

“TO ALL THAT ARE FAR OFF” by Roger Walkwitz

A fascinating feature of the Bible, and the work of the Holy Spirit while we read it, is to catch our attention to a word or phrase that we had read many times before but didn't “see it” until that moment. Such was my excitement when I read Acts 2:39 recently.

For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all the ones far off, as many as the Lord our God might call to himself.

Some people are “far out,” as the slang expression goes, but we Gentiles are said to be “**far off**” from God in Ephesians 2:11-13; that is, before we came to faith in Messiah Yeshua. The words “far off” in Acts 2:39 that caught my attention caused me to wonder if God, through Peter, was actually including Gentiles in His message that Shavuot day, without Peter or anyone noticing it!? Certainly “the promise” is to all mankind, but only through the Savior, Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah.

Continuing my search to find out if this might be the case, I found that the Greek word for “far off” is *makran*, which is used 10 times in the NT, 5 relating to geographical distance from a point, and 5 relating to comprehension distance from a desired spiritual goal, 4 being related to Gentiles. Both Acts 2:39 and Ephesians 2:13 are in the latter category, as well as Eph 2:17 and Acts 17:27, which is in Paul's message to the philosophers in Athens.

Ephesians 2 explains how God made possible the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into One Body. Yeshua's death and resurrection satisfied the enmity that God had toward mankind because of our sins, and therefore, can also solve the enmity that exists between Jews and Gentiles. Rampant anti-Semitism today shows that most people in the world do not know this, or do not care to learn the Truth of God and to implement it in their daily lives. The Jew was “near” to the Truth of God and the Gentile was “far off” from the Truth of God, but neither one was “in” until he or she surrendered to God. Eph 2:17-18 says:

and coming, [Yeshua] preached peace to you [Gentiles], the ones far off, and peace to the ones near [Jews], because through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Even with these few direct references, it seems to me that Gentiles were included in God's message through Peter on Shavuot. We say that we believe in the verbal “inspiration” of the Scriptures. Well, Acts 2:39 is a good illustration of this. Peter said what the Holy Spirit told him to say, not what current theology would have said. God has always had an “open door” to Gentiles throughout time. However, in the time of Yeshua and the Apostles, this was not understood. In fact, common teaching among Jews was that Gentiles could be accepted by God only if they became proselytes, actually converting to Judaism. Only Jews were “saved.”

Because this erroneous teaching was so ingrained, God had to dramatically teach His Truth to Peter, and later to the rest, in Acts 10, with the “sheet let down from heaven” with all the unclean creatures in it. Peter was puzzled by the meaning of the vision (he knew it was not about food), but quickly caught on when Cornelius' delegation arrived at the gate, as he stated a couple days later to Cornelius himself in Acts 10:28-29:

You 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 man common or unclean. Therefore, I came without objection, as soon as I was sent for.

Now “the coast was clear,” Bible Truth had been clarified, religious rulings had been overturned, and God’s eternal purpose for Israel “to be His witnesses, to be a light to the Gentiles” could be freely implemented! The Messiah has come, sins have been paid for, eternal life with God is offered by the Grace of God with the Faith response of both Jew and Gentile on an equal basis (Acts 15:11)!

Was this something new? No. God has never excluded Gentiles who want to trust Him and follow Him. They were called “God fearers.” There was one Torah for the native born Jew and the God fearing Gentile that lived among them (Num 15:16 and many others). They made up one of the 3 categories of God’s Family. One of several references to this effect is Psalm 115:9-11:

O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. **You who fear the LORD**, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

Cornelius was a “God fearer,” probably quite rare among officers in the Roman army. Maybe this is why God picked him to be the example for all of us Gentiles, a very unlikely “candidate” for salvation! He had been “far off” from God as he grew up from childhood, probably in a pagan family. But by the Grace of God, by the Spirit working in his heart and mind, Cornelius was brought “near” to God, becoming a Torah observant Gentile at the synagogue in Caesarea and well known by the Jewish community.

By reckoning from Psalm 115, Cornelius was already part of God’s family, but the Apostles and Jewish Believers needed to be “shocked” into really believing it. God proved it to them when He brought Cornelius “in” by giving him the same phenomenon in front of Peter & Co. that Peter and the Apostles had experienced on that memorable Shavuot some years before. “Jews require a sign,” so God gave it to them.

As I write, the “rumor” comes to mind that some Messianic Jews still want to put Messianic Gentiles in an inferior category, as 2nd class citizens. We hope that they remember that “religious rulings” contrary to Scripture will not stand. We Messianic Gentiles, however, are eternally grateful that God motivated some Jewish Believers from 1967 onward to accelerate the “Messianic movement.” Otherwise, we also might not have understood our true biblical foundation. As with every new movement of the LORD, growing pains are inevitable as attempts are made to implement Torah in a hostile world and against our still alive human natures!

But Praise the LORD, our Gentile eyes and hearts have now been opened to see Scripture with “Jewish eyes,” to Think Jewish, to think like THEY thought when the Scriptures were written, and to be GRAFTED IN TOGETHER with Jewish Believers in The Good Olive Tree of God’s ONE Family! Baruch HaShem! HalleluYah!