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Spiritual Blessings



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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3

The Epistle to the Ephesians:

It Would Never Have Been Written if Paul Had Not Received a New Revelation! (Part 2)

By Jan Lilleby, Norway.

(Note! Jan’s quotes are from the Amplified Version.)

PAUL’S MINISTRY IN EPHESUS 54-57 AD

When we study Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, we find a striking similarity to the ministries of Peter and the eleven. Paul in Ephesus, in Acts 19, says and does the same things as the apostles who were called before him. He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom on earth, he baptized believers in water in Jesus’ name, he imparted the Holy Spirit to believers by the laying on of hands so they received ‘gifts’ such as speaking in tongues and prophetic words. Paul was practically “on the preaching roster” in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus over a period of three months, speaking to them on every Sabbath, before he had to hire the school facilities of Tyrannus. Let us read Acts 19:1–2:

“While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul went through the upper inland districts and came down to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he asked them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

This question alone, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed”, makes it obvious to us that *he was not ministering in the era of the Church* – for we received the Holy Spirit in the same moment we came to faith in Christ. This is what Paul refers to in Eph. 4:5 as “one baptism”. The Holy Spirit comes into us as He baptizes us into the death of Christ. But the Kingdom-believers during Acts, like those in Ephesus in 54 A.D., were also subject to the baptism WITH the Holy Spirit, with power to perform miracles and sign gifts of the New Covenant. The Church, Christ’s Body, has only ONE BAPTISM, the one that is performed by the Spirit Who baptizes us into the death of Christ. We are circumcised – not by any human hand – but with the “Circumcision of Christ”. Only the Kingdom believers had the promise of the Holy Spirit in power, signs and miracles. It was part of the “New Covenant Deal”, which God sent into Israel’s believers, the Spirit with which he wrote His commandments in their hearts and minds; thus, in a supernatural way, MAKING or CAUSING the believers to **fulfil the Law** and keep it. But, if they failed, the sacrifice made by

Christ on the cross would “pay off” the sins committed. There was, therefore, no longer any need to have sacrifices made in the Temple by the priesthood (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 16:62-63; Rom. 3:31). As for the Church era, however, the Law is abolished (Eph. 2:14-15).

So, because of all these things, we know that it could not have been the Dispensation of the Mystery when Paul asked his question of the twelve disciples in Ephesus. It was still the era of the apostolic mission to Israel for the promised Kingdom on earth, connected with the New Covenant. Acts 19:3-5:

“And he asked, Into what baptism then were you baptized? They said, Into John’s baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, continually telling the people that they should believe in the One Who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus. On hearing this they were baptized (again, this time) in the name

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President's Word

Greetings once again to all of our readers across the world.

Annual Conference

Along with this issue, you will find details of our 2010 Annual Conference. We encourage you to plan today to put aside your regular routine and join us around God's Word at Toukley on the NSW Central Coast on September 18, 19 and 20. This year's guest speaker is British speaker and author, Michael Penny, who will take all of the Bible study sessions. Mike is an excellent speaker and well worth listening to.

Our Annual Conference is always a good opportunity to recharge your spiritual batteries (so to speak!). Come for all or some of the time, but the earlier you let us know your plans, the easier it is for our Conference Convenor to make the appropriate arrangements with the venue. See the enclosed registration form for details, and let us know your plans as soon as possible.

This year's Conference fee schedule features a special family rate - we'd like to encourage you to stay overnight and bring the whole family. If that's not enough incentive, then you should know that the site at Toukley is an excellent venue with so much to do for family members of all ages, being near the lake, surfing beaches, and with plenty of other great facilities onsite. Plan today to join us there - you'll be glad you did.

Michael and Sylvia Penny

Michael and Sylvia Penny, from the U.K., will conduct a number of other speaking engagements in New South Wales (Sept 14-29), Queensland (Sept 29-Oct 5), and Tasmania (Oct 5-10). A more detailed itinerary will be sent out shortly to readers of Spiritual Blessings in those regions. To find out more, please contact us at admin@spiritualblessings.org, or by using one of the addresses on page 12 of this issue. Michael will also be speaking in New Zealand between Oct 11-25, and you can find out more about those meetings by contacting Graeme Abbott in New Zealand - graeme@ababooks.co.nz.

Regular Meetings

Don't forget to check page 12 for details of our regular meetings, which are all free of charge.

