

Acts Chapter 10

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[0 : 0 0] We are studying together, verse by verse, the Acts of the Apostles, and we arrive now at chapter 10. And it is safe to say that chapter 10, which records the account of the conversion of Cornelius, and chapter 9, which records the account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and chapter 2, which records the account of the Day of Pentecost and the outworking of that, these are three of the very most strategic and important chapters in all of the Acts of the Apostles.

I've pointed out to you before, and so say I now again, it is probably due to the varied interpretations that are arrived at from the Acts of the Apostles that we have so many different churches, denominations, groups, etc., that we do today.

And virtually every one of them that differs one from the other has a different approach to the Acts of the Apostles, and they emphasize different things. But I say this without apology and without fear of unjust repetition.

The key to understanding the book of Acts is in knowing that it is a transitional book. That is so important. It is moving.

It is the account of moving from one thing to another. What are the things? They are the plan and program of God. Because when you get into the book of Acts, and all preceding that, everything is about the kingdom of heaven come to earth.

[1 : 3 6] That's the goal. That's the objective. That's where all of the emphasis is. That was the message of the prophets in the Old Testament. That was the message of John the Baptist when he introduced Jesus as the Messiah.

That was the message of Jesus. It was the same as John's repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And that kingdom would be realized when two things were fulfilled.

One was the price had to be paid for the removal of the curse that was imposed by Adam in his sin. The scales of God's justice had to be balanced.

What would it take? It would take the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the place of sinful man to enable God to justly, I say to justly remove the curse because the cost has been paid.

The price for sin has been paid in the finished work of Christ. That was the first step. And the second is Israel as the chosen people of God have to come and be on board with Jesus as their Messiah, embracing him for who he was and what he did, and understanding that he was God's provision.

[2 : 4 9] He was indeed the Messiah of Israel. And once Israel gets in line with that message, then that kingdom will be established. The first thing, of course, took place 2,000 years ago.

The second never has. The nation of Israel still resides in a position of spiritual blindness and in disobedience to God. And Romans 9, 10, and 11 offer the commentary on the status of the nation of Israel.

God is not finished with them, and he will once again bring them back on line, and the entire world is going to revolve around this tiny nation of Israel, and Jerusalem will be the world headquarters.

Funny thing about this is, it isn't embraced or understood even by most of the Jews today. Yes, they regard themselves as the chosen people, historically and traditionally.

God had something special to do with them. But most of Jewry today is really in the dark, spiritually, about this whole thing. And it's tragic.

[4 : 04] But one day, one day they will be enormously enlightened, and their Messiah is going to return. So, so much of this has to do with Judaism.

And, fellas, it just pains me that so much of Christendom, and so many of our churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, have completely just missed the boat on this.

But I understand how they do, because I missed the boat on it completely for the first 15 years of my Christian life. And it wasn't until then that I began to understand some things.

And I'll tell you, there's only one thing that will do it. And that is a verse-by-verse analysis of the books of the Bible. Because if a preacher is given to just reaching in and pulling out certain texts or certain topics and preaching on that, you'll never get it.

You never get the continuity. You never get the flow. You never get the historicity of it. You don't see the connection with prophecy, because these things are lost. And the typical thing to do is to just preach on those things that are popular.

[5 : 14] And that's what most people are doing. But when you go verse-by-verse, then you get it all. You get the tough stuff, and you get the easy stuff. But you get that which provides enlightenment and understanding.

And it is priceless. So, we open now with Acts chapter 10 and another pivotal point that is really, really important.

If you just consider briefly the previous page you're on, we won't turn to it, but it just says that this has to do with after Simon Peter was used of God to heal this man, Anus, then we are told that Peter resided many days at the house of Simon the Tanner.

And this was in the city of Joppa. It's still a major seaport in Israel today. It is right on the coast.

And Simon the Tanner, anybody who was a Tanner 2,000 years ago, had to have an abundant supply of water.

