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The Faith of the Centurion

Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10

The faith of the Centurion DIG: Why did the centurion send some elders of the Jews to Jesus instead of going himself? What was unusual about the centurion being concerned about his young servant? Why was the Lord amazed? Why is replacement theology wrong? Does the Great Physician still heal today? How? When? Under what circumstances?

REFLECT: How do you understand the authority of God? If you have been touched by the blessings of the Messiah through Isra'el, what are you doing to return the blessing to the Jewish people today? Like the centurion, people in the storms of life don't waste time or mince words. They go directly to the people whose faith they believe is real. Are you one of those people? Why? Why not?

From the very beginning of the Bible, **God's** plan has always been that **Jews** and Gentiles should worship **ADONAI** together. In the TaNaKh we learn that **all peoples on earth will be blessed through Yeshua** (see my commentary on **Genesis**, **to see link click [Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You, and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse](#)**). Rabbi Sha'ul teaches us in the New Covenant that **the dividing wall of hostility** has been torn down between **Jews** and Gentiles (see my commentary on **Acts [Ah](#) - The Jewish Good News for Gentiles**).

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening to His teachings (see [Da - The Sermon on the Mount](#)), He entered Capernaum (Matthew 8:5a; Luke 7:1). Christ considered Capernaum as His home base. But, because Capernaum was a Jewish town under Roman occupation, it gave Yeshua His first opportunity to publicly minister to a Gentile. Because He pronounced a curse on it (Matthew 11:23), the ancient city no longer exists, except in the form of ruins of a synagogue and a few houses. It was a pleasant town in Messiah's day and He spent considerable time there, probably much of it in Peter's house (Mt 8:14).



When **He** arrived, a Roman army officer called a **centurion** came to **Him**, asking for **help** (Matthew 8:5b). The reason **he** was called a **centurion** is because a century is a unit of 100 and **he** commanded 100 Roman **soldiers**. There is a good possibility that **he** belonged to a special category of Gentiles known as **God** fearers, or *Yirey Ha'Shamayim*. These were Gentiles who had great respect for the **faith** of Isra'el and even attended **the** local **synagogue**. However, they stopped short of becoming full converts (*gerim*) who not only attended **the synagogue** but also kept the required commandments for a convert, such as circumcision, immersion and Temple sacrifice. It is noteworthy that each of the Roman **centurions** mentioned in the New Covenant are spoken of favorably, and the Bible seems to indicate that each of them eventually believed in **Jesus** as their **Lord and Savior**.

His servant, whom he valued highly, was at home paralyzed, suffering terribly and was about to die. Whatever disease it was, it was fatal. **The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to Him** (Matthew 8:6; Luke 7:2-3a). In every town there were what we may call municipal authorities who were under the **authority** of the mayor. But, there were also **synagogue** representatives called **the elders of the Jews**, an institution frequently mentioned in the Bible, and deeply rooted in Jewish society.⁶⁰⁸

When **the** Roman **centurion** came to **Jesus** to have **Him** cure **his servant**, the homosexual theologians of today somehow think that the Greek text proves that **the servant** was in fact **the centurion's** lover. This lie is told to those who have **itching ears** (**Second Timothy 4:3**), and the unlearned that memorize foolish statements like this for their next debate. The gay church movement can rely on a sufficient number of the biblical ignorant to repeat such lies.⁶⁰⁹

Asking Him to come and heal his servant (Matthew 8:7; Luke 7:3b). There is a saying

that, “As the king – so the messenger.” In **Luke’s** mind, although **the elders of the Jews** were **the ones** who actually spoke to **Christ**, it is **the centurion** who really asked for help.⁶¹⁰ *Pais*, here translated **servant** by **Matthew**, literally means *a young child*. **Luke**, however, calls **him** a **slave** (Greek: *doulos*), indicating that **he** was most likely born into the **slave** household of **the centurion**. The term **servant** would cover both meanings.

