

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Acts 10”

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With

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Acts 10

Acts 10 is the account of Peter's vision whereby God teaches him that Gentiles are acceptable candidates for the gospel and the first transparently Gentile convert in the book of Acts – the centurion Cornelius. The chapter takes us into Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles and the theological question of whether unbelievers can ever please God.

Here is the paper referenced in the show:

[Proselytism and Godfearers](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 47, Acts 10. I'm your residential layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you?

MSH: Pretty good. Good to hear you again.

TS: Absolutely. Well, we're doing Acts 10 this week.

MSH: Yes we are. We're going to do the same thing we've been doing, reading through parts of it and then commenting on things and working our way through the passage and I doubt that this one will be as long as the Q&A was.

TS: We got a great response in the Q&A so I know people really appreciate the Q&A episodes.

MSH: Well good. We'll, of course, plan another one of those when the time comes and we'll blow the time gasket out like we did last time.

TS: Sounds good. I know everybody else included we'd like a four hour Michael Heiser Q&A question where there's no time limit.

MSH: Yeah, well, believe it or not, that has been done live and I don't know. I want to say it sort of gets ugly in the end. When I did it, it went well but I just haven't been any like that for quite a while. Alright, well, let's jump into Acts 10 and starting in verse 1, we have,

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

MSH: Now a couple of brief comments here to begin with. We see in verse 2, Cornelius is described as a devout man who feared God with all his household, and then, adding about giving alms and praying continually to God. Down in verse 22, Cornelius is going to be described as an upright and God fearing man who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation. So these descriptions are important. They give us an idea of the Gentile situation, at least for some people in the first century. Now there's a good article on this from the Dictionary of New Testament Background by Scot McKnight, and I have uploaded that for Trey to attach to this episode. I'm quite sure he'll do that, but McKnight, just to summarize what you'll read in that article, divides the, there's a range of attitudes among Jews toward Gentiles, the other nations. How did Jews

look at Gentiles in the first century is really the question. And broadly speaking, there were some who, McKnight uses the term, were in favor of integration. There were integrating tendencies among certain Jews. And then there were others who resisted contact with Gentiles. So as far as people who are thinking about, hey, the Gentiles aren't so bad. We should sort of be friendly to them or integrate them into what we're doing, McKnight sort of divides that category, the integrating category, into four subcategories. He refers, for instance, to a general universalistic outlook among some Jews.

This is just a wide range of opinion, Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles. What he means by a general universalism is that there is this notion among some Jews, embraced readily, that, hey, Yahweh, our God, is the God of the whole world, and he rules over all the nations. They belong to him. They may or may not have been thinking about reclaiming the nations, but if they're familiar with prophecies in Isaiah, that's going to be part of the picture. God is still interested in them, and if God's still interested in them, and he's the God of all gods, and he's the God of the whole world, then we should let that influence our thinking. The Gentiles are of interest to God and so we ought to be at least in some way positively predisposed toward them. Other people just sort of wanted to have good friendly relationships with Gentiles, not necessarily doing things cooperatively in terms of religion with them. So that was the second attitude, just to be friendly toward them. Don't shun them, in other words. Some, though, took it as far as participation.

So there were Jews and Jewish synagogues who practice a fairly regular permission to Gentiles to participate in the Jewish religion. That doesn't mean they invited them into the synagogue and our speaker today is Joe Gentile over here. But rather, that there are some to holidays, maybe a Passover, a feast, kind of what happens today when a Jewish family might invite a Christian friend to celebrate Passover to see what goes on. So you have that happening in the first century, this sort of broad general participation. And then finally, there were those Jews who wanted full integration, and that could be anything from a Jew arguing that, hey, we, as Jews, and Gentiles within the culture that were living in here in a Judea, that's of course under Roman rule, we should all have the same rights. We should all have the same social status. We should be able to hold political office together. We should be able to cooperate in all sorts of business deals and really anything, even including intermarriage. And that was controversial because of what the Torah says about intermarriage, even though there's not a strict all-encompassing prohibition against marrying Gentiles. McKnight goes through some of that in the article.

