

## STUDY NOTES

### Lesson 5: 2nd Peter; Acts 13, 14

*For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man  
as the flower of grass...*

*But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. 1 Peter 1:24-25*

#### THE APOSTLE PETER

The scriptures give us a portrait of the man Peter who was full of zeal to the point of rashness, but who had a powerful love for the Savior. The scriptures do not hide his human stumbles. Peter wanted us to know that he was just a man, a “living stone” in the building of the Church, built upon Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. Peter’s letters reveal his concern that we put our trust in the rock of our Redeemer and not on any arm of flesh.

The Savior had nicknamed him Peter, *Petros* in Greek, or “little rock.” Catholics have insisted that Matthew 16:18 means Christ built his church on the rock of Peter. Without getting into the issues of Greek translation that refute this view, let’s just look at Peter’s own words. In his first epistle, he calls the saints he is writing to, “lively (living) stones, ... built into a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” He reminds them of the wonderful Old Testament prophecy that “I will lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” (1 Peter 2:6 from Isaiah 28:16) Peter rightly knew that all of us, leaders and followers alike in His church, are living stones that must rest squarely upon the foundation of The Rock of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and on no other. Peter obviously did not see himself as the bedrock upon which the church would be built.

#### 2ND PETER: EPISTLE OF WARNING TO THE CHURCH

The letter known as 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter has a tone of warning and admonition. Writing not long before his death, he spoke counsel that he viewed as most important to leave with his beloved saints. Peter wrote of our precious faith (1:1) and the “precious promises” we have been given. He obviously liked this word. He used it 6 times in his first epistle! But it is fitting, for Peter is speaking almost as a grandfather would, telling his beloved children and grandchildren how precious are the important things of life, and how unfruitful are vain and worldly pursuits. He pleads with his hearers to be “diligent” (1:10 & 3:14). Synonyms are “active, constant, eager, persistent and hard-working.” Peter pleads with us to be diligent in seeking spiritual life, and diligent to avoid spiritual pitfalls.

Peter starts his letter right out with the most glorious of all promises in scripture. In 1:4 he writes the astounding phrase, unique in scripture---“partakers of the divine nature.” Our sights have been too low. God wants us not only to be forgiven and cleansed by His sacrifice. He wants to share His very nature with us! He wants to remake us (rebirth), so that the human nature that continually trips us up, will be ultimately replaced by the same perfect loving character that He has. Sometimes we rather blithely refer to the fact that it is our destiny to become Gods, a uniquely Mormon perspective. It would be a mistake to view this as a coming “office” or “reward,” a destination if you will. The miracle is not that we will have a crown and sit on a throne, or help create and govern worlds—the miracle is that our hearts will be like His heart, our nature like His nature. Now that is an “exceedingly great and precious promise!”

Peter says that we, as Christians, have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (1:4) We are climbing a different ladder than the world. The rungs of this ladder (which we are “giving all diligence” to climb) are Faith, Virtue, Knowledge, Temperance (i.e. Self-Control), Patience, Godliness (i.e., conforming to the laws and wishes of God, reverence towards God), Brotherly Kindness, and, finally, the queen of virtues, Charity. This list gives us a picture of the type of character we should be growing towards. Peter is not alone in declaring charity to be the final and ultimate piece in the puzzle. Both Paul and Moroni state that charity is the “greatest of all” (1 Corinthians. 13:13, Moroni 7:46) and both warn that if we don’t finally acquire it, we are “nothing.”

Peter leaves his witness that his testimony is based on sure knowledge for he saw the Lord transfigured and heard a voice bearing record from heaven. The Christian message is no "cunningly devised fable." Peter then tells the saints that they have an even more sure witness, i.e., the light of the Holy Ghost, which will shine in their own hearts until the Lord himself, the ultimate light, comes to earth. Peter calls the Lord the "day star," which is two things: it is a real star, the planet Venus actually, that becomes visible on the Eastern horizon just before the dawn of a new day, and is also known as the Morning Star. The book of Revelation tells us that this is one of the name-titles of the Savior. Revelation 22:16 reads "I, Jesus, am the . . . bright and morning star." The millennium will usher in a new day for weary mankind, so long subject to war, lies and suffering under the dark and false reign of Lucifer. Christ, appearing like the morning star, will come to earth to cleanse it in preparation for His rightful reign, and He will come in the darkest darkness—the great tribulation period wherein all seems lost—just before the dawning of the new millennial day. How beautiful!

