

SESSION 9

PETER BAR JONAH: HOW PETER CAME TO ROME

INTRODUCTION

In this session we will look in detail at the mission that Jesus gave Peter when he renamed him Peter bar-Jonah in Matthew 16:17.

After a recounting of the many miracles worked at the hands of Peter and the Apostles, and of the beginning persecution with the stoning of Stephen, Acts 9:31 tells us that “the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up and it was multiplied.” As the Church grew, its head Apostle was busy preaching, teaching, and encouraging all those who had come to faith in Jesus Christ, so much so that Acts 9:32 says, “Peter went here and there among them all.”

On one of these trips among the brethren, Peter ends up for a few days in the coastal city of Joppa. With all the converts to the faith, Peter probably feels like he has his hands full. But he will receive a vision and command from God that is going to enlarge the sea in which he is fishing for men. The gift of the Spirit is going to make obsolete the Old Covenant kosher laws (among others), breaking down the separation that existed for so long between Jew and Greek, and opening the door of the gospel to all the nations.

Like Jonah before him, Peter is going to be called from Joppa to preach the gospel to those who had long been the enemies of God’s people—the Gentiles and the Romans. But unlike Jonah, Peter will not flee from God’s call. Instead he will ponder in prayer God’s vision and obey God’s command to go to the house of the centurion Cornelius. When the Spirit is poured out on these Gentiles in the midst of Peter’s preaching, Peter understands fully God’s eternal plan for the salvation of all God’s sons and daughters.

Meeting Peter will not only be God’s providence for Cornelius and his household to come into the Church, but it will also prove providential for Peter, who will flee to Cornelius’ home in Caesarea when he needs to escape Herod’s attempts to arrest and kill him. And it will be Cornelius that provides the likely connection as Peter bar-Jonah eventually travels from the Holy Land to Rome to preach the gospel in the capital city of the enemy of God’s people.



CONNECT

First, review the previous session with your group. Can anyone recite the Memory Verse (Acts 2:33) without assistance? If not, look it up (page 153) and recite it as a group. Then bring up any questions the group may have regarding the COMMIT section from last session.

1. Were you ever faced with a choice to do the right thing, but knew you'd be criticized by others? What helped you to do what was right anyway? How did you handle what others said about your decision?

Some responses might include situations in which someone needed to defend a person who was being mistreated by others, or choosing honesty when others were encouraging a "little white lie." Our conscience and knowing God's truth help us to remain true in these situations. Patience and forgiveness are often required in moving forward with relationships of those who criticize us. Peter will take criticism for his interaction with Cornelius, but as he explains how the Spirit led the way, he will win the hearts of his critics.

2. Have you ever looked back on your life and realized how often seemingly random events and encounters later seemed to fit together like pieces to a puzzle? Think of an event in your life that seemed to have no obvious purpose but later led to something important.

Some events might be meeting a particular person who later in life helps with a job or makes an introduction to a future spouse, or learning a skill or hobby that later translates to better performance at work. Peter will meet Cornelius and baptize him into the faith. But later it will be Cornelius who will help Peter when he needs to escape from Herod Agrippa.



Play the video segment, which will last for approximately 45 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching.



DISCUSS

Following are suggested answers to the DISCUSS questions.

1. What is the significance of Peter's choice to travel to the port city of Joppa? What are the similarities and differences in Peter and Jonah's experiences in the city of Joppa?

Peter is called to Joppa from the nearby city of Lydda. While in Joppa, God raises Tabitha (also called Dorcas), from the dead at Peter's command. While Peter is staying in Joppa, he is given a vision and called to leave Joppa to preach to the Gentile Cornelius. Later Peter will again come to Joppa to flee arrest by Herod Agrippa and from there depart to Rome to preach the gospel. Jonah departs Joppa on a boat in order to flee from the Lord and his command to preach to Israel's enemies. Peter departs Joppa following the Lord's command to go to the home of Cornelius, later to the capital city of the enemy of the Jews, Rome.

2. When Peter arrives at Cornelius' home, he finds more than just Cornelius there to hear his message. As a result, many are baptized and come to faith. How is Cornelius a model for evangelization? What qualities did Cornelius likely possess to bring so many with him to Christ?

