



THIS MONTH'S QUESTION – CORNELIUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Continuing with last month's subject, a brother has raised a question based on Acts 10: 44-47, concerning the Holy Spirit and the conversion of Cornelius. He would like to know what these Gentiles 'received' and what was their spiritual state, when the Holy Spirit 'fell on all those who heard the word'.

To reach an understanding of the events in the house of Cornelius there are several points that need to be considered.

1. We must recognize that, when the Spirit came upon them, **Cornelius and his friends had not yet become Christians** and were therefore **not yet saved**, because they had not yet been told *how* to be saved! We understand this because Acts 10:44 tells us that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentile listeners, **'while Peter was still speaking'**.

This was made even clearer when Peter went to Jerusalem and was required to explain his visit to a Gentile home. Peter said, **"As I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell upon them"**, Acts 11:15. Only later, after they had heard the Gospel, did he instruct them to **'be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ'**, Acts 11:48.

Now, we remember that, on the Day of Pentecost, the same Peter had said to the Jews who believed his message, **"Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"**. Shortly after this, he informed the Jewish Council that God gives the Holy Spirit **"to those who obey Him."** Acts 5:32. Therefore, until these Gentiles had heard and understood the message which Peter had been sent to bring them, and had been baptised in the name of Jesus; -

- a) their sins were not forgiven and they were not saved, and,
 - b) they did not receive that 'gift of the Holy Spirit', which was promised in Acts 2; 38.
2. This raises the next question. **"When the Holy Spirit enabled these Gentiles to speak in tongues, what purpose did this serve?"** Or, in other words, **"Why did the Spirit come upon these unsaved Gentiles?"**

The short answer is: It happened just because they **were** Gentiles! Nothing like this ever happened, either before or after this event, to any other group of converts that we read about in the New Testament! As a Jew, Peter was well aware that fellow-Jews would consider him guilty of a grievous offence when they heard that he had entered the house of a Gentile. And they certainly did, as Acts 11:2-3 reveals!

Therefore, when he set out to go to Caesarea, he was careful to take the precautionary step of inviting six Jewish Christians to go along with him, to witness whatever might occur. The vision he had received at Joppa had taught Peter himself that the Good News is for everyone – even Gentiles. But Jewish Christians generally had still to learn this lesson. They had to learn that even

Gentiles were invited to hear and obey the Gospel. The six Jewish believers who, probably very reluctantly, had entered the house of Cornelius with Peter, were taught that lesson very vividly when the Holy Spirit enabled the Gentiles to speak in other languages, and it was to his companions that Peter's question in v.47 was addressed. It was, in effect, a challenge; "**Does any one of you now dare to refuse to baptize these people...?**"

They raised no objection, because there could hardly have been a more vivid and convincing expression of God's approval of Peter's action, than the dramatic intervention of the Holy Spirit when he began to speak to his Gentile audience. Indeed, his Jewish companions were '**astonished**'! (v.45), and Acts 10:15 and Acts 11:18 prove that both they and the Apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, were quick to recognize the significance of what had happened and had the grace and wisdom to acknowledge that this was God at work.

3. "Was this another instance of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?"

I recall, more than 60 years ago, being taught that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred twice during the New Testament period; once in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when the first Jews obeyed the Gospel, and once at Caesarea when the first Gentiles became Christians. That explanation was both simple and satisfactory because it dealt very effectively with many of the arguments made by so-called Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, who still continue to claim to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But I do not now believe that this explains what happened in the house of Cornelius.

I do not think that this was a 'second occurrence of baptism of the Holy Spirit'.

Just consider. We must ask ourselves the question; to whom was the baptism of the Holy Spirit promised, and why was it promised?

1. It was personally promised by the Lord to his Apostles – and **never** promised to anyone else. John 16:7.
2. Those to whom it was promised were instructed to wait to receive it. Acts 1:4-5.
3. When they received the baptism, it would guide them into all truth; they would receive new revelations, and they would be granted total recall of all that they had been taught by the Lord. John 14:26. 16:13-14.
4. Their baptism in the Spirit would endow them with power and bestow on them the authority to become His witnesses, Acts 1:8-9.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Lord's promise was fulfilled. Acts 2:33. The Holy Spirit fell on the Apostles – **not on the listening Jews, nor on the 3000 who obeyed the Gospel.** But, in contrast, in the house of Cornelius the Spirit fell **upon the listening Gentiles.**

The two events are obviously quite different, and the only point of similarity is the fact that, as with the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, in the house of Cornelius the Holy Spirit signalled His presence and approval by enabling these seeking Gentiles to speak in languages they had not learned. Later, when the converts obeyed the Gospel, we may be sure that they received the forgiveness of their sins and the indwelling presence of the Spirit – God's Own gift to those who obey Him.

Questions to: 11 Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP