

4. What are the similarities (or differences) between the leprosy described in the Mosaic legislation and modern leprosy?
5. Does the Bible teach that leprosy, as an obvious physical disease, is a symbol or type of sin? Prove your answer.
6. If you deny that leprosy is a type of sin, then, what instruction may be derived from this passage by way of application?
7. In what way(s) is the fact that Jesus touched the leper to be viewed by the then-current Jewish mentality as unthinkable, disgusting or even revolting? Is there any Mosaic legislation against touching a leper? Cite the passage.
8. Why does the Bible speak of "cleansing" of lepers, instead of "healing" them? What, if anything, is the difference?
9. The leper "worshipped" Jesus. Is there anything implied in this word more than simple, natural, oriental obeisance of humility rendered to a respected superior? Prove your answer.
10. Explain the psychological contrast between the original approach that the leper made to Jesus and his later response to Jesus' specific command not to tell anyone but the priests about his healing.
11. What, according to Mark and Luke, was the result of the leper's disobeying Jesus' command to "tell no man"?
12. What do Mark and Luke report as Jesus' reactions to the results of the cleansed leper's spreading the news of his cleansing far and wide?
13. For whom was the leper's offering to be a testimony? And, what was the "testimony" to testify to "them"?
14. Though the nationality of this leper is not stated in the text, as sometimes the nationality is given for other people whom Jesus helped, yet we can confidently affirm that this man was Jewish. What clue in the narration leads us to this conclusion?
15. Is there anything in the account to indicate whether the man advertized his healing *before* or *after* his examination by the priests? (Cf. Mk. 1:45; Lk. 5:15)

Section 13

JESUS HEALS A CENTURION'S SERVANT

(Parallel: Luke 7:1-10)

TEXT: 8:5-13

5. And when he was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,
6. and saying, Lord, my servant lieth in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.
7. And he saith unto him, I will come and heal him.
8. And the centurion answered and said, Lord; I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.
9. For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
10. And when Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
11. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:
12. but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.
13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed in that hour.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is the special significance of this centurion's request of Jesus in light of Roman-Jewish relations?
- b. Why do you suppose the centurion objected, for Jesus' sake, to Jesus' "coming under my roof"?
- c. If Jesus knows all things, why did He "marvel" at the faith of the centurion?
- d. Why was the centurion's faith so outstanding as to be above all the believers of Israel?
- e. What does his faith indicate about the nature of faith as it contrasts with national heritage, blood lines, or family relations?
- f. In what sense are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "in the kingdom"?
- g. Who comes "from the east and west" to be in the kingdom?
- h. Do you think that Jesus found "great faith" among the godly Jews who truly had sought God's kingdom and will?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When Jesus had finished addressing the people in the "Sermon on

the Mount" He descended from the mountain and entered Capernaum. Great crowds followed Him there.

There was a Roman army captain who had a slave whom he valued highly but the servant was ill, in fact at the point of death. When the captain heard about Jesus, he came forward to Jesus in the person of Jewish elders whom he sent, asking Him that He would come and completely cure his slave. When they came to Jesus, they pressed Him earnestly, saying "The captain says, 'Lord, my boy is lying paralyzed at home and racked with pain;' He deserves to have this done for him by you; for he demonstrated his intelligent good will toward our nation. Why, he has even built our synagogue out of his own pocket!"

Jesus said, "I will come and cure him," and with this He went with them. When He was not far from the house the captain sent friends to Jesus with the message: "Sir, do not trouble Yourself: I am not fit to have You come into my house—I did not deem myself worthy even to presume to come to You in person. Just give the order and the boy will be cured. I too know the meaning of authority, being under it myself, with soldiers under me. I order this one to go, and he goes; to another I say, 'Come,' and he comes; and I can say to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, He admired the captain. Turning to the crowd of followers, He exclaimed, "Believe me, nowhere, not even in Israel, have I met with such faith as this! I'm telling you that many Gentiles shall come from all over the earth to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Messianic kingdom of heaven. But those to whom the kingdom belonged by hereditary descent will be banished to the darkness outside; there men will weep bitter tears of disappointment and grind their teeth in helpless rage and self-reproach."

To the captain Jesus said (through those who had been sent by him), "Go; as you have believed, so let it be done for you!" The servant was healed at that very moment, for when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the boy in perfect health.

SUMMARY

THE RELATIONSHIP AND HARMONY BETWEEN MATTHEW AND LUKE

The Problem: Why is it that two independent testimonies of an event cannot agree on the obvious facts of the case? Matthew was purportedly an eyewitness; Luke received his information through careful research; yet neither tells this story like the other. (Read the two

accounts to appreciate the differences of detail!) Matthew represents the centurion as coming directly to Jesus but includes no mention of Jewish intercession or friends hastily directed to halt Jesus. Luke's narration includes these latter details, but gives the distinct impression that Jesus never saw the centurion.

Several solutions: if it can be demonstrated that there is a possibility to harmonize all known facts, no charge of inconsistency or contradiction can be lodged against the authors.

