

Acts 10:1- 23

A Dramatic Development

Two Visions – One Message

Chapter 10 of Acts give a key account in the ongoing spread of the Good News. It is the longest chapter in Acts, and is also a wonderful example of God's guidance for people.

Up to now the message of salvation has only been shared with Jews and Samaritans and proselytes (possibly such as the Ethiopian eunuch).

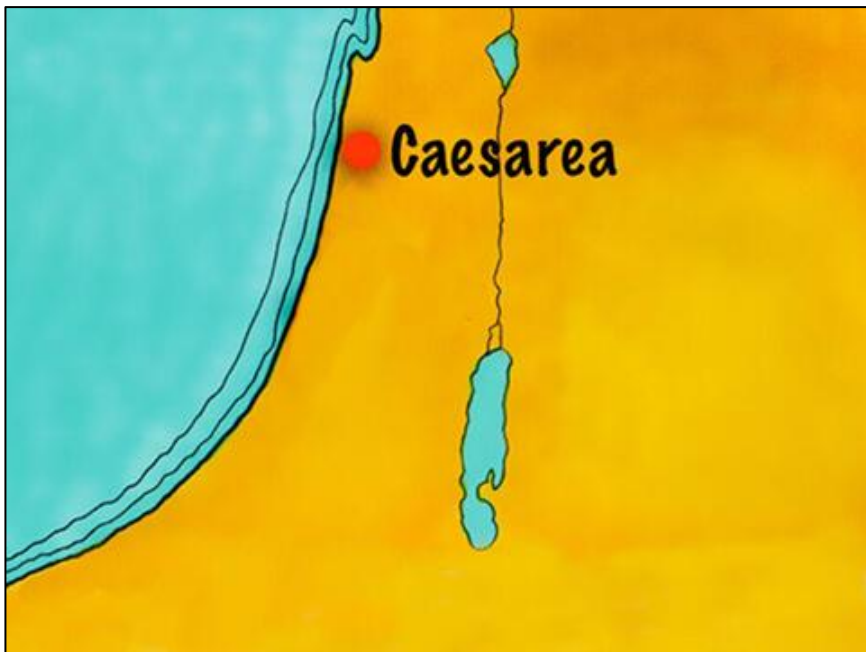
Now an unforeseen development occurs with regard to the gentiles.

God had chosen the Jews to be a light to the gentiles
in order to reveal to them the one true God,
but what happens next is astounding.

The Setting – Roman culture

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius,
a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

Caesarea was a Roman(gentile) city/port – the name is a clue!
Cornelius was a Roman officer – part of the oppressive class as far
as the Jews were concerned.



Introducing the man - Cornelius

He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.



- He is a gentile Centurion (in a well paid job) – but he is also a ‘God-fearer’.
- He ordered his family household in a godly way. Possibly he attended synagogue, and had abandoned pagan idolatry for the worship of the true God.
- He shows his religious sincerity by prayer, and gracious actions – generous to needy
- He is held in some respect by the observant Jews

How is Cornelius's sincere faith different to yours?

He is God fearing (such fear means loving respect).

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;

*He is 'devout' – he takes his faith seriously.

cf. Simeon (Luke 2:25), Ananias (Acts 22:12) *(a different but related word)*

*He influenced others to follow his example.

*He prays regularly.

*He puts his faith into action by helping others.

He is living up to the light that he has received.

What is missing, so that God sends an angel to get Peter for him?

What more does Cornelius need?

He believes in God – good; but he needs to know about Jesus the Messiah, and to **know** God in a personal relationship as:-

The Saviour – a knowledge of Jesus' sacrifice for his sin

The Lord – an indwelling presence of the risen Jesus

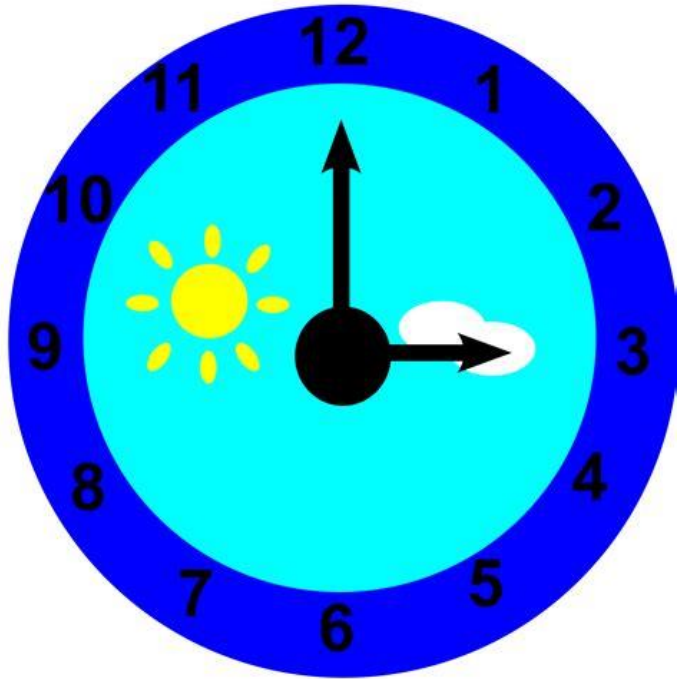
John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Vision number one.

