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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON SHEET

LESSON 1—SECOND QUARTER FOR
APRIL 4, 1909.

Text of the Lesson, Acts x, 1-48—
Memory Verses, 13-15—Golden Text,
Acts x, 35—Commentary Prepared
by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

This lesson really covers chapters x and xi, 1-18, for the whole of that portion is devoted to the record of Peter and Cornelius. It is the story of the reception of the first gentile household into the new company called the church, and Peter is the human instrument in connection with an angelic ministry, a vision and a special message from the Spirit. As in the case of Philip and the eunuch, we see the special interest of heaven in a truly seeking soul. The last we heard of Philip he was at Caesarea, for that was his home seemingly (chapter viii, 40; xxi, 8), and we cannot but wonder why he was not used to help Cornelius, but it was neither he nor Paul, the special apostle to the gentiles, but Peter, whom the Lord chose for this service. As Peter was used to gather the first company of Jews, so he is used to gather the first gentile, for to him were given by our Lord the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. xvi, 19). We know the church is not the kingdom, but the present age is the "mystery of the kingdom," and the church must be gathered and this age close before the kingdom can come.

Cornelius, the centurion, makes us think of the one who had such great faith and also the one who said at the crucifixion, "Truly this was the son of God" (Matt. viii, 5-10; xxvii, 54). If any man could be saved by character, as we hear on all sides today, surely this man could, for consider what is said of him in verses 2, 7, 22, 30, 31, and yet Peter has to come and tell him words whereby he and his household could be saved (xi, 14). He had to tell him of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and of forgiveness of sins through Him. If man's own doings can save him, then there was no necessity for the sufferings of Jesus Christ as the sinners' substitute, but without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, and there is no sacrifice but His by which sinners can be saved (Heb. ix, 22; Lev. xvii, 11; Heb. i, 3; Acts iv, 12). Cornelius was truly a devout man and lived up to the light he had, and to such God has respect and will somehow send them more light, even though he must needs employ angelic ministry.

One afternoon as he was fasting and praying a visitor unannounced stood before him clad in heavenly clothing and assured him that his prayer was heard and his aims remembered before God and that a man in Joppa for whom he should send would tell him what he needed to know (verses 3 to 6 and 20 to 3). Immediately he sent two of his servants and a soldier to find Peter. Notice in this connection that the Lord in heaven knows where we sojourn, who owns the house, the owners occupation and all other details of our life, for all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The servants being on the road Peter needed to be prepared to receive them, for he still considered it unlawful to come into or keep company with one of another nation (verse 28). See, then, how God prepared him. He was very hungry and would have eaten if anything had been ready, but while they made ready for him he fell into a trance. Many a housewife would be glad oftentimes if some of the hungry would do likewise. Note carefully the vision in verses 11-16 and see, if you have anointed eyes, the church gathered from Jews and gentiles.

We are all unclean, but the church must be gathered from such (1 Cor. vi, 9-11). As the sheet was let down from heaven, all must be born from above. The sheet was held in heaven. We are kept by the power of God and in due time shall be as a church caught up to heaven. The fine linen suggested by the sheet speaks always of righteousness—His, not ours, but ours in Him. In the seven passages where we read of "heaven opened" it is always to reveal something concerning Christ and His redeemed. While Peter considered the meaning of the vision the men from Caesarea were at the door inquiring for him, and the Spirit having said, "Behold, three men seek thee; arise, therefore, and get thee down and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them" (verses 19, 20), all was clear and plain for Peter.

Having lodged the strangers overnight, on the morrow Peter and six of the brethren (xi, 12), a party of ten

started for Caesarea. Cornelius had called together his kinsmen and near friends and awaited the arrival of Peter. Having received him all too reverently and told him all, he added, "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (verse 3). What a perfect attitude for a congregation to be in, and how the Lord would work if it was always so! Peter began to tell of Jesus of Nazareth, His life and death and resurrection by the forgiveness of sins, and that atonement and of peace through his blood the prophets had borne witness to Him, and while he was speaking the Holy Ghost fell on all who heard, and they spoke with tongues and magnified God. Then Peter baptized them and received them into the visible church.

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