1. Intentional difference in emphasis even though both authors knew all facts concerned. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 544) notices the following distinctions in the historical emphasis of Matthew, who seems to be addressing himself to Jewish readers primarily, and that of Luke, whose narrative may have been intended for wider readership:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Matthew's "Jewish" Gospel gives the pro-Gentile presentation of the event. b. Matthew sketches the event as Christ's direct, personal dealing with the heathen centurion. c. Matthew quotes Jesus' declaration that offers faithful Gentiles a blessed equality with Israel's future hope, putting aside Israel's merely fleshly claims, dooming unbelieving Jews to certain judgment. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The "Gentile" narrative gives the pro-Jewish presentation of the event. b. Luke narrates Jesus' dealing with the Gentile indirectly by Jewish intervention and on the basis of the centurion's spiritual sympathy with Israel. c. Luke omits this. |
|---|---|

2. In both accounts Jesus deals directly with the centurion, the delegation of Jewish elders and personal friends being essentially irrelevant to the central point: Jesus healed the centurion's slave. That is, Luke presents the fuller, more detailed account, whereas Matthew summarized the account of the centurion's request without specifying his manner of presenting it to Jesus. What a man gets another to do for him he may be said to have done for himself. Thus Matthew's account is to be interpreted as impersonal and indirect, according to Luke. The one

difficulty with this view, obviously, is that, while all of the centurion's speeches reported by Matthew may be merely the quotation of his words by the Jewish elders, what of Jesus' command to the centurion (Mt. 8:13)? If the centurion were not physically present in front of Jesus, how is this command to be interpreted?

It should be noted that the command in Greek is but one word: "Go!" (*hupage*) the verb as well as "you" (*soi*) are both singular, both of which point to one person being addressed.

It might be possible to interpret the last part of Jesus' words ("as you have believed, be it done for you.") as Jesus' answer to be carried back to the centurion by the elders, but what of the command in the singular ("Go thou!")?

3. Another often-offered theory of harmonizing is to view the two Evangelists' narratives as essentially referring to different phases of the total incident. In this case, Luke is regarded as relating the sending of the Jewish elders and later of the centurion's friends and omitting the coming of the centurion to Jesus as He neared his house. Accordingly, it is said, Matthew mentions only the latter event, omitting the others. But this view has two weaknesses:
 - a. This explanation fails to explain how the Jewish elders and friends could have "returned to the house and found the slave well" (Lk. 7:10) unless they went to the house another way and Jesus unexplainedly arrived there first, spoke directly with the centurion and sent him home confident of his slave's healing. The impression conveyed by the text, although not stated, is that the elders accompanied Jesus back to the house, were halted with Jesus not far from the centurion's house by the second group of friends and, after Jesus' healing word, returned to the house with the friends to find the centurion and his slave well and probably rejoicing.
 - b. This explanation fails to explain how Jesus could "marvel" twice, once when the friends reported the centurion's words expressing great understanding of Jesus' authority, and once again when, according to the theory, the centurion himself came out to meet Jesus. Is this psychologically credible? A possible answer might be found in the meanings of the word "marvel:"

(1) When the friends brought the centurion's expression of

great comprehension of Jesus' authority, Jesus was surprised, amazed by his almost incredible faith; hence, Jesus "marveled."

- (2) When according to this theory, the centurion himself expressed his understanding in identical words, Jesus was not surprised, for He had heard these words before from the friends. Now, He *admires* the awe-inspiring understanding of the Roman; hence, Jesus "marveled" a second time.

While these problems may seem to be inconsequential to the common person, yet they are of moment to the critical reader who sees the Gospel of Matthew and Luke for what they are: two independent historical testimonies of actual fact. If they can be changed with faulty or contradictory reporting even in this one event, their record of other events, which all readers would consider of utmost importance, is thereby rendered suspect.

While it is difficult to decide which possible harmonization best expresses all the known facts of the event under study, due to the details omitted by both Evangelists, this difficulty has a positive outcome. Had Matthew or Luke copied from each other or from some "earlier tradition," they could have been more careful to eliminate these apparent difficulties. Because of these difficulties we are driven to the conclusion that each represents an independent testimony, a fact that helps to guarantee the truthfulness of the facts related. It becomes obvious, therefore, that there is one fact left out by both Evangelists, a fact which would solve the apparent dilemma. Each told his own version without including the fact we need to harmonize the accounts. But each told the truth insofar as he wrote. The notes which follow as well as the PARAPHRASE HARMONY precede along the lines suggested in the second possibility for harmony mentioned above.

NOTES

I. THE CARING CHRIST

A. THE CRY OF HUMAN NEED (8:5, 6)

8:5 And when he was entered into Capernaum. Luke (6:17—7:1) identifies the Sermon on the Mount as the event immediately preceding Jesus' return to Capernaum. Jesus had already moved to Capernaum earlier (Jn. 2:12; Mt. 4:13; Mk. 2:1) and apparently shared a house there with His mother and brothers. His sisters, possibly married yet lived at Nazareth. (Mk. 6:1-5) Or else

He lived with families of His Apostles, since many were of Bethsaida (see on 10:1). But Capernaum (of which Bethsaida was but a small suburb) was Jesus' headquarters, "his own city" (Mt. 9:1; Mk. 2:1), even though He could point to no fixed dwelling place (Mt. 8:20).

There came unto him a centurion. If our assumption is correct that the centurion spoke with Jesus only through intermediaries; all that follows, then, is to be interpreted as Jesus' dealing with the centurion via that line of communication. A **centurion** was an army officer roughly equivalent in rank to our captain. These long-service, regular officers were responsible for the discipline of 100 men, a "century". These men were literally the moral fibre of the army, able to command, having character that was unyielding in fight and reliable in peace-time operations. This centurion was possibly the captain of the century stationed in or near Capernaum for the maintenance of law and order on one of the main East-West caravan routes from Egypt to Damascus. A centurion did not necessarily have to be Roman by national origin but must be a Roman citizen (See *ISBE*, 256), inasmuch as Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVII, 8, 3) reports that Herod indeed used foreign troops for the maintenance of order, but of German and Thracian origin over whom were muster-masters and centurions. These were definitely not Romans, as later they went over to the Romans in a strictly Jewish-Roman battle (*Ant.*, XVII, 10, 3).

