

[Peter] saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. (Acts 10:11-12)

Abiding God, you show no partiality. People from every nation who fear you and do what is right are made right by your grace. We pray that through us you would reach out in love to those who are strangers, knowing that only you have the power to turn strangers into friends, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

Throughout the days of the Old Testament, God had worked through his chosen people, the Jews. God wanted the Jewish people to be a light for the nations (Isaiah 49:6). With the coming of the Holy Spirit in Christ, God began to bring all people into the family of faith.

Read: Acts 10:9-35

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

The believers of the early Church met together in Scripture and prayer, and they lived their lives in love and service to their neighbors.

Most of the very first Christians were people with a Jewish background. They spoke the same language and were used to worshipping together. However, as the church continued to grow, many Gentiles (non-Jews) also became followers of Jesus as well.

This was one of the first challenges faced by the early church. Though Jews and Gentiles saw each other as foreigners, God taught them how to be one community in Christ. As Paul later wrote: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Discussion Questions

1. Read Deuteronomy 14:3-20. In the Law of Moses, what were some of the animals that Jewish people were not allowed to eat? Why do you think that God would have given his people such rules?
2. Read Mark 7:14-20. In this passage, what did Jesus tell his disciples? How was he helping them (and us) understand the true nature of sin? If not food, what is it that Jesus says makes us "unclean"?
3. Read the lead-up to today's story in Acts 10:1-8. Who was Cornelius? What was his job and position? How does the Bible describe his character?
4. Why do you think most Jewish people would have been suspicious of Cornelius or would have been cautious about meeting him?
5. What did the voice tell Peter in Acts 10:15? How does today's story show that God was not just talking about different kinds of food, but about different kinds of people?
6. Read Acts 10:34-35. How would you describe what is meant by "not showing partiality" (v. 34)? In what way is this a matter of fairness and equal opportunity? How is this different from simply saying "all people are equal"?
7. Read the follow-up to this story in Acts 10:44-48. How did the Holy Spirit confirm God's will for the Gentiles? Why was this so important for the early church?
8. Read Ephesians 2:13-18. According to these verses, what did Christ accomplish? How does this change the way we treat one another?