

WHAT HAPPENED AT CAESAREA?

What Do the Events at Cornelius' House

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Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen-- by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

(Acts 10:34-46 NIV)

What happened at Caesarea? This question provokes a very serious debate between Pentecostal/Charismatic and non-Pentecostals. Some read the story of Peter's visit to the home of Cornelius in Acts ten, and believe that the certain phenomena that took place there, are a universal pattern, which must be repeated by all Christians today. They assert that Cornelius' experience of Spirit-reception is a model or paradigm for all Christians. Since Cornelius' family spoke with other tongues, they advocate that the tongues-speaking of Acts 10 is a normative¹ pattern for the whole Church today. I

¹Normative: prescribing a pattern that is standard or universal; "relating to a standard or norm." (Oxford University Press). In the Pentecostal view, speaking with tongues would be normative, i.e., expected as normal for all Christians. Those who have not, would be considered abnormal.

agree that what happened at Caesarea is very important. Having a clear picture of what God did at Cornelius' home is necessary. Even more crucial is the question, "What does Caesarea mean to the Church?" That is, what does God intend to reveal to us through the story of Caesarea? I will try to answer this as we look at the topic: What happened at Caesarea?

The passage above, from the Book of Acts chapter ten, gives the account of Peter's historic ministry to the family of an Italian centurion. Because of the prominence of this story in Acts, it holds vital implications for the way Christians understand the believer's reception of the Spirit. Presently, this story is interpreted in a variety of ways. One of those ways is a Pentecostal view, i.e., Cornelius' experience of Spirit-reception is a basic pattern for all Christians in the future. Of what does this pattern consist? Among Pentecostals two different patterns are drawn from Cornelius. For the majority of Pentecostals,² Cornelius Spirit-reception is a model in two ways: 1) Spirit-baptism occurs subsequently to conversion, and 2) receiving the Spirit is demonstrated by the initial sign or evidence of speaking with tongues. A minority view,³ is that Cornelius is a paradigm of 1) initial Spirit-reception occurring as a part of conversion, and 2) speaking with tongues is the initiatory evidence of Spirit-reception. Thus, in this view, Spirit-reception or "Spirit-baptism" is essential to conversion and one is not truly converted unless one has spoken with tongues.

Cornelius' experience of the Spirit is considered by all Pentecostals to be normal, and even more challenging, *normative*. That is, it is to *be a model for all Christians at all times and places*. This is a crucial conviction in the Pentecostal interpretation. Is this Pentecostal interpretation sound? Does it provide a proper understanding of the story of Cornelius in Acts ten? Other questions we must ask include these: 1) Is the report of the Gospel coming to Cornelius intended by Luke to provide a *universal pattern to all Christians* of how to obtain the Spirit? 2) Does it tell us what we should *expect* from

²The Assemblies of God, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), the Foursquare Church, et. al.

³A number of Oneness Pentecostals, especially the United Pentecostal Church.

every Christian? 3) Because of what happened to Cornelius, should we *expect* that every believer should speak in other languages, a) at conversion? Or, b) as evidence of Spirit-reception subsequent to conversion? 4) How is this event *a precedent* for future generations of Christians? 5) Is Luke's purpose in recording this story to *teach* all Christians how to obtain "Spirit-baptism?" Obviously, how one answers these questions is crucial to how one views the Pentecostal interpretation.

What Happened?

Peter preached to Cornelius and those of his house about "the message God sent," which was "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ." The object of Peter's message was Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all; this means that He is *Lord of the Gentiles* as well as the Jews. This Jesus was "anointed" or chosen by God "with the Holy Spirit and power," and by this power he carried out the works of salvation. The heart of Peter's message was that Jesus had been murdered on a cross, but that God had miraculously raised him from the dead. After his resurrection, Jesus commanded Peter and the rest to testify, as the prophets had, that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." The essence of Peter's preaching is a message sent by God, the good news that Jesus, who was crucified, was resurrected by God and now forgives those who trust in him.

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on those who heard the message." His sermon was interrupted by prophecy - the praise of God for His wonderful works - offered by the whole household. What is the point of the Spirit's coming on them in the middle of Peter's speaking? It may be the author's way of indicating the moment that Peter's message of the Gospel was believed. Thus God gave them His Spirit as a result of and to testify of their faith in Christ. In other words, Peter's audience received the Spirit as a direct result of hearing and believing what Peter was saying. They received the Spirit upon believing the Gospel as Peter was preaching it:

Peter had said nothing of the gift of the Spirit (as he did in Acts 2:38), but had just begun to speak of belief and forgiveness. The natural implication is that Cornelius at that moment reached out in faith to God for forgiveness and received, as God's response, the Holy Spirit . . . ⁴

Notice, Peter did not restate the Acts 2:38 formula, nor did he urge them to *seek for* the Spirit. He preached to them Christ. Later, in recounting this dramatic development among the Gentiles, Peter tells the leaders at Jerusalem: “the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.” That is, the Spirit came immediately and unexpectedly, without their seeking and without their effort to invoke Him.

Peter does not say that the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius' household “just as he always does with everyone.” Had Peter said this we would have to suppose that in the earliest church the Holy Spirit was always, or at least normally, given with speaking in tongues. But that the only parallel Peter knows to draw to Caesarea is what had happened “at the beginning” reinforces the probability that after Pentecost the Pentecost manifestations were not only not normative but probably not known.⁵

Peter came to this conclusion in Acts 11: 17: “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” Peter and the others received the gift of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as a result of their faith in Jesus. Because the Gentiles of Cornelius' household had received the Spirit in the same manner as those on Pentecost, Peter determines it must be because they also believed on Jesus. This is certainly the apostolic pattern. Cornelius is a real life example of how one comes to salvation as described by Paul in Romans ten:

⁴James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 80.

