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THE HOUSEHOLD OF CORNELIUS

In a pamphlet on "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" put out by the Christian Broadcasting Network, it states that ". . . the scriptures seem to indicate throughout the Book of Acts that believers manifested this gift [tongues] after having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit . . ." The fact is, speaking in tongues is mentioned on only three occasions in Acts. The first was on the day of Pentecost, the second occurred when Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, and the third happened at the baptism of the twelve at Ephesus.

In the tenth chapter of Acts God is working to prepare a Jewish church to look beyond Israel and to see a whole Gentile world that needs the Gospel. Up to this point Christianity was a Jewish religion and they had no idea it would ever be anything else. God had to take some drastic steps to change that.

On one hand God used a man named Cornelius, a centurion (a commander of 100 soldiers) in the Roman army, stationed at Caesarea. Cornelius and his whole household feared God and was seeking the truth, but they were not saved. God sent an angel who told Cornelius to send to Joppa and bring back Peter, who would tell them what to do.

On the other hand God was preparing Peter by giving him a vision, commanding him to eat

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unclean animals. Peter was puzzled by the vision, not understanding its meaning. God directed Peter to go with the men who had come from Cornelius. He took six brethren from Joppa with him. When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he found that many of Cornelius' kinfolk and friends had gathered to hear him. Since it was contrary to Jewish tradition for a Jew to even enter a Gentile house, the brethren who accompanied Peter no doubt had some misgivings about the whole affair.

Peter went into the house and began to preach Jesus to them. In the middle of his sermon the Holy Spirit fell on all of them and they spoke with tongues.

Even though Cornelius and his family feared the Lord and were seeking His will, they were not saved. Peter said in Acts 11:14, "Who [Peter] shall tell thee [Cornelius] words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." They needed to hear about Jesus Christ so that they, by faith, might receive Him. They knew about God and feared Him, but knew nothing about the Savior, Jesus Christ.

One of the most unusual things about this incident is the fact that the Holy Spirit fell on them at the point of their salvation and before they were baptized. When Peter was preaching to the people at Pentecost, he said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and; ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38) Baptism preceded

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receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The word "gift" is the Greek word *DOREA* and means "a free gift" or "a present." Here it refers to the Holy Spirit as being that gift. The gifts of the Spirit, or the gifts that the Spirit gives, is the Greek word, *CHARISMA* meaning "grace" or "favor." It is from this word that the term "Charismatic" comes.

So, Peter said that a person should repent and be baptized so that he might receive remission of sins and receive the Holy Spirit. There is no instance in the New Testament, other than Cornelius, that unbaptized people received the Holy Spirit. Why was this different? It is obvious from the context that it was going to take something very special to convince the Jewish believers to accept Gentiles. This is evident in what Peter said to the Jewish believers who had accompanied him. After the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Gentiles, Peter said to the Jews present, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47) What could they say? They could only stand amazed at what had happened and were forced to accept the Gentiles on equal footing with the Jews. Suppose God had waited until after they were baptized to pour out the Holy Spirit on them? There would no doubt have been long and heated discussion among the Jewish believers as to whether they should be baptized. God's way, even though He set aside His own rule, left no doubt in anyone's mind, even all of the Jewish believers at Jerusalem, that the

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gospel should be preached to the Gentiles.

Was this the Baptism in the Holy Spirit? Yes! In Acts chapter 11 Paul makes it clear that it was, when he was explaining to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem what had happened at Caesarea. In verse 15 Peter told them, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning."

He said the Holy Spirit fell on them, "as" it did on the day of Pentecost. The word "as" is the Greek adverb *HOSPER* and means "just as, as, or like as." Peter identified it as an occasion like Pentecost. Peter was present on the day of Pentecost. The experience of the sound of a mighty rushing wind, the tongues of fire and the filling of the Holy Spirit were still fresh in his mind. He knew the experience in Cornelius' house was like the experience of Pentecost.

He goes a step further in identifying this as the Spiritual baptism Jesus spoke of. In the next verse he said, "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."

And, also in verse 17, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" The word "like" used here means "equal or like." Peter is saying that God gave Cornelius' household the Holy Spirit equal that they had received at Pentecost. The baptism in the Holy Spirit came on the Jewish church on

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the day of Pentecost and the baptism of the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius.

Was there the sound of a mighty rushing wind and the tongues of fire? It doesn't say that there was, but Peter said it was like Pentecost, so it is likely that there was.

What was the purpose of the tongues at Caesarea? They were given as a sign to the Jews that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, and, hence, were to be received as believers. Were they languages? Of course they were, since that is what the word "tongue" means. Did they preach to anyone in a language like the disciples did on Pentecost? The Scripture doesn't say, so we do not know.

These two cases are the only times in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit just spontaneously fell. In neither case did the Holy Spirit fall on individuals, but on groups. In the other instances in Acts the Holy Spirit came on the people by the laying on of hands.