

Why the Delay in the Coming of the Spirit upon Cornelius?

Acts 10:44-48

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When God delays certain blessings in the lives of His people, there is always a divine purpose and plan that God has in view. **When God delayed** the miraculous deliverance of Israel from many years of severe Egyptian bondage through Moses, God had a plan in that delay. **When God delayed** the exaltation of David as king, while David was chased and hunted like a wild animal by his father-in-law, King Saul, God had a plan in that delay. **When God delayed** the healing of the man born blind (John 9) through the power of the Lord Jesus until that man had reached his adult years, God had a plan in that delay. **When the many blessings promised in the Old Covenant of a coming Savior were delayed** until the coming of Jesus in the New Covenant (hundreds of years after these promises were made), God had a plan in that delay.

God's delays do not mean He has forgotten you or does not love you, His dear adopted children. God has a most wise and good plan for your life even in the delays, just as He did with every other delay we find in Scripture. It is so often the case that it is by means of persevering through the delays of life that we learn trust, patience, perseverance, and hope in what God has prepared for us in the future. This whole life of pain, heartache, and battling the world, the flesh, and the devil is in fact a delay that will be worth it all in the life of the Christian as he/she looks to the glories of heaven where all pain and sorrow, all conflicts and battles, all temptation and sin will vanish and be no more in the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's delays are always worth the wait—for the delays pale in comparison to the blessings He has prepared for those who trust alone in Jesus alone and who love Him in life and even unto death.

There were delays even in the administration of God's salvation to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. As we focus our attention upon God's delays and the salvation of the Gentiles, let us consider the following main points from our text: (1) The Gentiles and Spiritual Baptism (Acts 10:44-46); (2) The Gentiles and Water Baptism (Acts 10:47-48a); (3) The Gentiles and Brotherly Fellowship (Acts 10:48b).

I. The Gentiles and Spiritual Baptism (Acts 10:44-46).

A. As we consider the opening of the door of salvation and membership in the Church of Jesus Christ to Gentile believers, there was likewise a delay.

1. For we see that the ascended Lord Jesus first sent forth from His exalted throne in heaven the New Covenant promise of the Holy Spirit upon Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and then upon Samaritans in Samaria (Acts 8), and finally upon Gentiles in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10). There was a delay to the Gentiles because there was a divine order established by God (Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, Acts 1:8). The Lord had not passed over the Gentiles in His holy purposes. The delay was simply God working out His own eternal plan in redemptive history.

2. There was also one other delay that needs to be highlighted as well.

a. The Jewish apostles and followers of Jesus (except Judas) were believers during the time of Christ's earthly ministry, but the New Covenant blessing of spiritual baptism was delayed until Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and seated at the right hand of God. Why this delay (John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-3,32-36)?

b. Likewise, the Samaritans believed and were baptized through the ministry of Philip (Acts 8:12), but the New Covenant blessing of spiritual baptism was delayed to these baptized believers until the apostles, Peter and John, had arrived in order to demonstrate that Samaritans had received the same

salvation as the Jews and were also part of the same Visible Church of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:17).

c. And now Cornelius (a Gentile) had believed the gospel of Jesus Christ prior to the coming of Peter (as demonstrated by the fact that his prayers and care of the poor were received as an acceptable offering before the throne of God, Acts 10:4—and as we have seen, Cornelius knew the truths concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Acts 10:37), but the New Covenant blessing of spiritual baptism was delayed until the Apostle Peter was sent by God to preach and to bear witness that the New Covenant blessing of spiritual baptism had been given to the Gentiles as evidence that the Gentiles were likewise included in the Visible Church of Jesus Christ. With the Jews (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), and the Gentiles (Acts 10), there were delays between faith in Christ and the completion of that same salvation in receiving the New Covenant blessing of spiritual baptism.