[6 : 30] And this is one reason that Simon the Tanner was right there on the coast. This is on the Mediterranean coast. Joppa is one of the Mediterranean, one of the ports there. And when we were in Israel, we got to visit the place that tradition says, we don't know if it really was or not, but tradition says this edifice, this structure, was the house where Simon the Tanner lived.

And this is where Peter was staying. And it is, we'll see later on, it is up on the housetop when he sees this vision of the sheet let down from heaven.

So let's get into the text. In chapter 10, we are told, there was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius. And by the way, this Caesarea, it was named after one of the Caesars. This Caesarea is called Caesarea by the sea.

And the sea, of course, was the Mediterranean. There's another Caesarea that is way up in the north in Galilee, up near the Lake of Galilee. And it is called Caesarea Philippi.

And it too was named after one of the Caesars. And Caesarea Philippi is most well known for where Peter made that great confession when Christ said, who do men say that I, the son of man, am?

[7 : 52] And Peter said, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. That was in Caesarea Philippi. This is Caesarea by the sea. And the fascinating thing, if you go there today, even as a tourist, you can still see protruding out just like great arms coming right out of the earth.

You have to go down about maybe oh, eight or ten feet of earth and sticking out all along there are huge columns.

They are horizontal columns. They were once vertical columns that were built right on the edge of the seashore in honor of one of their gods.

The Romans built these columns. And then over time, with the sea coming in and more land being eroded, the land under these columns collapsed and they just fell over like that.

And they are projecting out from the beach. And you can just walk along there and see there are massive columns like, you know, like three feet in diameter. And they probably were twenty, thirty feet high.

[9 : 02] And there may be six or eight feet of them sticking out, hanging right out over the shore. It's just a fascinating place to be. This is Caesarea. And this man Cornelius was stationed there as a Roman centurion.

And he was, this is a rank. Centurion was the rank that the officer held. And it simply indicates that he had a hundred men under his jurisdiction.

We would call it a company or a unit or a squad or whatever, but it consisted of one hundred men. And Cornelius was this centurion of the band called the Italian band.

This is in the Italian regiment, Roman army. We might say that, we might say that his group, that his, and this is the word from which we get the word century, of course, which means a hundred.

His group would have been considered one of the elite crack troops in the Italian army. And they were assigned to this Caesarea.

[10 : 08] Caesarea was actually the seat of government for the procurator of Judea and that area. This was kind of like the Roman nerve center in Israel.

But they located it at Caesarea for the benefits of the temperature and the ocean breeze and all of that. So when Pontius Pilate was the procurator of Judea, any time and every time he got an opportunity, he would slip away.

He would leave Jerusalem and get over to Caesarea where the weather was a lot nicer, where all of the amenities were available that were provided for the Romans, etc. So it's kind of like Caesarea there on the coast was the epitome of what Rome had to offer in a foreign land.

And this man was stationed there. His name was Cornelius. I hadn't known too many Corneliuses. Ohio State used to have a quarterback, didn't they? The name of Cornelius Green. Remember that?

Yeah. And one of my favorite Bible teachers who is now with the Lord was named Cornelius Stam. And he's authored a number of books relating to dispensational themes.

[11 : 25] and the man was a great Bible scholar and he made an enormous contribution to the cause of Christ, founded the Berean Bible Society, etc. So I haven't known too many Corneliuses, but it's a great old name.

And we are told that he was a devout man and one that feared God with all his house. This means he was not your typical Roman army officer because he would have been a pagan.

He would have been polytheistic. He would have been a worshiper of many gods and he would have seen his emperor who was ultimately his commander-in-chief.

He would have seen his emperor as deity himself because the Caesars of Rome considered themselves God or God-like and many of the people under them did as well.

But this man is described as a God-fearer, which was rather unusual. Now let me explain this because a God-fearer in this term is used a number of times, particularly in the book of Acts, where Peter would be addressing the crowd and he would say, Men of Israel and you who fear God.

[12 : 40] That's another way of saying men of Israel and all of you Gentiles who respect and honor the God of Israel as the only true God and then he would go on and make his speech.

