



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

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Peter to the nations?

How is it that the nations were to hear the gospel through Peter? *Which* gospel?



At one point during his third video in which he attempts to prove that Paul's gospel is the only gospel in the New Testament, Alan Hess misconstrues Peter's words at the Jerusalem council in Acts chapter 15, to the confusion and consternation of those watching his presentation. Was Peter ready to jump ship and join the body of Christ? Was he ready to lead the other Jews into Paul's circumcision-free, law-free message? Alan says yes. He says that the Jews were trying to decide

whether or not they, themselves, should continue on with the Abrahamic rite of Circumcision. This is absurd. The Jerusalem contingent discussed nothing even close to this. Alan tortures the events of this council, hoping to force a confession from the events that will confirm his hypothesis that "There is only one gospel!" in the New Testament. The problem is that there are *two* gospels in the New Testament (Galatians 2:7), and no amount of thumbscrews applied to Peter and Israel will change that. The Jews are *not* becoming as the nations. Throughout Peter's lifetime, the Jews continued with the heralding of the Circumcision gospel but with an expanded audience—as we shall soon see.

I like Alan Hess, but he is throwing darts at this topic and hoping to hit something.



THE WORDS OF PETER

Here is Peter, from Acts 15:7-11—

Now, there coming to be much questioning, rising, Peter said to them, "Men! Brethren! You are versed in the fact that from the days at the beginning God chooses among you, that through my mouth the

nations are to hear the word of the evangel and believe.
 8 And God, the Knower of hearts, testifies to them,
 giving the holy spirit according as to us also,
 9 and in nothing discriminates between us and them,
 cleansing their hearts by faith.

10 Why, then, are you now trying God, by placing a
 yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our
 fathers nor we are strong enough to bear?

11 But through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are
 believing, to be saved in a manner even as they.”

How were the nations to hear the word of the evangel through Peter, and what evangel would they be hearing? Listen to Peter himself: “You are versed in the fact that *from the days at the beginning* God chooses among you, that through my mouth the nations are to hear the word of the evangel and believe.” Peter can be speaking of none other than the Circumcision evangel, because Paul’s “my gospel” was new and had not been given “from the days of the beginning.” But what about Peter saying that “the nations are to hear”? We are not used



to hearing the name “Peter” associated with the nations. Wasn’t Peter given the keys to the earthly kingdom of Israel? Yes. But the nations hearing truth through Peter accords with the Abrahamic promise to make Israel a priesthood nation that would eventually bless all the nations. For God said to Abraham, “In you, *all* the families of the ground will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). It is also consistent with the so-called Great Commission described in Matthew 28:16-20—

Now the eleven disciples went into Galilee, into the mountain where Jesus arranges with them. 17 And, perceiving Him, they worship Him, yet they hesitate. 18 And, approaching, Jesus speaks to them saying, “Given to Me was all authority in heaven and on the earth. 19 Going, then, *disciple all the nations*, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, 20 teaching them to be keeping all, whatever I direct you. And lo! I am with you all the days till the conclusion of the eon! Amen!”

We cannot understand Peter’s words here at the Jerusalem council unless we understand the phenomenon that he had experienced shortly before, namely, his encounter with Cornelius. These events are detailed in Acts, chapter 10.

CORNELIUS

Cornelius, a man of the nations—an Italian in fact—was in Caesarea and was told in a vision to send for Peter, who was in Joppa. So he sent two of his soldiers south. Coincidentally, Peter had just received the vision of the sheet descending from heaven containing clean and unclean animals, teaching him that the nations weren’t as dirty as he thought they were. Directly after the vision, soldiers from Cornelius arrived and God told Peter, “Go with them.” Peter went, but he took along some of the Circumcision brethren from Joppa. Peter needed witnesses because what God was asking him to do was unprecedented: it was unlawful for Peter to even enter the house of a Gentile. Peter was walking on the moon.

Just before leaving Joppa, Peter said to the soldiers something along the lines of, *Tell me about this Cornelius fellow whom you serve*, and the soldiers said in Acts 10:22—

Cornelius, a centurion, a man just and God-fearing, besides being attested by the whole nation of the Jews, is apprized by a holy messenger to send after you to come into his house, and to hear declarations from you.



