

## Peter in the Book of Acts

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The last time we talked about the fisherman Simon Peter was as he had left his fishing boat and was following Jesus and what he did after that, wasn't it? And we talked about how Peter saw Jesus, the Son of God, perform many miracles and how he learned from Jesus about God and the kingdom of heaven. And then Jesus was put on the cross and died there for our sins, didn't He? But do you remember what happened three days after Jesus died on the cross? That's right! Jesus was resurrected, was alive again, wasn't He?! And Jesus, now alive, was seen by Peter and by many other people.

And where had we gotten all of these true stories? Yes, from the New Testament in the Bible, from the four Gospels, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And that's where we stopped last time, wasn't it? So now let's go on and talk some more about Peter, this time from the book of Acts. All right? This book is called "Acts" or "The Acts of the Apostles", because it is about the way the apostles acted, what they did, after Jesus went back to heaven.

Well, Jesus was on earth for 40 days after He rose from the dead. And He was teaching Peter and the other apostles. Remember, "apostle" means someone who is sent out, doesn't it? And the apostles were the men that Jesus was going to send out to teach other people about how to be saved from their sins and be able to go to heaven when they died by just trusting in Jesus. And then the apostles would teach the people how they should live as Christians.

Okay, then. In the very beginning of the book of Acts it tells us that after the 40 days Jesus said to his apostles, "Wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes on you and gives you power. Then you will go all over the world and tell people about Me." And Jesus led Peter and the other apostles out onto the Mount of Olives, and there, as they watched, Jesus just started going up into the sky! And He went up into the sky until the clouds covered Him! And then 2 angels were there with the apostles and told them, "Why are you staring up into heaven that way? Jesus is going to come back to earth again the same way He went up into heaven."

Yes, Jesus just went back to heaven that way, and He's still in heaven. But we know that someday He is coming back to earth again, isn't He? And then He will be the great King over everyone!

Well, after watching Jesus go back to heaven, then the apostles went back inside the city of Jerusalem as Jesus had told them to do, and they went into an upper room. There were Peter and his brother Andrew and the brothers James and John, and Matthew, and Thomas (I'll tell you more about Thomas another time), and there were the other apostles as well. And there were also with them other believers, both men and women, including Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus' brothers. And do want to know something interesting? That's the last time that we hear about Mary in the Bible stories. Anyway, these believers stayed there together and prayed.

Well, ten days later on a special day called the feast of Pentecost (also called the Feast of Weeks), they were all gathered together -- when suddenly there was a great big sound like a mighty wind! And the noise filled the house where they were sitting! And the Holy Spirit came on them just as Jesus had promised. And what looked like tongues of fire were seen upon them. And then God let them start speaking in lots of different foreign languages! That was a miracle, wasn't it?!

Now, there were many Jews from all over the world who were in Jerusalem at that time because of the Feast of Pentecost. And they heard the noise, and they gathered together to see what was going on. And what do you think these many Jews from all over the world heard? Why, they heard the apostles talking in the languages of the different parts of the world! Everyone could hear them talking in the language from the part of the world that he had come from!

And then Peter began talking very loudly to the crowd. He reminded them of the miracles that the crowd had seen Jesus do before, and he explained to them about how God had sent prophets to tell about a Saviour and how Jesus was that Saviour and how Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that Peter and the other apostles had seen Him and talked to Him. Then Peter said, "Let all Jews know that this Jesus whom you had crucified, God made this Jesus to be both Lord and Christ." (Of course, "Christ" means "Messiah", and all the Jews were looking for their Messiah, the Christ.)

Then the crowd was very unhappy. Why, just 7 weeks earlier some of these very same people had probably shouted for Jesus to be crucified, to be put on the cross to die. And now they were unhappy about it and said to Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do?"

And Peter said to them, "Repent because of your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

And about 3000 people believed in Jesus that day and were baptized! Isn't that wonderful?! And these believers then followed what the apostles taught them. And they were very happy, and they met together and would pray and share the things they had with each other. And more people were saved, too.

Then after that, one afternoon Peter and John went up to the temple. (By the way, this John is the one who wrote the books of John and Revelation that we have in the Bible.) Anyway, Peter and John went to the temple, and there at one of the gates they met a man who had been born crippled. He was about 40 years old, and he had never been able to walk at all. And each day this man was carried to the gate of the temple where he could beg for money from the people who went through the gate to go to the temple. And now he asked Peter and John for some money.

Peter and John looked at the poor begging man, and Peter said, "Look at us."

