

The Mystery of Cornelius the Centurion : Part 1

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Amidst all of the evil and violent deeds perpetrated by the Roman occupiers of Israel during the First Century can be found one shining example of a devout man who feared the Lord. His name is Cornelius, and his story is told in Acts chapter ten. Upon reading the opening verses of the chapter, we discover that Cornelius was a centurion. That is to say, he was the captain of a band of one hundred Roman soldiers. This group of soldiers was called the "Italian Band", which may indicate that they may have possibly originated from Rome itself:

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,"
Acts 10:1, KJV

At the time of our story, Cornelius and the Italian Band were stationed in the town of Caesarea which was located northwest of Jerusalem. Caesarea was built on the Mediterranean coast by Herod the Great on the site of Strato's Tower, between the towns of Joppa and Dora. It had an excellent harbor, and was given the name of Caesarea in honour of Caesar Augustus who ruled the Roman Empire at that time. Caesarea was also the normal residence of the Roman procurators -- or governors -- of Palestine, such as Felix and Festus. The majority of the inhabitants of Caesarea were Greeks. Consider the following verses which confirm these various points:

"And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor."
Acts 23:23-24, KJV

"But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought."
Acts 24:27-25:6, KJV

Given the time and the setting of the Book of Acts, plus Cornelius' level of responsibility, it might be safe to assume that he was probably in his thirties or forties, or maybe even older. If this assumption is correct, then it is probable that he was a career military man, and was already a part of the Roman military machine at the time of Jesus' revelation to Israel. The reason why I am making this point is to validate the possibility that Cornelius' decision to become a military man in the armies of Rome may have been made before he came to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In other words, my implication is that if he had come to know

Jesus before his induction into the Roman forces, perhaps he may have decided against it. One thing we do know is that he was a very devout man who believed in God, as we see by the following verse:

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

Acts 10:2, KJV

I found this point to be very interesting due to the simple fact that the Romans were pagans. They had a whole pantheon of false gods and goddesses. Yet in writing his account, the author of the Book of Acts -- who is believed to be Luke -- points out to us that this man Cornelius was different. Not only he, but his entire house believed in the one true God of Israel. I was curious as to what might cause him and his family to break with Roman tradition and embrace the God of Israel, which was no doubt not a very politically correct thing to do at that particular time.

In fact, chronologically speaking, the Christian Gospel had not even reached Rome by that particular time. Furthermore, the Apostles had barely begun to share the Christian Gospel with the Gentiles in the tenth chapter of the Book of Acts. The Apostle Paul had just been converted in Acts chapter nine, and was probably still in Arabia or else in Damascus, and Simon Peter was given a vision of the sheet in Acts chapter ten -- in which he was instructed to preach to the Gentiles -- on the very same day that Cornelius' men were arriving at Joppa to fetch Peter.

To add some additional context to this story, as I explain in the article called "Fifty Days Which Changed the World", from the night of the Passover when Jesus had His last meal with the Apostles, to the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two when the Apostles received their fiery baptism of the Holy Spirit, was a period of only fifty days. Furthermore, it might interest you to know that the word "Pentecost" is derived from the Koine Greek word "pentekoste", which means "the fiftieth day". Now, as I explain in the aforementioned article, we are informed that Jesus spent forty days on the Earth following His Resurrection from the dead. This means that the events in Acts chapter two occurred ten days after Jesus ascended to Heaven. Consider the following verses:

"To whom also he [Jesus] shewed himself alive after his

passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."
Acts 1:3-5, KJV

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."
Acts 2:1-4, KJV

Now the situation becomes a little foggy. Exactly how much time transpired between the Day of Pentecost when the fire from Heaven baptized the Apostles, and the events in Acts chapter ten where we learn about both Cornelius and Peter's visions is hard to say. Personally, I don't believe that it was long at all, because my impression is that God was very interested in getting the evangelical ball rolling. Thus, the Apostles are baptized by fire in Acts chapter two only ten days after Jesus returns to Heaven. Saul of Tarsus is knocked off his horse and meets Jesus in Acts chapter nine. And Peter and Cornelius have their visions a day apart in Acts chapter ten.