There was a strong prohibition but it wasn't total. There were exceptions. There were Jews who said, this is okay. It's okay to be fully integrated in life and society, even marriage, raising children. To them it didn't threaten them. Typically, the argument against that sort of integration is that you start to lose your identity. If Jews start marrying Gentiles, they lose their distinctiveness. Even if people, aside from the fact, that, hey, maybe we should care because the Torah says don't do this or that, setting even the theological question aside, there were people who resisted it just because, if we do this long enough, it's not going to mean anything to be a Jew. How will we maintain our in our ethnic identity? So that was the integrating side. On the other side of course, the opposite is that no, we shouldn't have anything to do with Gentiles. And that sort of worked its way out in the different expressions as well. Some Jews who resisted relationships with Gentiles would sort of be separatists. In other words, this was usually about maintaining personal purity. We have to be separate from Gentiles in a whole host of areas.

Otherwise, we will be ritually or ceremonially impure. So that was one view. Others were not that extreme.

They just said, well, there are some things we can do with Gentiles but we have to restrict their access to Temple, to our religious customs, to our religious ceremonies, to what we do in any aspect of worship. Another view was that was a polemic, that we should sort of go on the offensive when it comes to Gentiles. Every time we run into Gentiles, we should make a point to say, hey, these people worship idols. In other words, we should be critical. We should criticize Gentile religion. We shouldn't be thinking about making friends with them or what can they do with us religiously or hey, do you want to come over to my house and do this so you can see what we do. No, we should say, you people, essentially, are heretics and your idolaters and that's just pretty much the end of the story. Of course, along with that came a real strong view about intermarriage and social interaction. So you have a wide spectrum of opinion and that's going to come out in this passage because, as we move on in a moment, Peter's actually going to allude to this whole thing about, hey, it's really against the rules I should be here in your house because you're a Gentile.

He alludes to this tension, this friction, either culturally and/or religiously. But Cornelius, though, is described as a God fearer. And basically, this was a person who, while not converting to Judaism, would be someone who respected Jewish customs, believed in the Jewish God, sort of tried to worship the Jewish God, the God of Israel, in ways that didn't require going to Temple or didn't require things, acts, that would be offensive to certain Jews, basically, someone who really wanted to know more about the God of Israel and wanted a relationship there because there's this sense that the Jews are onto something here and this is preferable to what we're doing over here in Gentile land with all these idols. So there was an attraction to certain points of Jewish theology, if we could put it that way. And so you had Gentiles who would pray to the God of Israel and they would be respecters of things like circumcision, and Sabbath and whatnot. In other words, they're trying to do what they can without roughing the feathers of the community and knowing that, hey, in my pursuit of this faith, of this religion, I'm going to hit a wall at some point because I'm a Gentile, but that's okay. I'm going to do what I can, try to participate as much as I can, and that's Cornelius, a devout man who feared God with all his household, upright God-fearing man. So you have this category of Gentiles that the Scripture uses. Scripture isn't unique in this regard. There are other ancient texts that refer to God fearers among the Gentiles. But this is essentially what they are. So they're trying to have this relationship or have this faith, but knowing they're going to hitting the wall at some point. Another thing I want to mention is in verses 3 and 4, we have here in the comment about Cornelius,

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius."⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?"

MSH: I think I need to comment here that Cornelius refers to this angel as Lord, it's the word *kurios* but he is not seeing the risen Christ. This is not an allusion to the risen Christ. It's not even an allusion to the angel of the Lord from the Old Testament. In scholar speak this would be referred to as Angelomorphic Christology. That's not what we have here. *Kurios* here is just a term of respect and the New Testament uses *kurios* this way, and it was widely used in in the

Greco-Roman literature. If you would say something like, can I do this sir, sir would be a legitimate translation of *kurios*. In other words, it's just a phrasing, a term of respect. For instance, in Matthew 21:28-30, Jesus is teaching there and he says,

A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' [MSH: Again, this is another parable sotry]
²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.

MSH: Again, we're familiar with this parable but the words sir there, when the second son says, yeah, I'll go sir, he is speaking again to his father, that word is *kurios* in the Greek New Testament. So it's not the only time when *kurios* is used. Again, this is a term of respect but that does happen. And it's best to see that going on here in verses 3 and 4 when Cornelius is talking to this angel. So let's pick up in verse 9. We have Peter's of vision here. So we have this little opening snippet about Cornelius, then he meets the angel and he sends two of his servants and a soldier to go get Peter. Meanwhile, we have in verse 9,

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, [MSH: So while those guys are coming to meet Peter] Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance

