

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

T3 ACTS: THE KEYS AND THE SWORD

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Consider the following questions:

- What does it take for someone to lay down his life for the Gospel?
- What does it take for someone to lay down his life for the Gospel?

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The answer: It takes more than good doctrine or an understanding of how religion "works," more than years studying the Bible, more than

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You are going to have to come to grips with the fact that St. Peter and St. Paul are not just names, but real people. They are the two saints who gave us the keys (Matthew 16:19) and the sword (Ephesians 6:17). The two saints even share a feast day together, one that celebrates their lives by honoring their deaths (i.e., martyrdom) on June 29th each year.

The glory of such an important feast day is found, in part, in the reality that Sts. Peter and Paul aren't remembered solely for their importance to the early Church or their accomplishments but for their martyrdom. These two apostles celebrated

SESSION 1

The teenage years are usually accompanied by a certain amount of freedom. Now, you might be saying to yourself, "For other people, sure, but not in my house." The truth, though, is that no matter how strict or lenient your parents are, you have more freedom now than you did ten years ago—and you will be even more "free" ten years from now. But what do you do with that freedom? What (and more to the point, *who*) influences your decisions and choices?

Who decides where will you go to school? To college? What you will do for a living? Who decides if you will get married? Who you will marry? What about a vocation to the priesthood or religious life? How about where you live or how much money you will make? Are these choices you make alone, or do you leave room in the equation for God?

You might be wondering what all these questions regarding your freedom and future have to do with this first session studying the book of Acts. Actually, everything! The apostles also had questions about their future and what to do next. They had been following Jesus, in the flesh, every day. He told them where to go and what to do. Now, all of the sudden, they were left alone (or so they thought), wondering what to do and where to go next.

In this first section you will see that true freedom is not "doing whatever you want." Rather, freedom is the power to do what is right (i.e., what God wants). It is in the battle between doing good or evil—between freedom and slavery—that heroes are born and true disciples of Christ are made.

THE CHAPTERS COVERED IN THIS LESSON

OPENING QUESTION

VERSE TO REMEMBER

BREAKING IT DOWN

- How did Jesus give the apostles instructions after His ascension?

- Why did Jesus spend those forty days with His disciples?

- Between the gospels and Acts 1:8, how have Jesus' instructions changed?

- Why was it important for the apostles to see Christ's ascension?

ST. PETER'S RESUME

Here is a brief biography on the first pope, the world's greatest "fisherman turned shepherd."

ORIGINAL NAME

Simon, a common Jewish name in the New Testament period. Jesus changes his name to **Peter** (*Petros* in Greek), meaning "Rock."

AGE

Uncertain. Commonly believed to have been born around the time of Christ and to have died in the late AD '60s.

BIRTHPLACE

Many believe Bethsaida, on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. St. Philip, another one of the twelve apostles, was also from there.

PARENTS' INFORMATION/ UPBRINGING

He was the son of a man named **Jonah** (see Matthew 16:17). Simon Peter's mother is not mentioned in Scripture. His younger brother, **Andrew**, however is the one who first brought him to Jesus (see John 1:40-42) and was, also, one of the twelve apostles.

EDUCATION

While Peter was raised in the Jewish faith, he probably had no formal religious training. In Acts 4:13, we are told that Peter appeared before the Sanhedrin looking like "an unlearned man."

RELEVANT JOB EXPERIENCE

Simon and Andrew were successful fishermen (see Luke 5:7). They worked with their good friends and fellow apostles, Sts. James and John.

MARITAL STATUS

St. Peter was married, though we do not know his wife's name. His mother-in-law is referred to in Scripture (see Matthew 8:14, Mark 1:30, Luke 4:38). His wife may have even accompanied Peter on some of his missionary journeys (see 1 Corinthians 9:5, 1 Peter 5:13).

TRAVELING COMPANIONS/FRIENDS

St. Peter's most famous traveling companion was probably St. Mark (see Acts 12:25, 1 Peter 5:13), to whom one of the gospels is attributed.

PATRONAGES

He is the patron saint of fishermen, the papacy, bridge builders, and the city of Rome, among other things.

