

Acts

Part 27 – “A Turning Point”

Acts 10:1-8

The conversion of Cornelius and the events surrounding it are of immense importance. Luke records it twice – first in the report of the event itself and then again in Peter's recounting of the event to the brethren in Jerusalem. What Luke records is the first inkling of what is to be **the** great issue and problem of first century Christianity, an issue that leaves its mark on virtually every page of the rest of the NT: namely the transition from a virtually entirely Jewish church to a mostly Gentile church, a transition that was bitterly resisted by a large part of early Jewish Christianity, and a transition that was not, in fact, altogether successful insofar as the Jewish segment of the church virtually disappeared after the first century.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. The Mission to the Gentiles (8:1-12:25)
 - A. The mission of Philip (8:4-40)
 - B. The conversion of Paul (9:1-30)
 - C. The mission of Peter (9:31-11:18)
 - 1. The mission to the cities of the coastal plain (9:1-43)
 - 2. **The mission in Caesarea and the conversion of Cornelius (10:1-11:18)**
 - a. **Cornelius is introduced (10:1-2)**
 - b. **An angel of the Lord speaks to Cornelius (10:3-6)**
 - c. **Cornelius responds obediently (10:7-8)**

Main Idea: God is saving people from among all the peoples of the earth irrespective of their ethnicity, social status, or religious heritage.

Vv. 1-2 – The introduction of Cornelius

1. *Cornelius was a Roman Centurion.*

He was an elite member of the Roman (pagan) occupying force in Judea. He would have commanded 80 men in his cohort.

2. *Cornelius was a God-fearer.*

“God-fearers” were Gentiles who had converted to the faith of Israel. This often meant undergoing circumcision and adherence to the ceremonial regulations of the Old Covenant.

3. *Cornelius led his entire family to serve and worship God.*

As one who had come to believe in the Covenant God of Israel, Cornelius would have taken seriously God's pattern of blessing children through the parents.

4. *Cornelius was a pious man.*

He is described as “devout.” Also, Luke tells us that he was a generous and praying man.

Vv. 3-6 – God speaks to Cornelius

God grants Cornelius a vision in which an angel speaks to him.

1. The circumstances of the vision – It occurs at 3:00 in the afternoon. This suggests that Cornelius was not dreaming.
2. The angel initiates a conversation with Cornelius.
3. Cornelius responds to the angel's appearance with reverence and attentiveness.
4. The angel commends Cornelius. His prayers and works of generosity have been a living offering to God.
5. The angel directs Cornelius to send for the Apostle Peter who is in Joppa. The implication is that blessing is assured.

Vv. 7-8 – Cornelius responds

Cornelius does not delay obedience.

Theology in Application

1. God is impartial.

God does not play favorites. He is no respecter of persons. That is, God does not favor one ethnicity or social class above any other. Every person no matter who they are or what they have is equally in need of God's grace and has access to this great salvation by faith in Jesus.

2. God takes the initiative in the gospel mission.

A major emphasis in this event and throughout Acts is on God's initiative in guiding the mission to advance the gospel. God pursues Cornelius. God directs Cornelius to send for Peter. God gives Peter a supernatural vision that will mark a change in how God's people had previously thought about the church and its mission.

3. God delights in the prayers and piety of His people.

God commends Cornelius for his prayers and acts of piety ("alms"). The prayers and obedience of God's people are compared to a fragrant offering.

The main point of the entire episode described in 10:1-11:18 is how the Lord lead Peter to acknowledge that God grants salvation through Jesus without requiring obedience to the law. God's people will no longer have a distinction between pure and profane foods. Neither will they think of people as pure or profane. As the new covenant in Christ dawns Gentiles who have come to faith in Jesus Christ are afforded equal status with believing Jews and this apart from any adherence to the ceremonial laws whose purpose has been consummated in Christ.