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THE GENTILE PENTECOST--Continued

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 39
ACTS 10:17-36

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For 1400 years the Nation of Israel had been responsible for the Word of God and for the dissemination of the Gospel to all nations of the earth. This actually began at the Tower of Babel when God scattered the nations under three divisions--language, race, and geography. So today, and down to the end of time there will always be languages, races, and nations. Abraham was the first Jew and through him God founded the Jewish nation. The Jewish nation was founded on the principle of regeneration. One of the titles given to Jesus Christ is the title, "The Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". With this great beginning God prepared this nation to produce the Saviour. But when Israel failed to carry out their part of the bargain, God displaced them with the church, and through the church God will carry forth his work until the second coming of Christ. All believers in the church are "In Christ" and Galatians 3 says they are one in Christ and there is neither Jew nor Gentile. The church immediately had a problem in the very beginning for it began with one race and in one spot. So the church had a problem racially and geographically. It began with Jews only and in one spot, namely Jerusalem. But as a result of Pentecost the church soon spread and the Jewish monopoly was broken and the spread of the church was the Gentile Pentecost explained here in Acts 10.

ACTS 10:17 "Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate" The word translated "doubted" really means to be confused or perplexed. All of his life Peter knew that God's word had told him not to eat certain animals and now it seems to him that God is telling him something differently. The written Word had said not to eat these animals, now it seems to him the spoken word is telling him something differently. Of course there was no conflict, but because of the change of dispensations this thing had come to pass. Matthew 5:17 tells us that Christ completely fulfilled the Law of Moses. The thing that confused Simon Peter was the implication and implementation of the vision. And please notice how God's timing of these events was perfect. Let us remember that God's timing of events is always perfect. The giving of the vision to Simon Peter, the men being sent from Caesarea by Cornelius, their arrival at that very moment--all these things were timed beautifully. Greek servants, a Roman soldier, a Jewish Tanner and Simon Peter are all going to sit down and eat together. It all turned out in such a wonderful way that they called in others, had a great dinner party, and the next day many of them will join in the return trip to Caesarea and they will participate in the Gentile Pentecost. Just think of this--millions of years before, God had timed these events so they would all fit in together. By the time that patrol reached the house of Simon the Tanner, God had prepared Simon Peter for their arrival.

ACTS 10:18 "And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there." The word "called" really means they "shouted". Simon was up on the roof and possibly the Tanner was in the back of the house and they had to shout to be heard.

ACTS 10:19 "While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee." Simon Peter was in deep meditation, trying to figure out the meaning of the vision he had just seen, and at that moment God broke in on his concentration by these visitors at the door.

ACTS 10:20 "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." God told Simon Peter to go, not doubt the vision. Notice God said, "I have sent them". The implication of this language is that God had sent them and the result of their visit would go on forever.

ACTS 10:21 "Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?" Simon Peter obeyed here without completely understanding what he was doing.

ACTS 10:22 "And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee." Here is a wonderful description of this man Cornelius. The words "A just man" means he had positive volition toward God. "A good report" means that Cornelius had so lived that people had high regard for him. And the words "One that feareth God" means that he held God in awe. Here is a Roman general so great that his life is acceptable to Jewish standards. Cornelius was indeed an amazing man.

ACTS 10:23 "Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him." This was Simon the Tanner's greatest day. A Tanner was an ostracized man, and no Jew would associate with a Tanner. But here we see him calling them in, feeding them, and entertaining them. The meal was already prepared and they stayed for dinner and spent the night. Christian hospitality broke down all barriers. Please notice that on the next day when they went on their journey that certain other believers accompanied them. They were impressed with the Greek servants and this Roman soldier, so they went along with them. They realized that something great was taking place and they wanted to be a part of it. About midway on their journey was a town called Appalonia and they stopped there.

ACTS 10:24 "And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." So they spent the night here at Appalonia and the next day, probably in the afternoon they reached Caesarea.

THE GENTILE PENTECOST

Please notice---Jews, Greeks, Romans, Believers, and Unbelievers were all involved. Possibly those who made the trip had enough doctrine in their minds to partially understand the tremendous importance of what was happening. Inner happiness can be yours if God occupies your mind. Minimize your circumstances and magnify doctrine. Your life does not depend on details and circumstances. Fill your mind with Bible truth and you can live with contentment.

Thirty miles away we see the assembly in the house of Cornelius. Cornelius had his friends and relatives gathered there. Cornelius was a military man and he always did things on schedule. He had sent this patrol away and he knew that on the fourth day they would return. He knew these dependable men and he knew they could be trusted. He knew these men would follow his instructions. So the Gentile Pentecost went off as planned, as we often say "without a hitch". There is discipline in military life and Cornelius lived by discipline. Military life brings discipline and causes men to think. You see, behind this whole Gentile Pentecost is a military man who understood discipline. When the angel came to reveal this plan to Cornelius he recognized superior authority and he followed it. So Cornelius didn't have to gather the crowd after Simon Peter arrived, the crowd was already there. Let us get a lesson right here from Cornelius. He lived by order and discipline and system. He never did anything "sloppy". We should never be "sloppy" in vocabulary, in dress, in thinking--in anything. These words "waited for them" mean that they eagerly awaited the return of this patrol. These well-laid plans will result in one of the greatest events in the history of the Christian church.

ACTS 10:25 "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him." This brings us to a very dramatic moment. The way Cornelius fell before Simon Peter was a certain kind of salute used with the Caesars and other important personalities. So Cornelius accorded Simon Peter every honor that you could give even to a Caesar.

ACTS 10:26 "But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man." But Peter lifted him up and said, "Stand up, I also am a man". Simon Peter refused to accept obeisance of any kind. In this act Simon Peter demonstrated that he didn't have any false conception about who he was. Simon Peter realized that he was a mere man and didn't deserve the worship of any man. Simon would not take worship that belonged only to God. He told Cornelius, "I also am a man" and we might add, "A man just like you, a man with an old sin nature". He wanted Cornelius to know that he was a real man and not an angel or some other kind of divine being.

ACTS 10:27 "And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together." Evidently this Gentile Pentecost was going to involve many important people and they were all gathered in the house of Cornelius to hear what Simon Peter was going to say.

ACTS 10:28 "And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to Keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." But Simon Peter had a taboo problem--that he couldn't go into Gentile quarters where no Jews were gathered. Principle. One of the most severe problems faced today by anyone is the problem of background. Peter had been taught to stay away from Gentiles and not to associate with them. But here he is in a room filled with them and few Jews present. Simon Peter is a victim of his background and to the hundreds of taboos that the Scribes and Pharisees had added to the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses did not forbid contact with Gentiles. Now the Mosaic Law did forbid marriage with Gentiles. So Simon Peter had in his background of training the idea that Jews should not associate with Gentiles, but here God had given him some very plain instruction which cuts straight across these taboos. God showed Simon Peter that these taboos were nullified by the Word of God. For the first time in his life Simon Peter realized that these taboos he had followed were directly contradictory to the plain teaching of the Word of God. This is true in our society. We have developed a self-righteous morality which we substitute for salvation and in this way the truth of salvation is obscured. We are not saved because we don't do certain things. We are saved by faith in Christ and what we do or do not do grows out of this truth.

ACTS 10:29 "Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" Simon Peter is carefully taking his steps and doesn't want to lose his leadership in this situation. A few Jews have come along with him and he knows how they feel and he is cautious about each step he takes. But Simon Peter is also getting his eyes open and he is going to walk right through this Gentile Pentecost and is going to establish the truth "Call no man common or unclean". So the fact that Simon Peter is standing there is an indication that he is ready to share the Gospel with Gentiles. Peter therefore asks them why they have sent for him. In fact, Peter is beginning to realize that he is no longer just a Jew, but he is a believer and a member of the body of Christ.

ACTS 10:30-33 The Key To Peter's Vision. "And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore

are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." The correct rendering of this statement is "Four days ago as I was observing the afternoon prayertime". Cornelius was not fasting but praying. Possibly he was saying, "O God, reveal thyself to me in some way". At three in the afternoon he kept on praying and an angel, in the form of a man, appeared to him. Two aspects of this man Cornelius were revealed in these words. He was a man of prayer and he was a generous man in helping the poor. Let us not overlook the decisiveness of the action of Cornelius and his direct obedience to what God had told him to do. Cornelius had obeyed God's orders and he was there ready to hear God's word.

ACTS 10:34 "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:" This is the heart of the message of the Gentile Pentecost. Peter is here giving a formal message. Peter's vision has now been clarified in his own mind. "I perceive" refers to information Peter had received from God. The great message was this--GOD IS NOT A RESPECTOR OF PERSONS.

Let us get several points on this great truth.

1. A Careful study of Romans 9:30-33 reveals that more Gentiles were saved in Old Testament times than Jews. The Jews distorted the Mosaic Law. ROMANS 9:30-33 "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." So here we have a Scripture which shows that even in Old Testament times more Gentiles were saved than Jews. The reason is simple: Jews tried to be saved by keeping the law and not by having faith in Christ. They stumbled over the Law of Moses and did not accept Christ by faith. Christ was the great stumbling block for most Jews.
2. Gentiles sought salvation by faith in Christ while Jews sought salvation by keeping the Law of Moses. Gentiles came to Christ by simple faith, while most Jews allowed the Law of Moses to blind them from Christ.
3. From the idea of keeping the law for salvation the Jews moved into the falacy of obtaining salvation through physical birth. Most of them came to believe they were saved just because they were born Jews. They distorted ritual and took the mark of circumcision on their bodies as a designation that they were saved.
4. But Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all saved. Romans 9:6-14 brings out this idea. The foundation of the Jewish race, which was salvation by regeneration, contradicted the Jewish view of salvation which was salvation by natural generation. Jesus Christ was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and they were all saved by faith in Christ.
5. Regeneration is the key to the foundation of the Jewish race.
6. There are no assets in physical birth whereby a man can be saved.

ACTS 10:35 "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." "He that feareth him" is used here synonymous with faith. "Feareth" here doesn't mean one is afraid of God, but one who has reverence for God and believes. "Worketh righteousness" means to gain or acquire righteousness by faith in Christ. "Accepted with him" means that Gentiles are accepted as well as Jews.

ACTS 10:36 "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)" "Preaching peace" means the removal of the barrier which stands between God and man. This barrier cannot be surmounted by man. If the barrier comes down, it must come down because of the work of Christ on the cross.

In closing let us read Ephesians 2:14-17 which explains the meaning of peace.

EPHESIANS 2:14-17 "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh."