

# Seven Centurions

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## Introduction

In this lesson, we consider the seven centurions mentioned in Sacred Scripture, and the varied lessons they communicate.

Thomas defines **hekatontarchēs** or **hekatontarchos**, derived from **hekaton** [a hundred] and **archō** [to rule, to begin], as “a centurion, a captain of one hundred men” [1543].

BDAG say it refers to “a Roman officer commanding about a hundred men (subordinate to a tribune), centurion, captain.”

This word occurs 20x in the NT (Matt. 8:5, 8, 13; 27:54; Luke 7:2, 6; 23:47; Acts 10:1, 22; 21:32; 22:25, 26; 23:17, 23; 24:23; 27:1, 6, 11, 31, 43).

Additionally, one other word should be considered. Thomas defines **kenturiōn**, of Latin origin, as “a centurion (a Roman army officer)” [2760]. BDAG say this Latin loanword refers to a “**centurion** (=ἑκατοντάρχης).” This word occurs 3x in the NT, and only in Mark’s account of the crucifixion (Mark 15:39, 44, 45).

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia provides the following summary: A centurion was “The commander of a hundred men (a “century”), more or less, in a Roman legion. Matthew and Luke use the Greek word while Mark characteristically prefers the Latin form, since he seems to write primarily for Roman readers.”

“The number of centurions in a legion was always sixty, but the number in the cohort or *speira* varied. The ordinary duties of the centurion were to drill his men, to inspect their arms, food, and clothing, and to command them in the camp and in the field. Centurions were sometimes employed on detached service, the conditions of which in the provinces are somewhat obscure. Men like Cornelius and Julius (Acts 10:1; 27:1) may have been seconded from the legion to which they properly belonged for the discharge of special duties. They and other centurions mentioned in the Gospels and Acts (Matt. 8:5; Mark 15:39, 44ff; Luke 23:47) are represented by the sacred writers in a favorable light” [*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), s.v. “Centurion”].

## Christ’s Authority

The first centurion understood the authority of our Lord (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10).

## **Jesus' Divinity**

The second centurion understood the deity/innocence of the Savior (Matt. 27:50-54; Mark 15:37-39; Luke 23:44-47).

According to Mark's account, he also recognized the certainty of Christ's death on the cross (Mark 15:37-46).

## **Individual Accountability**

Cornelius, the third centurion, understood individual accountability (Acts 10:1-8, 17-33).

## **The Value of Citizenship**

The fourth centurion understood the value of citizenship (Acts 21:30-34; 22:21-29).

## **The Value of Haste**

The fifth centurion understood the value of haste (Acts 23:12-35).

## **The Value of Companionship**

The sixth and seventh centurions understood the need for companionship (Acts 24:22-23; 27:1-3).

## **The Value of Prophecy**

Julius, the seventh centurion, originally discounted, then respected, and finally protected the apostolic voice of prophecy (Acts 27:4-15, 27-32, 39-44).

## **Conclusion**

Do we have the same spiritual perceptiveness as these seven centurions? Do we recognize Christ's authority and Jesus' divinity? Do we understand individual accountability? Do we realize the value of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven? Do we understand the need for haste, the importance of companionship, and the value of prophecy?