Everyone is welcome, so bring a friend, too.

Loss of a Friend

Sadly, one of our long time friends and supporters, Richard Snowden, passed away in June this year, aged 66. Richard occasionally spoke at our meetings and contributed a number of articles to Spiritual Blessings. He also authored a pamphlet, which has been widely distributed, entitled "What Is Right Division?". Richard also served our Fellowship as its Secretary for a number of years, and contributed greatly to the wording of the BBFA's Constitution, ensuring that all legal requirements were met, whilst also ensuring that the spirit of what our Fellowship stands for was also captured in that document. Richard was a firm believer in resurrection, and we await the day that we shall appear with Christ together. The BBFA wishes to extend its deepest sympathy to Richard's wife, Maree, and the family at this difficult time.

Until our next issue, may the Lord be glorified by our walk, our witness, and the study of His Word.

Editorial

Two major articles take up most of this issue's pages, the first being Part 2 of Jan Lilleby's article about Ephesians. The second is the study given by John Hutton at our recent Day Conference. The other two studies from that day will appear in later issues.

I think John's study complements Jan's. The place of Gentiles in God's plans throughout history is often ignored, but it is of vital importance to a correct interpretation of God's Word.

My sincere thanks to those readers who have expressed appreciation of recent issues of "Spiritual Blessings". Many have said how much help and blessing they have received, and your comments have been passed on to the authors concerned. We are grateful for the effort made to let us know your reactions. I am looking forward to the responses to Ron Hodge's article in our last issue. It is too early, as I write these words, for any responses to have reached us, but both Ron and I hope that what he has written will stir many not only to think about the topic raised, but also to respond with comments or questions for further discussion.

I pray that we all will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Athol Walter.

cont from Pg. 1

of the Lord Jesus.”

This was the same kind of baptism that we find Peter and the eleven taught and practised inside the land of Israel, in Acts 2 (c. 32 AD) to Acts 12. They baptized in water for the remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul (and/or his fellow ministers) did the same, starting with the mission to Galatia in 43 A.D (Acts 13ff). He baptized in all of Galatia, in Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus. Luke made particular note where Paul was the one who baptized. This was to point out Paul’s ministry which started in Acts 13. This, however, does not mean that only Paul baptized people. More often, he let his fellow workers, such as the elders in the assemblies, perform baptisms as needed. Water baptism was a permanent rite for believers under the New Covenant based on the blood of Jesus. It was part of the Kingdom ministry, and had nothing to do with the era of the Church which is His Body.

Acts 19:6-7: “And as Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.”

Another parallel between Paul and Peter is the baptism in the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost in Acts 2, we find – with the one exception of Acts 10 and Cornelius – that the baptism with the Holy Spirit always came through the laying on of hands from an anointed apostle of God, be it Peter, Paul or one of the others.

We see this with Philip in Samaria (Acts 8), who had to get the apostles Peter and John to come and lay their hands on the believers so they could be filled. And so it was in Ephesus as Paul laid his apostolic hands upon these twelve disciples, having first baptized them in water. This same order was followed in Paul’s case when Ananias baptized him in water, and then with the Holy Spirit, healing him of blindness (Acts 9:17-18). Paul continued in his ministry just as he started. He taught and practised all the Kingdom-ordinances connected with the New Covenant to Israel, just as Peter had done before him. The only real difference between Peter and Paul, was WHERE on the Roman map they ministered. Peter and Paul agreed to “split” as follows: Peter witnessed to Israel inside her natural borders, and Paul witnessed to the Dispersed of Israel outside

of Israel’s borders. Paul was not the first apostle who spoke to Gentiles; Peter was (Acts 10; 15:7). After God had opened the way to Gentile proselytes to come into the Messianic assembly, Paul was told by the Lord to do the same. He should turn to Gentiles in every case where Jews would not believe his message. The order was “Jews first, then Greeks” (Rom. 1:16).

Luke had been following Peter’s actions closely in the *first twelve chapters of Acts*, but *from Acts 13 through to the end of his history, he leaves Peter and records Paul’s actions*. Israel, within her natural borders, had heard the Kingdom Gospel preached by Peter and the eleven, and there was not much new stuff to report. The ministry had stalled to a certain degree, and the leadership had even been turned over to James (Acts 21). History shows that James was stoned to death by the Sanhedrin under the supervision of High Priest Ananias II in 62-63 A.D., and in 64-66 A.D. the whole assembly fled to Pella, a small village up in the Decapolis Province. Some scholars hold that they fled in 66 A.D. to 70 A.D.