The man looked at them, figuring they'd give him some money.

Then Peter said, "I don't have any money, but I'll give you what I do have."

Now what did Peter have? Yes, he now had special power from God the Holy Spirit, didn't he?

So Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk."

And then Peter took the crippled man by the right hand and lifted him up -- and right away the man's feet and ankles were strong! And the man jumped up and stood there and then began walking! And he went into the temple area, walking and jumping around and praising God!! He knew that God had let Peter do this miracle.

And everyone knew that this was the man who had been crippled and had begged by that gate of the temple for so many years. And now they saw him walking and praising God, and they were amazed! And they saw him grabbing onto Peter and John.

Well, this was a good chance for Peter to tell this crowd of people about Jesus, wasn't it?! So he did!

Peter said, "You men of Israel (that means the Jews), why do you look at us as if we had done this thing by our own power?"

And then Peter went on to tell them that the man had been healed, made well, by faith in the name of Jesus. And he reminded them that they had had Jesus killed, but that God had raised Jesus from the dead just like the prophets had said would happen. And Peter told them that he and John had even met with Jesus after He was alive again. After all, this had all happened right there in that same city of Jerusalem just a few weeks before this.

Peter told the crowd, "You and the leaders didn't really realize what you were doing then, but this is what the prophets said would happen. So repent, turn from your sins, and believe on Jesus."

Peter wanted the people to trust in Jesus so they could be saved from their sins and be able to go to heaven when they died, didn't he? And about 5000 of them did believe and were saved from their sins. (Yes, no matter what bad things we may have done, if we repent and ask Jesus to forgive us, He will, won't He? He will save us from our sins, just like the Bible says. And then we follow what He wants us to do.)

Well, that was good news about all those people being saved, wasn't it? And you'd think everyone would be happy about it, wouldn't you? But they weren't! No! The high priest and some of the Jewish leaders didn't like it at all! So they grabbed Peter and John and put them in jail! Remember, Jerusalem, though ruled by the Romans, was a Jewish city, so it had Jewish

leaders. Jesus was a Jew, Peter and all the other apostles were Jews, and at that time all believers were Jews (though later many, many people who weren't Jews would become believers in Jesus).

So there were Peter and John in jail. And the next day the leaders gathered together and had Peter and John brought before them. And the man that had been healed was with them, too.

The leaders asked Peter and John, "By what power and by what name have you healed this man?"

Well! Here was another chance for them to tell about Jesus, wasn't it?! And Peter was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and he said, "You rulers and leaders of Israel, I want all of you to know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ that this man here was healed! Jesus is the one you killed, but God raised Him from the dead."

Then Peter told the Jewish leaders, "There is no way at all to be saved except by His name." And that's true, isn't it? Only Jesus can save us from our sins, by believing in Him.

Well, the healed man was standing right there, and the people were all giving glory to God for this miracle, so there was really nothing bad the Jewish leaders could say, was there?! So they just told Peter and John not to teach in the name of Jesus anymore.

But Peter and John said to them, "Which is the right thing to do? What God tells us to do or what you tell us? We have to talk about what we know."

Then Peter and John were let go, and they went back to their friends and told what had happened, and they all praised God and prayed for boldness, for the strength to be brave enough to keep telling others about Jesus.

Then the house they were in was shaken. This was a sign from God, that He was with them, wasn't it? And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

And God let Peter and the other apostles perform many signs and wonders, miracles. And more and more people began to believe in Jesus. And they'd even lay sick people on mats in the streets so that even Peter's shadow might fall on them and make them well. And crowds began coming from other cities for them to heal, and they healed every one of them.

Then the high priest and some of the Jewish leaders got really jealous of the apostles, that the people were following the apostles. So the leaders grabbed Peter and the other apostles and put them in jail!

So Peter and the other apostles were in prison. But guess what happened that night? Why, the angel of the Lord came and opened the prison doors and took the apostles out! And then the angel of the Lord said to them, "Go to the temple and tell the people how to be saved!" So early

in the morning they did.

But the leaders didn't know this! And they sent officers to the prison to have the apostles brought before them! But the officers came back and said, "We got there and found the prison shut tightly, and the guards were there -- but when we opened the doors, no one was inside!"

Then the high priest and the leaders didn't know what to think, until someone came to them and said, "Look, the men you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

So the captain and the officers went to get them. And they did get them. But they were polite to the apostles when they got them, because they were afraid the people might throw rocks at them if they weren't!

