

ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS

LESSON SUBJECT

A DOOR OF FAITH FOR GENTILES

SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 10:1-48

MEMORY VERSE: Acts 10:1-2. There was a certain man in Caesarea, A Centurion of the band called the Italian band. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

INTRODUCTION:

Cornelius, a devout, God-fearing, benevolent, praying man, who is also a Roman Centurion in charge of 100 soldiers, has a marvelous encounter with God in this lesson. He is stationed in Caesarea, about 35 to 40 miles from Joppa (where Peter is currently residing). Caesarea is a port city built by Herod the Great. It was a luxurious city, with palaces, theatres, aqueducts, and even the port itself was magnificent compared to any of that day. The fact that Cornelius is stationed at such an important city may suggest that he had earned a position of great trust in the Roman army. If so it would confirm the fact that his deep spiritual life had also endeared him to his Roman superiors.

However this story is not about his position in the Roman army as much as it is about far greater things to both Cornelius and the rest of the world. It is very unusual that a man of his responsibilities in the military could suddenly be thrust into the center of what God is doing in his own “spiritual army”. Cornelius receives a vision from God, about the ninth hour of the day, giving him instructions about his future relationship with the Lord. In chapter 3:1, Peter and John went to prayer also at the “ninth” hour. It must be that this is a usual hour of prayer that Cornelius is observing when he receives a vision from the Lord.

This chapter begins with the statement: “There was a certain man in Caesarea, called Cornelius”. God was not using just any member of the Roman army for the great event of this chapter; He chose a certain man who was devout, benevolent and a praying man. In all likelihood God had been preparing Cornelius for this work for some time. Cornelius is told that his prayers and alms are come up for a memorial before God, which suggests that this has been his lifestyle for a long time. Many would argue that the devotions, alms deeds and prayers of Cornelius had no availing influence on his salvation that follows. But this passage (V2-4) puts forth a compelling argument that it was, in fact, because of these spiritual attributes that the grace of God came to this good and Godly man. Cornelius is told to send men to Joppa, and find one Simon Peter, who will come tell him what he ought to do. What follows is the marvelous story of the door of faith and salvation opening unto the Gentile world, with Cornelius being at the front of that line.

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS AND THOUGHTS

MONDAY. ACTS 10:1-2. A CERTAIN MAN NAMED CORNELIUS.

SCRIPTURE.

V1. There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band. 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

COMMENTS.

We have already called attention to this “certain man” in the introduction to this lesson. Some additional emphasis will not be too much. After all, the events of this chapter are very unique, in that they reveal the opening of the door of faith to the Gentile world. At Pentecost, Jews, from every nation under heaven, were brought into the kingdom of God by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Sometime later, the Samaritans received the same experience as at Pentecost. Now, a Roman Centurion, a Gentile, is about to share the exact same experience. God has chosen this devout Centurion, not because of his position in the Roman army, but because of his relationship and devotion to God. God truly does look on the heart. If it had been left up to the apostles, Cornelius would have had little chance. That is why God had to deal with Peter very specifically about the Gentiles. Cornelius, however, was a man we would all like to welcome into our churches because of his devotions, God-fearing, alms giving and prayers, continually practiced by him. And yet, in spite of these very great God-given qualities, there was a need in his life that only an experience with God could fill. That need is faith in Christ as the crucified savior, water baptism in Jesus Name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

TUESDAY. ACTS 10:3-18. TWO VISIONS CHANGED THE WORLD.

SCRIPTURE.

V3. He saw in a vision, evidently about the ninth hour of the day and angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4. 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. 5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; 6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7. 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: 8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. 9. 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. 10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance. 11. 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: 12 Wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, rise,

Peter: kill, and eat. 14. But Peter said, not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. 15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. 18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

COMMENTS.

God works in such unique ways. Instead of just sending the Holy Spirit to Cornelius, he gives him a vision by which he tells him to send for one Simon Peter, who lives at the house of Simon the tanner, and he will tell you what you ought to do. God does not deal in vague generalities with Cornelius, but provides him with the city, the name, the house and the location of the house. Cornelius' salvation is at stake; it must be exact.

Meanwhile, down in Joppa two days journey away, God is likewise dealing with Peter. He, too, is in prayer, and God reveals to him a most unusual thing: a vessel let down from heaven, full of unclean beasts, and the voice of God telling him to kill and eat. This astonished Peter because he had followed the Jewish custom of not eating anything common or unclean. So (in the vision) Peter refuses to eat unclean animals. God tells him not to call unclean what he has cleansed. This was done three times. Not only had Peter not eaten animals that were described under the law as being unclean, he also did not mix with Gentiles for the same reason. They were unclean and off limits. God, in his loving kindness and wisdom, had prepared a plan of salvation that was equally the same for Jew and Gentiles. The Jewish people needed the same plan of salvation as did the Gentiles, and still do today. The notion that God has something special in store for Jews in the future is completely unscriptural. God is trying to open Peter's eyes to see this very truth because there are some Gentiles at his gate, ready to escort him to an evangelistic service for the Gentile world. How marvelous and precise God worked on both ends to accomplish this glorious event.

WEDNESDAY. ACTS 10:19-33. JEW AND GENTILE BECOME ONE IN CHRIST.

SCRIPTURE.

V19. And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them. 21. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius: and said, behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? 22. And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. 23. Then called he them in, and lodged them, and on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea, and Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. 25. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. 26. But Peter took him up, saying, stand up: I myself also am a man. 27. And as he talked with him, he went in and found

many that were come together. 28. And he said unto them, ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for 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. 29. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? 30. And Cornelius said, four days ago, I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 33. Immediately, therefore I sent for thee; and thou hast well done that thou art com., Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things, that are commanded thee of God.

