

God Leads Man to Decision

Key Verse: *“Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
—*Matthew 16:16*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 16:13-23

IT WAS WELL ALONG IN Jesus' short earthly ministry that he inquired of his disciples concerning the public's opinion of him, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (vs. 13) The disciples' report to Jesus indicated that there were a number of opinions as to the Master's identity. Some thought he was John the Baptist; others that he was the foretold Elias, or Elijah; “and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” (vs. 14)

Turning to his disciples, Jesus asked, “But whom say ye that I am?” (vs. 15) Peter answered, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Peter had become convinced that Jesus was that most important personage who had been foretold in the Old Testament; that he was indeed the Messiah of promise, and that he had come in fulfillment of all those wonderful promises of deliverance for Israel, and blessings for all the families of the earth.

Jesus was pleased with this reply, for it revealed that Peter had grasped the real truth concerning him, and he said to his faithful apostle, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (vs. 17) The great truth concerning Jesus, which Peter had expressed, had not come to him through the process of human reasoning, but by the revealing

power of God's Holy Spirit.

When Jesus said to his apostle, "Thou art Peter, [rock], and upon this rock I will build my church" (vs. 18), he used two different Greek words. The one translated 'Peter' literally means a pebble, or small fragment of rock, while the word translated 'rock' means a large stone, or boulder. Thus, Jesus did not say that his church would be built upon Peter, but upon a much more substantial stone, or rock. It has been built upon the great foundation truth expressed by Peter, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

When the church is built, as Jesus explained to Peter, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (vs. 18) The word 'hell' is here translated from the Greek word *hades*, meaning the state of death. The purpose of the church in the plan of God is to work with Jesus in the deliverance of all mankind from death. He has the keys of death and of hell, and will open its 'gates' and set death's captives free. The gates will not prevail to hold its prisoners.

Jesus told Peter that he would give him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (vs. 19) Peter used one of the 'keys' on the day of Pentecost, when through his Pentecostal sermon, he opened up kingdom privileges to believing Jews. He used the other key three and one half years later when he opened up similar kingdom opportunities to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert.

Toward the close of his ministry he began to acquaint his disciples with the fact of his coming arrest and death. But Peter endeavored to dissuade Jesus from thus giving himself up voluntarily to die. He said to Jesus, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Jesus' reply was, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (vss. 22,23) It was God's will for Jesus to die, else the world could not be redeemed from death. ■