

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a soft orange and pink near the horizon. The water is a dark blue with gentle ripples. In the distance, a sailboat is visible on the horizon line, and other smaller boats are scattered further away. The title text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

Life and Ministry of Peter

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Table of Contents

Forward		3
Chapter 1	Peter's changing character	4
Chapter 2	Peter begin to sink	7
Chapter 3	Peter tried to protect Jesus	11
Chapter 4	Impulsiveness of Peter	15
Chapter 5	Peter hears of coming temptations	20
Chapter 6	Jesus predicts his death	26
Chapter 7	Religious leaders notice change	29
Chapter 8	Peter defends his work with the gentiles	32

Forward

Jesus' first words to Simon Peter were "Come, follow me" (Mark 1:17). His last words to him were "You must follow me" (John 21:22).

Every step of the way between those two challenges, Peter never failed to follow—even though he often stumbled.

When Jesus entered Peter's life, this plain fisherman became a new person with new goals and new priorities.

He did not become a perfect person, however, and he never stopped being Simon Peter. We may wonder what Jesus saw in Simon that made him greet this potential disciple with a new name, Peter—the "rock."

Impulsive Peter certainly didn't act like a rock much of the time. But when Jesus chose his followers, he wasn't looking for models; he was looking for real people.

He chose people who could be changed by his love, and then he sent them out to communicate that his acceptance was available to anyone—even to those who often fail.

We may wonder what Jesus sees in us when he calls us to follow him. But we know Jesus accepted Peter, and, in spite of his failures, Peter went on to do great things for God.

Are you willing to keep following Jesus, even when you fail?

Chapter 1

Peter's changing character.

John 1:42

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone.

Andrew accepted John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus and immediately went to tell his brother, Simon, about him. There was no question in Andrew's mind that Jesus was the Messiah. Not only did he tell his brother, he was also eager to introduce others to Jesus (see John 6:8-9; John 12:22).

Jesus saw not only who Simon was, but who he would become. That is why he gave him a new name—Cephas in Aramaic, Peter in Greek (the name means “a rock”). Peter is not presented as rock-solid throughout the Gospels, but he became a solid rock in the days of the early church, as we learn in the book of Acts. By giving Simon a new name, Jesus introduced a change in character

Acts 2:14

Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this.

Peter had been an unstable leader during Jesus' ministry, letting his bravado be his downfall, even denying that he knew Jesus (John 18:15-18, 25-27). But Christ had forgiven and restored him (John 21).

This was a new Peter, humble but bold. His confidence came from the Holy Spirit, who made him a powerful and dynamic speaker. Have you ever felt as if you've made such bad mistakes that God could never forgive and use you?

No matter what sins you have committed, God promises to forgive you and make you useful for his kingdom. Allow him to forgive you and use you effectively to serve him.

Peter tells the people why they should listen to the testimony of the believers: because the Old Testament prophecies had been entirely fulfilled in Jesus (2:14-21), because Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 2:25-36), and because the risen Christ could change their lives (Acts 2:37-40).

Peter followed Jesus' call.

Matthew 4:18-20

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen.

Jesus called out to them, "Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

And they left their nets at once and went with him.

The Sea of Galilee is really a large lake. About 30 fishing towns surrounded it during Jesus' day, and Capernaum was the largest.

Jesus told Peter and Andrew to leave their fishing business and become "fishers of men," to help others find God. Jesus was calling them away from their productive trades to be productive spiritually.

We all need to fish for souls. If we practice Christ's teachings and share the gospel with others, we will be able to draw those around us to Christ like a fisherman who pulls fish into his boat with nets.

These men already knew Jesus. He had talked to Peter and Andrew previously (John 1:35-42) and had been preaching in the area.

When Jesus called them, they knew what kind of man he was and were willing to follow him.

They were not in a hypnotic trance when they followed but had been thoroughly convinced that following him would change their lives forever.

Chapter 2

Peter sank when he took his eyes off Jesus.

Matthew 14:28

Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you by walking on water."

Peter was not putting Jesus to the test, something we are told not to do (Matthew 4:7).