“... the Holy Spirit wants us to see that Paul was at the height of his ministry in Ephesus during those three years.”

Now, turning back to Paul in Ephesus in 54 to 57 A.D., we find that he not only preached the Kingdom (Acts 19:8) as a part of the New Covenant to Israel, but like

Peter, he also performed numerous astonishing signs, wonders and miracles, such as casting out demons and healing the sick. Ephesus, in Paul’s time, had about 200,000 citizens. The outdoor theatre described in Acts 19 seated 20,000 people. (The ruins of that theatre may still be seen). As Peter literally *shook Jerusalem* (Acts 4:31) and the surrounding districts in his time, Paul did likewise throughout Galatia, Macedonia (Acts 16:26), Asia, Achaia and Malta.

But it seems that the Holy Spirit wants us to see that Paul was at the height of his ministry in Ephesus during those three years. The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write these things so we can clearly see the LIKENESSES (not differences) between Peter and Paul. Paul did some miraculous things in Corinth, but Luke does not record them. We only have Paul’s word *saying in general* that he “had shown an apostle’s signs” - and thus healed many among them. Acts is not showing us differences between Peter and Paul, but their **similarities!**

Acts 19:11-12: “And God did unusual and extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. So that

handkerchiefs or towels or aprons which had touched his skin, were carried away and put upon the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.”

So, we have seen that Paul ministered the New Covenant to Israel, and he had an overwhelming likeness in ministry to Peter. He had people water baptized and also Spirit baptized, he healed sicknesses and delivered from demon possession; he even raised people from the dead. Just like “Peter and Tabitha”, we have “Paul and Eutychus” (Acts 20:9-12).

“The power of miracles, signs and wonders was never committed to the Church, the Body of Christ ...”

Peter’s shadow healed hundreds of sick people as he proceeded to the temple for prayer (Acts 5:15-16), and Paul had his handkerchiefs and aprons performing the same kind of miracles as Peter’s shadow. The *power of miracles, signs and wonders* never was committed to the Church age, but it operated conspicuously during the thirty years described in Acts, in which the apostles offered the earthly Kingdom of God to Israel and ministered the New Covenant. That was **before the Church age** was revealed.

The Church age is left with the “Power of Prayer” – which God may answer at His pleasure (Eph. 3:20). In the Church era, no believer can lawfully say to any sick person: “**That which I have** (i.e. the power of healing), I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” (Acts 3:6). We do not have what Peter had, not by a long shot!

We have the Holy Spirit – yes – but not as an aggressively agitating and demonstrative power to perform great miracles and signs, like the apostles did. Peter and Paul both had that, and Luke has reported this great power of God in the Book of Acts. **This was for Israel and her proselytes, and their hope was the promised Kingdom on earth with Jesus as their King Messiah.** All of that, however, was put aside in 62 A.D. when we find Paul writing the epistle to the Ephesians. This book is a *Revelation Book*, rather than just a standard doctrinal book. It tells of a **whole new set of doctrines and belief**, and even the hope of salvation has been changed: It is now heaven, and not the Kingdom, as it was when Paul ministered in Ephesus 54 A.D. to 57 A.D.

Paul’s claim to have given the Ephesians everything that God possibly could give them through his ministry, referred ONLY to the New Covenant and the offer to them of the Kingdom on earth, with Jesus

coming from heaven to sit upon the restored throne of David. When Paul told them on the beach near Miletus in Acts 20:27 that he had given them all of God’s counsel, it had nothing to do with the Church, the Body of Christ. This was a reference to the New Covenant, as I mentioned earlier.

Dear Believer in Christ: I sincerely hope that these few words will help you to rightly divide the Word of God. It is important to be aware that Acts is all about the apostles’ offering the earthly Kingdom to the Jews: Peter to the Jews inside Israel’s natural boundaries, and later, Paul to the Jews of the dispersion outside Israel. This, of course, included any proselytes.

