

Basic Bible Course

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Seventh Case of Conversion — CORNELIUS & HIS HOUSEHOLD

Lesson Eighteen

INTRODUCTION: We come now to an event of broad SIGNIFICANCE to every GENTILE in the world. The date of our lesson: A.D. 41. The church Jesus built was established in Jerusalem in A.D. 33. Peter had PREACHED (as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance) that “the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are AFAR OFF” (Acts 2:39). The people thus addressed on Pentecost—and their children—were all either JEWS (Acts 2:5) or JEWISH “PROSELYTES” (Acts 2:10). The ones styled as “AFAR OFF” were the Gentiles, i.e., non-Jews (Ephesians 2:11-13). Yet, from A.D. 33 to 41, eight long years had elapsed, and NOT EVEN ONE GENTILE CONVERT to Christ had been made.

Evidently, PETER HIMSELF did not grasp the MEANING of the words the Holy Spirit had caused him to utter, about the promise being also to “all that are AFAR OFF.” For, in today’s study, we shall see it took a MIRACLE to convince him that God also had granted SALVATION unto the GENTILES. It is the SEVENTH case of conversion, as recorded in the Book of Acts. The scene is laid in the household of Cornelius, a Gentile, in Acts 10—

I. CORNELIUS IS DESCRIBED (verses 1-2).

- A. He lived at Caesarea.
- B. He was a “centurian.”

NOTE: A CENTURIAN was a Roman officer in command of 100 soldiers.

- 1. His command was known as “the Italian band.”
- C. He was a devout man.
- D. He feared God with all his house.
- E. He helped the poor with alms.
- F. He prayed to God always.

NOTE: Please ponder the excellence of character, the deeply-religious nature as well as the responsible position of this man Cornelius. According to every consideration of HUMAN REASONING, most of us would say, from this description, that if ANYONE had a right to Heaven, surely CORNELIUS must be the man! But watch this lesson, as we move on down, and you will see that even THIS man had to DO SOMETHING, i.e., the same as required of all the others we have studied thus far.

II. CORNELIUS SEES AN ANGEL IN A VISION (verses 3-6).

- A. It was about “the ninth hour” of the day.

NOTE: In those days, a day was reckoned to begin at sunrise, i.e., approximately 6 a.m., according to our modern idea of time. Thus “the ninth hour” would be about 3 o’clock in the afternoon.

- B. The angel came in to him, saying, “Cornelius.”
- C. Cornelius looked on the angel and was afraid.

- D. What is it, Lord?” he asked.
- E. “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God,” the angel answered. “And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with *one* Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: he shall tell thee what thou OUGHTEST to do.”

NOTE: From the description, foregoing, it would seem to most of us that Cornelius ALREADY had been doing what he OUGHT to do. But God does not look at things the same way man does. And God had SOMETHING MORE in mind for Cornelius to do beyond what he had done already. Watch for it.

III. WHEN THE ANGEL HAD FINISHED SPEAKING, HE LEFT (verses 6-7).

- A. Cornelius called three people.
 1. Two household servants, and
 2. A devout soldier, who waited upon him continually.
- B. He declared all these things unto them.
- C. He sent them to Joppa.

IV. AS THESE THREE DREW NEAR TO JOPPA, NEXT DAY, PETER WENT UP UPON THE HOUSE-TOP ABOUT THE SIXTH HOUR (i.e., noon) TO PRAY (verses 9-11).

- A. He became very hungry.
- B. He would have eaten; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.
- C. In this trance, Peter saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him.
 1. It was like a great sheet knit at the four corners.
 2. It was let down to the earth.
 3. In it were all kinds of four-footed beasts of the earth, wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
- D. A voice commanded, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”
- E. Peter answered, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”
- F. The voice spoke the second time, “What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common.”
- G. This was done three times.
- H. The vessel was received up again into heaven.

V. ABOUT THIS TIME CORNELIUS’ EMISSARIES FROM CAESAREA ARRIVED AT SIMON’S HOUSE (verses 17-18).

- A. They stood before the gate.
- B. They called and asked if Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodged there.

