

A Long Expected Answer

Acts 10:1-8

The book of Acts is unlike any other book in the New or Old Testament. Yes, it is a historical book, similar to the OT books of Genesis, Exodus, Judges, 1 and 2 Kings, etc. But more than a historical book, it is written for the precise purpose of being an **apologetic** of the Christian faith. Understand, Luke isn't *apologizing* for the Christian faith, that's not what the word means.

Apologetics is:

- 1: systematic of discourse in defense of a doctrine
- 2: a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity

As we go through the book of Acts, we need to remember the very beginning of Luke's statements found in the opening paragraphs **of his Gospel account**. Remembering that the book of Acts is in reality the Book of Luke, Part Two.

Listen to what he writes in **Luke 1:1-4**

*¹ Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you **an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus,** ⁴ that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

He is writing to someone by the name of Theophilus, who is actually addressed as *most excellent Theophilus*. I won't go into it at this point, but the very phrase *most excellent*, brings with it the **connotation of rank or office**. Thus the reasoning by many to believe that Theophilus was very likely a ranking Roman officer, who had either already come to a **saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus or was at a point in his life where he was seriously considering the claims of Christ**.

His relationship to Luke is unknown, but speculation has suggested that Theophilus was **perhaps the officer in charge of the Apostle Paul's imprisonment**, having had the

Gospel shared with him on numerous occasions. Here in both his Gospel account and in the book of Acts, Luke takes it upon himself to write out in **an orderly account the actions and claims of Jesus** (through the Gospel account) and then the **move of the Holy Spirit through the birth and life of the Church and the activities of men like Peter and Paul** (through the book of Acts). If it is true, that Theophilus was the officer in charge of the Apostle Paul's imprisonment, it would also explain why we have such a **large portion of the book of Acts focused on the Apostle Paul's** life conversion and ministry.

At the beginning of Acts, Luke once again references Theophilus –

Acts 1:1-2

¹The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,

I share all of this with you as we prepare to get into chapter 10 of Acts, to help us to understand a couple of things:

1. We find that through the Holy Spirit's leading and directing, all of chapter 10 and up to 11:18 deals with the conversion of Cornelius and his household – a Gentile and a Roman officer – this would speak directly to Theophilus.
2. The conversion of Cornelius leads to the debate among the Church leadership in Jerusalem as to rather a Gentile can become a Christian without first converting completely to Judaism – this too speaking to the heart of Theophilus.
3. God is flat out shaking up some prejudiced opinions and false understandings of who can be saved and how they are saved.

All of these issues would be a **very powerful testimony** to a Roman officer like Theophilus. A testimony of God's love and plan for *all people, everywhere*. He is not just the God of Israel, **He is God over all His creation**, and *He calls men and women everywhere to repent* (Acts 17:30).

Now, I know and understand that **this is a very long introduction to chapter 10 of Acts**, but *please* bear with me for just a couple of more interesting points.

In nearly every case, if not in every case, whenever any of the Gospel writers speak in reference to the Centurions, they speak of them in a good light. One such case is detailed for us in both Matthew and Luke's gospel... the Centurion whose servant was sick and dying. This man in the Gospel accounts is described in very much the same light as we will see Cornelius described here in Acts 10: a devout man, with a giving and generous heart. Not a proselyte to Judaism, but a man who loves the God of the Jews and works favorably with the Jews.

One last thing, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke we read of the possible conversion of a Centurion at the crucifixion, who upon the death of Jesus he testified, "*Truly this was the Son of God!*" We don't know for sure, only God knows, but that was a powerful declaration.

So with all of that **overload of information rattling around in your brains**, let's at least get into the beginning of chapter 10.