And when God set Israel aside in 62 A.D., Paul revealed the Mystery in the epistle to the Ephesians and the Church era had begun. The Church is not here *instead of or in place of Israel*, taking over all of Israel’s promised blessings in Scripture. The Church age is here in *the absence of Israel*. The Church has it’s own separate hope and blessings, viz. in Christ in heaven – and shall not share these blessings with Israel. Conversely, the Church, the Body of Christ, does not share in Israel’s blessings.

But one day soon, the Church shall appear with Christ in glory, in heaven (Col. 3:1-4) – and in the same instance, God will re-open the offer of the Kingdom on earth to Israel. This renewed offer will be performed in due time by Elijah the prophet (Matt. 17:11;24:14), and by Moses – the two of them operating together as described in Rev. 11. And it has nothing to do with the Church, the “One New Man” – the Body of Christ. This renewed offer of the Kingdom comes in the form of God’s wrathful judgement upon an ungodly Israel – which is the Great Tribulation, and which Moses first prophesied in Deut. 28 – when all the horror of the “Egyptian plagues” fall on Israel in the end times. It is part of the Mosaic curse on the wicked, ungodly Israel that hates Jesus.

It is clearly revealed in the New Testament that Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians *because he was given the revelation of the Mystery at that time* – which can only mean that he taught nothing but the New Covenant to Israel prior to the day he had this revelation.

The Mystery of Ephesians in 62 A.D. cannot be pushed back in time, and “installed” into the Acts period or the epistles written in that era! ❖

Gentiles in Scripture

By John Hutton, Newcastle.

(This article is the study given by John at our recent Conference at Charlestown in Newcastle.)

The first 12 chapters of Genesis cover the first two thousand years of human history. In that time mankind multiplied greatly on the earth, quite naturally the different families became tribes and, as they grew in number, they either became nations themselves, or joined with other like-minded tribes to become nations. At the Tower of Babel, the various nations were given different languages and dispersed to different parts of the earth.

In Genesis 12:1-3 we have the record of a promise from God to the man Abraham that he would be the start of a new nation.

'Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: ²And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. ³And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed'.

Abraham had a son, Isaac, Isaac had a son, Jacob, Jacob had twelve sons, and the children of those twelve sons became the nation of Israel. Now, here is an important point. Israel is at the centre of God's dealing with mankind during the period of time from the call of Abraham in Gen. 12 to the end of the book of Acts, i.e. a period of two thousand years. In that time, no other nation or individual from another nation is mentioned or blessed by God in the Bible unless they come into contact with the nation Israel, or an Israelite.

If you were not a member of the nation of Israel you were a Gentile, which meant you were a foreigner to Israel. The KJV calls foreigners strangers, and Paul states in Eph. 2:11-12 that Gentiles were *'...aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world'*.

If that was the case, in the two thousand years from the call of Abraham to the end of Acts, who

had the advantage as far as God was concerned, Israelite or Gentile?

We don't have the space in this study to look closely at the Old Testament. If you are interested to know, you will find that strangers living among the Israelites were to be treated kindly, but they were excluded from taking part in most of Israel's religious practises. For instance, they could visit the Temple but could only go as far as the Court of the Gentiles, and only watch the Temple practices. The same thing happened in the synagogues. Gentiles were, and still are today, limited to a fenced-off part at the rear or side of the synagogue and could only listen to the service without taking part.

Proselytes

Some Gentiles wished to become Israelites and went through a ritual, where, amongst other things, they were assigned a tribe, and having been accepted into the nation, were called Proselytes.

Proselytes had almost all of the privileges of a natural born Israelite. One exception was that a Proselyte could not become the king. Their sons, however, could become king because they were considered to

be natural-born Jews. Some Gentiles recognized that the God of Israel was the one true God and chose to worship Him as best they could, but would not become Proselytes. When we get to New Testament times, things were still the same. We read of Jews, Gentiles, Proselytes and God-fearing Gentiles.

Apparently it was a common practice to get as many Gentiles as possible to join Israel as Proselytes. Matt. 23:15 tells us that the scribes and Pharisees *'...compassed (or travelled) sea and land to make one proselyte'*.

In Acts 2:10, we are told that many of those who came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, from the many different countries where Jews lived, were Proselytes.

In Acts 6, we read that there arose a dispute about the service that the Grecian Jewish women were

"... (Gentiles) could visit the Temple, but could only go as far as the court of the Gentiles, and only watch the Temple practices."

receiving in comparison to the service that the local Jewish women were getting as far as the daily food distribution was concerned. One of the men chosen to ensure equality between the two groups was 'Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch'.

