

### Cornelius Part 3

#### Acts 11:1—18

The story of Cornelius takes up two chapters in the book of Acts. 73 verses are devoted to this account, which is told three times. This is an indication that we are being told something critically important that we need to understand. Most people take this as being an account of the gospel finally going to the Gentiles almost 10 years after Jesus told the Disciples to go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel. Many people think that Peter and the Disciples failed to do this because they did not want to associate with the Gentiles. In other words, they were bigots who would rather disobey God than speak to a Gentile.

This type of silly reasoning comes about because people are trying to make sense of Scripture without rightly dividing it. Those who don't understand that God is beginning a new work will remain confused and come up with some pretty bizarre explanations. Once you understand that God is showing Peter that He is changing the rules, then this story becomes much more understandable. Israel was being used as a vessel of honor as God revealed Himself through her. Now, God is changing His dealings with Israel by placing her in a different position. Israel is now a vessel of dishonor while the Gentiles are in a place of honor. We have been grafted into the olive tree and have taken the position of honor that Israel once had. However, this does not mean that we are now spiritual Israel and all her promises are going to be fulfilled spiritually through us. It only describes how God is using us as His primary means of revealing Himself to the world. All of Israel's promises will be fulfilled exactly as God told them that He would, but only after Israel is put back into their position of honor. The changeover will happen following the Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ.

This section of Acts shows how Peter is being lead to understand how God is changing His dispensational program. God is now bypassing Israel and going directly to Gentiles so that they will be able to become saved apart from Israel. It is not showing how the Gospel of Grace is now expanding out from Israel to the Gentile nations, as is commonly thought. Peter needed to learn how God was changing His dealings with mankind so that he, and the Hebrew church in Jerusalem, would listen to Paul when he tells them about the Gospel of Grace that he is now preaching among the Gentiles. We will see the leaders of the Hebrew church (leaders of the Little Flock of believers) give him their right-hand of fellowship as Paul's ministry increases and theirs comes to an end.

#### **When did Cornelius become a believer?**

One thing that is often debated is the timing of Cornelius' conversion. Was he saved before Peter visited him, or was it after? There are a couple of verses that seem to indicate that he was saved prior to Peter's visit. Acts 10:2 says that that he was a devout man who feared God, gave much alms and prayed often. In Acts 10:22, Cornelius is called a just man. A person who is just is righteous, thus Cornelius is being called a righteous, god-fearing man who devoted himself to God. Now if that doesn't sound like a believer, then what could?

On the surface it appears he was a saved man, but we need to take a closer look. First, being called devout and God-fearing describes many people today who are religious, but not saved. It means that they devote themselves to being religious and there are certainly many who fear God. They are sincere in their devotion, but too often, they are sincerely wrong. The same word is used in Acts 10:7 to describe one of the soldiers in Cornelius' household. The Pharisees devoted themselves to God, but they did it on their own terms. Devout and honorable women were used to drive Paul and Barnabas out of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:50). People are not saved by being devout and God-fearing. People often fear God

because they do not have a true personal relationship with Him. Many in Israel feared God, but there was actually only a remnant of believers within the nation.

Second, Cornelius is called a just man in verse 22 by those who work for him. They are speaking only in earthly terms of how well he treated them. Cornelius dealt with them in a fair and equitable manner, but they were in no position to be able to judge whether or not he had a right relationship with God. The statement in verse 22 is only an indication of how he dealt with his men on a day-to-day basis, but gives no insight into his relationship with God.

Finally, there would be no reason for Peter to preach a salvation message to Cornelius if he were already saved. The primary purpose of this experience is for God to show Peter that salvation is now going to the Gentiles without having to go through Israel. Peter preached Jesus Christ and salvation through believing in Him. What Peter was learning through this incident was going to be very important in the weeks to come as God continues to put Paul in the forefront while pushing Peter and the Hebrew church onto the back burner.

This is somewhat similar to what is happening in the United States today. President Trump is teaching the Republicans that they are not in the position of honor they thought they held. He is now going around the Republicans and reaching out to the Democrats to get his agenda passed. This does not prove that the Democrats are becoming Republicans, but teaches the Republicans that the president is now working in a different manner to accomplish his will. Similarly, God is not showing us that Gentiles are now being saved, but that God was beginning to work apart from Israel in saving Gentiles. It is a whole new dispensation with a whole new set of rules.

### **Order of events**

One thing often passed over as being unimportant is the order of events in terms of salvation. In early Acts, Peter preaches a message to Israel that they needed to repent of their sin of killing their Messiah, be baptized and then they would be given the Holy Spirit. Now, however, as Peter begins to preach his standard sermon, he speaks of Christ and the forgiveness of sins that come through believing on His name. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit came upon all those who were hearing the word and believed (see Acts 15:9), just as He had come upon those Jewish believers in Acts 2. Seeing this, Peter assumed they needed to be baptized, because that was what was supposed to be done.

Notice that the order of event went from believe, baptize, Holy Spirit to believe, Holy Spirit, baptize. Why would the Holy Spirit come upon these believers before they were baptized? This event was all set up for Peter to learn about a new dispensation. Things were changing, and one of those changes was that of God moving away from Israel as His prime link to the rest of the world. Baptism was originally given to Israel as a means of manifesting Christ to Israel (John 1:31), and as a means of ceremonial purification in preparation of becoming priests (Exodus 29:4; 1 Peter 2:9). Now that God had turned from the nation of Israel, baptism is no longer important. Peter, and the Jews who were with him, were completely shocked to see the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles in the same manner as He came upon them in Acts 2. This proved to Peter that God was now working with the Gentiles apart from Israel. They were baptized only because that's what Peter was taught when God was working with the nation of Israel. He will soon be shown that the Gentiles, in this Dispensation of Grace, are not under the Law (Acts 15). This is his introduction into the many changes that are being instituted through the Apostle Paul.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit [www.MidActsTruths.com](http://www.MidActsTruths.com)