

GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles, Part I

The Preparation of Peter and Cornelius

Acts 9:32-10:8

July 29, 2007

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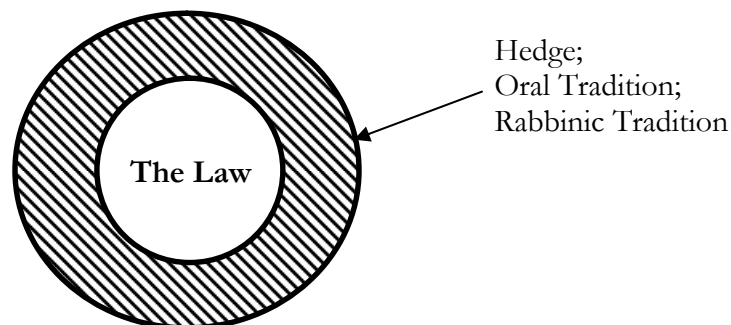
- Consider what is involved in a family vacation. Think of all the preparation that goes into it. However, how much of this is the concern of the young children in the family? They inherently trust that the parents will ensure that everything is taken care of. All they must do is enjoy the trip. How does such a reality correspond to our trust in our Heavenly Father?
- Recall **Acts 1:8**: ‘but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’
- As the Lord ordains the ends, He always ensures, *absolutely*, that His purposes will be accomplished.
 - One must understand that no boundary is to formidable for God [for He is the Creator of everything!]. This was clear in the conversion of Saul – the great persecutor of the Church.
 - Yet, it is interesting that the boundaries that block ‘professing’ Christians are often more significant than even unbelieving pagans. This will become clearer as one examines all of the events surrounding the conversion of Cornelius.

- ❑ God has already declared, in Acts 1:8 and throughout the Old Testament, that it is His purpose that the Gentiles would be included in the family of God. [Therefore, it **will** happen!]
- ❑ The Gospel had already spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.
- ❑ Recall, as well, that an Ethiopian eunuch, an unclean Gentile himself, has already been saved [He was, in a sense, the ‘first-fruits’ of the Gentiles]. Yet, it was through the work of Philip, who was not an apostle, that the Eunuch was saved.
- ❑ Therefore, when Peter, a member of the apostolic band, proclaims the Gospel to the Gentile world [beginning with Cornelius in Acts 10], he does so authoritatively, as an original apostle appointed by Christ Himself [Read Ephesians 2:20]. This, once again, ensures the unity of the early church as One Body with One LORD [as it did in Acts 7, when Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritan converts].
- ❑ **Thus, the Gospel had yet to penetrate the Gentile world [as it had in Samaria in Acts 8] with the authority, affirmation, and authentication of the Apostles.** Because of the unique authority that the Apostles possessed in this early church age, it was necessary that they have an ‘authoritative’ role in the penetration of the Gospel into the Gentile world.
- ❑ God chose Peter to be the Apostle to open the kingdom of God to the Gentiles. [NOTE: Peter will also be the Apostle to the Jews; however, before he fulfills the role, he must first fully understand his Lord is the Lord of ALL Creation – to include the Gentiles.]
- ❑ The reason for this goes back to **Matthew 16:16-19**. In this passage, Christ establishes the truth of the Gospel as the foundation of the Church, and ‘gives’ Peter the **key of the Kingdom**. One must understand; however, the context of this passage. **The Jewish authorities of the day were attempting to lock certain individuals and entire races of people out of the kingdom of God on the basis of what they deemed appropriate.**
- ❑ However, when Jesus gave Peter [and subsequently all who proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ] the ‘keys of the kingdom’, he gave them authority to open the kingdom of God to the whole world, without racial or ethnic distinction.
 - ‘it was on the basis of his confession and not on that of personal abilities that Peter was given the keys [of the kingdom].’ He continues by describing the legalists of Christ’s day as ‘excluding people from the knowledge of God by their [erroneous] handling of Scripture.’
 - The right to ‘bind and loose’, which is inseparably linked to the metaphor of the keys, will later be given to the disciples as a whole in Matthew 18:18, therefore, this was not something that only Peter possessed [or as the Roman Catholic Church teaches, all those who were in the line of succession from Peter (whom they incorrectly assert, as the pope)].
 - In short, **the ‘keys of the kingdom’ is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what we see here, in Acts 9-10 is Peter using the keys [i.e., the Gospel Message] to open up the kingdom of God to the Gentile world.**

