

Who was Simon the tanner?

Simon the tanner housed Simon Peter while Peter ministered to believers in Joppa (Acts 9:32-43). Joppa is known today as Jaffa and is located 40 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It perches on a high cliff overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and served as the port city for Jerusalem. A tanner is a leather-maker. Simon was in the business of treating animal hides to produce leather, a trade that was considered unclean by the Jews of his day. Most likely, Simon the tanner chose to work in the seaport of Joppa to more easily receive the pelts coming in and to ship the finished product out. His house was “by the sea” (Acts 10:6), probably at some distance from the rest of the community, to allow the offensive smells related to his work to dissipate.

It was during his stay in Simon the tanner’s home that Peter received the revelation from the Lord that salvation was also for the Gentiles (Acts 10:10-16). While on the roof of Simon the tanner’s home, Peter saw something like a sheet lowered from the sky containing an assortment of animals, both clean and unclean (verses 11-12). Peter heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat” (verse 13). Peter resisted, having never eaten non-kosher food before (verse 14), but the voice replied, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (verse 15). This vision was repeated three times, and then Peter heard the Spirit saying that three men were looking for him and that he should go with them without hesitation (verses 19-20). The men showed up on cue, and, because of the vision, Peter welcomed them into the house.

The fact that Simon Peter lived with Simon the tanner for a considerable length of time and felt comfortable welcoming strangers to stay with him there (Act 10:23) may indicate that Peter was working or apprenticing as a tanner himself. Although Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade (Mark 1:16), he may have been earning his keep by working in the

tanning trade with his host, Simon.

The three men who came looking for Peter at Simon the tanner's house were sent by a Roman centurion named Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea. Cornelius, a Gentile, had earlier received a vision from the Lord instructing him to contact Peter and bring him to Caesarea (Acts 10:3-8). Peter left with the men the next day to return to Cornelius, and several believers from Joppa went with them. It is possible that Simon the tanner was among them (verse 23).

When Peter arrived at the home of Cornelius, he shared the gospel, and the entire household was saved. The Holy Spirit fell upon all of them, and Peter began to understand his vision (Acts 10:44-48). God had prepared him for a tradition-shattering idea: Gentiles were to be welcomed into the fellowship of God's people. After all, here were Gentiles who had received the same Holy Spirit the Jews had received at Pentecost. The Jews had believed that the Messiah had come only for them (Romans 3:29; Galatians 3:27-29). But now Peter was a witness to the fact that the church was extending to all people groups, in fulfillment of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8. Peter was soon able to share the news of what God was doing with the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:1-18).