VI. THE SPIRIT, AT THIS MOMENT, SAID TO PETER, “BEHOLD, THREE MEN SEEK THEE. ARISE THEREFORE, AND GET THEE DOWN, AND GO WITH THEM, DOUBTING NOTHING: FOR I HAVE SENT THEM” (verses 19-23).

- A. Peter went down to the men.
- B. He said, “Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what *is* the cause wherefore ye are come?”
- C. They replied, “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.”
- D. Peter called the men in and lodged them for the night.

NOTE: In the next chapter—Acts 11:1-14—when Peter’s Jewish brethren called him to account for going in to “men uncircumcised” (i.e., Gentiles), he “rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order” unto them. He made a clear connection between God’s telling him, miraculously, in the trance, not to call “COMMON” what God had CLEANSED, and His command to go with the three Gentile men to Cornelius’ house. Seemingly, THIS WAS WHEN

IT FIRST DAWNED ON PETER THE MEANING OF HIS WORDS ON PENTECOST THAT “THE PROMISE IS UNTO...ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF.” From this it seems reasonable to infer that those who spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance did not always understand the meaning of the words they were caused to utter. Just think: It took a MIRACLE to convince Peter that what he had said on Pentecost, eight years earlier, was true!

- VII. NEXT DAY, PETER, ACCOMPANIED BY “CERTAIN BRETHREN” FROM JOPPA, WENT WITH THE MEN (verses 23-25).
- A. The following day, they reached Caesarea.
 - B. Cornelius waited for them.
 1. He had called together his kinsmen and near friends.
 - C. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him.
 - D. He fell down at Peter’s feet and worshipped him.
 - E. Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself also am a man.”
NOTE: How different from Peter’s alleged “successors!”
 - F. As they talked, Peter went in and found many people gathered together.
- VIII. PETER ADDRESSED THE ASSEMBLY, SAYING,
“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. 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?” (verses 28-29).
- IX. CORNELIUS ANSWERED.
“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, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 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. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (verses 30-33).
- X. PETER PREACHES THE FIRST GOSPEL SERMON TO GENTILES (verses 34-43).
- A. “I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.
 - B. “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.
 1. “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.
 2. “[Jesus] went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”
 - C. “And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem.”
 - D. They slew Jesus and hanged Him on a tree.
 - E. God raised Him up the third day.
 - F. God showed Jesus Christ openly after His resurrection.
 1. Jesus was not shown to all the people.
 2. Rather He was shown unto witnesses chosen before of God, “*even us*, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (verse 41).
 - G. Jesus “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” (verse 43).

- H. “All the prophets witness to him that through his name, whosoever BELIEVETH in him shall receive REMISSION OF SINS” (verse 43).
- XI. WHILE PETER PREACHED, THE HOLY GHOST FELL ON ALL THEM WHICH HEARD THE WORD (verse 44).
 - A. The Jewish disciples, who accompanied Peter from Joppa, were astonished because that on GENTILES ALSO was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost (verse 45).
 - 1. They heard them speak with tongues, and
 - 2. Magnify God (verse 46).
 - B. Peter then asked, “Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (verse 47).
 - C. “And he COMMANDED them to BE BAPTIZED in the name of the Lord” (verse 48).

NOTE: Also read Acts 11:1-18 again and compare it closely with the foregoing material. Especially for every GENTILE person, this lesson is extremely important. For, prior to the conversion of Cornelius and his household, the gospel had gone to JEWS ONLY. From this point forward, in the Scriptures, it was preached both to GENTILES as well as JEWS, without distinction...The “KEYS OF THE KINGDOM,” given to Peter in Matthew 16:19, were used by him to OPEN THE DOOR OF THE CHURCH, first to the JEWS (Acts 2) and eight years later to the GENTILES (Acts 10). Miraculous demonstrations accompanied both of these two major gospel events (Acts 11:15-18). In the Bible, the BEGINNING of everything always is accompanied by miraculous demonstration.