Instead he was the only one in the boat to react in faith. His impulsive request led him to experience a rather unusual demonstration of God's power.

Peter started to sink because he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the high waves around him.

His faith wavered when he realized what he was doing. We may not walk on water, but we do walk through tough situations.

If we focus on the waves of difficult circumstances around us without looking to Jesus for help, we too may despair and sink.

To maintain your faith when situations are difficult, keep your eyes on Jesus' power rather than on your inadequacies.

Peter confessed Jesus as Lord.

Matthew 16:13-17

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

Then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.

Caesarea Philippi was located several miles north of the Sea of Galilee, in the territory ruled by Phil.

The influence of Greek and Roman culture was everywhere, and pagan temples and idols abounded.

When Philip became ruler, he rebuilt and renamed the city after the emperor (Caesar) and himself. The city was originally called Caesarea, the same name as the capital city of Philip's brother Herod's territory.

The disciples answered Jesus' question with the common view—that Jesus was one of the great prophets come back to life.

This belief may have stemmed from Deut. 18:18, where God said he would raise up a prophet from among the people.

Peter, however, confessed Jesus as divine and as the promised and long-awaited Messiah.

If Jesus were to ask you this question, how would you answer? Is he your Lord and Messiah?

Peter viewed Jesus wrongly.

Mark 8:32-33

As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and told him he shouldn't say things like that.

Jesus turned and looked at his disciples and then said to Peter very sternly, "Get away from me, Satan! You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

In this moment, Peter was not considering God's purposes, but only his own natural human desires and feelings.

Peter wanted Christ to be king, but not the suffering servant prophesied in Isaiah 53. He was ready to receive the glory of following the Messiah, but not the persecution.

The Christian life is not a paved road to wealth and ease. It often involves hard work, persecution, deprivation, and deep suffering. Peter saw only part of the picture.

Don't repeat his mistake. Instead, focus on the good that God can bring out of apparent evil, and the resurrection that follows crucifixion.

Peter was often the spokesman for all the disciples. In singling him out, Jesus may have been addressing all of them indirectly.

Unknowingly, the disciples were trying to prevent Jesus from going to the cross and thus fulfilling his mission on earth.

Satan also tempted Jesus to avoid the way of the cross (Matthew 4). Whereas Satan's motives were evil, the disciples were motivated by love and admiration for Jesus.

Nevertheless, the disciples' job was not to guide and protect Jesus, but to follow him. Only after Jesus' death and resurrection would they fully understand why he had to die.

Chapter 3

Peter tried to protect Jesus from suffering.

Matthew 16:22

But Peter took him aside and corrected him. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!"

Peter, Jesus' friend and devoted follower who had just eloquently proclaimed Jesus' true identity, sought to protect him from the suffering he prophesied.

But if Jesus hadn't suffered and died, Peter (and we) would have died in his sins. Great temptations can come from those who love us and seek to protect us. Be cautious of advice from a friend who says, "Surely God doesn't want you to face this."

Often our most difficult temptations come from those who are only trying to protect us from discomfort.

Peter at the transfiguration

Matthew 17:4

Peter blurted out, "Lord, this is wonderful! If you want me to, I'll make three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Moses and Elijah were the two greatest prophets in the Old Testament. Moses represents the law, or the old covenant. He wrote the Pentateuch, and he predicted the coming of a great prophet (Deut. 18:15-19).

Elijah represents the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6).

Moses' and Elijah's presence with Jesus confirmed Jesus' Messianic mission—to fulfill God's law and the words of God's prophets.

Just as God's voice in the cloud over Mount Sinai gave authority to his law (Exodus 19:9), God's voice at the transfiguration gave authority to Jesus' words.

Peter wanted to build three shelters for these three great men to stay to show how the Feast of Tabernacles was fulfilled in the coming of God's kingdom. Peter had the right idea about Christ, but his timing was wrong.

Peter wanted to act, but this was a time for worship and adoration. He wanted to capture the moment, but he was supposed to learn and move on.

Jesus is more than just a great leader, a good example, a good influence, or a great prophet. He is the Son of God.