Study the character of the centurions mentioned in the Bible, remembering that they were men living on the fringe of the knowledge of God (this man; the centurion at the cross, Mt. 27:54; Lk. 23:47; Cornelius, Acts 10; Julius Acts 27).

What sort man is this centurion? His character is seen inductively from his deeds:

- a. He had a more tender heart than was generally found in a mercenary soldier occupying the land of the vanquished, for he occupied himself with generous concern from the welfare of the Jews so often that their leaders could honestly affirm: "He loves our nation." His goodwill had expressed itself intelligently when he paid for the building of the Capernaum synagogue (Lk. 7:4, 5).
- b. He understood the value of human life, be it slave or free. Luke (7:2) informs us this "slave was dear to him."
- c. He possessed a humility that authority had not spoiled and that accomplishments could not puff up. Although he had done much for the Jews that gave him real standing, he said not a word about it.

- d. His courteous discretion puts more brazen believers to shame, for he sent Jewish elders, not presuming to be good enough to present himself before Jesus. (Luke 7:7)
- e. His intelligent faith caught Jesus' eye. He did not even ask Jesus to come to heal the slave; He just lays before Him the story, confident that such great love as Jesus possesses could be reached merely by a knowledge of the facts of the case.
- f. He was a wise administrator, because he had probably passed up the temptation to build something more impressive in Capernaum instead of a synagogue. A theater, hippodrome, or public baths would have been a more impressive expression of his beneficence. However, Plummer (*Luke*, 195) notes that Augustus had recognized the value of synagogues in maintaining order and morality. But the centurion's construction of the synagogue was probably not prompted so much by an interest in good civil order as motivated by a genuine sympathy for the God of Israel, as his later faith seems to indicate.

beseeching him. Although the Evangelists do not inform us with what words the centurion urged Jesus, it is clear that he did not intend for the Lord to come into his house, as his later objections to Jesus' coming demonstrate, unless those objections represent a change of position on his part.

- a. Luke's report (7:3) that the Jewish elders were sent to ask Him to come, may be understood to state what the Jews themselves thought the centurion's commission meant, rather than what he had actually told them to say.
- b. Another possible harmonization of the facts is the suggestion that he sent the elders to call Jesus to come near the centurion's house; then, upon seeing the success of his first messengers, he sent his friends to stop Jesus not far from his house to inform Him that he was an unworthy Gentile for whom but a word from Jesus would suffice.

It is worthy of note that Luke (7:4, 5) describes the elders as "beseeching" Jesus (*parekáloun autòn spoudaios*), Matthew's word (*parakalôn*).

How much did this centurion know about Jesus? Jesus' ministry had been concentrated around Capernaum (Jn. 4:46-54; Mt. 4:13-17; Mk. 1:21-34; Mt. 4:23, 24; Mk. 2:1, 2; Lk. 5:17; Mk. 3:7-12). It is hardly likely that the centurion would depend entirely upon hearsay information regarding the cause for greatly aroused public gatherings in an area over which he was personally responsible for maintaining

law and order. Could he afford to ignore this popular Leader in a land tormented by social unrest fomented by self-styled messiahs? Had he, as member of governmental circles, heard of Jesus' healing of the royal officer's son (Jn. 4:34f.)?

Who are these elders of the Jews? They were no strangers to Jesus, since they had already personally observed in their synagogue His demonstrated authority over the demon-world (Mk. 1:21-28; Lk. 4:31-37) and His undeniable right to forgive sins on earth, however blasphemous this seemed to them (Mt. 9:2-8; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26). Is it necessary to assume that these elders were among the habitual critics of Jesus, who, by the unquestionable generosity of the centurion are thereby put in debt to him, and, thus, cannot deny his present request for their intercession? May not these have been sincere Jews, ever friends of truth and righteousness, whether that be found in Judaism, Gentiles or Jesus? It is not necessary to assume that the centurion sent, or could even persuade, all the elders. Their own urging (Lk. 7:4, 5) reflects their real appreciation of this centurion's true spiritual sympathy with Israel as well as their understanding of Jesus' Person and work.

Viewed from a purely Jewish standpoint, the centurion's coming raises a crucial question regarding the nature of Jesus' ministry itself and His relation to the entire Gentile world. Up to this point no Jewish request had been refused by the Nazarene. But is it possible that God be a God of the Jews only? (cf. Ro. 3:29, 30) Is Jesus an exclusively Jewish Messiah? Must Gentiles be barred from the blessings of His reign as somehow unworthy? Whether, at our distance, we can appreciate it or not, Jesus' ministry is facing an immediate crisis:

- a. If He is but a Jewish Messiah from whose Kingdom unworthy Gentiles are barred, then, philosophically speaking, He represents no God Who can be the Father of all men. If there is a segment of mankind for whom Jesus is not the Messiah, even His claims to be an adequate Jewish Messiah are thrown into doubt, for the very prophecies which had taught us to expect a Messiah at all, promised that "he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles . . . in his name will the Gentiles hope." (Mt. 12:15-21 from Isa. 42:1-4)
- b. On the other hand, His hobnobbing with the outcasts of Israel, the pagans who "were without hope and without God in the world," (cf. Eph. 2:11, 12) could not help but occasion the stumbling of many of Israel. It is fine to promise Gentile participation in the Messianic Kingdom in the figurative lan-

guage of the abstract future, but let none actually help any in the concrete present!

