

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Third Quarter 2015: *Missionaries*
Lesson 9 “Peter and the Gentiles”

Read for this week’s study

Acts 2:5–21, 10:1–8, 23–48; Romans 2:14–16; Acts 10:9–22, 11:1–10, 15:1–35.

Memory Text

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38-39, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Peter at Pentecost
- III. The Conversion of Cornelius: Part 1
- IV. The Conversion of Cornelius: Part 2
- V. Peter’s Vision
- VI. The Jerusalem Decree
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Daniel Duda

1. “Peter worked to bring about an integrated church, uniting Gentile converts, who were unaware of the finer points of Jewish culture, and Jewish converts whose customs tended to take on the character of divine absolutes. Like all pioneer missionaries, Peter had to discriminate between unchangeable divine absolutes and those practices that are cultural and relative and of no important consequence in the life of the believer, whether Jew or Gentile. Thus, it was Peter who, at the Jerusalem Council, declared of the Gentiles that God ‘put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith’ (Acts 15:9) and who helped work through the issues that threatened the early church’s unity.” (Sabbath afternoon) Was Peter preaching at Pentecost to Gentiles or to Diaspora Jews? Nevertheless, how we could use that kind of help even today, especially in a world that is so culturally diverse. Who and where are those who are ready to do the work of ‘Peter’ today?

2. “What does the story of Pentecost reveal about our utter need of the Holy Spirit in our lives? What choices can we make in order to be more attuned to the Spirit’s leading?” (Sunday’s lesson) While undoubtedly we all need to rely on the Holy Spirit more in our lives, is this the message of Pentecost? Pentecost is a salvation-historic event, just like creation, the exodus, Sinai, Golgotha. How does it function in the biblical storyline?
3. Compare Genesis 11 with Acts 2; also Acts 2:41 with Exodus 32:28. At the Babylonian tower, the introduction of multiple languages was a means of confusion and separation; at Pentecost, the gift of each hearing in their own language was a means of unification. At Sinai, 3000 men died because they refused God. At Pentecost 3000 men accepted God and their lives were transformed.
4. Pentecost was an agricultural festival. It was a day when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop and offered it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude and partly as a prayer that all the rest of the crop would be safely gathered in. But because Pentecost came fifty days after Passover (as a reminder of the Exodus), Pentecost was also a reminder of the fact that 50 days after Passover the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the law. Thus Pentecost was not just about the ‘first fruits’, the sheaf by which the harvest has begun. It was also about God giving to His redeemed people a way of life by which they could carry out His purposes. ‘Walking in the Spirit’ will become a New Testament metaphor for the Christian life (Romans 8:14).
5. “The conversion of Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army and a pagan, has been termed the *Gentile Pentecost*. It is a crucial story in Acts, one that addresses the most divisive issue facing the early church—can a Gentile become a Christian without first becoming a Jew?” (Monday’s lesson)
6. Peter and early Jewish Christians are followers of Jesus. And who was Jesus? He was a Jewish Rabbi, born to Jewish parents, in a Jewish territory. Thus the early Christian church was basically a Jewish community. They studied and observed the Torah, they ate kosher food; they recited Jewish prayers in a Jewish temple. These were Jewish people following a Jewish Messiah, who lived a Jewish life in a Jewish nation. And He never said to them, “The time has come to stop being Jewish.” Will the Christians remain this way, just a subgroup (sect) of Judaism, or will they change and become a world religion?
7. “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.’ (Acts 10:34, 35, NIV). Though these words to us are not that revolutionary, for them to have come from the mouth of Peter was an astonishing confession. We have to remember who Peter was, where he came from, and the attitudes that he had and still struggled with. (See Galatians 2:11–16.) No doubt, though, his experience with Cornelius helped him see even more clearly the error of his ways and helped him get a better picture of what God had intended to do with the gospel message.” (Tuesday’s lesson)