⁵Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 194.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Romans 10: 14-17 NIV)

Pentecostal Reinterpretation

There is a certain predisposition among Pentecostals to amplify or expand the experience of Cornelius and imply that the same phenomena occurred in his household that many Pentecostals claim as part of their present experience of Spirit-baptism. This invites us to ask: First, how did the members of Cornelius family experience the coming of the Spirit? Second, do many of the Pentecostal claims find support or precedence in Cornelius' experience?

Particularly, I refer to the assertion that Cornelius' tongues speech is a model for all Christians. Luke tells, "For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." This is the only observable phenomenon in Acts ten that might lend support to the modern Pentecostal distinctives of Spirit-reception. This being so, we must ask: How much can we read into the Cornelius story? Should we treat post-biblical, subjective experiences of Christians, whether stated or implied, as crucial, or even pertinent to the message of Acts? Does Scripture tell us how they felt? Does Luke tell us that those who received the Spirit had something "warm" come over them? Does he indicate that a powerful bolt like lightning coursed through their bodies? Or, do we read that some had a vision of Christ or of God? Do we even know if they wept for joy? Nothing is written about whether they shook, jumped, "shouted," or "fell out" under the power of the Spirit? Yet, for many, these are vital elements to Spirit-reception, and they are taught as though we should expect them. Yet, none of these phenomena are recorded by Luke.

Whatever Cornelius' personal, emotional experience, it was never reported by Luke. Why? Because Luke, *as inspired by the Holy Spirit*, did not treat any of those experiences as important enough to record for future generations of Christians so that they might seek to recreate them. These experiences did not even come up on Luke's theological "radar" as important to transmit to the Church of his day. And if they were not significant enough to report to them, it certainly cannot be said that these things are *normative* for all Christians today. That would be an unbearable leap in assumptions. It is significant that most phenomena many Pentecostals claim as their Spirit-reception experience are never recorded, nor even hinted at, in Scripture. Why? Because too often, the authority for Christian piety is not Scripture but personal experience. This should give us great pause and cause for concern.

Experience Centered

One of the chief reasons extra-biblical experiences flourish among Pentecostals is the way they come to the Bible. Pentecostals have been routinely criticized by non-Pentecostals for placing experience over Scripture. Kurt Mitchell comments about Jack Deere's conversion to the charismatic experience, as it is related in the book *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*:

. . . his personal experiences punctuate each chapter. Indeed, there is almost a sense in which the book affirms that the power of the Spirit is real primarily because Deere experienced and saw it. He comes perilously close to using experience as a form of expanded translation of the biblical text.⁶

I do believe at the very heart of the Pentecostal hermeneutic (way of reading Scripture) is their personal experience.

⁶Kurt Mitchell, "Dispensing with Scofield," *Christianity Today*, 10, Jan. 1994, p. 57.

The charismatic renewal movement is unashamedly experiential in its nature. It is this “experience” of Spirit-Baptism that usually takes people by surprise.⁷

It is not simply enough to say that they treat their experience as an *equal authority* (and sometimes higher) to the Scripture. It is more complex than that. I mean that their very reading of the Bible⁸ is *controlled* by their experience. I would propose, on the basis of my lifelong observations as a Pentecostal, among a large variety of Pentecostal/Charismatics, that experience is central to their world view (as it once was for me). This means, prior to coming to Scripture, we were taught to trust (presuppose) our experience as the guiding rule for knowing all things.

Pentecostals have often been accused of exegeting their own experience and then looking to the Bible to support it. In part this may be true; but it is important to know *why* they have done so. On the one hand, their experience itself has been so empowering, so thoroughly life-changing, both in terms of personal obedience to god and readiness and empowerment for witness, that they instinctively know that it *must be of God – and therefore must be biblical*.⁹

This is not to say biblical authority is not important or held very high among Pentecostal/Charismatics. It would be unfair to relegate their views to pure speculation or subjectivism. The majority of Pentecostals believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. And throughout their history they have honestly sought to validate their beliefs and practices by the Bible.

⁷Henry I. Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of “Spirit-Baptism” in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1988), pp. 21-23.

⁸Cp. My paper “How We Read the Bible” <http://www.inchristalone.org/HowWeRead.htm>

⁹Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 107.

All the early Pentecostals carried with them to their experience the traditional Protestant view of Scripture, as inspired *of* the Spirit and made effective *by* the Spirit through Spirit-anointed preaching. Thus the Pentecostals felt a great urgency to verify their experience by the interpretation of Scripture. For them the Bible was still vital, they knew that the God of the Bible and the God of their experience has to be the *one God*. Hence they automatically expected to find the evidence for their experience in Scripture. Their understanding of Scripture, therefore, seemed both reasonable – and perfectly plain. In the course of articulating this experience biblically, however, they felt a special urgency to press for *all* the aspects of the experience – not only the experience itself, but also especially its necessity as a work of grace subsequent to salvation. But in so doing, they exposed their flanks to some exegetical and hermeneutical weaknesses; and they ended up trying to persuade others of the rightness of their experience on grounds different from the *own* experience of the Spirit.¹⁰

Whether Pentecostals seek to validate their experience by Scripture or not, the issue remains: Their experience appears to have priority over Scripture. Their experience has led them to Scripture rather than Scripture leading them to their experience:

... in general the Pentecostals' experience has preceded their hermeneutics. In a sense, the Pentecostal tends to exegete his or her experience. For example, the doctrine of Spirit-baptism as distinct from and subsequent to conversion did not flow naturally out of the Pentecostal's reading of Scripture. What happened was that they had themselves spent considerable time after their conversion sensing a lack of spiritual power. They saw the dynamic, life-transforming quality of the apostolic experience of Acts 2 and asked God for something similar. When they did have a dynamic experience in the Holy Spirit, they said with Peter, "This is that." That it happened after their conversion helped them to see this very pattern in Scripture: they saw the analogy with Jesus and

¹⁰Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 108.

the apostles, and the precedent in Samaria (Acts 8) and Paul (Acts 9). What followed was perfectly natural. They took the scriptural pattern they had found, supported by their own personal experience and that of thousands of others, and made it normative for all Christians.¹¹

But there is a deeper issue we must not miss. This issue is their *orientation* to the Bible. I believe they come to Scripture *through and to validate* their experience, rather than beginning with Scripture and *then* moving into their experience with Scripture as the primary interpreter of all things. They assume their experience is the norm and cull from Scripture that which gives credence to their experience. In many ways theirs is an experience seeking validation,¹² rather than a truth to be known *through* their experience.