- ❑ Therefore, at the end of Acts 9, the Lord begins to prepare Peter for his role in the ‘official’ opening of the kingdom of God, through the Gospel message, to the Gentile world.

I. The Lord prepares Peter to Proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles

- ❑ However, before the Lord would use Peter, He would prepare Him for the task.
- ❑ This would involve the breaking down of several strongholds in the life of Peter.
- ❑ One must understand that the average Jew was a staunch **legalist** and **racist** – being nationalistic and ethnically exclusive. In other words, the Jews of the first century believed that, as God’s ‘chosen people’ they were, in some way, superior to all other races. This obviously proved to be a huge stumbling block for the Jews in the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentile world (and the fulfillment of Acts 1:8!) [NOTE: Even though he was a believer, Peter was himself susceptible to this].
- ❑ Because of their legalism and their racial and ethnic exclusivism the Jews made themselves out to be gods all the while claiming to be worshippers of the one true God. [This truth will be clearer as we study Acts 10 in the coming weeks].
- ❑ Before one can understand the legalism of the Pharisees and many of the Jews of the first century, one must understand the signs of the biblical covenants. For example, the *sign* of God’s covenant with Noah was a rainbow
- ❑ However, the two main covenants of the Old Testament also had associated SIGNS:
 - **Circumcision** was the ceremonial *sign* of God’s covenant with Abraham.
 - **The Sabbath** was the ceremonial *sign* of the Mosaic covenant
 - Therefore, to break the Sabbath was, in some way, to be guilty of breaking all of the Laws of Moses. [Dietary laws were also of the utmost importance.]
- ❑ Each of these **signs** were intended to **point to Christ**; however, the Jews turned them into something they were never meant to be: ‘tests’ or ‘measures’ of a ‘good Jew.’ In other words, they were something that you could see with the human eye and judge, on the basis of appearance whether someone was godly or not – regardless of the nature of their heart.
- ❑ Therefore, in order to protect the obedience to the external stipulations of the Law – that which you could see and measure, the Jews developed an extra-biblical hedge; which became as important [or even more important] that the biblical Laws themselves.



- ❑ Example of the Law vs. the Rabbinical Tradition
 - Law: Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy.
 - Rabbinical Tradition: Is it lawful to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath?
- ❑ The leaders of the Jews obeyed the Law as far as appearances were concerned; however, their hearts were far from God [See Isaiah 1; Matthew 23:23]
- ❑ **To ensure that the Sabbath Law was not broken, Jewish rabbis defined thirty-nine types of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath:**

“The main classes of work are forty save one (39); sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing wool, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer and taking out aught from one domain to another. These are the main classes of work: forty save one (39). (*Sabbat* 7:2).”

Also, “(On the Sabbath) a man may borrow of his fellow jars of wine or jars of oil, provided that he does not say to him, ‘Lend me them.’” (*Shab.* 23:1). This would imply a transaction, and a transaction might involve writing, and writing was work and therefore forbidden.