That was what a God-fearer was. A God-fearer was a non-Jew who believed in the God of Israel. That there was but one God and this God was the God of Israel.

That made them a God-fearer. If they were more serious about their faith, they could become a proselyte. A proselyte was not only one who feared God, but was one who submitted himself to Jewish circumcision and was circumcised and offered an animal sacrifice at the temple before the priest and he was accepted into the commonwealth of Israel as a full-fledged Jew.

He was not born a Jew. He is a proselyte. He is a convert to Judaism. And Cornelius had not gone that far, but he was a devout man. That is, he was serious about his faith.

The 20th century New Testament says he was a religious man and one who revered God as also did all his household. We don't know exactly what this household consists of.

[13 : 59] Probably near relatives, maybe servants as well, possibly even some of officers or men who were under his authority. But he had obviously convinced others in his family and in his immediate circles of the virtue and the wisdom of embracing the God of Israel.

So, they were committed. And we are told that he gave much alms to the people. If you understand anything about Judaism, you know that one of the requirements of a good Jew, quote unquote, is that you share your wealth with others.

That you help to lift up the downtrodden and the poor and that you make contributions to what we would call the poor box or the alms box. This was money that was given to offset the needs of the less advantaged and it was a recognition because there was no welfare system, no salvation army, no Lutheran services, no Catholic charities, none of this stuff existed.

And whatever was to be given would be given usually at the temple. Remember in the Gospels where the lady came up to the temple site and where the coffer was to put the money in, remember the widow's mite?

She just put in all that she had and Jesus said the wealthy man who came in and made a big show out of what he was contributing and how much he was giving, that he didn't give as much as that little lady who gave the widow's mite because the wealthy man gave out of his abundance and he had much more.

[15 : 42] But the widow gave everything she had. That was the widow's mite. And it didn't begin to compare with what the wealthy man had given so far as dollars and cents were concerned.

But Christ said she gave much more. She gave all that she had. So this man was accustomed to giving alms to the people and that's always a test of one's faith. You know, the anecdote is repeated about John Wesley who in the 1700s was told that, Mr. Wesley, did you hear that so-and-so was converted?

And Wesley said, no, really. Well, tell me, was his purse converted too? Because where your heart is, where your treasure is, that's where your convictions lie.

And out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And out of the abundance of the pocket book, the contributions come. So are we sold enough in our faith and in our belief to support it financially?

This man obviously was. He gave much alms to the people. We're told he was liberal in his charities to the people. He practiced liberal benevolences among them.

[17 : 05] And notice, I think the Rue translation helps it better and the New English Bible as well. He was generous in giving alms to the people of Israel because he considered them as worshippers of the true God.

And he prayed to God always. He was a real man of prayer. What do you think he prayed about? What do you think he prayed for? Any ideas?

I think so. I think so. Fellas, probably the most honorable prayer that any of us can offer to God is a prayer for more light, more truth, more understanding.

This was the prayer of the Apostle Paul when you read Ephesians and Colossians and I pray for you that you may increase in wisdom and understanding and in the knowledge of his will.

This was Paul's great burden, not only for himself but for those to whom he wrote. And I cannot think of a more honorable prayer that you can offer up to God than this.

[18 : 23] Oh Lord, I want to know the truth. And I don't know how you're going to get it to me. Because God is unlimited in the ways he can impart truth and understanding and enlightenment.

But if we can pray with an open heart that we want to know more truth because we want to be obedient to it.

We want to walk in it. We don't want to know truth and information just so we can cram our head with a lot of facts and a lot of knowledge and say I know this and I know that and I know six other things.

But the real rationale for wanting to know truth is because we want to respond to it. We want to walk in it. We want light so we can walk in the light.

And I am convinced that anybody who offers that prayer to God, it is not going to go unanswered. Nothing delights the heart of God more than dispensing information to his people who are open to it.

[19 : 30] And Cornelius had to have been one of those kind of people. I think Cornelius was saying something's missing. There is more. I don't know what it is, but I just sense that I need to know more and understand more and oh God would you open my eyes?

