

Who was Cornelius in the Bible?

Cornelius in the Bible was a centurion, a commander in the Italian Regiment of the Roman military. He lived in Caesarea. His story in Acts 10 is important because it was in Cornelius's household that God publicly opened the doors of the church to the Gentile world. The apostle Peter was present to see it happen, just as he had been a witness to the opening of the doors to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Jews (Acts 2).

Despite being a Roman, Cornelius was a worshiper of God, a Jewish proselyte known and respected by the Jewish community (Acts 10:22). Cornelius was a devout man who regularly prayed and gave to charity (verse 2). One afternoon, while Cornelius was praying, he saw a vision of an angel of God, who told him that God had heard his prayers (Acts 10:30-31). The angel told Cornelius to find Peter, who was staying in Joppa at the house of Simon, a tanner (verse 32). Cornelius immediately sent two of his servants and a devout soldier to Joppa to find Peter and bring him back.

Meanwhile, God was preparing Peter's heart to minister to his coming Gentile visitors. God gave Peter a vision of an assortment of animals, both clean and unclean (Acts 10:11-12). Peter heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (verse 13). Peter resisted this command, having never eaten non-kosher food before (verse 14), but the voice replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (verse 15). This vision was repeated three times, and then Peter heard the Spirit saying that three men were looking for him and that he should go with them without hesitation (verses 19-20). Peter found Cornelius's two servants and the soldier, and they told Peter of Cornelius's visitation by an angel and asked him to come and speak to Cornelius (verse 22). Peter invited the men to stay the night, and the next day Peter followed them back to Caesarea (verse 23).

When Peter entered Cornelius's home, the centurion fell at Peter's feet in reverence, but Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up . . . I am only a man myself" (Acts 10:25-26). Peter then reminded Cornelius that it was against Jewish law for Peter to be associating with Gentiles. However, Peter explained, God had shown him in a vision not to call any person common or unclean. Peter understood that the animals in his vision were symbolic of the Gentiles, to whom God was preparing to give the gospel (Acts 10:28-29). Cornelius then told Peter about the angel who had told him to seek out Peter. Both Peter and Cornelius saw that God had acted to bring them together.

Peter then said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34-35), and then he preached the gospel to everyone gathered in Cornelius's house. As Peter was speaking, the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues, and were baptized with water (Acts 10:44-48). Peter and the Jews who were with him saw the beginning of something new God was doing: "They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (verse 47). The "mini-Pentecost" in Cornelius's house was proof positive that the gospel was for all people, not just Jews (see Luke 2:10; Matthew 28:19)

In considering the story of Cornelius in the Bible, it is important to note that being religious is not enough to save a person. Cornelius was as devout as they come, and he worshiped the one true God. Yet he still needed to hear the gospel and respond to it positively. That's why God sent Peter, so that Cornelius could hear of the death and resurrection of Christ, which Peter clearly preached (Acts 10:39-40, 43). It was only after Cornelius and his household received the message about Jesus that they received the Holy Spirit and were born again. The story of Cornelius not only shows the necessity

of the gospel but it indicates that God will move heaven and earth to bring the gospel to those who are ready to receive it.