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- ❑ Once again, Peter was Jewish. There is no question that he loved the Risen and Exalted Lord. However, he was a part of the first century Jewish culture, and there were legalistic boundaries in his life that had to be broken before he would be used by God.
 - For example, first century Jews [not just Pharisees] often referred to Gentiles as ‘Dogs.’
 - Furthermore, a committed Jewish male, would NEVER enter into the home of a Gentile [because he was unclean]. [Yet, the conversion of Cornelius providentially involved Peter entering into the house of the centurion.]
- ❑ These boundaries, however, were nothing for God. Yet, he would use a series of events to break down these boundaries in order to powerfully use Peter in the spread of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. The Lord Prepared Peter through his Itinerant Ministry

- ❑ In Acts 8, when persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the Apostles remained there [as many of the Hellenistic Jews scattered]. However, now that Saul has been converted and has returned to his home in Tarsus, there is a period of peace in Jerusalem.
- ❑ Now that Saul has ‘left the scene’ for the time being, Peter, a member of the Twelve, appears to take advantage of the peace and proclaim the Gospel message.

- Luke writes in **Acts 9:32**, ‘Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions...’,
 - This passage demonstrates the sovereign hand of God working in human history. It is God who orchestrated the peace at exactly the right time in order that Peter would begin traveling about proclaiming the Gospel, in order that Cornelius, a Gentile, would hear and believe.
- However, it also prepares Peter [and the reader] for something else quite significant. Through Peter’s itinerant ministry, as well as each of the healings that he is going to perform, the Lord is bringing Peter *geographically* closer to Caesarea, where he will proclaim the Gospel message to Cornelius and authoritatively open the kingdom of God to the Gentiles.

b. The Lord Prepares Peter through the Healing of Aeneas

- Luke begins this narrative with the phrase **Verse 32**, ‘Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.’
 - It never ceases to amaze me how events that seem, from our perspective, to be so ‘ordinary’ or ‘mundane’ are always under God’s sovereign, providential control.
 - There is no question, as is clear later in this passage, that there is nothing ‘idle’ or ‘random’ about Peter’s actions. Certainly, to Peter, he is walking freely about the regions in Judea. In fact, Luke writes, ‘Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also...’
 - Peter is freely moving about, proclaiming the Gospel, all the while God is orchestrating events that will eventually lead to the opening of the kingdom of God, through the proclamation of the Gospel message, into the Gentile world.
 - In other words, from God’s perspective, He is leading Peter to exactly the place and point in time that he has ordained.
 - The first place that Peter comes to is Lydda. This is the Old Testament city of Lod (1 Chronicles 8:12). It was about thirty (30) miles northwest of Jerusalem on the ancient road to Joppa. It was also about twelve (12) miles southeast of Joppa. It was known for its purple dye and would later become a center of rabbinical learning.
 - It is likely that much of the community of Lydda was made up of fugitives who had fled the persecution in Jerusalem.
- Luke then states, **Verse 33**, ‘There he found a man named Aeneas...’
 - Just as Jesus did, at times [Luke 7:13-15; 13:12] when He healed the sick and lame, Peter took the initiative and sought the paralyzed man out.

- Certain, as will be clear, this is a picture of our salvation. It is God who seeks us out, not the other way around. It is likely, even probable, that the paralyzed man was not even aware of Peter and his authority as a disciple. Therefore, he was not only paralyzed, but wholly ignorant of the fact that a man who possessed the authority to heal him was in his midst. [Again, so it was before we were saved.]
- Luke, again, writes **Verse 33** that Aeneas ‘had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.’
 - This could also read, ‘He had been bedridden from the age of eight.’
 - Regardless, here was a man who was bedridden who had been unable to move, in his own ability, for years.
 - Once again, the man’s paralysis gives us additional insight into the state of man apart from Christ. Apart from Him, we are spiritually paralyzed, **unable** to move or do anything that would help ourselves or improve our spiritual state – we are in desperate need of His healing and salvation.
- In **Verse 34**, Peter speaks to the paralyzed man, saying, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.’
 - Notice that Peter makes it irrefutably clear that it was the power and authority of the risen and exalted Jesus that healed Aeneas...not himself.
 - The word for ‘heal’ in the Greek is in the aorist tense. Therefore, Peter’s words literally mean, ‘Jesus heals you this moment.’
 - In other words, the healing power of Jesus Christ, through the Apostle Peter was thorough, complete, and immediate. So it is when he regenerates us. We are brought from death to life: completely and immediately.
 - This act of Peter [or, rather, Jesus through Peter] was, indeed, a **sign**, pointing to the reality of the risen and exalted Christ at work in the lives of the Apostles. This sign, along with all of the others 1.) authenticated the message of the Apostles, demonstrating that they were, in fact, called by Christ Himself; and 2.) pointed to salvation which is found only in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - So complete was the healing of Aeneas, that Peter commands him to not only get up, but to make his bed.
- Luke concludes his account of the healing of Aeneas by stating **Verse 35**, ‘And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.’
 - Lydda, as well as Joppa, was located on the coastal plain of Sharon to the northwest of Jerusalem.

