

Acts 10:44-48

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The Gentiles Believe in Jesus and Receive the Holy Spirit

The Gentile Roman audience to Peter's gospel message believe in Jesus. Immediately the Holy Spirit enters their hearts. They begin praising God in various languages, like at Pentecost. The Jewish believers who escorted Peter to this house are dumbfounded to see Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter declares that the Gentiles should be water baptized in Jesus's name, because they had received the same Spirit as the Jews. God's deliverance was for all people groups. No one was to be considered unclean or unholy.

Something incredible happens *While Peter was still speaking these words* about faith in Jesus (v. 44). Cornelius and his friends and relatives are silently and respectfully listening to Peter, and yet as soon as he offers the choice of the gospel, that through Jesus's name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (v. 43), Cornelius and the other Romans believe in Jesus's name. They do not shout it out, they do not declare their faith audibly. It occurs in their hearts. *While Peter was still speaking*, the Romans believe, and immediately *the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message* (v. 44).

When Peter first confessed that Jesus was the anointed messiah sent by God, Jesus told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Peter first unlocks the doors of heaven to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:14), then he goes down to Samaria and unlocks the doors to the kingdom for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-15), and now God has sent him from Joppa for the express purpose of unlocking the doors of the kingdom for the Gentiles, that everyone can come and be redeemed if they trust Jesus to save them from sin and death.

Salvation is the work of God, but Peter was able to participate in each of these inaugural moments for the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles to be spiritually born again into Jesus's Kingdom, because he obeyed God's leading (Acts 10:20).

All the circumcised believers cannot believe what they are seeing. Whenever the New Testament refers to the *circumcised* or the circumcision, it is referring to the Jewish people, who circumcised themselves as a physical symbol of their covenant with God, and of being separate from the world (Genesis 17:10-14). "The circumcision" essentially refers to those who follow the Mosaic Law overall, the holy and set-apart people who follow the Law (Galatians 2:12).

These Jewish believers in Jesus *who came with Peter* to Caesarea *were amazed to see* Romans believe in Jesus. They were *amazed because* they were witnessing *the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles also* (v. 45). That the *Holy Spirit* of God would be given to indwell unclean and unholy *Gentiles* was something they never imagined possible. The reason they were amazed is because they previously had thought of the Gentiles as unredeemable, unclean, and unholy. Just as they would never think an unclean animal could be edible, they did not think a Gentile could be made holy. Through the vision early, God showed Peter otherwise.

He prepared Peter's heart to understand that God was making these Gentiles holy, setting them apart as His servants.

The Jewish believers knew that the Romans also believed *For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God*. This was the same sign (or one of them) at Pentecost of the Spirit's arrival, *speaking with tongues and exalting God*:

“And [the disciples] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance...Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language... ‘we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.’”
(Acts 2:4,5,6,11)

These Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter must have expressed their amazement to him, because he *answered* them:

“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” (v. 46-47).

Can anyone stand in the way of God bringing salvation to the Gentiles? Can anyone *refuse the water for the Romans to be baptized*? Not these Gentile Romans, for they *have received the Holy Spirit just as the Jews did*.

Four days ago, Peter had considered the Gentiles as unworthy of salvation. He saw them as unholy and unclean. He saw them as he saw unclean animals—something to stand apart from and avoid. Now he sees that the Holy Spirit has come to all men, Jew and Roman. At Pentecost for the Jews, they spoke in different tongues and languages as a sign. Now that same sign has fallen upon the Gentiles. This shows that the gospel is for everyone. It is not just in Greek or Hebrew anymore, but every tongue and every nation can know the gospel in their own language and believe.

This moment in Cornelius's house is a Pentecost for the Gentiles, the moment the Holy Spirit visibly falls on them and causes them to begin *speaking with foreign tongues and exalting God* for His goodness. Praising God for salvation from sins and new life in His Son.

So Peter *ordered* the believing Gentiles *to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*. The word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptize.” It means to immerse or be subsumed. The Jews routinely practiced baptism for purification, as a part of their ceremonies. Many Jewish baptisms (called “mikvehs”) have been unearthed by archeologists that would have been in use during the first century. A house thought to belong to the high priest had its own mikveh, since the priests were required to baptize often. The Essene community in Qumran also has a number of mikvehs that have been found. And many mikvehs were found near Herod's temple.

But while baptism was used frequently by Jews for various purposes, this particular baptism was to symbolize being buried with Christ, then raised in newness of life in Him. By participating in

believers' baptism with these Gentile Romans, Peter is testifying that they are now one in Christ with he and the other believing Jews.

This too was in fulfillment of the Great Commission given by *Christ* to His apostles, "baptizing [Christ-followers] in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The baptism referred to in this command was the believers' baptism practiced by Peter with the Gentile Romans in Caesarea.

Baptism is a celebratory ceremony. Faith saves believers from spiritual death and separation from God, and gives them a new birth (Romans 4:3; John 3:14-16). Baptism does not save from sin. Rather, it is done to declare and illustrate the new resurrected life a believer now has thanks to the gift of God, only received by faith in His Son (Ephesians 2:8-9). But by participating in this ceremony, Peter has now affirmed that salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Peter will have to defend himself when he returns to Jerusalem, because some of the Jewish believers there will criticize him for associating with Gentiles. They had the same basic attitude Peter had before he had the vision and experience with the Spirit. But just as he and his fellow travelers had their hearts changed and their understanding of God's mercy expanded, so will the believers in Jerusalem after he tells them what happened,

“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?’ 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.’”
(Acts 11:15-18)

Then they, Cornelius and the other new believers, asked Peter to stay on for a few days in Caesarea (v. 48). Doubtless Peter had many questions to answer, and began teaching them what to do now that they were believers and followers of Christ, just as Christ commanded him to do (Matthew 28:20). He possibly reconnected with Philip the Evangelist who ended up living in Caesarea and began a church there (Acts 8:48, Acts 21:8-9). Perhaps he handed Cornelius and the other Roman believers off to Philip before he left the city to return to Jerusalem.

In detailing here in Acts 10 that Jesus opened the way to the Gentiles through Peter, Luke (the author of Acts) is documenting a basis for his fellow minister Paul's authority as an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). He also documents that Peter endorsed the fact that all peoples are saved the same way: through God's grace. Luke artfully sets forth many works of Peter in this first section of Acts that:

- Validate that God opened the door for the Gentiles to receive the gospel through Peter (Acts 10, 15:7)
- Document that Peter (and the other apostles and elders in Jerusalem) affirmed that the Gentiles were free from Jewish religious laws (Acts 15:10-11)

- Demonstrate a number of miracles done by Peter, that were also done through Paul, validating Paul as an authentic apostle of Jesus, including the healing of a lame man (Acts 3:1-10,14:8-11) and the raising of people from the dead (Acts 9:40; 20:9-12).

Biblical Text

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 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. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 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?” 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.