MSH: Now I'll just stop there. This word trance I think calls for some comment. This is not some epileptic seizure or something like that. Now literally, it does say there came upon him an ecstasy and that might make you think that Peter just freaked out like you'd see someone go into a seizure or something like that. That actually isn't the case. This particular word in Greek is used in the Septuagint in passages like Genesis 2:21, remember Adam, this is Genesis 2 and Genesis 15:12 Abraham, where Adam and Abraham have a deep sleep come over them. So where in the Hebrew text the word translated deep sleep in English is actually a Hebrew term *tardemah*. That term in the Septuagint is *eckstasis*. So it refers to sort of a visionary deep sleep. In other words, you essentially pass out and have a vision, or something like that. Again, it gets translated trance here in Acts chapter 10, so it's not a seizure or any sort of wild flipping out or anything bizarre like that.

But it is this deep sleep that happens on occasion in the Old Testament when God has information to give. Now let's think about this for a moment. A Hellenistic Jew, a Jew who is familiar with their Old Testament by means of the Septuagint, when they're reading this in Acts, or they're hearing the story orally, and they say Peter got hungry and he wanted something eat while they were making him a meal, he was overcome by *eckstasis*, knowing that this term is used for *tardemah* in Hebrew, the deep sleep that comes upon Adam and Abraham. This links, think about it, links what's going to happen to Peter is sort of cast in the same way or is something of the same category or the same qualitative event as God's speech to Adam and

God's speech to Abraham. Again, that's important because of who they were, Adam and Abraham, especially when you look at Abraham. In Genesis 15, what is about? What is the deep sleep that comes upon Abraham about? What is Genesis 15 about? Well, it's about the covenant. If we go back and look at that, this is where, Genesis 12, God had shown up in the form of a man to Abraham and said I'm going to make from you a great nation, so and so forth. We have this covenant language Abraham believes. In chapter 15 it says Abraham believed God. God counted it to him for righteousness. Abraham is told by God, okay, take certain animals and cut them in half, lay the sides apart. And then wait, verse 12 says,

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

MSH: Now this is where, in the rest of the scene, we have the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch appears and passes between the pieces, the separated, the dead separated carcasses, to form the covenant relationship between God and Abram. So, we have there the covenant with the Jewish, what would be the Jewish nation, the descendants of Abraham, Israel, and the term that's used for the deep sleep that comes over Abram when God informs him about some of these things, then he in his dream sees this, the smoking pot, the flaming torch, pass between the pieces. That episode in the Septuagint is referred to as *eckstasis*, that event. And now we have the same thing happen to Peter. So, again, if you're a Hellenistic Jew, you are mentally connecting these things. Okay, the covenant was with us, the descendants of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, and now we hear Peter, over reading this account about Peter with Cornelius, and the same thing happens to Peter. And the message this time is, let's just pick up. He falls into a trance in verse 10,

¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. ¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" ²² And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well

spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.”²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

MSH: So, we'll stop there. You get the point. We have two separate *eckstasis* events using the Greek term, Septuagint, and here with Peter in Acts chapter 10. They are conceptually linked by virtue of the term and what's happening. But the first one, of course back in Genesis 2, we have Adam, the original family of God. Now we get Genesis 15, the family of God defined as the people of Israel, and now here, we have the same messaging, all these things connecting saying, hey, look, what God has called clean don't call unclean. He's prepping Peter and the people reading this or hearing the story understand that, wait a minute, that same God who is behind these other things is behind this. There's a continuity of thought here. So the language is designed to put all of these things together, and of course what is the result? The result is that Gentiles are included. Gentiles are also covenant people. Gentiles are also part of the people of God. And that's what we're going to find out in the rest of the story. So we pick up where we left off.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered.²⁸ And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

³⁰ And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

MSH: Now catch what Peter says, verse 34,

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

MSH: I'm going to stop there. I'm going to rabbit trail a little bit on a theological irritation that I have. I can remember sitting in Bible College, sitting in, I took some seminary classes and other contexts. Because, I guess there's lots of reasons I've been trying to be charitable here. The whole, Christianity begins with this assumption about our need for salvation, that we are lost in sin, that the wrath of God abides on those who are outside Christ, John 3:36 and verses like that. So it's no wonder, because of that theology, that people are taught, and I was one of them, that, and here we go, that it's impossible for an unbeliever to ever do anything at any time that pleases God. I think that's bunk. I think it's bologna, and I think the verse we just read just blows it to bits. And this is a common idea, especially in reformed or very Calvinistic circles. I have a quotation here. This quotation is from a book called a New Systematic Theology the Christian Faith by Robert Raymond. Raymond is a well-known reformed theologian. Here's his quote. "Because man is totally or pervasively corrupt, he is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption. He is unable to discern, to love or to choose things that are pleasing to God." Now usually what's offered in defense of that is a verse like Romans 8:7-8, says,

⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

MSH: The problem is that this idea or this interpretation, this understanding of passages like Romans 8 and the whole concept of depravity is just flatly contradicted by other passages. In Acts 10 is one of those instances. The verse could not be clearer. Peter says, 'in every nation, anyone who fears him, fears God, and does what is right, is acceptable to him.' Now Peter's not saying that, oh, the Gentiles, if they're nice people, they're going to heaven. There is no merit before God. We're not talking about salvation here. We're not talking about, can an unbeliever, putting it in Peter's context, can a Gentile unbeliever do works that make God happy, that make him acceptable to God, and therefore, he's on his way to heaven? That is not what we're talking about. We're talking, and what Raymond is saying and what reformed, very Calvinistic theologians will say with regularity, is that the person who is outside of Christ can do nothing ever ever ever ever, in any circumstance, that pleases God. When you take the unbeliever, the unsaved guy takes his dog out for a walk, the wrath of God abides. When he ties his shoes, God looks at that as angry.

I think it's a real misguided way of expressing the notion of depravity and of our need. The fact of the matter is Acts 10 says, look, when unbelievers do things that are in accord with God's will and God's law, God is glad that they do them. That does please God. Look at what Paul says in Romans 2 when he says, 'the Gentiles, who don't have the law, do by nature the things of the law.' So are we to conclude that when a Gentile, who doesn't even have the law, either accidentally or deliberately does something that is in-line with God's law, in line with the moral ethical precepts of the mosaic law, that God looks at that and has a hissy fit? Or that God looks at that as angry? No, that is just absurd. What Romans 8, if you actually go back and look at the context, Paul's trying to contrast someone who has the Spirit and someone who doesn't have the Holy Spirit, lost and then saved and whatnot. And he's talking about people who are controlled by their flesh.

They live sinfully. It's not dismissing or by default ruling out the notion that an unbeliever can ever do anything that pleases God, but that's how passages like that are typically taken. This is a little irritation of mine because I think it's a real misunderstanding of depravity. And I think Acts 10:34 just flatly contradicts it. I just don't know what Peter could've said to make the point more clear. We're not talking about being acceptable to God in a salvation sense, but Peter says in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. In other words, God looks at that and he approves, he's glad, he likes it, he enjoys it. Now in Cornelius's case, that wasn't sufficient. It's God who's telling Cornelius, hey, go get Peter. Peter will tell you what you need to believe. Cornelius is still, in the context of the New Testament here, in the context of Pentecost and the whole Jesus event of the crucifixion, resurrection, he's still an unbeliever. He has never heard about Jesus and this is why God is intervening, to get him the gospel and frankly, I think, this is a theological precept. I think this is a good theological point. Hebrew says, 'without faith, it is impossible to please God.' Those who are seeking God, God is going to notice that. God will see the heart that wants to believe, or at least is directed in that direction. Let me get the actual phrase here.

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

MSH: If you're in the King James, its reward those who diligently seek him. God sees all that. He sees Cornelius. He approves when Cornelius does right according to the law that he doesn't even have, that was never given to the Gentiles. He sees Cornelius' heart and says, look, I'm going to intervene here directly. Again, part of the context is you're dealing with events after Pentecost, getting the whole church thing, the circumcision neutral thing we call the church, getting that kick started. But he intervenes and says, here's what you need to believe. I see your heart now. I'm going to get you the gospel. And he knows Cornelius is going to respond because he's responded to the other things the way God wants him to. So this notion that God is perpetually angry at everything an unbeliever does, you brush your teeth, that makes God even angrier at you, I think it's absurd to think. And I think it's unscriptural. Yes the wrath of God does abide on the unbeliever. In other words, if they don't become believers, they're going to be separated from God forever. That's true. But it's more talk about God's disposition here toward, again, what he sees people doing and I just think this is a real misunderstanding of depravity, and really sort of turning aside or ignoring some other passages that just flatly contradict it. So let's resume here, finish up in Acts 10 Peter says,

