

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)