Reading Scripture Through Experience

Reading one's personal experience into the text of Scripture is very easy, and unfortunately, too common among Christians. Although it is very routine among Pentecostals and Charismatics, they are certainly far from being alone in this fault. Does the content of the Bible act as the initial, terminal and highest authority in our faith and

¹¹Fee, p. 86.

¹²Some may argue at this point that the earliest Pentecostals began with Scripture and then sought to obtain the experiences they found in the Bible. While I do not question the sincerity of many original Pentecostal, and I do admire their devotion and character, I am prepared to demonstrate from their own writings, that nearly all the early Pentecostal were seeking to validate a prior experience, in most cases as passed down to them by pre-Pentecostal groups, rather than beginning with Scripture and then moving to their experiences. Fee and Menzies, in their dialogue on these issues, do not consider enough how the Holiness and Keswick experiences greatly influenced the way pre-Pentecostals looked in the Bible to find validation for the experiences that these groups passed down to them. The influence of the Irwin Fire Baptized Holiness group and their experience of tongues on Charles Parham is a perfect example. In this case, as in most every account I have read, the experience precedes the Scriptural investigation, although Scriptural support is usually sought.

practice? Or is it our *experience* which ultimately dictates what we believe?¹³ One must resolve this issue before one can hope to rightly ascertain the meaning of any passage of Scripture. Here is a critical concern: If experience holds the chief place in our epistemology (the way we know something), then we have adopted relativism. The result of this is that truth is never absolute and one merely drifts on a sea of subjectivism. The ironic end of this path is that nothing is universally, ultimately true.¹⁴ Many Christians in a spiritualist or mystical movement fail to realize this. If my experience and that of those around me is the rule or measure of what is true, then the best that we can have is an opinion. It is only statistical truth. And if we are placed in a population where others hold contradictory experiences, then they would have to be right because their experience is held by the majority. This “democratic” view of truth places experience above the propositions of Scripture. This is quite the opposite from the absolute truth presented to us in the Bible. Bible truth is not based merely on personal or corporate experience, but on God’s revealed will in historical reality. The truth of the Gospel is fact and not personal experience.

There is a distinction between personal experience and fact:

The basic problem is that experience is not the same as fact. Fact is actuality. It does not depend on interpretation. Experience must be interpreted. The interpretations can vary, depending upon the interpreter; therefore, an objective control is needed to establish the validity of the interpretation.¹⁵

¹³Cp. My paper on *Truth or Experience?*.

¹⁴Francis Schaeffer wrote that relativism in secular culture only has truth with a little “t,” that is many little truths without final truth. Whereas, Christians who hold to Scripture as the ultimately authority have “true” truth or Truth with a capital “T.”

¹⁵Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 1996), p. 23.

One's experience cannot be used to prove itself. It is dependent upon fact for its validity. Fact is not dependent upon experience for its authenticity. Our Christian experience is dependent upon the facts of Scripture for their validity.¹⁶ That is why the facts of the Gospel are essential to soundness of our personal Christian experience:

Thus an experience cannot validate itself; it cannot be self-validating. It must be interpreted, and the only way to interpret accurately is to have a standard other than experience. The only accurate standard for determining whether an experience is from God is the Scripture.¹⁷

Please listen carefully to what I am saying. I am not saying that experience is unimportant. Experience is an essential part of our Christian life. I am not saying that Cornelius never experienced a dramatic nor remarkable encounter with God's presence upon receiving the Spirit. He may well have had a wonderful emotional experience of some type. Nor am I decrying any personal experience today. In fact, I believe that a profound sense or awareness of God and a wholehearted, life-changing response is a very healthy part of our relationship with God. Nevertheless, *we cannot teach that the Bible requires all people to have the same kind of dramatic, supercharged or emotional reaction. Why? Because the Bible does not require it. Luke does not intend¹⁸* to give a set of phenomena as a model for all Christians to expect or imitate.

We must be very realistic here. If Scripture does not state something, we cannot insert it, or attempt to make a story imply something unintended. We may *suggest* some possibilities of what *might* have happened, say to embellish our sermons. But we must be *very careful* to tell our audience *which* is our speculation and *which* is the

¹⁶Read my article, "Truth and Experience," for further treatment of this subject.

¹⁷Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 1996), p. 24.

¹⁸A fundamental principle for trying to determine the meaning of a portion of Scripture is to ascertain what the author originally intended his audience to understand. Authorial intention is crucial to "reading" the Bible effectively.

factual teaching of the Bible. Many false doctrines have been encouraged by a preacher's unbridled "embellishments." When the Bible does not relate the detailed, individual, personal experiences of Christians, such as Cornelius, *it is for a very significant reason.* It is because *those things are not vital to the message of the story.* And if it is not important to the central message of Luke's account of Cornelius, then we, today, cannot place *expectations* upon Christians *which the writers of Scripture never intended.*

Unique Phenomena

We must acknowledge that the Bible *does say* they experienced a unique phenomenon. They spoke with other languages. However, we must be careful *not to say* that *everyone* who received the Spirit at Cornelius house spoke in other languages. This cannot be proven conclusively from the text itself. It is always safer not to assume. All Acts 10 states is that those with Peter "heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." It is not clear whether some were praising God and others were speaking with tongues, or, that they were praising God by speaking in tongues. Nor, is there anything in the grammar of the Greek text that indicates every single person present spoke with other tongues. Max Turner makes this very valid point:

The majority of Pentecostal interpreters have read Acts 10:46 and 19:6 to mean each individual *both* spoke in tongues *and* "extolled God"/ "prophesied," but in the first-century context these texts would as naturally be taken to mean that some experienced glossolalia while others experienced invasive praise or prophetic utterances. It would thus not be possible to demonstrate that Luke expected tongues in each and every case of Spirit-reception . . . ¹⁹

¹⁹Max Turner, "Tongues: An Experience for All in the Pauline Churches?," *AJPS* 1/2 (1998), p. 233.