Luke writes to us –

Acts 10

¹ There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a Centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Caesarea was a powerful coastal, commercial and political city in the area of Judah. It was built upon a lesser city by Herod the Great from 22-10 B.C. and was the residence of his son Herod most of the year, but particularly during the summer. Because of its position as a major Roman city within Judah, and because of the residence of Herod himself, there was a **very large deployment of Roman soldiers** who were stationed in Caesarea. One of which was *Cornelius, a Centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.*

Cornelius' position over these men was **a position of status, authority, and power**. As a Centurion he was directly over 100 men, but he was also a part of what was called the Italian Regiment (cohort or band), which was a division of anywhere from 400-600 soldiers. This particular group being soldiers directly connected to Rome or at least

Italy. This differs from other divisions of Roman soldiers in the area, some being Syrian by origin, as well as an abundance of other regiments made up of fugitives or slaves from a variety of regions conquered and captured during the Roman invasion.

You need to understand, there were many times when **Rome acted “extremely fair” with their captives** – they would actually **give them a choice**: *you could join the Roman army to fight against your neighbors or you could be killed* – it was a **very persuasive enlistment plan**. Some have said that the Italian Regiment was a **group of freed slaves actually from Rome**, serving as soldiers in the Roman army until they were able to **retire with full Roman citizenship**. But by serving as a Centurion, Cornelius would have already held Roman citizenship.

Beyond being a Roman Citizen, Soldier, and a Centurion, Cornelius was also described by Luke as

“..a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.”

This would have been a very unique situation for a Roman soldier. Known for **their grit, strength, tenacity in battle, and their life-sacrificing loyalty to Rome and the Caesar**, to find a Roman officer who was devoted to the God of Israel was a **rare find indeed**.

His devotion wasn't just in the **privacy of his own heart** either; apparently his love of God and devotion to Him had **impacted his whole family** – *he feared God with all his household*.

His devotion to God wasn't just by words and prayers, it was also **through sacrificial giving and living**. Luke tells us that he *gave alms generously to the people*. In the context of Luke's writing, we understand that this was **monetary support to the Jews** in the area. Cornelius took out of his own pocket and helped to support the Jews in the area that had suffered under the rule of the Romans. **He was a giving man**.

He was also a man **desiring to hear from God**, he *prayed to God always*. This is very interesting in the whole of the mix of things, because this man wasn't a convert to

Judaism..., nor was he a Christian..., **yet he prayed continually. God had placed on his heart a hunger for the things of the Heavenly Kingdom.**

It was a hunger that **couldn't be satisfied with riches... Worldly power and authority would have left him empty and desiring more... He had come to understand that the pagan worship of Rome was foolish, powerless, and left him hopeless.** And so he **turned to the God of Israel**, the God of all creation, the God of all gods: through a healthy fear of Almighty God; in his devotion to the One True God; in the hunger of his soul, **he sought for Truth.**

- How long had he been searching? We have no way of knowing.
 - Years? Perhaps.
- How much had he supported the people of Israel with his own funds?
 - \$100's of 1,000's of dollars? We have no clue.
- How many prayers had he prayed? Luke tells us he *prayed to God always*.
 - There's no possible way to number them.

But at just the right time, God answered and God honored his devotion and sacrifice.

³About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" ⁴And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

Undoubtedly, it had become his usual course of life; Cornelius stopped his day's business at 3:00 in the afternoon (the set time of Jewish prayer) and spent time in prayer. As he was praying **a vision came to him**. The **words Luke used for *he saw clearly in a vision*** here have the impact of being **both supernatural and real**. This **wasn't just a foggy, surreal, dreamlike vision – half awake and half asleep**, Luke writes in such a way as describing evidentiary proof that what Cornelius saw was **tangible and real**.

Even in verse 4 where Luke says, "*he observed him*" the word he used for *observed* has a strong meaning of *gazing intently, fastening the eyes, looking earnestly*. This was **something real and standing now in front of Cornelius and *he was afraid***.

I mean, let's face it, it's not every day we see an angel face to face is it? I don't care how tough of a Roman soldier you are... I don't care how many battles you have fought and won... you don't stand face to face with a true Angel of Almighty God and not have the fear of God shoot through to the very core of your being.

