

Research: Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10:1-5, 25-28, 34, 35

1 THERE was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian *band*,

“**Conversion of Cornelius.** The baptism of Cornelius was an event of far reaching importance, and is, therefore, described by St. Luke in great detail. If it was not the first actual baptism of a Gentile (see [Acts 8:38](#)), it was, at any rate, the first such baptism which was publicly acknowledged” (Dummelow’s).

“Hitherto none had been baptized into the Christian church but Jews, Samaritans, and those converts who had been circumcised and observed the ceremonial law; but now the Gentiles were to be called to partake all the privileges of God’s people, without first becoming Jews” (Matthew Henry).

“Cornelius - This is a Latin name, and shows that the man was doubtless a Roman. It has been supposed by many interpreters that he was "a proselyte of the gate"; that is, one who had renounced idolatry, and who observed some of the Jewish rites, though not circumcised, and not called a Jew. But there is no sufficient evidence of this. The reception of the narrative of I Peter [Acts 11:1-3](#) shows that the other apostles regarded him as a Gentile. In [Acts 10:28](#), Peter evidently regards him as a foreigner - one who did not in any sense esteem himself to be a Jew”.

“**Cæsarea]** built by Herod the Great on the site of an insignificant town called Strato’s Tower, and renamed Caesarea Augusta in honour of his patron Augustus. There was a theatre, an amphitheatre, a royal palace, and a temple containing images of Augustus and of Rome. The majority of the inhabitants were Greek, but Jews enjoyed equal rights. At this time Cæsarea was the capital of the Roman province, and the residence of the governor.

“**Cornelius, a centurion]** A legion consisted of about 6,000 men, and was divided into ten cohorts, each commanded by a tribune (or chiliarch, see [Acts 21:31](#)). A cohort was divided into six centuries, each commanded by a centurion. Centurions were men who had risen from the ranks, and were therefore, as a rule, men of capacity and good character: cp. [Luke 7:5](#)” (Dummelow’s Commentary).

“**The Italian band]** rather, 'cohort.' In the smaller provinces legions were not stationed, and therefore St. Luke is doubtless right in saying that there was only a cohort of Roman soldiers at Cæsarea. The men were recruited in Italy, and were probably Roman citizens” (Dummelow’s Commentary).

2A devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

“**One that feared God**] i.e. a believer in the one true God, but not a circumcised proselyte. The baptism of Cornelius would not have been an innovation if he had been circumcised: see Acts 6:5. Cornelius was diligent in the three recognized religious duties of prayer, fasting (Acts 10:30), and alms deeds; he kept the Jewish hours of prayer (Acts 10:3)” (Dummelow’s Commentary).

“A devout man - Pious, or one who maintained the worship of God.

“With all his house - With all his family. It is evident here that Cornelius instructed his family, and exerted his influence to train them in the fear of God. True piety will always lead a man to seek the salvation of his family.

“Much alms - Large and liberal charity.

“Prayed to God alway - Constantly; meaning that he was in the regular habit of prayer” (Barnes’ Notes).

3He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

“*He saw* — At a time, it seems, when engaged in secret devotion; *in a vision* — Not in a trance, like Peter; *evidently* — manifestly and plainly, so as to leave him, though not accustomed to things of this kind, no room to suspect any imposition; *about the ninth hour* — That is, about three in the afternoon, which, being the hour of evening sacrifice, was chosen by him as a proper season for his devotion; *an angel of God* — Known to be such by the brightness of his countenance and the manner of his coming in to him: *and saying, Cornelius* — Calling him by his name, to intimate the particular notice God took of him” (Benson Commentary).

4And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him,

“What is it, Lord? - This is the expression of surprise and alarm” (Barnes’ Notes).

