

# Acts 10:1-23a: Do You See the Lord's Footprints in the Sand or Just Yours?

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## I. Introduction

Have you ever felt God walking next to you? After telling us to go and make disciples of everyone around us, Jesus says, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." What if Jesus didn't just walk next to you but went out ahead of you in order to prepare the necessary things to address the next problem headed your way? Would He do that? Has He done that in your life?

## II. Acts 10:1-23a: Have You Ever Felt God Patiently Discipling You Through Your Struggles?

Peter raised Tabitha from the dead, many came to faith in Christ because of it, and now he's staying at the house of Simon the Tanner, a man who was constantly rendered unclean under the Mosaic Law because he worked with dead animals. Now God is about to confront Peter with the BIGGEST unclean issue of his life: God's going to send him to the house of a Gentile!

**10:1-8, God disciples Cornelius**, as Peter is staying at the house of an unclean man, there's another man about 30 miles away in Caesarea named Cornelius. He's an Italian soldier. But there's something odd about him. Though he's a Gentile and a Roman centurion he behaved more like a Jew. He was a devout man who feared God with his entire family, gave generously to poor Jews, always prayed to God, and had at least one devout soldier under his command. This means that he went to synagogue regularly and led his entire family and others to believe and follow the God of Israel. And his religion was not a veneer; it ran deep. He had a daily relationship with God and sought to follow Him in everything he did which is why he gave his money generously to the poor and constantly prayed to God. Around 3:00 pm he saw in a vision an angel sent from God call his name. He was afraid, but knowing that God sent him, he replied, "What is it, Lord?" The angel informs him that his prayers and the money he's given to the poor has "come up for a memorial before God"—the angel is echoing the Old Testament language used to describe the smoke from the incense and offerings that were offered to God (Leviticus 2:2, 9; Numbers 10:10; Psalm 141:2). That is, this was not a one-way relationship; God had accepted this man, cf. Acts 10:35. God next gives him orders: he tells him to send men to get Peter from Joppa, who will then tell Cornelius what to do. Cornelius promptly complies and sends two of his household servants and a devout soldier who served as one of his close assistants. Cornelius is missing something very important and God has taken great care and concern to personally usher him, his family and friends into the Church. He's walking alongside him...do you see God walking alongside you when you need Him?

Was Cornelius a believer or unbeliever? Cornelius is usually considered an unbeliever, the first Gentile to enter the Church. However, it appears he's a heaven-bound believer in God in the Old Testament sense. How so? He obviously believes in the one true God. He also led his family and some of his soldiers to also believe and follow Him. Isn't this what the Old Testament saints did? They feared and believed in God and obeyed Him and showed their households to do the same. And God in return accepted them, e.g., Abraham. Isn't this exactly how God sees Cornelius, in fact, God says that he's accepted him as such, 10:35. Thus, Cornelius was saved (as every other Old Testament saint was saved) but he had not yet received the Holy Spirit or entered the Church. In the end, it doesn't matter whether or not Cornelius is heaven bound. What we do know is what God expects us to do with such individuals. We're not to guess at their "heaven" status, instead, we're to give them the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whether they need the full story or just part of it.

**10:9-23, God discipled Peter**, as all this is going on with Cornelius, God continues to disciple Peter in one of the most challenging events of his life. About noon Peter goes up to the roof of Simon's house to pray. He then becomes very hungry and while others are preparing lunch, God puts him in a trance. What Peter sees is a great sheet let down from heaven by four cords. In it are all kinds of animals, wild and otherwise, creeping critters, and various birds; these are both kosher and non-kosher according to the Mosaic Law. At that point God says, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter objects. He's never eaten anything unclean and he's not about to start now. So he refuses. God responds, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." God does this three times for Peter and then the sheet disappears into heaven.

This was a terrible dilemma for Peter; he cannot understand why God would tell him to eat something un-kosher. He's the one who gave him the kosher laws and yet He's now telling him to eat something un-kosher! As he's wracking his brain trying to figure this out, Cornelius' men have made their way to Simon's house and are now at the gate asking for Peter. At that very moment, God's Spirit begins to relieve Peter's mind. He tells him about the men, that He's sent them and he's to go with them, doubting nothing. So he goes down to meet them and they explain how they happen to be there: Cornelius, a Gentile and just man, who fears God and has a stellar reputation with all Jews, was commanded by God to summon Peter to his house. Peter then begins to realize that everything up to this point has been orchestrated by God: it was no accident that he went to Lydda and from there to Joppa and stayed in the house of someone unclean. God was patiently walking alongside Peter in one of the most difficult tasks of his life. God was sending him to usher the Gentiles into the Church!! Realizing that God was at work, Peter didn't hesitate to invite these three Gentiles into Simon's house overnight!

Why is all this such a big deal, what's the big deal with Jews mixing with Gentiles. As we'll see, Peter and the rest of the apostles likely thought that Gentiles had to enter the Church as they entered Judaism, by becoming Jews and adopting the Mosaic Law, including the kosher laws. So all of this is shocking to Peter. But God has been with Peter every step of the way. Before Peter ever realized the real mission God sent him on, He'd already gone before him to prepare the way.

**Whose footprints do you see in the difficult sands of your life, yours or the Lord's?** There's a famous poem titled *Footprints* (also *Footprints in the Sand*). In it, a man is walking along the beach with Jesus and scenes of his entire life are flashing in the sky. In each scene he notices two sets of footprints, one his, the other the Lord's. But he also notices that at the most saddest and difficult times of his life, there's only one set of footprints. Assuming they were his, he asked the Lord why He would abandon him when he needed Him the most. The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." Peter thought that he was going to have to solve the unclean problem on his own, but God had carried him all along. Peter didn't have to solve anything; God was going to solve it for him. Have you seen God's footsteps along yours? In fact, do you know that He goes on ahead of you to meet your problems before you ever do? Did you know that God was this close to you instead of up in the sky somewhere or buried in the Bible?

### III. Conclusion

*Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."*