**  
CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

For Use by the

**Blue Letter Bible Institute**

[Web: Study.Bible](http://Study.Bible)

A Ministry of the

**Blue Letter Bible**

[Web: BlueLetterBible.org](http://BlueLetterBible.org)

Hello. This is Unit 3 of BIB204, NT2, The Early Church. In the previous units, we dealt with Pentecost, its ramifications, the preaching of the gospel, what that meant. We talked about the apostolic tradition being grounded in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, in particular, his teaching and how it rewired their understanding of their own traditions, their own Scriptures, in fact. And we see this in Luke 24:44-45 where Jesus says, "Everything that just happened to me can be found in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms," basically the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible as we understand it today, arguably, the outlines or the features of it. And then the next verse, verse 45, he opened their minds to comprehending the Scriptures. We ran all the way to the church in Jerusalem where there is the beginning of conflict between Jews who are Hellenized, diaspora Jews who are there who have come to saving faith in Messiah, and Palestinian Jewish widows. The Hellenistic Jews, the widows are being neglected in the daily ministrations. So you see the choice of seven men of good reputation who are filled with the Holy Spirit, who are about the ministry of Messiah. And we see that Stephen becomes prominent among them. And so we sort of dealt with that. In the second unit, we dealt with Stephen's martyrdom, the scattering of the church, and what that meant. And we dealt with the conversion of Saul in the midst of that particular persecution. We went into some detail about what Saul actually did during his time of persecuting the people of the Way.

Today, in Unit 3, we're going to be looking at the aftermath. So we're going to be looking at the latter portions of chapter 9. We're going to run through chapters 10, 11, and 12, and the beginning of chapter 13. So the aftermath of Saul's conversion, the church being put back together and being multiplied since the arch persecutor of the church has now become one of them. In fact, in Unit 2, we dealt with Paul's autobiographical record in the Galatians letter and we correlated that with Acts 9 and 22 and 26. So here, we're going to finish up chapter 9, the aftermath. We're going to look at Peter and Cornelius. So now the gospel spreads out to Gentiles, and we see that initiated by an apostle, the leading apostle, in fact, of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to get into that kind of a detail with that. And we're going to look at the aftermath of Cornelius' conversion and we're going to treat that in detail. And then we're going to see the ramifications of Peter's actions play out in the history of the church under the aegis, the impress of the Holy Spirit. And we will end at the early portion of 13, which is arguably the call of Saul and Barnabas to missionary work, to evangelization.

So in Acts 9, if you would, please open your Bibles. We want to do a bit of a recap. Starting in verse 26, I'll summarize that passage from verses 26 to 31. Paul attempted to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him. They didn't believe that he had converted. Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord. When we look, when we bring the perspective of Galatians to this particular part of Acts, what we see is it wasn't all the apostles. It was just Peter and John and James, the half-brother of Jesus, the Lord's brother. So he goes in and out among them at Jerusalem. This is verse 28. He's preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. He spoke and disputed against the Hellenists, but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this (verse 30), they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. They sent him back home.

So what that means, again bringing the Galatians' letter, bringing its lens to bear, on this passage, what we find then is that, according to the Galatians' letter, Paul was there about 15 days and he stayed with Peter. So within a fortnight and a day, Paul had created enough of a storm in Jerusalem that people were seeking to kill him. In his disputes, which they could not withstand, he provoked much anger. And so within two weeks of him staying with Peter, he has to exit Jerusalem. He has to be sent back home for his own safety. And then we read in verse 31, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and

Samaria had peace and was being built up.” So the time of persecution is over. “Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” Verse 31 implies that even though Paul is taken out of the picture, there is probably still scattered persecution that gradually dies down during the three-year period between Paul’s conversion, I should say Saul’s conversion, and his arrival in Jerusalem to announce to them that he had become one of them. It took him that long, three years, to make himself known to them as a disciple. But in the meantime, there is still presumably fallout from the social, historical, and cultural forces that have been set in motion by Paul’s actions and those of others like him.

So with that said, we can now go to verse 32. “Peter went here and there among them all.” That is, he traveled to various churches, various communities, various local churches in Judea and Galilee and Samaria. “He came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.” Lydda is close to Joppa. Joppa is on the Mediterranean coast. But he goes to Lydda. He finds a man there named Aeneas (verse 33), and he had been bedridden for eight years, and he was paralyzed. Now, we have to read this very carefully. Watch this carefully now. “Peter went here and there among them all.” (Verse 32) Prior context: Paul came to Jerusalem. You look at verse 26, as we said in Unit 2, this is three years after his conversion. So three years have gone by, assuming his conversion took place in AD 32 or AD 33, maybe AD 34. That’s three years after that. So no later than AD 35 to AD 37, he comes to Jerusalem. He announces he’s a disciple. They’re all afraid of him. He can only get an audience with three apostles: Peter and John and James, the author of the letter of James. Within two weeks of him spending time with Peter, staying with Peter, his life is in danger. He has to go home to Tarsus. It is probably best to assume that this section, verses 26 to 31, is basically an encapsulation of three years past Saul’s conversion.

And then when you come to this section here in verses 32 to 35, it’s after Paul has been sent home to Tarsus that as the church gets comforted and multiplied, you pick up from the third year of the previous context, right? And as it turns out, Peter is going here and there among them all. Then he comes to the saints at Lydda and he finds a man named Aeneas, who has been bedridden for eight years. It’s not absolute. It’s merely a suggestion at this point, but what we see of the material afterwards sort of throws light on this prior context. So we can’t depend on verses 26 to 31 entirely. We have to look at the context that is subsequent. But more on that later.