One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision.

The original Greek says it is the 9th hour = 3 o'clock. This was the customary Jewish hour of afternoon prayer.



How did they tell the time?

An angelic visit

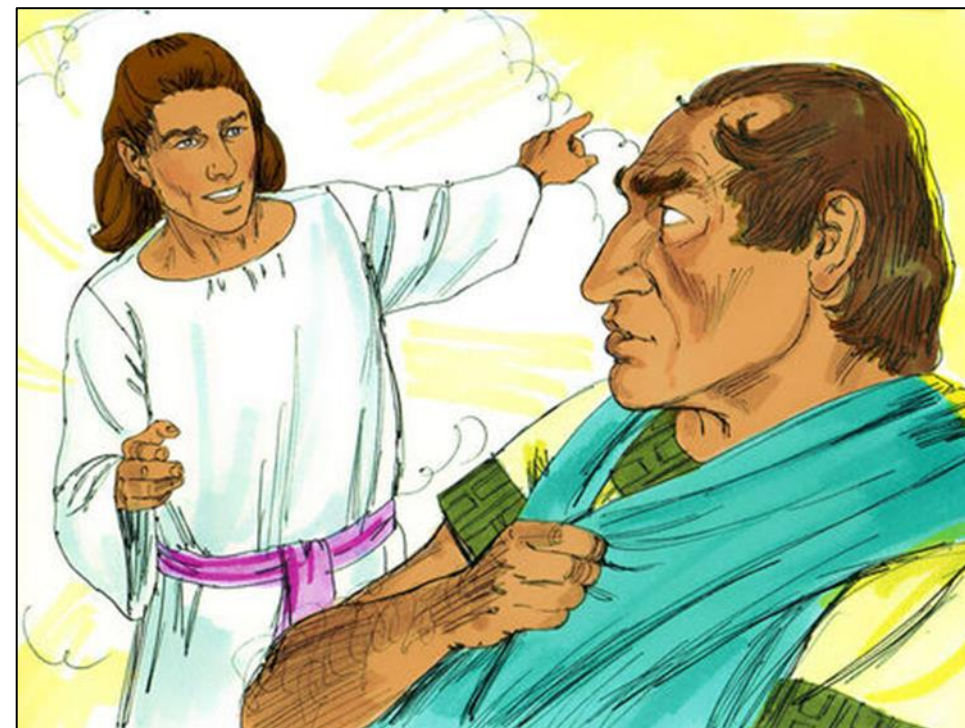
He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

An angel appeared in a vision – but the word “distinctly” tells us it wasn’t a mental image but something external.- he saw him.

He knows about Cornelius – even his name.

Note that an angel of God entered a gentile man’s house.

This now appears to be holy ground!



Worried

Cornelius stared at him in fear.



Reasons to worry:

His unexpected presence

– where did he come from?

His knowledge

– how did he know his name?

His unusual appearance ?

Cornelius' response

"What is it, Lord?" he asked.

Fear - he's human!
but he still responds

He shows respect (Lord = sir)

And he is willing to act –

What do you want me to do?



God has noticed you!

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

He uses sacrificial language

– memorial = part of a thank offering to God

What you have done is like a sacrifice
- practical religion – prayer and alms

God acknowledges his sincere desire to
worship and serve him.



He gives Cornelius his instructions – orders.

"Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter."

