

## Peter's Work for God



### SABBATH—AUGUST 4

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Acts 9:32–43; Acts 10:9–16; Ephesians 2:11–19; Acts 11:1–26; Acts 12:1–18.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Peter began to speak: ‘I really understand now that to God every person is the same. God accepts anyone who worships him and does what is right. It is not important what country a person comes from.’ ” (Acts 10:34, 35, ICB).

**PAUL LEAVES FOR TARSUS.** Then Peter again becomes the most important person in Luke's story in the book of Acts. Luke tells us that Peter travels everywhere in Judea to share with people the Good News about Jesus. Peter also travels to places near Judea too. Luke tells us three stories about Peter that happen at this time. The first story is about how Peter heals Aeneas. Next, Peter wakes up a dead woman named Tabitha. Then Luke tells us the story about Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius was not a Jew.

Should non-Jewish people be allowed to join the church? Many Jewish Christians argued about this question. But God poured His Holy Spirit on Cornelius and everyone in his house. That gift helped show the truth to Peter and the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. They now believed that the gifts of the Good News were not only for the Jews. At the same time this story happened, the church in Antioch also was beginning to contact the non-Jews.

This week's lesson also talks about the attacks against the church by King Herod. We will learn about the things the believers experienced during this time.



Luke tells us the story in Acts about how Peter wakes up a dead woman named Tabitha.

**PETER GOES TO LYDDA AND JOPPA (Acts 9:32–35)**

Peter visited the Christian churches that were on the coasts of Judea. Clearly, Peter wanted to make sure these churches had a correct understanding of Bible teachings (Acts 2:42). But God also used Peter to do miracles that were as powerful as the ones that Jesus Himself did.

**Read the story about how Peter healed Aeneas in Acts 9:32–35. Then read about the miracle Jesus did in Luke 5:17–26. How are these two miracles the same?**

The miracle Peter did helps us remember the story about the man Jesus healed in Capernaum (Luke 5:17–26). See the part about the bed? Both stories are nearly the same. Many people living in Lydda and the plains of Sharon saw Peter’s miracle. Then they believed in Jesus.

**Read the story in Acts 9:36–43 about how Peter woke up Tabitha from the dead. What was very special about Tabitha?**

The name “Tabitha” comes from an Aramaic word that means “gazelle.” The name for Tabitha in Greek is Dorcas. Many people who lived near Tabitha loved her very much. She did many kind and good things for the people in her neighborhood. The story about how Peter woke up Tabitha from the dead is almost the same as the story about how Jesus woke up Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56). Peter saw that miracle happen. So, Peter did what Jesus did. Peter asked everyone to leave the room (read Mark 5:40). Then Peter knelt down and prayed. He said to the dead woman: “ ‘Tabitha, get up!’ ” (Acts 9:40, NLV).

God’s followers did many miracles. But God’s power made the miracles happen (Acts 5:12). There may be a reason why the miracles that Jesus’ followers did were almost the same as the ones that Jesus did. Maybe God wanted to remind the church—and us—about what really matters. What really matters to God is not how important we are. What is important to God is that we give ourselves fully to Him (John 14:12). What happens when we fully give ourselves to God? Then God can use us to do great things.

**Miracles can make faith strong. But what is the real reason we should believe in God?**



**Peter healed Aeneas. God used Peter to do miracles that were as powerful as the ones that Jesus Himself did.**

**PETER VISITS CORNELIUS (Acts 10:9–16, 28, 34, 35)**

In Joppa, Peter stayed with a man named Simon. Simon worked as a tanner. A tanner was someone who made leather from animal skins. About 25 miles away from Joppa in Caesarea, there lived a Roman soldier named Cornelius. Cornelius and everyone in his house were loyal to God. But they did not become Jews. Then God gave Cornelius a vision. In it, God told Cornelius to send messengers to Peter. So, Cornelius invited Peter to visit him (Acts 10:1–8).

**What does Peter experience in Acts 10:9–16, 28, 34, 35? What does Peter learn from this experience?**

It is important to know that Peter's vision is not about food. Instead, his vision is about people. The vision happens at noon. Peter is hungry. The voice in the vision tells him to kill and eat. But God does not use the vision to get rid of the food laws about eating clean meats and not eating unclean meats. God uses the vision to teach Peter that the Good News is for everyone and not only for Jews.

