

The story of Cornelius has long been considered to be the story of the first 'Gentile' to convert to Christianity. It's also been used by many in the Christian world to indicate that God had reversed Himself on his view of eating meat that is considered to be 'unclean', i.e. – unfit for human consumption.

Though many believe that this Roman centurion was the first Gentile convert, a deeper look reveals something different. As we will see, Cornelius was not the first 'gentile' convert. Instead, he was the first named 'Hebrew' convert from the northern tribes, and as such, he was the beginning of the fulfillment of some of the Old Testament's most consistent prophecies – the restoration of Israel - which is pictured in the joining of Ezekiel's 'Two Sticks'.

NKJ Ezek. 37:15-28 - Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>16</sup> "As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it, 'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.' <sup>17</sup> "Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand. <sup>18</sup> "And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, 'Will you not show us what you mean by these?'-- <sup>19</sup> "say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'" <sup>20</sup> "And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. <sup>21</sup> "Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "**Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone,** and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; <sup>22</sup> "and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. <sup>23</sup> "They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, **and will cleanse them.** Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. <sup>24</sup> "David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. <sup>25</sup> "Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. <sup>26</sup> "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. <sup>27</sup> "My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>28</sup> "The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.'"

In a nutshell, this prophecy states that the time would come when Israel (depicted as Ephraim in the prophecy) would join with brother Judah and become one nation once again. This is very important because without a united Israel and Judah, Yeshua's #1 message – the 'Restoration of the Kingdom of God' - could never come to pass.<sup>1</sup>

In the prophecy it is noted that when the prophecy commences, Israel will have been scattered throughout the nations, or in Hebrew – the 'goyim' (Strong's 1471). Using the Septuagint (LXX), we find that the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew 'goyim' is the word 'ethnos' which means 'nations'. For example, in the Cornelius passage, we find this –

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<sup>1</sup> See my 3-Part article - [https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/MysteryOfGospel/MysteryOfGospel-2024\\_P1.htm](https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/MysteryOfGospel/MysteryOfGospel-2024_P1.htm)



<sup>NKJ</sup> **Acts 10:22** - And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the **nation (ethnos – Strong's 1484)** of the Jews..."

What is interesting is that even though 'ethnos' means 'nations', it is translated 'gentile(s)' 93 out of the 164 times it is used in the New Testament. Thus 'gentile' basically means 'one who is among the nations', and as we see in Ezekiel's prophecy – Israel is 'among the nations' (vs. 21) when the prophecy commences.

One more point before moving on is that – to the Jews, there were only two peoples. Those peoples were 1) the Jews, and 2) everyone else. If you were not 'Jewish', you were considered to be 'heathen'. Therefore, the Romans, the Greeks, as well as the 'Lost 10 tribes'<sup>2</sup> were in their eyes 'gentiles' (heathen).

With that background, let's delve into the story.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Acts 10:1-4** - There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup> a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. <sup>3</sup> About the **ninth hour of the day** he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" <sup>4</sup> And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a **memorial** before God."

What we see from these verses is that Cornelius was a 'devout' man. Later, in verse 22, he is called a 'just' man. There are only four other men in the entire Bible who hold that honor. They are Noah – Gen. 6:9; Joseph – Matt. 1:19; Yeshua – Matt. 27:19; Luke 23:50; and Joseph of Arimathea – Luke 23:50. The Greek word for 'just' is 'dikaios' (Strong's 1342) which is a law term that means that the person is obedient to the law. Thus, Cornelius was thoroughly versed in the Torah.

Luke makes a point that Cornelius was praying at 'about the ninth hour'. By indicating that, Luke was not simply trying to fill up space – instead he's pointing out a specific time, and that time is the time of the 'evening sacrifice' – the twice-daily sacrifice of a lamb that were like bookends in regards to the sacrifices. All the sacrifices took place between the morning and evening sacrifice. Thus, the time of the evening sacrifice was a special time – it's when the sacrifices came up as a 'pleasing aroma' to YHVH. Because of that, you find many major events in scripture that take place at one of those times. For instance, Yeshua was crucified at the morning sacrifice, and He died at the evening sacrifice. Peter and the disciples began to speak at the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour (morning sacrifice) on the Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost). The lame man of Acts 3 was healed at 'the hour of prayer' - the 9<sup>th</sup> hour. There are many more examples, but that's for another study. What this tells us is that Cornelius followed at least some of the Jewish traditions in regards to prayer.