DEATH

Tradition tells us that St. Peter was martyred in Rome between AD 64-67. He was crucified upside down, at his request; he believed he did not deserve to die in the same manner as Christ.

FEAST DAYS

February 22 - Feast of the Chair of Peter
June 29 - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul
August 1 - Feast of St. Peter in Chains
November 18 - Feast of the Dedication of the Basilicas of Peter and Paul

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY ON THE PAPACY

We are very fortunate as Catholics that Christ instituted His Church here on Earth.

Before going on, read that phrase again because to some people it makes no sense. The truth is, however, that Christ did institute a Church—a foundation through which and by which the Holy Spirit guides and leads us deeper into God's divine revelation.

One might ask, however, why Jesus would entrust His Church to sinful human beings. It is not as if Jesus, as the Son of God, didn't know that his followers would sin. The beauty of the Church, however, is that it stands as a guardian and interpreter of the Gospel of Christ, standing as a pillar of truth (see 1 Timothy 3:15)—in spite of the sinfulness of its members.

In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus sets St. Peter above the other apostles as their leader:

And so I say to you [Simon], you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Take note of all that Jesus does here:

1. He changes Simon's name to Peter ("Rock").
2. He tells Peter that He will build His Church upon him.
3. He promises that "the gates of the netherworld" (i.e., death or hell) will not prevail against the Church.
4. He gives Peter "the keys" of the Kingdom.
5. He gives Peter the power "to bind" and "to loose."

Let's deal with each one briefly, in terms we can understand:

1. **Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter ("Rock").**
If you have experienced T3: *The Teen Timeline*, recall the others whose names were changed by God. Remember that a change in one's name signifies a change in his essence.
2. **Jesus tells Peter that He will build His Church upon him.**
Seems pretty straightforward, no? While some assert that the first time Jesus uses the word "rock" He is referring to Peter and the second time He is referring to Himself, this is a flawed interpretation based on a misunderstanding of the original Greek. The majority of biblical scholars all agree that Christ is referring to Peter in both instances.
3. **Jesus promises that the "the gates of the netherworld" will not prevail against the Church.**
People may try to point to scandals as proof that Christ was talking about Himself as the Church, rather than an earthly, institutional Church. But this betrays the plain sense of Scripture. The truth is that while battles may be lost, the war has already been won by Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. The Church will always prevail; Christ has promised as much.
4. **Jesus gives Peter "the keys" of the Kingdom.**
The person with the keys is in the driver's seat and nothing has changed in 2,000 years. Keys not only let people in, they also lock others out. The keys signify power.

Consider Jesus' words in Luke 10:16:

Whoever listens to you listens to me.
Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.

The one driving is the one who steers the car, i.e., the one who directs where it goes. The other passengers can object, but they don't have the keys and, thus, cannot drive. Notice that none of the other apostles were given the keys, only St. Peter.

5. Jesus gives Peter the power "to bind" and "to loose."

What does this mean? It refers to Peter's authority to rule in the Church. In a sacramental sense, it refers to the power to forgive sins in the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick, which all bishops and priests share by virtue of their ordination.

As Jesus goes on to make clear, the authority exercised by Peter on earth counts in heaven as well (read again the verses from Matthew 16 mentioned above before continuing).

Here are some additional verses that demonstrate the special authority given to St. Peter, the first pope. Take the time to read through each verse and answer the questions below.

Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:12-19, Acts 1:13
Whose name appears first in each list?

Mark 8:29, John 6:68-69, Acts 2:14-41
Who becomes the leader and "spokesman" for the apostles?

Luke 22:31-32
Who is the only apostle that Jesus personally prays for?

Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5
Among the apostles, who did the resurrected Christ appear to first?

Mark 16:7
Who was singled out by the angels following Christ's resurrection?

John 21:15-17
Who does Christ empower (as shepherd) to feed the sheep?

Acts 1:15-26
Who oversees the election of Judas' successor?

Acts 3:1-10
Who is the first apostle to work a miracle in Christ's name following Pentecost?

Acts 10:9-49
Who receives a special revelation from God regarding the Gentiles' place in the Church?

Galatians 1:18
Who does even St. Paul submit to?

You get the idea.

May God bless our Holy Father and all of our bishops, that they might continue to lead the flock with humility, boldness, wisdom, and abandonment to God's will.