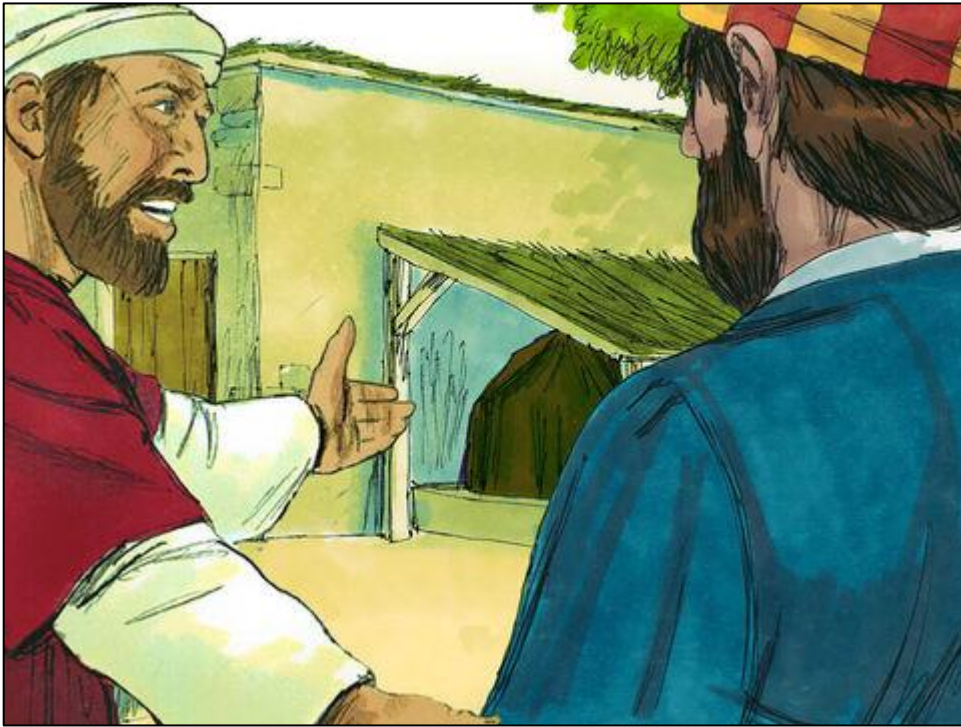
Send for a particular man
(name and regular name)
in a particular place – Joppa

It is important that he meets Peter.



Location - address

"He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."



At the home of another Simon –(a Hebrew name)
whose occupation is a tanner,(work requiring much water)
by the sea i.e. along the shore line in Joppa.

When the angel who spoke to him had gone,

Gone!

Did he just disappear?
If so it was confirmation that this was an
angelic visitor.

He didn't imagine all this

Action required

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants.

Two household attendants plus a 'devout' soldier requisitioned to the centurion's house.

These were the trusted men he chose in response to the angel's instructions.

