

Acts Chapter 9 left off with Peter staying in the house of Simon the tanner. A tanner was someone who dealt with corpses and was therefore ceremonially unclean. The fact that Peter was staying with him shows that Peter was already in a state that made him fit to receive fuller revelation.

10:1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

10:3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"

10:4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

10:5 "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

10:6 he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

10:7 When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants,

10:8 and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Acts 10:1-11:18 is a watershed event in the unfolding narrative of redemptive history. It is God's signal that salvation is intended to go to all peoples, not just the Jews. Of course, this had always been God's purpose. The Old Testament had predicted that God would *bless all the families of the earth* (Gen. 12:3). It foretold the day when God's Messiah would inherit *the nations* (Psa. 2:8) and all the nations would flow to the Lord's house to worship (Zech. 14:16). Joel had said that God would pour out his Spirit on *all mankind* (Joel 2:28).

Cornelius was a centurion (a leader of a group of 100 Roman soldiers). He was also devout; he gave alms and prayed regularly. He feared God. As a God-fearer he had accepted monotheism, the ethical standards of the Jews, and attended synagogue services; however, he fell short of being a full proselyte in that he refused circumcision and keeping the Jewish dietary restrictions. His beliefs were sincere but he was unaware that a new age had dawned; according to 11:14 he still needed to hear of the Messiah and be saved.

Verse 4 states that Cornelius's prayers had been heard. Like Ruth the Moabitess, or Rahab the Canaanite (Gentiles who had placed their faith in the God of Israel), Cornelius and his family were Gentiles accepted by God.

10:9 On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

10:10 But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;

10:11 and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

10:12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

10:13 A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"

10:14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."

10:15 Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."

10:16 This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

In order to understand Peter's vision we need to understand Jewish dietary laws.

The section on dietary restrictions in Leviticus 11 is concluded with the statement, "For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth . . . You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45). Likewise, Leviticus 20:24-26 says, "You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey." *I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 'You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. 'Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.'* In other words, the reason for not eating certain things is because God is holy, and we should imitate God.

The divisions in the animal kingdom mirrored those in the human world. They separated the clean from the unclean, the Israelite from the Gentile. That which is separate must be kept separate as God designed it. Israel wasn't allowed to intermarry with people from other nations because she was to maintain her unique identity. Even the mixing of seed or fabric was forbidden. This is why Leviticus 19:19 states that "you shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials." All of these things "mix classes" and are contrary to holiness.

The notions of clean and unclean expressed an understanding of holiness and were consciously felt in the everyday life of the people. Every meal reminded the believer that he was one of God's chosen people, distinct from the nations around him. Because of this he knew that he should live in a way that was consistent with, or, was "normal" for who he was. His life should be characterized by purity and integrity because he was holy.

In his vision, Peter saw heaven (not "sky" –NASB) opened and something that looked like a large sheet being lowered down. What surprised him was that although the sheet had a heavenly origin, it contained both clean and unclean animals in it. The mixture was calculated to disgust any orthodox Jew (Stott). Peter was told to kill and eat what was in the sheet.

During His earthly ministry Jesus had told Peter and the other disciples in Mark 7:18-20 “. . . Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) . . . "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles a man. . . ." He also told them after the resurrection to spread the gospel to “the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In Matthew 28:19 Jesus had commissioned the disciples to “make disciples of all nations.” Peter had even preached that the gift of the Holy Spirit is “for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:38-39). But what God is saying is counter to what Peter had known from the day he had drawn breath; it was counter to all that the nation had practiced for centuries. Peter couldn’t believe what he was hearing because of the newness of what God was saying. So the vision was repeated three times.

The dietary restrictions and other OT practices had a purpose. They created a hedge around Israel, protecting it, and demarcating it, keeping it from absorbing the values and beliefs of the nations, and reminding it of its divine call and dignity. But the law was also transitory; the fullness of time had come where the OT shadows were no longer in force.

