

THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERT

– ACTS 10:1-48. – APRIL 4. –

Golden Text: – "In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." – Acts 10:35.

THIS lesson seems to illustrate the necessity for our understanding of the "Divine Plan of the Ages."

After being blessed with this aid for several years we can scarcely appreciate what was our condition before this light shone on our pathway. Could we always have this in mind, it would assist us in the exercise of patience and forbearance towards our dear friends in all the nominal churches. In illustration of this we quote the words of a Doctor of Divinity on this very lesson – a man of much more than average intelligence, too. He says, "The narrow exclusiveness of the Jews, which had fortunately kept their religion pure for so many centuries, was a formidable barrier to this extension [of the gospel, beyond the Jews]. Christ himself had preached only to Jews. That was necessary, for the time of his ministry was too brief for a larger field, and the Jews at first would not have listened to a broader Gospel. But the time had come to break down the barrier of Jewish exclusiveness and carry out Christ's larger thought."

Not seeing the "Divine Plan of the Ages," this teacher and most others impute to our Lord merely motives of expediency and broadening thought, and to the Jews narrowness and exclusiveness, whereas when once the "Plan of the Ages" is seen, it is discerned that it was God who was exclusive and who insisted upon the Jews separating themselves from Gentiles and who told them that they alone were his special nation, his chosen people. It was God who made a Covenant with that nation and

not with others. It was God who declared, "You only have I known (recognized) of all the families of the earth." – Amos 3:2.

It is the Apostle who explains to us that Israel had "much advantage every way" over all the other nations, **[R4344 : page 70]** because to them were committed exclusively the oracles of God – the Law and the Prophecies. To them alone Jesus came, not because of narrowness on his part, nor because of insufficiency of time on God's part. God delayed the sending of Messiah for over four thousand years. He could easily enough have made our Lord's ministry longer and have allowed it to extend to the Gentiles, had he chosen. On the contrary, our Lord declared, "I am not sent, save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." – Matt. 15:24.

The proper view of the subject shows us that time and order have to do with every feature of the Divine Plan, that it has an exactness to a day. "But when the fulness of the due time was come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law." (Gal. 4:4,5.) At exactly the right time he began his ministry. Exactly three and a half years thereafter it ended on the very day indicated in the type. On the very day indicated our Lord arose from the dead. On the very day indicated in the type the Pentecostal blessing came. And we may be sure that it was on the very day indicated that the incidents of this lesson occurred. That day must have been exactly three and a half years after our Lord's crucifixion.

Why? Because, according to Divine prophecy, "seventy weeks" of years, 490 years, had been specifically set apart as a period of favor to the Jewish nation. It had been foretold that at the beginning of the last seven years of that period Messiah would come and that in the exact middle of that seven years Messiah would be cut off in death, but not for his own sins, but for the people's. It had been foretold that the prophecy would be marked

by the anointing of the "most holy" at Pentecost and the further end of the seventieth week would also be marked as the termination of God's special, exclusive favor toward Israel. It was so marked by the sending of the Gospel message to Cornelius, and by his begetting of the holy Spirit after he had believed the message.

The record shows that Cornelius was a just man, a reverential man, a benevolent man, a man every way prepared to be a follower of Jesus – a Christian, the only obstacle being that he was not a Jew. That obstacle was not Jewish prejudice, but an insurmountable one – God's unwillingness to deal with any others than his covenanted people of the seed of Abraham. So soon as the Covenant arrangement with Israel terminated, and God's "due time" came for dealing with such Gentiles as were in proper condition of heart, he had no difficulty in finding messengers to convey the good tidings, as our lesson shows.

It is difficult for us to remember that but a few years ago we, like the mass of Christians, still somehow believed that we had been under the Law, as were the Jews; that the Ten Commandments and the sacrifices, etc., were all given to our fathers and that they were under the Jewish Law Covenant established at Mt. Sinai. We all believed also that, following our Lord's death, we were transferred from the Law Covenant, instituted by Moses, and came under the provisions of the New Covenant, which we supposed was in effect. It was in harmony with this that we used to sing with the spirit, but with misunderstanding also, the words: –

"Free from the Law, O happy condition,
Jesus has died and there is remission."

The "Divine Plan of the Ages" showed us that the Law Covenant was not given to, and did not affect, Gentiles, but Israelites only. We were redeemed, but not redeemed from the

Law; only the Jews, who were under that Law, could be redeemed from the curse of that Law. The same "Divine Plan of the Ages" shows us now that the New Covenant belongs to natural Israel, and will go into effect at the beginning of the Millennium, and that we are not under it at all. It shows us that we are under a still higher and grander Covenant than either the Law Covenant or New Covenant; that we are under the Faith Covenant, the Grace Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Oath-Bound Covenant, as the Apostle says in Heb. 6:17-19 and Gal. 3:29.

Now we perceive that our high calling to be members of the Body of the Messiah, his Church in glory, signifies that we with him, under his Headship, as his Bride, will be associated in the mediating of that New Covenant between God and Israel and all the nations during the Millennial Age. Our lesson teaches us that God has an intimate acquaintance with all of our affairs, and at the appropriate time

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

Our Lord indeed intimated that ultimately his Gospel message would be extended to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The Jews themselves had always expected that they would first be nationally blessed, and that God's blessing through them would extend to other nations, just as it ultimately will do, not under their (old) Law Covenant, instituted by Moses, but under their New (Law) Covenant, which will be in due time instituted by Messiah glorified. The disciples, therefore, had no thought of the Gospel invitation being extended to the Gentiles. They considered that, like all the preceding favors of God, it would go to the Jew only. It was not bigotry and not prejudice that lay at the bottom of this, but due to the Divine dealing of the past and the tenor of the Divine promises. The disciples had not yet learned that the Gospel dispensation, with its Spiritual Israel,

is, as it were, a parenthesis in the Divine Plan, with Israel dropped at its beginning and restored to position at its conclusion.