Pray **Matthew 16:16-20**, again, and close in prayer.

NOTES

ST. PAUL'S RESUME

Here is a brief biographical sketch of the first—and greatest—Christian missionary that the world has ever known.

ORIGINAL NAME

Saul (see Acts 9); later referred to by his Roman name, Paul (see Acts 13:9)

AGE

Uncertain. Most believe he was born early in the first century and died sometime in the mid- to late '60s, before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

BIRTHPLACE

Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province in the southeast corner of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Tarsus was also the site of a famous university, more respected and better known than even those in Athens and Alexandria.

PARENTS' INFORMATION/ UPBRINGING

Paul's father was a member of the straightest sect of the Jews, a Pharisee, from the tribe of Benjamin.

- He had pure and unmixed Jewish blood (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5)
- Though a Jew, his father was a Roman citizen. His mother is not mentioned, but we can infer that she was like minded in religion and upbringing. Read Philippians 3:6.

EDUCATION

He enjoyed the best education. At the age of thirteen, he went to the Jewish school of sacred learning at Jerusalem, and spent many years studying the Hebrew Scriptures. He went to college to become a rabbi, but according to Jewish custom, he had to learn a trade before entering direct preparation for a sacred profession.

RELEVANT JOB EXPERIENCE

He was a tentmaker, one of the most common professions in Tarsus.

MARITAL STATUS

He was unmarried (i.e., celibate). For more about why, read 1 Corinthians 7:32-33.

TRAVELING COMPANIONS/FRIENDS

Sts. Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

PATRONAGES

He is the patron saint of missionaries, preachers, authors, journalists, reporters, and publishers, among others.

NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

Read Acts 9:23-30, 2 Corinthians 11:23-29

DEATH

He died during the persecutions of Roman emperor Nero, after the great fire in AD 64 (probably around AD 66), a few years before the fall of Jerusalem.

A reliable tradition says that he was that he was martyred by beheading, about the same time as St. Peter, but on the Ostian Way, where the basilica and abbey of St. Paul-outside-the-Walls still stands.

FEAST DAYS

January 25 - Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul
February 16 - Feast of St. Paul's shipwrecked
June 29 - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul
November 18 - Feast of the dedication of the Basilicas of Peter and Paul

SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT ST. PAUL AND HIS JOURNEYS

As mentioned, St. Paul was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province in the south-east of Asia Minor. Cilicia was known for its wealth and extensive commercial traffic.

According to Jewish custom, Paul learned a trade before he began his rabbinical studies. He learned to make tents out of goat hair.

St. Paul was not only a rabbi, but a Pharisee, a learned doctor of the law.

Paul's father, though a pure-blooded Jew, was also a Roman citizen.

Tarsus was the site of a famous university, with a greater reputation than even those universities in Athens and Alexandria. So Paul was surrounded by great thinkers throughout his youth.

At about thirteen years of age, Paul was sent to Jerusalem to a school of sacred learning where he spent many years studying the Scriptures.

In the years following Pentecost, Paul was an active leader in the persecution of the early Christians, seeking to wipe this "new religion" off the face of the planet.

Contrary to popular belief, nowhere in Scripture does it say that Saul was riding a horse when he was knocked to the ground and Christ appeared to him.

The vision of Christ in dazzling light blinded Saul for three days, in which he neither ate nor drank.

Following his experience of Christ, many believe that Saul spent almost three years in solitude in Arabia, studying and meditating on Christ.

St. Paul's first missionary journey (AD 45-48) spanned more than twenty cities and 1,500 miles.

His second missionary journey (AD 50-53) spanned twenty-two cities and more than 2,800 miles.

His third missionary journey (AD 60-61) spanned about eighteen cities and more than 2,700 miles.

His fourth and final missionary journey to Rome included stops in about thirteen cities and covered 2,300 miles.

Paul endured his share of hardships, including imprisonments, beatings, lashings, stonings, shipwrecks, sleeplessness, and hunger (See 2 Corinthians 11:23-29).

St. Paul also had a memorable run-in with a snake (see Acts 28:1-10).

NOTES

ST. PAUL'S PASSPORT