10:17 Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate;

10:18 and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.

10:19 While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you.

10:20 "But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself."

10:21 Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?"

10:22 They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you."

10:23 So he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

The vision left Peter confused. While he was pondering its meaning, some Gentile men sent by Cornelius under the direction of God arrived at his door. The Spirit told Peter to go with the men for He had sent them to him. This will provide the clue to the meaning of the vision.

10:24 On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

10:25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him.

10:26 But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

10:27 As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled.

10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

10:29 "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me."

Peter and the visitors set north out along the coastal road that led to Caesarea. When Peter arrived at Cornelius's house, he said that it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile. "Unlawful" is better translated as a "taboo" or "tradition;" the OT law did not forbid Jews from associating with Gentiles.

It's difficult to grasp the huge barrier that existed between Jews and Gentiles. The attitude of most Jews was like that of Jonah who preferred trying to run from God than preach to the Gentiles in Nineveh. No orthodox Jew would ever enter the house of a Gentile or invite a Gentile to his home. The Gentiles were hated and called "dogs." This was the entrenched prejudice that had to be overcome for Gentiles to be admitted into the Christian community. However, now, after seeing his vision and being instructed in its meaning, Peter felt the liberty to break the traditional rules. God had shown him through the vision of the unclean animals that he should not call any man unholy or unclean. That was why he went without raising any objection.

10:30 Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments,

10:31 and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

10:32 'Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.'

10:33 "So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

10:34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,

10:35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

The circumstances surrounding Cornelius coupled with the vision had caused Peter to understand that the intent of the vision was to show him that the distinction between clean and unclean animals symbolized the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and that Peter should not call any man unholy or unclean (10:28). Peter therefore concluded, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but *in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him*" (10:34-35).

Acts 10 is written to demonstrate that Gentiles have become recipients of the spiritual blessings of the Jewish Messiah. The separation of Jew and Gentile no longer needed to be maintained.

In writing to the Gentiles in Ephesus Paul said, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the

Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Eph. 2:14-16).

10:36 "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)--

10:37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

10:38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

10:39 "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

10:40 "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,

10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

10:42 "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

10:43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Peter's message to Cornelius begins with Peter stating what he had learned through his experiences and the vision. In essence, he states that God's attitude toward people is not determined by external criteria such as race, nationality, or class. Instead, He accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right (10:35). God has accepted Cornelius for who he is; there was no need for him to become a Jew to have peace with God. At the same time, being a God-fearer isn't enough; if that had been all that was necessary, there would be no reason for Peter to make his trip. Cornelius must believe in Jesus.

Although Peter is speaking to a Gentile, Cornelius's family was familiar with the teachings of Judaism (10:36, 37); they were God-fearers. Peter isn't preaching into a vacuum, but relates the facts that they had in some measure come to know. Thus, the message is very similar to the one that he gave in Acts 2. God has sent His Son to His people, Israel, to bring peace. He has accomplished this through the death of Messiah on the cross (10:39) and raising Him from the dead (10:40) – events to which Peter and the other apostles were eyewitnesses (10:41). Peter was then commissioned by the risen Lord to proclaim to everyone (10:42) that whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins (10:43).

The message is comprehensive and precise. "Focusing on Jesus, Peter presented Him as a historical person, in whom God was savingly at work, who now offered to believers salvation and escape from judgment. Thus history, theology and the gospel were again combined, as in other apostolic sermons" (Stott, 192).

10:44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.*

10:45 *All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.*

10:46 *For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,*

10:47 *"Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"*

10:48 *And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.*

Before Peter had finished speaking (11:15), the Holy Spirit came upon all those who heard the message and believed (10:44). There are two significant observations:

1) The Jews were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. They had come to realize that salvation extended beyond the Jewish nation.

2) The experience of the Gentiles was the same experience that the 120 Jews had on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. They began to speak in tongues and exalt God (cf. Acts 2:4, 11). Peter recognizes this and says that they "received the Holy Spirit *just as we did.*"

So they were baptized, outwardly identifying with the church.