8. It took a heavenly vision to help Peter see what he was supposed to understand and what Jesus had tried to teach him and the other disciples long ago (see Wednesday's lesson). God finally breaks through Peter's hardness of heart and through all the prejudices and all the barriers that divide up the world –barriers that always had divided the world until Jesus started this movement, this community of oneness.
9. Sociologist Robert Putnam writes that sociologists distinguish between two kinds of connections: bonding and bridging. Bonding happens when people who perceive themselves to be similar develop deeper connections; but bridging activities involve people who have been separated. Bonding activities might involve people in the same ethnic group or economic status. Bridging connections, by definition, are "outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Jesus is the greatest bridge builder the world has ever seen. When the church understood His heart, it became a community like nothing else the world had ever seen.
10. The church understood this and expressed it in the decree of the Jerusalem Council. "What lesson can we take away from the Jerusalem Council that could help the church today as it deals with controversial issues? What did they do that can serve as a model for us?" (Thursday's lesson)
11. In Jerusalem, the early church said: We can never go back. We don't want to go back. We must be one community around Jesus. We will make any needed change, and we will pay any price, and we will remove every barrier between people and God, except for the scandal of the Cross itself.
12. Perhaps a private question for each of us: Will we be part of God's final movements in history? Will we be part of the Spirit led change in these last days? Will we say: "God, whatever you want us to change in order to be part of your unchanging mission, we are willing—and we welcome doing it"? Because at the end God will have one community that will clearly reflect His beautiful character. At the Jerusalem Council the early church did not allow the stress and pain of change to hold them back. And God's end-time community is not going to allow it either!

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

In the New Testament Peter was stunned to find he was supposed to take the good news to the Gentiles. In fact, it took a dramatic event to lead him to be willing to do it. There came that sheet, you remember, with all those inedible items in it, and Peter heard the voice from Heaven saying,

"Arise, Peter, kill and eat."

And he said, "No, I won't."

By the way, would you dare say no to a voice from Heaven? Doesn't faith say, no questions, whatever you say, I'll do it? Then should Peter have said, "Lord, hand me a knife and fork." It's very wonderful that Peter on the authority of what God had clearly said already said, "God, no, I can't make sense out of that."

The voice came again, and a second time he said no. The third time the voice came, "Rise Peter, kill and eat."

Can you imagine the quiver in Peter's voice when for the third time he said to Heaven "No"? And then there was a ring on the bell or a knock on the door and Peter understood the point. He was right about the things in the sheet, wasn't he, absolutely right, but the message from Heaven was, that's one of your brothers there at the door. Don't treat a fellow human being like one of those creeping things in the sheet. You're right about those things in the sheet but you're wrong about that man at the door. To the Jew it didn't really make much difference, did it? You could be unclean by taking the things in the sheet and you could be unclean by associating with that good Gentile at the door. And Peter got the message and off he went. And he came back to the General Conference and said, "You should've seen what I've seen. The Lord has welcomed the Gentiles!"

Which was quite a shock at headquarters, and it took them quite awhile to accept it, too—because they were conditioned against it. They knew about outsiders!

If we really admire this willingness of God to meet people (as evidence in all these stories in Scripture), eventually, well it's a law we become like the one we worship and admire, and we'll gradually find ourselves able to treat others with dignity and respect and grace, realizing we're really not one wit better. It's just that we got to the hospital a little sooner than some of the others did. And we're very happy to tell them where the hospital is and who the head physician is and hope they too will share in the healing. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapters 15 & 16, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/29MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/30MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

Think of the picture of God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Not that it was new. The whole Old Testament had born witness to this truth about God. Look at Jeremiah's picture, and Isaiah, and Hosea, and Amos, and Micah, and others in the Old Testament. But now Jesus has come, and has clearly demonstrated, at risk of life, the truth about our Heavenly Father. And you think of what the disciples are now privileged to take out to the world. Now they knew what God was like. They were not that clear when Jesus began, were they? You remember they asked Him, 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' And, "Do You wish that fire

would come down from heaven and consume Your adversaries?" They didn't know God that well.

But they had been together in the upper room and heard Jesus say, "If you have seen Me, you've seen the Father. And there's no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself. And in the judgment, you'll actually just be judged by the truth. That's all. Nothing arbitrary about it." And they'd seen Him feed the hungry, and heal the sick, and cry at the funeral of one of His friends, and all those things. And now they were to go out and spread the good news. You'd think the world would be thrilled, but it was no more thrilled to hear them than it was to hear Christ.

