

CORNELIUS: THE CENTURION (I)
Acts 10:1-8

Introduction:

1. Years ago we used a religious survey in door to door evangelism.
 - a. We asked people to answer a series of basic questions about their religious beliefs.
 - b. One question was, “Do you think the majority will go to Heaven?”
 - c. Almost everyone answered in the affirmative.
 - d. The follow-up question was: “If you died today, do you think you would be saved?”
 - e. After some deliberation, the majority answered “yes.”
 - f. Most based their salvation on a “negative goodness” by listing the bad things they didn’t do and the good things they did.

2. The Bible speaks of a man who believed in God and worshiped regularly.
 - a. He taught his family and members of his household to serve God.
 - b. He prayed often and regularly.
 - c. He was kind, compassionate and generous to the poor.
 - d. But he still needed to hear “words by which he and his household would be saved.”

Discussion:

- I. CORNELIUS WAS A ROMAN CENTURION.
 - A. The Roman army was the finest fighting force in the world.
 1. Its basic fighting unit was made up of one hundred men.
 2. Their captain was called a “centurion,” one in charge of 100.
 3. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army.
 4. Every centurion in the New Testament was honorable.

 - B. Cornelius was a Roman officer stationed in Caesarea.
 1. Cornelius is a Roman name; his unit was called “the Italian band,” meaning it was made up of soldiers from Italy.
 2. Caesarea was the seaport of Israel as well as the Roman capital of Judea.

 - C. Cornelius believed in the one true God.
 1. Many writers believe he was a proselyte to the Jewish faith.
 2. Some notable men among our brethren believe he was still

serving God under the Patriarchal Law, which continued for Gentiles when Israel was given the Law at Mt. Sinai.

3. The Law of Moses ended at the cross (Col. 2:14; Heb. 7:12), but the Patriarchal Law for the Gentiles continued until the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles.

D. An angel appeared in a vision to Cornelius when he was praying.

1. He said: "Your prayers and alms have come up for a memorial before God."
2. He was instructed to send to Joppa for Simon called Peter who would tell him what he must do.
3. Cornelius immediately sent a devout soldier and two servants to Joppa to bring Peter to Caesarea.

II. PETER HAD BEEN GIVEN THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM BY JESUS.

A. When Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, God's Son, Jesus promised to give him the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:16-19).

1. Keys are used to open.
2. Peter was privileged to open the door of the kingdom to the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2).
3. By inspiration, he foretold the Gospel was for the Gentiles also, but did not comprehend what he was saying (Acts 2:39).
4. Now Peter would open the doors of the kingdom to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18).

B. Peter was staying with Simon, a tanner, in Joppa.

1. As the servants of Cornelius approached Joppa, Peter went up on the housetop to pray.
2. He became very hungry, but while waiting for food to be prepared, he fell into a trance.
3. He saw a great sheet let down from heaven with all kinds of animals and birds, both clean and unclean (Leviticus 11).
4. A Voice commanded: "Rise, Peter: kill and eat."
5. Peter replied, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean."
6. The vision was repeated three times.

C. The men sent by Cornelius arrived as Peter pondered the meaning of what he had just seen.

1. The Spirit told Peter three men were seeking him.
2. The men related Cornelius' message to Peter.

3. He took them in to lodge them, something an orthodox Jew would not have done.
4. The next day, Peter went with them to Caesarea, but took six Jewish brethren with him (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 1 Tim. 5:19).

III. PETER ARRIVED AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE.

A. Cornelius had gathered his family and friends together to hear Peter.

1. He attempted to worship Peter, but Peter said: "Stand up, for I myself am also a man;" a pope would have received worship.
2. Peter explained that it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile but God had shown him not to call any man unclean.
3. Peter then asked: "For what reason have you sent for me?"
4. Cornelius related how an angel had told him to send for Peter.
5. He said: "We are all present before God to hear all things commanded you by God."

B. Peter began preaching the Gospel to them.

1. He reminded them of the facts about Jesus which were well known in all Israel.
2. The prophets testified that Jesus was the Christ.
3. The apostles were all witnesses of His death and resurrection.
4. Remission of sins was now available through Jesus Christ.

C. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word.

1. They all began to speak with tongues and glorify God.
2. Those who came with Peter were astonished because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles also.
3. Peter asked: "Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"
4. He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Conclusion:

1. This is one of several examples in Acts of people converted by the Gospel as it was preached by inspired men.
2. We must separate the law of conversion from the circumstances of the specific case - the binding action from those acts tied to a peculiar case.
3. In the second part of this lesson, we will note the part played by the angel, the Holy Spirit, God's providence, and the preaching of the Word.
4. In all cases of conversion in Acts, the Gospel was preached, sinners heard, believed, repented and were baptized in order to receive remission of sins.