Then the high priest scolded the apostles saying, "Didn't we command you not to teach in that name?" He meant in the name of Jesus, of course.

Then Peter and the others answered, saying, "We must obey God rather than men. Jesus, whom you crucified, was made alive by God and is now in heaven with God the Father. Jesus is a Prince and a Saviour to forgive sins. We saw these things."

Well, the high priest and leaders didn't know what to do! They wanted to kill the apostles! But one of the leaders, a great man named Ga-ma-li-el, told them, "Leave them alone. If they're just talking, pretty soon it will be all over. But if God really sent them, you don't want to fight against God."

So then the leaders agreed with Gamaliel. But they had the apostles beaten anyway and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore and then let them go. And the apostles left. But they were even happy that they'd been able to suffer because of Jesus.

So do you think Peter and the others then stopped telling people about Jesus and how they could be saved from their sins by trusting in Him? No! They were very brave, and every day they'd go to the temple and teach about Jesus. After all, there is nothing more important in the whole world than to hear about Jesus and how we can be saved from our sins just by trusting in Jesus, is there? And then when we die we can go to heaven and be with God forever, can't we? That will be wonderful! But let's go on about Peter.

Well, later Peter began going all over Israel and teaching people about Jesus. That is good news that everyone needs to hear, isn't it?! And one day Peter came to a city where there was a man who was paralyzed and hadn't been able to get out of bed for 8 years.

Peter said to the man, "Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up."

Then the man got up right away! He was well! And the people in that city and around

there saw this miracle that God had let Peter do, and they turned to the Lord.

Well, there was another city a few miles away from where Peter was, and this city was called Joppa. Joppa was on the sea coast. This is the same Joppa where hundreds of years before the prophet Jonah (remember Jonah who was swallowed by the big fish?), well, Joppa was the city where Jonah had caught a ship to try to keep from doing what the Lord had told him to do.

But we were talking about Peter, weren't we?! Anyway, there in Joppa was a very godly woman named Dorcas. She was also called Tabitha. She did many good things and gave much money to the poor. Well, Tabitha got very sick, and then she died. And since Joppa was near the city where Peter was, the believers in Joppa sent 2 men to ask Peter to come to them right away. So Peter got right up and went back with the 2 men to Joppa. When he got there, they took him to the room where there were some widows (women whose husbands were dead), and these widows were crying about Tabitha, because she was now dead. And they showed Peter the clothes that Tabitha had made for them when she was alive.

Well, Peter had everyone leave the room, then he knelt down and prayed. Then he turned to the dead Tabitha and said, "Tabitha, get up."

And what do you think happened then?! Yes! Tabitha opened her eyes! She was alive! Tabitha saw Peter, and then she sat up! And Peter took Tabitha's hand and helped her get up, and then he called to the believers and the women who had been crying. When they came, he gave them Tabitha all alive and well! Think how happy they were that God had let Peter do this miracle!

Then everyone in Joppa heard about this, and many believed on the Lord and were saved. And Peter stayed in Joppa for many days at a man's house.

Well, about 30 miles up the seacoast from Joppa was a big seaport called Cae-sa-ri-a, and in Caesaria lived a man named Cor-ne-li-us. Cornelius wasn't a Jew; he was a Gentile, and he was the head of a group of Roman soldiers. Remember, at that time Rome was the ruler of Israel and also all over the world as well. Well, Cornelius was a Gentile, but he and his household all loved God and prayed to God all the time and gave money to poor people. But he evidently had not heard that Jesus was the Saviour, that He was the Christ.

Anyway, one day God sent a vision to Cornelius. In this vision an angel of God came to him and said to him, "Cornelius."

Cornelius was scared when he saw the angel! And he said, "What is it, Lord?"

The angel said, "God has heard your prayers and seen what you do for the poor. Now, send men to Joppa to a man called Simon Peter, and he will tell you what you should do." And the angel told Cornelius just where Peter was. Then the angel left.

So Cornelius called two of his servants and a godly soldier to him and sent them to Joppa.

Now what do you think was happening to Peter the next day as these 3 men were getting near Joppa? Well, Peter had gone up onto the flat roof of the house where there was like a little patio where people could sit. And Peter was praying. It was right around noon time, and Peter got hungry and wanted to eat. But while they were getting a meal ready for him, Peter sort of fell asleep, and he had a vision from God.

