

## WEEK # 5

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# HINGE POINTS IN HISTORY



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*—Acts 4:12–14 NIV*

## WEEK FIVE

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### MEMORY VERSE:

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## THE HINGE POINTS IN GOD’S STORY

This week, we are returning to the story of Peter, and this will be almost the last time we see Peter until we read his letters of 1 and 2 Peter at the very end of his life. From Acts 1–Acts 12, Peter is the primary spokesperson for the new and growing group of believers. In Acts 1, he steps up as the leader and in Acts 2, filled with the Holy Spirit, he declares the story of Israel’s God and the story of Jesus as Messiah. In Acts 3 and 4, he gives a clear and ringing witness to the power of Jesus, and in Acts 5, he has the authority of Jesus to discern and judge sin. In chapter 9, we read of Peter again, and Luke is setting up the most important human hinge point in God’s story with His people. This week, we will look at Acts 9:32–12:24. I recommend that before you start this week’s homework, you sit down and read this section all at once. Acts 12:24 is the natural break in the book of Acts. In the first 12 chapters, the gospel has been proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria — and in Acts 13–28, the gospel will be taken to the whole world! God moves in the stories that make up these three chapters to open the door so that ALL might come to know His love through His Son Jesus.

*Jesus, these chapters move us so deeply. As we prepare to study your word, would you touch our eyes so that we see the world from the perspective of the Father’s love? Would you quicken our minds so we can understand your glorious story of redemption and your deep desire for homecoming to your world? Would you open our ears so we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us the words of Jesus? When we see, let us act! When we understand, let us reach out! When we hear, let us obey! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

## DAY 1

Read Acts 9:32–42.

We are going to start with another map because the places where these events take place matter to the overarching story of God. Make sure you know where these places are on the map.



Peter begins traveling around the country, leaving Jerusalem to share the good news of the resurrection of Jesus.

First, he goes to Lydda where he heals a paralyzed man.

Then, believers at Joppa ask him to come at once to Joppa. He remains there with Simon the Tanner for some time.

At the same time, there was a righteous man in Caesarea on the coast, and God appeared to him and told him to go and find Peter in Joppa.

In verses 32–35, what happens when Peter comes to Lydda?

a. Peter meets a man named? \_\_\_\_\_

b. What is this man's story?

- c. What does Peter say?
  
- d. Who heals Aeneas?
  
- e. How does Aeneas respond?
  
- f. How do the people in Lydda respond?

This story is strangely familiar, isn't it? Does it remind you of a healing in the gospels?

**Read Mark 2:1–12 and Matthew 9:1–8.**

In both these stories, Jesus is establishing His authority. And now, in Acts 9, Peter also establishes Jesus' authority. How does he do it?

Why do you think this is important at this point in the story of Acts?

**Read Acts 36–42.**

What happens when the men of Joppa hear about Aeneas?

Write down all the details given about Dorcas or Tabitha. What made her so special to believers in this area?

When the believers knew that Jesus was working through Peter, they call him to come after Dorcas has died. Describe the scene.

What does Peter do in verse 39–41? There are seven actions which Peter does.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

This story is also vaguely familiar. What story in scripture does it remind you of?

**Read Matthew 9:18–25 and Mark 5:35–43.**

What similarities do you see?

Again, why is it important that the authority of Jesus is seen through Peter's life at this moment? Think of what has happened in Acts 1–9 and what is going to happen in Acts 10.

## DAY 2

**Read Acts 10:1–22.**

While Peter was staying with Simon the Tanner, a new story is unfolding in Caesarea. A little background on Caesarea. This town was right on the coast, and it was a very important military town for Rome. It served as a crossroads for traveling north and south and for traveling east to west through the Mediterranean Sea. It was here, in 67AD, that a skirmish took place between Jews and Gentiles outside the Jewish synagogue. That skirmish resulted in the crackdown from Rome that would eventually lead to the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70AD. This event is happening about 30–35 years before the complete destruction of the temple and Israel as the Jews have known it. Cornelius of Acts 10 is a Roman Centurion of the Italian Regiment, which means he oversaw 100 men in the Roman army. He is not Jewish but he is a "God-fearer" which is what Gentiles were called who adopted the practices of the Jewish faith.

Locate Caesarea on the map. Where is it in relation to Lydda and Joppa and Jerusalem?

How does Luke describe Cornelius?