8:6 and saying, **Lord.** **Lord**= "Sir," since even with his apparent clear insight into Jesus' unlimited power, it is not necessary to suppose that this centurion clearly comprehended, or believed, Jesus' Deity. This first, person-to-person encounter with Jesus may certainly have led him to conclude Him to be a true Prophet of the true, living God of Israel; but without further revelation he may have gone no further. An understanding of the Deity of Christ comes upon the basis of evidence found in the deeds of Jesus (Jn. 14:11; 5:36). This conclusion may have been dawning upon the Roman. Jesus here furnished him clear evidence that would lead the centurion to grasp Jesus' identity.

My servant lieth in the house. The centurion's choice of words indicates his sensitive taste, **servant**; but Luke states the man's actual social position, *slave* (*doûlos*). Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 307, 308) collects the following ancient world viewpoints:

Aristotle: "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."

Gaius, *Institutes*: "We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over the slave."

Cato, on agriculture: "Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave and whatever else is superfluous."

Peter Chrysologus: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law."

We are aware that some ancients possessed slaves of even greater ability than the master, as, for example, educated Greeks became slaves of the victorious but less cultured Romans. But this does not prepare us for Luke's description: (7:2) "This slave was dear to him." *Dear* (*éntimos*: "honored, respected, esteemed; valuable, precious". Arndt-Gingrich, 268) The centurion's overt anxiety over the slave's recovery may also speak well for the slave's previous conduct by which he had

earlier so devoted himself to the Roman that his thoughtfulness and obedient service merited him this concern.

The servant **lay in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.** Palsy is a synonym for *paralysis* (*UWRE*, 3711; *ISBE*, 2236). The centurion emphasized that the slave is **in the house**, thereby suggesting the patient to be unmoveable, since the sick were frequently brought to Jesus. While the specific disease cannot be catalogued with accuracy, the fact that "he was about to die," (*Lk.* 7:2), **grievously tormented**, points to the conjectures of spinal meningitis (*ISBE*, 2207), progressive paralysis with respiratory spasms (*ISBE*, 2236) or tetanus.

Observe that the centurion leaves Jesus free to decide what was best to do about the problem, because he believes that whatever Jesus chooses to do, He **CAN DO!**

B. THE CONFIDENCE OF DIVINE POWER (8:7)

8:7 **I will come and heal him.** Jesus volunteers to go immediately to the centurion's house, because this man's faith is sure that the living force of Jesus' word is so irresistible that His physical presence is not necessary to produce its effect (cf. 8:8). On other occasions, as for example, that of the Capernaum royal officer (*Jn.* 4:46ff) when faith is weak and He is asked to go, He refused in order to strengthen the confidence of the petitioner. But sometimes He went anyway even in the face of weak, faltering faith, as in the case of Jairus (*Mt.* 9:18-26). This statement of Jesus is loaded with a powerfully confident assumption! Jesus did not say, "I will come to see what I can do for him," but "I will heal him!" This is the quiet voice of dignified authority proceeding about its normal business.

I will come. Did the centurion actually ask the Jewish elders to seek this decision of Jesus, or did the elders, being of weaker faith and less insight, suppose that Jesus' physical presence were essential and therefore put this interpretation into the centurion's words (see *Luke* 7:3), or did Jesus just decide mercifully to accommodate this needy Gentile in this manner? The key that answers this question is the motive for the centurion's sending friends to halt Jesus not far from the house:

- a. He halted Him there because, to his happy surprise, his earlier mission had achieved more success than he could have hoped, for the wonderful Jewish Teacher is actually coming to his house, but perhaps under a misapprehension as to the nature of the house he is about to enter, i.e. it is that of an "unclean"

Gentile. Thus, he sent his friends to apprise Jesus of this fact. He had expected Jesus to speak a word without coming. What he would not have revealed to Jesus before, he must now confess (8:8).

- b. Or, he expected Jesus all the time, but changed plans when the great reality seizes him that the Teacher is actually about to enter the house. But is he, the careful planner, psychologically caught "off guard"?
- c. He expected Jesus not to say a word at a distance, but to come to the house, stop in front of the house and speak the word. Contrast THIS King's confidence with that of king Jehoram (2 Kg. 5:7). A prophet that knows he is commissioned by God talks this way (2 Kg. 5:8).

II. THE MARVELING MASTER

A. THE COURTESY OF GREAT FAITH (8:8, 9)

8:8 **I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.** This humble objection was brought to Jesus by friends (Lk. 7:6-8). Whether he had expected Jesus to come to his house or not, he feels he must now confess his unfitness, since He is actually coming to enter his house. Either the centurion can now see the group approaching his house, Jesus and the Jewish emissaries in the lead, or else perhaps a runner brought him the joyful word of the success of the elders' intercession and Jesus' coming. Now the centurion, aware of the Jewish viewpoint concerning Gentile houses, must react decisively and rapidly to avert the possibility that Jesus contaminate Himself by contact with Gentiles.

This centurion, alert to Jewish taboos (cf. Acts 10:28) that to associate with a non-Jew, was religiously contaminating, whatever he may have thought of these Pharisaic distinctions, apparently ascribed to Jesus a holiness worth protecting. For this same reason he decided not to approach Jesus personally (Lk. 7:7). He was almost certainly not a proselyte to Judaism (cf. *ISBE*, 2467-2469) for the following reasons:

- a. **I am not worthy** (8:8; Lk. 7:6) *bikanós* = "fit, appropriate, qualified, able, "with connotation of 'worthy'", Arndt-Gingrich, 375.) This language is perfectly consonant with Jewish prohibitions regarding Gentiles (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 546), since a full proselyte would probably consider himself equal to Jews. Luke's expression (7:7) "I did not consider myself worthy to come to you," (*axiós*) also speaks of the centurion's feeling *undeserving the right* to approach Jesus.

