

Acts 10-11:18

God's promise to Abraham was, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). In different sections of the Old Testament there is reference made to benefits gentiles would receive from God. Jesus had said, "Other sheep have which are not of this fold..." (Jn. 10:16). James cited Amos 9:11f as proof that God would "visit the Gentiles and take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). The prophet has said, "In his name shall the gentiles trust." The great commission was a command that the gospel should be preached to the gentiles (Mt. 28:18; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47). When Peter arrived at Joppa, God was ready to open the door of faith for the gentiles, and so He set in motion the events of Acts 10:1 - 11:18.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion who lived in Caesarea. Caesarea at this time was one of the most important cities in Palestine and Roman soldiers were garrisoned here. Cornelius was a centurion, the captain of one hundred men. Whether Cornelius learned of the true God before he was stationed in Caesarea, the record does not reveal. It is generally assumed he became a worshipper of God after he came to Caesarea, and that is likely true. When we are introduced to him we are told that he feared God with all his house (10:2). The statement that he "feared God" tells that he revered God, man's whole duty (Eccl. 12:13). Cornelius shared his faith with his servants and soldiers (10:7).

Cornelius was a good man, generous in helping the poor and well reported of by all the Jews (10:22). He was keeping the ninth hour of prayer when a remarkable thing happened. An angel appeared to him, calling his name (10:3). Cornelius naturally was frightened, but the angel answered him that his alms and prayers had gone up before God as a memorial. God remembered the promise He made to Abraham, made possible through the sacrifice of his Son, and was ready to open the door to Gentiles. So Cornelius was instructed to send and get Peter from Joppa. He would tell him words whereby he and his house might be saved (11:14). For all of Cornelius's prayers, goodness and alms deeds, he was still lost for he was a sinner and only the blood of Jesus can remove sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 1:7). Two servants and a soldier were sent to fetch Peter.

While these three men made their way to Joppa, God prepared Peter for their arrival. God had chosen Peter to preach to the gentiles (Acts 15:7; Mt. 16:19). Still, Peter had to be convinced that he should preach to

Cornelius. At noon-time Peter was praying on a housetop. He fell into a trance and saw a great sheet let down from heaven wherein were found all manner of four footed beasts, creeping things and fowls of the air. A voice commanded, "Arise, Peter, slay and eat," but Peter said, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean." Again the voice spoke, "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common" (Acts 10:9-16). Three times this was done and then Peter was left alone to ponder the significance of the vision he had seen. Soon the three men Cornelius had sent arrived in Joppa and made their way to the house of Simon the tanner. The Spirit informed Peter that "...three men seek thee. But arise and get thee down and go with them, nothing doubting for I have sent them" (10:19f). Peter obeyed, and after lodging them for the night, the next day went with them to Caesarea.

When Peter, the six brethren he carried with him, the two servants and soldier sent by Cornelius arrived at Cornelius's house, he found a large company of people gathered there. Cornelius fell at Peter's feet to worship him and was immediately commanded, "Stand up, I myself am also a man" (Acts 10:25f). How unlike those who claim to be successors of Peter who, today, accept without protest the reverence and adoration of men! Cornelius was asked, "Why have you sent for me?" to which question Cornelius rehearsed the events of days earlier. Then Cornelius said, "Forthwith therefore I sent for thee and thou has well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord" (Acts 10:33).

The meaning of the vision Peter had seen and was perplexed about now was abundantly clear. Already he had said, "Ye yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another nation, and yet unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28). Now he says "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him" (10:34f). Peter opened his mouth and began to preach the gospel. Scarcely had he begun until the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household and they spoke with tongues (10:44:ff). The six brethren whom Peter had brought were amazed, just as people on Pentecost were, when they heard them speak with new tongues. Speaking the saving words to them, Peter concluded, "Can any man forbid the water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (10:47). None could. Peter commanded Cornelius and his household to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and continued certain days with

these new converts, obviously to edify, strengthen and comfort them regarding their new-found faith.

Peter returned to Jerusalem but news of the conversion of the gentiles and Peter's part in that had preceded him. Those of the circumcision contended with Peter, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them" (11:3). Peter did not deny this. He rehearsed in their hearing all the details of both his and Cornelius's vision. He told how the Holy Spirit had fallen upon the gentiles as it fell on the apostles at Pentecost (11:15f). He then asked, "If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto we, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (11:17). It was enough, at least for the moment. The contenders were convinced. They held their peace and glorified God saying, "Then to the gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life" (11:18).

And so, the door of faith has been opened unto the gentiles. It is a trickle of converts at first, but the floodgates will open and in the coming years the gentiles will become the majority in the number of Christians. And so it continues to our present day. It will ever be. Jesus came to his own and they that were his own received him not (Jn. 1:11). They still do not receive him, sealing for themselves their condemnation in the sight of God.

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