COMMENTS.

The importance of these two visions in bringing Christ to the Gentiles cannot be overstated. Every detail of this entire story is specifically orchestrated by God, leaving nothing to chance or religious whims. Without it, the possibility of success of so great a mission would have been very slim to none. If Cornelius had been given a vision and Peter had not, the story ends there and vs/vs. If Peter had been given his vision (and Cornelius had not) and gone to Caesarea on an “evangelistic” campaign, it would have been futile. “New York city” certainly has a great need for the gospel, but to embark on an “evangelistic” crusade to save even one person there, must have the work of God on both ends. Further, God created this very high level meeting for just one man and his friends and not for “metropolitan Rome” where the crowds would have been greater and where the great coliseum could be filled with celebrities. And the details involved in these two visions complement and confirm each other. As Peter ends his prayer, God tells him “3 men seek thee”; go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them.

As the process of the two visions unfold, Cornelius is at home, anxiously waiting to learn who this “Simon Peter” is and what he would tell Cornelius to do. At the same time, Peter is struggling with a culture war within his heart over God’s command to “kill and eat”. Cornelius could have argued that he already was an obedient servant of the Lord; praying, devout, alms giving, and with a good reputation among all the nations of the Jews. But he did not argue this. To do so would have negated his status and relationship with the Lord. When Cornelius and Peter finally stood face to face with each other, one anxiously awaits what God would tell him, while the other one wondered why he had been sent for. Both of them represented a sense of divine awe at the occasion, and not a sense of personal importance. Cornelius bowed before Peter, who declined the honor by declaring “I myself am also a man”. With this they embarked upon a meeting that would save Cornelius and his household, and further, would impact all the nations of the world. A meeting that empowered Jew and Gentile to be ‘ONE IN CHRIST’

THURSDAY. ACTS 10:34-43. PETER PREACHES “JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION”.

SCRIPTURE.

V34. 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. 36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all.) 37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee; after the baptism which John preached: 38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. 39. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. 40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead. 43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

COMMENTS.

He did not have to search long for an appropriate message for the occasion. He used the only message there was with any redeeming value, the same one he had preached on the day of Pentecost: the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Peter noted the past barriers between Jew and Gentile and the cultural and religious divide between them. In Verse 34 he observes that God truly is no respecter of persons and in verse 35, that of every nation those who fear God are accepted by him. Then in verse 42, he speaks of Christ as being ordained to be the judge of quick and dead (living and dead). I believe that this refers to the relative spiritual state of Jew and Gentile. (See Eph. Chapter 2). Further in verse 43, Peter declares that whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. Gentiles now have the door of faith in Christ opened unto them. The responsibilities and opportunities beyond that door are up to them.

FRIDAY. ACTS 10:44-48. GENTILE BELIVERS EXPERIENCE THE HOLY GHOST JUST AS THE JEWS AT PENTECOST DID.

SCRIPTURE.

V44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45. 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. 46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God, then answered Peter, 47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

COMMENTS

The easy thing to do with these verses would be to speak in generalities about the Gentiles "believing" on Christ and becoming Christians, which would be a very true statement. However it

would not describe in clear, unmistakable terms precisely what took place as these Gentiles received Christ into their lives. So let's review this remarkable event just as the scriptures describe it to us.

- While Peter yet spake these words (of the gospel of Christ)
- The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.
- The Jews who came with Peter (who also had received this same Holy Ghost, V47) were astonished at what they saw and heard.
- Because that on the Gentiles was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- For (because) they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.
- Then Peter asked, 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.

This event completely eliminates the opinion held by many that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was only for the apostles, or for the Jews at Pentecost, as well as any other restrictions upon it. The Gentiles, too, have received the exact same experience with the exact same manifestation (tongues) as did the Jews at Pentecost. The baptism of the Holy Ghost foretold by the prophets, specifically promised in all four gospels and experienced in the book of Acts, is the most sacred and precious gift God has ever given to man. To all whose theology denies or condemns this experience as manifested to Cornelius I would ask simply, what was wrong, bad or unscriptural about it? If you had the chance to ask Cornelius what he thought about it, what do you think his answer would be?

SUMMARY.

Do not call what I have cleansed common or unclean. A Centurion, a devout, praying, God-fearing man receives a vision direct from God. God is no respecter of persons. In all nations whosoever believes in him will have remission of sins. "I myself also am a man" (and not above you, Cornelius). The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Jesus Christ).

There is another intriguing thought about Cornelius. In Lk. 7:1-10, there is the story of a Roman Centurion who comes to Jesus to ask him to heal his sick servant. This Centurion (in Luke) is described as a good man, one that feared God, very benevolent, even building a synagogue for the Jews. He describes to Christ the obedience of his servants and soldiers and Jesus said, I have not seen that kind of faith in Israel. When you compare the great, godly qualities of the Centurion in Luke with Cornelius, in Acts 10, you wonder if they might be the same person. If so, it sure does add significance to the story. If not, it sure was very coincidental to have two Roman Centurions with identical qualities, each of which was God-fearing and noble. You decide.

QUESTIONS.

1. How was Cornelius selected as the one through whom the door of faith to Gentiles opened?
2. Why was it necessary that God work with Peter and Cornelius?
3. What does this lesson teach us about who the gospel is meant for?

4. Of all that Cornelius experienced, what part of it is restricted to him and not for us today?