

A Leader of Mission¹: The Apostle² Peter



SABBATH—AUGUST 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 18:2, 31; Psalm 95:1; Matthew 16:18; Acts 5:15; Acts 10:25, 28–43; Acts 11:19–26; Galatians 2:11–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “The leaders saw how bold Peter and John were. They also realized that Peter and John were ordinary [common] men with no training. This surprised the leaders. They realized that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Peter, the changed Peter, became one of the greatest missionaries³ the world has ever known. But there were some lessons Peter still needed to learn.

LAST WEEK WE STUDIED THE WONDERFUL CHANGE OF PETER. We learned how Peter went from being a weak disciple (follower of Jesus) to a strong leader of the church. How easy it would have been, after Peter's terrible failure, to have written him off from the service (work) of the Lord. But that was not God's plan for this weak hero.

After Peter came back, he would devote his life to one mission: to share spiritual food with Jesus' flock—both inside and outside the sheepfold.

Last week we also learned what Christ did in Peter's life to make him a great missionary. This week we will look at the results of his mission. We will follow some of Peter's experiences in helping spread the gospel.⁴

There are some powerful lessons for us today from the story of Peter. We can learn from both his successes and his failures.

1. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or group out to do.

2. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

3. missionaries—persons sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

4. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 24**PETER'S COMMAND: A CLOSER STUDY (Matthew 16:18)**

Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:18 are some of the most misunderstood words in all of the Bible. A lot of Christian history has been based on what different people have said this verse means.

For many, it meant that Jesus built His church on Peter. It meant that he was what has been called "the first pope," and that Peter was the rock that Jesus was talking about.

Others, however, interpret it as Jesus saying, "You are Peter. But on this Rock, Myself, I will build My church." The proof is strongly in favor of the second interpretation (meaning).

How do Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:2, 31; Psalm 95:1; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:6 help us understand what the "rock" really means?

It does not matter how honored Peter was. It does not matter how gifted Peter was. It does not matter how important Peter's work was. God's church has never been built upon a sinful human⁵ person. Jesus Himself is the Rock. This Rock is the foundation (basis) upon which His church rests. All of us, including Peter, are

secure (safe) as long as we rest on that foundation, that Rock. And we can do that only when we are surrendered⁶ in faith and obedience (read Matthew 7:24) to the words and command of our Lord. Sure, the Lord knew the future of Peter and knew what Peter would become. But He certainly was not going to make Peter, who is a sinful, fallen human person, the foundation (beginning; first) rock of His church.



Jesus is the Rock on which His church is built.

What should Christ's words tell us about how important it is for us to be humble in our lives and in our work for the salvation⁷ of others? Why are our gifts nothing if we are not fully surrendered to the Lord, no matter how gifted we are?

MONDAY—AUGUST 25**THE SHADOW OF PETER (Acts 5:15)**

5. human—having to do with men, women, and children.

6. surrendered—to give one's whole life to Jesus.

7. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

Quickly, after Jesus returned to heaven, Peter became a leader among the believers, about 120 people. In the book of Acts, Peter is usually named first in lists of the apostles. Peter led the believers in choosing an apostle to replace Judas. But it is not until after Pentecost⁸ that Peter stands up and preaches powerfully to the crowd. There we fully realize the wonderful change in Peter's life (Acts 2:14–41). As a result of the Holy Spirit's working through Peter's preaching, 3,000 people accept Jesus and are baptized.

The next time we read about Peter, he is walking with his fellow apostle and longtime friend John up to the temple to pray. Peter then does the first healing miracle recorded in Acts. He heals a man crippled from birth (Acts 3:6–8).

Compare⁹ Acts 3:6, 12, 13 and Acts 4:10. What common theme (topic; subject) runs through Peter's words?

Peter had a long and bitter experience of trying to do things in his own strength. He would never forget sinking into the dark waters after he took his eyes off Jesus. He would never forget betraying Jesus after Jesus' arrest. He would never forget Jesus rebuking (scolding) him for trying to do things his own way. Peter really learned his lessons and fully depended on the power of the Lord. He would need to.

