

## The Book Of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

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### Study Notes: Acts 10:30-35

As we return to our study, we find Peter has now entered Cornelius' home, and discovers that it is filled with family members and friends – all anxiously awaiting to hear what this Jewish man has to tell them.

- **Why Have You Sent For Me?**

When Peter asks Cornelius why he has sent for him, the latter starts by recounting the vision of the angel he had some days before. Look at how he starts his narrative:

- **Four Days Ago: vv. 30-32**

“Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

- **The “Third Hour” – Another Look:**

“Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon.”

Christians' statements on Prayer: 1. “The only prayer that God hears on the part of a sinner is the prayer of salvation.” 2. “God doesn't answer the prayers of the unsaved.”

The Pharisees' statement in John 9:31: “We know that God does not

listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.” – John 9:31

### **“Does God ever answer the prayers of the unsaved?”**

God hears and answers the prayers of his children: “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” – I John 5:14

But what about the unsaved? Cornelius saved was a God-fearer. He was a generous man. He was a respectable person. But he wasn't saved – not in the New Testament sense.

Yet, as he is praying, God sends him an angel to direct him to go get Peter so that the latter can tell him HOW to be saved!

According to I John 4:19, believers have “standing” with God - the legal right – so to speak – to appeal to God for him to intervene in a particular situation. But John says our requests must line up with God's intentions and purposes.

The unsaved do not have “standing” with God, but does that restrict Him from hearing their prayers when they are in alignment with his purposes and intentions? Evidently not – because the angel told Cornelius, “God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.” – v. 31

The Ninevites: After Jonah pronounced their destruction ... “The Ninevites believed God.” (Subsequently, the king sent out a decree that everyone in Nineveh should, “... Call out earnestly to God, turn from his evil ways and from the violence in his hands.” - Jonah 3

God's response: “When God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—He relented from the disaster He had threatened to bring upon them.” Jonah 3:10

- Two Takeaways: 1. Believers have standing before God. We can

come with confidence to His throne in times of need (Hebrews 4:16).  
 2. God can hear and answer the prayers of the unsaved when such prayers fit his purposes and intentions.

- **A Man In Shining Clothes: vv. 30-32**

“Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter.’”

Cornelius adds one piece of information and omits another. 1. He omits any mention of his fear when he saw the angelic messenger. 2. He calls the heavenly messenger, “a man in shining clothes”.

The Greek word for “shining” is “lampros” – from the word “lampo”, which means, “to shine” (radiant light). In the New Testament, “lampros” is always a tip-off that the entity is either an angelic messenger or a glorified person. See: Mark 9:3; Luke 24:4; Revelation 15:6, 22:16

- **Ready To Hear: vv. 33**

“... And it was good of you to come.”

The Greek word here for “good” is “kalos”. What Cornelius is really saying is, “You have done well to come”. In other words, as he thanks Peter for coming, he is recognizing the various hurdles that Peter had to deal with in order to answer the summons.

Peter had to set aside the common Jewish insistence that Jews could have no dealings with Gentiles. He had to overcome the ingrained prejudice that Gentiles had no part in the next kingdom. He even had to bypass the Church’s recent neglect of taking the Gospel to non-Jews.

It’s at this point that Cornelius says, “Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you

to tell us." See: Luke 5:17

F.F. Bruce: "Never had a preacher of the gospel a more promising audience as promising in its way as Philip's one-man audience on the Gaza road when he was invited to expound the Isaianic prophecy of the suffering Servant."

- **God Does Not Show Favoritism: vv. 34-35**

"Peter began to speak...". The original language is more down the lines of, "Then Peter opened his mouth..." In almost all ancient, historic speeches, the first words were carefully considered and crafted because audiences understood them to be the weightiest.

"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

The phrase, "I now realize" is the Greek word, "katalambano". It's only found three times in Acts; Acts 4:13; Acts 10:34; Acts 25:25.

"Katalambano" can mean, "to take eagerly", "grasp with force", "lay hold of", "seize with hostile intent" or "to gain control." It means to mentally grasp something.

Ephesians 3:18: "That you may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to (katalambano) grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..." – Ephesians 3:18

G. Campbell Morgan: "[Peter] had come to a new view, to a larger understanding, fresh light had broken in upon him."

What is this new truth? It's the truth that Paul will articulate in Romans 3:29-30: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one." - Romans 3:29-30.

Looking again at verses 34-35, Peter says, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

Is Peter saying that there are alternative paths to salvation that rest on the intentions and the behaviors of those who have not heard the Gospel?

Cornelius' Story:

Luke describes Cornelius as a "God-fearer" ("godly" man) - a generous man, who prayed to Yahweh regularly. In Acts 10:22, Cornelius' servants described him as a "righteous and God-fearing man" who was respected by the Jewish community.

- The "Acceptable" Memorial Offering: Acts 10:4

"Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

The phrase, "memorial offering" is translated from Hebrew into Greek. It is a direct reference to one of the Old Covenant grain offerings known as the "memorial portion" described in Leviticus 2:1-3.

- How are we to understand this statement about Cornelius' prayers?
- What does Peter mean when he says that God "accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

The Greek word for "accept" is "dektos". It is used very sparingly in the New Testament to denote various forms of the verb "accept".

John Stott: Two Possible Interpretations of Peter's use of the word "dektos" in relation to those outside of Christ's followers.

**1. Peter is speaking about believers – not pre-Christians.** Peter is not referencing good works and good intentions as a means of acceptance by God. Instead, he is describing the relationship that believers have in Christ. Fearing God and doing what is acceptable are the evidence of salvation – not the prerequisites. (See Paul’s use of “dektos” in Romans 2:9-11)

**2. Peter is not using “dekto” to mean absolute justification in the theological sense of “made right with God”.** Rather, he uses it in a comparative way: “God prefers righteousness to unrighteousness and sincerity to insincerity, and in the case of Cornelius God provided for him to hear the saving gospel.” – John Stott

- **What Peter Did Not Mean:**

Peter clearly did not mean that, apart from the Gospel, anyone who fears God and attempts to do what is right is justified or made right with God.

If Cornelius’ God-fearing, benevolence, generosity, and prayers could have justified him in God’s sight – why would God tell him to send for Peter?

The liberal theological view that anyone in any nation who attempts to fear God and behave by some godly standard is “accepted” by God circumvents the very truth that Luke is echoing in the Book of Acts.

Why, would Jesus instruct the apostles to “go into all the earth preaching the gospel” if anyone, anywhere, could simply fear God and try to live a righteous life?

Cornelius still needed to hear the Gospel, repent, and believe in Jesus.

The danger of isolating verses 34-35 is to create a “two-track” path for salvation. Peter is not saying that people like Cornelius are already right with God – because of their devout efforts.

What Peter has really and finally understood is that God does not show favoritism with respect to saving humans. God does not make a distinction between the races when it comes to offering salvation to all peoples – whether Jews or non-Jews.

As we will see a little later in Cornelius' story, God also gives the same Holy Spirit to anyone who believes in Christ – regardless of their ethnicity and despite their non-compliance with Jewish Laws such as circumcision.