Cornelius was a faithful supporter of Israel. We read earlier in the chapter—

Now a certain man in Caesarea, named Cornelius, a centurion of a squadron called “Italian,” devout and fearing God with his entire house, doing many alms to the people and beseeching God continually (Acts 10:1-2).

“Doing many alms to the people” meant that Cornelius supported Israel financially. “Fearing God” meant that he loved and respected the God of Israel. “Devout” meant that he took his faith seriously, which corresponds with “beseeching God continually.” “A man just” means that Cornelius comported himself in a manner worthy of a God-fearing man. In other words, the man produced fruit worthy of his choosing the Israel way to God.

Alan Hess teaches that Peter brought to Cornelius the same gospel that Paul brought to the nations. This is not only a careless conclusion, but it is tragically mistaken in that it invites a mixing of Paul’s gospel with the law-loving disposition of the other New Testament writers.

CARELESS AND DISENGAGED

Up to this point, Alan has shown neither concern nor

care that he lets Circumcision writings bleed into Paul’s letters. That is, he doesn’t seem to be bothered by the fact that he is even passively obliterating the distinction between Pauline epistles and other New Testament books. I have leveled this charge against him, but he is apparently unconcerned about fielding objections. I have been bringing objections to Alan’s new teaching for a month now and as far as I know Alan has never addressed a single one of them.

On this particular topic of the two gospels, I consider Alan to be a “drive-by” teacher; that is, he lays out things that he either cannot or refuses to defend against reasonable, Scriptural objections, and then he simply rolls up his window and moves on to the next topic with nary a glance into the rearview mirror at the wreckage left behind. Alan’s teaching that any New Testament letter (including James) can be dipped into for Pauline truth is not only mistaken, but dangerous. It is dangerous in that it compromises faith in Paul and allows for the introduction of law into Pauline teaching.

We will see exactly what Peter preached to Cornelius shortly (Pauline truth is absent), but let’s see where Alan goes off track.

BAD TRANSLATION = BAD TEACHING

In his third video, Alan quotes Paul from Galatians 1:6-9. He quotes from the King James Version, but I quote it here from the *Concordant Literal New Testament*—

I am marveling that thus, swiftly, you are transferred from that which calls you in the grace of Christ, to a different evangel, which is not another, except it be that some who are disturbing you want also to distort the evangel of Christ. But if ever we also, or a messenger out of heaven, should be bringing an evangel to you beside that which we bring to you, let him be anathema! As we have declared before and at present I am saying again, if anyone is bringing you an evangel beside that which you accepted, let him be anathema!

Follow this up with an Alan Hess quote from the same video—

“Bless God, Peter better not be bringing a different gospel other than what Paul taught.”

Because Alan teaches from a translation containing over 20,000 translating errors (the KJV), he does not realize that Paul uses two different words in this passage

to describe two different gospels. The “different evangel” is the pseudo-evangel that mixes Paul’s gospel with elements of the gospel of the Circumcision, but the word “another” in this passage describes the other legitimate evangel, namely the evangel of the Circumcision. Unfortunately, the version Alan teaches from (the KJV) translates two different Greek words with the single word “another.” Thus, the King James version nonsensically reads, “Another gospel which is not another.” The Concordant Version has “a different evangel, which is not another.”

Because of this failure, Alan can see only one gospel: Paul’s. Based on this error, he then assumes that Peter *must* be teaching Paul’s gospel, otherwise he’d fall under Paul’s anathema. This is why Alan says, “Bless God, Peter better not be bringing a different gospel other than what Paul taught.” But Peter *is* bringing another gospel other than Paul’s. But he’s not under the anathema because it’s the “another” gospel, not the “different” one. The KJV version of Galatians 1:6-9 allows for only one gospel (“another which is not another”), while the correct translation allows for two (“a *different* evangel, which is not another”). Additionally, we have Galatians 2:7 at our disposal, a verse which *proves* that there are two gospels in the New Testament, and a verse which, to date, Alan continuously misquotes without so much as a hint of apology or defense in the face of Scriptural and grammatical criticisms.



