

Feed My Sheep: 1 & 2 Peter

A Royal Priesthood

Lesson #3 for April 15, 2017

Scriptures: 1 Peter 2; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 28:16; Exodus 19:3-6.

1. In this lesson we will study one of the most precious Jewish promises from the Old Testament which Peter took and applied to the Christian church.
2. So, what does it mean to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His [God’s] own special people”? (1 Peter 2:9, *NKJV*) [Word in brackets is added.] These words were used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe that covenant relationship which the Hebrew people were supposed to have with God.
3. From the beginning in Abraham’s day, Abraham and his descendants were supposed to represent God to the nations around them. Abraham himself did an excellent job of that.

God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word, He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct his children and his household in the principles of God’s law. And that which gave power to Abraham’s teaching was the influence of his own life. **His great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism. Such a household required a firm hand at the helm. No weak, vacillating methods would suffice. Of Abraham God said, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.” Genesis 18:19. Yet his authority was exercised with such wisdom and tenderness that hearts were won.** The testimony of the divine Watcher is, “They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” Genesis 18:19. And Abraham’s influence extended beyond his own household. Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.—Ellen G. White, *Education** 187.2; *RH,** February 1, 1912, par. 7. [Bold type is added.]

4. Being fully acquainted with God’s original plan for His people, Peter was saying that since the Hebrews failed in carrying out God’s plan, it was time for Christians to take up that covenant relationship with God. Is that a fair evaluation?
5. Paul himself described that relationship in Romans 11:17-18. How does this apply to us?
Romans 11:17-18: Some of the branches of the cultivated olive tree have been broken off, and a branch of a wild olive tree has been joined to it. You Gentiles are like that wild olive tree, and now you share the strong spiritual life of the Jews. ¹⁸So then, you must not despise those who were broken off like branches. How can you be proud? You are just a branch; you don’t support the roots—the roots support you.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Romans 11:17-18). New York: American Bible Society.
6. But, the privileges associated with being God’s chosen people also carry some very important responsibilities. Are we living the truth that we profess?

7. How well are we as modern-day Christians and Seventh-day Adventists doing at spreading the gospel to the ends of the world? (Matthew 24:14)
8. Read 1 Peter 2:1-3. In order to do that, we must avoid some things and earnestly seek others. Peter exhorted us to avoid all evil, lying, hypocrisy, jealousy, or insulting language. Instead of living like the world, we need to be like newborn babies, thirsting for the pure spiritual milk that we may grow by it.
9. If we are no different in our behavior and in our actions from the world around us, how can we expect to be examples to them? So, how do we as Christians truly become different? As teenagers, we do not want to be different! We must partake of that spiritual milk—the Word of God. (See Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 22:29; 2 Timothy 3:15-17.) It is by studying and meditating on the Word of God and discovering the truth about His character and His government as described in the Bible that we learn to love and serve Him in the best possible way.
10. Surrounded as we are with people living immoral, greedy, evil lives, how are we supposed to be transformed? The Word of God separates truth from falsehood.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 555.1. [Bold type is added.]

11. Read 1 Peter 2:4-8. Compare Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; and Isaiah 8:14-15.
12. No doubt, Peter had memorized those Old Testament passages when he was young, probably attending one of the small synagogue schools in his hometown of Bethsaida. Or, perhaps he learned them when attending services on Sabbath. But, having spent years with Jesus, he recognized the true application of those verses. In fact, Jesus Himself used Psalm 118:22 at the conclusion of the parable recorded in Matthew 21:42. Peter himself had referred to the same idea in his sermon before the Sanhedrin recorded in Acts 4:11. Paul used Isaiah 28:16 in Romans 9:33. Compare also Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:11.
13. Notice that Peter called Jesus a living Stone, in fact, the living Cornerstone in 1 Peter 2:4 and following. Then, immediately in verse 5, he called us to be living stones to be used in building up the spiritual temple which is God's ultimate plan for this earth.
14. What is a living stone? Clearly, Peter was not talking about some kind of brick and mortar; he was talking about Jesus Himself and His followers who are the true spiritual "building material" that makes up God's church.
15. But, as living stones we are not to be just sitting there doing nothing. If we are not alive and working for Jesus Christ by witnessing to our friends around us, then we can hardly be called living stones in the temple of God. When we choose to be baptized, we are not only baptized into Christ, but we are also baptized into a local church community; it is our responsibility to help build up that church community.
16. But, as we seek to reach out to others, we ourselves must grow. If our picture of God has not grown in the last year, we are worshipping an idol.
17. Peter wasted no time in moving on to say that those living stones—that is, us—are supposed

to be holy priests, offering “spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5, *GNB*) Do we understand what we are supposed to be teaching to the world?

