

A Conversation With Peter

Introduction

We sat down recently with Sylvanus to talk with Peter about his life and ministry.¹

Interview



The Apostle Peter

Sylvanus: Tell us about yourself and how you began your ministry?

Peter: My brother and I, Andrew, grew up as fishermen in Bethsaida, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. One day, the Lord (we didn't know He was the Lord), was walking along the seashore and saw us. He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." We obeyed; we dropped our nets and followed Him (Matthew 4.18-20).

Sylvanus: Why?

Peter: (*smiling*) It's hard to explain. He spoke with authority, as if He was used to being obeyed. We were His first disciples. As we walked down the coast with Him we

encountered James and John, sons of Zebedee, fishermen also. They were with their father in a boat a bit offshore, repairing their nets. The Lord called to them and they also joined us. We had heard John the Baptist was preaching the kingdom of God was near and that Jesus of Nazareth had taken up the same message (Matthew 3.1-2, 4.17). This was exciting. We longed for our nation to have its independence and hoped to restore the glories of David and Solomon. Could it really be after all the centuries that God was about to fulfill His promises? As we accompanied the Lord throughout Galilee, listened to his teaching in the synagogues, and witnessing His healing the sick, it seemed it might truly happen.

Sylvanus: Sounds exciting.

Peter: It was. Israel had not seen a prophet in 400 years—since Malachi. Jews from all over Israel—Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea, and from beyond the Jordan river began following us. We had tremendous crowds (Matthew 4.23-25) and hoped God was finally going to establish His kingdom on earth and deliver us from the Romans.

Sylvanus: Would you tell us about this kingdom?

Peter: Gladly. God's earthly kingdom is one of the two great subjects of Jewish theology. He had promised that my people would become a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exodus 19.4-6) and preeminent among the nations of the world (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). For us to realize this destiny required obedience, which is why John, and later Jesus, preached repentance. We had to repent before God could give us our kingdom. Throughout the prophets, we read about the glory of this kingdom. War will be no more. Animals will live in peace and no longer prey upon one another. Long life will be restored. Israel will become a channel of blessing to Gentiles. Best of all, the Lord Himself will rule as King of Israel and the whole world (Isaiah 2.2-4, 11.6-9; Zechariah 8.20-23, 14.9; Isaiah 11.1-5). The entire earth will once

again become like the garden of Eden.

Sylvanus: This kingdom sounds wonderful.

Peter: Yes. Every Jew who loved God longed for it. But due to our disobedience, idolatry, unfaithfulness, failure to keep the commandments, God disciplined us. He subjected us to Gentile powers: Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks, and finally, the Romans. We longed for our own country and freedom. Also, the Eleven and I were eager to occupy our positions the Lord had promised us. We were excited at the prospect of sitting on thrones and ruling the twelve tribes (Matthew 19.28). One doesn't forget a promise like that. Because of this, we asked the Lord before He ascended if He would now establish His kingdom. He deferred in His answer (Acts 1.6-8) but our hearts were filled with thoughts and the hope that the kingdom would be established soon. For it to come, we knew we needed twelve apostles—someone to replace Judas. That was why our first order of business after He ascended was to choose a new apostle.

Sylvanus: Some have taught you were precipitous in choosing Matthias. You should have waited for Paul. What do you say to this?

Peter: (*laughing*) Well, we would have been waiting a long time for Paul to come around. He was not saved until several years later. Besides, Paul did not fit the selection criteria. A viable candidate had to be one who had been with the Lord from the time of John's baptism to His resurrection and had witnessed His resurrection (Acts 1.21-22). Those who have taught Paul should have filled Judas' place have misunderstood the kingdom program. We were apostles of Israel. The Lord commissioned Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13). His ministry was to Gentiles. Ours was to Israel. Paul would not have fit. God commissioned Paul to found and lead an entirely new program—the Church, the body of Christ. We had separate commissions from the Lord.

Sylvanus: So you did not minister to Gentiles?

Peter: No. None of the Twelve ever had a ministry to Gentiles. Why would you think we did?

Sylvanus: Well, did not the Lord say in the great commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28.20). Weren't you to go to Gentiles?

Peter: Eventually, yes. But how could we go to Gentiles before our nation repented? The Lord instructed us to begin at Jerusalem and spread out from there (Luke 24.47; Acts 1.8). According to the prophetic program, most Gentile blessing would come through the Jews *after* the kingdom was established. The Abrahamic Covenant established that Gentile blessing would come through Israel. God had revealed no plan to bless Gentiles (Genesis 12.1-3) apart from Israel. Therefore, our priority was to evangelize Jews beginning in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost, I addressed Jews. The thought never crossed my mind to address Gentiles. To have done so would have conflicted with everything God had revealed through the prophets as well as what the Lord had taught in His earthly ministry. No, we had no thought of evangelizing Gentiles. In my second sermon, Acts 3.11-13, 17, 25, I also addressed Jews only. For us, the significance of the Lord's resurrection was He was alive and could return to establish His kingdom (Acts 3.19-21). That was the importance of His resurrection for us.