We also see that his prayers came up to YHVH as a 'memorial' (Greek 'mnemosunon' – Strong's 3422). 'Mnemosunon' is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word 'zekar' (Strong's 2142) which means 'to remember'. A good example of this is in the 'blessings and curses' chapter of Leviticus –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Lev. 26:40-42** - <sup>40</sup> `But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, <sup>41</sup> and *that* I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt-- <sup>42</sup> then **I will**

<sup>2</sup> Judah is only one of Jacob's twelve sons. After Solomon's death, the Kingdom of Israel was split into two kingdoms. The 'northern kingdom' was called 'Israel' and was made up of ten of the twelve 'tribes'. The southern kingdom was basically made up of two tribes and was called 'Judah'



**remember (Heb. 'sakar' / Greek 'mnemosunon')**<sup>3</sup> **My covenant** with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land.

From this passage, we see that when God's people – scattered as exiles throughout the nations – repent and turn to YHVH, He will remember (zekar) His covenant with Abraham and begin to restore them. This was the case when God – through Moses – began to redeem Israel the first time –

NKJ **Exodus** 2:23-24 - Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. <sup>24</sup> So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

Because He remembered His covenant, God began the first 'redemption' and gathering of Israel. Thus YHVH's words to Cornelius in the vision could very well indicate that something major was getting ready to happen.

The story continues with YHVH's instructions to Cornelius concerning finding Peter and summoning him to his home. Why did YHVH want Peter to go to Cornelius instead of Cornelius going to Peter? The answer is found in Acts 11:28 –

NKJ **Acts** 10:28 - Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

YHVH sent Peter to Cornelius' home because He wanted to make it very clear to Peter that the Jewish oral tradition that prohibited a Jew from keeping company with a non-Jew was only tradition. It is not found in the Torah. As you get into Peter's discussion with his Jewish counterparts about what had happened (chapter 11), you see their reaction. It's like they are yelling at him saying - "You went into the home of a Gentile and ate with him?" (Acts 11:3 paraphrased). So Peter – through YHVH's urging – changed the tradition, at least for the disciples. Going into the home of a 'gentile' is not forbidden in the Torah in spite of Judah's 'oral traditions.

Continuing on, we find more clues as to what is actually happening.

NKJ **Acts** 10:9-12 - The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. <sup>10</sup> Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

Peter was praying (though not at the 'hour of prayer') and had a vision. In the vision, he saw a 'four-cornered linen' filled with unclean animals. Though many see this as unclean animals, I see it as 'unclean men' as we later find in Acts 10:28.

NKJ **Acts** 10:28 - But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Peter was quite specific in saying that the linen sheet had four corners, and that the corners were 'bound'. When I looked at it, it reminded me of this prophecy –

NKJ **Isaiah** 11:11-12 - It shall come to pass in that day *That* the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. <sup>12</sup> He will

<sup>3</sup> In Hebrew there are words that sound somewhat the same and have similar meaning, but are spelled differently.



set up a banner for the nations, And will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah **from the four corners of the earth.**

When God scattered the Hebrews, He sent them to the 'four corners of the earth'. For generations they were scattered, 'bound to the corners', exiled from the Promised Land. Though a small percentage of Jews did return to Judea after the Babylonian captivity, most of the Jews remained in Babylon, Persia, and Egypt. On the other hand, the northern tribes were scattered all over the world. What's more, the Jews maintained their identity in spite of their scattering because they maintained the Sabbath and festivals; but the northern tribes threw it all away. Without the identifying sign of the Sabbath<sup>4</sup>, they lost their identity, and for all practical purposes, looked like and acted like the people in the nations to where they went. To the world, they looked like Gentiles, even though their heritage was Hebrew.

