

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XXII. God's Careful Preparation Of Peter To Reach Gentiles

(Acts 9:32-43)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 9:32-43 shows God carefully working to start to prepare the orthodox Hebrew Peter to disciple Gentiles, what would involve a huge religious and cultural "stretch" for Peter. We view this passage for our insight:

II. God's Careful Preparation Of Peter To Reach Gentiles, Acts 9:32-43.

- A. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus had predicted that He would give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter, that Peter might open the kingdom to others. This promise was partly fulfilled in Peter's opening the kingdom to other Hebrews on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-41 and later to half-Jewish Samaritans in Acts 8:14-17, 25.
- B. However, using Peter, an orthodox Hebrew who had been reared in first century Israel to open the kingdom to Gentiles would be a huge stretch for him, for it had always been unlawful for Peter with his upbringing and lifestyle to keep company with a Gentile or even to enter a Gentile's house, cf. Acts 10:28.
- C. Accordingly, Acts 9:32-43 shows how God carefully began to prepare Peter to evangelize Gentiles, removing the former obstacles in his orthodox Hebrew background that he might fulfill God's calling (Ibid., p. 379):
 1. God strongly confirmed that Peter's ministry was of the Lord by way of two great miracles, Acts 9:32-42:
 - a. After Peter had returned from ministering in Samaria (Acts 8:25), he was involved in traveling around Judea and he eventually ended up in Lydda, modern Lod in partly Gentile territory down near the seacoast, Acts 9:32. (Ibid.; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, Map 12: The Ministry of Jesus)
 - b. Peter there met a paralytic named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years, so Peter healed him in the name of Jesus Christ, leading many people in that area to turn to the Lord, Acts 9:33-35.
 - c. In the nearby city of Joppa (Acts 9:38a) a dear Christian woman named Dorcas who had performed many good works became ill and died, and her associates prepared her body for burial, Acts 9:36-37.
 - d. The believers at Joppa sent for Peter, asking him to come quickly to rectify the situation, Acts 9:38.
 - e. No one in the Early Church had yet been recorded as having been raised from the dead (Ibid., Bible Knowledge Commentary, N. T.), so apparently the faith the believers had in God's ministry through Peter was so great, they had sent for him expecting God to use him even to raise Dorcas from the dead. (Ibid.)
 - f. Peter raised her and presented her to the believers, leading many people to believe in Christ, Acts 9:39-42.
 2. This strong divine confirmation of Peter's ministry occurred in an area of many Gentiles, Ibid., p. 379:
 - a. Lydda was in the Plain of Sharon and Joppa that was near Lydda lay along the seacoast (Ibid., Ryrie), both cities in an area that had a significant Gentile population, Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.
 - b. This first recorded miracle of Peter's raising a woman from the dead, as important as it was, occurred in an area where many Gentiles lived, indicating God's strong will to use Peter to reach Gentiles.
 3. God used Peter's long stay at Simon the tanner's house to prepare him to reach Gentiles, Ibid.; Acts 9:43:
 - a. After Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, he stayed "many days" in Joppa with Simon, a tanner, Acts 9:43.
 - b. Tanners "were considered to be ceremonially unclean because they were constantly in contact with the skins of dead animals (Lev. 11:40)." (Ibid.)
 - c. This experience opened the door for the Lord to begin to teach Peter that just as he was no longer under the Mosaic Law and thus free from its ceremonial restrictions in regard to contacting dead animals, neither was he under the Law's restrictions regarding his contacting Gentiles!

Lesson: *To prepare the orthodox Hebrew Peter to contact and disciple Gentiles that he had been reared under the Mosaic Law to avoid, God (1) confirmed his ministry by two great miracles (2) where there were many Gentiles who came to Christ, and (3) God let Peter to stay for many days in a ceremonially unclean tanner's house where he became more comfortable not living under the rules of the Mosaic Law, preparing him to evangelize Gentiles.*

Application: *(1) If God wants us involved in a ministry that "stretches" us beyond what our backgrounds would normally comfortably let us do, He will carefully lead and encourage us into that ministry. (2) We must thus not let ourselves be pressured by others into a ministry that conflicts with our backgrounds, but let God carefully lead!*