- Notice, here, that Luke writes ‘all who lived in Lydda...saw him...’
 - Yet, as John Calvin correctly wrote, ‘when Scripture mentions *all*, it is not embracing, to a man, the whole of whatever it is describing, but uses ‘all’ for many, for the majority, or for a crowd of people.’
 - In other words, this Verse should be taken in the proper literary context of not meaning ‘every single individual without exception,’ but rather, many throughout the region.
- ❖ Yet, one of the powerful truths, here, is that much of this region was ‘semi-Gentile in population.’ Therefore, Luke is demonstrating how God is moving Peter closer to the Gentile regions of Israel, and in so doing, he is preparing the reader for the opening of the Gospel message to the Gentile World. As F.F. Bruce writes, ‘a further widening of the range of the saving message is implied.’

c. The Lord Prepares Peter through the Raising of Dorcas

- The raising of Dorcas by Peter parallels several ‘raisings’ throughout both the Old and the New Testaments, such as Elijah’s raising the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24); Elisha’s raising of the Shunammite woman’s son in 2 Kings 4:32-37; and the raising of the widow’s son by Jesus in Luke 7:11-17.
- However, certainly the closest parallel exists between Peter’s raising of Dorcas and the raising of Jairus’s daughter by Jesus in Luke 8:49-56 and Mark 5:35-43.
- In **Verse 36**, Luke writes of a ‘disciple’ named Tabitha who ‘was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.’
 - Luke also provides the Greek translation of her name, Dorcas. Both the names Tabitha and Dorcas mean ‘gazelle.’
- However, tragically, in **Verse 37**, Luke states that ‘she fell sick [we are not told from what] and died.’
- Luke continues in **Verse 37**, stating that ‘they...washed her body...and laid it in an upper room.’
 - It was the ancient near eastern custom to wash a body prior to its burial; however, it was not custom to place the body in a room of a home.
 - Some have suggested that the Christians caring for her body had such faith in the resurrection, that they were performing a symbolic act, demonstrating their firm belief that Dorcas would be bodily raised from the dead. Therefore [assuming this scenario is true], Tabitha’s Christian friends so no real need in her burial.