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was

with him.³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

MSH: That's the end of the chapter. So the last thing I want to say something about here, in these last few verses, the issue of the spirit coming and baptism shows up again. Now think about the turf that we've covered so far in the podcast going through the book of Acts. We have the baptism pre-Pentecost. We mentioned this really in the initial one or two podcasts when we restarted the Naked Bible podcast when we jumped into Acts. Before Pentecost, baptism marked those who aligned themselves with John's message, John the Baptist, and later that of Jesus. What was the message? Well, the kingdom of God was at hand. So baptism marked a belief or a faith in that message, and it involved, when Jesus shows up to be baptized, it involved embracing Jesus as Messiah.

You remember John said, hey, I'm just baptizer guy. This guy, you need to follow him now. So before Pentecost, baptism marked those who had chosen, who had decided, to believe that the kingdom of God was at hand, and that this person that John pointed us to, this Jesus, who's out there preaching about the kingdom of God, this is the Messiah. We believe that, and we're going to be baptized, and align ourselves with that message and with him. Now after Pentecost, baptism was what you did when embracing the apostolic preaching about Jesus that he was, in fact, the Messiah and Savior, raised the third day, and so on and so forth. If you go back and look at the passages, we had Acts 2:38, which, of course, is controversial. Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins. Well, if you looked back at Acts 2:41, three verses later, we often sort of lose this one for verse 38. It said, “so those who received his word were baptized and there were added that they about 3000 souls.” So the issue is we've heard this message and we believe it. We should be baptized. Acts chapter 8, not too long ago, we covered this, where there was this line in it. It was kind of interesting. This is Philip and his activities. This is before he gets to the eunuch. This is when he's in Samaria. It says, “when they believed Philip”, this is Acts 8:12,

¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

MSH: We talked about this language earlier. Again, the point is that in Acts 8 it's not the being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus was sort of inadequate for any sort of spiritual thing. The point of the description or the point of the language there is that all they had known to that point was this message about Jesus and about the kingdom. They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus but God needed to show them that this faith, faith that they were exercising here that was showing up in Samaria, was connected. It was of the same quality. It's the same happening here that happened back in Acts 2 and the signage for that was the coming of the Holy Spirit. And so when the Holy Spirit shows up and empowers and is something spectacular with these people, everybody seeing this knows, okay, this is the same thing that happened back in Acts 2.

We know this is from God now. So you needed to have that. You see the same thing in Acts 10, and we get Acts 9. Paul is baptized in his new conversion experience. In Acts 10, where we are at today, Cornelius, they're baptized. This time they are baptized in the name of Jesus but the Holy Spirit comes right then at that event. We don't have two separate occasions of a prior baptism and then a coming of the spirit. It's just the context of Acts 8 that those were two separate events because it was the first time anyone had gone to Samaria to preach the gospel. So we had people show up there that had heard some of the message before, had been baptized into Jesus, but now we need to know that what's happening here in Samaria is of the same God, God's behind this, just like he was at Pentecost. So that's the role of the Spirit here. And this is what you see happening in Acts 10. Now we have Gentiles and that's really freaky. The Gentiles can be included, full Gentiles.

We've talked about proselytes before. We've talk about what sort of half Jewish people, as the gospel spreads and the nations started be reclaimed, you're picking up all these different classes of people. Well now, here we are in Acts 10. We're finally where the rubber meets the road. We're at full-blooded, full-blown Gentiles, and Cornelius was someone who was positively predisposed to the revelation given to the Jews. He was a God fearer but had no idea about the gospel. And so God responded to his primitive inadequate faith but still genuine, God was happy with it. It's just the sort of response God would like to see. In other words, God didn't get angrier when Cornelius knelt to pray and ask God for help to believe, or what to believe, or who knows what the content of Cornelius' prayers were. It doesn't make God angrier. It's just a response God wants, and so we have this whole story. And the capstone of it is that the Spirit falls upon all who heard the word, and then they are baptized.

So we have all the elements together again. And so for the Jews present, especially Peter, Peter knows this is, not just because of his vision, he already related to Cornelius that night. I got it, but when the Spirit comes, he convinces everybody there in the group who didn't have the vision and they're just listening to what Peter says. What we see happening right in front of us, that the Gentiles are part of the people of God now, this is linked back to the program that began in Acts 2 and we know all about that. So what you have here in these stories are these theological connections, these theological links that are helping both the people present during the event and people reading later on, confirming the notion that God is behind all of this. It's not an aberration. There's consistency and coherence through all of it.