"Cornelius!" "What is it, lord?"

"Are you the angel of death?"

"Are you God's Avenging Angel coming against me
for any and all of the evil I've done in the past?"

Fortunately there doesn't seem to be any hesitation in the Angel's answer to Cornelius –

"Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God..."

And I believe that with that there was a **great sigh of relief** coming from the lungs of Cornelius. I believe that with the simplicity of those words, Cornelius was **able to breathe again**, the **blood came back to his face** and **his senses returned fully to him**, and the Angel continued.

⁵ "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

We have every reason to believe that Cornelius had **never heard of the Apostle Peter**. He would have had no way of knowing who this Simon character was. The Angel had to explain it to him fairly clearly.

Now, if I was dramatizing this scene, it would come out a little like this –

"Send men to Joppa and look for a guy whose name is Simon. But, he's also called Peter. He's staying at Simon's house, no, not his own house, another Simon's house – Simon, the Tanner. He has a house by the sea... He's going to tell you what you must do... no, not Simon the Tanner. Simon, who is also called Peter."

Luke continues –

⁷ And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. ⁸ So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Two servants and a devout soldier – most likely **all of them being men of faith like Cornelius**. Men whom Cornelius could trust in the personal exercise of his faith, men that he could trust with the importance of this particular task. The **soldier went along, no doubt for their safety**, to deal with any robbers or highway men they might run in to. Particularly as they traveled at night.

Caesarea is located about 33 miles up the coastline from Joppa. An average walker, taking rest breaks and meal breaks can average about 20 miles in a day. Considering that Cornelius was praying at the 3:00pm hour, by the time he sent the men out most of the day was already gone.

Verse 8 tells us that after the angel had left and after Cornelius explained things to his messengers, *he sent them to Joppa*. But, there is no way they would have made that whole trip in one afternoon. As a matter of fact, verse 9 tells us –

*⁹ The **next day**, as they went on their journey and **drew near the city**, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about **the sixth hour (or noon)**...*

Well, they wouldn't have been able to make it since just that morning. So, it's possible that if they had traveled all night, with a few breaks and some sleep. Then they would have been able to arrive at Joppa around noon. About the time Peter went to the rooftop.

Once again, we see a man who was ready and willing to move at a moment's notice once God gave him directions and purpose. Yes, he had the ability to send others in his spot, but the fact is,

- He was a man after God's own heart and lived a life of faith in the midst of his pagan surroundings...
- He was a man of generosity... God took account of his willingness to give of his resources for the benefit of others...

- He was a man willing to continually seek after the face of God, even when answers are slow in coming... We don't know how long he had sought for God, but God saw his faithfulness and moved in his life...
- And when he heard from God, he responded immediately.

How about you this morning? Are you willing and able to **stand firm in your faith in the midst of our pagan culture**. That culture might be at your workplace, or school, your neighborhood or your family. Are you willing to receive the attacks against our Lord Jesus when they come before you?

Remember, when they attack you they are attacking the Lord Jesus. Let Him be your strength.

How about you this morning? Are you willing and able to be **generous with the provisions God has blessed you with**? Have you determined yet in 2019 to be **financially faithful in your support to the Kingdoms work**? The angel told Cornelius that **even his financial gifts were a memorial to God**.

Remember, it is when we are faithful in **all areas** of our lives that God can and will entrust us with greater responsibilities and opportunities. We are all called to be **faithful stewards in our Time, Talent and Treasures**.

And finally, how about you this morning? Are you willing to continue to seek the plans and purposes of God in your life, **even when the answers come slow**? Are you willing to continue to **trust Him in the hard things of life**? Waiting for His answer rather than trying to take control by your own strength and logic.

Isaiah 40:31

Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Let **2019** be the year that God brings to you a newness and a freshness by His might and by His Spirit. Be open to Him giving you dreams and visions, as you seek His face in devotion.

Live your life in such a way that God takes notice of your prayers and your sacrifices.