

Bible Stories for Adults

Peter's Ministry

Acts 9:32-11:18

Opening

Gathering: How does God nudge people when they resist doing the work He has for them?

Today's Focus: God used Peter to lead the church in reaching out to those from Jerusalem, from Judea, from Samaria and from the ends of the earth.

Key Verses: *If God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? Acts 11:17*

So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life. Acts 11:18

Opening Prayer

Lesson

The Church's Mission (*Acts 1:8*)

What mission did Jesus give to His church before He ascended?

Matthew 28:19 = Go and make disciples of all nations

What verse in the Book of Acts summarizes how the early church grew towards this goal?

Acts 1:8 = With the Spirit's power; From Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to ends of the earth

Who was given the responsibility and privilege to lead this church through these doors?

Matthew 16:17-19 = Jesus gave the keys to heaven's door to the church, starting with Peter

Doors Opened (*Acts 8:25*)

How was Peter involved in opening the first door in Jerusalem?

Acts 2:1, 4, 14, 40-41 = Spirit spoke through Peter on Pentecost to bring 3000

Acts 3:12, 16; 4:4 = Peter's witness after healing lame man added 1000-2000 Jerusalem locals

How was Peter involved in opening the second door in Judea?

Acts 5:12-16 = People from Judea came to see Peter and became Christians

How was Peter involved in opening the third door in Samaria?

Acts 8:5, 14-17 = Peter and John brought Holy Spirit to Samaritans taught by Philip

After his visit with Philip, did Peter rush back to the temple to continue his ministry in Jerusalem?

Acts 8:25 = No, he and John took the long road home and witnessed in Samaria

Lydda (*Acts 9:32*)

After he returned to Jerusalem, did he stay and focus his work in the temple as before?

Acts 9:32 = No, he had heard the Spirit and began a traveling ministry

Lydda - 25 miles NW of Jerusalem, at the southern end of the coastal Plain of Sharon

Christians there either from persecution (Acts 8:1) or by Philip's witness (Acts 8:40) or ...

A commercial center since at crossroads of Egypt-Syria and Jerusalem-Joppa highways

Now called Lod, location of Israel's international airport

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Aeneas (Acts 9:33-35)

What happened in Lydda that was significant enough for Luke to include in this book?

Acts 9:33-34 = Healed a man paralyzed for 8 yrs; Told to make bed since not needed

But Peter had healed others. Why was this so significant? = Not just those in Lydda

Acts 9:35 = This was the first group Peter converted outside of Jerusalem

Was it strange that people became Christians just because they saw Aeneas walking?

John 12:9-11 = Same response people had when they saw Lazarus after he was raised

How else was this healing similar to the raising of Lazarus?

John 11:43-44 = Both were healed in Jesus' name and power

Dorcas (Acts 9:36-38)

Who was Dorcas? = Tabitha (Aramaic) and Dorcas (Greek) mean gazelle

Acts 9:36-37 = A very charity- and service-minded Christian who died

Note: Jews washed bodies, anointed with spices and buried before sundown

What does the death of this Christian have to do with Peter?

Acts 9:38 = The Christians sent for Peter to come since he was nearby

Joppa - 10 miles from Lydda, 3-4 hour walk, Now part of Tel Aviv-Jaffa

Jonah caught a ship for Spain in Joppa to avoid bringing God's saving word to Gentiles

A profitable port city, only natural harbor between Egypt and Ptolemais (near Tyre)

Where do we see an example of Joppa's role as the seaport for Jerusalem

2 Chronicles 2:16 = Logs for the temple were floated to Joppa from Lebanon

Tabitha / Talitha (Acts 9:39-41)

What else do we learn about Dorcas? = Only women prepared women's bodies for burial

Acts 9:39 = She was a good seamstress and widely loved

As leader of the church, did Peter try to comfort the mourners?

Acts 9:40-41 = No, he sent everyone out, prayed to God and raised her to life

What had Peter witnessed that may have led to him asking everyone to leave?

Mark 5:37-40 = Peter was there when Jesus emptied room and raised Jairus' daughter

What is interesting about his words, "Tabitha, cumi" (*Tabitha, get up*)? = Both took by hand

Mark 5:41 = Jesus had said nearly the same thing, "Talitha, cumi" (*little girl, get up*)

Preparing for Another Step (Acts 9:42-43)

What happened as a result of this Peter raising the dead to life through the Spirit's power?

Acts 9:42 = Word spread widely, *and many people believed in the Lord*

Ten years after Jesus ascended, what door had Peter left unopened for the church and why?

Ezra 6:21 = The door *to the ends of the earth* - the Gentiles, they were *unclean*

Peter had been raised to avoid unclean Gentiles. How did God subtly work on him now?

Acts 9:43 = *Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner*

How could this prepare Peter for reaching out to unclean Gentiles? = Had to live outside of city

Leviticus 11:35, 39-40 = A tanner stayed unclean by regular contact with dead animals

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Another Step Outward (Acts 10:1)

What person and place would God use to lead Peter to take this next big step?

Acts 10:1 = Cornelius, an Italian centurion in Caesarea – as non-Jewish as could be
Caesarea - In center of coastal Plain of Sharon, 65 miles NW of Jerusalem, 30 miles N of Joppa
Roman capital of Judea, home of governor, named after Augustus Caesar
Herod the Great built seaport, fresh water aqueducts, amphitheater, public buildings
Centurion led 80-100 soldiers, 600 men made up a cohort (regiment), 6000 men made a legion
Caesarea had 5 cohorts, Jerusalem had one
Jews were exempt from Roman military since soldiers ate pork and worked on Sabbath

Cornelius (Acts 10:2-8)

What else do we learn about Cornelius? = Full converts (inc. circumcision) called proselytes

Acts 10:2 = God-fearer - a Gentile who worshipped God, but didn't keep Oral Laws
Cornelius was 30 miles away from Peter and didn't know him. How did he enter this story?