In this vision Peter saw heaven open and something come down to earth from heaven. The thing was sort of like a big sheet that was held together by its four corners, making like a big basket. And inside of this sheet were all kinds of animals and birds and even things that could crawl around. And a voice came to Peter saying, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Now, remember, the Jews had been living under the law of Moses for about 1,500 years, and in the law of Moses they were told not to eat certain things. Those things were called "unclean", things that weren't to be eaten. Well, this sheet had lots of unclean things in it. So, of course, Peter said, "No, Lord, I've never eaten anything unclean."

But the voice spoke to him again and said, "What God has made clean, don't say it's not clean."

This happened 3 times, and then the sheet-like basket was taken back up into heaven.

Well, Peter knew this was a vision from God, but he didn't know what it all meant! But while he was thinking about it, the 3 men whom Cornelius had sent to him had gotten to the house and were at the gate asking if Simon Peter were staying there.

Peter was still on the roof thinking about the vision he'd just had, when suddenly God the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said, "Look here. There are 3 men looking for you. So get up and go down to them. And then go with them -- and don't wonder if you should, for I have sent them."

Now why would Peter have wondered if he should go with them, and what does the vision have to do with all of this? Well, you see, of course Peter was a Jew, just like all of the other apostles and Jesus were all Jews. And at that time the Jews didn't have anything to do with Gentiles, with people who were not Jews. They only visited and were only friends with other Jews. Why? Well, there were several reasons, but one reason is that Gentiles often worshipped false gods, and God had told them to stay away from any false gods, so the Jews didn't want to have anything to do with Gentiles. And this was sort of like saying that the Gentiles were unclean, wasn't it? But by giving Peter the vision of the unclean animals and telling him to eat them, God was showing Peter that God loved the Gentiles, too, and that Peter should go tell Gentiles about Jesus so they could be saved, too. And then Peter understood why he had had the vision and what it meant. So right away Peter obeyed God and went down to the 3 Gentile men.

Peter said, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

Then they told Peter that an angel from God had told Cornelius to send for Peter. So Peter had them come in and spend the night, and the next day he started out with them to Caesaria, and he took six other believing Jews with him.

Well, the next day they all got to Cornelius' house, and there were Cornelius and his friends and relatives all waiting for them. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius went up to meet him and fell down at Peter's feet as if to worship him. Well, of course, Peter didn't want that! So he lifted Cornelius up and said, "Stand up. I'm just a man, too."

And then Peter explained to all these Gentiles that ordinarily Jews didn't have anything to do with Gentiles, but that God had shown him that it was all right. Then Cornelius told about his own vision. So Peter then explained to Cornelius and his family and friends about Jesus and that Jesus had died on the cross and then been alive again 3 days later, and how believing in Jesus would save people from their sins.

And guess what happened while Peter was still talking? Why, God the Holy Spirit came on these Gentiles; they were saved! And they began speaking in other languages they hadn't know before, just like the apostles had done on Pentecost (remember?); and they began to praise God. This clearly showed Peter that the Lord had saved these Gentiles! So when Peter and the Jews with him heard this, Peter said, "They have the Holy Spirit as well as we do! Why can't they be baptized, too?!"

So Cornelius and the other Gentile believers were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now, back in Jerusalem the apostles and the other believing Jews there heard that Peter was preaching the word of God to Gentiles! So when Peter got back to Jerusalem, they sort of scolded him. They said, "You stayed with Gentiles and ate with them!"

But Peter explained everything to them about his vision from God (with the sheet and unclean animals, remember?) and that he was told by the angel that he wasn't to think of the Gentiles as being unclean. He even told them that God had sent a vision to Cornelius telling him to send for Peter.

Then Peter said, "And the Holy Spirit came on these Gentiles, just like He had on us."

When the apostles and believers in Jerusalem heard all that Peter had to say, they didn't scold Peter anymore. Instead, they glorified God because now God was saving Gentiles, too.

And I'm glad about that, too, aren't you?! After all, I'm a Gentile, and God has saved me, too!



Well, around that time the Roman king there, Herod Agrippa (the grandson of the bad king Herod who had wanted to kill Jesus when He was a baby), this Herod had the apostle James, the brother of John, to be killed. And the Jews who didn't believe in Jesus were happy about this. So Herod Agrippa decided to kill Peter, too, and make them even happier. But it was Passover time again, so Herod decided to wait until the week of Passover was finished. So he had Peter put in prison. And there were to be several guards with Peter at all times in prison.

