

Cornelius - Gentile Conversions D Reeve - July 2020

Acts 10 → 11:-18

Intro

Cornelius often called the first Gentile Christian but what about the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 5?

Cornelius was:

- a centurion - from the Italian band (probably a Roman officer) in Caesarea v1, 22 - a devout, just man - v2, 22
- he feared (revered) God - so did his family - v2, 22
- he donated **much** to the needy – v2
- he had a good report (from the Jews - like captives/quite outstanding) - v22 - he prayed to God always - v2

What a man! Surely fit for heaven? You probably know friends who are good citizens, give to charity, honest and just, with high reputations + may even fear God and may even pray to Him. You may also think that they are much better people than many so-called Christians you know. There are many good living people out there that put Christians to shame by their practical, caring and giving to those in need. How sad that they are doomed to hell without a true conversion to Christ. We should ponder this thought often and do more than just mutter a cheap prayer for them! Cornelius was better than the rich young ruler who came to Jesus but he still lacked one thing - a personal knowledge of Christ.

The Visions

1. Cornelius - He was a true seeker and truly had the promise (maybe without realizing it) that God would reveal Himself to him sometime/somehow (Seek and you shall find + Heb 11:-1, 5.) One day, at 3 pm (time of Temple prayer - co-incidental??), he saw in a vision, an angel of God coming and calling his name - Cornelius! God used visions when there was no witness (written or spoken) available and still can but most current so-called visions are false or imaginary and we should seek our answers via His written Word. (My father in law, once awoke from sickness and thought he was in heaven but what he saw was not an angel but the doctor in a white coat!) Please be very careful re visions; they can be mental or even demonic - they never will contradict or replace or add to God's Word. Cornelius was terrified and cried out - '**What is it, Lord?**' (like Paul - Who are you Lord? and unlike Samuel - 'Speak [no Lord mentioned] for your servant hears)

The angel's message was fantastic - 'Your **prayers and your alms** are come up for a memorial before God.' Notice that God acknowledged both his prayers **and his alms**. ie He was genuine - not just a 'Holy Joe' -

(faith without works is dead) - practiced what he preached - a doer, not just a talker. He was **ready** for God's answer.

Cornelius did exactly what the angel said - sent to Peter at Joppa (about 50 Km) - he sent two servants + a devout God fearing soldier/personal attendant v7 - Why? Security?

2. Peter - While the 3 were travelling, God was preparing Peter - about noon Peter went up on the rooftop **to pray** (obviously a regular habit - do you have this too?).

Peter became distracted - his hunger took over from his praying - attack from Satan - 'the Devil trembles when he sees the feeblest saint upon his knees' - so he tries to twist our minds away. He can do this even when we are reading God's Word too.

Peter then fell into a trance, saw the heavens open and a sheet with all kinds of 4 footed and wild beasts, creeping things and birds (forbidden for Jews to eat - Lev 11) on it descending to him - maybe representations of the **wider** creation that would equate to and include the **wider** human kind and the Nations God was going to send the Gospel to, outside His Jewish covenant - ie. **the Grafting In**. The voice from heaven said - 'Rise Peter, kill and eat'

Peter answered - **Not so Lord**, (no way, never) I have never eaten anything common or unclean. What is our attitude to the '**untouchables**'? This was not the first time Peter had said No to the Lord - eg. 'You shall never wash my feet!' (We had several 'untouchables' - street kids - come to live with us and they were not easy to accept - easier to 'pass by on the other side' like the Priest and the Levite in the Good Samaritan story.) This vision occurred 3 times (another reminder to Peter - 3 times he denied the Lord and 3 times Jesus asked him if he loved Him!!) We don't know if Peter objected 3 times but v17 tells us that he was still perplexed, doubting re the meaning of the vision after the sheet was taken back to heaven and this continued when the visitors arrived - v19 (Amp version) - Peter still 'earnestly revolving the vision in his mind and meditating on it'. It was taking a lot to get the message through (like a brick wall). Getting God's message through can often be like this - very frustrating and wearying.

But then the Holy Spirit took control of Peter v19, 20 - 'Behold, 3 men are looking for you - Arise, get down and go with them, **doubting nothing, for I have sent them.**' Oh, that the Holy Spirit's guidance would be as clear and direct to us today - visions, circumstances, direct commands, total authority etc. - God will use His Word and His timing to convince us about His will for us - we should say yes, doubting nothing because He has said it!

Even so, as Peter obeyed, he still wondered - '**What is the reason for your coming**' v21 - answer - Cornelius has been warned/instructed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and **to hear what you say**. cf Rom 10:-14, 15 - 'How shall they hear without a preacher and how shall they preach except they are sent'. Peter is the preacher here and he was sent directly.

