

## ***Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries*** ***A Pillar of Mission: The Apostle Peter***

Lesson #9 for August 30, 2008

Scriptures: Psalms 18:2,31; 95:1; Matthew 16:18; Acts 5:15; 10:25,28-43; 11:19-26; Galatians 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:15,16.

1. This lesson describes the work and mission of Peter after his disastrous weekend denying his Friend and Lord. (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:56-62; John 18:15-18,25-27) What happened to Peter, John, and the other disciples that made such a fantastic change in them following the resurrection, the ascension, and Pentecost? What changed Peter from the disciple who could deny his Lord because a maid pointed her finger at him (Mark 14:66-72) into the Peter who stood up in front of the entire Sanhedrin and said,

“<sup>10</sup>...This man stands here before you completely well through the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth—whom you crucified and whom God raised from death. <sup>11</sup>Jesus is the one of whom the scripture says:

‘The stone that you the builders despised  
turned out to be the most important of all.’

<sup>12</sup>Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us”? (Acts 4:10-12, *GNB*)

Was it that Peter finally realized that Jesus was not “just” a Friend but was the God of the Universe?

2. Jesus clearly recognized Peter as a man with great potential. But Peter also had the tendency to speak before he thought. Why do you think Peter was the leader of the early church after the ascension of Jesus? Was he always the first one to speak? Did he speak with great conviction? Did he speak without fear? Notice that he always gave credit to the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. (Acts 2:38; 3:16; 4:10)
3. After feeding the 5000, the people and the disciples—especially Judas—thought Jesus was about to be made king. Jesus had to put an end to those plans. Soon after that, Jesus concentrated His efforts on teaching the disciples. For about six months, He took them to remote areas where there were fewer scribes and Pharisees and fewer people “pressuring” Jesus to heal them. That portion of Jesus’ life is called the “retirement” from public ministry.
4. Read Matthew 16:13-28; Mark 8:27-9:1; Luke 9:18-27. This event was a clear turning point in the ministry of Jesus. For the first time, He suggested to His disciples that He was going to go to Jerusalem and there be killed. But, before He revealed that to them, He asked them to express their faith in Him. What did Peter mean when he said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”? (Matthew 16:16, *GNB*) The term, “Son of Man,” meant being a “human being” and was applied to Ezekiel as well as to Jesus. The term, “Son of David,” meant being in the royal line of David. Being “the Messiah” (in Hebrew) or “Christ” (in Greek) meant being “the anointed one” which could refer to a priest or king. However, the term “Son of the living God” as used by Peter indicated Peter’s conviction that Jesus was divine and was God! Where do you think Peter’s ideas about Christ came from? Why do you think Peter was the one to express that particular idea? Did the other disciples agree with Peter? As Isaiah indicated in chapters 40-55, the criteria for the True God are 1) having the ability to create out of nothing, 2) having the ability to predict the distant future, and 3) having the

ability to perform supernatural acts. Which of those three is Satan able to counterfeit? Does Satan really perform supernatural acts?

5. As we know, the Roman Catholic Church has taken Matthew 16:18,19 as evidence that Peter was the first pope and that he handed his authority down through a succession of popes to the present day. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the pope, therefore, is the one on this earth who speaks on God's behalf. Roman Catholics believe that Peter was given the "keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19) and that those keys are still "held" by the current pope. Thus, they teach that unless one is recognized and baptized as a Roman Catholic member, s/he cannot be saved. How should you respond if a Roman Catholic Church member approaches you with this argument? Knowing the future, why did Jesus—and the Holy Spirit as He inspired the writers of Scripture—allow the statement about Peter being given the "keys of the kingdom" to be stated and recorded? Why not avoid the future misinterpretation of the statement by eliminating it from Scripture?

1. You could mention the fact that the word *petros* comes from a Greek word for a small stone while the word *petra* refers to bedrock. (Matthew 16:18) While Matthew was written in Greek, Jesus' words were in Aramaic and there is no evidence that such a distinction in terms was present in Aramaic. There are many verses mentioned in this lesson and throughout Scripture supporting the fact that God is our Rock and that Christ is the Chief Cornerstone of the church. Peter himself stated that. (1 Peter 2:4-8)

2. You could mention the fact that while the keys to the kingdom were apparently given to Peter, (Matthew 16:19; compare Luke 11:52; Matthew 23:13) they were later given to all of the disciples. (Matthew 18:18) And that authority apparently extends to any group of two or three Christians who are true followers and who pray together. (Matthew 18:19,20)

3. It is probably more convincing to agree with your Catholic friend that the church was/is built on Peter. It is built upon the foundation laid in the Scriptures by all of the apostles (including Peter) and prophets with the Cornerstone being Jesus Christ Himself. (Ephesians 2:20) The church is built on the truths of Scripture.

4. You should ask them also to look at 1 Peter 2:4-8. We all are to be building stones, even "living stones," in the temple of God.

The church is not built on one faulty human being but rather is built on the living Cornerstone, Jesus Christ Himself.

