

# Conversion of Cornelius

The greatest conflict and error that faced the church for the first thirty years of its existence centered on the salvation of Gentiles and the role of circumcision and the Law of Moses under the New Covenant. Galatians revealed how insidious this doctrine became and how strongly it needed to be opposed. God wanted all men to be saved by the gospel and his son to have all authority.

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. Gal 1:6-9*

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. Gal 5:1-5*

The first Gentile convert became the test case for all others. So Peter revealed in the great debate about circumcision and the Gentiles in:

*But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they. Acts 15:5-11*

Luke therefore recorded every detail of this conversion (Acts 10) as well as Peter's explanation (Acts 11:1-18), and it is of the highest importance that we understand this conflict and its answer if we are to understand the NT. Many of the books allude to or openly discuss this controversy.

## **1. God sent an angel to Cornelius to initiate the contact. (10:1-8)**

A centurion was an officer over 100 men. He was stationed in Caesarea and had become a servant of the one true God at some point in his life. His prayers and alms had gone up as a memorial and God honored him as the first Gentile convert. An angel was became involved in the conversion of one who was lost. He did not preach, but directed him to one who would. Cornelius sent two of servants and a devout soldier to find Peter and bring him.

## **2. Prior to the arrival of the messengers Peter granted a vision to prepare him. (10:9-17)**

It is midday and Peter while waiting for lunch is praying on the rooftop. He sees a vision of all the animals that were forbidden to be eaten in the Law. Being a devout Jew he had never eaten such things and had a visceral reaction to the command calling them common and unclean.

*"Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: 3 Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud — that you may eat. ... Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you. ... 4 ... does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; ... 7 yet does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. 8 Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you. Lev 11:2-4, 8*

An unidentified voice reveals to Peter that these animals had been cleansed and were no longer unclean. This was repeated three times and then the sheet was drawn back up to heaven. The truth that the Law had been nailed to the cross and that the distinction between Jew and Gentile is being revealed in more detail.

## **3. As they knock on the door the Holy Spirit commanded Peter to go with them. (10:17-22)**

As with the Eunuch the timing is perfect. The men from Cornelius have made inquiry and are even then "knocking at the door." As Peter pondered the vision and the men who were seeking him are entering the house, the Holy Spirit told Peter directly to go with them.

*Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. Acts 11:12-13*

He then heard their message and lodged them for the night. It must have been an interesting evening for Peter and the other Jewish brethren as they discussed the implications of this visit.

#### **4. Peter selected 6 witnesses then traveled to meet Cornelius. (10:23-29)**

*Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. Acts 11:12*

As Peter arrived Cornelius reveals his Gentile ideas, thinking that Peter deserved some special reverence. Peter quickly made it clear that he was just a man as deserved no special honor. It was not to be a small discussion with a few as Cornelius had invited his friends and family so when Peter "went in and found many who had come together." Peter's opening words to the group explain why he had set aside established custom. Jews did not have contact with Gentiles and without the vision it is clear that Peter would not have come. He then asks Cornelius exactly why he asked him to come.

#### **5. Cornelius explained to Peter, relatives, friends and six witnesses what occurred(:30-33)**

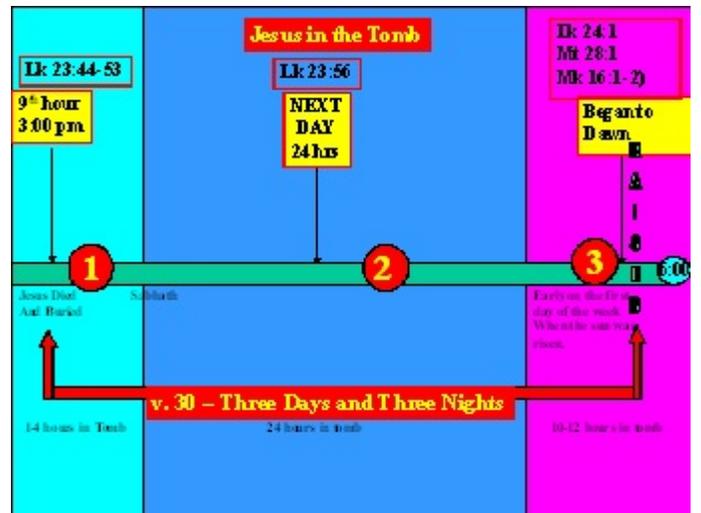
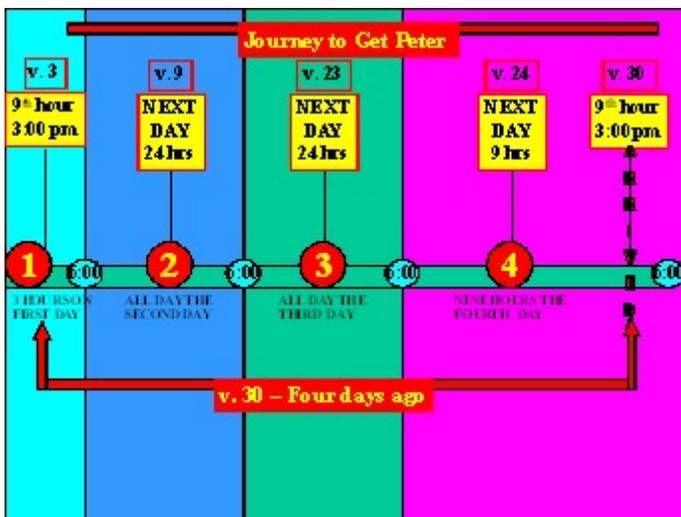
Cornelius documented exactly when and what had occurred. It had been four days to that very hour that he had been fasting and had received a vision. He summed up the vision nearly exactly as Luke recorded it earlier.