Would you would you maybe he even prayed this way. I'm reading something into this, but I don't think it's too far-fetched. Maybe Cornelius even said, would you send me somebody who can tell me what I need to know because I really want to know.

Well, he prayed to God always and he saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day.

Clockwise, that's about three o'clock in the afternoon. an angel of God coming into him and saying to him, Cornelius, and when he looked on him, he was afraid.

That seems to be the response everybody has when they're confronted with an angel. And I've explained to you in the past that the reason for this, I think, and here this is a vision, but the reason, I think, is because when everybody is initially afraid over the appearance of the angel, in the Old Testament, Mary was afraid, and the first words were fear not, Joseph was afraid, and the first words were fear not, Zacharias was afraid when he was in the temple offering incense, and an angel appeared, and the main reason was, is because this angel appeared out of nothing, from nowhere.

[21 : 19] It isn't as though he looked up and saw someone walking toward him and came up to him, no, no. The fear factor was engendered by the reality that where there was nothing and nobody all of a sudden appearing out of nowhere and nothing, this being is here.

Whoa! Where did he come from? What is this? Natural inclination is to be scared witless because you know this is not ordinary.

And when the angel appeared to him, he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, what is it, Lord? And the angel said unto him, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

Hmm. fascinating. Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God and now send men to Joppa.

Joppa would be just up the coast a few miles and call for one Simon whose surname name is Peter.

[22 : 42] He lodges with one or he's staying with one Simon a tanner. Simon's house would have been easy to find because the tannery always emitted very unpleasant odors.

This was the smelly part of the area. You've been in places where there's been paper mills and things like that. I remember when I was a kid, I spent the first five or six years of my life in Chillicothe, Ohio.

Within a stone's throw of where we lived, there was this huge paper factory. It was called the Mead paper company. Huge, employed thousands and thousands of people.

The only thing that nobody liked about that in town was the smell. It had an odor to it that was really rank. The closer you lived to the place, the stronger the odor was.

We lived right back door to it. It really smelled. I can still smell that all these years after. If you lived close to a tannery in the first century, there would have been a similar kind of odor that would have been very telltale in its evidence.

[23 : 56] Simon was the tanner, and his house is by the seaside, and he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

Wow, this is breakthrough stuff. This is opening a whole new kind of chapter. I want you to note, it's really interesting, and I think this is very important.

I've asked myself when I've read this, why didn't the angel just tell him? After all, the word angel means messenger. Why didn't the angel tell him what he needed to know?

I don't think the angels know. I don't think the angels understand. When Peter wrote his second epistle, he talks about our salvation, and he describes it as something that the angels desire to look into.

And the word that is conveyed there in the Greek means that angels, it's almost like our salvation is recorded, the details are recorded in a book or in a writing, and that the angels want to just peel back part of the page and look under there and see what this is all about, because they don't know.

[25 : 18] Angels, in many ways, are superior in power and in wisdom to mere human beings. They know a lot that we don't know. They have capabilities that we don't have.

But when it comes to this thing called redemption and human salvation, angels do not seem to understand or have a clue, because none of them have experienced it.

And there is an old gospel song that talks about going to heaven, and one of the lines in it goes something like this. And when all the saints of God are gathered together and says, and when we sing redemption's story, they will fold their wings.

For angels never knew the joy that our salvation brings. Angels are of a different created order, and there is no redemption that is accruing to the benefit of angels as it is to human beings.

So this angel could not tell Cornelius what he needed to know. but the angel knew who could tell him, and his name is Peter.

[26 : 33] And Peter is going to play a really super strategic role here. Peter is a key individual, no pun intended. God, Jesus Christ, gave to Peter back in Matthew chapter 16, the keys to the kingdom of heaven, you'll recall.

And a key in the Bible speaks of authority. It means that the one who has the keys has the authority because the one with the keys can lock or unlock.

And that makes them very strategic and very pivotal. And Peter is that. And it's significant that even though the conversion of Saul of Tarsus has already taken place, he is too new on the scene to have any credibility.