Sylvanus: But Israel had to repent?

Peter: Yes, that was the condition. We have Dr. Luke's record of my words at Pentecost: "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and

the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2.36-38).

Sylvanus: That seems pretty clear. So water baptism was necessary for salvation?

Peter: Yes. It had been since John’s ministry (Mark 1.4, 16.16).

Sylvanus: What about faith?

Peter: Faith has always been necessary for salvation. But the content of faith has changed over time in God’s programs. For example, Abraham believed God would make him a great nation (Genesis 15.5-6). He believed what God told him. That was how he was saved. Faith is believing what God has revealed at a particular time. To us, God revealed Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the Son of God. That was what we believed for salvation (Matthew 16.16; John 1.47-51, 11.25-27). That was what we preached—that was our gospel. The focus of our gospel was on Jesus’ name, on His identity—believing who He was.

Sylvanus: What about His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins?

Peter: We knew nothing about that. We learned He died for our sins and rose in victory for our salvation later.

Sylvanus: Really? How did you learn this?

Peter: Why from Paul, of course. We knew nothing about the Lord’s death and resurrection paying for Jewish sins—much less for Gentile sins. That knowledge came through the Lord’s revelations to Paul.

Sylvanus: Well, a lot of confusion exists about this. Most teach you and Paul proclaimed the same message, preached the same gospel.

Peter: How would anyone get that idea? Nothing in the Scriptures supports that.

Sylvanus: So let me get this straight. You and the Eleven preached Jesus was the Messiah. For personal salvation, one had to repent, be baptized, and believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Your hope was the Lord would establish His kingdom. For this to occur, the Jewish nation had to repent. If it had, Jesus would have returned to establish His kingdom.

Peter: That's it. That's Jewish theology. The only thing missing was that we were under the Law. We had to keep the Law for salvation.

Sylvanus: Well, now you've thrown a curve. I thought salvation was by faith alone.

Peter: Where did you learn that?

Sylvanus: From Paul.

Peter: (*smiling*) Exactly! From Paul. That gave us trouble.

Sylvanus: What do you mean?

Peter: Remember the Council of Jerusalem?

Sylvanus: Yes, Luke recorded it in Acts 15 and Paul wrote of it in Galatians 2.

Peter: That's the one. As I mentioned earlier, we lived under the Mosaic Law. We had lived that way for 1,500 years. No one had told us not to live under the Law. We understood keeping the Law was necessary for salvation (Mark 10.17-22; Luke 10.25-28). But we heard Paul was teaching those saved under his gospel (mostly Gentiles) were not under the Mosaic Law and that it was unnecessary for salvation. That upset us, especially the Pharisee believers. As a result, representatives went to Paul's converts to tell them they had to be circumcised and keep the Law to be saved (Acts 15.1, 5).

Naturally, this upset Paul. He had taught them they were saved by faith alone—by believing his gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). So the result was confusion.

Sylvanus: So what happened?

Peter: The Lord instructed Paul to go up to Jerusalem and resolve the issue (Acts 15.2; Galatians 2.1-2). What arguments! It was a Pharisee free-for-all! Paul, the premier Pharisee, versus our Pharisees. You should have been there! They went at it hammer and tongs.

Sylvanus: So, what was your role? And by the way, why weren't you in charge? Why was James in charge?

Peter: My authority and my role declined as hope of Israel's repentance was lost. By the time of the Council, in 51 A.D., I had lost much of my authority. James, the Lord's half-brother, not one of the Twelve, had assumed my position. I had become number two. Paul recognized this and wrote about it to the Galatians (Galatians 2.6, 9).

Sylvanus: So what happened?

