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# Jesus Movement: No Gentiles Allowed!

By Jim Myers

**Continued from Issue Number 40.**

The New Testament account of Cornelius is used to set the stage for one of the most significant events in the history of Christianity. Yet, this extremely important event is completely overlooked by contemporary Christians who have completely lost their connection to the original Jewish Jesus Movement and its Jewish roots.

The central figure of this dramatic account is Peter, the apostle who was chosen and taught by Jesus. Peter was clearly one of the top leaders of the Jesus Movement after the crucifixion of Jesus. The fact that Peter was so close to the historical Jesus is what makes the impact of this account so great and historically important. Jesus knew Peter and, of all the people that knew Jesus, very few knew him as well as Peter.

In order to set the stage for this event we must jump ahead to Acts 10:28-29:

28 And he (Peter) said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. 29 "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me."

How and when did God reveal this to Peter? Verse nine indicates that this took place on the day after Cornelius sent his men to fetch Peter.

9 And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry, and desired to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;

11 and he *\*beheld* the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, 12 and there were in it all *kinds of* four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." 15 And again a voice *came* to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy."

16 And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky. 17 Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate;

This event took place long after the crucifixion of Jesus. The beliefs that Peter held concerning the interaction between Jews and Gentiles had not been changed by the teachings of the historical Jesus. If anything, it appears that these were also the beliefs of Jesus. *If Jesus had intended to*

*include non-Jews in his Movement wouldn't Peter have held very different beliefs about Gentiles? Clearly there would have been no need for Peter to have a divine revelation concerning the relationship of Jews to Gentiles, would there?*

*Just think about how different the story would have been if Peter had not fallen into the trance and had the vision! Cornelius's men would have arrived and Peter would not have "associated or visited" with them, because he would have still believed it was unlawful.*

Another interesting aspect of this situation is that none of the other original apostles fell into a trance and or had a similar vision. *As far as all the other apostles are concerned it was still – "No Gentiles Allowed!"* This can easily be seen in the event that launches the infamous Jerusalem Council, which are recorded in Acts 14:26-15:2:

26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27 And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.

1 And some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

Another way of putting the response of the men from Judea would be – "Unless the Gentiles convert to Judaism they cannot be saved (by being a member of the Jesus Movement)." Notice how the leaders in Jerusalem react – *6 And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.*

If the account recorded in Matthew 28 is historically accurate would the apostles' reaction been in the above manner?

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 And when they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (EThNE – Gentiles), baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "

Obviously Peter was one of the eleven disciples mentioned in Matthew. If he had been personally instructed by Jesus, as were the other ten disciples, there would have been no need for the trance and vision. There would also have not been any confusion among the Jerusalem leadership when they heard about the "door of faith being opened to the Gentiles."

Acts 10-15 reflect the confusion and struggles of the early decades of the Jesus Movement after 50 CE. In our studies of early Christianity we have found numerous examples of the different types of "Christian" groups -- exclusive Jewish membership to exclusive anti-Jewish Gentile membership. It would take a few centuries for the Jewishness of the original Jesus Movement to be extracted from the beliefs and teachings of the Church.

The fact that we find both the "Great Commission" and the "Jerusalem Council," with their conflicting accounts, in the same Bible is very significant. I think it clearly shows how the writings of the different groups of the early Jesus Movement were collected and combined. The goal was not to present absolute theological truth; it was to provide a history of the Movement, including their doctrinal differences. They wrote about Christianity as they knew it. **BHR**

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