

## 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)