It *does state* that speaking with other languages was a result of the Holy Spirit “coming on” them.²⁰ Speaking in other languages is the only description that Luke records as indicating how they knew the Holy Spirit had come upon the believers at Caesarea. If there were other phenomena, they were not mentioned. Granted, later behavioral indications that the Spirit indwelt them were expected. But we are talking about the initial proof or “sign”²¹ that the Spirit was upon them. Why did tongues-speech happen? A reasonable suggestion might be to compare this with what happened to the prophets when the Spirit of the Lord overcame them, causing them to prophesy. Tongues-speech has all the markings of prophetic utterance. We will look at this shortly when we take up Peter’s reference to Joel’s prophecy on the Day of Pentecost.

²⁰Acts 10:44 NIV = “The Holy Ghost **came** on all” **KJV** = “**fell** on all”; Greek is *epepesen* from *epiipto*; Louw-Nida Lex: **02624** επιπιπτω (aor επεπεσον pf επιπεπτωκα) (a) press against 19.43; (b) happen 13.122; (1) επιπιπτω επι τον τραχηλοω embrace **34.64 Occurs 13xs in NT**: Mar. 3: 10 in so much that they *pressed upon* him.; Lu. 1: 12 and fear fell *upon* him.; Lu. 15:20 and ran, and fell *on* his neck, ; Jn. 13:25 He then *lying on* Jesus' breast Acts 8:16 he *was fallen upon* none of them: ; Acts 10: 10 made ready, he fell *into* a trance, ; Acts 10:44 the Holy Ghost fell *on* all; Acts 11: 15 the Holy Ghost fell *on* them.; Acts 13:11 there fell *on* him a mist; Acts 19:17 and fear fell *on* them all; Acts 20:19 Paul went down, and fell *on* him, Acts 20:37 and fell *on* Paul's neck, ; Rom. 15:3 them that reproached thee fell *on* me. The combination of two basic Greek words *epi* + *pipto*, forms a expression probably first used very literally: “a hailstone on a man's head Hm 11:20” (BAG p. 297). It is used to refer to a crowd pressing on Jesus. It is also used to refer to an embrace: “fall upon someone's neck.” This expression is also used to explain figuratively a physical phenomenon. In one case, of Elymas, who was struck blind - a physical state - it was as if a mist had come upon him to take his sight. In this case the suddenness is connoted. It also is used to describe non-physical things, such as a trance, as falling on someone. Since a trance is not a physical thing, the use of the word is descriptive of the effect that a trance has - as if something had fallen upon the person. It completely incapacitated or overwhelmed the person. Also, it is seen in the fact of being overwhelmed or overcome with fear, a human emotion, or the Holy Spirit, that invisibly, intangibly passes from God to the recipient, but has the effect of overcoming them. The idea is something that is sudden, thoroughly impacting and overwhelmingly effecting - that takes over or control in some way.

²¹A number of Pentecostal scholars wish to move from the language of “initial evidence” to the use of the word initial “sign.” They feel that evidence sounds more scientific while sign is more biblical and comprehensive. Whether one uses the legal language of “evidence” or the religious language of “sign,” the question remains: What do tongues signify?

Cornelius and Pentecostal Doctrines

It is worth noting that many other things commonly taught by Pentecostals about Spirit-reception are lacking in this story. The other languages were not *expected*, *taught*, or *required*. Peter's audience was not urged to seek for the Spirit. Even more, they were not told anything about their **need of the Spirit**. They were simply told what Jesus Christ had done for them:

As elsewhere in Luke and Paul the order of salvation is commitment to the Lord Jesus resulting in God's gift of the Spirit.²²

Additionally, *everyone* received the Spirit -- "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." Everyone there received the Spirit. This is significant. Most Pentecostal churches do not teach, or usually expect, that every single person, lacking Spirit-baptism, will receive it in a given Pentecostal meeting. The basic reason for this is that they believe certain conditions must be met, and unless each and every person present is meeting these conditions, it is not possible for all of them to receive the Spirit together, at the same time and the same place. Yes, Pentecostals will allow that everyone *can*. However, that is much different from a universal expectation that everyone *present will* receive the Spirit. Further, they all received it *at the same time*. There may be claims by Pentecostals of services where everyone seeking the Spirit has appeared (we don't know the heart) to receive the Spirit at the same moment. But, that would be considered more uncommon and extraordinary among Pentecostal churches. It is not normally taught that everyone in a service will receive the Spirit at the *very same time*.²³ Yet, that is exactly what happened to Cornelius and his family. Their

²²Dunn, Op. Cit., p. 8 1.

²³There's good reason for that. It is not the usual pattern. (I am sure there are instances where such a thing is claimed. But, it is considered remarkable, even by Pentecostals, just because it is so exceptional.)

Spirit-reception was *corporate* and practically simultaneous. It was a group conversion, rather than a “subsequent Spirit-experience of an *individual*”²⁴

The gift of the Spirit, as always, was no further experience, it was *the* experience of salvation. And this salvation was without conditions and “without price” - it was simply given through the gospel (cf. Gal. 3:2).²⁵

It is lost upon many Pentecostals that the reaction to the tongues-speaking of Cornelius was a *shock* instead of an anticipated joy. Rather than looking for “tongues” to confirm the Gentile's “baptism of the Spirit,” they were *surprised* when it happened. Those with Peter were amazed when they saw them speak in other languages. Ironically, the significance of the “tongues” was just the opposite of what most Pentecostals teach. Why? They were not expected. The effect of tongues was not because the sign was *expected*, but because the sign of “tongues” was *unexpected*:

Tongues were a sign not because they were expected, required, or usual, but precisely because they were unexpected, unrequired, and unusual - resembled only by Pentecost - convincing even the most hard-necked that God wanted the Gentiles as well as the Jews among his people.²⁶

Was the amazement of those with Peter because Cornelius was a Gentile? I will admit this could be one of the reasons. However, if we look carefully at the record of Acts, from the time of the tongues-speaking in Acts 2, up to the time of Cornelius' conversion in Acts 10, *there is no report of anyone speaking in tongues* (let alone of tongues speech as a sign of Spirit-reception). While Pentecostals commonly teach that many (if not every) Christian spoke with tongues between the Day of Pentecost and Cornelius' conversion, the fact is, *there is no record of it*. There is no report of anyone

²⁴Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publisher, 1970), p. 191-2.