You see, we humans have a propensity for looking at time in a very lateral, straight-line sense. However, not so with our mighty God. Using modern lingo, He tends to be what we might refer to as a multi-tasker and very astute strategist. If this life were a chess game, our Heavenly Father is most assuredly millions of moves ahead of us. I don't doubt that He is constantly putting His ducks in a row as they say, and that He is working on a variety of developments all at the same time, so that at a particular point in time, there will be a confluence of events which will result in the effect which He desires. I am reminded of the following Scriptures:

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things

that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:"

Isaiah 46:9-10, KJV

My point is the following: Given that the Gospel was still largely unknown to the Gentiles at that point in time, it would seem that something else influenced Cornelius and his family to believe in the God of Israel. So let me share my personal thoughts with you regarding this matter. Given how God tends to work, I suspect that sometime before Peter and Cornelius met, God had already been working in the life of Cornelius, so that by the time he met with Peter, he and his family were already firm believers in the God of Israel. So taking this possibility a step further, while I cannot prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt, I suspect that Acts chapter ten may not be the first account we have of Cornelius in the New Testament. In his Gospel, Luke relates a similar story of a centurion who was stationed in Capernaum during the early part of Jesus' ministry. Consider the following group of verses:

"Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."

Luke 7:1-10, KJV

Notice the similarities between these two accounts. In both we find a Roman centurion who believes in the God of Israel.

In Luke's account in his Gospel, we are informed that this centurion has servants. Likewise in Luke's account in the Book of Acts, he tells us the very same thing, as we see by this verse:

"And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;"
Acts 10:7, KJV

In reading Luke's account in the Book of Acts, we also know that Cornelius led a comfortable life in Caesarea. Being on the emperor's payroll, he must have been rather well off in a financial sense. Thus, he was able to help out the poor considerably. In the Gospel account, Luke tells us that this unnamed centurion also went as far as to build a synagogue for the Jews, which complements what Luke writes in the Book of Acts regarding Cornelius being "a devout man, and one that feared God" and who "gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway".

It also appears that in both of these stories, the unnamed centurion is not alone in his worship of the God of Israel. His household servants appear to be of the same persuasion. Likewise in the Book of Acts, Luke also mentions a devout soldier who is under Cornelius. This does not necessarily mean that he, or they, already believed in Jesus. Remember, many people believed in the God of Israel at that time, but not all of them had met Jesus personally during the course of His three-year ministry.

One thing we do know with certainty is that the unnamed Roman centurion in the Gospel of Luke had apparently heard of Jesus at least by word of mouth. It was for that very reason that he sent for Him in the first place. But notice. Because of this man's own humility, Luke tells us that he does not come out to meet Jesus face-to-face. He merely sends his servants to petition that Jesus heal his sick servant. If this man is indeed Cornelius who was later stationed in Caesarea further down on the coast, this is proof that the Lord had already been working in his life and preparing him for the events which would occur to him in Acts chapter ten. It seems that God was already drawing Cornelius to Christ. I am reminded of what Jesus said in the Gospels, as well as of some things that were written by the Apostle Paul. Consider this group of verses:

"ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVETH ME shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out . . . No man can come to me, EXCEPT THE FATHER WHICH HATH SENT ME DRAW HIM: and I will raise him up at the last day . . . And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father."