When you understand this profound truth, the only adequate response is worship.

When you have a correct understanding of Christ, you will obey him.

Peter reactions to transfiguration

Luke 9:33

As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, "Master, this is wonderful! We will make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

When Peter suggested making three shelters, he may have been thinking of the Feast of Tabernacles, where shelters were set up to commemorate the exodus, God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Peter wanted to keep Moses and Elijah with them.

But this was not what God wanted. Peter's desire to build shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah may also show his understanding that real faith is built on three cornerstones: the law, the prophets, and Jesus.

But Peter grew in his understanding, and eventually he would write of Jesus as the "chosen and precious cornerstone" of the church (1 Peter 2:6).

Peter, James, and John experienced a wonderful moment on the mountain, and they didn't want to leave.

Sometimes we too have such an inspiring experience that we want to stay where we are—away from the reality and problems of our daily lives. Knowing that struggles await us in the valley encourages us to linger on the mountaintop.

Yet staying on top of a mountain prohibits our ministering to others. Instead of becoming spiritual giants, we would soon become dwarfed by our self-centeredness.

We need times of retreat and renewal, but only so we can return to minister to the world. Our faith must make sense off the mountain as well as on it.

Peter was among inner circle of disciples.

Mark 9:2

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain. No one else was there. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance changed,

Jesus announced his kingdom by both preaching and healing. If he had limited himself to preaching, people might have seen his kingdom as spiritual only.

On the other hand, if he had healed without preaching, people might not have realized the spiritual importance of his mission. Most of his listeners expected a Messiah who would bring wealth and power to their nation; they preferred material benefits to spiritual discernment.

The truth about Jesus is that he is both God and man, both spiritual and physical; and the salvation that he offers is both for the soul and the body. Any group or teaching that emphasizes soul at the expense of body, or body at the expense of soul, is in danger of distorting Jesus' Good News.

Chapter 4

Impulsiveness of Peter

Matthew 17:24-27

On their arrival in Capernaum, the tax collectors for the Temple tax came to Peter and asked him, "Doesn't your teacher pay the Temple tax?"

"Of course he does," Peter replied. Then he went into the house to talk to Jesus about it.

But before he had a chance to speak, Jesus asked him, "What do you think, Peter? Do kings tax their own people or the foreigners they have conquered?"

"They tax the foreigners," Peter replied.

"Well, then," Jesus said, "the citizens are free! However, we don't want to offend them, so go down to the lake and throw in a line.

Open the mouth of the first fish you catch, and you will find a coin. Take the coin and pay the tax for both of us."

Peter learned a lesson in service.

John 13:6-7

When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, why are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand now why I am doing it. Someday you will."

Jesus was the model servant, and he showed his servant attitude to his disciples.

Washing guests' feet was a job for a household servant to carry out when guests arrived. But Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist, as the lowliest slave would do, and washed and dried his disciples' feet.

If even he, God in the flesh, is willing to serve, we his followers must also be servants, willing to serve in any way that glorifies God.

Are you willing to follow Christ's example of serving? Whom can you serve today? There is a special blessing for those who not only agree that humble service is Christ's way, but who also follow through and do it (John 13:17).

Imagine being Peter and watching Jesus wash the others' feet, all the while moving closer to you.

Seeing his Master behave like a slave must have confused Peter.

He still did not understand Jesus' teaching that to be a leader, a person must be a servant. This is not a comfortable passage for leaders who find it hard to serve those beneath them.

How do you treat those who work under you (whether children, employees, or volunteers)?

Peter's fate contrasted with Judas's.

John 13:27-38

As soon as Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus told him, "Hurry. Do it now."

None of the others at the table knew what Jesus meant.

Since Judas was their treasurer, some thought Jesus was telling him to go and pay for the food or to give some money to the poor. [30] So Judas left at once, going out into the night.

As soon as Judas left the room, Jesus said, "The time has come for me, the Son of Man, to enter into my glory, and God will receive glory because of all that happens to me.

And God will bring me into my glory very soon.

Dear children how brief are these moments before I must go away and leave you! Then, though you search for me, you cannot come to me—just as I told the Jewish leaders.