To make Peter's vision more clear, God specifically had certain animals in the sheet – wild beasts, creeping things, and birds. We see a prophecy that mentions similar animals in Jeremiah –

NKJ Jer. 12:8-9 - My heritage (Israel) is to Me like a **lion** in the forest; It cries out against Me; Therefore I have hated it. <sup>9</sup> My heritage is to Me like a speckled **vulture**; The vultures all around are against her. Come, assemble all the **beasts** of the field, Bring them to devour!

Obviously, YHVH's heritage is Israel. At the time of this prophecy, the northern tribes had already been taken captive by the Assyrians, but Judah had turned against YHVH as well and would soon be taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. But God is not through with Israel, for the prophecy continues –

NKJ **Jer. 12:14-15** - Thus says the LORD: "Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit-- behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. <sup>15</sup> "Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land.<sup>5</sup>

So it's clear that YHVH pictured Israel as beasts and birds, much like the animals we find in the sheet.

One more thing in regards to the sheet ... the Greek word translated sheet is 'othonay' (Strong's 3607) which actually means 'linen'. If you continue in Jeremiah's prophecy to chapter 13:1-11, you will see that Israel and Judah are also depicted as a 'linen' sash.

The point so far is that what Peter saw in the vision could very well represent Israel returning to YHVH. So how does Cornelius fit in? It's quite simple. To the Jews (including Peter) those Israelites from the northern tribes were 'common and unclean'. They were 'common' in the mind of the Jews because they would not submit to Jewish 'oral' law. They were unclean, because YHVH had said they would be -

NKJ **Hos. 9:1-3** - Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like *other* peoples, for you have played the harlot against your God. You have made love *for hire* on every threshing floor. <sup>2</sup> The threshing floor and the winepress Shall not feed them, And the new wine shall fail in her. <sup>3</sup> They shall not dwell in the LORD'S land, But Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and shall eat unclean *things* in Assyria.

Eating something that YHVH deems 'unclean' makes the person who eats it 'unclean' as well. Ephraim (the northern tribes) were unclean, and the Jews understood that. But in most cases, immersing in a mikveh (baptismal pool) is pretty much all it takes to become ritually 'clean' again. So being unclean was not necessarily a problem, and as we see in the story, that was taken care of quickly.

<sup>4</sup> Ex. 31:13;17

<sup>5</sup> In regards to linen, see Jer. 13:1-11



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

Note that in this case, baptism was not for the purpose of bringing the Holy Spirit since it is clear they had already been given the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we could assume it was for the purpose of making Cornelius and his household ceremonially 'clean' (see Ezek. 37:23).

Up to this point, we've seen quite a bit of evidence that Cornelius was actually a Hebrew, but to really nail it down, there is one more verse we need to see –

NKJ **Acts** 10:28 - Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another **nation**. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

In this verse, the word nation (which is typically translated from the Greek word 'ethnos') is translated from the Greek word 'allophulos' (Strong's 246). Allophulos is a conjunction of the Greek word 'allos' (Strong's 243) which means 'from', and the Greek word 'phyle' (Strong's 5443) which is translated 25 out of 31 times in the King James Bible as 'TRIBE'. Here's a couple of examples -

NKJ **Matt.** 19:28 - So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes (5443) of Israel.

NKJ **James** 1:1 – "... a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes (5443) which are scattered abroad: Greetings."

So, this pretty much seals it. Cornelius was from one of the twelve tribes of Israel. I would guess he was from the tribe of Ephraim since Ephraim was the tribe from which leaders and warriors like Joshua came from.

So to wrap this up -

The death and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua had provided the redemption for Israel, and just as YHVH remembered His covenant at the prayers of the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt, YHVH remembered His covenant at the prayers of a formally exiled Hebrew who had become a Roman soldier, and may have even witnessed the death of his Messiah (Matt. 27:54; Mark 39; Luke 23:47). There is indeed – 'no new thing under the sun'!

Once you see it and realize that the problem the apostles were most often dealing with was the animosity the believing Jews had for the believing non-Jews (Israelites from the northern tribes) the words of Paul, James, and Peter make so much more sense.

Yeshua came for the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel (Matt. 12:24). Thus, it makes sense that His first 'convert' was not a 'gentile' 'converting' to some new religion, but was a lost Hebrew who had been found and was 'returning' to God's way and to the congregation of Israel.

Shalom Aleichem