

Caesarea: Barrier-Leaping Spirit

Thomas Robinson, Cities of Hope 2, May 29, 2016

Acts 10:34-48

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth, I'm beginning to grasp that **God shows no partiality among persons,** ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who holds him in awe and does what is right is acceptable to him.

³⁶ **God sent that message** to the children of Israel, announcing **good news of peace** through Jesus Messiah, since he is **Lord of all people.** ³⁷ You yourselves know the message that passed throughout all Judea, after he started from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed [Lk 3:3]: ³⁸ About **Jesus of Nazareth,** how **God anointed him** (as Messiah) with the **Holy Spirit** and with **power** [Lk 4:14], who went about **doing good** and healing all who are under the Accuser's enslaving rule, because **God was with him.**

³⁹ And we are **witnesses** of **all that he did** both in the countryside of the Judeans and in Jerusalem, whom also they killed by *hanging him on a tree* [Dt 21 22], ⁴⁰ but **God raised him** on the third day and granted for him to be **manifest,** ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to **witnesses** who had been selected beforehand by God, **to us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.** ⁴² And he **commanded us to proclaim** to the people and **testify** that he is the one appointed by God as judge of living and dead.

⁴³ To him all **the prophets** bear witness that everyone who **believes in him** receives **forgiveness of sins through his name."**

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, **the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.** ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were **amazed,** that **even on the nations/Gentiles,** the **gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out.** ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the **water** so as not to **baptize these people,** who **received the Holy Spirit** just as we did?" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them in the **name of Jesus Messiah** to be **plunged in water/baptized.** Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 8:40

⁴⁰ Philip found himself at Azotus, and ... he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

1 Peter 1:17-19

¹⁷ And if you invoke as Father the one who judges without partiality according to each person's actions, then shape your way of life with awe throughout the time of your sojourn, ¹⁸ since you know ... that you were redeemed from the futile way of life of your ancestors, ¹⁹ ... with the precious blood of the Messiah.

1 Samuel 10:1

¹ Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on David's head and kissed him and said, "Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?"

Luke 4:14, 18-19

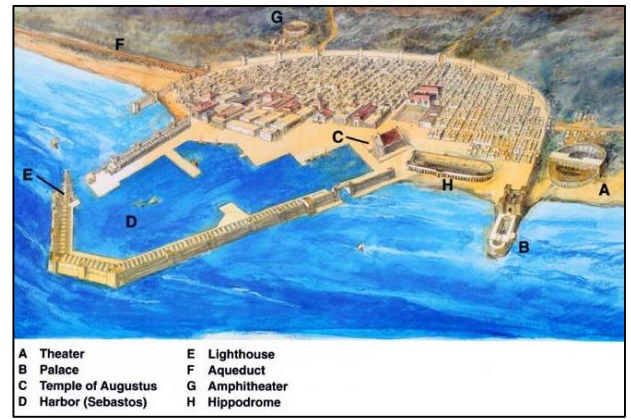
¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.... [Teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth he read from Isaiah 61:1; 58:6] ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release/forgiveness to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to give release/forgiveness those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Caesarea: New City, Roman Center

Caesarea, built by Herod the Great, gift of Augustus. 10 bc. Harbor. Excavations. Many Caesareas. Mixed pagan and Jewish. Herod's Temple to Augustus. Like other Greek cities. Center of Roman government. Pilate inscription.

Philip came there after Jerusalem (6:1-7), Samaria (8:5-25), & the Ethiopian (8:26-40). He was a leader of Greek-speaking believers who began the process of realizing the promise of Pentecost, reaching out to the world. The Spirit pushed him to new encounters. Now that same Spirit pushes Peter. Luke shows Peter had no intention of going to non-Jews, but visions to Cornelius and Peter (10:1-23) show God's determination to leap that barrier.

In Caesarea: Agrippa I was acclaimed as god and died. Paul visited Philip, was later imprisoned, and appealed to Caesar. In 66, the Jewish war with Rome broke out. Vespasian was acclaimed Caesar.



Cornelius and Peter – Both Learn the Gospel

Cornelius is a captain (centurion) in the Roman army (Italian cohort). His name has ancient Roman roots. He's a pagan already strongly drawn to the God of Israel (one God, morality), known as a "God-fearer." He also embodies the oppressing Roman empire, the enemy. He shows the complexity of human stories and inadequacy of dividing lines among people.

Peter is leader of the disciples, taught directly by Jesus. He's a Galilean Jewish fisherman, with assumptions about the world. He was ready to fight the Romans when they arrested Jesus. He was learning, changing: Learned from visions but cautiously took Jewish believers along. He comes to Cornelius' house with trepidation: A boundary crossing is dangerous.

Peter's speech (in Luke's summary) is not smooth and eloquent, but halting, ungrammatical, like someone very nervous. He has something powerful to say but is just taking hold of it.

There is no way to overestimate the revolutionary importance of Peter's statement that "God shows no partiality among people." It is fundamental theologically – One God of all. It's an old idea: God looks at the heart not the face. But it had never come to any realization even among Jews. The Roman empire was founded on the opposite idea: a stratified society of rich/poor, powerful/powerless, slave/free, men/women, various ethnic groups all keeping in their place. That was law and custom. Our society echoes that long tension. Could a community exist within that empire that embodied a fundamentally different vision?

Peter starts from God's/Jesus' proclamation of peace. He was anointed as Messiah by God's Spirit and power shown in service, concretely healing brokenness. He brought release/forgiveness to those under the Accuser's slavery. Rulers responded by crucifying him, but God overturned that verdict, creating new life in resurrection and establishing him as judge.

The Spirit's Great Surprise

As Peter turns to his exposition of scripture, the Spirit freely decides to intervene. He "falls" on the listeners. He is a gift "poured out" on even Gentiles. They "receive" the gift as the apostles had. Peter is learning about God even as Cornelius is. This is the God of the promise to Abraham, the one God of all nations, all creation. Nothing will ever be the same.

But people are very resistant. People could cite scriptural law against including Gentiles. It's hard to cross cultural, class, economic lines. A lot of work had yet to be done. But it started! This Spirit would continue to push the believers, even Peter and Paul, to join in leaping boundaries.