

Summary of the Ministry of Apostle Peter to the Jews

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By Nancy Wood



How could a man who initially lived in Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee, born and raised in a traditional Jewish home and went into his father's business of being a fisherman become known as Apostle Peter. He was to become known as the "Apostle to the Circumcision."

Peter first appears in the Gospel history in John 1:35-42, when Andrew discovered that Jesus was the Messiah. He went and found his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus. When Jesus saw Peter, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas." Cephas is an Aramaic surname whose Greek synonym is Petros, or Peter and is translated as "rock" or "stone." As we see in the scriptures in Matt 16:18 - "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This scripture is misunderstood by many denominations. It is not Peter who the church is built upon but Christ. We know that if the church, or anything, built on man will not withstand the test of time. It must be built on Christ as the foundation. Christ did not intend to teach that His church would be built upon Peter, but upon Himself as confessed by Peter. Peter is careful to affirm this in the first of his two Epistles (1 Peter 2:4-9).

Peter's life can be divided into two parts - first from his call to discipleship to Jesus Christ's ascension and from the ascension to the end of his life. Although there are several events in the first part of Peter's life before the ascension of Christ, only one seems to have a direct impact on the balance of Peter's life. That is his call to the apostolic office and his spiritual equipment

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as seen on Matt 10:2-4 -Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

Peter held a distinguished place among the twelve disciples. We see in the four lists of the apostles found in the New Testament, Peter is named first - Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; and Acts 1:13. Also, Jesus chose Peter, James, and John as three main apostles to be present during certain important moments of His ministry such as the Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As stated in Matt 4:19 - Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." This is when Peter received his call to the discipleship of Jesus.

As Apostle Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, his ministry began. He went out and preached the first gospel that day as we see in Acts 2 and 3000 became Christians. This is where Peter gets the title, "Apostle of the Circumcision." He was speaking to a crowd of Jews. He began his sermon by quoting the prophet, Joel. He was preaching to them what they were already familiar with and then continued to explain to them that they had killed The Christ - God, Himself. Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" - Acts 2:38.

Peter and John on their way to the temple came upon a man lame from birth who was placed daily at the gate of the temple called Beautiful. Peter (with the assistance of the Holy Spirit) healed the lame man. Peter then addressed the people in the temple. Peter was arrested and beaten several times but continued preaching and healing and performing signs and wonders - heals Aeneas at Lydda, raised Dorcas from the dead at Joppa.

Peter has a vision upon the rooftop which leads him to preach the gospel to the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, in his (Cornelius) home in Caesarea. This opened the door of the gospel to the Gentile world. This is where he found contrary to everything he was taught. Here is where he found that Jesus Christ not only came for the Jews but the Gentiles as well. Peter, with the help of the Holy Spirit had to learn to circumcise the foreskin of his heart. At Cornelius's house he saw that Gentiles also could be saved. Peter witnessed scenes closely akin to those of Pentecost at Jerusalem (Acts 10:44-47). It was given to him to pronounce the solemn sentence on the guilty pair, Ananias and Sapphira. In these and similar situations Peter exhibited the authority with which Christ had invested him (Matt 16:19) - an authority bestowed upon all the disciples (John 20:22-23) - the power to bind and to loose.

As his ministry was primarily to the Jews, Peter defended the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian movement at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem.

The ministries of Peter, "Apostle to the Circumcision" and Paul, "Apostle to the Uncircumcised" are by no means in conflict with each other as demonstrated at the point of transition in Acts 10.

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Up until this point in time the gospel had been offered only to the Jews. Now they have rejected it in the national sense, and "the normal order for the present Christian age" is reached (Acts 13:44-48). We find Peter and Paul side by side, affirming the great doctrine of justification by faith only, as stated in Acts 15:11(KJV), "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (Jews) shall be save, even as they (Gentiles)."

It is clear from Peter's Second Epistle (2 Peter 1:1) that his conception of justification from God and as well as the human side is identical with that of Paul, since he speaks of justifying faith as terminating on the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. This is not the righteousness which God is, but the righteousness which God gives as we see in Rom 1:16,17; Rom 3:21-25; and 2 Cor 5:20,21.

Presumably late in life, Peter wrote his two Epistles, as it appears especially in the Second Epistle (2 Peter 1:12-15). Both were addressed chiefly to the Jewish Christians scattered abroad in the different provinces of Asia Minor, among whom Paul and his followers had planted the gospel (1 Peter 1:1-2 and 2 Peter 3:1). The First Epistle was written at Babylon (1 Peter 5:13) on the Euphrates, though destroyed as a great capital, was still inhabited by a small group of people, mostly Jews.

Peter went to Rome and it is believed that Mark (writer of the Gospel of Mark) was Peter's translator as he preached. It is also believed that as Peter told and retold his experiences with Jesus, he gave Mark an almost verbatim account. After Peter's death, Mark recorded what he remembered in what we know as the Gospel of Mark.

Tradition has it that Peter died a martyr in Rome about 67AD. He was about 75 years old. He was crucified under Nero. It is thought, by his own request that he be crucified upside down, feeling unworthy to resemble Christ's crucifixion in his death.

That is how a man from Bethsaida went from being a fisherman to a fisher of men. As stated in Matt 4:19 - Then He said to them, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men."

2011 Nancy A. Wood

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