So God is using this individual who was well established, well recognized, well accepted by the Christian Hebrew community.

And I say Christian Hebrew in a, maybe better to say believing Hebrew because at this time, guys, bear in mind, at this time, there were no Christians.

[27 : 47] Didn't exist. What there was, was believing Jews. But there were no Christians. Paul makes it very clear when he writes to the Ephesians in chapter two, that before they came to faith in Christ, they were simply strangers to the commonwealth of Israel without God, without hope, without Christ in the world.

That was their plight. So there will not be any Christians until you move along further in the book of Acts when more and more Gentiles come to faith. And even then, it is a gradual kind of thing.

Because Cornelius is not even a full-fledged pagan. He is a God fear. He is one who has already embraced the true God of Israel.

So it isn't going to be a quantum leap for him to come from that position to faith in Christ because he's already embraced the God of Israel. And we read in verse 8, send men to Joppa, just down the coast, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter.

He's lodging with Simon, he's lodges with one Simon a tanner, the name, the same as a guest, and it's a little confusing because we've got two Simons here.

[29 : 10] We've got Simon Peter, who is the apostle, and we've got Simon the tanner. So keep your Simon straight. And he will tell you what you ought to do. And then when the angel, which spoke unto Cornelius, was departed, and a devout soldier of them, where are we here?

Yeah, when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually, and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

He dispatched these men. And on the morrow, as they went on their journey, these men that Cornelius sent, and they drew nigh unto the city, about this time, Peter went upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.

Well, why in the world would he go on the housetop? Well, this is a cultural thing, and you've got to remember that the houses in and around Israel, and this is still true today, too.

Most all of them are built with flat roofs, flat roofs, and they have a parapet all the way around them, about two feet high, so that you can lean over and look over without falling off, and it was a protection for children, because children would often go up on the housetop and play, women would go up on the housetop and hang out their wash, and sometimes people would have an outdoor party or a picnic up on the housetop, a lot of times because it was cooler, and there was a little breeze blowing, and especially if you were near the Mediterranean, you'd get the breeze blowing in from the sea, and there were a lot of advantages to being up on the housetop, and it was a favorite place for a lot of people to go up at the time of prayer and pray on the housetop, and that's exactly what he was doing.

[31 : 03] Remember that quote in the Gospels where the Lord said to his disciples, that which you have heard in secret, proclaim from the housetops.

You could go up on the housetop, you could communicate with your next door neighbor without going over to your neighbor, you could just talk to everyone he stones throw away, and houses were built close together, and you could start a conversation with your next door neighbor, and the gist of it could be around the whole neighborhood just from the housetops.

That's the way they communicated. I mean, what are you going to do when you don't have an internet or a telephone? You just use the housetops, and that's what they did. So, as Peter went upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, this would be about noon.

They reckoned their time from six o'clock in the morning, and the sixth hour would be about six o'clock, or be about twelve o'clock noon. And he became very hungry. It's lunch time.

And would have eaten. But while they made ready, that is, no doubt, the ladies were downstairs, preparing the lunch, we are told that Peter fell into a trance.

[32 : 15] This was like a vision. And a significant thing about a vision that differentiates it from a dream is that, of course, when you dream, you're asleep.

Daniel, in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, had a number of dreams. And when you're sleeping, you've had dreams too.

Some of them make sense and some of them don't make sense. But the significant thing about a vision is you're not asleep. You're awake. And yet, this vision comes to you and it kind of leaves you transfixed.

And from that we get the word trance, of course. and it means he's just captivated, almost immovable, just like almost like you're awake but you're not fully conscious as you're accustomed to being.

And this trance is going to be a vehicle through which God is going to speak to him. And in this trance, he saw heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth.

[33 : 47] I can't vision this. I've never contemplated anything like that. So let's just read some of these alternate renderings. A certain vessel descending as it were, a great sheet let down by four corners upon the earth.

Something like, 20th century says, something like a great sail was descending, let down by its four corners towards the earth.

