

Peter Goes to the Gentiles

Key Verses: *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”*
—Acts 10:34,35

Selected Scripture:
Acts 10:24-48

IN THE BEGINNING YEARS

of the Early Church, the disciples of Jesus gave little or no thought that the Gospel invitation might be extended to the Gentiles. They did not yet understand that in the Gospel Age dispensation just beginning, a “spiritual Israel” class would be developed, made up of Jews and Gentiles alike. Natural Israel would not be forgotten, however, God promising that “all Israel shall be saved” after completion of the Gospel Age work of developing the spiritual class—the faithful followers of Christ.—Rom. 11:25,26

In words recorded by the Prophet Daniel, God had set apart seventy weeks—490 years in Bible reckoning—as a period of favor to the Jewish nation, following which they would suffer “desolations.” (Dan. 9:24-27) The end of this period of favor was marked by the sending of the Gospel message, by God’s authority and instruction, to Cornelius, a centurion—captain over a hundred men—in the Roman army.

Cornelius was in every way fitted to be a Christian.

He was a “devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, . . . and prayed to God alway.” (Acts 10:2) The only obstacle that seemed to prevent him from being considered a footstep follower of Christ was the fact that he was not a Jew. God, however, had heard his prayers. (vs. 4) When Israel’s special period of favor ended, God’s due time came for dealing with Gentiles such as Cornelius, who were already in the proper condition of heart to fully receive the benefits of the Gospel of Christ.

As a centurion, Cornelius was in a position of having significant military authority. Unlike most military captains of that time, however, he was apparently a reverential and benevolent man. Cornelius was highly respected among the people, even the Jews. He was likely the same centurion referred to in Luke 7:4,5 by his Jewish servant, who spoke these words about him: “He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue.”

The method by which Cornelius would receive the message of Truth is the same as has been the case throughout the Gospel Age—for both Jew and Gentile. Paul tells us of this with these simple words: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) The “Word of God” did not come to Cornelius, nor has it come to any of us, by vague impression, nor by intuition, but through faithful “witnesses” of Jesus, who have served as the Heavenly Father’s mouthpieces throughout the age.—Acts 1:8

When Peter spoke the words of our Key Verses, he did not mean that he had previously been wrong in supposing God’s favors were confined to the Jewish nation. He now, however, perceived a change of dispensation; that God was no longer dealing exclusively with just certain persons or nations, and from then forward all righteous, God-reverencing individuals of every nation were to be acceptable. Peter now understood the meaning of the vision God had given him. ■