PETER TO CORNELIUS

Was Peter teaching the same message to Cornelius as Paul taught to the nations? Alan says, “yes.” The correct answer, however, is “no”—as we shall see. I will admit to this similarity: both Peter and Paul are teaching to people of the nations. But here is a vital distinction, the recognition of which will keep one from fatal derailment on this topic: Cornelius represented those of the nations aligning themselves with Israel; the people Paul spoke to got their truth apart from Israel. Cornelius was “attested by the whole nation of the Jews.” He was a friend of Israel in that he gave alms to the favored nation. Additionally, he called for the apostle to whom Christ had given the keys to the terrestrial kingdom. Contrast this to those of the nations to whom Paul spoke and wrote: They were not attested by Jews anywhere. In fact, the Jews hated them (Acts 22:21-22). None of those to whom Paul spoke sought the intercessional powers of Peter. Their apostle was Paul.

Here is Peter’s gospel announcement to Cornelius. Note the absence of any of the essentials of Paul’s gospel, namely, “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This is Acts 10:34-43—

Now Peter, opening his mouth, said, “Of a truth I am grasping that God is not partial,
 35 but in every nation he who is fearing Him and acting righteously is acceptable to Him.
 36 Of the word He dispatches to the sons of Israel, bringing the evangel of peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all),
 37 you are aware, the declaration coming to be down the whole of Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John heralds:
 38 Jesus from Nazareth, as God anoints Him with holy spirit and power, Who passed through as a benefactor and healer of all those who are tyrannized over by the Adversary, for God was with Him.
 39 “And we are witnesses of all that He does, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem; Whom they assassinate also, hanging Him on a pole.
 40 This One God rouses the third day, and gives Him to become disclosed,
 41 not to the entire people, but to witnesses who have been selected before by God, to us who ate and drank together with Him after His rising from among the dead.
 42 And He charges us to herald to the people and to certify that this One is He Who is specified by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.

43 To this One are all the prophets testifying: Everyone who is believing in Him is to obtain the pardon of sins through His name.”

There is common ground here between Peter’s evangel and Paul’s, namely, the resurrection of Christ on the third day. But Peter is announcing this, not as something to be believed for salvation, but rather as an historical fact. Peter is presenting it as supporting evidence that Jesus is the Christ. Additionally, Peter announces a pardon of sins through His name, whereas in Paul’s gospel it is the death of Christ that delivers from sin. This may seem like a subtle difference, but it is the difference between forgiveness and justification. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4—

Now I am making known to you, brethren, the evangel which I bring to you, which also you accepted, in which also you stand, through which also you are saved, if you are retaining what I said in bringing the evangel to you, outside and except you believe feignedly. For I give over to you among the first what also I accepted, *that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*, and that He was entombed, and that He has been roused the third day according to the scriptures.

Those who embrace Paul’s gospel of the Uncircumcision are saved by a recognition that Christ died for their sins. The death of Christ for sin is what eliminates the old humanity (Romans 6:3-7) and makes Jew and Greek into one new humanity (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:15). In Peter’s gospel, Jew and Greek are *not* one new humanity, for Jews retain a national superiority over Greeks in the Circumcision gospel as evidenced by the fact that, in the coming kingdom, the disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

Besides that, Peter states boldly how those of the nations—those like Cornelius—are saved into the Circumcision gospel: “But in every nation he who is fearing Him and acting righteously is acceptable to Him.” In the Circumcision evangel, one’s acceptance by God depends on how well he or she acts. In order to be accepted by God, one must “act righteously.” How could anyone construe these words as consistent with the gospel heralded by Paul, who writes in 2 Timothy 1:9—

...Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, *not in accord with our acts*, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian.

Here is the stark contrast:

PETER: “He who is acting righteously is acceptable to Him.”

PAUL: “Who saves us and calls us not in accord with our acts.”

Peter is heralding Paul’s gospel to Cornelius? I think not! Belief in the Circumcision evangel required two things: 1) a recognition of Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and 2) righteous acts. As Aaron Welch writes in his article “Peter, Cornelius and the Jerusalem Conference: A Study on Acts 15:1-17 (Part One)”—

Peter’s declaring that Jesus of Nazareth had been anointed by God “with holy spirit and power” is simply another way of identifying Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (see Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). Everything Peter said—including the facts concerning Jesus’ “assassination” and subsequent resurrection—served to support and further validate this central truth. To say that Jesus is “...he who is specified by God to be judge of the living and the dead” (which, again, was the truth that Peter said he and his co-laborers had been charged by God to herald) was simply another way of saying that Jesus is the Christ, for no other man had been, or would be, given this great authority from God (cf. John 5:21-29).