²⁵Bruner, p. 192 .

²⁶Bruner, p. 192 .

speaking in other languages as a sign of Spirit-baptism between Acts 2 and Acts 10. To assume that they did is an argument from silence. Silence cannot provide proof for the claim that tongues were a common phenomena in the earliest church. The silence cannot be used to prove tongues were regular or normative. I believe that part of the shock or astonishment of those with Peter is that they had not heard tongues-speech since the Day of Pentecost. And they took this second manifestation of tongues to be an astounding event. It was the *sign* of the Gentile Pentecost.

What Does “baptized with the Spirit” Mean?

There is another very significant fact that we should note concerning the phrase or idea of “the baptism of the Spirit.” It does not occur in the Bible. What does occur is the verbal form, “baptized with the Spirit.” This latter phrase is found only twice in Acts. The first occurrence is in Acts 1:5:

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5 NIV)

Jesus spoke these words on the eve of Pentecost. He linked the imminent coming of the Spirit in the upper room with the promise of John the Baptizer. John announced, “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1: 8 NIV) In the days just before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus paralleled Spirit-baptism to the water baptism of John. We may assume that Jesus wanted the disciples to make a meaningful connection between these two baptisms. What did John's baptism mean? To understand this we must be familiar with the nature of ritual cleansing under the Law. The ritual of baptism was understood by all Jewish people to represent *cleansing*. This was the fundamental idea behind water baptism. It was a rite of *washing* or *purification* for those who would attend the functions of worship; especially presenting and offering sacrifices at the Temple. It symbolized the desire to be free from the *defilement* of sin, as the Jewish believers dipped themselves in the *mikvah* bath.

Out of this concept grew the idea of baptism for *conversion*. The Gentile believer could only participate in the minimum of religious activities until he or she was baptized as a sign of their repentance or turning to God. All Gentile proselytes had to be immersed in water (baptized) to enter into the Jewish faith. An important connection between John's baptism and Jewish proselyte baptism is the aspect of *conversion*. *Water baptism was normally a means of conversion to the Jewish faith for Gentiles.* However, John preached to the *Jews* about water baptism. He was implying that the Jews were equally as *unclean* as the Gentiles. What a scandal. He was telling the nation of Israel that they needed to repent and jump in the giant *mikvah* bath of cleansing (the dirty Jordan). Of course, for the Jews this was the height of insults. That is why John was killed. His water baptism was a solemn call to repentance and cleansing, that the obedient might avoid the coming judgment of God. The water of John's baptism was a symbol of his call and God-ordained ministry to bring Israel to repentance.

There is another aspect to Jesus' linking John's water-baptism to his Spirit-baptism. When Jesus came to be baptized, John told him, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John realized that his own baptism was a preparatory, outward cleansing. In contrast, he discerned that Jesus's baptism was the fulfillment of the prophets -- the inward cleansing of the heart by the Spirit. It was Messiah alone who would fulfill the promise announced by Ezekiel that God would "give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you." (Ezk. 36:26 NIV) Jesus' Spirit-baptism superseded John's as the true cleansing which converted both Jew and Gentile to God. It did more than purify the body. It would be a spiritual fire to cleanse the heart:

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3:11 NIV)

God had given to John a sign by which to recognize the Spirit-welding Messiah:

I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' (John 1:33 NIV)

God's sign for John was the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus. This sign indicated that Jesus was the Messiah, who had the authority to baptize with the Spirit. This is why Jesus made the emphatic point to his disciples that, while John baptized with water, he would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. This remark by Jesus was brought to Peter's remembrance through the events at Cornelius' home. "Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 11: 16 NIV) The baptism with the Spirit was a cleansing of the Spirit to initiate or convert sinful Jews and Gentiles and make them holy or acceptable unto God. In this way, Jesus' ministry was epitomized as one of Spirit-baptizing.

Thus, when we see the phrase "baptized with the Holy Spirit" in only two places in the Bible; and when we realize one was referring to the conversion of the Jews at the Day of Pentecost, and the other is attributed to the converting of Gentiles at the home of Cornelius; then, we might be safe in assuming this is a unique phrase referring to God's uniting of both Jew and Gentile into one body and one new Kingdom. This phrase should not be used to speak of a normative, individual, experience which each and every Christian must repeat. There is no mention of this pattern being repeated in the rest of the Bible. It is not taught in the epistles, which are the authoritative texts of the Apostles. Rather, Spirit-baptism is a rare, significant and unrepeatable event, like the Cross or the Resurrection, which signifies a major transitional event in the history of the Church. Spirit-baptism as a reality occurred when both the Jews and the Gentiles were initially baptized -- initiated/converted through the cleansing of the Spirit - into the body of Christ.

What is the Meaning of “Tongues?”

