



## Cornelius

### *Scripture Reading*

Acts 10:1-4 (NKJV)

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. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

4 And 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.

James 5:16 (NKJV)

16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

### Introduction

Today's message takes us into the book of Acts and centers us on the effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man named Cornelius. He was a centurion of the Italian Regiment yet he was a man of prayer. He was also a radical giver and gave alms consistently. He was known for this in Caesarea. He was not yet a born again Christian nor had he received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, yet the Bible still states that his prayers had come up to the Lord as a memorial. That says a lot. He believed in the God of Israel, yet he himself had not fully converted to Judaism—he hadn't been circumcised so his devotion to God was personal and may not have been fully recognized by the Jews as a profession of faith. Yet God regarded his prayers because he feared and revered the Lord—and he made sure that his household did the same. It is as if he made the declaration "As for Me and My House, we will fear the Lord."

### Prayers that Move Mountains & People

For many people, this passage of Acts 10 is mostly about the Vision where God showed Peter the unclean animals and told him to "rise

kill and eat.” For a lot of people the focus is what led Peter to break away from his Jewish upbringing and observance of the purity laws regarding food and other people of other nations. They focus on the moment, but don’t realize what led to that moment.

The beginning of the text lays it out for us in a timeline and it begins with a righteous man’s prayers! Luke the author is careful to not hint nor overly suggest what happened, but rather tell it like it happened.

- Cornelius, a righteous man of prayer and generous giving had caught the eye and attention of the Lord Himself. His prayers were a memorial before God and the Lord remembered Him and decided to reveal Himself to him.
- While Cornelius is praying, the Scriptures tell us that Simon Peter is staying with another Simon—a Tanner by the sea by Joppa.
  - Joppa—the very same place where Jonah took a boat to run from God
  - Simon the Tanner’s occupation was to work on the hides of dead animals and produce leather.
  - But because of the blood and the constant exposure to dead animals, it would have been impure and unclean for Peter to be around the area much less staying at the Tanner’s house.
    - ◆ The tanner’s were usually living by the sea so that the smell of the animal hides would not linger around town but be carried away by the sea breeze.
  - Yet God had Peter in a place already breaking some of his Jewish purity laws
- While Simon Peter is staying with Simon the Tanner, the Lord gives Cornelius a vision:
- Acts 10:3-6 (NKJV)3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” 4 And 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. 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.”
- Meanwhile Peter is clueless to all of this and this timeline unfolds:

Cornelius’ vision	9th hour	~3:00 PM	Day 1
Cornelius sends men to Joppa	Immediately after	~3:30–4:00 PM	Day 1
Peter’s vision about unclean animals coming down from heaven on a sheet. And the Lord tells Peter “rise kill and eat.” Peter protests and says he won’t eat what is “common and unclean.” This happens 3 times. And the Lord tells Peter “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”	6th hour	~12:00 PM	Day 2
Cornelius’ men arrive at the house	Shortly after	~1:00 PM	Day 2
Peter travels back to Caesarea	Afternoon → Next day	Overnight travel	Day 2 into Day 3
Peter meets Cornelius	Following day	Morning–midday	

Cornelius’ prayers were accomplishing more than just pleasing the Lord, they were moving a racial and religious mountain out of the way and moving one of Jesus’ Apostles into a spiritual journey that would transform the preaching of the Gospel!

## Race, Respect & Regard

### Race

It's important to locate this story in the region that it happened and the people groups that are involved. Historically, ethnically, and geographically, Peter was a Middle Eastern, first-century Galilean Jew, which means:

- Brown skin
- Dark, coarse hair
- Brown eyes
- Semitic facial features
- Mediterranean / Levantine complexion
  - Not European.

Jesus and His Disciples were from that part of the world, Christ's DNA bearing some African in Him also due to Mary's lineage. Mark a North African being also being one of Christ's Disciples. Christianity and The Gospel was being preached amongst people of dark-skin and middle eastern locale long before it reached the European shores.

Peter didn't know it yet, but he was on a journey of unlearning and stripping away of what he held as a standard, that would be crucial to his ability to share the gospel and being used by God.