Peter was quick to conclude that the church had to know what had happened and they must accept the Gentiles as well: "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"

11:1 *Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.*

News spread quickly about the conversion of the Gentiles.

11:2 *And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, 11:3 saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."*

The Jewish believers were upset that Peter had associated with a Gentile and went into his house and even ate with him.

11:4 *But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, 11:5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, 11:6 and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. 11:7 "I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'*

11:8 "But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

11:9 "But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'

11:10 "This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

11:11 "And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea.

11:12 "The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house.

11:13 "And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

11:14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'

11:15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.

11:16 "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

11:17 "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

11:18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

In Acts 11:4-17 Luke writes the same story, only from the lips of Peter. Peter relays things to the church from his time frame and understanding of what had happened. From a literary perspective, the repetition of the story stresses the main point which is summed up in 11:18: "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

In order to understand the working of the Spirit in the Book of Acts, we need to keep what we read tightly tied to the historical context. There are a number of elements that come into play.

First, the pouring out of the Spirit (also called the baptism in the Spirit) meant that a new era had come, the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled, and the New Covenant had been established. This in turn meant that Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of the Father (for He is the one who dispenses the Spirit).

Secondly, pouring out of the Spirit, *when witnessed by the apostles*, validated the reality of the salvation. As the representatives of God, it was the apostles' teaching and testimony that laid the foundation for the church's practices and doctrine. When the apostles witnessed the Spirit coming upon other ethnic groups besides the Jews, the church at large knew that those groups had also entered into the fullness of New Covenant salvation. The universal scope of salvation was realized through the coming of the Spirit.

It is important to note the historical sequence of the Spirit's outpouring in redemptive history.

1) The baptism with the Holy Spirit is connected to the events foretold by the OT prophets and the messianic age.

God had promised that He would establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27). One of the marks of the New Covenant was the presence of the Spirit in the believer. In the book of Ezekiel God said, "I will put My Spirit within you. . ." (Ezek. 36:27). In Joel 2:28, which Peter quoted in Acts 2:17, He said, "I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind."

Though the words "baptism in the Holy Spirit" don't appear in the OT, the idea of the pouring out of the Spirit does (Isa. 32:15; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10). Whether the Bible speaks of the Spirit being poured out upon someone or someone being immersed (baptized) in the Spirit, the resultant imagery is nearly identical. Both images picture the flood of the Spirit over the believer's life.

2) After the OT was completed, John the Baptist appeared on the scene and said, "I baptize you with water. . . He [Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 3:11).

At this point in history the baptism in the Spirit is spoken of as the work of Messiah and as a future event. John 7:38 is a similar passage where Jesus said, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" Then John said, "this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; *for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*" (Jn. 7:39). Once again, from that point of time, the event is spoken of as future and as the work of the Messiah.

3) Prior to His ascension Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but "to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4-5). What was about to happen is what John had predicted and it is still viewed as a future event.

4) Jesus' words came to pass in Acts 2:1-4

The Spirit came with the sound of a great wind. Evidence of the Spirit's coming was seen in the miraculous ability of those who had received the Spirit to speak in foreign languages (tongues) that they had not previously learned. This was a sign of the universal nature of salvation. The Jews were speaking praises to God in the tongues of the nations.

5) In Acts 2:17 when observers asked what the meaning of the speaking of tongues meant (Acts 2:12), Peter answered by stating that it was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel and evidence that Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God.

Acts 2:17-21 -- "*this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND. . . AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'*"

Acts 2:33 -- "*Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.*"

In sum, the coming of the Spirit upon the Jews in Acts 2 was the sign that they had entered into a new era in redemptive history. This became the baseline by which the church could tell who entered into the New Covenant.

