

Simon had stayed in Caesarea establishing the Gentile saints whom he had been privileged introduce to his beloved Lord Jesus. How he must have enjoyed ministering the Lord he had followed, served and loved for the three plus years of His public ministry before the crucifixion. And he could also minister Christ to them from the Old Testament scriptures. What a wonderful time they all must have enjoyed together. When Peter returned to Jerusalem the reception among some of his fellow saints there was less cordial. The “scandalous” news of his association with Gentiles had preceded him (though apparently the wonderful news of God’s grace to the Gentiles hadn’t). There was a contingent of believers there who were apparently not prepared to let go of the religious teaching and traditions they had so faithfully observed and embraced for years. They challenged him for having associated with Gentiles termed by them as “the uncircumcised.” Peter (and the other disciples) had been a faithful Jew, following the Mosaic Law, its commands and rituals. He had been able to say with a good conscience, “Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.” This was not an idle boast. It was a stunning statement especially coming from an obscure Galilean fisherman. And this placed him favorably in the sight of the Jewish believers who were questioning his actions with Cornelius. They could not accuse him of rebellion or irreverence. He was allowed to repeat the whole story in almost every detail. What could they say? They held their peace and glorified God. “Then God has granted the Gentiles repentance unto life.” By the grace of God and through the indwelling Holy Spirit they understood and bought in. They not only accepted it but glorified God. We echo, Glory to God!!! We’re included in God’s grace. The “whosoever” of John 3:16, Joel 2:32 and Acts 2:21 was not for Jews only. God so loved the world . . .

Yet even then many of the old guard Jewish believers, “they of the circumcision,” weren’t quite able to give up what national pride and religious privilege had so deeply ingrained in them from birth. Years later Peter himself had difficulty and temporarily compromised his integrity when certain of “the circumcision” came to Antioch from Jerusalem. Paul rebuked him face to face, Galatians 2:11-16. But despite human failing in maintaining it, the truth of “whosoever” was accepted and held and put into practice by ensuing generations of believers for centuries. Now we look back with the benefit of the all of scripture, completed and filled out by the Apostle Paul. We realize the inclusion of the Gentiles in the “whosoever” was the unfolding of a marvel planned by God from before the beginning and undreamed of by any believers previous to Paul — **the Assembly.**

Ephesians 3:1 *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, 2 If ye have heard of the*

dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

Yet Judaism was to be a continuing source of trouble for saints of God down through the centuries, and still is. The epistle to the Galatians had to be written to head off attempts by Jewish agents to infiltrate the assemblies and impose the Law upon those Gentile believers. The principles of Judaism, the practice of establishing law to govern behaviors of the saints and as a ticket to heaven was too soon established in the Assemblies. Sadly today this teaching characterizes the Catholic, Orthodox, many Protestant denominations. (And the Peter that prevented Cornelius from kneeling before him is now falsely revered as the first Pope of many who, unlike his example, happily receive men’s adulation.) We learn from Peter’s narrative of events to the skeptical Jewish believers in Jerusalem that the Lord had told Cornelius Peter would “tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.” While Cornelius, and presumably at least some of his household, was already a child of God he needed to trust in Jesus Christ as His personal Savior to be “saved.” To be saved from the wrath to come on Judgment day when the Lord returns to reign, and to receive remission of sins now. It was these that Peter had offered and warned of.

42 . . . that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

The ministry of Paul later filled out the truth of salvation. In Romans we learn not only of salvation from the coming wrath of God, Romans 3 - 5, but two other phases of salvation. Salvation from the power of sin in our present lives, Romans 6 - 8 and future salvation from the very presence of sin in our bodies and from the very world we now live in, Romans 8. Neither Cornelius and his household, nor any other believers at that point, knew this yet. As time went on the Lord in His wisdom gradually revealed this, and the rest of the blessings He procured for

us at the Cross. Peter, James and Jude were used to reveal some of it but the greatest and deepest truths were given us though Paul. Dig in! Sooner than later.

Marvelously the saints at Jerusalem accepted and even rejoiced in the bringing in of the Gentiles. Luke now returns our thoughts to what else was happening. The persecution generated at the time of Stephen scattered the believers across the territory surrounding the eastern Mediterranean. Though they were refugees they spread the gospel wherever they lighted. Preaching arose spontaneously all over, northern Africa, Cyprus, northern Palestine and along the northeastern Mediterranean. Before He ascended the Lord had commanded the disciples spread the word outward from Jerusalem worldwide to Jew and Gentile alike, Matthew 28:____, Acts 1:____. We don't read in Acts of the Apostles leaving Jerusalem to do so, but there are traditions of different ones preaching in various areas of the world, even as far as India and China. Some believe they neglected to obey the Lord's commission at first so the Lord used "common men" such as Phillip and Stephen and others to spread the word. Antioch is especially singled out as a place where the gospel was presented to the Gentiles by the Jews. But at first all of the preaching was to the Jews. It was in Antioch, a large port tucked in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, the Grecians heard the gospel and believed.

While many translations have "Hellenists" (Greek speaking Jews), those that have "Greeks" are most likely correct, for the conversion of many Hellenists wouldn't warrant the Jerusalem assembly sending a delegate seeking confirmation. Barnabas was sent and a bond of unity was forged between the first great Jewish assembly and the first great Gentile assembly of Christians. Realizing the need and opportunity, Barnabas went to Tarsus nearby to bring back Saul, the man he had first vouched for before the

apprehensive assembly in Jerusalem. They spent a year in Antioch building up the Gentile believers. Eventually the Spirit sent them from Antioch on their first missionary trip together, Acts 13 & 14. While the Jewish converts to Christ needed to unlearn much they had held dear in the Judaistic regime, the Gentile converts needed to be taught much truth from Old Testament scriptures largely unfamiliar to them.

Antioch became a large and spiritually blessed assembly comprised primarily of Grecian Gentile believers. It was these that were derisively called Christians by their local unbelieving Gentile neighbors. A name and distinction unsought, but surely a continuing testimony greatly annoying to any local Jewish contingent. This name also attracted the contempt of any pagans who despised this "new sect of the Jews." But it was not a new "sect of the Jews" but a whole new body including all believers of Jewish or Gentile descent. The believers in Antioch and Jerusalem were one in Christ. This was soon witnessed in the ready reception in Antioch of a prophet from Jerusalem and his message. This tested the unity of the assemblies. It expressed itself in the saints in Antioch whole heartedly, as each was able, contributing to a relief effort for the saints in Jerusalem. Later their unity experienced a more severe test, Acts 15, but held fast despite the continuing efforts and intent of the devil to divide.

They sent what they had collected to the elders (not apostles) at Jerusalem by Saul and Barnabas who took the occasion to visit there for a while before returning. Apparently they were there when Herod began to persecute the believers. A menacing time indeed, but also good preparation for them as they soon would be sent by the Spirit to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles in hostile circumstances.

By Ronald Canner, September 30, 2009