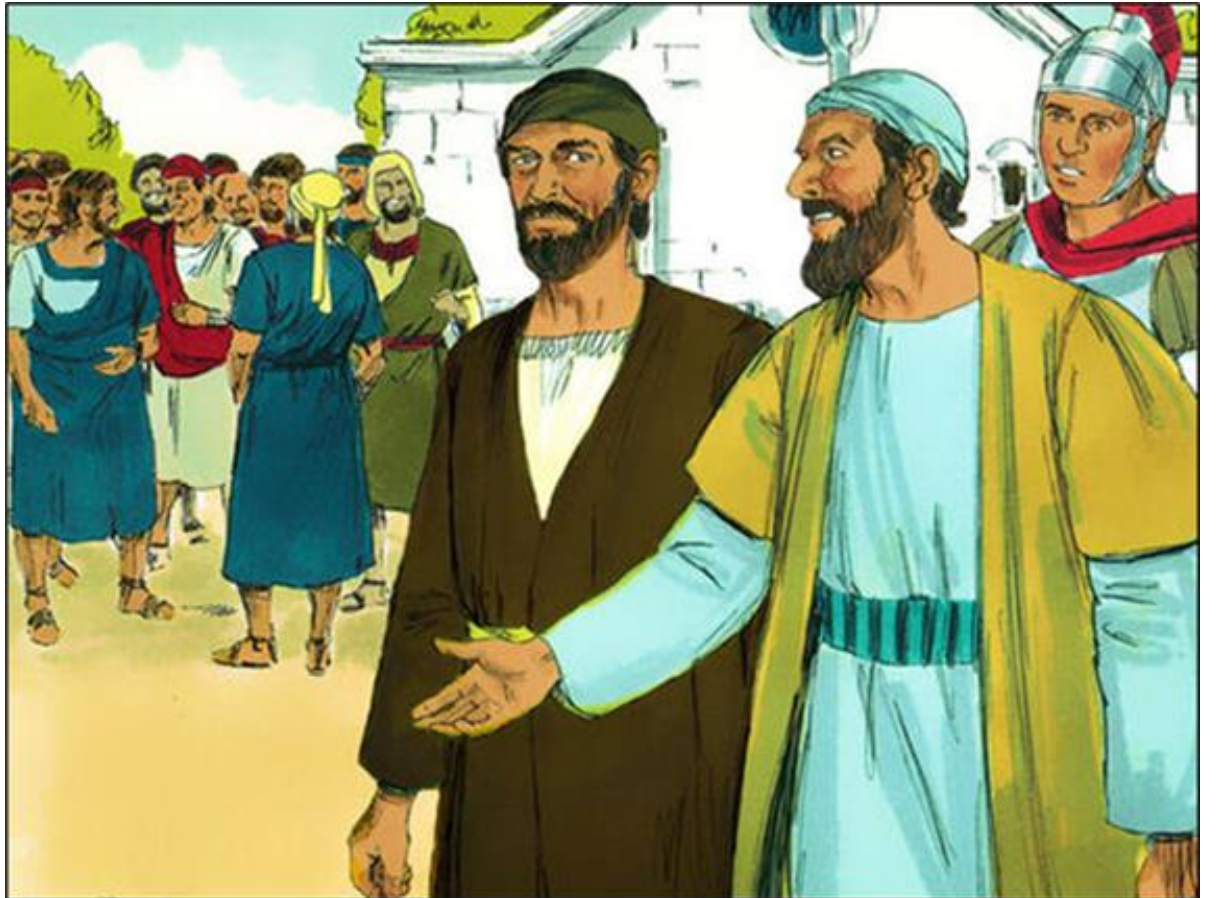


A full explanation

He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

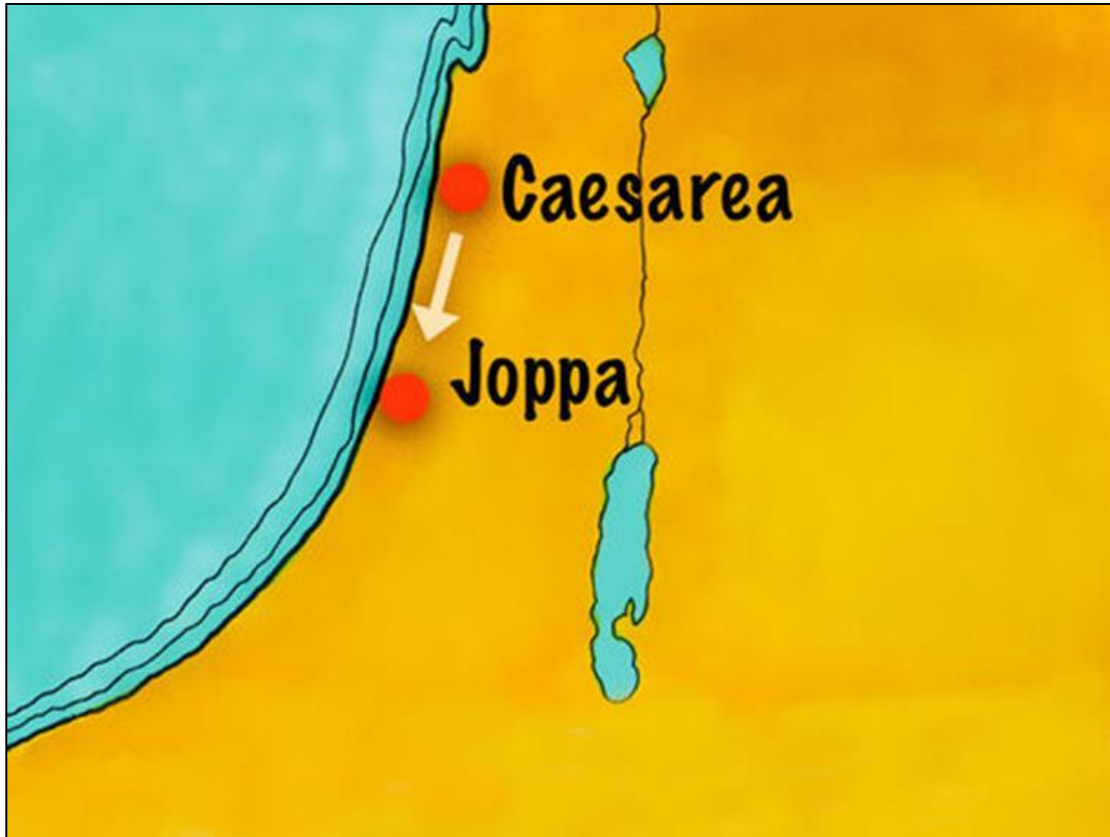
He shared what had happened with these like-minded 'believers'. They too rightly believed in the God of Israel but at present didn't have a personal relationship with Him.