- b. Were the centurion somehow Jewish, Jesus' response to his remarkable faith would be inexplicable, since His elevation of Gentile faith above Jewish unbelief would be less relevant in this situation (Mt. 8:10-12).
- c. Plummer (*Luke*, 195) urges that "He loves our nation," could hardly be said of one who was actually a proselyte and would more likely have been said of one in the service of the Herods than that of heathen Rome. However, this has less weight since Josephus (*Ant.* XX, 2, 5) records the remarkable story of a series of benefits brought the Jewish nation by the proselyte king Izates of Adiabene and his mother, Helena.
- d. The more general truth that Jews, even those who were Roman citizens, did not serve in Roman military duty (*ISBE*, 2622) being exempt therefrom, might also corroborate the suggestion that the centurion was in no sense a Jew.

I am not worthy. Though Matthew is a Christian, he records the facts true to life as they occurred: as far as the Jewish elders (Lk. 7:4) and the centurion were concerned, Jesus was a purely Jewish rabbi-prophet. Neither had glimpsed Jesus' universality, for they hoped He would set aside whatever anti-Gentile sentiments He might possess, in order to respond to the centurion's need. Else, why should the elders argue the centurion's worthiness in just those terms used: "He is worthy . . .?"

What a remarkable, practically unique concept of our Lord's qualification and abilities that this centurion possessed! This uncommon confession is the freely offered expression of a representative of the conquering rulers of the vanquished people whose nationality Jesus shared! It is said by a ROMAN officer to an itinerate JEWISH Teacher! This courteous regard for Jesus probably goes beyond the simple discretion of a gentleman. Nobody really believes much in Jesus as Lord until he learns humbly to recognize his own worthlessness and un hypocritically to await Jesus' pleasure. This real man's man is convinced of the great dignity and power of Jesus. This produced in him a counter feeling of equal dimensions of his own unworthiness and inadequacy. This is a normal psychological reaction and a necessary spiritual experience if we are to please God. (cf. Lk. 5:8) Eidersheim (*Life*, I, 549) rightly notices:

But in his self-acknowledged 'unfitness' lay the real 'fitness' of this good soldier for membership with the true Israel; and his deep-felt 'unworthiness' the real 'worthiness' for 'the Kingdom' and its blessings. It was this utter disclaimer of all claim,

outward or inward, which prompted that absoluteness of trust which deemed all things possible with Jesus, and marked the real faith of the true Israel.

In this connection see notes on Mt. 5:3. Compare Lk. 15:21.

But only say the word and my servant shall be healed.

This is supreme confidence in the omnipotence of Jesus: Jesus' Word is to be the instrument by which the healing is to be effected. The centurion's personal experience in the military had taught him the axiom of authority: a real authority needs only a word. (cf. Ps. 33:6-9. Contrast Jn. 4:49; 11:21) His physical presence is not needed to assure the carrying out of his wishes. These words of the centurion, though stated in the imperative mood (*eipè lógo*), must not be interpreted to make him commanding Jesus to use this method or that, for Jesus does not so construe his words. The Lord views these words as expressing the highest comprehension of His power He had ever encountered.

8:9 These expressions offered by the centurion from his own career illustrate but one point: "I understand the principal of *authority*. You have but to give the command and the sickness will leave. If I, an inferior can give orders and they will be unquestionably carried out, how much more can You do so?"

I also am a man (*kai gàr ego ánthropós eimi*). Why did the centurion use the word **man** (*ánthropos*), for it was not strictly necessary in Greek to include this word in the phrase "a (man) under authority." In Luke 7:8 this is made more obvious by the addition of "being set under" (*tassómenos*) a masculine present participle. Is the centurion meaning to suggest, by antithesis, "You are more than a man," i.e., that Jesus were superhuman? The use of "I" *kai gàr ego* is generally emphatic and here antithetic (Dana-Mantey, 123) and suggests that the centurion's antithesis is: "But you are not a man under authority, hence, over all things." The "I also" might also mean "you too," suggesting that the centurion believes Jesus to be "under authority" in a higher sense than that in which the centurion obeys orders of his superiors, for the "also" may merely connect his illustrations with the principle point he is making ("But a word will suffice.") There is a sense in which Jesus was "under authority" (see Jn. 5:19, 30; 14:28; I Co. 15:24-28) and it can be fairly argued that the centurion comprehended by deduction this much of the truth about Jesus.

I say to my servant, Do this and he doeth it. Is this merely a general illustration of the centurion's understanding of author-

ity, or also an unconscious, incidental allusion to the now-suffering servant? If also the latter, then we have a bit larger concept of the slave's personal fidelity which so endeared him to his master.

B. THE JOY OF THE LORD (8:10)

8:10 When Jesus heard, he marvelled. This verse shocks those who, having spent many hours arguing the Deity of Jesus, have lost sight of His true humanity, for, how could Jesus marvel? Does not marvelling include the element of surprise and surprise require the element of previous ignorance? How is it possible for Jesus, who could read the hearts of men as an open book (cf. Jn. 2:25), to be suddenly caught off guard by this sudden display of strong, intelligent faith? The problem may rest in the unproven assumption that Jesus was always omniscient, whereas the obvious meaning intended by Matthew and Luke is that He did not know that the centurion would respond as he did. Jesus had accepted ordinary human limitations, except whereinsofar He needed to act in His character as Deity. Though He possessed supernatural powers He chose not to use them. This means that where ordinary means could not be used to arrive at supernatural knowledge, He used supernatural means, but where ordinary knowledge was needed to carry out His mission and could be obtained by common means, He used them. (Study the following texts as further evidence of Jesus' choice not to know certain things: Mt. 26:40; 24:36; Lk. 2:52; Mk. 11:13; Heb. 5:8)