Caesarea

Cornelius was waiting with relatives and friends - great expectations no doubt (prayers answered and preacher coming - (maybe like Billy Graham crusades and others). He fell at Peter's feet and worshipped him. **Get up** said Peter - **I am just a man** (not a God [+ I'm not the 'Pope' either]!). cf ch 14:-8-18 and 28:-6. We are never to worship or follow any man, woman, saint or any living person - God alone is worthy of worship.

Peter excused himself as a Jew talking with Gentiles v 28 (forbidden - like woman at the well with Jesus) but God had **told him** that **no-one is common, unclean, inferior - all equal**. He had **got the message** (at last) and came without hesitation (without gainsaying, hesitation, doubts). But he **still didn't know what for** v 29. (cf Abraham - went to a far country not knowing why). Cornelius explained v 30-33 but see especially v33 - **we are all here present before God, to hear all things commanded you of God** - we want to hear God's message from you for us! This should be our constant desire - to meet before God and hear His message to us.

Now Peter gets it v34 - truly I perceive (understand) that **God is no respecter of persons** - In all Nations, those who fear God and live righteously are accepted (sure of being received and welcomed by Him). Then comes the **simple Gospel** (Peter's personal witness and story of Jesus) v 36 - 43 - Jesus coming to bring peace, doing good/healing, hanged by the Jews on the cross, raised again on the third day, commanding Himself to be preached as Judge and believing on Him for forgiveness of sins (similar message to 1 Cor 15 by Paul) - **the Gospel of God's grace!**

Note v43 - **All** the prophets give witness to Him - separate study to see this - every OT prophet.

Result - v 44-46 - Before Peter finished, God was at work - the Holy Spirit **fell on all** - all at one time they were **convicted, converted, sealed, empowered by the Holy Spirit**. The proof was the speaking in tongues (like the Jews has done in Jerusalem etc. - ie visible proof to unbelieving Jews that God had welcomed in [grafted] Gentiles to His family - the Church).

Baptism straightaway - cf Ethiopian eunuch - If you believe you may be baptized - Acts 5. Here in ch10, receiving of the Holy Spirit was proof of their belief and so they qualified for baptism. Why do we often wait so long between believing and baptism? Could it be that there is often no proof - no visible evidence of the new life in Christ? Sad if that is true.

Problems with disbelieving Jews

Acts 11 - **Peter at Jerusalem** - v 1-3 - He was attacked, criticized - why did you go to uncircumcised Gentiles and even eat with them? (Some cults, like 'exclusive brethren', are like this - won't speak to or fellowship with the unclean 'Philistines' like us). Jesus was attacked for eating and drinking with sinners, forgiving prostitutes etc. - **thank the Lord He was!**

But Peter 'socked it to them' by rehearsing the whole story about the visions and Cornelius and the speaking in tongues proof v 4- 17. '**Who was I, that I could withstand God**' said Peter. That shut them all up! At least they held their peace and better, they **glorified God**.

NB. This is vitally important for us today - v18 - 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles (you and me) repentance unto life.' God has grafted us in!

Note - Peter had 6 witnesses (believers from Joppa) with him - 10:-23; 11:-12 - added to the reliability of his report to the other believing Jews - ie beyond reproof.

Council at Jerusalem Acts 15 - God had trouble convincing Peter (as we have seen) and this problem didn't go away easily. Jewish believers (mainly Pharisees) still wanted non-Jews to be like them - be circumcised and obey Jewish laws etc. So we get the famous **Council at Jerusalem** - the apostles and elders assembled together v 6. James reminded them about Peter's episode (Cornelius) in v 14. This great debate resulted in a letter for all the churches to free Gentile believers from the Jewish bondage v23-31. This also applies to us today - we do not have to be circumcised physically but we should abstain from food offered to idols, blood and sexual impurity v20, 29

Final

This true story about Peter and Cornelius is a wonderful revelation for all members of the Church of God - all true believers. Initially, God chose Abraham, then the Children of Israel but His broader aim was for the blessing of all mankind. He established His Church **with Christ** as the Head, the Bridegroom and linked it to His Jewish choice **through Christ again** as our Great High Priest (once for all sacrifice). So His Church is a very special combination of Jewish believers plus the **grafted in** Gentile believers (us).

Personal plea - There are many good living and giving (some God fearing) people, especially friends, out there who we should be making a special, consistent effort to reach with the Gospel. Some may be like Cornelius - ready and waiting!