Why were there other languages (tongues)? This is a widely debated and sensitive subject. But we must courageously address it if we are seekers of truth. A few good questions to ask may be, “Why did Jewish people, engaged in Jewish worship at the Jewish Temple, on the Jewish feast Day of Pentecost, suddenly begin to worship in many foreign or Gentile languages?”²⁷ “Why did they speak these languages to other Jewish people gathered for the feast?” “Why were they Gentile tongues rather than Hebrew or Aramaic?” Peter does not try to explain this in his sermon. His only elucidation is that the phenomenon of speaking in other languages was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Joel foretold that a day would come when the Spirit of God would be “poured out” (language of anointing) on “all people.” The expression “poured out” in Scripture can connote *instrumentality* rather than quantity or spatial dimensions. In other words, Luke's purpose in using this language probably was to express that God was *active or doing something* by His Spirit. It is not a reference to *how much* of the Spirit was given. There is a *key concept to the language of “pouring”* in the Old Testament. The person *chosen by God* was anointed. That is, the oil of anointing was *poured* all over the chosen. This *symbolized that God had chosen this person*, and that God's Spirit was resting upon them. Those anointed were set aside for God's special use. Thus, the *pouring of the Spirit* in Luke indicates God's act of choosing, and not merely the quantity of the Spirit received.

This same thought can be seen in the words of Peter earlier. He states that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” Peter appears to say that

²⁷Acts 2:7 Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues! “ (NIV) The hearers were Jews who lived in Gentile land and had learned the Gentile languages, but whose common language was Aramaic - a Jewish language. It should be noted that Greek was a common language that would have been known by many of these.

the “anointing” of Jesus with the Holy Spirit was a demonstration that he was God's choice. It meant Jesus was used by God and was not acting as a mere man. This is consistent with how all the prophets were endued with the Spirit - to show the people that God truly spoke through them and that they did not utter mere human ideas. The “pouring” or “anointing” with the Spirit is the reality which the custom of anointing with oil in the Old Testament only symbolized. Therefore, those who are imbued with the Spirit after Christ's ascension are those whom God has chosen, and chosen for His purposes. The pouring, anointing, sealing, falling on, coming upon, receiving, et. al., of the Spirit, indicate in biblical terms that God has *chosen someone*, saved them, received them and called them into His Church. Paul later explains this in theological terms to the Ephesians:

In him we were also chosen, . . . And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1: 11- 14 NIV)

When the Spirit was come, according to Joel, many would “prophesy.” Peter's citing of Joel indicates that he understood the tongues speaking to be the fulfillment of the promise of God, that those upon whom the Spirit would be poured would prophesy. The result of this prophesying would be to announce “the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.” This is the Day of the Lord's salvation promised to Israel. That this assumption is sound can be seen in the next verse, which states, “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The whole thrust of the phenomena of Pentecost was to mark the beginning of God's fulfillment of His promise of salvation. The prophesy of tongues announced the Day of the Lord's salvation. Its purpose was to lead all people to salvation through faith in Jesus. The Spirit opened the hearts of Jews and Gentiles so that they would believe in Jesus Christ. It caused them to prophesy, that is, give glory to God. It was a sign, marking those who were accepted by God into His church.

However, the full intent of the “other languages” was not realized until Acts 10. It was here that Peter was “converted” to accept all Gentiles into the Church. Peter said that God showed him that He, “accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” This provoked him to go and preach the Gospel to Gentiles, despite the tumult it would create in the Jewish Christian community. During his Gospel sermon, God confirmed Peter's words by accepting the Gentiles of Cornelius. He gave them the Spirit. How did Peter know that this was God's work. Because they were speaking in other languages, which he and others shared on the Day of Pentecost. The sign of tongues is a perfect means to tell Jewish Christians that God had accepted the Gentiles into the Church. Why? It was the sign for the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. God's Spirit moved in the hearts of Gentiles to prophesy and they did so in their Gentile languages. Why such a sign? One reason may be the universal significance of language. Anthropologists say that the fundamental division among people groups is not race, nationality or geography. It is language. God inspired Gentiles to announce His kingdom in their own "pagan" or vulgar tongues. This was a monumental sign that God was saving the Gentiles and joining them to the children of Abraham by faith.

Even more amazing, Peter and the other Jewish leaders came to realize that God used their tongues to prophesy in the same “vulgar” Gentile languages! God showed them ahead of time, through the tongue-speaking authored by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, that the Gentiles would be accepted into the Church. Thus, when Peter heard Cornelius' family speak in other languages, it suddenly dawned on him that God had prepared him for this. This is one possible reason why the Gentile languages were given to those Spirit-filled Jews on the Day of Pentecost.

What Does Caesarea Mean?

Acts 10 records the Gentile Pentecost. I propose that nothing could be more effective as a sign for convincing the Jewish Christians of God's approval of the Gentiles' salvation than prophecy, given by the Spirit, in their own pagan tongues. Before this, prophecy of God was in the Jewish language. It was blasphemy to think that God would

declare His glory and announce the inauguration of the Day of Lord in another language than Hebrew. But, the fact that it occurred in Gentile languages was profoundly significant. It indicated a much grander scope for the Kingdom of God than the Jewish Christian vision could imagine – except by this miraculous sign.

Later, Peter explained to the Christian council at Jerusalem that God orchestrated his mission to the Gentiles. Peter was receiving severe criticism because he, "went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." This was a serious charge among orthodox Jews. Peter had to defend his actions. He therefore shared with them the vision of the canopy filled with unclean animals. He told them that an angel had come to Cornelius, instructing him to send to Joppa for him. The angel said about Peter, "He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved." Notice that salvation would come through the *message* and not the *experience*. The men from Cornelius invited Peter to visit. Peter took six Jewish Christians with him. Notice how Peter describes the eventful moment: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. " (Acts 11: 15 NIV) Peter directly connected what had happened in Caesarea with what happened in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Trying to understand it, Peter pondered until he remembered the words of Christ: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Peter realized that the exact same thing had occurred among the Gentiles as had happened to the Jewish Christians on the Day of Pentecost -- just as Jesus had promised.

As a result of their reception of the Spirit, Peter commanded them to be baptized. Taken literally from the Greek syntax, verse 48 states: "and he commanded them in the name of Jesus Christ to be baptized." There are several extremely important truths here: 1.) Peter commanded that the family of Cornelius be baptized. Peter was speaking to the Jewish brothers who came up from Jerusalem when he said this. This can be seen by the fact that verse 47 has Peter asking them "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Peter is definitely speaking to the Jewish leaders who came with him. Then, without change of voice, he gives a command for the new believers to be baptized.