John 6:37, 44, 65, KJV

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. MY FATHER, WHICH GAVE THEM ME, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

John 10:28-29, KJV

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for THEM WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME; for they are thine . . . And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name THOSE WHOM THOU HAST GIVEN ME, that they may be one, as we are . . . Father, I will that they also, WHOM THOU HAST GIVEN ME, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

John 17:9, 11, 24, KJV

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Philippians 2:13, KJV

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT ARE HIS. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

2 Timothy 2:19, KJV

What I also find interesting regarding this account in Luke is that we are not told what happens after Jesus heals his servant. It seems to me that the natural thing to do would be for the centurion to at least go out to thank Jesus, if not invite Him into his house for a meal, or to spend the night so he could hear Him speak more. Regardless of what actually happened, considering how devout he was, it seems to me that after this miracle, this man must have become a believer in Jesus as the Messiah. As I will explain in a minute, there exists some possible evidence that this did happen, in Acts chapter ten.

It is also noteworthy that this same account of the unnamed centurion is likewise mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. The primary difference between the two accounts is that in the Gospel of Matthew, the centurion did in fact come to Jesus directly, and Jesus then marvelled at his faith when He said the following concerning him:

". . . Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Matthew 8:10, KJV

In thinking about these different aspects of the life of Cornelius, perhaps we can compare him to a modern-day, pious family man with a long career in the military. While he was a worldly man, Cornelius did have faith in God. However, as other chapters in the Book of Acts clearly demonstrate, and as I have explained in articles such as "Where Are the First Century Churches?" and "Abundant Life Doctrine: Scripturally Exposed!", being a full-time Disciple of Christ meant, and still means, much more than just having a superficial faith. As the following group of verses reveal, true Discipleship meant forsaking all and following Jesus one hundred per cent everyday. It meant selling everything one possessed and giving the money to the Apostles for distribution according to each person's need. This financial plan for the Early Church was first laid down by Jesus Himself:

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Acts 2:44-45, KJV

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Acts 4:34-37, KJV

"And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Matthew 19:29, KJV

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

Luke 14:33, KJV

Being a true Disciple of Jesus Christ also meant, and still means, to be willing to suffer persecution for the cause of Christ. It also means being willing to crucify one's flesh and to deny the desires of one's flesh for the furtherance of the Gospel. I discuss this latter point in articles such as "Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution" and "Are You Crucified With Christ?", which you will find listed at the end of this same article. One thing which is apparent in reading Acts chapter ten, is that Cornelius was a man who was well-loved by God. It is for this very reason that He sent an Angel to prepare Cornelius for Peter's visit, as we see by the following set of verses:

"He 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. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:"

Acts 10:3-5, KJV

It is also in this very same chapter while the servants of Cornelius are on their way to Joppa to find Peter, that the Lord reveals to Peter -- via his vision -- the true depth of His Sacrifice on the Cross, as well as the full extent of God's wonderful plan of Salvation for humanity. You see, as I amply explain in articles such as "Beware of the Pauline Extremists", up until the time that Peter had his vision on that roof, and until God directed the Apostle Paul to go to the Gentiles, neither Peter or the other Apostles had fully understood that Salvation would eventually be offered to all men, regardless of their ethnic heritage. Jesus had actually given them a hint that it would be so, but they missed it. This is why the Lord had to give Peter a special revelation in order to teach him this valuable lesson. Consider this set of verses where we see the evangelical progression from preaching only to the Jews, and then to all races of people everywhere:

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying,

GO NOT INTO THE WAY OF THE GENTILES, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But GO RATHER TO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 10:5-7, KJV

"But he answered and said, I AM NOT SENT BUT UNTO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL."

Matthew 15:24, KJV

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, PREACHING THE WORD TO NONE BUT UNTO THE JEWS ONLY."

Acts 11:19, KJV

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

John 10:16, KJV

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

John 12:32, KJV

"On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

Acts 10:9-16, KJV

In speaking about the miraculous vision he had experienced on his rooftop, on the following day after arriving at the house of Cornelius, Peter said in part the following:

". . . 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 . . . 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 with him."