3. God's delay between faith in Christ and spiritual baptism in these unique and extraordinary cases was not intended to convey an ordinary and permanent pattern of first, salvation, and then second after some delay, spiritual baptism, as a second work of grace.

a. For we do not read that the 3,000 (Acts 2) or subsequent multitudes of Jews who trusted in Christ followed the same pattern as the Jewish apostles (faith, delay, spiritual baptism). Nor do we read of subsequent Samaritan or Gentile believers following the same pattern (faith, delay, spiritual baptism). Salvation was a package.

b. To the contrary, Paul teaches that the Spirit comes by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:14), and that all who trust in Jesus Christ are baptized with the Holy Spirit into the spiritual body of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

c. Spirit baptism comes only once as a part of the package of our salvation—it is unrepeatable (1 Corinthians 12:13). Whereas Spirit filling (i.e. being controlled and energized by the Holy Spirit) is to be ongoing work of the Spirit in the life of a Christian (Ephesians 5:18—both verbs being in the present imperative tense).

d. These miraculous blessings that the Lord Jesus poured out upon Jews (Acts 2), upon Samaritans (Acts 8), and upon Gentiles (Acts 10) were not intended to be repeated after some delay every time one comes in faith to Jesus Christ. The delays in receiving spiritual baptism served the purpose and plan of God on those specific occasions that the Church might be assured that Jesus is seated upon the throne of David in heaven and is pouring forth the royal gift of spiritual baptism, and that the Church might be assured that it is His will that His Church not be divided by ethnicity, by gender, by social status, by wealth, or by education. For all have received the same spiritual baptism making all who trust in Jesus Christ one spiritual body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

B. Note three important truths found here in Acts 10:44-46.

1. The Holy Spirit fell upon ALL these Gentiles in Acts 10:44 (none were excluded just as 1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches). After these three occasions, there were not some believing Jews, Samaritans, or Gentiles that had this spiritual baptism and others that did not have it.

2. None of these Gentile believers had to pray for this spiritual baptism or had to be taught or led to speak in tongues (as happens in so many Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches). No, spiritual baptism came by faith in Jesus Christ even as Peter was preaching. Peter did not have to coach them on how to receive the Holy Spirit. Spiritual baptism was a part of New Covenant salvation. The only reason spiritual baptism was delayed was so that Peter (and the six other Jewish witnesses) might be present to confirm that the same salvation had come to the Gentiles and that believing Gentiles were baptized with the same Holy Spirit into the spiritual body of Christ (Acts 10:45). There is no division within the Church of Jesus Christ between the "haves" and the "have nots". We are all "haves"! As a Christian you have as much of the Holy Spirit as any other Christian—the question is not how much of the Holy Spirit you have, but how much of your life is being controlled by the Holy Spirit?

3. The Gentile believers received the same gift to speak in tongues that the Jewish apostles and followers of Jesus Christ received on the Day of Pentecost back in Acts 2 (Acts 10:46). This was an outward confirmation from Jesus Christ to Peter and the six Jewish witnesses that Gentile believers were members (equal in status) with Jewish believers.

a. This was the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language which one had never learned (Acts 2:8-11). Note here in Acts 10:46 that Peter and the six Jewish witnesses understood what was said: they magnified God.

b. This was not a gift for the secret edification of believers at home where no one could hear them. This was a gift intended for the public edification of the whole church (Acts 2; Acts 10; 1 Corinthians 12-14—the analogy of the different members of the body).

c. This was a gift that was to be interpreted into the language of the people gathered for worship or to be silent if no one was present to interpret the message in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

d. This was a gift intended to show to the believing Jews God's plan to save the Gentiles who spoke these various languages and to warn the unbelieving Jews that God's judgment was soon to fall upon them (Acts 2:8-11; 1 Corinthians 14:22).

e. This was a gift sovereignly distributed by the Holy Spirit to some and not to all (1 Corinthians 12:11,28-30). There is no indication that individual believers were encouraged by the apostles to seek out this gift as a special gift. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12-14 is written by Paul to correct the spiritual pride that exalted that gift over the others.

f. This is the biblical criteria by which to judge those who claim to speak in tongues today (as I myself once claimed to do).

C. Dear ones, delays in God's economy and providence are ordained for your good, as much as was the delay in the life of Cornelius in receiving spiritual baptism into the body of Jesus Christ. God's delays in your life will only become your disappointments when you take the eye of faith off of these delays as God's appointments. Cornelius waited upon the Lord until it was God's time to receive the New Covenant blessing of spiritual baptism, and so must you. Waiting upon the Lord is hard when you are looking for an answer to prayer right now. But waiting upon the Lord evidences your trust in and love for Jesus Christ. Waiting is not inactivity; it is seeking his help and his direction in your life (Isaiah 40:31).