Our own psychological insight into our own spirit should teach us Jesus' wisdom in choosing to know only what He had come to earth to reveal. There are some things it were better for us not to know, for from a strictly human viewpoint, the joy of surprise would be impossible to the man who knows literally everything. Conversely, all the nightmares of a thousand tomorrows would be no secret to the man who knew everything, and *that* knowledge would be unbearable. Unless we are prepared to be God, Who, knowing the future can do something about its outcome, let us not fret to know a future that God has left out of our ken. Jesus chose in His incarnation not to know some things, in order that His human reaction be genuine, not faked, because of unadmitted knowledge supernaturally acquired.

The question of Jesus' ignorance is, then, a question of extent. If this conclusion is surprising, let us just admit that we have never seen a God-Man before, and we are likely never to see another. Jesus was

unique Son (*monogenes huiós*, Jn. 3:16) and unique God (*monogenes theós* Jn. 1:18). Since none of us have ever tried being God, let us not be too quick to judge what is possible for Him who knows everything, yet chooses to empty Himself of His omniscience and all the rest of those attributes which are His glory (Jn. 1:14; 17:5; Phil. 2:5-11) to be born in human flesh, hemmed in by all the limitations that go with the definition of being human! That is a unique experience that only a God could understand. This may be something of the meaning of Jesus' cry: "No one knows who the Son really is except the Father!" (Mt. 11:27a) So let us just put this fact, that Jesus could marvel, into our understanding of His earthly ministry and accept it. The Apostles who became firm believers and fervent preachers and ready martyrs for Jesus' Deity do not flinch at this suggestion of Jesus' authentic humanity.

It should give us pause to realize that the two factors recorded by the Apostles over which Jesus marvelled are: great faith (Mt. 8:10) and persistent unbelief (Mk. 6:6). Both are intimately linked in Jesus' thought which follows.

I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. Jesus thought it necessary, in order to give adequate expression to His amazement, to cast the centurion's monumental faith against the backdrop of Jewish misgivings about His Messiahship. Vital faith always excited Jesus, probably because it was so rare. This was a moment of great joy for Him. He had been looking for faith, but had not to that moment found any example so noteworthy. Jesus is still looking for faith (Lk. 18:8), for He holds men responsible for what they trust as their real God. This means, obviously, that God does not produce faith in men by some mysterious action of the Holy Spirit without their knowledge and will. For had Jesus produced faith in this centurion, He could not have marvelled at its existence. Further, He could not have blamed the Jews for their unbelief or weakness of faith, because their failure would not be their fault, but His. The centurion's great faith was the result of his apprehension of the evidences Jesus had given men of His identity, plus his personal willingness to act upon what he knew.

No, not in Israel. No more tragic lines have been penned! Where should one expect great faith if not among the heirs of the promises, the chosen nation particularly belonging to God? Yet all Israel had no one, in Jesus' judgment, to match this straightforward, uncomplicated Gentile who trusted Jesus implicitly. Israel had encountered God's mighty acts head-on; their very existence was living

proof of His personal concern. They had every reason to believe God, but were outstripped in actual practice by this faithful foreigner. (See also Mt. 15:21-28). Jesus' joy is tempered by the human tragedy and loss that Israel's failure represented.

Great faith is Jesus' estimate of the man's understanding upon which his faith is founded. Let none suggest that his grasp of Jesus' identity and work is somehow sullied by gross pagan concepts bordering on magic. Not a few commentators suggest he may have even been what later Judaism termed "a proselyte of the Gate," i.e. a Gentile not entirely converted to Judaism by ritual initiation, but still quite sympathetic with Jewish religion and practice. For suggestions how his faith was great, see *Expository Sermon Chapter Eight* over this section.

Study the following texts that reveal that faith is a measurable reality:

Mt. 17:20 The disciples could not cast out a demon "because of their *little faith*" and were culpable because a small amount of real confidence in God could have accomplished relatively greater results.

Lk. 17:5 The apostles requested Jesus, "*Increase our faith!*" as if His stiff requirements required an even superior faith. Instead, Jesus replies again that the smallest amount of real faith would render significant results. What was needed was not more faith, but more humble obedience (Lk. 17:7-10). Faith is a moral phenomenon for which the believer himself is responsible. Jesus evidently did not actually answer the disciples' request as they had stated it, but rather He increased their understanding about what they could expect from God. There is thus a certain point at which God does not need to increase our faith, indeed, cannot, for that is just the point where our own responsibility begins and we must ACT on the faith we possess based on the evidence He has given us all. We grow in faith by doing His will.