- Peter had an upbringing of Jewish standards that taught him to regard certain foods, occupations and people as unclean.
- This went beyond dietary laws but also towards racial prejudice
  - the message of salvation through Jesus Christ came first to the Jews and the gospel was first preached to them.
  - Christianity started with Jesus and His disciples who would become His Apostles
  - When the Holy Spirit came it fell upon the Jews first. And Jews from every nation on earth saw and heard the phenomenon and carried the news back to the places of residence.
  - Up until this moment this was a movement happening amongst the Jews. Outsiders were not participators in this Holy Ghost movement.
- Rise, kill and eat was an affront to his sensibilities. Almost a temptation that he must refuse. But it was actually an invitation to expand his understanding of what God was getting ready to do and who He was getting ready to redeem!
- Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian regiment. These centurions were also of brown skin and curly hair from the Mediterranean region.
- The 2 men (Peter and Cornelius) were from different nations, different kingdoms, of similar complexion yet there was a barrier between them.
  - Even though it wasn't about skin color, it **felt like race** because it created:
    - Social separation
    - Identity separation
    - Cultural superiority
    - "Us vs. Them" mentality

So when Peter arrives at Cornelius's house, he doesn't really know why he's there and is still struggling with the fact that he's been summoned to a Gentile's house. But the Holy Spirit told him to go.

Cornelius doesn't know the angel told him to fetch Peter and so he says, 'The Lord says you have a message for us.' ***Like an awkward meeting between 2 people who have been setup to meet.***

### Respect

Acts 10:34-35 (KJV)

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Echoes of God's impartiality ring throughout the Old and New Testament

Romans 2:10-11 (NKJV)

10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

Deuteronomy 10:17 (NKJV)

17 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a

bribe.

## Galatians 3:26-29 (NKJV)

### Sons and Heirs

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

As believers in Christ, we must reject and rebuke any notion or any politic that asserts or implies that God prefers one race over the other. And based on this Scripture, we must also question the notion that God only hears Christians when they pray.

### **Regard**

God is clearly not a respecter of persons, but He does pay special attention to people exercising faith and devotion that truly honors Him:

This kind of regard given by the Lord to Cornelius' prayers and devotion reminds me of:

- Job (not a Jew whose story predates Abraham—so how did he know God?)- Job 1:8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"
- Genesis 4:4-5 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.
- Abraham came from a family of idol worshippers but he was a man of prayer and the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham and called him to follow Him in to the wilderness. Abraham obeyed and it was counted to him as righteousness.
- All of this predates Judaism (the oldest religion) but the kind of faith that Job and Abraham has been termed by scholars as Patriarchal Faith:

A direct relationship with God based on:

- Revelation
- Obedience
- Sacrifice
- Covenant
- Fear of the Lord
- No formal religious system
- No rituals prescribed by law
- No national identity

It is the FEAR of the Lord that brought about such faith and devotion to Him and what prompts the Lord to regard that kind of faith.

Galatians 3:29 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

- While the Scriptures do state that God is no "respector" of persons, I do believe that God gives "regard" to individuals who have been diligent in prayer and seeking the Lord!
- Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

## **James 5:16b (NKJV)**

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man/woman avails much.

- Cornelius' prayers moved the heart of God and prompted a move of God to reach the Gentiles
- Peter's prayers moved his location, religious barriers and prejudices out of the way
- Both men obeyed the Lord and the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles
  - breaking the religious bonds that were tied to strict Judaism
  - releasing the reality of patriarchal faith and relationship to God
  - expanded the preaching of the Gospel and the revelation of God through Christ
  - racial and religious barriers were forever broken so that The House of the Lord would receive all people from all nations.

## Conclusion

- What would have happened if Cornelius wasn't a man of prayer?
- What would have happened if Peter had made the same mistake that Jonah did at Joppa and run from the unlearning journey that God was calling him into?
  - where would the Church be today?
  - would WE have even received the Gospel?
  - would WE understand that God loves us no matter what we look like or come from or how we were raised?
- Prayer moves mountains and people into position so that bridges can be built, lives can be set free and God's house may be enlarged.
- Cultivate a deep fear/reverence/love/devotion to God and see what He moves through your prayers!

