

What Happened to Peter ?

"Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers what was become of Peter" (Acts 12:18).

The two soldiers were there - the chains were there -the walls and the doors were there - but Peter was not! No wonder *"there was no small stir among the soldiers"*.

Nowadays they might call that an understatement. Having read the story through, of course, we know quite a lot more about what happened to Peter than those poor ignorant soldiers. But after all, do we?

We read of earnest prayers going up for him -the angel coming - the light in the dungeon - the instructions given- the iron gate opening. Then Peter passes through one street and presently arrives at the house where they are praying for him. (I confess to a wry smile whenever I read the next piece, for those good folk all believed in prayer, of course, but when Rhoda tells them their prayers are answered, they first of all say that she is mad, and then say it is his angel, and in the meantime Peter continues knocking. When at last they opened the door they were astonished!) Oh yes, I admit I should have been just as astonished myself, but I cannot help the smile all the same.

Well now, Peter is back again, and, of course, we can expect further great Pentecostal addresses, more wonderful miracles, etc. But no, he just tells them how he was delivered, tells them to go and tell James and the brethren, and then promptly disappears again! In the next verse we read *"what was become of Peter?"* The fact of the matter is, we have come to one of the great turning points of Scripture; the thrust of the Acts period is changing. Peter the Apostle of the Circumcision, is giving way to Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. Peter, who has been the outstanding figure in nearly all the preceding chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, is to be heard of no more, except for a passing reference to him, and a short speech made by him to the council at Jerusalem, at Acts 15.

Let us look back now and see what has been going on, and why this change. As we read the first two chapters of the Acts, we realize that one great change has already taken place. That is in the attitude of the eleven disciples. Instead of being a band of beaten men, meeting behind closed doors, cowed and in fear of the Jews (John 20:19), they seem to be completely infused with new life. The resurrection and appearances of our Lord has transformed them. They are now filled with boldness, and, as usual, Peter takes the lead (Acts 1:15). First of all we have the choosing of Matthias, to take the place from which Judas fell, and then comes the great day, the day of Pentecost. Again Peter is the leader. Great crowds are surging round Jerusalem to keep the feast. Jews have come from all parts - Jews from Parthia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Libya - a list of places. Jews from the world over. In this great multitude stands Peter, and the other eleven, Peter, his face glowing and his voice vibrant with emotion, declares that they are living in the days of prophecy, the last days (Acts 2:17). Days when great events are to take place (verses 19 and 20). He reminds them of the awful happenings of Golgotha (verse 23), but hastens on to tell them of the wondrous resurrection of our Lord (verse 31). Tells them that God's gracious forgiveness is extended to them in spite of all (verse 38), and bids them to *"repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ"* (verse 38).

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added about three thousand souls" (verse 41).

In chapter 3, we find Peter still to the fore, and in an acted parable shows the Children of Israel just what might happen to them as a nation. As a nation they were lame and helpless (verse 2). As a nation they were unable to enter into the fullness of joy in worshipping and praising God, but *"in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"* (verse 6), they could be given strength. In His name

they could *"enter in with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God"* (verse 8). Again the *"men of Israel"* gathered round, and Peter once again repeats to them the awful story of what they have done (verses 13-16). Once more he tells them of God's loving message of forgiveness (verse 19) Times of refreshing are promised. Jesus Christ would come again (verse 20), prophecy would be fulfilled, the restitution of all things would take place, and in and through the Children of Israel *"all the kindreds¹² of the earth should be blessed"* (verse 25). There was one condition only, "REPENT". Did they repent? The Pharisees and Sadducees were *"grieved that they taught the people."* (chap. 4:2). *"They laid hand them"* (verse 3). *"They commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus"* (verse 18). They *"further threatened them"* (verse 21). *"The high priest rose up, and all that were with him....and were filled with indignation, and laid hands on the apostles"* (chap. 5: 17-18). Did they repent? *"They were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them"* (verse 33). *"They beat them"* (verse 40). *"They suborned men"* (chap. 6:11). *"They stirred up the people."*(verse 12), *"They set up false witnesses"* (verse 13), Did they repent?

THE ANSWER IS A BROKEN AND A BLOODY CORPSE - STEPHEN'S.

We can never say that God's patience was exhausted The limits of His long-suffering and tender mercy are beyond us.

Still, the first two words of chapter 8 indicate just something of a change of attitude towards Israel as a nation. The two significant words are *"And Saul"*. Thus Peter's work is drawing to a close. His public ministry in Jerusalem is ended. He still has service to do in Samaria, Lydda and Joppa, and then Cornelius, not a Jew this time, but a Gentile. Now Peter's work as Apostle to the Circumcision is over. Chapter 12 brings us to the words *"What was become of Peter?"* Peter has quietly slipped out of the story. Then has God given up the Children of Israel? No, not yet. So long as there is any possibility of repentance without compulsion, so long would the door remain open to them. To our amazement, Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles is going to the *"Jew first"*. However, in contrast with the restoration of the lame man in chapter 3, where the Jew was restored, Paul's first miracle condemns the Jew - Elymas the sorcerer – to blindness for a season (chap. 13:11). Typical of that which is now coming upon the Children of Israel. (See Romans 11)

One might be tempted to ask what possibility was there now of the Children of Israel accepting the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and King? Well, there was just one. These Jews were very jealous of their place and position in the hands of God. They knew from their past history that they were a chosen people, an elect nation. They were well aware that they were the custodians of the oracles of God, and that to them pertain the promises and the covenants (Rom.9:4). Could they look on, unmoved, as they see Gentile outsiders being admitted into close relationship with God - yea, and being graft into the very nation of Israel by receiving Salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ? (Acts 15:11). Would they not be moved to emulation (jealousy) to follow this wonderful example? Could they bear to see their privileged position as God's chosen people slipping away from them, as the Gentiles turned unto God, without their will and sanction? Would not this very thing move them to repentance - a change of mind -with regard to Jesus, the despised Nazarene? They were not unmoved by any means. *"They were filled with envy and spoke against those things that were spoken by Paul"* (Acts 13:45). They *"stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas"* (Acts 13:50). They *"stirred up the Gentiles, and made, their minds evil affected against the brethren"* (Acts 14:2). They planned *"to use them despitefully and to stone them"* (Acts 14:5). They were again *"moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows off the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar"* (Acts 17:5). They came to Berea also, *"and stirred up the people, laid hands on him"* (Acts 21,27). *"They went about to kill him"* (Acts 21:31). They *"banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul"* (Acts 23:12). They *"came down from Jerusalem. . . and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul"* (Acts 25:7).

No, the Jews were not unmoved. But right down to the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles God, through Paul, was endeavoring to lead them to repentance. *"Paul called the chief of the Jews together"* (Acts 28:17). *"He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus . . . from morning till evening"* (Acts 28:23). After that Paul had repeated to them for the last time those awful words of Esaias *"Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be It known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it"* (Acts 28:25-29).

So was the patience of God exhausted? Still we cannot say that, but the door is shut anyway. The Jew is now Lo-ammi - not My people. No, the patience of God is never exhausted, for there is still the promise of the New Covenant, the promise of compulsion this time. *"After those days saith the Lord, I will PUT my law in their inward parts, and WRITE it in their hearts; and WILL be their God, and they SHALL be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, and I will remember their sin no more"* (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Those days are soon to be fulfilled for Israel, but what a wondrous God of Grace is manifest to us in this present interval. Amen.

Reprinted from:
"The Babler".