Acts 10:28, 34-35, KJV

During the course of witnessing to Cornelius and his entire household, Peter says something which, in my view, seems to make it clear that Cornelius and his family already knew to some degree about Jesus Christ and the Salvation He brings. This could be an indication that dear Cornelius was indeed the unnamed centurion who had been mentioned by both Matthew and Luke in their respective Gospels, and that God had been working behind the scenes to prepare Cornelius' heart for this very encounter with Peter:

"The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;"

Acts 10:36-37, KJV

Please notice Peter specifically says, "ye know". In other words, Cornelius and his family are not ignorant of who Jesus is. After all, not only did the word of His miracles travel throughout all of Judea, but it began in Galilee. This point is rather interesting because it is exactly in Capernaum of Galilee where, as you may recall, the story of the unnamed centurion took place. Granted, this may merely be a coincidence, but I am not convinced that it is so. It may very well be that Cornelius was stationed in Capernaum at the time. But that is not all. While Peter was witnessing to Cornelius and all of his household, much to the surprise of the believing Jewish Disciples of the circumcision who accompanied Peter, the Holy Ghost then fell upon Cornelius and his household, and they begin to magnify the Lord and speak in tongues, as we can determine by the following set of verses:

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God . . ."

Acts 10:44-46, KJV

Please notice carefully that in the previous verses, there is no mention of Cornelius and his family acknowledging the Lord as their Savior. Peter is simply witnessing to them, and the next thing they know, these Gentiles are filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues! It is after this occurs that the chapter ends with Cornelius and his family being water baptized, and Peter and his companions remaining with them for a few days, as we see by these two verses:

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

Acts 10:47-48, KJV

So the question which arises in my mind is this: Was their Salvation and being filled with the Holy Ghost a simultaneous occurrence? Or is it possible that Cornelius and his entire family were ALREADY saved since the time that Jesus healed the servant of the unnamed centurion in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke? In my view, this probability seems highly possible. But again, I cannot prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt, because as I noted earlier, neither Matthew or Luke tell us what happened after Jesus healed the centurion's servant. Thus, it remains a matter of personal speculation.

Furthermore, it doesn't seem likely to me that Cornelius and his family would be filled with the Holy Ghost, and THEN be saved afterwards through the process of water baptism. My personal understanding of the Scriptures has long been that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is usually, but not always, a secondary event following one's Salvation.

Please also notice that this particular water baptism was simply a symbolic act of the true baptism of the Holy Spirit which had ALREADY occurred. As I have made rather clear in other articles such as "Roman Catholicism, Water Baptism and the Holy Trinity", I personally am not convinced that water baptism is necessary for Salvation. As I have long said and taught, our Salvation is based solely upon our faith in the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and NOT upon a physical act. As the Apostle Paul clearly teaches, Salvation which is based on anything other than simple faith in the Blood Atonement of Jesus Christ, is not Grace-based Salvation. Rather, it is worked-based Salvation, or else a hybrid combination of the

two, which is wrong. Consider the following sample verses:

"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

Romans 11:6, KJV

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9, KJV

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Galatians 2:21, KJV

"And by him [Jesus Christ] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Acts 13:39, KJV

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith."

Romans 3:20-27, KJV

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Romans 7:4, KJV

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed

in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified . . . I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

Galatians 2:16, 21, KJV

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

Galatians 3:11, KJV

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

Galatians 5:4, KJV

Please go to part two for the conclusion of this article.

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The Mystery of Cornelius the Centurion : Part 2

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Water Baptism Isn't Necessary For Salvation, Salvation Is By Grace Alone And Not By Works, A Step Of Faith By Both Peter And Cornelius, Apostle Peter Is Confronted By The Legalistic Jews After Returning From Caesarea, An Eventual Falling Out Between Peter And The Apostle Paul, Remainder Of Cornelius' Life Is Unknown, God's Ways And Thoughts Are Above Our Own, Nothing Happens By Accident To A Christian, Many Things Were Never Written Down, Why Jesus May Have Healed The Centurion's Servant, Several Years Transpired Between Capernaum Miracle And Events In Caesarea. Laborers Are Few, God Was Working In Cornelius' Life For Years, Heavenly Visitations Are Reserved For Key Players In God's Overall Plans, Different Points That Highlight Importance Of Cornelius' Calling, Purpose For Being Baptized With Holy Ghost, What Cornelius May Have Done After