Mk. 9:24 The father of the demonized boy recognized the involuntary doubt in his life that questioned even Jesus' ability to help: "*I believe: help thou my unbelief.*"

Mk. 4:40 Jesus rebuked the believing disciples for their fear

Mt. 8:26 during the storm: "Why are you afraid? Have you *no faith?*"

- Lk. 18:8 Jesus seems to despair of finding *any faith* on the earth upon His return.
- Mt. 15:28 Jesus praised the Canaanite woman for her dogged instance that He heal her demonized daughter: "Woman, *great* is your *faith!*"
- Lk. 22:32 Jesus prayed for Peter that his *faith not fail*.
- Mt. 6:30 Jesus attacked worry about food, clothing and shelter as evidence of *little faith*. (also Lk. 12:28).
- Mt. 14:31 Jesus rebuked Peter for being afraid to walk on the water after he had so well begun to do so: "O man of *little faith*, why did you doubt?"
- Mt. 16:8 Jesus rebuked the Twelve because they so quickly forgot the miraculous division of loaves and fishes and were worrying about the fact that they had hardly any bread for the whole group: "O men of *little faith . . .*"

III. THE JUST JUDGE

A. THE HOPE OF FAITHFUL FOREIGNERS (8:11)

8:11 The figure which Jesus used is typically Jewish in language. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 549f) Out of many OT texts the commonest idea of the Messianic rule was the enjoyment, by reassembled Israel, of the joyful banquet at which the patriarchs of renown would be honored guests. (cf. Isa. 2:2; 25:6-9; 45:6; 49:12; 59:19; Zech. 8:20-23; Mal. 1:11. Other NT uses of similar language: Lk. 13:27-29; 14:15f; Mt. 22:1; Rev. 19:9) Edersheim points out that it never crossed the minds of the Jews that any Gentile would ever be permitted to sit down at that feast.

Many shall come from the east and the west. These are Gentiles from out of all nations of the world whose real belief in God exceeded that of the standard Judaism that rejected Jesus. Notice the gentle sensitivity of Jesus as He describes the Gentiles without actually naming them, lest the Jewish bystanders, victims of their own prejudicial views of OT promises regarding the heathen nations, find His choice of words unbearably offensive. (cf. Acts 22:21, 22) Still, the prophets had not been unintelligible in their expression of their expression of God's interest in Gentiles. (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Ro. 15:9-12 where Paul collects some together. NT texts that further indicate Gentile entrance into the Kingdom are: Mt. 12:18-21; 21:43; 22:9; 24:14; 25:32f.; 28:19; Jn. 10:16.) In fact, the whole history of the Church down to the present has vindicated this prophetic word of Jesus, in that the Church has known a Gentile majority almost before the end

of the Apostolic age. What started as a mere trickle (Ac. 10—11:18) has grown into the mighty river of Gentile believers John saw in the Revelation. (Contrast Rev. 7:1-8 with Rev. 7:9f.)

They shall sit down with Abraham: Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom. Jesus is looking at the kingdom as God's reign finally perfected at the end of time when the judgment will have revealed the true relationships that earth's national distinctions tended to obscure. The true sons of the ancient patriarchs are, not those whose only claim is physical descent, but, rather, those who trust God. This truth forms the real basis for Christianity's claim to be truly universal. Note how often this theme permeates Christian teaching: Lk. 19:9; Ro. 2:25-29; 4:11, 12, 16-18; Gal. 3:6-9, 29; 4:29; Eph. 2:11—3-9.

B. THE HOPELESSNESS OF DISBELIEF (8:12)

8:12 **But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth.**

Who are these sons of the kingdom?

- a. "The son of anything" is Hebrew parlance for some characteristic quality or relationship of the person thus described (*ISBE*, 2826; cf. Eph. 2:2). The meaning would be, then, those people, whose main distinguishing feature would be their supposed fitness for entrance into the Kingdom of the Messiah, have suddenly been found very unfit.
- b. If Jesus means the word "sons" in a non-technical sense, the emphasis is upon the legal heirs to the Messianic Kingdom as physical inheritors of Abraham's legacy transmitted through the Messiah. (Ro. 9:4)

In either case, Jesus refers to those descendants of Abraham who rejected the One descendant of Abraham through Whom God intended to bless all nations.

From the Pharisaic standpoint, Jesus is heaping insult upon injury! Not only will Gentiles be welcome guests at the great feast, but the "people of God's own peculiar possession," the Jews as a whole, will be not at all welcome to attend that banquet to which they supposed themselves to have most right. (cf. Mt. 21:33—22:10) The only valid passport to the blessing of God is not membership in a particular nation, family, club or church: it is trust in Jesus, that God wants!

But this biting ironic declaration of Jesus should prove that He was not mere "creature of his time, expounding the highest hopes of contemporary Judaism." Let the unbeliever, who would thus reduce the Lord, explain this fundamental difference between Christ's judgment upon His nation and the thought of His contemporaries. Jesus can

not even be called a mere reformer of current Judaism, for He is hereby smashing its most cherished notions of the privileged place of Israel in the economy of God!

Nor is Jesus merely elevating the Gentiles in importance before God above Israel, for this would controvert the clearest revelations of God's plans for Israel to be the nation through which He would bless all the Gentiles, (cf. Ro. 9-11) Rather, the faith of Gentiles is placed on a par with that of believing Jews. Jesus flatly rejects Israel's merely fleshly claims and obvious, obstinate unbelief. (cf. Mt. 3:7-10; Ro. 9:6ff; 2—4; Jn. 8:37-47) According to Jesus, Gentile faith does not however occupy a position unconnected with or above the true Israel, but rather shares with all Christian Jews the realization of the promises made to the patriarchs on the basis of their faith. (Gal. 3:6-9) This Jewish universalism that admits God-fearing Gentiles is the only true interpretation of Israel's hopes for the messianic Kingdom. (Ac. 10:34-43) This simple sentence pronounced by Jesus must have crashed upon the ears of His audience with the force of an atomic blast. Rather than predict Jewish world domination under the leadership of the Messiah, Jesus describes the fate of unbelieving Israelites: "They will go to hell!"