Peter’s omission of the fact that Christ died for the sins of those to whom he spoke means that it’s impossible that “the word of the evangel” he heralded to Cornelius and his house (as referred to in Acts 15:7) was the same evangel that was entrusted to Paul to herald among the nations. Logically, the evangel that Peter heralded to Cornelius and his house and the evangel which Paul heralded among the nations must be different. And if that’s the case, then we can reasonably conclude that the evangel heard and believed by Cornelius and his house (who, again, were the “nations” referred to by Peter in Acts 15:7) was the evangel of the Circumcision. Cornelius and his house evidently recognized their place in subordination to the nation of Israel, and desired to worship the God of Israel via the mediation of Israel.

“US AND THEM”

What did Peter mean in Acts 15:9 when he said that God “in nothing discriminates between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith”? Alan and others believe

that the “us” and “them” here refer to the law-keeping Jews (“us”) and the Greek heathen being reached by Paul (“them”). Those who believe that there is only one gospel in the New Testament must, however, read this viewpoint into the text. In fact, the “them” refers to those of the nations who would seek out the Lord in the re-built tabernacle of David, that is, the Israel temple. At the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13-17), James quotes the prophet Amos in 9:11-12—

On that day I will raise up
The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,
And repair its damages;
I will raise up its ruins,
And rebuild it as in the days of old;
That they may possess the remnant of Edom,
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the Lord who does this thing.

Paul never associated his converts with any part of the Jewish temple.

“A YOKE ON THE NECK”

What did Peter mean in Acts 15:10 when he said, “Why, then, are you now trying God, by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we are strong enough to bear?” Peter is addressing here the very reason that the Jerusalem council was convened in the first place: *Were Paul’s converts required to adhere to the law of Moses?* Peter admits here that not even the Jews could successfully do the law—try as they might. It didn’t mean that they would stop attempting it, but that the Jews would be foolish to saddle these new non-Israelite believers with a burden that 1) they themselves—the Jews—could never do perfectly and 2) had not even been placed upon the men and women of the nations in the first place (Romans 2:14).

“IN A MANNER EVEN AS THEY”

What did Peter mean in Acts 15:11 when he said, “But through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are believing, to be saved in a manner even as they”? Is Peter here admitting that there was no difference between Jews and Gentiles? No. With this conciliatory statement, Peter is merely emphasizing one common denominator between both evangels, and it’s this: unless the grace of God is upon it, any enterprise is lost. It requires grace to believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and then to be able to follow up that profession with good works. Likewise, it requires grace to believe that Christ Jesus died for our sins. Spirit is another common denomi-



nator of both evangels. Doesn't the spirit of God animate everything? Very well. Thus also, grace.

“TIED TO ISRAEL'S EXPECTATION”

Here is Aaron Welch again, this time in his article “Peter, Cornelius and the Jerusalem Conference: A Study on Acts 15:1-17 (Part Two)”—

Given the fact that Cornelius and his house were called by God through the evangel entrusted to Peter (the evangel of the Circumcision), we can reasonably conclude that the salvation of Cornelius and his house was (and is) inseparably connected with God's covenant people (this also follows from the fact that their “acting righteously” was inseparably tied to their relationship with God's covenant people). That the calling and eonian expectation of Cornelius and his house were understood by Peter and James as being tied to Israel's covenant-based expectation is further evident from what James went on to say in Acts 15:13-17:

“Men! Brethren! Hear me! Simeon unfolds how God first visits the nations, to obtain out of them a people for His name. And with this agree the words of the prophets, according as it is written, After these things I will turn back, ‘And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen... And its overturned structure will I rebuild, And I will re-erect it... So that those left of mankind should be seeking out the Lord, And all the nations, on them over whom My name is invoked, Is saying the Lord, Who is doing these things.’”

In these verses, was James referring to events that will be taking place “in the heavens” and “among the celestials” in the eon to come? Was he referring to that celestial kingdom in which flesh and blood is unable to enjoy an allotment (as was referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:50)? No. James was undoubtedly referring to the future kingdom of God on the earth – i.e., the kingdom that is to be restored

to Israel following Christ's return to earth. And James clearly understood Cornelius and his house as being representative of that class of righteous Gentiles who—like the “sheep” of Matthew 25:31-46—will be enjoying an allotment in the kingdom of God after it has been established on the earth.

Based on this fact alone, it can be concluded that Cornelius and his house (and, by implication, Peter as well) were not in the body of Christ, and had not been “justified through the faith of Christ.”