Well, the night before Herod was going to have Peter killed, there Peter was in prison. He was asleep. And he was chained to a soldier on each side of him. And there were more soldiers outside of the door. And what do you think happened then? Why, suddenly the angel of the Lord came to Peter in the prison! And a bright light shown all over that dark prison! But the soldiers didn't see any of this!

The angel of the Lord struck Peter on his side (probably to wake him up). And the angel raised Peter up, saying, "Get up quickly!"

And then the chains fell off of Peter's hands!

And the angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and tie on your sandals!"

So Peter did.

Then the angel said, "Put your coat on you and follow me!"

Then the angel went out of the prison cell where Peter had been, and Peter followed him. But Peter didn't realize that all of this was really happening! He thought it was just a vision!

Well, they went past the first guards. Then they went past the second guards. And none of the guards saw them! And then they came to the iron gate that led out into the city -- and this iron gate just opened for them all by itself! And Peter and the angel went through the iron gate and walked through one street -- and then the angel just disappeared!

Well, Peter really woke up then! And he said to himself, "Now I know that this really happened! That the Lord sent His angel and saved me from Herod!"

Peter thought about this and then went to the house of the mother of John Mark. (This is the Mark who later wrote the Gospel of Mark which we have in the New Testament.) There were lots of believers at this house, and they were praying. Well, Peter knocked at the gate, and a girl named Rhoda came to the gate to listen to see who it was. And Rhoda recognized that it was Peter's voice outside the gate. And she was so glad that she just turned around and without even stopping to open the gate, she just ran and told the people that Peter was outside the gate!

The people said to Rhoda, "You're crazy!" They thought they knew that Peter was in prison!

But Rhoda kept insisting that it really was Peter. Then they said, "It is his angel!" (I think they meant a ghost, but I'm not sure.)

In the meantime, though, here was Peter standing outside the gate! And he kept knocking and knocking! So finally they opened the gate -- and they saw Peter himself and were all astonished! (And this is the only time in the Bible that we hear about Rhoda! (I think that's all funny, don't you?!))

Anyway, Peter motioned to them to be quiet, then he told them how the Lord had taken him out of prison. Then he said, "Go tell James (the half-brother of Jesus) and the other believers." Then he left and went to another place.

Well, the next morning guess what happened? Yes, the soldiers realized that Peter was gone! And they were all upset! And when Herod Agrippa looked for Peter, of course he couldn't find him!

But before we go on about Peter, I want to tell you what happened to that bad king Herod Agrippa. He went down from Jerusalem to a place he had in Caesaria. (You remember Caesaria, don't you? It is where Cornelius had lived.) Anyway, Herod had a big meeting planned there with some leaders from other places that he was mad at. These leaders had come to make peace with Herod. Well, they set a day to meet, and Herod Agrippa dressed all up in his kingly clothes and sat on his throne and made a big speech to them.

Now the people wanted to make Herod to be happy with them, so they shouted out, "Oh, it is the voice of a god and not of a man!"

And Herod didn't stop them from saying this. And right away the angel of the Lord made Herod very sick because he hadn't given the glory to God! And Herod died.

But back to Peter!

Well, probably a couple of years later is the last we hear of Peter in the book of Acts. At that time the apostle Paul and Barnabas has been traveling around telling people about Jesus, and many Gentiles were being saved. (I'll tell you a lot more about Paul some other times). But some Jews who believed in Jesus said that then those believing Gentiles had to become Jews themselves and follow the law of Moses. This led to a big argument, so finally Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and talked there with the apostles and other leaders of the believers there. One of these leaders was Peter. The different people there talked about this and argued about it.

Finally Peter stood up and said, "Brothers, you know that God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles, just as He did to us. And they are saved by faith just as we are. So why are you trying to put this big burden of the law of Moses on the believing Gentiles? Why, even we can't keep

the law of Moses!"

And so it was finally decided that the Gentiles did not have to follow the law of Moses but that they should do 4 things that had to do with clean living. And a letter was written about that and sent out to the Gentiles telling them so.

But now the book of Acts doesn't say anything more about Peter. However, the apostle Paul does mention Peter in a couple of letters he wrote to Christian believers in other cities. In the first letter he wrote to the Corinthian believers, Paul mentions that Peter's wife would go places with Peter. And in his letter to the Galatian believers, Paul mentions about staying a while with Peter in Jerusalem and that Peter was good to him.

But later in the letter to the Galatians when Paul is telling them that they don't have to follow the law of Moses, Paul says something else about Peter that isn't so good. You see, it