God-fearers

In Acts 10, we read of Cornelius, a Gentile, who had never become a Proselyte. He was one that feared God – in other words, a God-fearer.

In Acts 13:14-42 we read of other God-fearers:

'But when they (i.e. Paul and Barnabus) departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. ¹⁵And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. ¹⁶Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.'

Verse 26: *'Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.'*

Who were the God-fearers? Verse 42 tells us.

'And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath'.

The Gospel Period

Now let us look in the Gospels. In Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord makes an important point concerning Gentiles, but before we get to that, let me make a comment on the Sermon on the Mount itself.

'And seeing the multitudes (Greek = oklos), he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.' (Matt. 5:1)

That was a natural thing to do, wasn't it? When the crowd gathered around Him to listen to what He had to say, where in the crowd do you think His disciples would be? If you were in the crowd that day and you were a disciple, where would you be? You would be as close as possible to Him!

'And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people (the oklos, the crowd – the NIV gets it right) were astonished at his doctrine...' (Matt. 7:28)

The crowd had stayed for the whole discourse. Why were they astonished at what He said? *'...for*

he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes'. Who did the scribes teach? The Jews!

'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ²⁶Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? ²⁸And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? ³¹Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³²(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)'. (Matt. 6:25-32)

To make sense of verse 32, surely we must repeat the sentence included in verse 26 after verse 32. *'(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek). Are ye not much better than they?'* (v26) Are you not much better than them! What would you think if you were in the crowd that day and you were a Gentile? This man is a bigot.

Look at verse 31. *'Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?'* Does that apply, or has it ever applied to anyone reading this article? The Lord put a dividing line between Jews and Gentiles!

What about His healing ministry, was there a dividing line there?

Firstly, what about a Jew? Turn to Matt. 8

'And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. ³And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.' Mat. 8:1-4.

Here was a Jewish man who wanted to be healed, and without hesitation, the Lord healed him.

Verse 5: *'And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion,*

beseeking him, ⁶And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. ⁷And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. ⁸The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. ⁹For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. ¹⁰When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel...¹³And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. (Matt. 8:5-13)

Here was a Gentile and the Lord healed him. No difference to the Jew that was healed, was there – or was there?

We read of the same incident in Luke 7:1-6.

'Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. ²And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. ³And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. ⁴And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: ⁵For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. ⁶Then Jesus went with them'.

Did you notice the addition in Luke that was left out of Matthew 8?

In verse 3 we are told that the centurion sent the elders of Israel to Jesus. Verses 4 and 5 tell us what the elders said. *'And when they (who are they? – the elders of the Jews) came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he (the centurion) was worthy for whom he should do this: ⁵For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue'.*

Why were they saying that the centurion was worthy to have his servant healed? Remember Gen. 12:3? *'And I will bless them that bless thee....'*

But what about a Gentile who had not blessed Israel in some way or other?

'Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And, behold, a woman

of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. ²³But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. ²⁴But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ²⁵Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. ²⁶But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. ²⁷And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. ²⁸Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour' . (Matt. 15:21–28)

(The Lord) answered a Gentile woman's prayer, but not without putting her in her place first.

Here was an ordinary Gentile woman with no elders of Israel to plead her case. What was the Lord's initial reaction to her plea? – He ignored her! What was the disciple's reaction to her? – 'Send her away!'

Did you notice that this Gentile woman knew that Gentiles were looked on differently to Jews? In verse 24, he tells her He was not sent to anyone else other than the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In verse 26, He tells her that it was not right to give Israel's bread to dogs i.e. Gentiles. In verse 27, she showed that she knew that. 'True, Lord,' she said.

Let me summarise the Lord's healing ministry in a few words. The Lord healed a Jew without any reason at all other than that he was Jew, and almost all of those healed in the Gospels and Acts were Jews. He healed a Gentile who had blessed Israel. He answered a Gentile woman's prayer, but not without putting her in her place first.

Acts 10

It would be profitable for the reader of this article to take the time to read Acts 10 before continuing.

In Acts 10, we read of a remarkable event. The events recorded in the chapter occurred about eight years after Pentecost. In that eight year period, thousands of people had become believers in the Lord Jesus. I suggest to you, that other than the death and resurrection of Christ, the conversion of Cornelius is one of the most significant and momentous events in the two thousand year time span between the call of Abraham and the end of the Acts period, about 63 AD.

