

# The Faith of the Centurion

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

**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 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 (Ephesians 2:14).

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 publically 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 (Matthew 8:14).

When He arrived, a Roman army office called **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 HaShamayim*. 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.<sup>608</sup>

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 (2 Tim 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.<sup>609</sup>

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.<sup>610</sup> *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."<sup>611</sup> 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).<sup>612</sup>

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).<sup>613</sup>

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 (Matt 8:8a; 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 (Matthew 8:8b; Luke 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" (Matthew 8:9; Luke 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** (see **Matthew 8:10**), join (not replace) **God's people** and **take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven** (**Matthew 8:11**). 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.<sup>614</sup>

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**).<sup>615</sup>

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** (**Matthew 28:18**), and has put **Him at the head of the body, the Church** (**Colossians 1:18**). As a result, **all authority** comes from **God**. **Messiah** reminded Pontius Pilate of this during **His** passion: **You would have no power over Me unless it had been given you from above** (**John 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**.<sup>616</sup>