Acts Chapter Ten: Home Church, New Creatures In Jesus Christ, Productive Lives For The Lord, How This Article Originated, The Lord's Army Versus Man's Army, The Apostles Immediately Forsook All To Follow Jesus, Apostle Paul: God Uses Drastic Recruitment Measures, Challenge To Naysayers, Did Cornelius Remain In The Roman Army Or Did He Serve Christ?, Our Great Commission, Choose The Lord's Army, Give Your Body And Life To God's Service, Closing Remarks, BBB Suggested Reading List

As I concluded in part one, contrary to what some Christians believe, I personally am not convinced that water baptism is necessary for Salvation. As I have long said and taught, our Salvation is either based solely on our faith in the Blood Atonement of Jesus Christ, or else it is based on our own self-righteous works which, quite frankly, will never ever satisfy God's requirements for the remission of our sins. As the Apostle Paul so clearly taught, Salvation which relies on anything other than simple faith in the Blood Atonement of Jesus Christ, is NOT Grace-based Salvation. It is in fact a worked-based Salvation, or else a weird hybrid combination of the two, which is simply wrong. I more amply discuss this subject in articles such as "Dead to the Law: God's Laws Written on Our Hearts" and "Free From the Fear of Death: Law and Works vs Grace", for which you will find links at the end of this same article.

To continue our discussion regarding the life of Cornelius, one other interesting point worth mentioning is that the entire encounter in Acts chapter ten was a complete act of faith on the parts of both Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius had no idea why he was told to send for Peter. He simply obeyed what had been shown to him in his vision. In like manner, for Peter to even consider ministering to Gentiles was a rather huge step of faith, which the Lord had to first confirm to him by way of the heavenly vision in which Peter saw a sheet full of unclean animals.

Let me mention here that this entire event was so out of the ordinary, that after dear Peter had returned to Jerusalem, the trouble-making, legalistic Jewish Disciples who still believed that circumcision was necessary for Salvation, made it a point to confront him regarding the events which had occurred in Caesarea:

"And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard

that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."

Acts 11:1-3, KJV

After relating the entire incident to that troublesome lot of legalistic, law-bound snakes, Peter summed up his words by saying the following to them:

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Acts 11:15-18, KJV

Dear Peter was basically saying to them, "Hey, look fellows. I was just as surprised as you are now. However, who am I to dare question the workings of the Lord?" Now, while they did maintain their peace at that point in time, as I explain in other articles, sadly, there was an eventual serious falling out between Peter and the Apostle Paul when Peter chose to side with the legalistic brethren out of fear of the Jews.

Beyond the events we find described in Acts chapter ten, I cannot state with any degree of certainty what happened to Cornelius and the rest of his household in Caesarea, after they had been visited by Peter and received the Holy Ghost. The Scriptures are silent regarding this matter. However, upon reading the amazing account we find Acts chapter ten, my initial impression is that due to his position of wealth, status and comfortable living, it probably would have been very difficult for Cornelius to forsake all; much like the young rich man who went away grieved after Jesus told him to forsake all and follow Him. There is also the matter that Cornelius could not simply abandon his important post as a centurion in the Italian Band, without serious repercussions from his commanding officers. However, at the same time, I am reminded again of several verses I have often quoted in my articles and elsewhere:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your

ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:8-9, KJV

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28, KJV

If there is one thing I have learned over the years, it is that God does not make mistakes. Everything which happens in the life of a Christian is for a very specific reason. As I mentioned in part one, God is constantly manipulating the pieces on His divine chess board, so that He can obtain the results that He desires. When certain events occur in our lives, it is because God is trying to teach us something, or He is trying to move us in a specific direction, or He is trying to get us to do something for Him which will further His Kingdom in some way.