Acts 10 records the story of Cornelius, a Gentile, a devout man and a God-fearer. His prayers were heard by God and were to be answered by the mediation of Peter. We read about that in verses 1 to 8.

Verses 9 to 16 tell us of God preparing Peter for his meeting with Cornelius. Peter was hungry, and while waiting for a meal to be prepared, he fell into a trance. In the trance, he saw a great sheet descending out of heaven which was filled with food that was forbidden to be eaten by a Jew.

He heard a voice telling him to kill and eat the animals in the sheet, but Peter refused on the grounds that he had never eaten anything that was unclean. It is important to note that Peter addresses the speaker as Lord, so he knew whose voice it was.

The second and third time the order came to eat it was accompanied with the words 'What God has cleansed, don't you call them common.' Peter still would not eat. I want you to think of some kind of food that turns you off when you try to eat it. With me it would be salmon. With a vegetarian, it might be a T-bone steak. What would it be with you? If God was to put that food before you and told you to eat it, what would you do? I don't know what your reaction would be, but I suspect that it would be the same as mine. I would eat the salmon as quickly as I could.

Peter, however, refused God's instructions to eat the animals on the sheet three times. Surely that is an indication of how important to, and how ingrained the dietary laws were and how repugnant it was for Peter to break them!

If the vision was to prepare Peter for a task that God wanted him to perform, then that task must be something that Peter would never do or consider doing in his wildest dreams, wouldn't it?

Verse 17 tells us that Peter had no idea of what the vision meant. '*... Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean*' – and while he was wondering, the messengers from Cornelius arrived. Peter needed to be told by the Spirit to go with them and not to argue about it. Verses 19 and 20 says '*...Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them*'. These three men were Gentiles. Remember what Peter's reaction was to the Gentile woman who

approached Christ to be healed in Matt. 15? 'Send her away'. Now he is told, 'Don't argue, just go'?

'And Peter 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. ²⁹Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for...' (Acts 10:28-29)

The penny had dropped. Now he knew what the vision of the sheet was all about and he acknowledges to Cornelius that he needed that lesson. Without the lesson of the sheet he would not have come to a Gentile but considered them common and unclean - untouchables. The last part of verse 29 is staggering, '*I ask ... for what intent ye have sent for me?*' – 'why have you sent for me?' – 'what could you, as a Gentile, possibly want me for?'

It seems the fact that God might want the Gospel preached to Gentiles had never entered Peter's head! Cornelius had to tell him why he was there and that they were ready to hear him. '*Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*'.

Again, Peter's reaction is amazing. '³⁴*Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: ³⁵But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*'

If there had been a Gentile saved at Pentecost, would Peter need such prompting from God to go to Cornelius? In the early Acts church, they had all things in common and shared what they had, and there were thousands of them. If the Lord, during His three years of ministry both before and after the Cross – a ministry that Peter had witnessed in its entirety – had spoken about Gentiles being saved, why would Peter need such goading to go and preach the Gospel to one?

The conversion of Gentiles caused a big dispute and an explanation from Peter was demanded when he got back to Jerusalem.

'And the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ²And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, ³Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them'. (Acts 11:1-3)

The penny had dropped. Now he knew what the vision of the sheet was all about and he acknowledges to Cornelius that he needed the lesson.

The Apostles, who had also been with the Lord all through His ministry, were not happy about Paul going to Gentiles. He tells them the whole story concerning the incident and finishes with the words of verse 17. *'Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?'* Would it be too fanciful to add the words 'I would have if I could have'.

After Peter's explanation, the Church of the time accepted the fact that Gentiles were being saved, although the place of Gentiles in the Church caused big problems and was not finally resolved until the great council recorded in Acts 15.

In the Church during the Acts period, Gentiles were not equal with Jews. The Gospel had to be preached to Jews first, *'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first...'* (Rom. 1:16).

The Jew had advantages in every way, *'What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?'* ²*Much every way...* (Rom. 3:1-2)

Gentiles were only ever let in at all during Acts to provoke Israel to jealousy, *'First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you'*, (Rom. 10:19) and *'salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy'*, (Rom. 11:11), and needed to watch themselves or they could be cast out of Israel's blessings. Please read Romans 11:13-21.