- However, regardless of exactly *why* the Christian friends of Dorcas placed her in the upper room, Luke makes it clear, in **Verse 38**, that they knew Peter was nearby in the town of Lydda.
 - Therefore, ‘the disciples’ sent two men to Lydda – about 10 to 11 miles southeast of Joppa - a three hour journey by foot – in the hopes of bringing Peter to Joppa in order to heal Dorcas. [NOTE: Joppa, or Jaffa, is near the modern-day city of Tel-Aviv.]
- Upon arriving in Lydda, the disciples ‘implored Peter, ‘Do not delay in coming to us.’ Luke records, in **Verse 39**, that Peter agreed and went with the disciples.
- When Peter arrived at Joppa, **Verse 39**, ‘all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.’
 - In the ancient world, widows were a group in society who were especially helpless. In this first century culture, women rarely worked, and it was difficult, if not impossible, for widows to find employment after their husbands died. Without the help of extended family members, widows were left poor and destitute.
 - This historical reality, then, gives the modern-day reader a little insight into the role Dorcas has played in this early Christian community. She had, so it appears, cared for the widows of Joppa primarily by making clothing for them. Indeed, she was a woman ‘abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.’
 - Thus, it makes sense why the widows were ‘weeping.’ They had lost a dear friend and, to a large degree, caregiver.
 - In fact, the Greek which is translated ‘and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them’ literally means ‘**and showing on themselves...**’
 - In other words, the widows wanted Peter to know how important Dorcas was to them, and the generous work that she had done.
- Then, in **Verse 40**, Peter ‘sent them all out...’
 - Peter’s primary desire was to glorify God, not himself. He was not interested in ‘impressing’ the widows or ‘putting on a show.’ Rather, he was interested in submitting himself to will of the Lord. This certainly stands in stark contrast with the many modern-day ‘miracle-workers’ and ‘healers.’ Peter sought the praise of God, not of men, and his ministry was a reflection of this truth.
 - Interestingly, when Jesus healed Jairus’s daughter, in Mark 5:40, he asked everyone to leave the room except the young girl’s parents and three disciples.
- Just as Jesus so often did, Peter, then, in **Verse 40**, ‘knelt down and prayed...’

- Once again, this demonstrated Peter's submission to the will and authority of God, just as Jesus Christ, in his earthly ministry was always functionally subordinate to the will of His Father.
- Peter, then, said, "Tabitha, arise." **Verse 40**
 - When viewed in light of the narrative of the raising of Jairus's daughter by Jesus, Peter's words are fascinating.
 - In Mark's account of the raising of Jairus's daughter by Jesus, he preserves the original Aramaic form that Jesus would have most likely spoken, '*Talitha koum*' (Mark:5:41)...in English, 'Little girl, arise.'
 - Here, in Acts 9:40, however, Luke writes that Peter's words were almost identical to his Lord's, saying to Tabitha, "Tabitha, arise." Or, in Aramaic, Peter would have said, '*Tabitha, koum*.' In other words, there would have been only one letter different in Peter's words when he raised Tabitha, than the Lord's when He raised Jairus's daughter.
 - The similarity here is too close to deny. In other words, it was, indeed, this **sign** was the work of the exalted Lord through Peter pointing to the true **resurrection** that is found only through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- After Peter spoke these words, Luke writes, in **Verse 40**, that 'she opened here eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.' Then, in **Verse 41**, Peter 'gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.'
 - After he raised her from the dead, Peter, 'gave' her back to her loved ones.
 - From this day on, the story of Dorcas spread throughout the region: the coastal plain of Sharon. She would become a living example, indeed, a testimony to the miraculous resurrection-work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Her 'resurrection' not only served to help the temporary, physical needs of the widows in the community of Joppa, but pointed to a greater 'caregiver' – a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
 - Therefore, as Luke writes, **Verse 42**, 'It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.'
- ❖ From these two healing 'episodes', the modern-day reader can learn several powerful truths:
 - ◆ First, the miracles of Peter are examples of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, consistent with the context of the Book of Acts, **the miracles are the result of the Risen and Exalted Lord working in the Apostles through the Power of the Holy Spirit.**