The fact that the unidentified centurion is mentioned in two of the Gospels is significant. Out of the many people which Jesus healed during His short earthly ministry, we must ask why it is that this particular centurion is mentioned, while other miracles were overlooked. After all, as John wrote at the very end of his Gospel:

"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

John 21:24-25, KJV

In answer to my previous question, my personal thoughts are that perhaps by healing his servant -- assuming that it was in fact Cornelius in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke -- the Lord wanted to plant a deep seed of faith in his heart, and also leave Cornelius with a strong impression, because Jesus knew that some time later in his life, this centurion would become a faithful witness and a strong Disciple after he had received the Holy Ghost in Acts chapter ten. Let me remind you again that Jesus had a long-term vision for reaching the world with the Good News of Salvation, which I will address momentarily. But concerning planting the seed of the Word of

God, I am reminded of the following verse which is found in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Isaiah 55:11, KJV

As I noted in part one, we are not given a clear indication regarding how much time transpired between the story of the unidentified centurion in the Gospels, and the story of Cornelius in the Book of Acts. Considering that the first story occurred in Capernaum during the early part of Jesus' public ministry, and the second story occurred after the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, I think that it is reasonable to assume that perhaps three years or more may have lapsed between the two events. Sometimes it takes time for the Word of the Lord to produce the fruit that He desires. Could the story of Cornelius the Roman centurion be one such case? What do YOU think?

Putting all of the different pieces of this mysterious puzzle together, as I have already stated, I personally believe that the Lord must have had something very special for Cornelius to do. I don't think that He would allow a man of such great faith -- which He clearly recognized by His own comment -- to simply slip out of His hands; particularly when the number of laborers at that time were so few. Consider what Jesus said in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke:

"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

Matthew 9:37-38, KJV

"Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest."

Luke 10:2, KJV

So again, it is obvious to me that Cornelius was called by the Lord for some task. To reiterate a point I made earlier, if we accept that both Matthew and Luke were indeed referring to Cornelius in their Gospels before this event in the Book

of Acts several years later, then this is even more evidence that the Lord had been working in the life of Cornelius for some time. I have even considered the possibility that had the unidentified centurion gone out to meet Jesus in person on that day, perhaps he would have made a serious decision to follow the Lord right then and there. Personally, I can't imagine anyone who was so full of faith as Jesus said this man was, who witnessed a miracle by the hand of the Master, who would not want to dedicate his life to preaching His message in humble gratitude for having healed his servant. Can you?

In thinking about the amazing events which occurred in Acts chapter ten, we need to ask ourselves another question. How often is it that people receive a heavenly visitation? The Scriptures seem to indicate that such events are reserved for those people who have a very special calling from the Lord, such as Moses, Gideon, Joseph and Mary, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Paul, etc.

Another point worth considering is the fact that Peter was viewed as the chief of the Apostles, who had chosen by Jesus Himself. Yet the Lord did not think Peter to be too big, or too busy, or too important to send to those lowly Gentiles in Caesarea. In fact, as we have already discussed, the Lord specifically gave Peter his rooftop vision to convince him of the importance of his mission to Caesarea. Why? Because the Lord obviously knew that Cornelius and his family were very instrumental and an important part of His overall plans, whatever they were. I wish we knew.

Another very important fact to consider is that this family received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Not a Jewish family, but a Gentile Roman family no less! Many of you will already know what is the primary purpose for receiving the Holy Ghost. Is it to continue in our regular, dull existence living our own selfish lives? Of course not! We find a very clear answer in the first chapter of the Book of Acts where Jesus tells the Apostles the following:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Acts 1:8, KJV

So the primary purpose for receiving the Holy Spirit is to

empower us to be witnesses for Christ. It is to give us the power to go into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature. As such, based on the importance of Peter's mission to Caesarea, and the fact that the Lord had to convince him to go there by giving him a special vision, plus the unique way in which the Lord prepared Cornelius for this visit by an Early Church leader, even sending Cornelius a special Angelic visitor, I prefer to believe that after having received the Holy Spirit, Cornelius made the right choice to follow the Lord all the way.