In fact, from whom did the strongest opposition come? Hasn't that always been the history? Yes, God's professed people opposed this picture. In fact, one hesitates to mention this in these modern times, but in chapter 13:50, did you notice that even the devout women opposed. Not all of them, but some. We think of the women as being the first to be persuaded, so often in evangelism. They also can provide strong opposition. Did you notice 13:50? "But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men," they were together, "of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district." So even the devout women were opposed. But look who incited them. The Jews! God's own family had rejected His Son, and now they were making sure that nobody would accept the truth that Jesus had come to reveal. Why do you think again, at this stage, the Jews did not like what they had heard?

And now the disciples went out to explain it the best they could, and they did learn to do it better and better as time went on. You remember Peter had much still to learn. And the brethren in Jerusalem had much to learn. They still thought they should hang on to the ceremonies, you remember. The commission was given to the early Christian church when it still had a lot of theological progress to make. You see, just because we are commissioned, it doesn't mean our theology is perfect! Because certainly the early Christian leaders did not have a perfect theology, but they had the essence of it, and they went out to give the good news. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/59MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/60MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

COMMENT: At the meeting of the conference at Jerusalem, was it Peter that stood up for Paul, and made a very public appeal for his acceptance there?

Yes, he did. And did you notice in that speech, finally the brethren seemed almost reluctant to endorse Paul, and they said, "Well, at least we want you to go out and tell them not to eat food offered to idols." When Paul got out into the field, did he say, "You may not eat food offered to idols?" Romans will touch on this, but Corinthians especially the next time. He said, "I suggest you go ahead and eat it." No wonder he got into trouble at headquarters! But they didn't know his reason for saying this, so that should add great interest to our reading of Romans, and Corinthians. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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Further Study with Ellen White

In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness. Humanity, drawing its efficiency from the great Source of wisdom, is made the instrumentality, the working agency, through which the gospel exercises its transforming power on mind and heart. {AA 134.3}

All heaven is interested in our salvation. The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They guard us against evil and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. {MH 253.3}

In describing His earthly mission, Jesus said, The Lord "hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Luke 4:18. This was His work. He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by Satan. There were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house, for He had passed through them and healed all their sick. His work gave evidence of His divine anointing. Love, mercy, and compassion were revealed in every act of His life; His heart went out in tender sympathy to the children of men. He took man's nature, that He might reach man's wants. The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach Him. Even little children were attracted to Him. They loved to climb upon His knees and gaze into the pensive face, benignant with love. {SC 11.2}

Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did

not censure human weakness. He spoke the truth, but always in love. He denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity; but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, which refused to receive Him, the way, the truth, and the life. They had rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness. His life was one of self-denial and thoughtful care for others. Every soul was precious in His eyes. While He ever bore Himself with divine dignity, He bowed with the tenderest regard to every member of the family of God. In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save. {SC 12.1}

You have watched the rising sun, and the gradual break of day over earth and sky. Little by little the dawn increases, till the sun appears; then the light grows constantly stronger and clearer until the full glory of noontide is reached. This is a beautiful illustration of what God desires to do for His children in perfecting their Christian experience. As we walk day by day in the light He sends us, in willing obedience to all His requirements, our experience grows and broadens until we reach the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. {MYP 15.3}

All heaven has been looking on with interest, and ready to do whatever God might appoint, to help fallen men and women to become what God would have them. God will work for His children, but not without their cooperation. {RC 296.3}

Jesus has helped the whole world to an intelligent knowledge of His divine mission and work. He came to represent the character of the Father to our world, and as we study the life, the words, and works of Jesus Christ, we are helped in every way in the education of obedience to God; and as we copy the example He has given us, we are living epistles known and read of all men. We are the living human agencies to represent in character Jesus Christ to the world. {LHU 169.4}

The angels of heaven are sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. We know not now who they are; it is not yet made manifest who shall overcome, and share the inheritance of the saints in light; but angels of heaven are passing throughout the length and breadth of the earth, seeking to comfort the sorrowing, to protect the imperiled, to win the hearts of men to Christ. Not one is neglected or passed by. God is no respecter of persons, and He has an equal care for all the souls He has created. {DA 639.1}

All who have been born into the heavenly family are in a special sense the brethren of our Lord. The love of Christ binds together the members of His family, and wherever that love is made manifest there the divine relationship is revealed. "Everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." 1 John 4:7. {DA 638.1}

But not to any class is Christ's love restricted. He identifies Himself with every child of humanity. That we might become members of the heavenly family, He became a member of the earthly family. {DA 638.4}