Cornelius is a model for evangelization because he shared his love of God with others and invited them to hear the good news when Peter preached. Cornelius invited others to experience what he had and trusted that God would work in the hearts of those he brought with him. We know from Acts that Cornelius was generous in giving alms, and that generosity likely spilled over into his relationships with family and friends.

3. Kosher laws caused division between the Jews and the Gentiles. Kosher laws caused division between the Jews and the Gentiles. In what ways are Christians divided from those who are not Christian? How might those divisions be resolved? What keeps you from sharing your faith? How might Peter be an example to us of stepping out in faith?

Oftentimes nonbelievers have a very different view of the moral life or other issues (such as abortion, marriage, etc.). Sometimes these issues produce barriers that are difficult to overcome and cause us to hesitate in sharing our faith. When Peter knew it was God's will to go to Cornelius, he did so in faith, trusting for God's direction along the way. Peter treats those who come to get him as guests. Peter lets Cornelius begin by describing his vision. From these beginning acts of generosity and friendship, Peter steps out to share the truth of the gospel. Oftentimes it takes beginning acts of kindness, friendship, and generosity to lay a foundation on which God will work to open the hearts of those who do not yet believe. Often we need patience and prayer to discern when is the time for preparing the soil and when is the time for presenting the gospel.

4. Dr. Gray shows from Scripture the links between Peter and Cornelius, Pudens' name appearing in 2 Timothy 4:21, and the Tradition of Peter's time in Rome. How might we be inspired when Scripture, history, and Tradition intersect? How does understanding the history of the early Church affect your faith? *Personal answers for first questions. Understanding the history of the early Church often strengthens our faith because the first Christians lived in a very pagan society, yet in the midst of that environment they were faithful, often even to the point of martyrdom. Their witness encourages us to deeper faith.*

5. The *Catechism* beautifully explains the relationship between Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. Read the following quote. Have you ever thought about that description of Scripture? How does the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition impact your faith?

Personal answers for first question. The beautiful articulation of the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Tradition shows how the Church faithfully hands down the faith we have received from the Apostles. As St. Timothy says in his first letter, the Church of the living God is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

"Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal.' Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own 'always, to the close of the age'. 'Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.' And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching.'" —CCC 80–81



COMMIT

Following are suggested answers to questions in the daily COMMIT reflections.

COMMIT DAY 1 – THE CITY OF CAESAREA MARITIMA

Participants will learn about the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima.



COMMIT DAY 2 – THE PRIESTLY OFFICE OF APOSTLE

Participants will reflect on the vision Peter receives while staying in Joppa.

Look up the following passages. What miracles are performed by both Jesus and then Peter?

Jesus	Peter
John 5:1-9 – Jesus heals lame man	Acts 3:1-10 – Peter heals lame man
Luke 4:40 – Many brought to Jesus for healing	Acts 5:15-16 – Many brought to Peter for healing
Luke 8:49-56 – Jesus raises synagogue ruler's daughter from the dead	Acts 9:36-43 – Peter raises Tabitha (also called Dorcas), from the dead

Let's take a look at Acts 10:9-20. What animals appear in Peter's vision?

Acts 10:12 – *"In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air."*

What is Peter's response when instructed to "kill and eat"?

Acts 10:14 – *"But Peter said, 'No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.'"*

How many times is the vision given?

The vision is repeated three times.

Read the following passages. What is at the heart of their message?

Jeremiah 31:31-33 – *"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (emphasis added)*

God wants his law not to be something outside of the people, but to be on their hearts so that they can live it out.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 – *“I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”*
(emphasis added)

God wants to give his people a new spirit and heart so that they can live out his law.



COMMIT DAY 3 – CORNELIUS’ VISION

Participants will reflect on Cornelius, his vision, and the baptism of his household.

Read Acts 10:1-4. What work did Cornelius do?

Acts 10:1 – *“a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort”*

How do Acts 10:2 and 10:22 describe Cornelius’ faith?

Cornelius is described as *“devout,” a man who “feared God” and “prayed constantly,”*

How did Cornelius put his faith into action?

Acts tells us that Cornelius *“gave alms liberally.”*

According to Acts 10:2 and 10:7, what effect did Cornelius’ faith have on those around him?