1. What about the delays in your life (a job, a house, the salvation of a loved one, the blessing of peace in your marriage, the reformation of church and state)? God has a plan in each and every delay. He is never a second late or a second early. He is always on time.

2. Will you trust Him and love Him when He delays, or will you grow impatient, upset, discouraged, and hopeless when He delays? Delays are means that God uses to stretch your faith in His faithfulness—to rest in His peace that passes all understanding—to look in hope to the glories of heaven.

II. The Gentiles and Water Baptism (Acts 10:47-48a).

A. Having witnessed these Gentiles speaking in tongues as confirmation from the Lord Jesus that Gentiles now had received the fullness of New Covenant salvation (complete with spiritual baptism into the spiritual body of Christ), Peter asks, "Can anyone forbid water baptism to these that have received spiritual baptism as did we ourselves?" The expected answer is "No!" (because of the negative *me* used in the question rather the *ou*). "If believing Gentiles have received spiritual baptism, then certainly they are entitled to the outward sign of water baptism."

1. For outward water baptism signifies and seals the promise of inward spiritual baptism (Mark 1:8). That is not to say that all who receive water baptism have necessarily received spirit baptism

(Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:13 was a hypocrite). Dear ones, listen closely. You who have been baptized make a mockery of your baptism if you live in unrepentant sins of the flesh and befriend this world refusing to war against its hold on your life, affections, and family. Your baptism points you to the grace of God to all of the spiritual blessings promised to you in the Covenant of Grace. Your baptism points you to the death of Christ and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of your death to sin and new resurrection life in Christ. Baptism is not an empty sign. It calls you every day to improve your baptism by accounting yourself dead to sin and alive to Jesus Christ in putting off the old man and putting on the new man—applying by faith what is legally true of you in the courts of heaven.

2. Before leaving the subject of water baptism, note that this passage makes clear that water baptism does not make regeneration and spiritual baptism effectual (as is taught in the baptismal regeneration of the Church of Rome, or the Church of Christ); for Cornelius first received spiritual baptism, and then received water baptism. If even an infant can be regenerated and filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb (as was true of John the Baptist in Luke 1:15), then it must be clear that regeneration and spiritual baptism do not become effectual due to water baptism. Likewise, it is clear as previously noted that Simon the sorcerer was baptized and yet his baptism did not regenerate him (he outwardly professed faith in Christ, but was a hypocrite merely playing a role for the sake of outward fame and gain to himself). Dear ones, when our baptism is contradicted by a phony profession or by an outright wicked life, our baptism becomes a means to our greater condemnation, for we deny what our baptism declares.

III. The Gentiles and Brotherly Fellowship (Acts 10:48b).

A. What evidence do we have that the Apostle Peter and the six Jewish brethren who accompanied him as witnesses now understood that Jesus Christ had torn down the wall contained in ordinances (like the dietary laws) that separated believing Gentiles from believing Jews?

1. Cornelius and the believing Gentiles urged Peter and the other Jewish believers to stay with them, lodge with them, and eat with them (all visible expressions of brotherly fellowship with one another). The peace and reconciliation purchased by Christ on the cross is now fully realized as Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles sit around the same table no doubt spread with those very unclean animals that were lowered in the sheet before Peter (which the Lord had cleansed) and together they now rejoice in their common salvation and common inclusion in the one Church of Jesus Christ.

2. Dear ones, if fellowship with one another is signified by eating the same food at the same table, then how much greater is signified by eating the same bread and drinking from the same cup at the same Lord's Table together? Fellowship is communion—it is holding Christ and His purchased blessings of salvation in common with one another. Fellowship in spending time together, knowing we are bound together by covenant, is one of the greatest expressions of love (true in marriage as well). One of the greatest gifts purchased by Christ is fellowship with God (communion with God is the end of your salvation). When peace is restored, fellowship and communion follow in your relationship with the Lord and with one another. Whereas the sacrament of **Baptism** emphasizes the promised blessing of union with Christ (it is a single act of passive participation), the sacrament of **the Lord's Supper** emphasizes the promised blessing of fellowship with Christ (it is a repeated act of active participation). Dear ones, may our hearts rejoice to be united to Christ by faith, but may our hearts also rejoice and may they burn to live in communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ every day—He is bound to you by an everlasting covenant of grace and love and has chosen to spend time with you now and for all eternity. You may be rejected by man, but God receives you and communes with you.