They 'obeyed' and went with just the information the angel had given



At just the right time at the right place!

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city,



It was about a 30 mile journey (about 2 days' travel) involving an over-night stop. Here we can see the providential timing of their arrival.

Meanwhile ...

About noon ... Peter went up on the roof to pray.

The flat roof could be accessed outside by a staircase.

This was also a customary Jewish prayer time - before lunch.

It would be a secluded spot to pray and have fellowship with the Lord.



Dinner time distraction from prayer?

He became hungry and wanted something to eat,
and while the meal was being prepared ...

Could he smell the preparations for the meal rising up?



God breaks through

while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

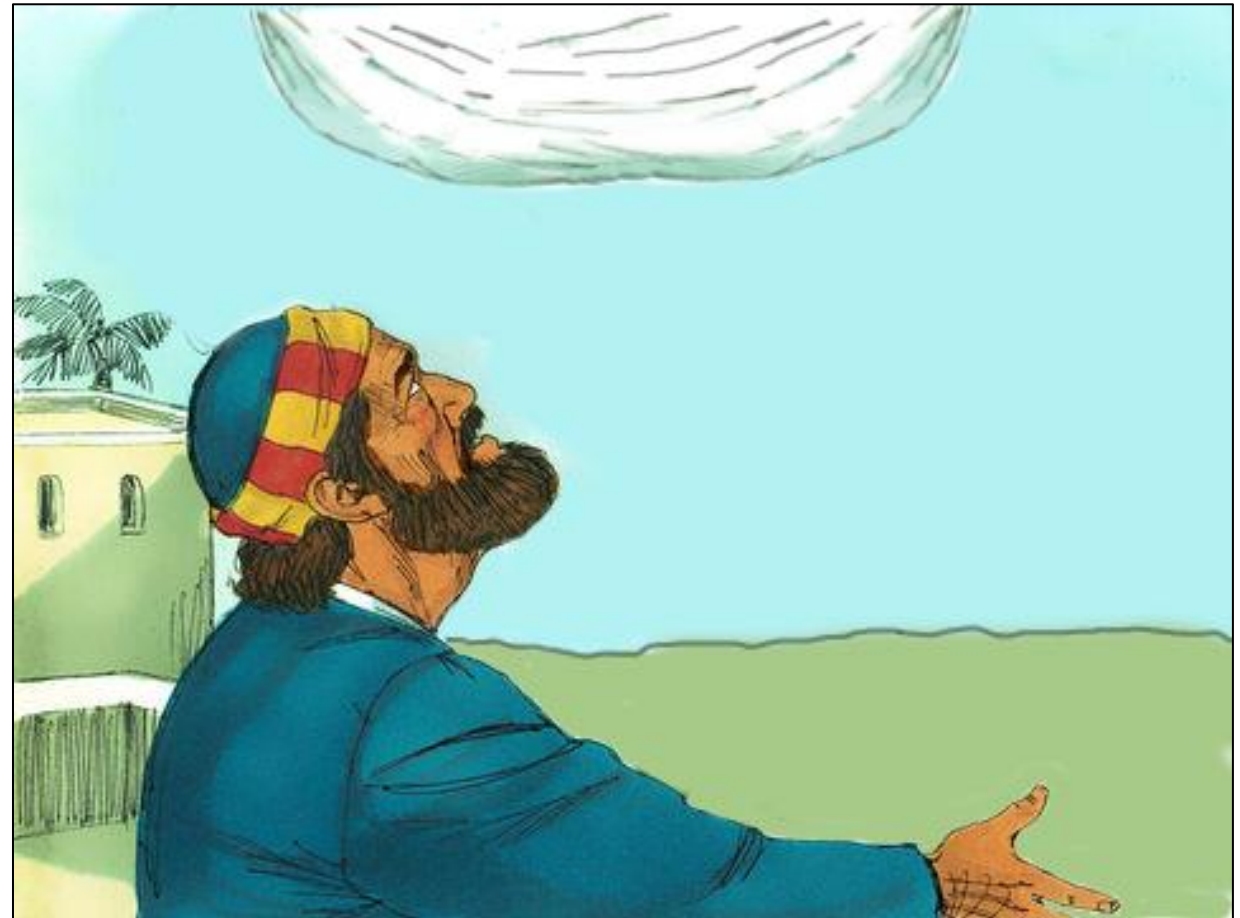
God puts him into a kind of out of body state.