The vision is meant to stop Peter's dislike of non-Jews. Peter feels that if he goes into Cornelius's house and eats with him, then he, Peter, will become dirty. Then he also will not be able to worship in the temple. Why does Peter think this way? Because Jews from Judea who lived in the first century lived separate from non-Jews.

Why do the Jews in Peter's time behave this way? The problem comes from their wrong idea about God. Many Jews during this time believe it is wrong to eat with non-Jews. This idea goes against God's first plan for Israel to share the truth about Him with everyone on the earth.

But the non-Jews in Bible times are not circumcised. Circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. So, the Jews in Bible times look down on non-Jews because they are not circumcised. The Jews believe God will not bless non-Jews until non-Jews are circumcised and become Jews first. But Jewish Christians start to see that this thinking is wrong.

**Read Titus 2:11; Galatians 3:26–28; and Ephesians 2:11–19. As these verses show us, why is the Good News for everyone?**



**Peter's vision was not about food. It was about people. God used the vision to teach Peter that the Good News was for everyone and not only for Jews.**

### THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 11:1–18)

Acts 10:44–48 shows us an important time in the New Testament church’s history. It was the first time that the Good News was preached to a non-Jew by one of Jesus’ followers. Before this time, Jesus’ followers and other Jewish believers from Judea were not ready to accept non-Jews in the church. Jewish Christians believed that God gave the Good News only to the Jews. So, the Jewish Christians believed that non-Jews must become Jews first before they joined the church. But the Jewish Christians needed to change this way of thinking.

God helped change the way His followers thought about non-Jews. How? God gave the gift of speaking different languages to Cornelius and his family. This gift showed very clearly that God did not love one group of people more than another group. Both Jews and non-Jews are the same in God’s eyes. God will save both Jews and non-Jews.

**Read Acts 11:1–18. How does the church in Jerusalem feel about Peter’s experience at Caesarea?**

In Bible times, Jews do not think well of non-Jews. This dislike leads Jewish believers in Jerusalem to blame Peter for eating with people who are not circumcised. To be circumcised means that the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. So, it looks as if the believers in Jerusalem care more about Jewish laws than they care about saving Cornelius and his family. Maybe Jewish believers worry that the Jews will think that Jewish believers turned away from the Jewish faith if the Jews see the Jewish believers eating with non-Jews. That will mean God no longer accepts the believers. Then the Jews may try to kill the believers as they killed Stephen.

“The Jews closed a door against many non-Jews. But the time comes for that door to open. The non-Jews who accept the Good News will be equal to the Jewish believers. They will not need to be circumcised first.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 136, adapted.

God gave His people the gift of speaking different languages when He poured His Spirit on them. God gave His people this gift of languages so they could preach the Good News to everyone on earth. God gave the gift of speaking different languages to Cornelius and his family for a different reason. God wanted to show His Jewish followers that His Spirit was also at work to save the non-Jews.



“The Jews closed a door against many non-Jews, But the time comes for that door to open.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 136, adapted.

## THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH (Acts 11:19–26)

Luke is happy when Cornelius accepts Jesus. Luke is so happy about it that he stops telling us the story about Peter's work for God and starts telling us about how many more non-Jews are accepting the Good News.

**Read the story in Acts 11:19–26 about the Jewish believers who are forced to leave Jerusalem. What happens when they come to Antioch?**

This part of Acts 11 helps us remember Paul's attacks against Christians in Acts 8. Some of the Greek-speaking Jewish believers were forced to leave Jerusalem during the time when non-Jews in Judea started accepting Jesus. So, these Greek-speaking Jewish believers took the Good News to places far from Judea.

Luke gives special attention to the city of Antioch. Antioch was an important city in Syria. The believers who were forced to leave Jerusalem started to preach to other Jews. Many of these Jews accepted Jesus. So, Jesus' command in Acts 1:8 came true. The Greek-speaking Jewish Christians were the ones who made Jesus' command come true. They started the work of taking the Good News to the non-Jews.

The church experienced success in Antioch. So, the leaders in Jerusalem decided to send Barnabas there to find out what was happening and to tell the leaders about it. Barnabas saw that there were many people in Antioch who wanted to know about the Good News. So, Barnabas asked Paul, who was in Tarsus, to come help him.