In Romans 15:25-27, Paul says that it was the duty of Gentile believers to financially support the poor believers in Jerusalem, *'For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things'*.

Romans is the last letter written by Paul in the Acts period and in chapter 10, verses 1 and 2, he makes a statement that is staggering if the Church that believers belong to today began at Pentecost. *'I say then, Hath God cast away his people?...'* ²*God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew'*.

In the church during the Acts period, Gentiles were not equal with Jews Gentiles were only ever let in at all during Acts to provoke Israel to jealousy.

I want to finish with something new concerning Gentiles that is even more amazing than the conversion of Cornelius.

In Acts 28:25, Israel is set aside by God as the people through whom He would work. In the very first book written after the book of Acts, Paul writes about a revelation from God that had never been revealed before.

'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles'. (Eph. 3:1)

That in itself is a new thing that Paul is saying. In Acts 28:20, he said that he was a prisoner for the hope of Israel. However, let us go on.

'If (i.e. assuming or surely) ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (more correctly - the secret)'. (Eph. 3:2-3)

If you have a secret — and I'm sure that every reader has at least one, good or bad, something that nobody else knows about — how can others find out what that secret is? You must reveal it. Now if you and I can keep a secret, then I'm sure that if God has a secret, no one would ever find out what it was if He did not reveal it. That is exactly what Paul says was the case with this secret he was revealing.

'... the mystery, which from the beginning of the world (ages) hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ ...'. (verse 9)

Well, what is the secret, Paul?

'That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs (or joint-heirs), and of the same body (or joint-body), and partakers (or joint-sharers) of his promise in Christ by the gospel'. (verse 6)

In the sight of God, absolute equality now between Jewish and Gentile believers! That is different to all of the Old Testament, other than the first 12 chapters of Genesis, isn't it? That is different to what was happening in the Gospels, isn't it? That is different to the place of Gentile believers in the Acts period, isn't it? Paul revealed something entirely new!

Why is it so important to recognise the different ways that God has dealt with us Gentiles as compared to the way He has dealt with Israel throughout history? If we don't, then we will apply Scripture to ourselves that is not for us today, and then wonder why it isn't working.

It is up to us whether we do or do not accept the fact that Paul received a new revelation from God. If he did not, then we can hardly believe anything else that he wrote, or at best treat them as suspect. If he did, then we cannot be faithful to God if we ignore that revelation.

This article is about Gentiles in Scripture, so I will leave it to you to read about other new things that accompany the revelation of the Secret. If you carefully read Ephesians, you will find a new Church is revealed, the Church which is His Body of which Christ is the Head (Eph. 1:20-23). For the first time in Scripture, a believer is said to be going to heaven itself where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Eph. 2:6). In the Gospel period, those who followed Christ were looking for the thousand-year Kingdom that will be set up on this earth. Believers in the Acts period were looking for the appearance of the New Jerusalem which comes down out of the New Heavens and sits on the New Earth. Study the book of Ephesians carefully and see how many new things you can find.

This article is written on the premise of the full inspiration of God's Word, a truth that is well expressed by the first doctrine of my old denomination, The Salvation Army: "We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God and that they only (i.e. only they) constitute the divine rule of Christian faith and practice'. ❖

Are you aware?

Are you aware of what the rich young ruler asked our LORD in Luke 10:25? The verse reads (NIV), "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The word translated inherit means to gain by the casting of a lot, and the word translated eternal comes from the Greek word aionion which means age-long.

I think that the question asked by the rich young ruler was, "What must I do to be allocated a place in the Kingdom when it is set up on the earth."

Or, possibly, "What must I do to be allocated a place in the Kingdom and live through the Millennium?"

The context of this verse clearly shows that it has nothing to do with the gift of salvation.

Remember that God's word is consistent and logical.

Ron Hodge.

Trials & Difficulties

By Athol Walter

A most puzzling and even problematic aspect of the Christian life is that difficulties, hardships — even disasters — happen to people who are faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it can sometimes appear that many people who are quite opposed to the Christian Faith, go through life with very little trouble at all. Psalm 73 is well worth a serious read in this respect.

Alfred Eidersheim, D. D., has written these wise words on the subject:

"We cannot understand the meaning of many trials; God does not explain them. To explain a trial would be to destroy its object, which is that of calling forth simple faith and implicit obedience.

