

=LIFE OF PETER=

Lesson 1

Peter the Fisherman Becomes a Stone

AIM: to teach my pupils the facts of Peter's early life and his call into discipleship.

POINT OF CONTACT: Bring to class the following objects: a picture of growing trees, a branch or a twig from a tree, a picture of fine furniture, and a picture of a lovely house. Ask the pupils as you show them the picture of trees and the branch from a tree, "What do you see when you look at this picture or this branch?" (Some students may say, "The bark." Some may say, "The leaves." Perhaps there will be other answers.) The carpenter sees this when he looks at the wood in the branch or the tree (Show the picture of the house), and the cabinetmaker sees this (Show the picture of the fine furniture). Any human being looking at Peter in the New Testament times would see a rough fisherman. Jesus looked at Peter and saw one of His finest disciples who would be made into His image.

INTRODUCTION: We now begin a new series of lessons. A study of the life of Peter the Apostle is not only interesting, but is also needful. Many legends and traditions have grown up around him; as a result, people need to listen to the truth about his life and his ministry. The Ebionites, who were a group who got into the early church between A.D. 2 and A.D. 4, started many of these stories about Peter. The Ebionites were made up largely of Pharisees and Essenes who denied the divinity of Christ. Peter is a picture of what can be done in the life of any person who is determined to obey the Lord immediately and to uphold Him exclusively as the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the coming of God's Anointed One, Who will rule someday as the King of kings. Peter was a man who was blessed of God and, like any other man, owes all the glory to the power of God operative in his life. Through learning the facts of Peter's life, fiction can be separated from truth, and inspiration can be gained to live more as Jesus would have us to live.

I. MEET PETER.

1. Let us note available information concerning his background.

- 1) He was originally named Simon. John 1:42.
- 2) His father's name was Jona or Jonas. "Simon Bar-jona" means "Son of Jona." Matthew 16:17; John 21:15.
- 3) Peter was originally of Bethsaida. John 1:44. (Look at the map in the back of your Bible. Bethsaida and Capernaum are located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee—Capernaum is more northwest, and Bethsaida, due north.)
- 4) Peter was married. He had a mother-in-law who made her home with him. See Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:30. Some think that I Corinthians 9:5 indicates that Peter took his wife with him on his missionary journeys.
- 5) Peter had a brother named Andrew. Peter's home was also Andrew's home. Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:29; John 1:40.

2. See Peter the fisherman. Matthew 4:18.

- 1) He fished in the Sea of Galilee, while Capernaum was his home. Mark 1:16-20. The Sea of Galilee is pear-shaped. It is a lake through which the Jordan River flows. The Sea of Galilee is thirteen miles long and seven miles broad. At its deepest point it is 157 feet. There are other names which have been given to this body of water: the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1) and the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1; 21:1), among others. The Sea of Galilee is a body of fresh water and contains many—some think as high as twenty-two—different species of fish. Perch, carp, and bluegill are some of the kinds of fish found there. The fish ran in schools between Capernaum and Bethsaida in Peter's day. Bird life is abundant over the lake. Sea gulls and pelicans are among the different kinds of birds. Tortoises, mud turtles, and crayfish are on its shores.

In the summer the hills surrounding the sea are brown and bare, but in the spring they are clothed with vegetation. Some areas are overgrown with oleander plants bearing their fragrant red or white flowers. The marshy growth around the northern shore of the lake includes the papyrus plant.

- 2) Peter was in partnership with James and John in the fishing business. Luke 5:10. Fishing was a flourishing business in the Sea of Galilee. Professional runners took the fresh fish to marketplaces or to distant places where feasts were served. They carried the fish in woven straw baskets. Other fish were smoked, pickled, or salted for preservation before selling them. (Fish decay very rapidly!) The salt came from near the Dead Sea, which was also called the Salt Sea. Peter, James, and John might have hired other fishermen to work for them. Fish merchants owned fishing fleets and salting and drying works. Some hired fishermen were too poor to eat even one of the small fish that struggled in their nets. They lived on bread and a few dates and figs while their catches were sold all over the country.

