

Acts 11:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

Analysis

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision. Peter begins his defense of baptizing Cornelius by describing his supernatural experience that challenged Jewish exclusivism. The detail "in the city of Joppa" establishes the geographical setting and connects to Acts 10:9-16. "Praying" (proseuchomenos, προσευχόμενος) indicates this vision came during devoted communion with God—divine revelation often accompanies seeking God's face.

"In a trance" (en ekstasei, ἐν ἐκστάσει) means literally "standing outside oneself"—a state where normal consciousness is suspended for direct divine communication. This wasn't meditation or imagination but God-initiated revelation. The vision of "a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners" contained clean and unclean animals, symbolically representing all peoples and nations.

Peter's detailed recounting demonstrates the profundity of this revelation: God was dismantling the ceremonial barriers separating Jews from Gentiles. The repeated vision (three times) and the Spirit's explicit command to accompany the Gentile messengers left no doubt about God's new direction. This verse marks a pivotal moment in Acts—the gospel breaking free from Jewish-only restrictions to become genuinely universal.

Historical Context

This account comes from Acts 11, where Peter defends his controversial actions to Jerusalem church leaders who criticized him for eating with uncircumcised Gentiles (11:2-3). The incident occurred around AD 40-41, approximately a decade after Pentecost, when the church was still predominantly Jewish and struggling with the implications of Gentile conversion.

Joppa (modern Jaffa) was a Mediterranean coastal city with mixed Jewish and Gentile populations. Peter was staying with Simon the tanner (Acts 10:6), a detail indicating his growing openness to ceremonially unclean occupations. Cornelius, the Roman centurion in Caesarea, represented the first documented case of direct Gentile conversion without prior Jewish proselytization.

The Jerusalem church's resistance to Peter's actions reveals how difficult it was for first-century Jewish Christians to accept that Gentiles could be saved without first becoming Jewish proselytes. The ceremonial food laws had served for centuries as identity markers separating God's people from pagan nations. Peter's vision declaring all foods clean (10:15) symbolized the obsolescence of these barriers in Christ. This controversy was ultimately resolved at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does God use prayer as the context for revelation and direction in our lives?

2. What cultural or traditional barriers prevent us from obeying God's call to reach all people?
3. How can we discern between personal preference and divine conviction regarding cultural practices?
4. What does this passage teach about God's heart for global missions and ethnic reconciliation?
5. How should we respond when God challenges our comfortable religious traditions?

Interlinear Text

Ἐγὼ ἦμην ἐν πόλει Ἰόππῃ προσευχόμενος καὶ εἶδον

I was in the city of Joppa praying and I saw

G1473 G2252 G1722 G4172 G2445 G4336 G2532 G1492

ἐν ἐκστάσει ὄραμα καταβαῖνον σκεῦός τι ὡς

in a trance a vision descend vessel A certain as it had been

G1722 G1611 G3705 G2597 G4632 G5100 G5613

ὁθόνην μεγάλην τέσσαρσιν ἀρχαῖς καθιεμένην ἐκ τοῦ

sheet a great by four corners let down from

G3607 G3173 G5064 G746 G2524 G3588

οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἥλθεν ἄχρις ἐμοῦ.

heaven and it came even to me

G3772 G2532 G2064 G891 G1700

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