

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XXIII. God's Circumstantial Guidance For A Landmark Ministry

(Acts 10:1-23)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 10:1-23 shows God's circumstantial guidance for the landmark ministry of Peter's evangelizing of Gentiles. The passage thus provides invaluable insight into the **ways** the Lord uses circumstances to guide us believers in the Church era. We view the passage for our insight and application (as follows):

II. God's Circumstantial Guidance For A Landmark Ministry, Acts 10:1-23.

- A. God used circumstances to prepare the Gentiles Peter was to evangelize to be willing to hear him, Acts 10:1-8:
 - 1. The Lord provided circumstantial guidance for the Gentile Cornelius who was already a devout semi-proselyte to Judaism, lacking only circumcision, Acts 10:1-2; Ryrie St. Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Acts 10:2.
 - a. Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing centurion who had led his household to revere the Lord, and he had given many alms of his income to the people and habitually prayed to God, Acts 10:1-2.
 - b. However, he was still a Gentile, not a proselyte to Judaism, for he was uncircumcised, cf. Acts 10:45.
 - 2. The Lord used the circumstantial experience of a vision of a heavenly angel to inform Cornelius that God had approved of his prayers and alms, and that he was to send to Joppa for Peter who would inform him what God wanted him to do next, Acts 10:3-6.
 - 3. Cornelius heeded the angel, sending men to Joppa to learn from Peter God's message for him, Acts 10:7-8.
- B. God used circumstances to prepare Peter to evangelize the Gentiles God wanted him to reach, Acts 10:9-23:
 - 1. As the messengers from Cornelius were approaching Joppa (Acts 10:9a), Peter went up to the housetop of Simon the tanner's house to pray around noon, Acts 10:9b; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 380.
 - 2. He became hungry, but while his meal was being prepared, he had a vision of the heavens opening up and a great sheet was coming down to the earth with all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds, Acts 10:10-12. A voice from heaven commanded him to rise, kill and eat these animals, Acts 10:13.
 - 3. Peter, an orthodox Hebrew who had always heeded the dietary restrictions of the Law, cringed at this order even from the Lord by saying, "Surely not, Lord! For I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean," Acts 10:14 NIV. The expression "Surely not" translates *medamos*, a "more polite and subjective term than *oudamos* ("by no means," used only in Matt. 2:6)." (Ibid.)
 - 4. The voice from heaven replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean," Acts 10:15 NIV.
 - 5. This vision occurred three times (Acts 10:16), not only to emphasize the truth that was then being given, but also to remind Peter of his past errant three-fold denial of the Lord (Mark 14:66-72) that was painfully, corrected by Christ in His three-fold call of Peter to shepherd His people (John 21:15-17). The three-fold repetition of this vision to Peter would thus clearly signal God's intent that he give up his diet restrictions!
 - 6. While Peter was pondering the meaning and application of this vision, the messengers from Cornelius stood before the gate of Simon the tanner's house, asking for Peter, Acts 10:17-18.
 - 7. Simultaneously, the Holy Spirit informed Peter that three men were seeking him, that he was to go down and go with them, not hesitating to do so, for the Lord had sent them, Acts 10:19-20.
 - 8. Peter went down from the rooftop, he met these men who then told him of the vision that Cornelius, a devout follower of God, had seen regarding meeting Peter and hearing his message, Acts 10:21-22.
 - 9. Realizing that the vision of the unclean animals applied to the Gentiles whom God wanted him to meet and evangelize, Peter yielded to God's will: he invited the Gentiles into the home, he lodged them, and the next day he began to travel with several Hebrews and these Gentile men to meet Cornelius, Acts 10:23.

Lesson: *God used the circumstantial evidences of visions, coincidences, past precedents of the Lord's dealings and multiple witnesses to direct Cornelius and Peter to meet one another that Peter might evangelize Cornelius.*

Application: *(1) We must not rely on subjectively interpreted dreams or visions as they can give errant guidance (Deuteronomy 13:1-3), so any dream or vision must fully align with Scripture for us to heed it. (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Rom. 12:6) (2) However, God today OFTEN uses coincidences, past precedents and multiple witnesses to lead us.*