

6. The Ministry of Peter (3Q 2018—The Book of Acts)

Biblical material: Acts 9:32–43, Acts 10:9–16; 34-35; Eph. 2:11–19, Acts 11:1–26, Acts 12:1–18.

Quotes

- Every believer should be an apostle ('one sent forth') since each believer is sent by the Lord Jesus to go and bear fruit. As a sent one, not every believer can preach like Peter to thousands...as in the beginning of Acts. However, every believer can be an apostle in a house, and can teach and experience fellowship as Paul did at the end of Acts. This conclusion opens the door for every believer to continue the writing of the book of Acts of the Apostles by visiting homes and opening their own house to build the assembly. *Henry Hon*
- An Apostle is a missionary, bearing testimony of the reality and divinity of Jesus Christ in all the world. *David A. Bednar*
- For, “Thou art Peter” and not “Thou art the rock” was said to him. But “the rock was Christ,” in confessing whom, as also the whole Church confesses, Simon was called Peter. *Augustine*
- Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power. *Cyprian*

Questions

Why was Peter’s role so critical in the early church? What were the pluses and minuses? How is Peter a model for us today? How did God work to change Peter’s prejudices? How does the life of Peter provide a miniature example of the great controversy? How would you explain Peter’s character?

Bible summary

Acts 9:32–43 recounts Peter’s raising of Dorcas from the dead. Acts 10:9–16 is the vision Peter received of the sheet containing unclean animals. His subsequent visit to Cornelius convinces him that the gospel is to go to the foreigners (Acts 10:34-35). Some object to what Peter has done, so he explains himself to the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1–26). The result is that “After they had heard this explanation, they didn’t argue with him anymore, and praised God, saying, ‘Now God has granted the opportunity to repent and have eternal life to foreigners as well.’” Acts 11:18 FBV. Acts 12:1–18 gives the wonderful account of Peter’s miraculous escape from prison at the hands of an angel.

Comment

Peter is often the one at the forefront. In the ministry of Jesus, Peter is the spokesman for the disciples. His great learning experience comes at the arrest of Jesus, and in his conversation with Jesus after the resurrection. While James seems to have been the one who took over the primary leadership role in the early church, Peter is still very much involved. In fact it is Peter of all people who receives the vision of the sheet with the unclean animals, and God’s command, “Rise Peter, kill and eat!”—a completely horrific idea for any Jew. God was making it clear to Peter that his role was to go with the messengers to Cornelius’ house.

His experience there convinced Peter that God was indeed working for the “foreigners,” and that they had an equal opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit. While Paul and Barnabas are the main providers of the evidence that the foreigners are receiving the gospel, Peter gets up in the council of Jerusalem, stating “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.” Acts 15:7 NIV.

While his experience continued to have ups and downs—notice the rebuke from Paul about how Peter vacillated in whether he should sit down and eat with foreigners or not (Gal. 2:11-21)—his ministry made a huge difference to the success of the early church. While the later part of Acts focuses on Paul, it was Peter who spoke up and delivered the most inspiring speech at Pentecost. It’s recorded that “those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Acts 2:41 NIV.

While we have no record in Scripture of Peter’s later ministry, it is believed he went to Rome. In his first letter, Peter gives a greeting “from the church in Babylon,” which is generally understood to refer to Rome (1 Pet. 5:13). Later Christian writers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Jerome note that Peter and Paul ministered in Rome. Tradition has it that when it came to his crucifixion, Peter asked to be crucified upside-down, as he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same way as his Lord.

Ellen White Comments

It was while Peter was still at Joppa that he was called by God to take the gospel to Cornelius, in Caesarea... This vision conveyed to Peter both reproof and instruction. It revealed to him the purpose of God—that by the death of Christ the Gentiles should be made fellow heirs with the Jews to the blessings of salvation. As yet none of the disciples had preached the gospel to the Gentiles. In their minds the middle wall of partition, broken down by the death of Christ, still existed, and their labors had been confined to the Jews, for they had looked upon the Gentiles as excluded from the blessings of the gospel. Now the Lord was seeking to teach Peter the world-wide extent of the divine plan. {AA 132-6}

Throughout his ministry, Peter faithfully watched over the flock entrusted to his care, and thus proved himself worthy of the charge and responsibility given him by the Saviour. Ever he exalted Jesus of Nazareth as the Hope of Israel, the Saviour of mankind... As time went on, the apostle's influence as an educator and leader increased; and while he never lost his burden to labor especially for the Jews, yet he bore his testimony in many lands and strengthened the faith of multitudes in the gospel...

In the later years of his ministry, Peter was inspired to write to the believers "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." His letters were the means of reviving the courage and strengthening the faith of those who were enduring trial and affliction, and of renewing to good works those who through manifold temptations were in danger of losing their hold upon God. These letters bear the impress of having been written by one in whom the sufferings of Christ and also His consolation had been made to abound; one whose entire being had been transformed by grace, and whose hope of eternal life was sure and steadfast. {AA 516-7}