Vision number 2 - What Peter saw

He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

- * Heaven opened – a sign of divine revelation coming down
- * A large expanded sheet held by 4 corners
(held up by some kind of power)
- * It came down to his level – earth.



Look ! all kinds

It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air.

An extensive collection of creatures
- land animals and birds
'Clean' and 'common – unclean'
creatures according to Jewish laws.

A full description is given for
emphasis.



A message from God

Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Who is speaking? God is.

Get up – action

Peter – that's you

Kill – catch something and kill it.

Eat – what you have killed
– prepared or raw?

Clear instructions.



A negative response

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied.



No way Lord!

These are incompatible words

no + Lord

Contrast Cornelius' response.

Essentially he is saying -

You are not serious Lord, are you?

He is an observant Jewish man.

"I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

He had followed the kosher food laws given in the bible.(eg. In Leviticus)

I'm a good Jew I don't eat ceremonially unclean food.

These Laws were given by God (sensible in Israel's environment) but were also meant as a way of preserving the Jewish nation as a distinct people – obedient to God's laws.



God's Answer

The voice spoke to him a second time,
"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

God made the rules and he can change them when they have fulfilled his purpose. (Some rabbis also taught that the food laws would change when the Messiah comes)



When God makes or declares something acceptable to him then it must be counted as 'clean' to us.

Emphasised in triplicate

This happened three times,

This is a really important development and it needed to be emphasised in triplicate so that Peter 'got it'.

(also 3 gentile men were about to arrive)



Did he still say 'No, Lord' three times?

and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

GONE !

Symbolically the creatures were taken back into God's presence.

What did all that mean?

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision,

He hadn't worked it out yet.

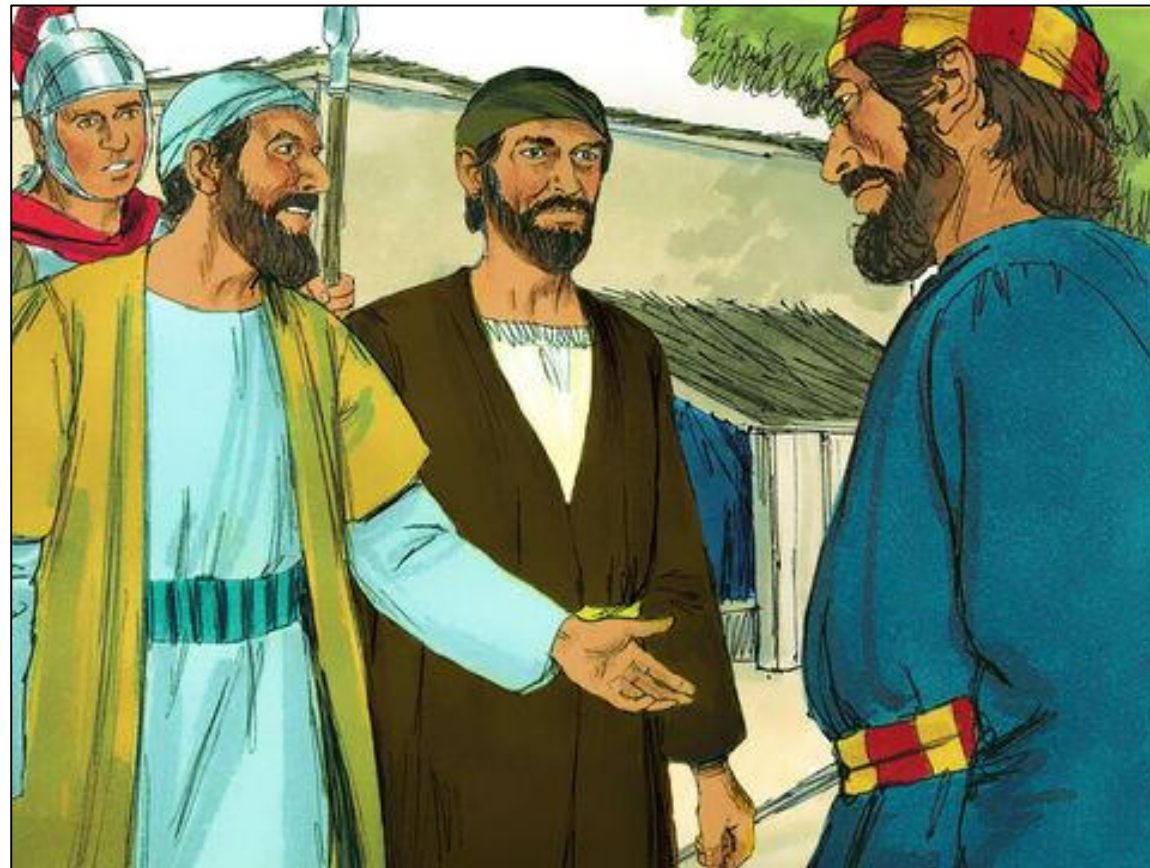
Does that apply to you and me at times?