If we knew why the Lord sent us this or that trial, it would thereby cease to be a trial either of faith or of patience."

Consider the words of the Lord Himself in Matt. 16:24,

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

The context of this passage is important. It is not speaking of joining the Lord in His work on the cross. Rather, it refers to another aspect of cross-bearing, viz., the continuous struggle we have with temptations from our sinful natures, as well as testings of our faith that come from outside ourselves. It is in these struggles that we can prove our faithfulness. One sure thing is that the Christian pathway is not an easy one, but we have several things in our favour. Firstly, through His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus has broken the power of sin, so that we no longer are its slaves. Secondly, He promised that no temptation or testing will be allowed that is beyond our capacity to overcome, and thirdly, there is the unshakeable promise of our Lord that He will be with us all the way.

Another relevant passage is Heb. 12:1–13, particularly vv. 5 & 6: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him: for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Seriously consider v. 11 also.

The term 'son' in these verses does not exclude females, for it refers to the position of the 'first-born', which certainly includes female believers. ❖

Charlestown Conference Day

Report by Sue Hall.

Much needed rain certainly did nothing to dampen the spirits of those attending the Charlestown Day Conference held recently in May at the Charlestown Community Centre. This venue is ideal for our needs, and as we have used it on a number of occasions now, we are all familiar with its layout and feel quite at home.

It was another remarkable day, filled with wonderful teaching and warm fellowship, and it was particularly great to see plenty of new faces. Julie and Clem Milgate were proud, and just a bit excited, to have their recently married son and daughter-in-law with them, as were all of us. It's always a blessing to have time to catch up with friends, both old and new, at these day conferences without the need to rush off. One of my favourite pastimes at these conferences is pouring over the book table, searching for new topics and study aids. We certainly are spoilt for choice.

The day commenced with morning tea and chat time which was extended a little as we waited for John Hutton's arrival. It seems the need for a wheelchair taxi presents its own challenges, but he eventually arrived and the work and study part of the day commenced.

Ron Hodge had the necessary recording equipment set up, and David Tavender attended to the audio-visual equipment. We have become used to visual aids in the studies, with screens, PowerPoint presentations and laser pointers becoming the norm, even though some of the presenters still struggle to wrestle the technology into submission. It is the efforts of people like David and Ron that allow us to have CDs of studies we've missed, and I'd like to express my appreciation to them both for the quiet work they do in this area which benefits us all.

Master of Ceremonies, Peter Ward, got proceedings underway with some uplifting congregational singing to stir the heart, mind and blood, after which John Hutton presented a study on Gentiles in the Bible. John never fails to present new and thought-provoking material and it was very quickly time for lunch and more opportunity for fellowship.

Following lunch, Peter again got us to our feet for another opportunity to worship through song and it is a pleasure to be in a room when so many voices

are lifted up as one, rejoicing in the Lord and all He has done for us. David Tavender then took the stand and presented a study on speaking in tongues, showing the dispensational problems that arise when this pre-Acts 28 gift is brought into today's dispensation.

Dulcie Farley, one of the Wednesday Lorn Study regulars, who was with us for the first time at Charlestown, commented on how accurate and meaningful David's study had been for her, as she had recently been involved with a charismatic Church in southern NSW.

After scones and another cuppa, it was Athol Walter's turn at the podium. He took us through the Feasts of Israel's sacred year, showing how they provide a forecast of Israel's history and foreshadow so much of the work of Christ. Athol's focus was particularly on the significance of Pentecost. He also warned us that, while there is much we can learn from these feasts, we must remember that they belong to Israel and we should be careful not to take what does not belong to us.

It is never easy being the speaker following on the heels of lunch and afternoon tea, but Athol managed to keep us awake and listening through to the end. And just as quickly, it was all over, another day conference completed and enjoyed. It only remained to pack up, and as usual, everyone pitched in to complete the task.

It is good to know that we only have to wait till the 10th. July for the next day conference planned for Rutherford. Then the visit of Mike and Sylvia Penny follows quickly in September at the annual conference at Camp Toukley.

For those of you who have not been able to attend one of these conference days, I would urge you to consider coming, as all those who have attended would recommend them to you for the rich blessings through the teaching and warm fellowship you will experience. ❖

St. Augustine was not correct in all he taught, but he was certainly correct when he said, "Discern the times, and the Scriptures harmonize."

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