From our historical perspective, we know that all, Jew and Gentile alike, are partakers of salvation and enter into the New Covenant, but in the historical setting of Acts, this was not immediately apparent. For centuries the only chosen people of God were Jews. They were the heirs of the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12). They were the people who were instructed out of the Law (Rom. 2:18). God had dwelt among them and had spoken through their prophets. The Messiah was a physical descendant of Abraham. There was no question that Jews could enter into this New Covenant. In Jeremiah 31:31 God had said, "days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Jesus told the disciples (who were Jews) that they would be baptized in the Spirit (Acts 1:5); this was fulfilled in the upper room on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Peter also said to his Jewish audience, "Repent . . . and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2:38-39). In other words, Peter not only said that they (his Jewish brethren) would receive the Holy Spirit if they repented, he also said that the promise of the Spirit was *for them and their children*.

Even though it was obvious that the New Covenant had been established, questions needed to be answered in relation to non-Jews. Was it even possible for non-Jews to participate in New Covenant blessings at all? If so, did the individual need to first become a Jew? Was he a full participant, equal to the Jews themselves? The answer to these questions came by observing the outpouring of the Spirit. If Gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit as the Jews did, then these questions would be answered definitively. This is a major theme in the early chapters of the Book of Acts.

The first incident that demonstrated that non-Jews could be included in the New Covenant promises was the conversion of the Samaritans through the ministry of Philip in Acts Chapter 8. There had been a very bitter rivalry between the Jews and Samaritans for centuries, and it still existed at the time that the New Testament was written. They were a mixed race, not pure Jews. However, in Acts 8:12 it says that many Samaritans believed in the gospel and were baptized; not only had a Jew preached to them, but they had accepted the Jew's message. The question remained as to what this meant. Did the Samaritans' belief in Jesus as the Messiah give them equal status with the Jew? Immediately the apostles (God's authoritative representatives) headed out from Jerusalem to find out what had taken place. When they arrived they found baptized believers who had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:14-16 says, "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

The reception of the Spirit *after salvation* has given rise to different beliefs and practices in the church today. Is this pattern typical? Is this two-stage salvation experience what we should expect today? Is the Holy Spirit still outpoured upon people sometime after salvation?

The answer to all these questions is “no.” The stories recorded in Acts occurred at a unique time in history.

The first group of people who experienced the outpouring of the Spirit (the 120 Jews in the upper room – Acts 1:15ff.) were already believers before they received the Spirit. However, this was due to the historical timing of things; the Spirit was not given until Jesus ascended. Their experience was atypical; it was rooted in the emergence of the new era out of the old.

The second group of people (the 3000) who received the Spirit is also recorded in Acts 2. These were unbelievers to whom Peter said, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Although this passage does not specifically state that they were baptized in the Spirit when they believed, it does say in verse 41 that they received his word and were water baptized. Having fulfilled the conditions Peter had set forth, we can assume that they received what was promised – forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. The distinction between these two groups is important because the norm for today must surely be the second group; the historical circumstances of the first group have ceased to exist. Today all who receive the Spirit start as unbelievers who come to faith – like the 3000.

What about the Samaritans?

Just as the 120 in Acts 2 were in a unique historical situation, so were the Samaritans. The salvation of non-Jews needed to be witnessed by an apostle to validate their full status in the New Covenant blessings. Since no apostle was present when Philip was preaching, it necessitated a delay in the coming of the Spirit until an apostle arrived on the scene. In other words, it is reasonable to suppose that the coming of the Spirit upon the Samaritans was delayed at this crucial time in church history in order to avoid a schism in the church. If the Samaritans received the Spirit at the hands of the apostles, there would be no question that they were full participants in New Covenant salvation.

Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8 was coming to pass. The gospel was spreading beyond Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, but it still needed to go to the uttermost parts of the earth. This is what Acts Chapters 10 and 11 are all about.

In Acts 10:10-16 Peter saw his vision.