### **FALSE TEACHERS; WORLDLY WICKEDNESS**

The unity of the earliest saints after Pentecost had past. The church has grown. With growth came challenges. Peter now issues warnings. There will be opposition from within as well as from without. False teachers will be "among you" and "many shall follow" and "the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Peter then bears a passionate testimony of the justice of God. He warns them not to forget that they worship a god who destroyed the world in Noah's day for its wickedness and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This justice will most assuredly catch up with hypocrites, apostates, and with the "filthy," those who "walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness" and "despise" the governing laws of God. They "speak evil of the things that they understand not," but "they shall receive the reward of unrighteousness." Judgment for sin is certain, though it sometimes seems to tarry. Peter also reminds us that it is possible to fall from grace and become "entangled again and overcome." This end—that of a cleansed pig wallowing once more in the mire—would prove worse than if they had never known the way of truth.

The last chapter provides perspective for those who were anxiously "looking for" the day of the Lord. Living as they did in a time when persecution sometimes flared and threatened to destroy their families or livelihood, it was natural for these saints to long for the vindication that would come with the Lord's return. Their persecutors would then be punished and the false brethren would be revealed. Everything would be made right. But Peter adds a practical caution to this understandable desire for the score to be settled. We simply can't know God's timetable. Since a day with the Lord is as a thousand years, we are for all intents and purposes, unable to determine the when of His coming. We only know two things for sure: that God is patient and longsuffering towards men, hoping for all to come unto repentance, and secondly, that His coming will catch us all off guard, "as a thief in the night."

Since that is true, we should not just wait around for that day to arrive; we should be diligent (there's that word again) so that we are found "blameless and without spot" when He comes. Peter then asks his readers to ponder the implications of the Lord's coming with fire and judgment. He is pleading with us to develop a proper perspective. Don't you realize, he asks, that the earth "and the works that are therein shall be burned up?" He then poses one of the great questions in scripture: "Seeing then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?" Dissolved is a great word. We should keep it in mind more often when we go shopping. As in, 'do I really need to spend my money or my time on this—seeing that in the end, it is going to be dissolved?' Far better to spend on those things that will last, or as Peter says in his closing lines, to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

### **ACTS CHAPTER 13 & 14: THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL & BARNABUS**

We come now to the first missionary journey of Paul. The focus of the book of Acts will now switch to Paul for the remainder of the book. The first four verses of chapter 13 make clear that this mission is the work of God, for "the *Holy Ghost said*, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." This is the last usage of the name Saul; from here on out he is Paul, a citizen of and missionary to Rome. The church then lays hands on them—what we would call setting apart—and "they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost" travel first to the island of Cyprus.

The first missionary discussion they have is a command performance. The Roman deputy of the island of Cyprus, a man named Sergius Paulus, who is mentioned as being "prudent," or in other words, being sensible and having good judgment, wants to know what they will be preaching on "his" island. Satan's influence is spread in various ways in the earth. Especially in the pre-scientific time of the early church, one of his chief avenues of influence was through magicians and soothsayers. That such a man influenced Sergius Paulus seems pretty good evidence to us in the 21st century that he wasn't so sensible after all, but each era must be judged by its own standards. Back then it was precisely the sensible thing to do to attempt to find out what was coming in the future and be prepared for it. (What do we rely on today?)

Saul, however, recognized the power behind this soothsayer's influence and confronted him directly. His rebuke of Bar-Jesus was severe but warranted. This incident made plain that God had the greater power. Perhaps also, Paul remembered his own former unbelief and how his physical blindness had been the means of healing his much more serious spiritual blindness. We are not told if Bar-Jesus repented, but only that Sergius Paulus "believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Upon traveling to the mainland, John Mark leaves the mission and returns to Jerusalem. As we will see later, disagreement about John Mark is the reason that Paul and Barnabus split up. We wish Luke had given us a few more details. We are only told in verse 5 that John Mark was with Saul and Barnabas, and then in verse 13, that he left them. He could have simply decided that the rigors of such a journey were too hard. Scripture indicates he was fairly young. Perhaps he was homesick. In any case, we're glad that Luke included the information he did. Often there are young people in our own midst who come home from missions early for various reasons. We sometimes draw the unwarranted conclusion that their lives are forever blighted.

It can help to learn something of Mark's later contributions to the building of the kingdom of God. This is the very same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark! We all have reason to be grateful that the Lord gave Mark a second chance. There is also a reference to him in 2nd Timothy 4:11. Here Paul laments that all his companions except for Luke have left him, specifically chiding a man named Demas for giving up because he "loved this present world" more than the work. Then he asks Timothy to bring Mark back with him, "for he is profitable to me for the ministry." So we know that Mark had become the kind of man Paul trusted. This glimpse into the lives of the first Christian missionaries carries a significant message of hope for us today.