6. Read Acts 5:15, *GNB*. "As a result of what the apostles were doing, sick people were carried out into the streets and placed on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by." What do you think was happening then? Was there any miraculous power in Peter's shadow? Were people healed by John's shadow as well? Did God "take" the people's acts of positioning themselves where Peter's shadow would fall as an "act of faith" and heal them even though there was no miraculous power in Peter's shadow?
7. Review the story of Cornelius and Peter. (Acts 10) Peter apparently needed a lot of convincing to accept Gentiles as Christians. He knew what kind of opposition he would get from the church leaders back in Jerusalem. So, to protect himself, Peter took along a number of witnesses. On that occasion and again later in Acts 15, Peter spoke eloquently about the truth and how it should be allowed to spread freely to Gentiles.

8. Was Peter a major factor in the organization of the early church? When Peter and John went to Samaria to evaluate the work of Philip, what do you think they had in mind? Read Acts 8:14-17. Why do you think the Holy Spirit waited for Peter and John to be present before He was “poured out” on those new believers?
9. Antioch was the third largest city in the Mediterranean world in the days of the apostles. Headquarters of the Christian church seemed to shift from Jerusalem to Antioch. Notice what happened when Barnabas was sent there. (Acts 11:19-30) Later, Peter also went to Antioch to evaluate the situation. (Galatians 2:11-14) What do you think happened on that occasion? Was Paul justified in the way he treated Peter? After being so bold in reaching out to Gentiles such as Cornelius, did Peter “slip back”? What kind of pressure was there from the church leaders in Jerusalem that they seemed to be very reticent to see the gospel spread to Gentiles? Were representatives from James, the stepbrother of Jesus, trying to keep the church Jewish?
10. In the apostles’ day, it seemed that “Jewish thinking” and the requirement of the observation of all the Jewish ceremonial prohibitions were major hindrances to the spread of the gospel among Gentiles. Paul often spoke against those “Judaizing” Christians. (Galatians 1:6-10; 2:14; 4:17; Philippians 3:2)
11. What were the motivating factors in the minds of those Judaizers? Were they trying to protect the dominance of Jews in the Christian church? Were they trying to maintain their cultural and religious norms? Do we struggle against certain cultural prejudices in the church today?
12. Some of us feel very strongly that the “Larger View” is the essential message of Paul, of Jesus Christ, and of Ellen White. What keeps most Seventh-day Adventists from accepting this “Larger View”? Are there certain cultural and/or religious prejudices which prevent people from accepting this view?
13. Unfortunately, like Peter, Paul also bowed on one occasion to pressure from the Christian church leaders at Jerusalem. Was Peter one of those leaders pressuring Paul? At the Jerusalem conference as described in Acts 15, the early church decided on four requirements for Gentile Christians—1) eat no food offered to idols, 2) eat no blood, 3) eat no meat from an animal that had been strangled, and 4) abstain from sexual immorality. Were those four “restrictions” what the Gentiles had to “do” or “not do” to be saved? Or were those four “requirements” so that the Jews would not be repulsed by the actions of the Gentiles and would agree to sit in the same room with the Gentile Christians? After agreeing with church leaders at that Jerusalem conference, Paul went forth and clearly reversed the decision of the general committee when he suggested that food being offered to idols did not change the food in any way. (1 Corinthians 8, 10, and Romans 14) Later, when Paul himself went back to Jerusalem to deliver the large offering he had collected from the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, the church leaders put a lot of pressure on him to prove that he was still a faithful, Jewish Christian by participating in the Jewish ceremony of purification. God did not authorize him to compromise with them to the extent that he did. (*Acts of the Apostles* 399-405.1) As a result, Paul was arrested and spent most of the rest of his life in prison.
14. What should we learn from the fact that the two greatest apostles to the Gentiles bowed to the pressure of the leaders of the Christian church and made serious mistakes by compromising with those leaders and thus, misrepresented God? Do we have any idea who led out in this opposition to Peter and Paul when they reached out to Gentiles? (Acts 6:7;

15:5) Peter and Paul both “got into trouble” for compromising with church leadership. What is the lesson for us?

15. While we recognize that it is very difficult for people in leadership positions always to follow principle in every detail of their lives and their examples, certainly that is the ideal to be sought after.
16. While we do not know for sure, it is quite possible that Peter and Paul ended up together at the same time in the Mamertine prison in Rome before they were each executed. Before that day, they apparently were reconciled despite previous differences. (2 Peter 3:15,16)
17. When national and international Sunday laws exist, will the Seventh-day Adventist Church continue to exist? Will the church either compromise or become illegal and cease to exist. Will we need to stand up for God even better than Peter or Paul did? If the “official church” takes a position contrary to the Word of God, will we need to be like Daniel and Christ who refused to compromise? Or should we be like Peter and Paul who compromised beyond what God authorized? (See *Acts of the Apostles* 405.1)
18. Read Acts 6:7. Many priests—and presumably Sadducees—accepted the message of the disciples after Pentecost. Are they the ones whose influence made the “Judaizers” so pervasive? Did they carry their old ways into the new church? What lesson is that for us?
19. What kind of pressures do we place on our pastors and church leaders? Do we make their lives more difficult by our expectations of them? Do we in our own lives behave from principle at all times? Have we learned how to do right because it is right no matter who may oppose us?

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