What was going on in Acts 5:15 and Acts 10:25? What kind of great pressure was being put on Peter here? What great danger would Peter, or anyone, face in the same situation?

People wanted only to have "the shadow of Peter" touch them. In many ways now, Peter was filled with God's power. But he would face his greatest spiritual challenges.



Many people believed that if Peter's shadow only touched them, they would be healed.

What would it do to you if people acted toward you the way they did toward Peter? What is the only way you could keep yourself from the most damaging kind of spiritual pride?

8. Pentecost—the time when Jesus' followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

9. compare—to show how two things are the same.

TUESDAY—AUGUST 26**ORGANIZING THE EARLY CHURCH (Acts 11:19–26)**

In the early history of the Christian church, the new believers sold their homes and the things they owned. They met together daily for worship, and enjoyed fellowship together. “They praised God. They were respected by all the people” (Acts 2:47, NIV). Things were going well under the leadership of the apostles.

But as the church grew, problems arose. It became clear that the church needed to be organized. Peter and the other apostles realized there had to be a proper balance between helping local church members and preaching God’s Word. They decided: “‘It wouldn’t [would not] be right for us to give up teaching God’s word in order to wait on tables’”¹⁰ (Acts 6:2, NIV).

As new church groups were formed in new areas, it became necessary to have better church organization. It was important to make sure that the believers were properly trained in their new faith.

The Jerusalem church began sending missionaries in groups of two (following the example of Jesus when He sent out the apostles and the disciples two by two).

What did the leaders in Jerusalem do in Acts 8:14 when they

heard about the new group of believers in Samaria that Philip had established? Or in Acts 11:19–26 when a new church was founded in Antioch? Why are these actions important?

Throughout the book of Acts, we find Peter and the other church leaders in Jerusalem watching very closely the rapid growth of the church, especially among the Gentiles (non-Jews). The leaders realized how easy it would be for the Gentiles to slip back into paganism¹¹ or to be led astray by false doctrines (church beliefs). Having come to Jesus as babes in the faith, these new believers needed to grow from the “milk” of the Word into solid doctrine.

What more could you do to help new members be better grounded in Jesus and our message? Why not take a new member under your wing and help him or her along?

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 27**A WIDER VISION (CALLING; PURPOSE) (Acts 1:8)**

After Pentecost, Peter’s life was changed. And he became a powerful leader of the church. But there still was more for him to learn. Like the other apostles, Peter still believed his mission was only for the Jews.

10. wait on tables—this refers to church work the apostles were doing that prevented them from doing the most important work God called them to do, which was teaching His Word.

11. paganism—the beliefs and practices of people who are not Christians, Muslims, or Jews. In the world of ancient (old-time) Greece and Rome, paganism often included sun worship and a belief in many gods.

What was Jesus saying in Acts 1:8 that should have helped Peter and others understand that things were not going to be the same as they expected, according to their understanding of what missions meant?

In Acts 10:1–14, Peter was given a vision.¹² In his vision Peter was told to eat unclean foods. As a Jew, he was surprised by what he was told. “ ‘No, Lord! I will not!’ Peter replied [answered]. ‘I have never eaten anything that is not pure and “clean” ’ ” (Acts 10:14, NIV). It would be the same as a Seventh-day Adventist being told in a vision to smoke a cigarette and drink alcohol.

Of course, God was not telling Peter to eat unclean foods. In the same way He would not ask us to smoke tobacco or drink alcohol. Peter’s vision was a parable.¹³ At first Peter wondered about the meaning (verse 17). But soon it became clear as Peter was invited to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile (non-Jew).

What does Acts 10:28–43 teach is the real meaning of the vision? What did Peter now understand that he did not before?

For us today, it is clear that the gospel is a message for the whole



In Peter’s vision, God told him to eat unclean foods, meaning Peter should preach to the non-Jews.

world. But it must have been quite a surprise for someone like Peter, coming from a Jewish background. How important that we not let our cultural¹⁴ prejudices¹⁵ put blinders¹⁶ on us. How important that, as with Peter, we get a wider vision (understanding) of the mission of our church.