In fact, I would venture to say that following the pattern of the First Century Church, he probably began a church in his own home beginning with his own family and servants. As I point out in "Where Are the First Century Churches?", this is where the first Churches were located. That is to say, in the private homes of the Lord's followers. Granted, the idea that Cornelius may have started a Church in his home is only conjecture on my part. But to think otherwise is to suggest that God wasted His time in setting things up the way He did if Cornelius just went back to his same old lifestyle. As I have explained before, when we accept the Lord and His Holy Spirit, we become a new man, a new creature in Christ Jesus, with new goals and new aspirations, as becomes evident by verses such as the following:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Ephesians 4:24, KJV

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:"

Colossians 3:10, KJV

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Romans 12:2, KJV

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of

life."

Romans 6:4, KJV

Let me point out that this "newness of life" is NOT just something which begins after we have been resurrected into our new glorified bodies. Rather, it is something which can and should begin here in our present life the minute that we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. If we accept the Lord, and then continue living our same old, selfish lives business as usual, then something must be wrong somewhere, in my view. As becomes clear in Paul's Epistle, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. In other words, no one in their right mind is going to be sorry for having chosen to follow the Lord, or turn their back on any type of ministerial gifts which they may have been granted by the Lord:

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Romans 11:29, KJV

Likewise, as the Apostle James writes, faith without works is dead. To clarify, this does NOT mean that we are saved by our works as some Christians erroneously believe. It simply means that if we are truly saved and filled with the Spirit, the fruit of our lives will reveal that we are truly saved children of God. If we truly believe and are born anew, then there should and will be a very noticeable change in how we choose to live as we try our best to follow and serve the Lord in some capacity. We will lead productive lives for the Lord. This is a subject which I discuss more at length in articles such as "Are You a Burning Ember for the Lord?" and "The Parable of the Sower: Salvation and Service". Consider the following set of Scriptures which confirm these points:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

James 2:26, KJV

"But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold . . . But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Matthew 13:8, 23, KJV

"And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as

hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred."

Mark 4:20, KJV

"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

Luke 8:15, KJV

"He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

Luke 13:6-9, KJV

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples . . . Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

John 15:1-8, 16, KJV

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Romans 7:4, KJV

Changing gears a bit, the idea for this article came about as a result of someone challenging my view in which I stated that one cannot serve in the Lord's Army and man's army at the same time. One cannot follow Jesus' commandment to save lives, while at the same time he destroys lives through the mandates of some earthly government or military force. This is a subject which you can more amply explore in some of the articles which are listed at the end of this current article.

At any rate, to refute my statements, the person in question referred to the example of Cornelius to try to prove to me that a person can serve in the military and still serve the Lord at the same time, even though I personally find such a view both contradictory and incompatible. So the purpose of this article then has been to show that it is quite possible that after being filled with the Holy Spirit, Cornelius may very well have chosen to leave his old military life behind, in order to embark on a new life of winning souls into the Lord's Kingdom. When Jesus called Simon and Andrew, James and John, and Matthew the tax collector, this is exactly what all of them did. They immediately dropped everything on the spot and followed Jesus without hesitation, as we can see by the following group of verses:

"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him."

Matthew 4:18-20, KJV

"And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him."

Matthew 4:21-22, KJV

"And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him."

Matthew 9:9, KJV

In certain cases, the Lord had to use more drastic measures. Such was the case with Saul of Tarsus whom the Lord not only knocked off of his horse, but blinded him for three days as well. Paul's story is more fully discussed in the article

called "A Biblical Cafeteria, or the Whole Course?". In light of the examples I have presented here, I really don't see how Cornelius could have done otherwise after the Lord had sent an Angel to him, plus given Peter his heavenly vision. What other signs than those could he have possibly needed to realize that the Lord was calling him into special service?