So this man is paralyzed. “And Peter says to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.’ And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.” So Peter goes there. He visits the saints at Lydda. He runs into a man who has been bedridden for eight years. He’s unconverted. And Peter heals him in the power and in the name and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he gets up, he’s healed, and all of the people in Lydda and Sharon saw this event. And as a result, they are converted. They turn to the Lord (Verse 35). It tells us then, it shifts us to Joppa (verse 36), which is on the coast, as I’ve said before. “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas.” They both mean ‘gazelle’, the term. The Aramaic name Tabitha, the Greek name Dorcas means gazelle. We’re told about who she is, her reputation. She has a reputation for good works and acts of charity. “In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him.” They’ve heard of him healing this man Aeneas, who was bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. So they figure that Peter can raise Dorcas, Tabitha, from the dead. So they ask, they appeal, and he arrives. He goes with them (verse 39). He arrives. They take him to the upper room. Her loss is felt in that community keenly. You have all the widows standing

there beside him weeping, showing tunics that she had made as well as other garments while she was with them. We read about that in verse 39.

Peter puts them all outside. This is oddly reminiscent of Jesus putting out all of the people who are mourning the death of Jairus' daughter in the gospels. And he kneels down and he prays, and he turns to the body, and he says, "Tabitha, arise." It's interesting that he kneels down and he prays. He knows he needs help from on high. The power does not come from him. It is not intrinsic to him. He is utterly dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ and he knows it, and he kneels down and he prays because to raise someone from the dead, he's never done it before. And so he turns to the body and he said, "Tabitha, arise." And wonder of wonders, she opens her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and raised her up. This is all reminiscent of the raising of Jairus' daughter. "Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa. Many believed in the Lord." It says in verse 42. So that eventuates, that results in conversions all across that particular town or city. So, "He stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner." Presumably, Simon the tanner was one of the converts. Entirely possible. It's, in fact, probable.

That takes us into chapter 10. "At Caesarea (also on the coast) there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God." So Cornelius is a centurion of the Italian Cohort, so he has command over 80 to 100 men, probably closer to 100, we might suggest, within the context of the cohort itself. We're told in verse 2 that he is a devout man and that he fears God. All his household fears God. So you have a household that is devout. You've got a household of devout Gentiles who are uncircumcised. That's the meaning of the term devout. It's often rendered God-fearer. This is to be distinguished from the term proselyte which you see in the English translations of our Bibles.

Now, proselyte was someone who got circumcised and began to absorb the custom of Moses. They would learn the law. They would learn to think through the law. They would be instructed in the law. They would be instructed in doctrine. They would undergo circumcision and they would offer sacrifice and thereby be effectively, to a greater or lesser degree, grafted into Judaism and its practices. A God-fearer did not do that. A God-fearer did not submit to the rite of circumcision, but they were no longer idolatrous, as far as they could take it. They believed in the Hebrew God. They acclimated themselves to the Scriptures, but that's as far as it went. They would be allowed to attend synagogue, but they couldn't participate as direct agents within the context of the synagogue. They could go and they could listen to teaching. So this is who this man is. He gave alms generously to the people and he prayed continually to God.

And we're told about the ninth hour of that particular day, he saw in a vision an angel of God come in and call his name, "Cornelius." "And he stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?'" And of course, he's not calling him God. He's just expressing respect. "And he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.'" When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier." So there's a soldier there and the servants are devout. They're God-fearers. This soldier is also devout. He's not a member of the household, but he is known to Cornelius as someone who fears the Hebrew God. "And having related everything to them (verse 8), he sent them to Joppa."

So in verse 9, we see “The next day, they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop (of Simon the tanner’s home) to pray. He became hungry, wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance. He saw the heavens opened.” And I’ll summarize this material “Something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners on the earth.” A voice says to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” And Peter says, “Not so, Lord; I have never eaten anything unclean.” And the Lord says, “What God has cleansed, you must not designate or call common.” And the vision is repeated three times, and then the heavenly vision departs. The sheet is taken back up into heaven. The significance is that the heavens are opened and something like a great sheet descends out of the heavens. Again, the heavens being opened, we might say, is oddly reminiscent of the heavens being opened at Jesus’ baptism in the gospels. A sheet descends from heaven. To Peter’s mind, even in trance, he would recognize that as a heavenly message. And he enters into conversation with the risen Lord, and the Lord basically corrects him. “What God has made clean (verse 15), do not call common.”

Peter doesn’t understand this. Verse 17, it says, “Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean.” And at that moment, Cornelius’ messengers arrive. They made inquiry for Simon’s house and they called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And Peter is puzzling out this vision and the Spirit speaks to him and says, that there are men “looking for you. Rise, go down and accompany them without hesitation. I sent them.” Peter goes down to the men and says, “I am the one you are looking for. Why are you seeking me out? What is the reason for your coming?” Verse 22, “And they said, ‘Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.’ So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he arose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.” So he didn’t go by himself. He went with some of the brothers from Joppa.

“And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them. He had called together his relatives, his close friends. Peter entered (verse 25). Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet and worshiped him.” But Peter corrected him, “lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am a man.’” “I don’t need to be worshipped.” “As he talked with him (verse 27), he went in and found many persons gathered.” And probably with some irony, he said to them in verse 28, “‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.’ And Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing.’” So here we have, in Luke’s narrative, a description of the angel. The angel appeared in bright clothing and said, “‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.” So Cornelius again has gathered his relatives, his close friends because he wants them to hear this too. Peter arrives. He falls at Peter’s feet. Peter raises him up and says, “I’m a man too. This is highly unusual. I’m a Jew. You know the custom. We don’t enter into Gentiles’ homes or people of other nations. It’s unlawful for me to do this.” And so Cornelius describes his experience to him. We will pick up, in the next segment, Peter’s proclamation and the results.