Acts 10:44-47 says that all the circumcised believers (believing Jews) who came with Peter were amazed; they were amazed because “*the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.*” This is the significance of the event. The Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles! Cornelius had even spoken in tongues as Peter had at Pentecost (Acts 2). Seeing this, Peter concluded that there was no reason to refuse Cornelius’ baptism, the symbol of entering into the New Covenant community.

Later, when Peter described what he had witnessed to the others in Jerusalem, he said, “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy

Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:15-17).

Once again, we must not miss the significance of what Peter is saying:

(1) The pouring out of the Spirit upon Cornelius, the Gentile, was described in terms of what Peter had experienced at Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2. Peter says, "the Holy Spirit fell upon them *just as He did upon us at the beginning.*" "The beginning" is Acts 2.

(2) Peter also says that the outpouring of the Spirit is what John the Baptist and Jesus had alluded to as the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5). Earlier, he had called this the outpouring of the Spirit spoken of by Joel the prophet (Acts 2).

(3) He repeats that this was "*the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The emphasis in the passage is obvious:

- Acts 10:15 A voice tells Peter, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."
- Acts 10:28 Peter confesses to Cornelius, "God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean."
- Acts 10:34-35 Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him."
- Acts 10:44-45 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.
- Acts 10:47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"
- Acts 11:9 Peter repeats to the Jews in Jerusalem that he heard the heavenly voice say, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'
- Acts 11:15-17 He recounts for them, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"
- The section ends in 11:18: "When they [those in the Jerusalem church to whom Peter was addressing] heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). The church in Jerusalem had come to accept that "God has granted *to the Gentiles also*" eternal life. This is the point that Luke is trying to convey.

Through Peter's experiences in Acts 2, 8 and 10, it is confirmed through the outpouring of the Spirit that not only Jews, but also Samaritans and Gentiles are full heirs of the New Covenant as well.

The questions about Gentile salvation have been answered. God has poured out His Spirit, not just upon Jews, but upon all mankind (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28). This wasn't just hearsay, a theological opinion, or speculation that could be called into question later; the apostles themselves witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit on all three ethnic groups.

One last incident that needs to be commented upon is in Acts 19:1-7. When Paul was on his third missionary journey he arrived in Ephesus and met about a dozen men, who according to Luke's description of them, do not appear to be Christians. Though they were called "disciples," as Charles Hodge, in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians (124) rightly observes, "the Scripture always speaks of men according to their profession, calling those who profess faith, believers, and those who confess Christ, Christians." However, this does not necessarily mean that what they profess is true.

The first thing Paul asks them is if they had received the Holy Spirit when they had believed. This at least indicates that they were professed believers, but it also suggests that for some reason he doubted the reality of their faith or he would not have asked the question. In verse 2 their answer is startling; they replied, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul immediately asked them about their baptism, "Into what were you baptized?" (19:3); had they been baptized with the Trinitarian formula in Matthew 28:19-20, "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?" If they had, how could they never have heard of the Holy Spirit?

As it turns out, their baptism was the baptism of John the Baptist. Therefore, Paul goes on to tell them that John preached about believing "in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (v 4). Paul then baptizes them "in the name of the Lord Jesus," and the Holy Spirit comes upon them with accompanying signs.

Some emphasize the order of what happened: Paul preached, they believed, they were baptized, Paul laid hands on them, and then they received the Holy Spirit. In other words, they stress that the Spirit came upon them at the laying on of hands, subsequent to conversion. To this Stott replies, "this is so; but I do not myself think the order is very significant. To me the really important point is that all four events belong together and cannot be separated. They were different parts of a single initiation into Christ, which took place by both baptism and the laying on of hands (outwardly) and by both faith and the gift of the Spirit (inwardly)" (Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, 48). One may debate if Stott is right or not, but his perspective makes sense. In any case, the events at Ephesus do not belong to the same order as those in Samaria and Caesarea. The group described as "disciples" is atypical; they were most likely not even Christians, but were disciples of John the Baptist. Furthermore, they had not received Christian baptism which in the early church was the sign of faith.