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Simon Peter said, "Lord, where are you going?"

And Jesus replied, "You can't go with me now, but you will follow me later."

"But why can't I come now, Lord?" he asked. "I am ready to die for you."

Jesus answered, "Die for me? No, before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me."

Jesus encouraged him in his faith.

Luke 22:31-32

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to have all of you, to sift you like wheat.

But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon that your faith should not fail.

So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen and build up your brothers."

Jesus predicted his denial.

Luke 22:33-34

Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you."

But Jesus said, "Peter, let me tell you something. The rooster will not crow tomorrow morning until you have denied three times that you even know me."

Satan wanted to crush Simon Peter and the other disciples like grains of wheat. He hoped to find only chaff and blow it away. But Jesus assured Peter that his faith, although it would falter, would not be destroyed. It would be renewed, and Peter would become a powerful leader.

Jesus predicted that Judas would betray him, and he said that calamity awaited the traitor (Luke 22:22).

Jesus then predicted that Peter would deny that he knew Jesus, but later Peter would repent and receive a commission to feed Jesus' lambs (John 21:15).

Betraying and denying—one is just about as bad as the other. But the two men had entirely different fates because one repented.

Chapter 5

Peter warned about coming temptations.

Matthew 26:40-41

Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you stay awake and watch with me even one hour?"

Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak!"

Jesus used Peter's drowsiness to warn him about the kinds of temptation he would soon face. The way to overcome temptation is to keep watch and pray.

Watching means being aware of the possibilities of temptation, sensitive to the subtleties, and spiritually equipped to fight it.

Because temptation strikes where we are most vulnerable, we can't resist it alone. Prayer is essential because God's strength can shore up our defenses and defeat Satan's power.

Peter cut off man's ear.

Matthew 26:51-53;

One of the men with Jesus pulled out a sword and slashed off an ear of the high priest's servant.

"Put away your sword," Jesus told him. "Those who use the sword will be killed by the sword."

Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?

Peter was trying to prevent what he saw as *defeat*. He didn't realize that Jesus had to die in order to gain *victory*. But Jesus demonstrated perfect commitment to his Father's will.

His kingdom would not be advanced with swords, but with faith and obedience.

John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant.

But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup the Father has given me?"

Trying to protect Jesus, Peter pulled a sword and wounded the high priest's servant. But Jesus told Peter to put away his sword and allow God's plan to unfold.

At times it is tempting to take matters into our own hands, to force the issue. Most often such moves lead to sin. Instead we must trust God to work out his plan.

Think of it—if Peter had had his way, Jesus would not have gone to the cross, and God’s plan of redemption would have been thwarted.

How Peter got into high priest’s courtyard.

John 18:15-16

Simon Peter followed along behind, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the courtyard with Jesus.

Peter stood outside the gate. Then the other disciple spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in.

The other disciple is probably John, the author of this Gospel. He knew the high priest and identified himself to the girl at the door. Because of his connections, John got himself and Peter into the courtyard. But Peter refused to identify himself as Jesus’ follower.

Peter three stages to his denial.

Matthew 26:69

Meanwhile, as Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, a servant girl came over and said to him, "You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean."

There were three stages to Peter’s denial.

First he acted confused and tried to divert attention from himself by changing the subject.

Second, using an oath he denied that he knew Jesus.

Third, he began to curse and swear. Believers who deny Christ often begin doing so subtly by pretending not to know him.

When opportunities to discuss religious issues come up, they walk away or pretend they don't know the answers.

With only a little more pressure, they can be induced to deny flatly their relationship with Christ.

If you find yourself subtly diverting conversation so you don't have to talk about Christ, watch out. You may be on the road to disowning him.

Peter denied Jesus using an oath.

Matthew 26:72-74

Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath. "I don't even know the man," he said.

A little later some other bystanders came over to him and said, "You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent."

Peter said, "I swear by God, I don't know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed.

That Peter denied that he knew Jesus, using an oath and calling down curses, does not mean he used foul language. This was the kind of swearing that a person does in a court of law.

