

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Forty-Fifth Week - Seventh Day

CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

"So Cornelius said, 'Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes he will speak to you.'" . . . While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. They they asked him to stay a few days" (Acts 10:30-32, 44-48).

When Cornelius had finished his recital, Peter at length expressed the conviction that the Gentiles were no longer to be regarded as unclean, and that the offer of the gospel was open to them as well as to the Jews. He then explained what the gospel was, showing that all things written in the books of the prophets were accomplished in Jesus, of whom Cornelius and his friends had doubtless heard, for the gospel had already been preached in Cæsarea by Philip.

While Peter was yet speaking the Holy Ghost fell upon Cornelius and his friends, and the same miraculous evidence was witnessed as on the great day of Pentecost. Indeed, Peter himself later states that the Holy Ghost had descended on this occasion "as *upon us* at the beginning." It is therefore not unreasonable to say that "tongues of fire" alighted on Cornelius and his friends. And the greatness of this occasion--being the first practical opening of the church to the Gentiles--might both require and explain such a manifestation. At all events, nothing like this had occurred since the great Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit. Since then many had received the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but none in this manner. Such gifts had been bestowed *after* baptism and at the apostles laying their hands upon the converts, but here it was direct and signal and *before* baptism. It was as distinct and sweeping as on the day of Pentecost.

Had not this sign been given, our impression is that Peter nevertheless would have admitted

these Gentiles, on their confession of belief in the Lord Jesus, into Christian fellowship. But it is doubtful whether the "brethren" who had accompanied him from Joppa would have done so; and it is nearly certain that others at a distance would not have recognized the legitimacy of such a step. But this miraculous sign was indeed given; and we therefore conclude that it was given for the purpose of rendering the will of God indisputably manifest while at the same time clearly showing that the course Peter took was not only in accordance with it but absolutely required by it. It was calculated to prevent the brethren then present from offering any opposition that might cast a damp and doubt over the proceeding. It was suited to stop the mouths of any who might afterward call it into question.

Accordingly, no sooner did Peter witness this sign and hear these Gentiles "speak with tongues and magnify God," than he exclaimed, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" The very cast of these words suggests that Peter was uncertain whether his Jewish brethren would be in agreement with this step unless there had been this miraculous sign to overcome their prejudices. But there was no opposition, for it was not for man to withhold the baptism of water where God had given the baptism of the Spirit.

Peter therefore commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. By this it appears that Peter himself did not do the baptizing. Indeed, it seems that the apostles very rarely baptized with their own hands. On this present occasion it was doubtless discharged by the brethren who had accompanied him; and he might prefer to use their ministry in order that the expression of their concurrence might be rendered all the more explicit.

To express their gratitude for the great benefits bestowed upon them, Cornelius and his friends implored Peter "to tarry with them certain days." It is not directly stated that he consented, but it appears from the sequel that he did, thereby involving himself in the accusation, "You went in to uncircumcised men *and ate with them!*" (11:3). This latter clause must refer to this subsequent "tarrying," for Peter did not previously eat with them. By doing so after their baptism, Peter showed he considered himself loosed from the obligation of ritual precepts under certain circumstances. However, even though he lived with Gentiles during this time, it does not appear that he partook of forbidden meats; for no charge is laid against him afterward, and neither does it appear that any converted Jew did so until after their final dispersion.

When the tidings reached Jerusalem that the Gentiles had received the word of God, the feeling aroused was not generally one of thankfulness. There were certainly many who thought that the gospel was the exclusive privilege of the Jews and was obtained only through Judaism. Thus Peter was censured for his conduct when he returned to Jerusalem. But in his own vindication Peter explained the matter from the beginning. At the close of his plain recital of the circumstances, he merely added this cogent and unanswerable remark: "*If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?*" (11:17). To the credit of the brethren at Jerusalem, on hearing this they not only held their peace but glorified God for the extension of his mercies to the Gentiles.

They had doubted only so long as it seemed that Peter had acted on his own judgment and discretion. When he made it plain that the will of God had been clearly manifested, they abandoned their ground of opposition and cheerfully acquiesced in the conclusion, "*Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*" (v. 18).