

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 07

Narrator: Cornelius

Primary Scriptures: Acts 10:1-4

Story Summary: Gratitude is a key attribute of a person of God

Location: Caesarea

Time: 30's AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Acts 10:4

Acts 10 is a turning point in the history of the world. It is many years after the death of Jesus. Christians are essentially a sect of the Jewish religion and almost all Christians are Jews. The Christians still follow the Jewish laws as much as they can, and they still meet in public places and the synagogues. They have not yet started evangelizing non-Jews, who are all called Gentiles. Some of the Gentiles do worship God and follow some Jewish rites, but are not allowed to participate in the full worship of the synagogue. These worshipers are called God-fearers.

Caesarea is the location of the Roman government in Israel. It is the only deep-water port on this portion of the Mediterranean Sea. One of the people in charge of keeping peace and order in the city is the centurion of the Italian Regiment named Cornelius, a God-fearer. The world changes when God sends Peter to convert Cornelius to being a Christian, which opened the door for all Gentiles to become Christians.

Why did God choose Cornelius to be the first Gentile Christian? Acts 10:3-4 lists some of the reasons: he and his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need, especially the poor; and he prayed to God regularly. The angel told him, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

In Roman society, generosity and gratitude were highly praised traits. One philosopher was known for saying that ingratitude was the worst of all traits a person could have. However, in that society, the generosity and gratitude were expected among people with business and social ties. Cornelius was special because he gave gifts to the poor without having expectation of either payback or gratitude.

From the way God treated Cornelius, and from many other examples and commands in the Bible, it is crystal clear God wants his people to be generous to the needy, and to live with constant gratitude to God. As Paul admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, "Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."