Peter was swearing that he did not know Jesus and was invoking a curse on himself if his words were untrue. In effect he was saying, "May God strike me dead if I am lying."

Jesus talked to him about love.

John 21:15-17

After breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you."

"Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him.

Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you."

"Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said.

Once more he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you."

Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep."

Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. The first time Jesus said, “Do you truly love (Greek *agape*: volitional, self-sacrificial love) me more than these?”

The second time, Jesus focused on Peter alone and still used the word translated into Greek, *agape*.

The third time, Jesus used the word translated into Greek, *phileo* (signifying affection, affinity, or brotherly love) and asked, in effect, “Are you even my friend?”

Each time Peter responded with the word translated into Greek as *phileo*. Jesus doesn't settle for quick, superficial answers.

He has a way of getting to the heart of the matter. Peter had to face his true feelings and motives when Jesus confronted him.

How would you respond if Jesus asked you, “Do you truly love me?” Do you really love Jesus? Are you even his friend?

Chapter 6

Jesus predicted his death.

John 21:18-19

The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to.

But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go."

Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me."

This was a prediction of Peter's death by crucifixion. Tradition indicates that Peter was crucified for his faith—upside down because he did not feel worthy of dying as his Lord did. Despite what Peter's future held, Jesus told him to follow him.

We may be uncertain and fearful about our future. But if we know God is in control, we can confidently follow Christ.

Importance of Peter's speech at Pentecost

Acts 2:24

However, God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life again, for death could not keep him in its grip.

Peter began with a public proclamation of the resurrection at a time when it could be verified by many witnesses.

This was a powerful statement, because many of the people listening to Peter's words had been in Jerusalem 50 days earlier at Passover and may have seen or heard about the crucifixion and resurrection of this "great teacher."

Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate sign that what he said about himself was true. Without the resurrection, we would have no reason to believe in Jesus (1 Cor. 15:14).

Peter healed lame beggar.

Acts 3:5-6

The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting a gift. But Peter said, "I don't have any money for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"

The crippled man asked for money, but Peter gave him something much better—the use of his legs. We often ask God to solve a small problem, but he wants to give us a whole new life and help for *all* our problems.

When we ask God for help, he may say, "I've got something even better for you." Ask God for what you want, but don't be surprised when he gives you what you really *need*.

"In the name of Jesus Christ" means "by the authority of Jesus Christ." The apostles were doing this healing through the Holy Spirit's power, not their own.

Why religious leaders felt threatened by Peter

Acts 4:2-3

They were very disturbed that Peter and John were claiming, on the authority of Jesus, that there is a resurrection of the dead.

They arrested them and, since it was already evening, jailed them until morning.

Peter and John spoke to the people during the afternoon prayer time.

The Sadducees moved in quickly to investigate. Because they did not believe in the resurrection, they were understandably disturbed with what the apostles were saying.

Peter and John were refuting one of their fundamental beliefs and thus threatening their authority as religious teachers. Even though the nation was under Roman rule, the Sadducees had almost unlimited power over the temple grounds.

Thus they were able to arrest Peter and John for no other reason than teaching something that contradicted their beliefs.

Not often will sharing the gospel send John and us to jail as it did Peter. Still, we run risks in trying to win others to Christ.

We might be willing to face a night in jail if it would bring 5,000 people to Christ, but shouldn't we also be willing to suffer for the sake of even one?

What do you risk in witnessing—rejection, persecution? Whatever the risks, realize that nothing done for God is ever wasted.

Chapter 7

Religious leaders notice change in Peter

Acts 4:13

The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men who had had no special training.

They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.

Knowing that Peter and John were unschooled, the council was amazed at what being with Jesus had done for them. A changed life convinces people of Christ's power. One of your greatest testimonies is the difference others see in your life and attitudes since you have believed in Christ.

How Peter's ministry healed people

Acts 5:15

As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by.

People who passed within Peter's shadow were healed, not by Peter's shadow, but by God's power working through Peter.

Peter sent to see Samaritans.

Acts 8:14

When the apostles back in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there.

Peter and John were sent to Samaria to find out whether or not the Samaritans were truly becoming believers.