With God's guidance – He will make the important things clear in his time.



Just then ... God's perfect timing

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and **stopped at the gate.**



Is Anybody in?

They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

They found the place.

This confirmed the guidance for them.

They called out.

Did they as gentiles approaching what they knew was the home of a Jew keep their distance?



**MARKS
THE SPOT**

Let there be light!

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him ...

Peter is still working on it when the Holy Spirit's illumination/ explanation of the application comes.



It's not just about food – it's about people.

the Spirit said to him , "Simon, three men are looking for you.
So get up and go downstairs.
Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

The Sprit speaks to Peter and gives him:-

Specific details

***3 men**

But he's not told that they are gentile men!

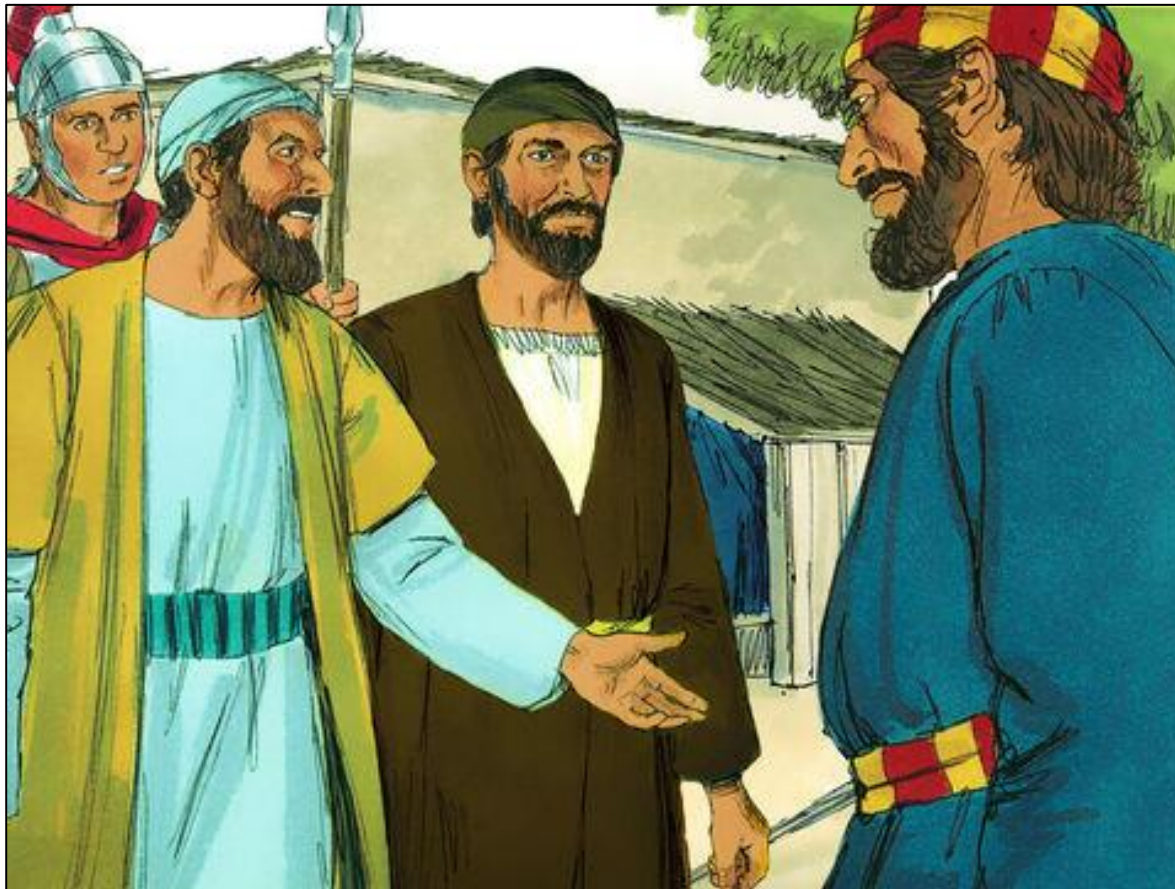
He will find that out.