When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with Him, saying: **This man deserves to have you do this (Luke 7:4), because he loves our [people] and has built our synagogue (Luke 7:5)**. The term **deserves** should not be interpreted to mean earned favor, as the replies of **the centurion** in 7:6-7 reveal. The fact that **Yeshua** commented on **his faith** rather than **his** good works indicates that the word **deserves** is not to be confused with merited favor. It was as if **the elders of the Jews** were saying, “**He** is the kind of man who has been good to **our people**.”⁶¹¹ **The centurion** was under the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant, which said: **I will bless those who bless you (Genesis 12:3a)**.

The fact that **the centurion** cared so much for **his servant** set **him** apart from the typical Roman **soldier**, who could be heartless and brutal. Normally, a **slave** owner in that day had no more regard for his **slave** than for an animal. The great Greek philosopher Aristotle said there could be no friendship and no justice toward inanimate things, not even toward a horse or a **slave** because master and **slave** were considered to have nothing in common. “**A slave**,” he said, “is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate **slave**” (*Ethics*, 1:52). Yet, **the centurion** from **Capernaum** had no such compulsion. **He** was a **soldier’s soldier**, but, **he** had deep compassion for **his** dying **slave** boy and felt unworthy to approach **Jesus** personally. **Yeshua** knew **the man’s** heart and didn’t need to hear a direct request, either from **the centurion** or from **the Jews** who came in **his** behalf. **He** simply responded in love, saying: **I will come and heal him (Mattityahu 8:7b NASB)**.⁶¹²

Jesus was not far from the house when the centurion saw Him and sent friends to say to Him, “Lord, don’t trouble Yourself, for I do not deserve to have You come under my roof” (Luke 7:6b). Here again the Greek indicates that, in **Luke’s** mind, **the centurion** spoke these words to **Christ** through the lips of **his friends**. While there was no direct biblical prohibition keeping a **Jew** from entering the house of a Gentile, it is understandable that virtually all would refrain from such an action so as not to become defiled (**Acts 10:28, 11:3 and 12; Tractate Oholot 18:7**). The Roman officer already understood such convictions and expected that **Yeshua**, a rabbi, would not come to **his** own home. **Luke** tells us that **the centurion** even recruited **some elders of the Jews** to present **his** appeal to **Christ**, another indication of **his** understanding of the cultural issues of that time (**Luke 7:3**).⁶¹³

He felt genuinely unworthy for **Jesus** to go to that much trouble for **him**, and no doubt also didn't want **Him** to break Jewish tradition. **That's why he** said: **I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you (Mattityahu 8:8a and Luke 7:6c)**. While both **Matthew** and **Luke** emphasized the **faith** of the centurion, **Luke** emphasized **his** humility as well.

Speaking for the **centurion**, **his friends** said: **Lord**, if **You** just **say the word**, and **my servant will be healed (Mt 8:8b; Lk 7:7)**. **He** knew of **the Lord's** healing power and **he** also understood delegation of power: **For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Mt 8:9; Lk 7:8)**. **He** trusted that the spoken word of **God** (Greek: *rhema*) was all that was needed for the **healing** of **his servant**. **He** recognized **authority** when **he** saw it, even in a real miracle or healing in which **he** had no experience or understanding. **He** knew that if **he** had the power to make **soldiers** and **slaves** do **his** bidding by simply giving **them** orders, **Yeshua's** supernatural powers could even more easily allow **Him** to simply say **the word** and cause **the servant** to be **healed**.

This is one of the few times in the New Covenant that **the Prophet of Nazareth** is said to be **amazed**. **When Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to those following Him: Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9)**. Many **Jews** had believed in **the Meshiach**, but, none had shown the sincerity, sensitivity, humility, love and depth of faith of this Gentile soldier. What happened here would eventually happen on a national scale. **The Jews** would reject **the Messiah** and the Gentiles would accept **Him**. **I say to you that many Gentiles will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 8:11)**.

