

The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:18-48)^a

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Context

1. **Book of Acts - establishment of the Church, early missionary activity**
2. **Last time: God is pushing to close the Jewish-Gentile gap**
 - A. **God uses an angel to cause Cornelius, a Gentile, to send for Peter, a Jewish apostle**
 - B. **God uses a vision to teach Peter that Gentiles are no longer to be considered unclean—that they have been cleansed**

Passage (Acts 10:17-48)

[17] Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. [18] And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. [19] While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. [20] Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." [21] Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" [22] And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." [23] Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. [24] And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. [25] As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. [26] But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." [27] And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. [28] Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. [29] Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?" [30] So 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, [31] and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. [32] 'Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' [33] So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God." [34] Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. [35] But in every nation

whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. [36] The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— [37] that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: [38] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. [39] And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. [40] Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, [41] not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. [42] And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. [43] To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” [44] While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. [45] And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. [46] For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, [47] “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” [48] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.¹

The Question of Gentile Salvation

1. Peter is still not sure that Gentiles can be saved like the earlier Jews—doesn't just launch into a gospel presentation.
2. After arriving at the house of Cornelius, Peter remarks: *Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?* (Acts 10:29).
3. May still be thinking that . . . *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15) meant preach to every “Jewish creature.”
 - A. Notice this little detail recorded in the following chapter: *Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only* (Acts 11:19).

The Meaning of the “Pig in a Blanket” Vision

1. Peter now understands the deeper significance of the previous vision where a sheet was lowered from heaven containing all kinds of animals—including unclean ones—which he was told to eat.
2. Then he said to them, *You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean* (Acts 10:28).

3. ***Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35).***

4. **This is highly significant!**

A. **We are now approximately six years after Pentecost (A.D. 33 → A.D. 39²), and Peter is only now starting to realize the full dimension of what God is now doing in establishing the Church made up of all ethnic groups.**

B. **The Jew/Gentile distinction, from the point of view of salvation, is now being erased. This takes the Jews *completely by surprise!***

C. ***While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God (Acts 10:44-46a)***

I. **It was not the miracle of speaking in an unlearned language which astonished the Jews.**

II. **It was that the Gentiles were also given the gift of the Holy Spirit—*just like the Jews!***

III. **When Peter has to explain his actions—going in to meet with unclean Gentiles—before his fellow Jews, he says: *If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17)***

Variations in How the Spirit is Given

1. **Compare the ways by which each of the three people groups receive the Spirit**

2. **Acts 2 → Holy Spirit is received by Jews who are already disciples of Jesus**

A. **Spirit falls after having come to faith—which has led many to see this as a “second work” beyond salvation.**

B. **Sound as might rushing wind, divided tongues as of fire, speaking unlearned languages: all testify that the “Promise of the Father”—Spirit baptism—has begun.**

C. **The Apostles themselves know they no longer need to wait.**

- D. Jews of the diaspora understand the miraculous sign.
3. Acts 8 → Holy Spirit is received by Samaritans, who are related to the Jews.
- A. Samaritans are coming to faith, don't receive the Spirit until Peter (and John) arrive.
 - B. Dependent upon the laying-on of *Jewish* hands (by Peter/John)
 - C. Jesus had told the Samaritan women at the well, *You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we [Jews] know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews* (John 4:22).
4. Acts 10 → Holy Spirit is received by Gentiles, considered to be “unclean dogs” (Mat. 15:27; Mark 7:28)!
- A. Peter's gospel presentation is “interrupted” by the Holy Spirit — even before he could give an altar call! :-)
 - I. *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God* (Acts 10:44-46a).
 - B. Peter was probably thinking he would finish his presentation and then lay his hands on the Gentiles to dispense the Holy Spirit by Jewish authority—as had taken place with the Samaritans.
 - C. The inclusion of Gentiles into the Church did depend upon Peter's presentation of the gospel message, but God unilaterally poured out His Spirit upon these Gentiles before Peter was done speaking and in a way the Jews found completely surprising.
 - D. The Gentiles were receiving the Spirit in almost the same way as the Jews had on the Day of Pentecost—directly by God's hand. They were not to be viewed as second-class participants in what God was now doing!
 - E. Spirit baptism is simultaneous with coming to faith.

