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# Cornelius - the Roman Centurion – Part 2

By Jim Myers

### Continued from Issue Number 36.

Cornelius was a Roman Centurion who was stationed in Caesarea and commanded approximately 80 Roman soldiers. There were many Roman soldiers stationed in Caesarea at this time and their primary job was to keep the peace, especially during Jewish festivals. The Romans were seen as the oppressors by most of the Jewish population; obviously the fact that they executed Jews by crucifixion reinforced that perception.

Roman crucifixion was a gruesome form of capital punishment. The victim suffered excruciating pain for hours, even days, before the rigors of the cross finally snuffed out his life. I am sure that anyone walking past those horrible sites would never forget that the Roman's were responsible.

The second verse of Acts chapter 10 presents a description of Cornelius that probably came as a surprise to some of the Jewish members of the Jesus Movement.

*a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.*

Many scholars believe that “feared God” is a term that is identical with “God Fearer” that appears in Jewish writings. It is defined as:



Roman Eagle

“A gentile who believed in the one true God and no longer worshipped the idols and foreign gods of the gentile world.”

The New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says, "No difficulties were put in the way of those strangers who wished to settle down in the land of Israel. All strangers, the third generation of Egyptians and Edomites included, and only

Ammonites and Moabites excluded could enter "the congregation of God" without circumcision and without the obligation to keep the ceremonial law. The stranger within the gate was free to eat meat which was prohibited to the Israelite (Dt. 14:21)."

It appears that long before Cornelius there were other gentiles who chose to affiliate themselves with various forms of Second Temple Judaism. There were many debates concerning what Gentiles were either permitted to do or prohibited from doing by the rabbis.

Cornelius is the first Gentile we read about who joined the Jesus Movement in the Book of Acts.

3 He saw in a vision openly, as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him, “Cornelius.” 4 And he, fastening his eyes upon him, and being frightened, said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said unto him, “Your prayers and your alms are gone up for a memorial before God.”

The hours of the day were counted from sunrise, the hours of the night from sunset, and consequently varied in length at different seasons of the year. Therefore, if sunrise was around 6 am it would have been in the early afternoon when he had the vision – unless he was taking a nap, this was a wide awake vision.

Notice how the message from God begins -- “Your prayers and your alms are gone up for a memorial before God.” We aren’t told anything about the content of his prayers. Were they spontaneous or was he reading more formal prayers that were part of established Jewish liturgy? Interestingly, we are told that his alms are for “a memorial before God.” The angel’s message continues:

5 And now send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter: 6 he is staying with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side.

Some of the later manuscripts added – “he shall tell you what you should do” to the end of verse 6. The older manuscripts did not contain it. Is it in your Bible? If it is, are there any notes advising you that it was an addition made by a later scribe?

Cornelius is a man of action, a good Roman soldier. He acts immediately:

7 And when the angel that spoke unto him was departed, he called two of his household-servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8 and having rehearsed all things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

We are now told that there is a second soldier who is devout.— *religious, godly*. The one thing that we aren’t told at this point is whether or not they know anything about the Jesus Movement or even if Cornelius has any intentions of becoming part of it. Was Cornelius devoted to certain aspects of one of the popular Jewish movements in Israel? Did he know anything about the man named Peter who was in Joppa?

The author leaves us with many questions at this point. But, since we are about to run out of space in this article, we will have to wait for the next part of the story of Cornelius. **BHC**

## MARCH MEMORIALS

*May the memories of our loved ones  
inspire us to seek in our lives  
those qualities of mind and heart  
which we recall with special gratitude.  
May we help to bring closer to fulfillment  
Their highest ideals and noblest strivings.  
May the memories of our loved ones  
deepen our loyalty to that which cannot die --  
Our faith, our love, and devotion to our heritage.*

*(Yitzhor Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)*

*In Loving Memory of*  
**DOVA IDA GREGORY**

**Born: March 14, 1907**

**Died: March 7, 1997**

*In Loving Memory of*  
**ROBERT DEAN**

**Born: UNKNOWN**

**Died: March 22, 1996**

*In Loving Memory of*  
**MINNIE KRAUTH**

**Born: UNKNOWN**

**Died: March 22, 1998**