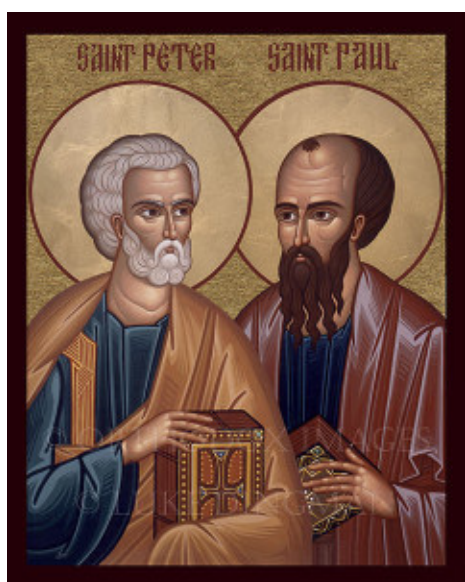
Peter: Paul was adamant but could not convince his opponents. I was largely silent, listening to the arguments. Finally, the Lord brought to my mind an incident that had happened many years before. Shortly after Paul had been saved, the Lord sent me to Cornelius, a Gentile. I had gone reluctantly. Remember, we were not evangelizing Gentiles. But God blessed the visit: Cornelius and his household were saved. Now the remarkable thing about their salvation was that they were saved apart from circumcision and keeping the Law (Acts 10.44-48). When I thought back on that experience, I understood God had given it to me for one primary purpose: so I could come to Paul's defense years later. God is outside of time and knew the opposition Paul would face fourteen years later. The Holy Spirit brought it to my mind. I then knew Paul was right and that God wished me to speak on Paul's behalf. I did. From that

time forward, Jews and Gentiles had to be saved through Paul's gospel (Acts 15.7-11; Galatians 1.6-9). The gospel of the kingdom, which focused upon repentance and believing in who Jesus was—believing in His name, ended that day.

Sylvanus: Wow! Not many understand this.

Peter: Perhaps not. But that is the explicit record of Luke and Paul.

Sylvanus: What was your relationship with Paul? Did you know him well?



St. Peter and St. Paul

Peter: Not really. As Saul of Tarsus, everyone was terrified of him. He had been at Stephen's trial when the Sanhedrin stoned him. After this, he became furious to arrest all who believed Jesus was the Messiah. When the Lord appeared to him on his way to Damascus, that all changed. The Lord transformed me. But what He did with Paul was almost beyond comprehension. Truly, nothing is too difficult for the Lord. The Lord exchanged Paul's zeal in persecuting us to evangelize and minister for Him. My contact with Paul was quite limited. I spent most of my time in Jerusalem while Paul went everywhere. A few years after he was saved, he visited me in Jerusalem for

a couple weeks (Galatians 1.18-19). Then we were both at the Council, of course.

Sylvanus: I believe you had a confrontation with Paul after the Council at Jerusalem. Tell us about this?

Peter: (*sighing, then smiling*) Well, you would bring that up. Ok. I had gone down with other Jewish believers to Antioch. We were having wonderful fellowship with the believers there—mostly Gentiles. After a time, some Jews of the party of the circumcision came down from Jerusalem. I buckled. I am ashamed to say I stop eating with the Gentiles believers because of them. My fellow Jews behaved no better. Even Barnabas, who had accompanied Paul on his first journey, stopped eating with Gentiles.

Sylvanus: What happened?

Peter: Well, Paul, being Paul, would have none of it. He called us out. He was right and we were wrong. We were ashamed (Galatians 2.11-14). I had gone against the very thing I had stated at the Council. Paul reminded us that justification was by faith alone, not by works (Galatians 2.16).

Sylvanus: So did this harm your fellowship and friendship?

Peter: Well, it was humiliating. But Paul was right. It gave him no pleasure to confront us. But had he not, he would have been remiss in his duty. We got over it and were better for it.

Sylvanus: I think you ended with great love for Paul.

Peter: Indeed I did. Paul had written to the Jews (the book of Hebrews) to expound upon God's plan for the Jewish people and to exhort them to trust in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. I wrote my fellow Jews to listen to Paul even though much of what he wrote in his other letters was difficult to comprehend. By this time, I knew Paul's letters were the Word

of God on par with Moses, Isaiah, etc. (2 Peter 3.15-16).

Sylvanus: So what is your hope going forward?

Peter: My hope is for my people. My hope is the same as it was on the day of Pentecost. On that day, I proclaimed repentance with full hope that my people would recognize Jesus as the Messiah. They will. While nearly 2,000 years have passed, that hope is as alive as it was then. When they do, the Lord will return. We have His promise (Matthew 23.37-39). But first, as we know from Paul's letters, the Church, the body of Christ, must be completed. When it is, the Lord will return for His body (the Day of Christ, the Rapture). After that occurs, God will initiate the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord. Israel will become center stage again. Those seven years will be the worst distress we have ever faced—and we have faced a lot. I had expected this time to come shortly after God had poured out His Holy Spirit (Acts 2.19-21). The prophets warned about the Day of the Lord. It, in addition to the kingdom of God, are the two great subjects of Jewish theology. As terrible as that time will be, it will end in joy. It will result in my people repenting so the Lord can return. He will establish His kingdom on the earth and fulfill all his covenant promises to us. What a time that will be! That time is near! ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ To life!

¹ This fictional interview serves as a vehicle to present Peter's life and doctrines. Peter proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom to Jews, to the nation of Israel, in hope that they would repent and believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. His ministry was distinct from Paul's. They had wholly different messages and ministries.

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