Spirit Baptism - the historical context

1. This “falling” of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius' household is not equivalent to previous situations throughout the Bible where the Holy Spirit came upon or fell upon individuals.

2. This is a unique historical period: where the Holy Spirit begins a new ministry: baptizing believers into the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:13)
3. Prior to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, there was no body of Christ (except the literal body of Jesus prior to His ascension).
4. Peter explains this new ministry of the Spirit
 - A. *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'* (Acts 11:15-16)
 - B. A reference to the words of Jesus prior to His ascension: *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* (Acts 1:4-5).
 - C. Peter connects the events of Acts 2 with this new baptizing ministry: the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles, as upon us at the beginning.
 - D. The "beginning" of what?
 - I. The beginning of the baptizing work of the Spirit
 - II. The beginning of the formation of the Church, the body of Christ
 - E. The same thing that happened to the Jews in Acts 2 has now happened to the Gentiles in Acts 10
 - F. It is something historically new
5. How does this chapter compare with modern practices?
 - A. No "tarrying for the Spirit"
 - B. No coaching: "just start speaking in random syllables . . ."
 - C. Neither the Jews nor Gentiles had the slightest idea the Gentiles would do this—the Gentiles had probably never even heard of this miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language
 - D. Completely spontaneous

E. The tongues they spoke were *bona fide* human languages which the Jews realized the Gentiles had no fluency in.

- I. The Jews apparently understood the Gentiles: they were Glorifying God with their praise (Acts 10:46).
- II. Peter will tell us in the next chapter that what happened in the house of Cornelius was analogous to the Day of Pentecost—where real human languages were miraculously spoken by Jews (Acts 11:17).

6. The uniqueness of these occurrences

A. Only three occurrences, so far, where tongues were spoken

- I. ~ 33 A.D. - Acts 2, Jews of the diaspora in Jerusalem
- II. ~ 36 A.D. - Acts 8, Samaritans (inferred) - 3 years after Pentecost
- III. ~ 39 A.D. - Acts 10, Gentiles in Cornelius' house - 6 years after Pentecost
- IV. (Yet to come, ~ 52 A.D. - Acts 19, Disciples of John the Baptist - 19 years after Pentecost)

B. Why no sound as a mighty rushing wind (cf. Acts 2:2), no divided tongues as of fire (cf. Acts 2:3)?

- I. Clearly, Acts 2 has a unique historical context—not even duplicated in the same way in Acts 8 or here in Acts 10.
- II. The initial coming of the Spirit following the ascension of Christ.
- III. Physical body of Christ rose, followed by spiritual body of Christ formed in His absence: which is the church
- IV. Mabana Chapel Statement of Beliefs concerning the *Doctrine of the Church*³

We believe that the universal church, the Body of Christ, is comprised of all believers from the Day of Pentecost to the "Rapture."

V. This is not happening over and over throughout history down to our day!

C. Although the events of Acts 10 have a close relation to the events in Acts 2, we already see evidence that Acts 2 is historically unique and that all of Acts

has a historical context which we ignore at our own peril.