What are some personal or cultural blinders that you have had to work with? How can you get a wider vision?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 28

GROWING IN GRACE¹⁷ (Galatians 2:11–14)

When church members in Christ are working together for the same

12. vision—a special message from God that is seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God’s will (plan).

13. parable—a short, simple story that teaches a truth.

14. cultural—having to do with the ideals, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people at a certain time.

15. prejudices—opinions already formed against someone or something before learning both sides of the issue; pre-judged ideas.

16. blinders—two leather flaps put over a horse’s eyes to prevent it from seeing anything that may scare it; something that prevents us from understanding an issue clearly.

17. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

mission, misunderstandings and disagreements can come up. The same is true with the early Christian church.

And this was also true of Peter. Peter was blessed of God. He was very important to the work of the church. But, after Pentecost, Peter still had some growing to do. How nice to know that even with his faults, God was still using him.

What does Galatians 2:11–14 tell us that Peter still did not understand?

Paul was upset because he believed that Peter was acting like a hypocrite.¹⁸ After Peter's vision about unclean foods and his experience with Cornelius, he had begun mixing with Gentiles. For this Peter was criticized (scolded) by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 11:2). Peter defended his actions. As a result, his critics changed their minds. "They had no further objections [reasons; protests] and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance¹⁹ unto life' " (verse 18, NIV).

But now Paul was disgusted. This is because Peter had done so much for the Gentiles in the past. Peter was changing his behavior (actions). Peter was now bowing to pressure from Jewish Christians and going against his beliefs. Peter was now refusing to eat with Gentiles, because he did not

want to make the Jewish Christians angry. But Paul became angry at Peter's actions. In another place Paul warned about a stronger brother being an offense to a weaker one (1 Corinthians 8:9–14).

Clearly, in this case of mixing with Gentiles, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, believed that the most important principle²⁰ of his mission was that all people are one (equal) in Christ.



All people are equal in Christ Jesus.

What is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 8:9–14? How could you take what Paul is saying and use it for yourself and your church? What things might you be doing that are insulting to weaker members?

18. hypocrite—a person who says one thing while doing another; a person who shows “two faces.”

19. repentance—the act of being sorry for having sinned. Repentance also involves turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

20. principle—the basic rule.

FRIDAY—AUGUST 29

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Jesus’ way of working with Peter had a lesson for him and his brethren [Christian believers]. Peter had denied his Lord. But the love which Jesus had for Peter had never weakened. And as Peter would take up the work of preaching the word to others, he was to meet the sinner with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love. Remembering his own weakness and failure, Peter was to work with the sheep and lambs under his care as tenderly as Christ had worked with him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 516.

“Peter failed often. He fell into temptation, but was later restored to fellowship with his brethren in Christ. He had a very close relationship with Jesus and knew of His strong principles [rules]. From Jesus, Peter received the best kind of training to be a disciple. He was gifted in preaching God’s Word. All these things made Peter qualified to be a disciple. So, does it not seem strange that Peter should be two-faced in his position? He should have been true to the principles of the gospel. Instead he was afraid of what people would think of him for doing the right thing. May God make every man sense his helplessness in directing his own ship straight and safely into the harbor. This is why the grace of Christ is very important. His grace alone can save our feet from falling (Manuscript

122, 1897).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, pages 1108, 1109.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the problem of working with weaker believers in the church who might be disappointed about certain practices. How far do we go in helping them along? What principles should we follow while trying not to insult people or their cultural practices?
- ❷ Spiritual pride is always a danger for anyone. How can we protect ourselves from this danger? How can we do this when we are having great success in soul winning, in ministering, or in any area of church life? How does the Lord help keep His servants humble?
- ❸ Is your church organized more as a club than a mission organization? If so, what can you do to help your church be more mission-minded?²¹

SUMMARY: The apostle Peter went through a dark night of the soul before, during, and after Jesus’ death. When Jesus rose from the dead, He gave Peter another chance to be faithful to his Lord. Peter dedicated his life to that task and led the church from strength to strength in challenging times.

21. mission-minded—focusing one’s life around the goal of leading others to Jesus.