

Cornelius Part 1

Acts 10:1—43

Change is coming, and that means new things to learn and understand. It also can lead to confusion. Israel had been God's chosen nation for about 1,500 years, but with Israel's rejection of Stephen by stoning, God puts Israel's program on hold and turns to the Apostle Paul to bring His message to the Gentiles, kings and Israel (Acts 9:15). Peter, and those within the Hebrew church at Jerusalem, need to understand these changes and to see what Paul's role is in all that is happening.

This section of Acts chronicles how God dealt with Peter to inform him of these changes. Although these changes are often viewed as a continuation and expansion of how God was dealing with Israel, it should become obvious that a whole new program is being introduced through the Apostle Paul. The book of Acts shows how Israel is diminishing and how the Church, the Body of Christ is forming and growing. If God were continuing His work with Israel, the number of believers within Israel would be growing, and those believers would be reaching out to the Gentile nations. Instead, Israel fades off almost completely while the Gentile Church expands.

Cornelius' vision (verses 1—8)

Cornelius was living in Caesarea, a city located on the Mediterranean Sea west of Galilee. He was a devout man who feared God and prayed continually. He was also very generous toward the Jews. He was in prayer around three in the afternoon when he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God. The angel was responding to him because of his prayers and alms, but not in response to a specific prayer request. He was looked on favorably by God because he was acting favorably toward Israel (Genesis 12:3). The angel told him to send men to Joppa and meet up with the apostle Peter and bring him up to Caesarea. Notice that he had a very specific and clear vision, and that he was given some very specific instructions by God. He was not merely impressed in his heart to call for Peter, nor did he feel led in his spirit that he was to do this. He sent two trusted servants and a devout soldier to seek out Peter.

Peter's vision (verses 9—23)

After Cornelius sent out his servants to go to Joppa, which was 30 miles away from Caesarea, Peter was on the rooftop around noon praying. Peter fell into a trance and he saw the sky open up and a vessel like a great sheet came down to the ground. It contained all kinds of creatures that were forbidden to be eaten according to the Mosaic Law. Since it was around noon, Peter was hungry and the Lord told him to arise and kill and eat. Peter responded negatively by refusing to do what the voice told him to do. The voice responds by saying, "What God has cleansed was not to be called common or unclean." This happened three times, and each time it happened, the vessel containing the creatures was brought back up to heaven.

Peter struggled to understand just what had happened and what it meant. As he was wrestling with this in his mind, the three men, sent by Cornelius, came to his residence. When they arrived, the Spirit told Peter that three men were looking for him, and that he was to go downstairs to meet them. It was God Himself who had sent them to him. Peter needed a direct command from God to go see them because these were Gentiles, and Jews normally did not associate with "unclean" races (Exodus 19:6). In like manner, the Spirit also came to Philip and told him to meet with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26). When God speaks, it is always clearly discernible, as if speaking to someone face to face. God's voice is never some nebulous urging from within.

The men sent by Cornelius introduce themselves and explain how Cornelius was given a message from God through a holy angel (Luke 9:26; Revelation 14:10) to send for Peter. Peter invites them to stay the night with him.

Meeting with Cornelius (verses 23—33)

The next day Peter and some believing brothers from Joppa travel to Caesarea with the three sent by Cornelius. Cornelius was waiting for them to arrive and had gathered family and friends together. I'm sure that he was quite excited to see what God was going to do. As soon as Peter came to Cornelius he fell to his knees and worshipped him. Peter immediately told Cornelius to stand up since he was only a man. Worship is reserved for God alone. This should stand as a lesson to those who think Peter was the first Pope. Many bow themselves to the Pope today in adoration, accepting the teaching that the Pope represents Christ on earth. Peter would be shocked by these acts of worship that are directed toward a human. Peter was representing Christ as he met with Cornelius, but he rejected any form of worship.

Cornelius relayed to Peter the events that happened four days earlier, how that he saw a man in shining garments (Matthew 28:3; Luke 24:4) and was told to seek out Peter to come to him.

Peter's message (verses 34—43)

Seeing how God had directed Cornelius to seek out Peter and told Peter to go see Cornelius, Peter now realized that God is no longer one to show partiality. In the past, God was dealing exclusively with Israel and giving her special treatment above the Gentiles (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; Romans 9:4—5). This is not to be confused with God being impartial when it comes to judging people (Deuteronomy 10:17; Romans 2:1—11; 1 Peter 1:17). Peter was specifically referring to how God had previously been dealing with the world through the nation of Israel. He now understands that the vision given to him means it is now acceptable for him to interact with Gentiles. In the past, it was required that Israelites were to remain holy by not defiling himself with Gentiles who were not following the Law (John 18:28). Now that God had declared that these unclean creatures were now acceptable to eat, he realized that the Law was being set aside and that it was now okay to mingle with those who were not following the Law. This was the beginning of some major changes for those who were saved under the Law (the Little Flock of believers). These changes would still take a number of years before being fully implemented, as can be seen by the faithful saints in Jerusalem still properly keeping the Law in Acts 21. The book of Hebrews speaks of Israel's salvation being based on Christ's work rather than in the sacrificial system. As we learn about our salvation in the book of Romans, Israel will learn about their salvation from the book of Hebrews.

Peter begins preaching a Kingdom message including the fear of the Lord and works of righteousness (Acts 10:35). He is speaking words that were sent to the sons of Israel beginning with John the Baptist (Acts 10:36—37). This message is found in Mark 1:4 and Matthew 3:1—2. Peter continues by describing Jesus' earthly ministry, His death and His resurrection. Peter then says that he and the Disciples were commanded to preach and testify that Jesus was ordained by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. All who believe on His name will receive remission of sins.

This is exactly what Jesus taught concerning Israel's program. Jesus will be Judge of the whole world (John 5:22), and that people need to believe on His name (John 3:16). Believing on His name is believing in the Person of Jesus Christ as Messiah. It is the Messiah who will come and judge the world and set up believing Israel to rule over the world. Peter's message to Cornelius excluded any mention of believing in the Person and work of Jesus Christ as 1 Corinthians 15:1—4 says is necessary for us to believe today.

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