The twenty-five verses in Acts 13:16-41, record Paul's missionary sermon given in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia. (Remember that this is a different city than the Antioch on the coast of Syria that was Paul and Barnabus' home base.) This sermon, which Luke records in such detail, is probably meant to be regarded as typical of Paul's preaching in a mixed crowd of Jews and proselytes and "God fearers" like those who would have been in the synagogue audience, though we still have only a short synopsis of the original, for we know that Paul was given to lengthy speeches (see Acts 20:9). He gives the usual argument from Old Testament scripture that Jesus was the Messiah, wrongly crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem, but raised from the dead by God and seen by many witnesses, thus proving that He was indeed the promised Messiah. Only in two sentences at the very end of this sermon is there a hint of the wider application of these things to the Gentile world. Paul says, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38-39)

Whatever hint of the good news of God's grace that Paul included was enough to cause quite a stir, for a crowd followed Paul and Barnabus out of the synagogue, wanting to know more about it. The text says only that he did speak to them and "persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." This doctrine of grace was a powerful and new message that must have flown from tongue to ear because we are told that by the next week "almost the whole city together came to hear the word of God."

We see a pattern begin in this city that will be repeated throughout Paul's missionary experience. The opposition to his message comes not from secular Roman authorities, but from the Jews. They were said to be envious of the large crowds that flocked to Paul. How like our own day when the opposition faced by Mormon missionaries is often from other Christian churches jealous

of our success. Today's tactics are like the tactics used in Antioch of Pisidia, that is, "contradicting and blaspheming." This is because the one behind these tactics was and still is the Father of Lies.

Paul's rebuke to the Jews who oppose him is recorded here, including the original sarcasm. "Seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles!" (Acts 13:46) Paul also bears his witness that he has no choice but to make this change of approach and change of audience, for he has been commanded to take this message to them, even as scripture long ago promised: "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6) The Gentiles rejoiced at this word and flocked to the new doctrine.

This is a witness to the spiritual and intellectual deadness of the pagan worship of the day. This is also why so many non-Jewish "God fearers" were coming to Jewish synagogues to hear readings from the Old Testament. The Jewish religion beckoned them to come out of a tradition devoid of life and ethical direction—one that appealed mainly to superstition and sensuality. Yet living the whole Law of Moses presented huge cultural barriers. That is why many had become, as Cornelius, "God-fearers." This means they believed in the One God of the Jewish nation and His revelation of Himself through the Old Testament prophets, though they had not converted to the Jewish faith by circumcision. These people provided an enthusiastic audience for Paul.

### THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE CITIES OF AISA

In what becomes an oft-repeated pattern, Paul leaves Antioch when the Jewish opposition becomes intense. He goes first to Iconium, where he preaches "the word of his grace, and [does] signs and wonders." When the missionaries are forced to flee once again from Jewish opposition they go to the city of Lystra. Here we get the interesting story of Paul and Barnabas being mistaken for the gods Jupiter and Mercury because of a miraculous healing. We see from this the uselessness of signs and miracles as the basis for true testimony, for the mob goes from wanting to offer sacrifices to them one day, to stoning Paul the next, after Jews from Antioch and Iconium bear false witness against him. We see how strong is the inclination of the corrupt and carnal heart to be persuaded easily to evil and away from light.

The Book of Mormon provides good commentary on these passages. We read in 3Nephi 11:29: "The spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another." And from Helaman: "And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him." (Helaman 12:1) And it was this infinite goodness that raised Paul from death or near death, after his stoning by the fickle people of Lystra, and allowed him to resume his journey.

Paul is not one to be stopped from his intended course by any opposition, so he finishes by preaching in Derbe, then going back to strengthen the new saints in Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and finally preaching in the city of Perga, before sailing home to Antioch in Syria. We are told he stayed there a longtime with the disciples. This was a much-deserved R & R for a man whose courage and determination as a missionary were phenomenal.

As we finish these chapters, we should ask ourselves just what was "the word of grace" that Paul preached to such powerful effect. It might help to remember that a person's message is shaped not only by what they know and believe, but also by what they stand in opposition to. Paul's troubles often came from the Jews and that shaped his message. His message of grace was always to be understood against the backdrop of the bitter opposition that came from those who refused to let go of the Law of Moses.

The restoration in our own dispensation was preached against a different backdrop. Our message was preached to a Christian culture that knew all about grace. Grace was not new to 19th century America, but the idea of modern prophets and continuing revelation was. This was to them as shocking as the end of circumcision was to the Jews. And so, to the mainly Protestant religionists of his day, Joseph Smith preached a message that strongly testified of continuing revelation and the calling of modern-day prophets. He didn't have to convince his listeners about grace. We should never assume from that, however, that it was of little importance! It is always helpful to put each gospel dispensation in its own cultural context.