Acts tells us that *“all his household” was devout, even one of his servants.*

After calling Cornelius by name, what are the angel’s first words to him in Acts 10:4? (See also Acts 10:30-31.)

Acts 10:4 – *“Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.”*

Acts 10:31 – *“Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.”*

Look at Luke 1:13. What similar words does the angel speak to Zechariah?

Acts 1:13 – *“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard...”*

According to both the envoy sent to Peter (Acts 10:22), and Cornelius (Acts 10:33), what are they expecting from Peter?

Acts 10:22 – *“to hear what you have to say”*

Acts 10:33 – *“to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord”*

How does Acts describe Peter as he begins to preach in Acts 10:34?

Acts 10:34 – *“opened his mouth”*

What is the reaction of the believers who traveled with Peter at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

They were amazed.

At what, specifically, are they amazed?

They were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out “even on the Gentiles.”

Acts of the Apostles notes that it was not simply Cornelius waiting for Peter's arrival. According to Acts 10:24, who is with Cornelius?

Acts tells us that on the day of Peter's expected arrival, Cornelius "had called together his kinsmen and close friends."



COMMIT DAY 4 – BAR JONAH FROM JOPPA

Participants will reflect on Peter's mission and the persecution of the Church.

In Genesis 12:1-3, Abraham is to be a blessing to whom?

*In Genesis 12:3 God says that by Abraham "**all the families of the earth shall bless themselves**" (emphasis added). Not just the Israelites or the Jews, but "**all**" families of the earth.*

In Leviticus 19:33-34, even when kosher laws were to separate Israel from the other nations, how was Israel to treat the stranger when he was in their land?

*Leviticus 19:33-34 – "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. **The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself**; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." (emphasis added)*

In Daniel 7:14, who serves the Son of Man?

*Daniel 7:13-14 – "As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received dominion, glory, and kingship; **nations and peoples of every language** serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed." (emphasis added)*

In Isaiah 52:10, who will see the salvation of God?

*Isaiah 52:10 – "...**all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God**" (emphasis added)*

According to Acts 11:1-3, what critique does Peter receive from some Jewish believers?

Some in Jerusalem criticize Peter, asking, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"

According to Acts 11:18, how does the response of those criticizing Peter's action change after they hear the word of the Spirit?

Acts 11:18 – "When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life."

According to Acts 12:19, what order does Herod give regarding the sentries?

After examining the sentries, Herod orders that they be put to death because of their failure to guard and secure their prisoner.

According to Acts 12:19, where does Peter go?

Peter went down from Judea to Caesarea, and remained there.



COMMIT DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Raphael's "The Liberation of Saint Peter."

According to Acts 8:1 and 11:19, why were many of the brethren scattered to various locations?

With the stoning of the deacon Stephen at the consent of Saul, there arose a great persecution of the Church in Jerusalem.

In Acts 12:1-2, what has already happened to the Apostle James?

James has been put to death by the sword.

In Acts 12:3-4, what then happened to the Apostle Peter?

Peter has been seized and imprisoned until he can be put to death after Passover.

Why are there all these precautions for one older fisherman? Read Acts 5:17-26. What happened when the Apostles were arrested earlier?

The Apostles had already been arrested once before and escaped prison by the assistance of an angel of the Lord.

Peter is sound asleep between the soldiers. What must the angel do to wake him in Acts 12:7?

The angel had to strike Peter on the side in order to wake him.

Peter being sound asleep should give us pause. What night is it in Acts 12:6?

It was the "very night when Herod was about to bring him out" to the people and then have him put to death.

Read these verses in Peter's letters. What is Peter's admonition in each to the faithful?

1 Peter 3:14 – *"But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled."*

1 Peter 5:7 – *"Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you."*

1 Peter 5:10 – *"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you."*

Even in the midst of suffering, we do not need to fear since Christ is with us and will strengthen us.

Look closely at the far left scene. What different sources of light appear in this scene?

The sources of light in the left scene include the moon, the beginning light of dawn on the horizon, the torch held by one of the guards, and the reflection of this light off the guards' armor.

Take a look at the light of the angel in the top and right scenes. How does the light from these two different sources compare?

The natural light in the left scene cannot compare in intensity to the brilliance of the divine light of the angel of the Lord.

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.