## Bible Study Notes

### Why was Simon Peter staying with Simon the Tanner?

- We don't know. We can only surmise that it was a move of the Holy Spirit for him to be there.
  - the proximity to the sea may have also been a factor given Peter's trade
- Peter's stay with Simon the tanner is a profound moment of cultural and spiritual transformation. As a leather maker who worked daily with dead animals, Simon was considered ritually unclean according to Jewish tradition. First-century Pharisaic groups typically looked down on such people, but Peter's willingness to stay with Simon suggests he was being liberated from prejudicial constraints that hindered the gospel's spread<sup>1</sup>.
- According to Jewish law, tanning hides was considered an unclean occupation based on Levitical regulations. Tanners were so stigmatized that they were required to live fifty cubits outside a city. Peter's decision to stay with Simon demonstrated that he was abandoning his Judaistic prejudices<sup>2</sup>. In this, Peter was following Jesus' example of "accepting those deemed unacceptable by religious authorities"<sup>1</sup>. The cultural context was so extreme that rabbis would say "it is impossible for the world to do without tanners; but woe to him who is a tanner" – a sentiment so strong that a Jewish woman could even sue for divorce if she discovered her husband was a tanner. As one scholar noted, Peter's lodging with the tanner was "a step on the road to eating with a Gentile"<sup>3</sup>.

### What was the ancient tanning process?

- **Tanner, Tanning.** Worker and process of changing hide into leather ([Acts 9:43](#)).
- The ancient tanning process was a complex and multi-stage method of transforming animal hides into durable leather. The process began with raw hides from cattle, goats, and sheep, which were initially preserved by salting or sun-drying to prevent decay<sup>1</sup>.
- Tanners would first skin the animal and remove flesh by stretching the hide over a surface and scraping it with a blade to eliminate fat, sinew, and muscle fibers. They would then soak and clean the hide, often using techniques like "soaking the hide in water mixed with wood ash or lime to remove hair." After cleaning, the skin would be racked and dried in the sun, during which tanners would stretch it to break up natural fibers and increase elasticity<sup>2</sup>. The actual tanning involved using tannin-producing agents such as nuts, pomegranate rind, oak bark, and acacia shrubs—with some tanners even using human and animal urine as an effective tanning agent<sup>1</sup>. This soaking process could take months to complete, but it effectively stopped putrefaction and made the leather water-resistant<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, tanning was not held in high regard among Jews, as it was accompanied by unpleasant odors and was considered ceremonially defiling due to the involvement of dead animals<sup>3</sup>.

### What was the social standing of a Tanner?

- The social standing of a tanner in ancient Jewish society was remarkably low. The tanner's social status was very low in Jewish communities, as evidenced by pejorative comments in the Talmud. The profession was considered undesirable due to its unpleasant characteristics: tanners worked with animal dung in the tanning process, were known for their terrible odor, were ritually unfit, and were even exempt from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>
- The stigma was so profound that according to the Mishnah, a tanner was obliged to divorce his wife if she could not tolerate being married to him—likely due to his smell. There's even a recorded anecdote from Sidon where a woman reportedly said of two tanner brothers, "Thy brother I could endure; but thee I cannot endure"<sup>1</sup>. Jews viewed tanning with aversion, and tanneries were typically located outside town walls because of the trade's unclean nature and the disagreeable odors associated with the work.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, while the general tanning trade was disliked, the preparation of skins for parchment was considered an honorable calling<sup>3</sup>—a nuanced distinction in an otherwise stigmatized profession.

## Cornelius.

- Roman centurion and the first gentile Christian mentioned in the Book of Acts.
- The story of Cornelius' conversion through the preaching of the apostle Peter is recorded in Acts 10:1–11:18. Before his conversion Cornelius was well known to the Jews as a person who feared God, prayed continually, and gave alms.
- At first the church was composed only of Jews, who were reluctant to preach the gospel to Gentiles because law-abiding Jews never had fellowship with "pagans." Peter, a law-abiding Jew, had scruples about entering a Gentile's house and eating "unclean" food. Through a vision, however, God led Peter to Cornelius' house to preach the gospel to him and his family and close friends. Before Peter had finished speaking, and before baptism or the laying on of hands could be administered, God dramatically demonstrated his acceptance of Gentiles into the fellowship of the church by giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter remained several days in Cornelius' house, no doubt rejoicing in the centurion's conversion and instructing him in his newfound faith.
- Cornelius' conversion represented a significant step in the separation of the early church from Judaism. Cornelius did not have to submit to any of the Jewish practices, such as circumcision or eating only ritually "clean" animals. For the first time a gentile believer was accepted into the church on equal terms with Jewish Christians.

Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. 1988. "[Cornelius.](#)" In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1:525–26. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.