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

“Are come up for a memorial - Are remembered before God. They were an evidence of piety toward God, and were accepted as such. Though he had not offered sacrifice according to the Jewish laws; though he had not been circumcised; yet, having acted according to the light which he had, his prayers were heard, and his alms were accepted. This was done in accordance with the general principle of the divine administration, that God prefers the offering of the heart to external forms; the expressions of love to sacrifice without it” (Barnes’ Notes).

5And now send men to Joppa, and call for *one* Simon, whose surname is Peter:

“**To Joppa**] A distance of about 40 m” (Dummelow’s Commentary).

“And now send men to Joppa,.... Which lay near to Caesarea;

“and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: the angel was not sent to instruct Cornelius himself, but to direct him to an apostle of Christ, and minister of the Gospel, who should do it” (Gill’s Exposition).

25And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped *him*.

“*worshipped him*] paying him the religious reverence which the supernatural direction of the angel concerning Peter would be likely to prompt. This act of obeisance in the Roman officer marks most strongly his sense that Peter was God’s messenger. Such acts were not usual among Roman soldiers” (Cambridge Bible).

26But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

“It is certain that Peter did think this worship Cornelius gave him to have exceeded; and here he blames him for it, telling him, he was but a man like unto him; and he needed not give any further reason of his reproof, for man must adore, but by no means may be adored; no, nor take too much honor unto himself” (Matthew Poole).

27And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

“*And as he talked with him, he went in*] So that the previous part of the interview had been without. The action of Cornelius in thus coming forth to meet Peter is in the spirit of that other centurion in the Gospel, who said (Luke 7:6), “I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof.” The Greek word here rendered “talked” indicates the communication made during an interview of some length. The subsequent remarks of St Peter shew us that he had been told many things by Cornelius, which are not specially mentioned, but comprehended under this word “talked.”

“*and found (findeth) many, &c.*] For the character of Cornelius had won him many attached friends” (Cambridge Bible).

28And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

“The strict *Jew* would not enter a Gentile’s house, nor sit on the same couch, nor eat or drink out of the same vessel. The very dust of a heathen city was defiling.”

“**God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.**—The Apostle had, we find, at last learnt the lesson which the vision had taught him, in all the fulness of its meaning”

“Peter thought it necessary to inform them how he came to change his mind in this matter, lest, being thought to have used lightness, his word should have the less authority.
(Ellicott’s Commentary).

34¶ Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

“*Then Peter opened his mouth* — Addressed himself to them, with a seriousness and solemnity answerable to so great an occasion; *and said, Of a truth I perceive* — More clearly than ever, from such a concurrence of circumstances; *that God is no respecter of persons* — Is not partial in his love. The words mean, 1st, That he does not confine his love to one nation; as the Jews were ready to suppose that he confined it to their nation. 2d, That he is loving to every man, and willeth that all men should be saved” (Benson Commentary).

“Is no respecter of persons - The word used here denotes "the act of showing favor to one on account of rank, family, wealth, or partiality arising from any cause." It is explained in James 2:1-4. A judge is a respecter of persons when he favors one of the parties on account of private friendship, or because he is a man of rank, influence, or power, or because he belongs to the same political party, etc. The Jews supposed that they were especially favored by God. and that salvation was not extended to other nations, and that the fact of being a Jew entitled them to this favor. Peter here says that he had learned the error of this doctrine, and that a man is not to be accepted because he is a Jew, nor to be excluded because he is a Gentile. The barrier is broken down; the offer is made to all; God will save all on the same principle; not by external privileges or rank, but according to their character” (Barnes’ Notes).

35But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. “*is accepted with him*] i.e. is acceptable unto Him. God has no longer a chosen people, but calleth all men to repent, and will accept them” (Cambridge Bible).

“**Feareth him, and worketh righteousness;** these two particulars include the observation of both tables of the law: the fearing of God comprehends piety, that is, the true worship of the true God; and working righteousness, includes all the duties to our neighbour; and both describe a truly good and holy man, such as Cornelius was; unto whose case this is to be applied” (Matthew Poole).