It should be noticed that the Book of Acts doesn't present any set pattern for salvation and the reception of the Holy Spirit. In Acts Chapter 2 the disciples believed, and then at some later date received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Next, in the same chapter, 3000 believed and it is assumed that they received the Spirit immediately. In Acts chapter 8 the Samaritans believed and were baptized first. Then they received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The experience of Cornelius takes place in a different order; he and his family believed, received the Spirit, and then were

water baptized. There is no mention of the laying on of hands which poses an awkward question to those who insist on a two-stage salvation experience. It is obvious that Cornelius received the Spirit when he believed and it is called the baptism of the Spirit (10:45; 47; 11:16, 17). Then in Acts 19 we have the story of Paul in Ephesus which is similar to the Samaritan's experience. Needless to say, it would be difficult to form a two-stage-salvation theology based on the Book of Acts without selectively picking some passages and ignoring others.

In sum, the apostles were designated by Christ to bear witness of His resurrection and ascension, but they were also designated by Christ to provide the doctrinal foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). The historical setting of Acts was the inception of a new era in salvation history and the outgoing of the old; it was the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. It was a unique period of history. The situation, therefore, demanded some sort of explanation as to what was happening. It needed validating evidence and authoritative testimony as to the nature of salvation and who could receive it. God used the outpouring of the Spirit through the apostles to instruct the church about the New Covenant salvation that had been inaugurated by the death of Christ.

It would be foolish to try to mirror these events in the church today. Once it has been recorded in the Bible that the apostles established that all who enter into the New Covenant by faith in Christ receive the Spirit, there is no need to repeat it.

After enough time had passed and these things became clear, Paul could write "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many*" (1 Cor. 12:13-14). Paul states that *Spirit baptism is all-inclusive*. There are not two groups of Christians in the church; some who are saved but have not yet received the Spirit and others who had. Paul says, "*We were (past tense) all*" baptized by the Spirit. All are equally part of the body of Christ; none are left out.

Although Pentecost is an unrepeatable historical event, "implications of the baptism with the Spirit which took place on that occasion overflow the banks of that Day and flow on, down through the centuries. Just as the blood of Christ cleanses men and women from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rev. 5:9), so the Spirit flows from the risen side of Christ on Pentecost into Jerusalem, and from there spreads throughout Judea, gathering momentum on to Samaria and indeed to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). All who come to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord receive the same gift as the disciples did. Consequently, believers enter into the implications of Pentecost, just as they enter into the implications of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. . ." (Ferguson, the Holy Spirit, 87).

LESSONS:

1) The main emphasis of the Cornelius' story is that there are to be no distinctions in the church. Unfortunately, Peter, despite his vision and defense of Gentile salvation in Jerusalem, caved in to pressure from certain Jewish believers for a time and refused to eat with Gentiles. Paul rebuked him publicly for his lapse (Gal. 2:11ff.). A meeting of key leaders in Jerusalem was also necessary to discuss

tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the church (Acts 15). Paul had to fight against Judaizers who threatened the churches in Galatia (The Book of Galatians). True equality and impartiality tends to be a truth that sinful men are slow to accept. Christian proclamation is that "God so loved the world." In God's eyes there is no distinction between color, class, or culture.

2) The work of the Spirit plays a crucial role in the church. Of course there are those who overplay His work, but there is also the danger of underplaying the work of the Spirit as well. Both are extremes we must avoid.

3) "Luke has now recounted the conversions of Saul and Cornelius. The differences between these two men were considerable. In race Saul was a Jew, Cornelius a Gentile; in culture Saul was a scholar, Cornelius a soldier; in religion Saul was a bigot, Cornelius a seeker. Yet both were converted by the gracious initiative of God; both received forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Spirit; and both were baptized and welcomed into the Christian family on equal terms. This fact is a single testimony to the power and impartiality of the gospel of Christ, which is still 'the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first for the Jew then for the Gentile'" (Stott, 199).