18. So, what does it mean to be a part of a covenant relationship? God made a covenant promise to Abraham. *Covenant* (Hebrew, *berit*) is the word we use to describe a formal arrangement between two parties. Besides the covenant between God and Abraham, we know about the covenant between Laban and Jacob; (Genesis 31:44) between two kings—Solomon and Hiram; (1 Kings 5:12) even between David and the elders in Israel. (2 Samuel 5:3)
19. Read Genesis 17:1-4; Exodus 2:24; and Exodus 24:3-8. What evidence do we have that the covenant relationship which God established with Abraham is supposed to extend to our time? These verses make it clear that the covenant first made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was supposed to extend to all their descendants. (See Genesis 15:9-21; 17:1-26; Exodus 19:1-24:8; and especially Exodus 24:3-8.) Paul, Peter’s fellow apostle, said in Galatians 3:29: “If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised,” (*GNB*) extending that covenant to “spiritual Israel.”
20. Almost anyone looking at these promises would be happy to accept them; but, they are not unconditional.

The Lord covenanted that if they were faithful in the observance of His requirements, He would bless them in all their increase and in all the work of their hands.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 2, 574.0.

Indeed, the prophets repeatedly warned Israel of the dangers of disobedience to God’s law, often using language reminiscent of the covenant. **It has been argued that with the possible exception of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, many prophecies in the Bible are conditional.** That’s how central the idea of obedience is in regard to the covenant promises. The covenantal prophecies of blessing were conditional on obedience to God’s law, and prophecies of doom applied only to the disobedient.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, April 11. [Bold type is added.] Are promises from God only good if we are obedient?

21. So, does this covenant relationship apply to us? Are we prepared to promise God our best obedience? Is there any question at all about whether or not that is what God wants?
22. On Mount Sinai the LORD told Moses to say to the people:

Exodus 19:4-8 (*GNB**): ⁴“You saw what I, the LORD, did to the Egyptians and how I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings, and brought you here to me. ⁵Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, ⁶a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests.” ⁷So Moses went down and called the leaders of the people together and told them everything that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸Then all the people answered together, “We will do everything that the LORD has said,” and Moses reported this to the LORD. (Compare Exodus 24:3-7 and Joshua 1:18.)

23. In these passages we see that three times the children of Israel promised God that they would do whatever He commanded them. In fact, they did so even before they had heard what it was that God wanted! Then, Moses told them what God wanted; and they said, “We will obey.” Then, Moses wrote down God’s commands in a book and read it to them again; and they said: “We will do everything that the Lord has said.” At that point, did the angels laugh? Or, cry?

24. So, how could it be that the story of the Israelite nation ended up so sadly?
25. Read 1 Peter 2:5,9-10. Peter believed that the time had come for Christians to take up the mantle and do what the Hebrew nation had failed to do. He called Christians to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's chosen people. So, how are we to minister to the world? Is it by telling them the truth about God in the Gospels and all of Scripture?
26. So, what does it really mean to be a "holy priesthood"? (1 Peter 2:5) Remember that only a small proportion of the priests were able to serve in the temple in Jerusalem at any one time. Most of them were serving their communities scattered around Israel in one of the 48 cities assigned to the Levites. What was their work in those cities and villages? Remember that they were not allowed to offer sacrifices anywhere except in Jerusalem. They were to minister to and care for the people in their local communities. Later, they taught schools.
27. Do our associates, our friends, and our neighbors think of us as a shining light for the gospel? Remember Jesus's words in John 13:34-35 (GNB*): ³⁴"And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."
28. Have you ever known anyone whose Christian experience stood out so remarkably that everyone around recognized it?
29. How can we in our day "proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light"? (1 Peter 2:9, GNB*) Clearly, God intended to bless the whole world through ancient Israel, His covenant people. But, something terrible happened. What does it actually mean to be called out of darkness into His marvelous light? How would you describe that light? How would you describe that darkness? See 2 Kings 17:5-23 and 2 Chronicles 33:9.
30. Read Deuteronomy 4:6; 26:18-19; Isaiah 60:1-3; and Zechariah 8:23. Although commanded to keep His commandments and, thus, to shine a light over all the world, ancient Israel did not do so. Can we succeed where they failed? Are we really spreading the gospel message? Do we really understand the gospel message? What is the truth about God?
31. Read 1 Peter 2:10. Think of the wonderful blessings that we have experienced as Christians. In what ways do you recognize that you have "received his mercy"?
32. Are you proud to be a part of God's family? God recognizes that especially in our day near the final events of this world's history, Christians must stand out. We are not supposed to be drowning in sin, immorality, and gluttony, etc. Christians are to "come out of her, my people." (Revelation 14:8; 18:4, KJV) At one time, we may have been buried in this world's sins; but, now, we have the opportunity actually to be representatives of God to those around us.

The church is very precious in God's sight. He values it, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of the members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience.