Outer darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth: this Jesus envisions as the clear alternative to being **in the kingdom**. These vivid metaphors picture in short, rapid strokes a terrifying reality that dares human language to attempt its description, God's final punishment of the wicked. (cf. Mt. 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28) **Outer darkness** calls up three possible visions, all possible:

- a. Banquets, usually being held at night, the invited but unbelieving guests are shut out of the festal gathering to regret their rejection.
- b. Gehenna was spoken of by the Jews as "darkness." (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 550) Accordingly, Jesus' expression becomes a Hebraistic expression for that place of punishment.
- c. Or, perhaps He gives us a picture of a tomb-like dungeon where the imprisoned while away useless hours in total darkness.

Whichever His meaning, the words picture an unbeliever shut out from the light of God and the joy of His fellowship as well as the companionship of the best men of all ages, shut up only to hopelessness and frustrated anger for eternity.

Interestingly, the expression **gnashing of teeth** was not used in OT for "anguish," as one might suppose, but for "anger." (cf. Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Job 16:9; Acts 7:54)

Lenski (*Matthew*, 330) reminds that the phrases "sons of the kingdom" and "shall be thrown out" do not necessarily imply that the Jews were actually in the kingdom, for one can be thrown out when he attempts to enter a place to which he had no right without ever getting into it.

Whether our prejudices will allow us to admit it or not, Jesus has just pronounced God's judgment upon the whole earth. Believers, regardless of their national origins, will enjoy the light and blessings of the Father's house forever; those who refuse to believe Jesus are damned, regardless of previous national privileges or relationships. This revelation of the outcome of God's verdict is valueless unless Jesus knows what He is talking about and has the authority to reveal it!

C. THE POWER OF REAL AUTHORITY (8:13)

8:13 However angered any Jew might have been by the complete controverting of contemporary Jewish beliefs, Jesus vouchsafed the truth of His assertions by the instantaneous cure at long-range of the servant. If the work of Jesus be God's power operating in Him to restore life and health to that centurion's "boy", He shall have no difficulty saving any believer, Jew or Gentile, out of spiritual paralysis and death for eternity! If Jesus' word is effective in accomplishing that which no other man could do, then His judgment of those who accept or reject Him will stand! (cf. Jn. 12:44-50)

Go; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. Unless we assume that the centurion has come out of the house and is now standing before Jesus, this is a message conveyed back to him by the elders. Luke (7-10) reports that upon their arrival at the house, they confirmed the immediate cure of the slave by the powerful word of Christ.

As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. This phrase on the surface is charged with joy because of the great amount of faith possessed by the centurion. But it also has ominous undertones expressed in its exact logical obverse: to the extent you have not believed, what you have asked will not be done for you." (cf. Jas. 1:5-8; Mk. 9:23; 11:23, 24; Mt. 17:19, 20) Jesus is still talking about the quantity of the centurion's faith: "To the extent you believed I could heal your slave, I shall do it."

However, Arndt-Gingrich (905) describe *as* (*hôs*) as a relative adverb made from the relative pronoun "he who" or "that which" (*hòs*), a fact which speaks of content more than

comparative extent. "Hós and the words that go with it can be the subject or object of a clause." If so, Jesus is saying, "the real content of your faith is what will be done for you, or, may what you have believed be done for you."

Lenski (*Matthew*, 333) warns against a wrong application of this declaration to our own experience of faith:

We should not generalize this word of Jesus so as to make it mean: whatever we believe he will grant us he will grant, or that the degree of our faith insures the gift we desire. A wrong faith may be ever so strong in expecting a wrong gift; Jesus will not meet that faith and expectation, he will first correct it. And often he will do wondrous things where there is no faith present in order to produce faith.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What was a centurion? State their comparative rank and responsibility.
2. Why was one stationed in Capernaum?
3. Describe the apparent character of the four Bible centurions.
4. Explain how this centurion could have both known much about Jesus and thus come to so great faith in Him as to make this plea.
5. Explain in what sense "Jesus marveled at him" is to be understood. Was Jesus in any way surprised by the centurion's great faith and understanding? It there anything wrong with Jesus' being caught off guard by actions of other men?
6. Who is meant by the phrase "many will come from east and west"?
7. What is the feast referred to by the expression "they will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"? Cite the passages that so identify it.
8. What is meant by the phrase "kingdom of heaven" in this context?
9. Who are the "sons of the kingdom who will be thrown into outer darkness"?
10. What is the "outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth"? How is this phrase to be understood? For instance, what if by bad dental care, men do not have teeth any longer?
11. Explain the difference between Matthew's and Luke's accounts wherein the first represents the centurion as coming directly to Jesus with his request, while the second asserts that the centurion never faced Jesus directly but sent Jewish elders and other friends instead.

12. What about the centurion caused the Jewish elders to intercede so willingly to Jesus on his behalf?
13. It is usually assumed that this centurion was probably Roman, but certainly non-Jewish. What are the indications in the text that lead to this assumption?
14. Cite other incidents or texts that indicate that Jesus chose to be particularly unwilling to see the Jewish-Gentile distinction, and helped other Gentiles or praised them, directly or indirectly.
15. State in literal language the meaning of Jesus' metaphor regarding the Messianic feast "in the Kingdom" (v. 11)

Section 14

JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

(Parallels: Mark 1:21-34; Luke 4:31-41)

TEXT: 8:14-17

14. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick of a fever.
15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto him.
16. And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus came to Peter's house? Was this a friendly social visit or something more?
- b. What is Matthew's purpose in the quotation of the prophecy?
- c. How did Peter's mother-in-law "minister" unto Jesus? Why?
- d. Why does Matthew connect these cures of diseases and casting demons out that Jesus is doing with Isaiah's prophecy?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus arose from the seat in the Capernaum synagogue where He had been teaching and left the building and entered the home of Simon Peter and Andrew. Accompanying Him were James and John.