2.) The verb “to be baptized”²⁸ is passive. That means the action happens to the subject of the verb rather than the subject actively doing something. Someone had to baptize them. They could not baptize themselves. This means that someone else had to act upon those needing baptism. That is why some translate that Peter “ordered that they be baptized.” Who should baptize them? The only ones who could officially baptize them were those Jewish leaders who came with Peter. In other words, Peter commands that the household of Cornelius be baptized, not because it was essential for their salvation, but to drive home to the Jewish Christians that God had accepted the Gentiles.

3.) The command to baptize these Gentiles was given “in the name of Jesus Christ.” I once believed this was an ironclad formula which must be invoked in order for sins to be remitted. I now realized that something else was behind this command. Rather than an exact formula for making baptism salvific, it is Peter acting under the imprimatur or very authority of Christ to secure these new believers' baptism and thus reception into the Church. Peter commanded the Jewish Christians, by the authority of no less than Jesus himself, to perform the baptism of these new Christians, thereby acknowledging that God truly accepted Gentiles into the Church. Nothing could be a more powerful statement of the unity of the Kingdom than Jews baptizing Gentiles.

When Peter concluded that the Spirit had come on the Gentiles, because they believed in Christ, the council agreed with him and vouched: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” (Acts 11: 18 NIV) Though this act brought a degree of unity in the Church, there remained a significant degree of strife between Jewish and Gentile Christians. A later controversy emerged over whether Gentile Christians should keep the Law (Acts 15). Peter spoke to the council again, building his argument on the accepted facts of his first encounter with the Gentiles in Caesarea. He reminded them:

²⁸βαπτισθῆναι = aorist, infinitive, active

“Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”
(Acts 15:7-11 NIV)

At this time, Peter distinctly articulates what had become increasingly clear to him and others in the Church. They were given the Spirit *to show that God had accepted them*:

By giving Cornelius the Spirit, God himself accepted Cornelius, and, by thus removing the decisive distinction between the pious God-fearer and the Christian Jews, showed that they too must accept him as one of themselves.²⁹

This is the reason the Spirit was given to the Apostles on Pentecost with the sign of languages. Peter was expressing, “He showed that both we and they were to become believers in the same way.”³⁰ God demonstrated His acceptance of the Gentiles when he “purified their hearts by faith.”³¹ God cleansed their hearts - forgave their sins because they believed in Jesus Christ. They were not forgiven so they could receive the Spirit; they were given the Spirit because they were already forgiven. The Spirit, like the waters of John's baptism, symbolized cleansing, and they were thus made acceptable to God.

²⁹Dunn, p. 81.

³⁰*A Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, Newman, Barclay M. and Nida, Eugene A., (New York: United Bible Society, 1972), p. 292.

³¹Cp. *Hearts Purified By Faith*: <http://www.inchistalone.org/PurifiedByFaith.htm>

I believe that Luke's intent in placing this story in the Book of Acts was more than to establish a pattern of conversion for future Christian. It means much more than an illustration of how to be Spirit-baptized. Neither of these things was central in Luke's mind or intent. *Luke's purpose was to show that God had joined the Gentiles with the Jews to form His one Church:*

An event such as the conversion of Cornelius serves this broader interest not simply . . . to illustrate Christian conversion in general or the baptism in the Holy Spirit in particular (so Pentecostals). Rather, Cornelius serves for Luke as the first-fruits of the Gentile mission, and he is important to Luke's purpose because his conversion is by direct intervention of the Holy Spirit through one of the Jerusalem apostles (Acts 15: & cf. 10: 19, 44; 11: 12; 15). Through these combined circumstances the eyes of the church were opened to the fact that "even to the Gentiles God has granted repentance unto life."³²

What Does Caesarea Mean to Us?

There is another significant difference between modern Pentecostal Spirit-baptism and what happened at Caesarea. The majority of Pentecostals teach that Spirit-baptism occurs subsequently to conversion, as a second experience, to empower the believer (already saved, converted) for ministry and to live a more victorious life. However, in Acts 10 the Spirit came upon them at the very instant of their conversion. Acts 11: 14-18, concentrates exclusively on God's acceptance of Cornelius; Cornelius was saved, was baptized in the Spirit, was given the Spirit, and was granted repentance unto life. All are synonymous ways of saying: Cornelius became a Christian.³³

³²Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 199 1), p. 91.

³³Dunn, Op. Cit., p. 81.

Filled with the Spirit

There is no hint of subsequence in this account. I believe that the moment Cornelius' household believed the Gospel was the moment when they were “baptized” with Spirit. Yet, I see no subsequent work of the Spirit indicated. The phenomenological language - “fell on” - is only another way of describing the same instance of the coming of the Spirit to indwell them at the moment of faith. The issue of subsequent takes us into a separate topic of the “filling” of the Spirit. It is said by most Pentecostals that one is indwelt by the Spirit at conversion but one is subsequently “baptized” and filled without the Spirit. I would agree that a true Christian, indwelt by the Spirit, can experience subsequent “fillings” of the Spirit.³⁴ But we must be careful how we understand the filling of the Spirit.

I would follow this with the question: “Does God have separate, unique packets of the Spirit, which he doles out on important occasions in the Christians life?” “Does he take off his shelf one packet of the Spirit for when we are first indwelt, calling it the “baptism”? Then later does he say, ‘Well, he sure needs a lot more “Spirit” than I gave him at first. I better send a larger dose,’ and then sends that labeled “anointing” or “filling”? For many the teaching of distinct, subsequent giving/s of the Spirit tends to create: 1) undue, unbiblical attention given to the work of the Spirit, rather than to Christ; 2) a fracturing of the Spirit; and eventually, 3) a fracturing of the very Gospel.