Summary

1. The initial giving of the Spirit, which never occurred and could not occur prior to the crucifixion and ascension of Jesus (John [7:38-39](#); [16:7,13](#)), has now occurred to all three major people groups: Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.
 - A. Jesus had said, . . . *you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea [to Jews] and Samaria [to Samaritans], and to the end of the earth [to Gentiles]* (Acts [1:8b](#)).
 - B. Not just to Jews throughout the world, but even to those unclean Gentiles!
2. Unlike the Old Testament of theocracy of Israel where believing Samaritans and Gentiles never had equal standing with the Jews, God now establishes a new Spiritual organism: the body of Christ, in which all cultures and races have equal footing (Gal. [3:28](#); Col. [3:11](#)).
 - A. This turn of events took the believing Jews by surprise.
 - I. Yes: the OT predicted that Gentiles would seek the Jewish Messiah⁴
 - II. But the Church, the body of Christ, wherein Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles are on equal footing was not revealed and completely unexpected (Eph. [3:3-6](#); Col. [1:26-27](#))!
3. The initial giving of the Spirit—to the Jews (chapter 2) and Samaritans (chapter 8)—historically occurred as a “second work” *after* coming to faith.
 - A. Is this always the case—even today? Many teach so.
 - B. This was because of the historical context: when the apostles first came to faith, John tells us “the Holy Spirit had not yet been given” (John [7:39](#)).
 - C. This was not the pattern for the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house: they were not saved until Peter preached.
 - I. They experienced Spirit-baptism *simultaneously* with believing on Christ.
 - II. Why is this fact ignored or overlooked by so many today?
 - III. They want us to pattern salvation after Acts [2](#), but ignore Acts [10](#).

IV. Mabana Chapel Statement of Beliefs concerning the *Doctrine of the Church*⁵

At the point of salvation every believer was baptized into the Body of Christ and received spiritual gifts for service (Acts 1:5; Acts 2:33-47; 1 Corinthians 12:11-13).

- D. The book of Acts is characterized by long periods of missionary and evangelistic activity where this unique sign of speaking in an unlearned foreign language does not occur. Why is that?
- E. It bears evidence of an historical context which is frequently misunderstood or ignored: to the detriment and confusion of many believers today.
- F. Tarrying for the Spirit (in Jerusalem?) and incorrectly interpreting ecstatic speech today as a modern equivalent of what took place in Acts 2, 8, and 10 represents a failure to appreciate the historical setting of the book of Acts and a misunderstanding of events connected with the establishment of the Church, the body of Christ, a foundation which was only laid once nearly 2,000 years ago.
- G. The foundation of the Church having been laid, is not being laid again and again today.
- H. Unlike those whom Jesus instructed prior to His ascension . . .
 - I. . . . we do not tarry for the Spirit (and certainly not in Jerusalem).
 - II. . . . we do not hear a sound as a might rushing wind.
 - III. . . . we do not see divided tongues as of fire over the heads of believers.
 - IV. . . . every person who comes to faith today is baptized with the Holy Spirit—eternally and fully joined to the body of Christ—the moment he or she believes (1Cor. 12:13).
- I. Modern attempts to equate the unintelligible utterances of ecstatic speech with the truly miraculous sign of speaking in a *bona fide* unlearned human language as exhibited in the book of Acts ultimately does a disservice to our witness.
- J. It is neither miraculous nor convincing. As many have observed: it is a practice of non-Christian, pagan belief systems.



SpiritAndTruth.org Scan Code^c

Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Acts 10:17-48
 2. Ref-1307, 342-345
 3. <http://www.mabanachapel.org/beliefs.html>
 4. Gentiles seek Messiah: Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Deu. 32:21; 32:43; 2S. 22:50; 1K. 8:43; 2Chr. 6:32; Ezra 7:15; Ps. 18:49; 22:27; 86:9; 117:1; Isa. 9:2; 11:1; 11:10; 42:6; 44:5; 49:6; 56:8; 60:3; 63:16; 65:1; 66:18; Jer. 16:19; Hos. 2:23; Amos 9:12; Mal. 1:11.
 5. <http://www.mabanachapel.org/beliefs.html>
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Sources:

NKJV Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Ref-1307 Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2011). ISBN:978-0-7586-2799-5^d.

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/33_Acts_10_18-48/index.htm.
b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-7586-2799-5>.