EVENTS SO WONDERFUL

These events of Acts are as intricately-woven and as wonderful as events can possibly be. There was a dual purpose afoot, and God executed these purposes with a brilliance and a precision worthy only of God. Notice—

Paul is called in Acts, chapter 9 and is given an evangel of the transcendent grace of God that no one

had ever heard or dreamed of, which included taking a select group of human beings into heaven and using them to reconcile the universe to Himself apart from the mediation of Israel. These people would become a new humanity in Christ where Jew or Greek would be irrelevant. God would require nothing of these people, no, not a single good work. In fact, the man God chose to give the message to was the worst sinner on the face of the earth and was busy committing heinous crimes on the day he was called.

The gospel given to Paul was so outrageous that it required the acquiescence of Jesus Christ's chief apostle (Peter) just to get it out of the starting blocks and to keep Paul from being assassinated by the very people with whom he was once associated.

To prepare Peter for Paul, God gave him the vision of the sheet coming down from heaven (Acts, chapter 10) containing clean and unclean animals. Then a voice came to Peter and said, "Sacrifice and eat." Peter said, "Far be it from me, Lord," because it was unlawful for Peter to eat unclean animals. The voice was unmoved and said, "What God cleanses, do not you count contaminating."

While Peter was ruminating on these things, some soldiers showed up at the door, having been dispatched to Joppa the day before by a man named Cornelius who had been told in a vision twenty-four hours before, "Send men to Joppa, and send after a certain Simon, who is surnamed Peter. This man is lodging with a certain Simon, a tanner, whose house is beside the sea" (Acts 10:5-6).

Peter went to the home of Cornelius and was amazed when the holy spirit came on the man while Peter was still speaking to him about Jesus Christ being the Messiah—and this was before Cornelius could even be baptized. This just wasn't how things were done; one was to repent and be baptized—and *then* the holy spirit was to come; at least that's how it had worked at Pentecost. Peter hurried and baptized Cornelius, shaking his head at the odd turn of events.

With the vision of sheet and the trip to the home of Cornelius, God accomplished two things, in this order: 1) He expanded the reach of the Circumcision evangel and 2) He prepared Peter for Paul.

AT THE COUNCIL

Not one attendee at the Jerusalem council—apart from Paul and Barnabas—had any clue what God was actually up to among the nations. There was no mention at the Jerusalem council of justification, or a new human-

ity, or being seated among the celestials in Christ, or the reconciliation of the universe, or of judging angels—nothing. The Jewish councilmen could barely handle the fact that Paul and Barnabas were making converts to *something* that did not require either circumcision or adherence to Moses. They never would have countenanced it had Peter not spoken up in defense of Paul. And Peter never would have spoken up in defense of Paul had not the vision in Joppa occurred, followed by the strange trip to Caesarea to visit Cornelius.

The Jewish councilmen had to have wondered at Paul, but they *could* entertain God visiting the nations with the Circumcision message, for after all God had promised their forefather Abraham to do that very thing. And hadn't Peter been given the keys to the terrestrial kingdom? Yes, this they could swallow. But not Paul. Never.

Behold the genius of God, then. God made sure that the Jewish councilmen wouldn't *have* to swallow Paul. All that was needed at this juncture was to keep Paul's Gentiles from the law of Moses and to let Paul do his thing in peace. When James said, "I decide not to be harassing those from the nations who are turning back to God" (Acts 15:19), he had no idea what he was doing, really. He probably thought that Paul was out in the great beyond reaching a bunch of other Corneliuses and that Paul's people would eventually have to call for Peter. Or perhaps even for him—James. Perhaps there would be another council—another convocation of the law-keeping Jews for the sake of faraway Greeks. But Paul would have winked at Barnabas and the two would have slipped out of the council room and—once out of ear and eyeshot of the Circumcision contingent—would have engaged in high-fives and war-whoops. Peter himself might have shrugged and thought, *What in the world have I unleashed upon the world?*

Paul would later discard even the minimal decrees drafted by James (Ephesians 2:15).

Everyone came out a winner. The Circumcision expanded their reach to the nations with the inclusion of God-fearers and Israel supporters such as Cornelius, and Paul and Barnabas escaped Jerusalem with their hides still attached, brandishing the "seal of approval" from the chief apostles of the Circumcision.

After that, the sky was the limit. —MZ