Again, we see the presence of God speaking to a man. This time the text says it was an angel who speaks to him, reminiscent of Luke's birth stories of John the Baptist and Jesus. God has a message to give to Cornelius. What is it?

How does Cornelius respond?

What does the angel tell him has happened to his prayers? And what is he to do? God hears! God answers! God gives Cornelius instructions!

What does Cornelius do?

Faithful, diligent prayer, A seeking, receptive heart, and instant obedience! This is how God changed the world! And, perhaps, He still wants to change the world in this way. Open doors to the Gospel come through prayer, a heart ready to receive Him and quick and ready obedience to His Word!

### **Read 10:9–22.**

Slow down as you read and make note of all the detail given in these verses. The story goes into slow motion as the door of history begins to swing open. What happens in the next part of the story is a revolutionary change in the way Peter has understood God's redemptive story since Abraham. God is doing something new and He is opening the story of Jesus to all Gentiles. Peter is neither prepared nor is he clear on what God is doing. God is the main character in this chapter, and all the initiative is with Him.





What does he hear?

How does Peter respond?

◆ 1st –

◆ 2nd –

What does the voice say?

How many times does this happen?

In verse 17, what does your version say about his response?

The Greek says, he was “thoroughly nonplussed” or “much perplexed” and the word is often translated “doubted.” Peter did not believe this is what God could really mean.

What happens as Peter thinks on these things (verses 17–18)? Who shows up at the gate?

And then, who begins to speak to Peter again? What is said to Peter?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

So, what does Peter do? First step of obedience.

What do the men say in reply?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

In 10:23, something revolutionary happens. What is it? Peter's second step of obedience.

## DAY 4

### Read Acts 10:23–48.

When Peter arrives at Cornelius' house, a crowd is gathered to meet him. Cornelius had no doubt that God would send Peter to see him, even though Cornelius knew Jews were not allowed to enter a Gentile home. What does Cornelius' action tell us about his understanding of God's story?

How does Peter respond to Cornelius' action? And, then when he sees the crowd, Peter acknowledges that this is an unusual situation. What is his reason for coming into Cornelius' home?

I think it is so funny that Peter still does not understand what God is doing. He asks Cornelius, "Why have you sent for me?" How does Cornelius describe his visit by the angel?

Peter is beginning to understand. Explain his conclusions before he starts to share his witness of Jesus (verses 34–36).

1.

2.

3.

How did Peter share the story of Jesus with Cornelius' family?

What does God do while Peter is speaking? Who is the main character in this story (44–46)?

Explain Peter's conclusions and actions in 10:47–11:18).

- ◆ To Cornelius' family –

- ◆ To the apostles and believers in Judea –

What is so revolutionary about God's action in this chapter?

## DAY 5

**Read Acts 11:19–12:24.**

This closes the fulfillment of Acts 1:8 and the church is spreading to "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria...." In chapter 13 the scope of the book will turn "to the ends of the earth."

In verses 19–30, explain the spread of the gospel based on the persecution arising in Jerusalem and Judea.

Explain the role of Barnabas in this spread of the gospel.

What was the world-wide tragedy taking place and how did believers of Jesus respond to it?

The early church was beginning to be known as those who came to the aid of others in the name of Jesus as well as those who gathered in the name of Jesus and loved one another. They took the words of Jesus seriously and began to live them out in quiet and intentional ways.

Is the Lord doing something new in our day? How does He want us to begin to reach out amid local and world-wide tragedies? Ask Him for specific direction for you in your own circumstances.

Acts 12 tells two stories. The first is the end of Peter's witness in Acts — after this he goes behind the scenes, and we only hear his voice one more brief time in Acts 15. Why do you think this is the last story we hear of Peter? What about this story stands out to you in light of all that we know of Peter's life?

I love Rhoda's part in this story. Write her witness out in your own words.

### Read Acts 12:19–24.

The judgement of God comes on Herod. Reflect on this scene in light of Psalm 110 and Psalm 2.

"This Acts 1–12 which began with Jesus exalted and proclaimed as King of the Judeans, and powerful works done in his name ends with the sudden demise of the present would-be king of the Judeans and with the word of God growing and multiplying. And Acts 9–12, framed by God's dealing in very different ways with violent opposition to this new movement, contains the seeds from which the worldwide mission will now grow. The king of the Judeans, as Scripture always insisted, was to be proclaimed as the Lord and Savior of the world. No matter what the principalities and powers might do to try to stop it." (N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Acts*, p 66)