TS: OK, is there a distinction between salvation and what is acceptable to him in verse 35 for the Gentiles?

MSH: I think it's just a generic reference because, it is a generic reference to being acceptable to God means God looking at what you doing and he's saying, well, I'm glad you're doing that. It's acceptable to me. In other words, it doesn't drive a wedge further between us. You're responding to what you know in a good way and when you do something that's in my law, I'm glad because it's my law. It's a good law. It's what you should do. It's the way people should live. It has nothing to do with meriting salvation, because if that were the case, God wouldn't have needed to tell Cornelius, go to summon Peter, go get Peter.

Why do I need Peter for? I thought I was acceptable. I thought I was saved. It has nothing to do with it at all. It's obvious that Cornelius needs information, and that information is the gospel, and God speaks to him, sends Peter, tells Peter go with them when they show up. I'm in this. I'm behind it. God knows the program, all the nations are supposed to be regathered. And this episode reinforces the whole point of what was initiated at Acts 2 when the Jews are sent back into the nations to start telling people about the Messiah.

TS: In verse 38 we have the word devil there. Can you touch on that?

MSH: Yeah, it is Diablos. I would take that not as a generic reference to like demons, but I would take that sort of oppression, yes, in the immediate context and if you went back and looked at these things since the demons are conceptually linked back to the devil and they are making life awful and doing horrible things to people. Okay, I'll admit it, that's there. But to be oppressed by the devil is, in my thinking, to be owned. Every human being is owned by this figure we call the devil or Satan. Why? Because he is lord of the dead. Every human dies, excepting people who are alive when the Lord comes back and all that. Let's just think generally here. Satan is lord the dead.

He has legal theological ownership over every human being because they die. When they die, they are by definition not with the author of life, unless they have taken care of the guilt problem. And this really can get us far off field because this really traverses on to the Romans 5:12 topic, and why does anyone go to hell and what about guilt? What about a little aborted fetuses or infants or whatever like that? And I don't want to, we can't just do that at the end of the podcast here. But just speaking in general terms, you are owned by the devil because he is the lord of the dead, and you need life. You get that through being united to Christ in his resurrection and if you're united to Christ, your sins are forgiven. You are not guilty before God.

That's the essence of salvation. So I would take this oppression, yes in the immediate context, we're talking about bad things done to people at the behest of the powers of darkness. But I think, more broadly, it's a reference to being lost, being under dominion.

TS: Do you have any other thoughts about Acts 10?

MSH: No, I got on my hobby horse there about verse 34. I've known people, let's put it this way. I've known people who taught at Christian colleges who have literally lost their job when they wrote a paper or taught in class, that yes, bad people, in other words, unsaved people, can please God. They can do something that God is not offended by. That is possible. I know people who've literally lost their job over that point of theology and to me, I don't know what to do with Acts 10:34. What else could Peter say or what else could the text say that makes that any clearer?

TS: Right, but there is a distinction between salvation and not saying that they are saved, but saying they can please Him, right?

MSH: That's right. That's what I'm saying. It has nothing to do with salvation. But so many of these people will, they'll buy that point because we all know that we're not talking works salvation here, but they will carry it to the nth degree and literally say that no act or thought that an unbeliever can do or think gets any response from God other than more anger. I just think that overstates the depravity case so badly and, personally, I think that in just in terms of practical theology here, that affects the way you think about people. It really creates a great potential for an adversarial relationship just out of the gate to people who don't share the faith. And we are supposed to be the bridge to them to help them believe.

Well, if we're just immediately thinking that God frankly hates them and they're enemies, it just creates this environment, this thought pattern of hostility, that everything they do or say that must be designed to attack me and overturn my faith and to pollute my mind, and destroy me. Look, we all know that there are people out there who do that, but it's really bad theology to think that even when this person can't even sort of gravitate toward God, and even if they do, that God is still angry with them until they pray the sinner's prayer, then everything changes. Well, it's just a system overstatement of their situation, their status. When God sees them searching, God is not offended. When God sees the unsaved guy turn from temptation and be loyal to his wife, that does not offend God. That's the law of God. That is a good thing. God is not going to call a good thing evil just because the person doing the good thing isn't yet a believer. I think it's a perverse notion, an exaggeration of what depravity means.