

Cornelius: Why Peter, and not Paul?

Acts 10

Introduction:

1. One of the hardest things in life to do is to wait. Our fleshly human nature despises waiting.
2. Yet, waiting is a vital part of the Christian life. Over and over again we see examples of this in the Bible. Here are just a few:
 - David – Psalm 27:13-14, 40:1
 - The apostles – Acts 1:4
 - Church-age saints – 1 Corinthians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:10;
2 Thessalonians 3:5
3. We are, by nature, impatient people (some of us are worse than others).
4. The apostle Paul had to go through one of those “waiting” time periods. After fleeing Jerusalem in Acts 9:30, Paul was sent to his hometown of Tarsus.
5. Paul is not mentioned again until Acts 11:25 when Barnabas brought him to Antioch to help in the ministry there. Paul had to wait for several years before he came back into the spotlight and his life’s ministry began.
6. The Tarsus experience is a preparation not easily accepted by the flesh, for it involves an indefinite waiting period. Think about it. Paul was, at that point, in possession of his gospel (he got it in Arabia), and was aware that it was to be the mission of his life to preach it to the Gentiles. Yet he had to wait a long time before his ministry would begin. This waiting period was probably five to eight years.
7. Why did Paul have to wait patiently in Tarsus? What was God’s purpose?

First, God made Paul wait to prepare him for an effective ministry to others.

Second, God made Paul wait to prepare others for Paul’s unique ministry.

1. God was preparing Paul for an awesome ministry, but God was also preparing others to receive Paul’s ministry.

- After Paul's conversion, Paul was forced to flee Damascus and go to Jerusalem. Acts 9:26
 - While in Jerusalem, God made it clear to Paul what his life's ministry was to entail. Acts 22:17-21
2. Paul's mission in life would be to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Acts 22:17-21, 26:14-18
3. But, there were some major obstacles to overcome before this could happen.
- Paul was a Jew and very familiar with Jewish law and customs, being a Pharisee. He was a leader in the religion of Judaism.
 - Up to that point, the spiritual blessings of God had been almost exclusively for the Jews. In Acts 1-9, the church is composed of believing Israel.
 - The Jews were God's chosen people and were forbidden to have anything to do with the Gentiles. The Gentiles were considered unclean, dogs, outcasts, and outside the fold God.
 - The church in Acts was exclusively Jewish.
 - They twelve didn't go into all nations (Acts 8:1). They concentrated their efforts on Jerusalem and the surrounding areas of Israel.
 - Why? God's prophetic plan was for Israel to be converted first, and through their conversion the blessing would flow from Israel to the Gentiles. Jesus told them to start in Jerusalem, and so the twelve were working feverishly to convert Israel in Acts 1-9.
4. Suddenly, Paul got saved in Acts. Paul was to minister to the Gentiles, but his ministry would have never been received, or accepted, by the Jerusalem church at that time. So, Paul went back to his hometown of Tarsus and waited for several years before God finally opened the door for Paul's unique and distinct ministry.
- The church simply wasn't ready for Paul's ministry yet. The timing was not right. God had to do some things first, and until then Paul would have to wait.
5. What happened during this time? During this waiting time period in Tarsus, a major event took place that would open the door for Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 10). A major event happened that opened the door for Paul.

6. God commissioned the apostle Peter to go into the home of a Gentile (Cornelius) and share with him the good news of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Acts 10
 - Cornelius was a Roman soldier who believed in Israel's God, but was very limited in his knowledge and understanding. He desired more divine revelation (vs. 1-6). God said, "Send men for Peter." vs. 7-8
 - Meanwhile, God began preparing Peter's heart for their visit and their call. vs. 9-16
 - While Peter is pondering, Cornelius' men show up at the door (vs. 17-22). Peter went with them. vs. 23
 - Here is Peter, a devout Jew, standing among a bunch of heathen Gentiles! (vs. 27). Peter basically says, "What do you guys want?" vs. 28-29
 - Cornelius explains everything to Peter and says, "We're all here, tell us what we need to know." vs. 33-34
 - Peter proceeds to explain to them the death and resurrection of Christ (vs. 39-40, 43), and before he can finish, these Gentiles believed Peter's message, the Holy Spirit came and filled them, and they were all saved.
7. This is one of the most momentous events in history.
 - Peter learned that, in this present age of grace, God would be no respecter of persons. vs. 34
 - Jews or Gentiles could be saved and brought into the church through faith in Jesus Christ. Because Israel continued to reject their Messiah, God would send salvation to Gentiles, not **through** Israel, but **in spite of** Israel. This was something completely new. vs. 43
8. The church did not readily accept this change, but Peter explained it to them, and they did accept it. Acts 11:1-18
9. Had **Paul** tried to convince the church of the change, the church would never have accepted it. Paul would have been viewed as a radical and a heretic. He was the new guy on the block that everybody was suspicious of anyway.
10. But Peter was universally accepted by the church. He could do what Paul could **not** do regarding the change towards the Gentiles.

11. After this change had occurred, then Paul could come on the scene, and his ministry to the Gentiles began. God was preparing the way for him to fulfill his ministry.
 - If Peter recognized the salvation of uncircumcised Gentiles, the church could take no legitimate exception to Paul's Gentile ministry. It is no coincidence that the next chapter (Acts 11), Paul shows up again and begins his Gentile ministry.
 - It was on the basis of Peter's experience that Paul's ministry among the Gentiles was later officially recognized. Acts 15
12. The idea of Gentile salvation had to be accepted in the church before Paul could begin his life's work. When this happened, we soon read in Scripture of Barnabas going after Paul to bring him back into the work. The time was then acceptable for Paul to commence his great ministry. Acts 11:25

In Conclusion:

1. Why did Paul have to wait?
 - Paul had to be prepared.
 - Others had to be prepared.
2. There is no record of Peter doing anything like this again. It was all part of God's plan.
 - Acts 9 – Paul gets saved. He goes to Jerusalem, and they send him home to Tarsus (we don't need you). He's not mentioned for 5 to 8 years.
 - Acts 10 – Peter goes to Cornelius, and the church accepts the change based on Peter's testimony.
 - Acts 11 – Paul shows up again, begins his Gentile ministry, and dominates the rest of the book of Acts.