Cornelius had his vision first. He saw in a vision "openly," not in a dream, an angel of God coming in unto him. He talked with the angel and received the assurance that his prayers and his alms of years had now been received of the Lord, because the "due time" had come – the end of Israel's covenanted favor. We may be sure that at the same time the alms and prayers of all other Gentiles ascended up as incense to the Lord. We may be sure that blessings were arranged also for all such, and the Gospel sent to them, though not in so marked a manner as to Cornelius, because the Lord would make of his case a special lesson for the benefit of the apostles and of all of us who have lived since. In recounting this matter elsewhere Cornelius says that the angel told him to send for St. Peter and gave him his address and added, "When he is come, he shall tell thee words, which shall be to the saving of thyself and house."

It will be observed that Cornelius' alms and prayers had not saved him. The death of Christ had not saved him, though it was necessary to his salvation; and his good works and prayers were necessary to his preparation for a blessing. The blessing could not come to him, except through a knowledge of the Truth, just as the Apostle assures us it shall ultimately reach all mankind. He declares, "God will have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the Truth." – I Tim. 2:4.

Let us not forget the importance God has attached to words – not to all words, nor to any words, but to the particular words or message of his grace, through the merit of Christ's blood. Cornelius was rejoiced, and showed his faith by immediately sending messengers to the Apostle. Meantime, while they were approaching **[R4344 : page 71]** Joppa, Peter at noon-time betook him to prayer, perhaps seeking special guidance as to what should

be his next move in Christian work. He got the answer through a dream-vision and through the messengers of Cornelius. He went with the messengers, nothing fearing, and yet not for a moment presupposing what actually took place. He took with him six men, probably as witnesses, or as an escort, or because of the dignity of the person upon whom he was calling. He doubtless was surprised to find that Cornelius had invited into his house his kinsfolk and special neighbors, who with his own family made quite an assemblage. The simplicity of the centurion's faith was thus clearly attested. When St. Peter inquired why Cornelius had sent for him, he explained the visit of the angel and [R4345 : page 71] declared that now they were ready to hear the words, the

"WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE"

Note well the fact that, even though the special favor promised Israel had ended, there was still but one way for the good tidings to reach Cornelius. St. Paul declares that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." It came not to him by impression. Just so today; the knowledge of the Truth goes not to people, however ready for it, by mental impression, but still, as then, God honors and uses his faithful ones as his mouthpieces. Mark the expression, "When he is come, *he shall tell thee words* which shall be to the saving of thyself and house." Now, by reason of the art of printing, the message reaches many otherwise – by *printed words*.

Let us note carefully what these words of life were. They were the simple story of the Cross: The story of man's fall, his sentence to death, his hopelessness as respects extricating himself from that condition and sentence; and the remedy which God in his mercy provided. The essence of the message was that "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and rose again for our justification." The message continued, and showed how the justified ones were invited to become joint-sacrificers with and

thus joint-sharers in Christ's coming glory. The centurion's heart had been troubled. There was something in the message that satisfied his longings as nothing else had ever done. He believed in the Redeemer and was thus justified. His consecration to the Lord, of years' standing, now became intelligent and specific. As his heart went out to the Lord in full acceptance of the Divine terms, in full consecration of his little all to the Divine service, the Lord accepted it, and manifested the acceptance; just as he had done with the consecrated Jewish believers at Pentecost. God having thus recognized Cornelius as a disciple and follower of Christ, a New Creature begotten of the holy Spirit, Peter tells us that he could not believe otherwise than that it was right for him to explain baptism to the centurion, and to give him water immersion, symbolic of the immersion into Christ's death, which he had already experienced.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

Our Lord had declared that he would give to St. Peter the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. A key symbolizes right or authority to open. On the day of Pentecost the Lord used St. Peter as his special mouthpiece in opening the door of the Kingdom to the Jewish people, to all who were in the right condition of heart to receive its blessings. Thus we read that "Peter, standing up with the eleven, said," he being the spokesman. So here, again, when the time had come for the message of the Gospel to go to the Gentiles, it was St. Peter who was granted the privilege of throwing the door wide open by the sermon which he preached to Cornelius. The "key" or power to open on both occasions was used by St. Peter.

THE LESSON OF THE GOLDEN-TEXT

These words of St. Peter do not signify that he had previously been mistaken in supposing that the Divine favors were all confined to the Jewish nation. He had been right in that

supposition. It was in line with all the Scriptural declarations. St. Peter meant by these words that he perceived that *now* God was no longer a respecter of persons and nationality; that now, henceforth, the righteous, God-fearing, in every nation were to be acceptable. He now perceived the meaning of the vision granted him on the house-top, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common or unclean." The cleansing at first was merely typical and to Israel only, accomplished through the blood of bulls and goats. The antitypical cleansing through the blood of Christ was confined for a time to Israel only. But now, in the Lord's providence, the middle wall of partition was broken down, so that all believers amongst the Gentiles, seeking fellowship with the Lord, might become adopted members in Spiritual Israel, the "household of faith," and might be covered by the merit of the better sacrifice of Christ.