- In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus heals the paralytic man in Capernaum, He said to the man, ‘Get up, take you mat and go home’ [Mark 2:11]. Here, in Acts 9:34, Peter said to Aeneas, ‘Get up and make your bed/mat.’
 - Again, Peter’s words to Tabitha in Aramaic would have been ‘Tabitha, koum’; whereas, Jesus’ words to Jairus’s daughter would have been ‘Talitha, koum’ [translated, ‘little girl, arise.’] The similarities are too great to simply dismiss.
 - The miracles of Peter most certainly **pointed to** the power of the resurrected and exalted Jesus.
- ◆ Secondly, the healings reveal Peter’s unique apostolic authority for proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentile world.
- It should be first noted that the healings authenticated Peter’s role and unique authority as an apostle [all apostles, such as Paul, had such authority]. As the Scriptures had yet to be canonized in this apostolic age, it was essential that those the Lord chose to complete this task be set apart in terms of their authority [that, of course, was not inherent to them, but given to them by Christ Himself].
 - Therefore, the healings serve to prepare the reader for the ‘authoritative’ opening of the kingdom to God, through the proclamation of the Gospel, to the Gentile world [beginning with the conversion of Cornelius].
- ◆ Finally, the healings serve as **signs**, pointing to something much greater than the actual miracles themselves: eternal salvation [resurrection] in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- In the case of Aeneas, he was paralyzed, **unable** to move or do anything physical in and of himself. This, most certainly, points to our inability to do anything that pleases God apart from His effectual, enabling grace.
 - In the case of Tabitha [Dorcas], she was dead, prior to Peter raising her. This, once again, points to the truth that prior to our salvation by grace through faith in Christ, we were ‘dead in our trespasses and sins’ (Ephesians 2).
 - To further underscore this truth, Luke uses the same Greek word [in both Act 9:34 and Verse 40] *anastethi*, **αναστηθι**, [translated here ‘Get up!’] as the Gospel writers do with reference to the raising of Jesus from the dead [Mark 16:9; Luke 24:46].

d. The Lord Prepares Peter through his stay with Simon the Tanner

- Chapter 9 concludes with a simple verse **Verse 43**, where Luke writes, ‘And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.’
 - The town of Joppa was on the sea, and this would make sense, as tanners took advantage of the sea water in their practice. Further, the sea breeze would remove the odor of the hides.
 - However, at a much deeper level, this demonstrates a further ‘breaking down of prejudicial walls’ in the life of Peter, as tanners were regarded as ceremonially unclean.
 - The reason that tanners were considered unclean was because their occupation caused them to come into contact with dead animals, an act of uncleanness in Levitical Law.
 - We are not told why Peter stayed with Simon the tanner; however, what it does reveal is God’s preparation of Peter to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to Cornelius, a Gentile – and do so by entering into his home!
 - Yet, as unclean as a tanner was, it still did not compare to the uncleanness of a Gentile. [This will become clear in Chapter 10.]

II. The Lord Prepares Cornelius for his Conversion

- The end of Chapter 9 demonstrates God’s preparation of Peter for the conversion of Cornelius; however, the beginning of Chapter 10 reveals God’s preparation of Cornelius.
- Luke opens Chapter 10, in **Verses 1-2**, stating, ‘Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.’
 - The name ‘Cornelius’ was the second of three common Roman names used by military men. The reason for this was because in 82 B.C., P. Cornelius Sulla freed 10,000 slaves. Many of the freedmen who were in the military took the name of their ‘savior.’
 - Luke states that Cornelius was stationed at Caesarea. This was a garrison city named after Augustus Caesar, and was known for its magnificent harbor built as one of the great engineering feats of Herod the Great.
 - Furthermore, it should be noted that Caesarea was a Hellenistic-style city and had a very large Gentile population.

