

No, Not in Israel

"When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and said to the people that followed him, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel"—Luke 7:9

THE SEVENTH chapter of Luke contains the record of the healing of a certain centurion's servant. This miracle of Jesus occurred after he had concluded his address on the mount, where he taught the people on one of the mountains near the Sea of Galilee. In Luke 7:1 we read—

"Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum."

We are told that this was a city of considerable size and importance in Jesus' day, containing the office of a tax-collector (Mark 2:14), a representative of the king, Herod Antipas (John 4:46), and a military station whose commander had built a synagogue for the Jews. (Luke 7:5).

This commander was, of course, the "certain centurion" whose servant, being dear unto him, was sick and ready to die. (Luke 7:2).

Who was this centurion? We do not even know his name. But we are told things about him which are of more value than his name, place of birth, age, etc.

And who was his sick servant? We are not told this either. The word Matthew uses (8:6) means "child" or "little boy." Luke uses **doulos**—"slave."

Whatever the relationship between this centurion and the critically sick person, the centurion clearly had a deep and fond attachment for him.

We are told that his sickness was critical—in fact the centurion was aware of the danger of his sick servant being "ready to die," so that there was no known hope of recovery. At this point we read in v. 3—

"And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant."

In v. 6 we are told—

"The centurion sent friends to him."

Matt. 8:5 says simply that the centurion himself came to Jesus. Matthew's account can be explained on the principle that "What one does by another, he does himself."

Of the elders of the Jews sent to meet Jesus, we read—

"And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying that, He is worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." (vs. 4-5).

These Jewish elders held the centurion in high esteem. On the whole, needless to say, we know that the Gentiles were not recognized favourably by the Jews. The Jews considered the Gentiles on a lower level than themselves.

All who were not of the Jews—all not in the divine covenant—whether Greeks or barbarians, were considered to be strangers, foreigners, aliens, heathen and uncircumcised, without hope and without God in the world.

While this centurion was held in high esteem by the Jews, he does not appear to have been a proselyte to Israel. Nevertheless the Jewish elders spoke unto Jesus on the centurion's behalf—

"He is worthy for whom he should do this . . ."

"Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him,

"Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof" (v. 6).

The centurion, at Jesus' approach, sent his friends, to protest his sense of unworthiness of Christ's presence.

He was humble to the extent of trying to prevent Jesus from entering a Gentile house (Acts 10:28).

"Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed."

Certainly it would be an honor to have Jesus come to one's house, but this centurion thought himself, as a Gentile, not worthy to even go to Jesus!

Here we behold humility in a man of such great faith as to cause the Son of God to marvel. Indeed, his faith was great, as further revealed in his words:

"For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (v. 8).

The Diaglott renders opening words of this verse—

"For even I am a man appointed under authority."

—the implication being—

"EVEN I, the mere man that I am, have authority and my word is obeyed without action or effort on my part— EVEN I say to this soldier, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it."

And so he reasons—

"IF EVEN I have some authority over soldiers and servants, what must be YOUR authority and power over people and circumstances and nature. Speak the word only —there is no need of closeness, or any action—I believe with a simple word of command you can banish disease."

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"When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel" (v. 9).

What a marvellous truth for Jesus to behold in this Gentile! What a depth of understanding of God's power! Jesus was looking—seeking—for some to hear and believe, who would manifest complete faith in him and in God.

If he found such anywhere, the apparent likelihood was that he would find them among God's Own people, the Israelites, even among his own nation and people to whom he was sent of God. But, as he said,—

"I tell you, I have not found, even in Israel, such great faith."

And so we read (v. 10)—

"And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."

The miracle took place in less time than it took for them to return to the house, and they were not far from it at that time. The healing was no doubt instantaneous, and took place immediately after Jesus granted the centurion's request. Matt. 8:13 says—

"And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour."

The Diaglott renders it "immediately restored." The RSV says "at that very moment."

Thus the centurion's great faith was fully justified. Jesus gave the command, and it was done.

In Matthew's account, after commending the centurion's faith, Jesus said, (8:11-12)—

"Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

"But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We, brethren and sisters, may be included among all those who will come from the east and west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, but only if we are faithful to the end of our probation, holding true to that faith without which it is impossible to please God, manifesting in all our actions the depth of faith exhibited by the Gentile centurion, and realizing that it must be a faith that works by love, and that only such a fulness of faith will give us the victory whereby we may receive the gift of eternal life.

—N. M.