The Jewish Christians, even the apostles, were still unsure whether Gentiles (non-Jews) and half-Jews could receive the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't until Peter's experience with Cornelius (Acts 10) that the apostles became fully convinced that the Holy Spirit was for all people.

It was John who had asked Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to burn up a Samaritan village that refused to welcome them (Luke 9:51-55).

Here he and Peter went to the Samaritans to pray with them.

The breaking down of his prejudice against non-Jews

Acts 9:43

And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a leatherworker.

In Joppa, Peter stayed at the home of Simon, a tanner. Tanners made animal hides into leather. It is significant that Peter was at Simon's house, because tanning involved contact with dead animals, and Jewish law considered it an "unclean" job. Peter was already beginning to break down his prejudice against people who were not of his kind and customs that did not adhere to Jewish religious traditions.

Peter was contrasted with Cornelius.

Acts 10:45

The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles, too.

Cornelius and Peter were very different people. Cornelius was wealthy, a Gentile, and a military man. Peter was a Jewish fisherman turned preacher.

But God's plan included both of them. In Cornelius's house that day, a new chapter in Christian history was written as a Jewish Christian leader and a Gentile Christian convert each discovered something significant about God at work in the other person.

Cornelius needed Peter and his gospel to know the way to salvation. Peter needed Cornelius and his salvation experience to know that Gentiles were included in God's plan. You and another believer may also need each other to understand how God works!

Chapter 8

Peter defended his eating with Gentiles.

Acts 11:12

The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry about there being Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon arrived at the home of the man who had sent for us.

Peter's defense for eating with Gentiles was a simple restatement of what happened. He brought six witnesses with him to back him up, and then he quoted Jesus' promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16).

These Gentiles' lives had been changed, and that was all the evidence Peter and the other believers needed. Changed lives are equally powerful evidence today.

Herod Agrippa I arrested Peter

Acts 12:3

When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish leaders, he arrested Peter during the Passover celebration

Peter was arrested during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the week-long festival directly following Passover. This was a strategic move, since more Jews were in the city than usual, and Herod could impress the most people.

Herod's plan undoubtedly was to execute Peter, but the believers were praying for Peter's safety. The earnest prayer of the church significantly affected the outcome of these events. Prayer changes things, so pray often and with confidence.

Peter was rescued from prison by an angel.

Acts 12:7

Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel tapped him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists.

God sent an angel to rescue Peter. Angels are God's messengers. They are divinely created beings with supernatural powers, and they sometimes take on human appearance in order to talk to people.

Angels should not be worshiped, because they are not divine. They are God's servants, just as we are.

Why Paul confronted Peter.

Galatians 2:11-12

But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him publicly, speaking strongly against what he was doing, for it was very wrong.

When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who don't bother with circumcision.

But afterward, when some Jewish friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore because he was afraid of what these legalists would say.

Antioch in Syria (distinguished from Antioch in Pisidia) was a major trade center in the ancient world. Heavily populated by Greeks, it eventually became a strong Christian center.

In Antioch the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Antioch in Syria became the headquarters for the Gentile church and was Paul's base of operations.

The Judaizers accused Paul of watering down the gospel to make it easier for Gentiles to accept, while Paul accused the Judaizers of nullifying the truth of the gospel by adding conditions to it.

The basis of salvation was the issue—is salvation through Christ alone, or does it come through Christ *and* adherence to the law? The argument came to a climax when Peter, Paul, the Judaizers, and some Gentile Christians all gathered together in Antioch to share a meal.

Peter probably thought that by staying away from the Gentiles, he was promoting harmony—he did not want to offend James and the Jewish Christians. James had a very prominent position and presided over the Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

But Paul charged that Peter's action violated the gospel. By joining the Judaizers, Peter implicitly was supporting their claim that Christ was not sufficient for salvation.

Compromise is an important element in getting along with others, but we should never compromise the truth of God's Word.

If we feel we have to change our Christian beliefs to match those of our companions, we are on dangerous ground.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Living New Testament

Additional comments and charts are taken from:

***Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print**