***A clear warning – don't hesitate to go.**

***Assurance that it is OK - I have sent them !**

What is this all about?

Peter went down and said to the men,
"I`m the one you`re looking for. Why have you come?"



The right choice

The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people."

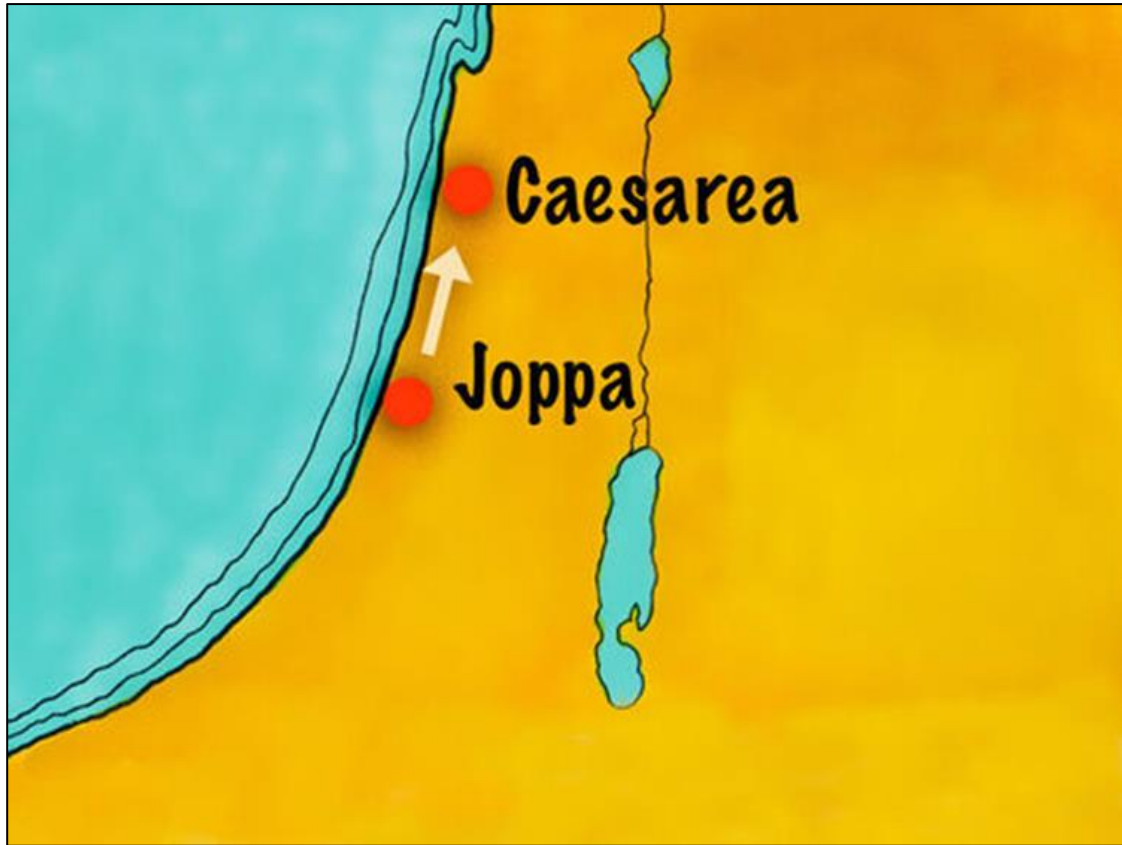
They give a full reply – describing their master who sent them - and presenting him as a good man.

God's choice of Cornelius as the first gentile is to make it easier for Peter and other Jews to think about accepting the changes that are happening as from God. He is a gentile of good character and integrity and believes in Israel's God.



Confirmation and a wonderful invitation

"A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."



An angel told him to ask you to come and speak.

And the Spirit just told Peter he should go!

Ready to go - tomorrow

Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The time being what it was – afternoon – they could stay the night and set off early the next morning.

Peter (a Jew) invited them (gentiles) into Simon's HOUSE to be GUESTS

Things are changing and becoming clearer to Peter.

But there's much more to come.



A Dramatic Development

Two Visions – One Message

God wants the gentile peoples to know Him too.

He may employ angels to help, but the job of telling people how to be saved is given only to humans – YOU.