Christ hungers to receive from His vineyard the fruit of holiness and unselfishness. He looks for the principles of love and goodness. Not all the beauty of art can bear comparison with the beauty of temper and character to be revealed in those who are Christ's representatives. It is the atmosphere of grace which surrounds the soul of the believer, the Holy Spirit working upon mind and heart, that makes him a savor of life unto life, and enables God to bless his work.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 298.1-2.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 (GNB*): ⁵ “I have taught you all the laws, as the LORD my God told me to do. Obey them in the land that you are about to invade and occupy. ⁶Obey them faithfully, and this will show the people of other nations how wise you are. When they hear of all these laws, they will say, ‘What wisdom and understanding this great nation has!’

⁷ “No other nation, no matter how great, has a god who is so near when they need him as the LORD our God is to us. He answers us whenever we call for help. ⁸No other nation, no matter how great, has laws so just as those that I have taught you today.”

33. Could these words describe the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2017?
34. When people in your community look at the members of your church today, do they see anything that is appealing to them? Are people always attracted by love?
35. What does it mean actually to be living stones built upon that living Cornerstone?
36. Read Isaiah 51:1. How do you understand this verse? Is God saying that we, as living stones, are to be cut from the same quarry from which that living Cornerstone came?
37. What would Jesus do and how would He be evaluated if He were alive in our day? Isn't that how we should live?
38. Read Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; and Luke 20:17. Unfortunately, during the last week of His life on this earth, Jesus had to describe Himself as the rejected Stone. Try to imagine the scene when Peter, standing before the ruling Sanhedrin of the Jews, used the same idea saying as recorded in Acts 4:11 (GNB*): “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.’”
39. The apostle John in the book of Revelation made several interesting comparisons to the ideas we have studied in this lesson. How do you understand Revelation 1:6; 5:10; and 20:6? The ancient priests ministered in the tabernacle, then, later in Solomon's Temple, and, finally, in the second temple by accepting sacrifices from the people for the repentance and forgiveness of their sins and then killing those animals. How did that show what God is like? So, what could be the role of a priest during the millennium as described in Revelation 20:6?
40. Read 1 Peter 2:1-3 again. Compare Ephesians 4:11-16 and Hebrews 5:11-6:3. Are we supposed to be continually like babies, nourished by that pure spiritual milk? Or, are we supposed to grow up and eat more “solid food”? Who was Peter talking about in 1 Peter 2:1-3? Spiritually, what is “more solid food”?
41. What kind of spiritual sacrifices are most acceptable to God? See Psalm 4:5; 51:17; 107:22; Romans 12:1; and Hebrews 13:15-16. In these verses we see that God asks us to put our trust in Him; He also asks us to live lives that are humble and repentant, thanking Him with gifts and songs of joy. We, too, are to offer our lives as living sacrifices to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him which is the true worship that we are to offer. We are supposed to do good and help one another because those are the things that please God.
42. If you could ask an angel how he evaluates your life, would he describe you as earnestly desiring that pure spiritual milk? Or, even desiring the more solid food found in Scripture?
43. What do we know about the Stone that was rejected but referred to by David, Jesus, and then Peter?

44. Consider what Ellen White wrote.

In quoting the prophecy of the rejected stone, Christ referred to an actual occurrence in the history of Israel. The incident was connected with the building of the first temple. While it had a special application at the time of Christ's first advent, and should have appealed with special force to the Jews, it has also a lesson for us. When the temple of Solomon [598] was erected, the immense stones for the walls and the foundation were entirely prepared at the quarry; after they were brought to the place of building, not an instrument was to be used upon them; the workmen had only to place them in position. For use in the foundation, one stone of unusual size and peculiar shape had been brought; but the workmen could find no place for it, and would not accept it. It was an annoyance to them as it lay unused in their way. Long it remained a rejected stone. But when the builders came to the laying of the corner, they searched for a long time to find a stone of sufficient size and strength, and of the proper shape, to take that particular place, and bear the great weight which would rest upon it. Should they make an unwise choice for this important place, the safety of the entire building would be endangered. They must find a stone capable of resisting the influence of the sun, of frost, and of tempest. Several stones had at different times been chosen, but under the pressure of immense weights they had crumbled to pieces. Others could not bear the test of the sudden atmospheric changes. But at last attention was called to the stone so long rejected. It had been exposed to the air, to sun and storm, without revealing the slightest crack. The builders examined this stone. It had borne every test but one. If it could bear the test of severe pressure, they decided to accept it for the cornerstone. The trial was made. The stone was accepted, brought to its assigned position, and found to be an exact fit. **In prophetic vision, Isaiah was shown that this stone was a symbol of Christ.** He says:

"Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin [trap] and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." Carried down in prophetic vision to the first advent, the prophet is shown that Christ is to bear trials and tests of which the treatment of the chief cornerstone in the temple of Solomon was symbolic. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." Isaiah 8:13-15; 28:16.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 597.5-598.1. [Bold type and word in brackets are added.]

45. So, what about you and me? Are we stumbling blocks for those seeking to understand more about God? Or, are we "steppingstones"?

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