All the Spirit Comes Through Christ Alone

I would submit that when we trust in Christ, God counts us as “in Christ.” Because we are in Christ, God sends Christ to dwell in us. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17 KJV). The Bible states that God gave Christ the “power” to give the Spirit. (Acts 2:33) The Spirit is mediated through Christ alone (John 15:26; 14:16,26). One cannot have the Spirit without Christ “Now if any man have not

³⁴Read my paper, “The Filling of the Spirit,” for a further examination of this important subject.

the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Romans 8:9 KJV). Since we are indwelt by Christ, we are indwelt by the one who gives the Spirit. In essence, when we are indwelt by Christ, we are indwelt by the Spirit. (John 14:18) Jesus said,

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:38,39 NIV)

The Spirit comes from Christ who dwells within us. It is not given to us directly from God, separate from Christ himself. *God does not need to give us more “Spirit” or additional and extra doses exclusive or separate from our faith in Christ.* The Spirit comes and works as we look to Christ. When we believe³⁵ in Christ, the streams or river of the Spirit will flow through our lives. Why? Because Jesus, the giver of the Spirit, lives in us. We do not personally possess the Spirit, nor control it, any more than we possess or control Christ. It is Christ in us who does this work. Through faith in him, the flow is constant. It is more than we can handle or control. It is far more than we can imagine at times (Ephesians 3:20) Sometimes it is a very conscious, dramatic work, and other times it is a quiet, even imperceptible process (like the “seed” of the kingdom in Mark 4:27,28). Nevertheless, all are just as real and significant. All come from the same Christ, who indwells our hearts by faith and makes us one body by His Spirit.

Conclusion

There is nothing in the text of Acts (or elsewhere) that states explicitly that all Christians should seek and expect the exact same Spirit-reception as experienced in Acts 10. Neither does Acts 10 explicitly state that this Spirit-reception must be accompanied by the universal sign or evidence of tongues speaking. These ideas are read into the words of the Bible and the stories of Acts by those looking to validate their personal experiences, all the while overlooking the real significance of the Acts message.

³⁵In the Greek, present, active verb - “continues to believe.”

If the events of Cornelius' house are to be taken as the universal pattern for all Christians, why is there not one statement to support that found in the epistles? I believe the biblical test of the Pentecostal interpretation of Acts 10 is the teaching of the epistles. Something as important as the universal pattern for Spirit-reception could not have been ignored so thoroughly by the Apostles in the epistles. Yet, in all of the comments about the work and manifestation of the Spirit in the Christian life, nothing is said to require all Christians to use Caesarea (or the other instances in Acts) as a pattern of Spirit-reception.

In the past, Pentecostals have struggled to refute the Evangelical argument that Acts, as historical narrative is not intended to be didactic (teaching) as the epistles. Pentecostals scholars in recent years have claimed that Acts is didactic (authoritative for teaching) in its own way and can stand along with the epistles in establishing normative and universal requirements for all Christians. I do not believe these scholars have proven their case. Historical writing is distinct in form from didactic writing. The authorial intent is clear in didactic writing, where understanding the author's intent in Acts requires a different approach. For example, when Paul says, "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband," it is clear what is required. Paul gives a propositional statement which is a direct command. But, when we read in Acts that, ministers were chosen by lots (Acts 1:23-26), or all believers shared their property in common (Acts 2:44), or some died in Church when they did not pay all their offerings (Acts 5), the direct application to the believers life it is not so easy to determine. An interpretation has to be made. That interpretation must look to the author's intent. If a reasonable determination can be made that the author did not intend that all Christians can heal people with their shadow (Acts 5:15), or that every time they are bitten with a snake they will be healed (Acts 28:5), then we should not treat those historical accounts, as well as others, as normative or universal for all Christians. This is the way we must approach Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19. What is the author's intent? We must discern what message the writer is attempting to convey through his historical account.

What happened at Caesarea? Caesarea was for the Gentiles what the Day of Pentecost was for the Jews. Luke records the events at Caesarea to provide an account of God's joining of Jews and Gentiles into one people through faith in the Gospel. Luke's history preserves the monumental coming together of two radically disparate groups into one fellowship and faith. The means of this union was the work of the Spirit inspiring faith in the preaching of Christ.

Is Caesarea a pattern or model for the Church? This would depend on one's view of the meaning of Caesarea. If one is looking at Caesarea as a model of the preaching of Christ or the response of faith to this preaching, the answer would be "Yes." If one is looking at Caesarea as a pattern for God's work in uniting all believers by His Spirit, the answer would be "Yes" again. But if one is looking for a universal pattern for how one receives Spirit-baptism, the answer is "No." The normative features of this story are not Spirit-baptism and speaking with tongues. The normative elements for the Church are the declaration of the Gospel of Christ, faith in Christ as the effective response to the message of Christ, the Holy Spirit's work of joining of all people into one Body through the Gospel of Christ.

This story is not setting forth a pattern for all Christians to follow or believe in order to obtain Spirit-baptism. It is telling Christians how God initially, in the first days of the Church, brought together Jews and Gentiles through the work of the Word and Spirit. Rather than teach that Spirit-baptism is an experience that all Christians must pursue and obtain, Acts tells us that all who believe in Jesus Christ are joined to the Body of Christ by and with the Holy Spirit.

Speaking with tongues, like Spirit-baptism, occurs in Acts as epochal phenomena. That is, we find them only rarely and at times when tremendously significant and unrepeatable events occur. Tongues speech in Acts is not signifying the routine or expected experience of the Spirit-baptized. Rather, tongues occur rarely and unexpectedly, as to mark or point out a history making moment for future generations.

The message of Peter was Christ-centered and not Spirit-centered (though one cannot have Christ without the Spirit). Peter preached that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection obtained forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Him. The Spirit came after this good news was preached, heard and believed. The Spirit came upon those who, hearing the Gospel, believed in Christ. The Spirit baptized them or included them into the Body of Christ as a result of their faith in Jesus. The coming of the Spirit signified that they had truly placed their faith in Christ. The particular way the Spirit came or the sign manifested in Acts 10 was for this one unique historical moment, and not a model for all future times the Spirit would come into believers' lives.