Many, many boats were kept on the Sea of Galilee. The fishing boats of Capernaum were fitted with sails. The boats would go out at night, returning at dawn with their catch. During the day the women spread out the nets on the shore to dry. In the daytime the fishermen mended their nets and put them in order for the next night's fishing. Professional fishing was done with nets. In the shallow water casting nets were used. The casting net had weights all around its edge. When the net was thrown into the water it settled on the water like a parachute. The weights made it sink. It would close like a sack. Sometimes, when the catch was a good one, the fishermen dived down to see that the net had closed. Matthew 4:18. In the deep water drag nets were used for catching the fish. Two boats trawled a drag net between them. As the boats came closer and closer together, the net caught whatever fish swam into its path. Then the dripping brown net and its silvery catch were hauled aboard. Luke 5:4-7. For catching one fish at a time, hooks and lines were used as well as spears. Matthew 17:27.

- 3) Peter was without a doubt a weather-beaten, strong man. His occupation would have made him so. Besides the fact that he worked outside all the time, he had had his share of coping with storms on the lake. The lake is set deep among hills; it is 696 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea, and consequently, it is subject to sudden squalls and violent storms which develop rapidly. Sailing the Sea of Galilee was risky, as it still is.
- 4) Peter was looking for the Messiah to come. He knew the prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus. Doing physical work out on the lake all night in the inky blackness of the water and in the sunshine on shore in the day afforded time for thinking. There was time for expression of thoughts. It is said that the night air would carry back to shore the songs the fishermen sang while they were out on the lake. Serious conversation could have passed among the workers concerning the events of the day and about the prophecy of the coming Messiah.

## II. PETER MEETS JESUS.

1. Into Peter's everyday life came the most important bit of news.
  - 1) It was his brother, Andrew, who brought the news to him. Andrew had been listening to John the Baptist and had seen John identify Jesus. John 1:35, 36.
  - 2) The news was, "We have found the Messiah." Andrew was convinced that his announcement to Peter was absolutely correct. Andrew had followed Jesus and talked with Him after John pointed Him out to the two disciples of John who were present that day. John 1:37-40.
  - 3) The first person whom Andrew told was Peter. John 1:41. Andrew was a soul winner. He brought Peter to Jesus.
2. Peter was changed as he accepted the fact of Jesus' identity.
  - 1) Jesus changed Peter's name from Simon to Cephas, which means "a stone." Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:42. Accepting Jesus as Saviour created a new man. II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.
  - 2) Jesus is the Rock; Peter was a stone. Matthew 16:18; I Corinthians 10:4. Anyone who accepts Jesus as his or her Saviour is made into the image of Jesus; he becomes a little stone that is made like the big Rock. Colossians 3:10. To what degree the stone becomes like the Rock is

the same degree to which the individual person yields to Jesus' working in him. Romans 8:29; 12:1, 2.

III. PETER FOLLOWS JESUS. Matthew 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18; Luke 5:8-11.

1. Peter and Andrew went back to their fishing business.
  - 1) Jesus asked Peter and Andrew to stop washing their nets by the sea. He had gone into their boat so that He might teach the multitudes from there. He wanted the boat pushed out a little from the shore so that the people could gather near it to hear Him.
  - 2) When Jesus finished speaking to the crowd, He commanded Peter to sail out into the deep water. He told him to let down his net. A great catch of fish came into the net. Peter worshipped Jesus and saw his own sinfulness.
2. Jesus called Peter and Andrew to follow Him. He told them that as a result of following Him they would become fishers of men. Just as they had brought in fish that had swum into the fish nets, so they would bring people unto Him.
3. Immediately upon Jesus' beckoning to them, Peter and Andrew left their fishing business to follow Jesus.

CONCLUSION: Peter knew what it was to wait for the Messiah to come and then to meet Him face to face. Of course, Peter was yet to learn much about what the coming of Jesus really meant. He learned quickly, however, to follow without question when Jesus called. He could admonish other Christians in later years to "...hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children..." I Peter 1:13, 14.