But the Pharisees, or **the subjects of the Kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12)**. Sometimes anti-Semites think that since the gospel is for all humanity that **ADONAI** is no longer interested in Isra'el as a nation (even though **Mattityahu 23:37-39** proves the opposite). This error - known variously as Replacement theology, Dominion theology, Kingdom Now theology, Covenant theology (in some of its forms), Reconstructionism, and in England, Restorationism - with its anti-Semitic implications, is so widespread that passages in the B'rit Chadashah are even mistranslated to conform to it (**Romans 10:1-8** for example). The present verse is one of those passages.

However, the point of this story is not the exclusion of Gentiles but inclusion. Here **Yeshua**

clearly states that Gentiles from all over (**from the east and the west**), even an officer of the hated Roman conquerors, can, by **believing in ADONAI**, join (not replace) **God's people and take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 8:10-11)**. Like many statements of the prophets pertaining to the Israelites, **Matthew 8:12** above is a warning against lack of **faith**, not an irrevocable prediction.⁶¹⁴

Then Jesus said to the centurion through his emissaries: Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would. And because of the sincere **faith** of that Roman officer, it is not surprising that **his servant was healed at that moment (Matthew 8:13)**. **The servant boy** may not have even known that **his master** had sent for **Christ** to heal **him**. There is no biblical evidence that **the servant** was a believer. **Yeshua** never touched **him** - didn't even meet **him** personally. **The Great Physician** just spoke the word and **he** was **healed**.

Jesus healed with a word or touch. **He healed** instantly, **He healed** organic diseases from birth and **He** raised the dead. **He healed all** who came to **Him**, fully and completely. Those who claim the gift of **healing** today are cruel imposters. If they could really **heal** the way **Messiah healed** when **He** walked the earth, they would be clearing out hospital wings, curing cancer patients and raising the dead like **Peter (Acts 9:36-42)** and **Paul (Acts 20:10)** did. When their supposed gift fails to materialize, they blame the sick, injured or deformed, saying *their* lack of **faith** prevented the **healing**. The wheelchair bound Joni Erickson Tada experienced this kind of spiritual abuse.

So, does **the Great Physician** still **heal** today? Yes, without a doubt. But, **He heals** on the basis of **His** will and in **His** timing. **Jesus** did not give the principle **just as you believed it would** as a universal promise to all believers. Rabbi Sha'ul had absolute **faith** in **ADONAI's** ability to **heal** him, and he personally experienced, and was often used as the instrument of **God's** miraculous healing. But, when he prayed three times for his **thorn in the flesh** to be removed, **the Lord's** answer to him was: **My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness (Second Corinthians 12:7-9)**.⁶¹⁵

When **the men who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well (Luke 7:10)**. **The Roman centurion** stands as a great example of a Gentile believer who has personal **faith** in **the God** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and as a result, a love for **the people** of Isra'el.

The centurion said: **I am a man under authority**. How do we understand the **authority** of **ADONAI**? We know that **God** created the world and has said that we would rule over it (**Genesis 1:26**). We also know that **the Father** has given **Jesus all authority in heaven**

and on earth (Mt 28:18), and has put **Him** at **the head of the body, the Church (Col 1:18)**. As a result, **all authority** comes from **God**. **Messiah** reminded Pontius Pilate of this during **His** trial: **You would have no power over Me unless it had been given you from above (Jn 19:11)**.

From time to time over the years, we may have been disappointed in human **authority**, especially as we have seen it used inappropriately. **The Lord**, however, never tries to control us with **His** authority. **He** has given us the freedom to choose good and evil. When we recognize **God's** perfect **authority**, we will be more likely to want to obey the commands **He** has given us through **His Church**. **His** commands are a gift intended to help us live more loving and fruitful lives - lives that will bear witness to **His** goodness and love.

Like **the centurion**, an acknowledgment of **God's authority** over our lives can open us up to greater **faith**. When we pray in the name of **Christ**, we are invoking **His authority** over all things, including fear, sickness, anxiety, and sin. Although we are **not worthy**, **Yeshua** is pleased with the **faith** we display when we call on **Him** in times of distress. Like **the centurion**, we can have great confidence in the power **the Lord**.⁶¹⁶