

A Council Convenes

Core Text: Acts 15

Key Lessons from Peter...So Far

(note John 21:25 – we have left out some stories)
(e.g. walking on water, raising Dorcas/Tabitha)

1 – In a world where the scribes interpreted God’s plan for the people based on actions and the Law’s prescriptions, there were underlying religious and cultural differences among groups that often provoked sharp dispute, hypocrisy, and a lack of grace.

2 – Simon meets the Messiah, gets a new name (Cephas=Peter=Rock), and responds to the call to follow Jesus to become a fisher of men.

3 – Peter—as the ultimate insider—witnesses Jesus’ divinity, sees supernatural power over the natural and spiritual realm, and experiences a precursor gift of the Holy Spirit, while also wrestling with Jesus’ compassionate acceptance of all who came to Him (e.g. Samaritan and Canaanite women).

4 – Peter and the disciples see Jesus as an awesome man, but struggle to understand both His status as God and the true plan of salvation. Further, “the Rock” discovers his human fault line still exists when Jesus is pulled away from him—compelled to follow but shut down by fear, Peter denies even knowing Jesus.

5 – Peter is restored by the risen Lord and leads a Holy-Spirit-driven revival by preaching the Gospel—just as prophesied, Jesus is Lord and Messiah and God’s sacrifice for sin.

6 – Peter’s message grows in depth and power, yet he still must learn that God’s salvation is for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike, and all will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when they repent.

And now, rapid growth following the startling visions and visits is straining the collective understanding. As the non-Jews become much greater in number than the Jewish believers, once again Peter finds himself in the middle of a struggle: What is Jesus’ plan?

Interactions between Peter and Paul:

Galatians 1:18-19 (Acts 9:26-30)

Galatians 2:1-10 (Acts 11:30; 12:25)

Galatians 2:11-21 (Acts 12:17)

The Conflict/Debate

Acts 15:1-6 (Matt 5:17-20)

What produces righteousness before God?

Acts 15:7-11

Peter's Statement

Acts 15:12

Paul and Barnabas's Evidence

The Resolution

Acts 15:13-34

James' decision and the Letter

Points to Ponder

- If I were Peter, with his background, would I have “gotten it” any sooner?
- If I were Paul, with his background, would I have “gotten it” as quickly?
- Who do I think are the “real” believers? Who do I choose to exclude?

Appendix A - A Brief History of Simon Peter's Life after Jesus' Resurrection

Here is a short history (dates approximate) connecting events in Simon Peter's Life:

- 30 AD Holy Spirit descends at Pentecost – Acts 2
- 32-33 AD The stoning of Stephen – Acts 7
- 35 AD The conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus – Acts 9
- 38 AD Three years later, Saul goes to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18)
- 44 AD Peter goes to Antioch (consider Acts 12:17 and Galatians 2:11ff)
- 44-48 AD Famines of Claudius – Saul/Barnabas deliver aid to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30; 12:25)
- 48-49 AD Paul returns to Antioch and confronts Peter (Galatians 2:11-16)
- 48-49 AD Paul writes the Letter to the Galatians
- 48-49 AD Paul and Peter return to Jerusalem
- 49-50 AD The Council at Jerusalem – Acts 15
- 63 AD Book of I Peter written
- 63-64 AD Book of II Peter written
- 64 AD Peter is executed