Acts 10:3-6 = He had a clear vision of an angel who told him to send for Peter
Besides serving as a vehicle for Peter to take the next step, why would God call Cornelius?

John 7:17 = *If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out the truth* – He sought God's will
What did Cornelius think about this strange vision telling him to send for some stranger?

Acts 10:7-8 = He didn't analyze it, he obeyed and sent trusted men

Peter Prepared (Acts 10:9-16)

How urgently did these men go for Peter?

Acts 10:9 = Left after 3 for 10-14 hour journey, neared Joppa by noon the next day
How did God prepare Peter for going with and ministering to unclean Gentiles?

Acts 10:10-13 = Gave him a vision offering food when he was hungry before lunch
How does this relate to Peter's upcoming encounter with Gentiles?

Leviticus 11:46-47 (1-47) = Animals unclean for eating, Gentiles unclean for fellowship
How did Peter respond to this tempting meal, and was God pleased?

Acts 10:14-16 = He refused 3 times, even after God told him it was okay

What was wrong about Peter's response?

Amos 4:4-5 (1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11) = More concerned in keeping Law than obeying God

What had happened years before when Peter thought he was being wise in rejecting God's will?

Matthew 16:21-23 = Jesus rebuked him

Go Where the Spirit Leads (Acts 10:17-29)

Did Peter remember his past experience and understand what God was trying to tell him?

Acts 10:17-21 = No, Spirit had to push him to go, he didn't see connection of visitors and vision
Why did the Spirit specifically tell Peter to go with the men (v. 20)? = He invited them in, spent the night

Acts 10:22-23 = Jews would not talk with, welcome in or visit unclean Gentiles

What did Cornelius think when Peter actually showed up?

Acts 10:24-26 = He was thrilled and knelt before him in reverence

Having had two days of walking and thinking, did Peter finally understand what was going on?

Acts 10:27-29 = No, but he did learn: *Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*

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The Purpose Revealed (Acts 10:30-43)

What was the purpose of this confusing experience? = Cornelius didn't know what Peter would say
Acts 10:30-33 = God had made sure Peter would bring the Gospel to this group
Did this click on any light bulbs in Peter's mind?
Acts 10:34-35 = Yes, the key bulb that not only Jews belong to God
How do we see that Peter began to realize God's intent for the Gospel to be taken to all people?
Acts 10:36-43 = He witnessed the Gospel message to them

The Purpose Realized (Acts 10:44-48)

How did Peter wrap up his message of the gospel? = Called the Gentile Pentecost
Acts 10:44, 46 = He didn't, the Holy Spirit interrupted him by coming on the listeners
Why was the Spirit so visible? Does this mean the Spirit is only in us if we speak in tongues?
Acts 10:45 = No, The tongues and other displays were for the sake of the Jewish Christians
Was this enough for Peter and the others to accept these Gentiles into the church?
Acts 10:47-48 = Yes, they were baptized and Peter stayed a few days

Great News! (Acts 11:1-18)

How excited was the central church with Peter's success in taking the Gospel out another step?
Acts 11:1-3 = They were furious that he had associated with unclean Gentiles
How did Peter respond to this attack?
Acts 11:4-14 = He told how God had directly intervened to make sure Peter went
Note: If seven witnesses agreed on something, it was taken as completely proven (v12)
What did Peter have to say about the fact that he had baptized them into the Christian church?
Acts 11:15-17 = God accepted the Gentiles just as He had the Jews on Pentecost

What was the critical and final outcome of this entire story?
Acts 11:18 = The Christians realized that Jesus came to save all, not just Jews!
That Jesus came for all seems pretty clear to us. Why was it a mystery to the early Christians?
Ephesians 3:4-6 = It was always a mystery until the Spirit revealed it

Homework - Read the story of Peter and Herod in Acts 12

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. To whom and when have I shared the keys to God's kingdom in my Jerusalem (family, friends)?
(Acts 1:8; 2:14, 32, 38-41; 3:12, 16; 4:4; 9:26-28, 31; John 1:40-42; 1 Corinthians 7:16; 1 Peter 3:1)
2. To whom and when have I shared the keys to God's kingdom in my Judea (neighbors, coworkers)?
(Acts 1:8; 5:12-16; 8:1, 4, 40; 9:31-35, 42; John 1:43-46; 1 Timothy 6:12)
3. To whom and when have I shared the keys to God's kingdom in my Samaria (acquaintances)?
(Acts 1:8; 8:1, 4-5, 14-17, 25; 20:21; Isaiah 6:8; John 15:26-27)
4. To whom and when have I shared the keys to God's kingdom in my ends of the earth (strangers)?
(Acts 1:8; 8:26-27, 36-40; 9:15, 19b-22; 10:27-29, 44-48; 11:19-21; 13:2-3; 15:12-14, 36; 18:24-28; 23:11; Matthew 10:18; 24:14; Luke 24:45-48)
5. What have I allowed to interfere with fulfilling God's calling to me to be a witness for the Gospel?
(Acts 5:29-32; 10:9-16, 27-29, 44-48; 11:1-3, 15-18; 20:24; Jeremiah 1:4-9; Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 9:57-62; 21:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:12-16)