

Cornelius Part 2

Acts 11:1—26

Looking back over the early part of the book of Acts, it should be understood that while there were changes occurring, these changes were all happening within Israel's prophetic program. This program was delineated in the Old Testament, and many of those things were beginning to be fulfilled with coming of John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1). The fulfillment of prophecies continued to be fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9:6), His death (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53) and resurrection (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27). As Jesus Christ left, He promised that He would return in the same manner, which was preparing them for His Second Coming, and the promised Millennial Kingdom. The focus is still on the fulfillment of prophecy concerning Israel.

The giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 is also a part of Israel's prophetic program and not a part of the Mystery revealed to the Apostle Paul (Ezekiel 36:27). This was the beginning of God fulfilling His promise to regather the nation of Israel and establish her in the Promised Land forever (Ezekiel 37:14). However, the ultimate fulfillment of these prophecies were delayed with the rejection of the Holy Spirit by Israel through the death of Stephen in Acts 7.

Peter continues to proclaim the coming Kingdom as he preaches in Acts 2 and 3. Baptism is still being preached as a part of their plan of salvation and entrance into the Kingdom (Acts 2:38). Unlike this Dispensation of Grace, those who stepped out of line, like Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, are immediately judged and punished (in this case, through Peter by the power of the Holy Spirit). This is what the Kingdom will be like with Christ ruling in Jerusalem with a rod of iron (Revelation 12:5); 19:15).

Understanding that God put Israel's prophetic program aside temporarily at the stoning of Stephen, and began a new work, headed by the Apostle Paul, clears up a lot of the Bible. Separating Israel's program of Prophecy from the Church's program of Grace makes a nice clean cut between two dispensational programs. This is what rightly dividing is all about (2 Timothy 2:15). Confusion enters only when elements of each program are mixed into each other. This is why Paul makes it clear that we are to follow his doctrine and no other (Galatians 1:6—9; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 Timothy 3:10; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 4:9).

The important thing to understand in chapter 10 of Acts is that God is informing Peter that Israel is no longer the favored nation, and that He is now working through the Gentiles. The Church, the Body of Christ, was formed with Saul being the first one in, as a pattern to all who would follow (2 Timothy 1:16). The next 35 years will be spent informing Israel that she is no longer the favored nation, and that God is now working through the Apostle Paul. The Gentiles are no longer on the outside looking in, but have been elevated to carry the Gospel of Grace to all individuals regardless of nationality.

Peter now has an opportunity to share what he has learned with believers in Jerusalem.

Peter's experience (verses 1—18)

Peter's experience with Cornelius was made known to some of the Jews in Jerusalem who were concerned of what was happening. When Peter came back to Judea, he was confronted by some from the circumcision because he had defiled himself by going to an unclean Gentile. The circumcision is one way to describe the nation of Israel, making the uncircumcision all those who are not Jews, those usually called Gentiles (Romans 4:9; Galatians 2:7). This is because

God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision for all future Israelites to observe (Genesis 17:12—14). This was one way God separated out Israel from the rest of the nations.

Peter defend himself by telling these Jews how God directed him to seek out Cornelius, and how that the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius, and those within his household who believed, in the same manner as when the Holy Spirit came upon the believing Jews on the day of Pentecost.

When they heard what Peter had to say, they could say nothing against what he did because they understood that God had caused this to happen, and had given the Gentiles the sign of the Holy Spirit to prove it was from God. Notice that God is communicating with them through the Holy Spirit, whereas God communicated with Paul through Jesus Christ. Paul received the revelation of the Mystery personally from Jesus Christ, and it was the Holy Spirit who revealed to the circumcision that what Paul said was legitimate (Ephesians 3:5). This is consistent with the experience that Peter had with Cornelius. The Holy Spirit revealed to Peter what he should do, then it was the Holy Spirit who revealed that God was working with the Gentiles by doing the same thing He did at Pentecost. This is what ultimately persuaded the circumcision to understand that God was changing His dealings with mankind.

Preaching of the gospel (verse 19—21)

Many think that after Cornelius is reached with the gospel that the Gentiles will finally be reached out to with the gospel. However, the section following Cornelius' salvation indicates that everything continued as it was, with only the Jews being preached to. Many struggle with this fact, and most will bring up the so-called Great Commission. It is often thought that they didn't understand the Great Commission, or that they were just ignoring it. Sometimes it is thought that these Jews were bigots who didn't want to interact with Gentiles. The Jews actually were doing what they were supposed to do, save Israel before going to the rest of the world. However, even the Great Commission is on hold now because God was now longer working with the nation of Israel at this time.

Everything happening, up to the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7, is a continuation of God dealing with Israel as a nation. The Gentiles are still standing on the outside without hope (Ephesians 2:11—12). Even as late as Acts 11:19, those scattered from Paul's persecution are preaching to the Jews only, some 10 years after Saul was converted on the road to Damascus and about 15 years following the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. If God were giving Jews and Gentiles the same status back with the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (as many believe) then why did it take so long to bring the gospel to the Gentiles?

Barnabas (verses 22—26)

Word got back to the Hebrew church at Jerusalem that those who were scattered were now preaching the word. There were some who came from Cyprus (an island in the Mediterranean Sea and home of Barnabas) and from Cyrene (northern Africa, west of Egypt) who were preaching to the Grecians (Jews who were living as Greeks). They were preaching the Lord Jesus, but probably not the Gospel of Grace. The Lord was with them and they spoke mightily and many believed and turned to the Lord.

Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul and brought him back to Antioch where they taught in the church there for a whole year. This is where Barnabas learned much about the Mystery doctrine before he and Paul took their first journey together. It was also in Antioch that believers were first called Christians, because they were Christ followers.

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