For those people who continue to challenge my speculations, I return the challenge and ask you to prove otherwise. Prove to me, if you can, through the Scriptures that Cornelius did choose to retain his important position as a Roman centurion in the Italian Band. As I've already made quite clear, after such a miraculous in-dwelling of the Holy Ghost which itself resulted from two supernatural events, how could that man even think about continuing to partake of the sins of the evil, oppressive Roman Empire by serving in its army?

As a newborn babe in Christ who had personally witnessed the peaceful ways of Jesus and the Apostles, how could Cornelius possibly participate in the slaughter of thousands of Jews, and Christian Jews, in Jerusalem, which occurred some years later? From my perspective, there is no way that Cornelius could have continued in his same occupation afterwards. He must have left his old, violent life behind in obedience to the Lord's commandment. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus had a long-term vision for reaching the world with the Good News of Salvation. He in fact had a global vision. Furthermore, the Lord was looking for qualified men who could help Him to bring that vision to fruition. Cornelius was apparently one of them. Consider the following group of verses:

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Mark 16:15, KJV

"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

John 17:18, KJV

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Acts 1:8, KJV

"For God so loved THE WORLD, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

John 3:16-17, KJV

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw ALL MEN unto me."

John 12:32, KJV

While my conclusion is obviously partially based on personal conjecture, the Scriptural evidence I have provided in this article does create a very interesting tapestry which seems to support my position. As I explained in part one. God does not make mistakes. He had a very specific plan for the life of Cornelius the centurion. As I noted previously, I believe that over an undefined period of time, God caused a series of events to occur in Cornelius' life, so that he ultimately fulfilled the Lord's desired plan. At the very least, I am convinced that Cornelius started a home church with his immediate family and friends.

Looking at my own life, and the lives of others I have known who have been touched by God's Spirit, I know how God tends to work. It's very difficult for devout Christians to resist God's Spirit working in their lives. So again, based on the evidence I have presented here, I believe that Cornelius was one such faithful man who heard God's calling, and followed it without giving it second thought. I believe he hung up his Roman sword, and he took the Sword of the Spirit and began fighting the good fight of faith. He forsook being a soldier of Rome, and he began a new profession as a soldier in the army of Jesus Christ, preaching the Gospel of the Good News of Salvation. Consider the following group of verses:

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."

1 Timothy 6:12, KJV

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

2 Timothy 2:3-4, KJV

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I

have kept the faith:"

2 Timothy 4:7, KJV

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Hebrews 4:12, KJV

"(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)"

2 Corinthians 10:4, KJV

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"

Ephesians 6:10-18, KJV

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

2 Timothy 2:4, KJV

To those young Christians who are considering joining the military service, I present this challenge to you: Instead of giving your life to Satan and man's armies, won't you please consider giving your life and your body to Christ so that He can use you to bring new life and new hope to the lost? Please consider these last verses:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,

that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Romans 12:1-2, KJV

"If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

1 Corinthians 3:17, KJV

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, KJV

So that, my friends, is the story of the mystery of Cornelius the Roman centurion, or at least how I personally currently understand it. Of course, you are not obligated to agree with me concerning it. After all, I do engage in a bit of personal speculation. However, I do believe that my explanation makes a lot of sense.

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you have found it informative, enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you'd take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were either mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server. To read these articles, simply click or tap on any link you see below.

A Temple Veil, an Earthquake and a Centurion
Abundant Life Doctrine: Scripturally Exposed!
Are You a Burning Ember for the Lord?
Are You Crucified With Christ?
Beware of the Pauline Extremists!
A Biblical Cafeteria or the Whole Course?

Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution
Dead to the Law: God's Laws Written on Our Hearts
Fifty Days Which Changed the World
Free From the Fear of Death: Law and Works vs Grace
Killing and the Phinehas Priesthood
Killing, Murder, War and Military Duty
Owning Guns: What Saith the Scriptures?
Roman Catholicism, Water Baptism and the Holy Trinity
The Parable of the Sower: Salvation and Service
Where Are the First Century Churches?

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