*And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, 14 who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' Acts 11:13-15*

He had been busy with his friends and family and Peter now had the perfect audience. "we are all present" No one is making any excuses to be excused. The angel made it clear that this would be an important discussion and everyone wants to hear it. "before God," They see themselves as being in the sight of God thus exhibiting the solemn nature of what they see happening and their attitude toward it. "to hear all the things," They do not want anything sugar coated, they are interested in all the things that Peter would have to say. "commanded you by God," but they only want to hear the things that Peter has been command by God. They do not want the wisdom of men but the word of God.

An important truth is revealed in this account. Note that Cornelius said it was four days since he had seen the vision. This reveals to us how they counted time in the first century:

9 <sup>th</sup> hour(3pm) soldiers sent to Joppa (10:3,8)	Jesus died at the 9 <sup>th</sup> hour buried before 12 <sup>th</sup> hour
Next day met Peter about 6 <sup>th</sup> hour (12pm -10:9)	Jesus in the tomb the entire Sabbath
Next day Peter went with them(10:23)	Jesus raised sometime around dawn 1 <sup>st</sup> hour
Next day entered Caesaria (10:24)	
(4r days ago until this hour (10:30)	Jesus 3 days and 3 nights in heart of the earth (Mt 12:40)



#### **6. Peter drew only logical conclusion and began to preach the gospel. (10:34-43)**

He began by revealing for the first time as an inspired apostle that God no longer saw any distinction between Israel and the other nations(Gentiles).

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, **preaching peace through Jesus Christ** — He is Lord of all — Acts 10:34-36

Everyone who obeyed the gospel would be accepted by Him. Peter summarized the work they had done among the Jews as preaching peace to the children of Israel by accepting that Jesus is Lord of all. Peter himself had already revealed this with his own words, but like the prophets before him who sought and searched to understand he did not understand until this moment.

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to **ALL WHO ARE AFAR OFF**, as many as the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:39

11 Therefore remember that **YOU**, once **GENTILES IN THE FLESH** — who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — 12 that **at that time you were without Christ**, ... 13 But **now in Christ Jesus YOU WHO ONCE WERE FAR OFF HAVE BEEN BROUGHT NEAR by the blood of Christ**. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and **preached peace to YOU WHO WERE AFAR OFF** and to those who were near. 18 For through Him **WE BOTH** have access by one Spirit to the Father. Eph 2:14-17

The sermon was similar to the first sermon Peter preached in the second chapter.

### **First Sermon to the Jews**

- 1 Approved by mighty works wonders and signs
- 2 You Killed Him
- 3 God raised him - Prophecy & we witnessed
- 4 At right hand of God Exalted - prophecy  
God made him Lord and Christ
- 5 Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins

### **First Sermon to the Gentiles**

- 1 From baptism of John, Jesus worked doing good and healing (we are witnesses)
- 2 They killed him by hanging him on a tree
- 3 Him God raised 3<sup>rd</sup> day and showed openly
- 4 He who was ordained by God to be Judge - all the prophets witness
- 5 Whoever believes will receive remission of sins."

## **7. As Peter preached God sent the Holy Spirit(11:15-17) upon the Gentiles(10:44-46)**

At this point in the sermon, while Peter is preaching by the inspiration of the Spirit, the Spirit now takes it one step further. Peter made it clear that he had intended to preach more, but was overruled.

as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Acts 11:15

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Acts 10:44-46

Luke's wording of Peter's explanation is very important to our understanding of exactly what happened here. The Holy Spirit "fell on them as upon us at the beginning." This led to great astonishment on the part of the Jewish brethren who had come with Peter. They were hearing them speak with other tongues just as the apostles had done in the very beginning. Peter then calls this "the same gift he gave us when we believed.

If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? Acts 11:17

But the most important thing stated to make it clear exactly what occurred was what it reminded Peter of. He remembered what the Lord had promised them just before his ascension.

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for **the Promise of the Father**, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now." Acts 1:4-6

Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Acts 11:16

What happened to the Gentiles reminded Peter of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit because what occurred was exactly what had happened in the beginning.

This sealed God's approval that they were acceptable to Him and on equal footing with Israel. So Peter ended the sermon. All had been done. The Lord had accepted their faith, repentance and respect for the Lord (confession). As Peter stated in his defense.

If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" Acts 11:17

Since Peter could not withstand God he gave the only possible command as the final step in salvation.

*Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days. Acts 10:46-48*

With this step all was complete and when those who contended with Peter heard it they glorified God.

*When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." Acts 11:18*

From this passage we learn some very important things about baptism and the Holy Spirit.

1. **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** for the remission of sins Acts 2:38
2. He **HAD FALLEN UPON NONE OF THEM**. They had only been **baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:15-17
3. preached Jesus to him, ... they **came to some water**. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. **What hinders me from being baptized?**" Acts 8:35-36
4. "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who **HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT** just as we have? And he commanded them to be **baptized in the name of the Lord**. Acts 10:47-48

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is in water for remission of sins and is not connected in any way to the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.