- According to one scholar, ‘There was a substantial Jewish minority there and considerable friction between the Jews and the larger Gentile community.’
- Cornelius, according to Luke, was a centurion of ‘the Italian cohort.’
 - The main unit in the Roman military was a *legion*. A legion consisted of 6,000 men. Each legion was divided into ten *cohorts*. Therefore, a cohort was made up of 600 Roman soldiers. Each cohort was then divided into groups of 100, each led by a centurion. Thus, Cornelius, most likely, was responsible, in part, for 100 men.
 - According to the ancient Roman historian Polybius, ‘Centurions are required not to be bold and adventurous so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive or start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard-pressed to stand fast and die at their post.’
 - One of the points that should be made is that Cornelius, as a Roman Centurion, in the eyes of the Jews of the day, would, at least to some degree, represent the foreign, Gentile, Roman [pagan] occupiers that the Jews had come to so greatly despise.
- Luke, again, in **Verse 2**, comments that Cornelius was ‘a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.’
 - From this Verse it appears [although it is not completely certain] that Cornelius was what was known as a ‘God-fearer.’
 - **God-fearers** were Gentiles who were worshippers of the God of Israel, supporters of the Jewish community, readers the Old Testament Scriptures, observers of many of the Old Testament Law, and attendees of the synagogue services.
 - However, God-fearers were not full converts to Judaism. The reason for this was that, although they worshipped the God of Israel, typically the act of circumcision proved to be too much of a stumbling block [for obvious reasons] for the males.
 - Yet, it was circumcision that was one of **the** most important rites in Judaism, according to first-century Jews. Without the mark of circumcision, regardless of the devotion of a male to the God of Israel and the Scriptures, he was still considered an unclean Gentile [although, to some degree regarded as somewhat less ‘unclean’ as the pagan Gentiles].
 - Luke writes that Cornelius was ‘devout’...giving ‘many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.’
 - It seems that Cornelius had every qualification for a Jewish convert except circumcision.

- In fact, Luke specifically mentions that Cornelius practiced two of three main acts of Jewish piety – prayer and almsgiving [the only one he does not mention is fasting].
 - Certainly, Cornelius was a devout, sincere follower of the God of Israel.
 - However, **sincerity is NEVER enough! One must be saved by grace through faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ! – NOT through sincere acts of devotion and religious piety.**
 - Yet, despite the devotion and sincerity of Cornelius, he was still a Gentile [as he had likely not undergone the act of circumcision]. Therefore, a devout Jewish male would not enter into the home of even a God-fearer like Cornelius. [Although, if a Gentile male underwent circumcision and a proselyte baptism, he would be regarded as fully-Jewish, with all ‘rights, privileges, and social standing.’]
- ❖ **NOTE:** Because Cornelius had most certainly not been circumcised, he had not bought into the Pharisaical Judaism of his day. Ironically, since he had not embraced the Judaism of the Jewish leaders, his ‘religion’ was certainly more pure and consistent with the actual teachings of the Old Testament.
- Therefore, Cornelius seems to be much more prepared to embrace Jesus as the Messiah than even the Jews of the day. Again, since he had not been ‘perverted’ by the false, legalistic teachings of the Pharisees and the Jewish teachers of the day, it makes sense that Cornelius’ heart was prepared as his reading of the Old Testament Scriptures would have pointed him to Christ – as the Old Testament is Messianic, pointing to salvation in Christ Alone.
- Luke then explains in **Verses 3-6**, that ‘About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’ And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said to him, ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner name Simon, whose house is by the sea.’”
- Cornelius was observing one of the three traditional Jewish prayer times, the afternoon hour of 3 p.m., which corresponded with the *Tamid* sacrifices in the Temple area.
 - Notice, Cornelius did not take the initiative in this vision, God did.
 - The angel’s response to Cornelius’s question [‘What is it, Lord?’] is quite interesting: ‘Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.’
 - The word ‘memorial’, literally ‘remembrance,’ is ‘Old Testament sacrificial language’ [Leviticus 2:2,9,16; Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:15].

- Cornelius's humble, sincere commitment to God and the Old Testament Scriptures had risen like a sweet aroma of sacrifice before the Lord.
 - Yet, Cornelius still needed a Savior, and so, God reveals Himself to Cornelius [with the purpose of using Peter to eventually proclaim the Gospel to Cornelius].
- Finally, in **Verses 7-8**, Luke writes, 'When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them Joppa.'
- As one would expect from a man sincerely devoted to the Scriptures, Cornelius immediately obeys the command from the angel of God.
 - Therefore, the events for Cornelius conversion are set in motion; however, the Lord still must prepare Peter for his 'radical' encounter with the Gentile Cornelius.

Romans 3:21-26

'But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.'