Barnabas was right. During the year that he and Paul worked together, large crowds of non-Jews heard the Good News. It was in Antioch that people named the believers "Christians" for the first time (Acts 11:26, NLV). This verse seems to say that people who were not church members gave the name to Christians. It is possible that these people outside the church used the name "Christians" to make fun of the believers. Inside the church, believers had other names for each other: " 'brothers and sisters' " (Acts 1:16, NIV); "followers of Jesus" (Acts 6:1, ERV); and also " 'holy people' " (Acts 9:13, ERV). By the time Luke finished writing Acts, the name "Christian" became the name for Jesus' followers everywhere (Acts 26:28).

**What does it mean to be known as a Christian?**



**Luke is happy when Cornelius accepts Jesus. God pours His Holy Spirit on Cornelius and the people with him.**

## KING HEROD'S ATTACKS AGAINST THE CHURCH (Acts 12:1–4)

In Acts 12:1–4, Luke tells us about King Herod's attacks against the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead His church after He went to heaven. Herod put the apostle James to death. James was the brother of John and the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19).

**Read Acts 12:1–4. What do these verses teach us about the dangers that the New Testament church experienced?**

There were several kings named Herod. The Herod that these verses talk about is Agrippa the First. Agrippa the First was the grandson of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1). Agrippa the First ruled Judea from A.D. 41 to 44. He was popular among the Jews that he ruled because he followed the Jewish religion very carefully.

Herod planned to kill Peter too. Herod's soldiers arrested Peter. Then they brought Peter to Herod. Herod sent four soldiers to watch Peter at all times. Peter was chained to two of the four soldiers, with one soldier chained on his left and one soldier chained to his right side. The other two soldiers guarded the door. Peter escaped from prison before. So, Herod did not want to let Peter escape from prison again.



Herod sent four soldiers to watch Peter at all times.

Peter was chained to two of the soldiers. But the night before the king planned to kill Peter, an angel helped Peter to escape from prison.

**Read in Acts 12:5–18 about the Christians who pray for Peter. What happens to Peter because of their prayers?**

The night before Agrippa planned to kill Peter, an angel helped Peter to escape from prison.

Next, Luke tells us the story about how Agrippa dies at Caesarea (Acts 12:20–23). Many people have tried to figure out what caused Agrippa's death. (Here are some guesses about what killed him: Was it because his stomach swelled up from an infection? Or did he die from a painful sore inside his body? Or was he poisoned?) No one knows for sure *how* he died. But Luke is clear about *why* the king died. God judged Agrippa and found him guilty.

**Jesus is killed. Peter escapes death. God judges Herod. Sometimes the things that happen make sense, and sometimes they do not. What should this tell us about why we need to trust God about the things we cannot understand?**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** “In Acts 10 we read about another example of the work done by angels from heaven. In this chapter in Acts, the angels help Cornelius and the people with him to become Christians. Our people should read Acts chapters 8–10 and pay special attention to them. In these chapters, we see that God and His angels work very closely with the Christian worker who is trying to save souls. For sure, God and His angels are nearer to this worker than many people might believe. We should learn from these chapters the lesson of how much God loves each person. We should be kind to everyone. We should remember that each person is God’s tool for doing His work here on the earth.”—Ellen G. White Comments [Ideas], *The SDA Bible Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, page 1059, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Luke tells us that Cornelius “was a religious man. He and all the other people who lived in his house worshiped the true God. He gave much of his money to the poor and prayed to God often” (Acts 10:2, ICB). It is clear from this verse that God’s Spirit was already working in Cornelius’s heart long before he met Peter. Do you think Cornelius’s strong prayer life and his loyal worship of God made it easier for God to bring Cornelius the Good News that Jesus saves sinners from their sins? What lesson can we learn from Cornelius’s story about prayer and worship?
- 2 In class, let us go back to the question at the end of Monday’s study and ask ourselves: What are some of the different beliefs and ways of life around us that cause some people to have bad feelings about other people who are different from them? As Christians, we must not let our bad feelings for other people live in our hearts. So, how can we move away from the different beliefs and ways of life around us that cause these bad feelings?
- 3 Saul’s attacks on the church hurt the Christians. But in the end, God used these attacks to make good things happen: the Christians who escaped Saul’s attacks went to Antioch and preached the Good News about Jesus there. Share a story in class about how God made good things happen from the pain you suffered.



“In Acts chapter 10, the angels help Cornelius and the people with him to become Christians.”  
—Ellen G. White Comments [ideas], *The SDA Commentary [explanation]*, volume 6, page 1059, adapted.