Weymouth says, an enormous sheet let down to earth by ropes at the four corners. If you can envision this thing, the New English Bible says, a thing coming down that looked like a great sheet of sail cloth.

It was slung by the four corners and was being lowered to the ground. Well, Peter would have been familiar with this sail cloth apparatus because he was a fisherman and they were used to mending sails and nets and things like that and the size of them and all the rest of it.

So, envision this, if you will. Here's this great sheet suspended like a rope at each corner and it's let down horizontally as if the ropes are holding it up, one at each corner.

[35 : 06] And inside this, contained within this sheet, were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth and wild beasts.

And the key here is all manner, means all kinds, means about everything you could imagine was confined in this great sheet. And there came a voice to him saying, Rise, Peter, kill, and eat.

Goodspeed says, Get up, Peter, kill something, and eat it. Now, remember, it is lunchtime, but at the same time, this is a vision.

This is something he is seeing in a trance. So, are these things real? I don't think they're real at all, but I think they appear real.

They really look real to Peter. He sees them as real, but this whole thing is not physical. It is, I think, immaterial.

[36 : 17] It is presenting itself as reality to Peter, and Peter sees it as reality. And his response is, not so, Lord, or, no, sir, I cannot, never, sir, by no means, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

What's he mean? he's simply saying, my religion, which I take very seriously, will not allow me to eat anything that is not kosher.

And I see in this great sheet let down all kinds of animals, and I'm not permitted to eat all kinds of animals. I am a Jew, and I respect my kosher diet, and we've been told in the law of Moses what is permissible to eat and what is not permissible to eat.

I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And verse 15, let's turn the page, and the voice spoke unto him again the second time, and here's what the voice said, what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

what does that mean? Do you not see, fellas, now this ought to be so obvious that it almost insults your intelligence for me to bring it out, but can you not see a drastic, radical change taking place here?

[37 : 57] Is the authority behind this voice the same as the authority that put the prohibition on eating certain kind of animals under the Mosaic law?

Is this the same authority? Is this the same God? If it is, why the change? What's happening here?

All of a sudden, for all these years, it has been illegal, forbidden, for Jews to eat certain animals.

Gentiles? They didn't have any such prohibition. A Gentile was considered a dog. A dog will eat anything. A Gentile could eat anything he wanted to eat, anything he could handle, but not so with a Jew.

A Jew had certain stipulations. He was not to eat certain animals. Now, this authority, this voice behind this is saying, God has cleansed these things?

[39 : 04] What is that all about? They weren't cleansed before. Why are they cleansed now? What is responsible for this change? And here's what's brewing, and it is so significant.

It is so important. This is the first real indication that God is reaching out beyond the seat of Abraham, and he is reaching for the non-Jew, the Gentile, and all manner of four-footed beast, clean and unclean, together.

To the Jew, it was unthinkable. That's the way it had always been. Had not God himself said, I will make you a peculiar people unto me.

You have nothing to do with the Gentiles. You don't give them your sons and daughters to marry. You don't adopt their gods. You don't adopt their religion, and so on. There was this separation, this distinction made all throughout the history of Israel.

And now, the barrier is coming down. What is this? Peter, Peter is absolutely dumbfounded. And you know what his first response is?

[40 : 24] this can't be. This can't be. This goes against everything I've been taught. And I am not going to do this.

I don't know what this is. It's some kind of a trick or delusion or something, but I'm not going to fall for it. And he refuses. So, what is the one behind the vision going to do?

He's going to continue appealing to Peter. And eventually, Peter will get the message. And now, our food is here, so we'll have to discontinue this. Yes, Joe.

Is this preparing for his meeting with Cornelius? Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. In fact, this is strategic and key to his meeting with Cornelius. because when he goes to Cornelius, who is Cornelius?

He's a Gentile. He's not a Jew. And all of these animals together is nothing but a picture of Jew and Gentile together, the two making one new body that Paul makes so clear in Ephesians.

[41 : 31] And, fellas, with each verse, this thing gets more and more exciting and more involved and more enlightening. Can't wait to share it with you.