

Minor Characters In Major Roles

Lesson 1 – Cornelius

“Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are of the earth.”
Colossians 3:2

- Visitors, prayer requests, prayer
- Go over the MCIMR class overview (lesson00) sheet
- Handout #1: “Major Roles for Christians Today”

Acts and Facts

- "Joshua could have been talking about me when he said ‘...*but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*’"
- "My family and I lived in Caesarea for a while."
- "I gave many alms to the Jews."
- "I was the commander of 100 men."
- "Some refer to me as the first Gentile Christian."

Q: How many of you became Jews before becoming Christians?

A: If you had lived around 50AD you would have been expected to do just that! (Assuming, as a Gentile, anyone would have taught you about Jesus in the first place...)

The Roman Army

1. Stationed in large numbers throughout the Empire, Roman soldiers were, to those who's lands they occupied, the Empire "incarnate." They were both **feared and hated**.
2. Highly **organized**
3. Legion
 - a. Largest single unit in the Roman army
 - b. No commander—led by six tribunes who commanded in pairs, changing daily
 - c. 6000 men - 10 cohorts of 600 men each
4. Cohort
 - a. Army's basic tactical unit
 - b. Six groups of 100 each. Each group commanded by a centurion.
 - c. FYI, nine cohorts made up the Praetorian Guard (Praetorium = Pilate's residence in Jerusalem—5400 men to guard him!)
5. Centurion
 - a. Non-commissioned officer.
 - b. Commander of 100
 - c. Highest rank a common soldier could attain
 - d. x5 the pay of a common soldier
 - e. 8-10 Centurions are mentioned in the New Testament, and are ALWAYS PRESENTED FAVORABLY! (Note on Luke 3:14—no condemnation for being a soldier)

Early Evangelizing

1. Pentecost Review—Establishment of the Church
 - a. One of the major Jewish annual feasts (50 days after Passover)
 - b. The Spirit is poured out on mankind <**Read Acts 2:1-4**>

- c. Peter preaches the first gospel sermon to the Jews (v.22) (note prophetic words of 21, 39)
 - i. Acts 2:5-6, 34-37 also indicates this message was for the **Jews**
- d. The result: The Church is born <**Read Acts 2:41, 46-47**>
- 2. After **stoning** of Stephen, Christians were **scattered**, resulting in massive church **growth**
 - a. However, the message was **still directed at Jews**
 - b. Practice was to become a **Jew** before becoming a **Christian** (Acts 6:1)
 - c. This was a **hotly debated topic** at the Jerusalem Council <**Read Acts 15:1-2**>
 - i. Understand, this was a **BIG DEAL**—Jews no longer “special” or “elite”
 - ii. Those who argued against this “Jewish first” line of thinking (and said instead that Christianity was for **JEW AND GENTILE ALIKE**) based that belief on what happened to a certain Gentile—a centurion named **CORNELIUS**

Cornelius <Read Acts 10:1-2>

- 1. A centurion living in Caesarea (seaside town 50 miles NNW of Jerusalem)
- 2. Quite a lot said in only two verses!
 - a. He was a **devout** (righteous) man
 - b. He and his household **feared Jehovah** God
 - c. He gave many **alms** to the Jews
 - d. He **prayed** to God continually
- 3. Cornelius finds himself **right in the middle** of God’s Grand Plan
 - a. <**Read Acts 17:26-27**> God is in charge of everything! (And He’s as near as you!)
 - b. God brought all the players together at **just the right time**, in order to demonstrate and teach that **all are acceptable in His sight**
 - c. God calls Cornelius <**Read Acts 10:3-8**>
- 4. The preparation of Peter <**Read Acts 10:9-16**>
- 5. God sends Peter to Cornelius <**Read Acts 10:17-22**>
- 6. Peter arrives in at Cornelius’ house in Caesarea.
 - a. Cornelius had gathered relatives and friends to hear this “messenger from God”
 - b. Cornelius tries to worship Peter. “*Stand up; I too am just a man*” (v.26)
 - c. Peter asks Cornelius why he sent for him <**Read Acts 10:28-29**>
 - d. Cornelius tells Peter about being visited by God’s angel
 - e. Peter makes a **remarkable reply** <**Read Acts 10:34-35**>
 - f. Peter preaches Jesus to them, and **another remarkable thing happens** <**Read Acts 10:44-48**>

Q: What is happening here? A “Gentile Pentecost?”

A: Peter confirms this <**Read Acts 11:15-18**> We see that God’s plan for the salvation of **all men** was confirmed through Cornelius and his household. A pretty **major role** for a **minor character**!

Q: Why Cornelius?

Characteristics of Cornelius

- 1. Devout
- 2. God fearing
- 3. Compassionate (gave alms to the poor)
- 4. Glorified God
- 5. Evangelistic (brought others to God)