

“A Spiritual ‘Ah! Ha!’”—Acts 11:15-18

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “A Spiritual ‘Ah! Ha!’”, is Acts 11:15-18 → *“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

One of the most enjoyable moments for a person explaining or teaching something to someone is the “Ah! Ha!” moment. It is that point in the interaction when the concept finally “clicks” in his brain; when he finally “gets it;” when it all “comes together.” You can actually see the “Ah! Ha!” moment physically as the person’s eyes may “light up,” a smile may come to his face and he may nod his head in excitement saying, “Ah! Ha!” It’s been pictured as a light bulb glowing above one’s head because “the light finally went on” and he understands the concept! The “Ah! Ha!” moment is considered the moment

of being “enlightened.”

What does a spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moment look like? Reading the Bible and the meaning of some portion of Scripture comes to light for you in new understanding? An encounter with the Lord through a vision or angel which gives you guidance, setting the course of your life in a new direction? Continually praying in the midst of difficult times and experiencing needed help from what appears to be “out of nowhere?” Being driven by the Lord through His Word and your circumstances to see the depths of your sin, so convicted with your guilt that you finally surrender in repentance and faith to His Will for you in Jesus? What does a spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moment look like?

Our text brings us to a spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moment for Jesus’ disciples. What was it that they weren’t “getting” that demanded a spiritual “Ah! Ha!” for them? They didn’t believe that non-Jews could receive the blessings of Jesus’ Person & Work without also following the laws of the Old Testament. Jesus once said that *salvation is from the Jews*. (cf. John 4:22) He also said that He came not to *abolish the Law or the Prophets* (i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures given to the Jews) *but to fulfill them*. (cf. Matthew 5:17) The Gospel is described in Romans 1:16 as *the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*. Thus, it would have been natural for the early Jewish Christians to think that one must hold to both the

Jewish laws and customs of the Old Testament along with believing in Jesus to be saved. Thus, they needed many spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moments given by the Holy Spirit to change their understanding of salvation.

Our text records Peter explaining his actions to some Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Acts 11:2-3 says: *When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”* He acted outside the parameters of Judaism. They referred to Peter’s actions of going into the house of a Gentile centurion named Cornelius.

Cornelius was a God-fearer. A God-fearer was a Gentile who believed in Yahweh as revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures but did not convert to Judaism. An angel appeared to him while he was praying and instructed him to send for Peter in the town of Joppa to *declare . . . a message by which* he and all his household *will be saved.* (cf. Acts 11:14) As Peter and his companions were going to see Cornelius the Lord sent a vision to Peter, giving him a spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moment. It was to prepare him for his visit at the house of a man whom Judaism considered “unclean” (i.e. unacceptable to God). What did Peter learn from the vision? In Acts 11:28 Peter said to Cornelius and those with him: *You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, **but God has shown me that I should***

not call any person common or unclean. The work of Jesus cleanses all from sin and brings salvation through faith in Him for all people!

The Holy Spirit works to connect people to the message of the Gospel—the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works through that Gospel to give you the gift of faith so that you can be saved. He doesn't just “zap” salvation into people. He leads them to the proclamation of God's Word and Will in Jesus! He also confirmed the truth which Peter learned as he expressed it in verse 15 of our text: *As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.* To what *beginning* was he referring? To the Day of Pentecost.

According to Acts 2:4, on that Day of Pentecost *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.* They were able to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the languages of the people present so that many believed and were baptized. (cf. Acts 2:41) Upon hearing the preaching of the Gospel by Peter about seven years later at Cornelius' house, Acts 10:44-46 says: *The Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.* These tongues were the evidence for these people who

had difficulty believing that Gentiles could be saved **only by faith in Jesus**.

This was a good example of what 1 Corinthians 14:22 says: *Tongues are a sign . . . for unbelievers*. This was a definite spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moment for these men!

Notice that Peter’s spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moment was not some subjective experience upon which he concluded something about God. He remembered the words of the Lord Jesus. (cf. verse 16) As the disciples did so many times, they took their experiences with Jesus to the Scriptures, the objective written Word of God, through which the Holy Spirit gave it proper meaning in their lives.

This is quite different from many who have some kind of “spiritual” experience and then make the Scriptures fit their own experience. The Holy Spirit always works to bring you into submission to the Scriptures and faith in Jesus Christ. He will never allow the Scriptures to submit to your understanding, experiences or reasoning. That is the work of satan. So Peter said in verse 17 → *If then God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way? “Ah! Ha!”*

The Holy Spirit works through the written Word of God to bring “Ah! Ha!” moments in your life as well. He is the gift given by Jesus to *teach you all*

things and bring to your remembrance all that He has said to you. (cf. John 14:26) He is the Gift, *the Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father* and bears *witness about* Jesus. (cf. John 15:26) Every single “Ah! Ha!” moment in your life is intended to bring you to, strengthen you in and empower the expression of your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior for all people—**you too!**

Actually, spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moments are humbling. Did you notice what those listening to Peter’s explanation did? Verse 18 of our text says that *when these men of the circumcision party who had criticized him . . . heard these things they fell silent.* It may be they still disagreed with Peter. We do know that this issue plagued the early church for another thirty plus years. However, maybe *they fell silent* because the Holy Spirit “made believers out of them” so there was nothing more they could say. They could only submit to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and the Scriptures.

Spiritual “Ah! Ha!” moments required you to give up control of your “spiritual” perceptions and yield to Jesus’ control in His perfection for you. They bring you to the point of seeing your sin and the sinful futility of your thinking so that you can repent, trust in Jesus and rejoice in the Holy Spirit’s work of bringing repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, even to those whom you think don’t deserve it! Verse 18 of our text goes on to say: *They glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to*

life.”The Holy Spirit brings to faith in Jesus based upon the revelation of God’s will in His written Word according to the gift of the Holy Spirit! “Ah! Ha!” and “Amen!”

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

(Romans 15:13)

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.