

"The right manner of growth is to grow less in one's own eyes."
—Thomas Watson

29-Jun-12

Peter, a Sketch

Of all the disciples of [Jesus Christ](#), the one that we usually consider to have the most personality is Simon Peter. This opinion may merely be the result of the fact that no other disciple's words and actions are so often recorded in Scripture, but by all accounts, he was a person who stood out in a crowd. As the apostle John records, even Jesus marked this quality—or maybe more correctly, potential quality—upon their first meeting: "Now when Jesus looked at [Peter], He said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, A Stone)." Thus, Simon took on his surname—in Greek, *Petros*, "Peter"—identified for all eternity as a rock of a man.

Peter was a native of Bethsaida (which means "house of fishing"), as were his brother, Andrew, and Philip ([John 12:21](#)) and possibly also James and John, the sons of Zebedee ([Luke 5:10](#)). This Bethsaida (there is another one east of the Jordan) lies on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in the fertile plain of Genesaret, and within a few miles are the cities of Capernaum and Chorazin. Jesus restored sight to a blind man in Bethsaida ([Mark 8:22](#)), and in nearby fields, He fed the 5,000 and healed multitudes ([Luke 9:10-17](#)).

At some point, Peter moved to Capernaum, where his wife's family also lived ([Matthew 8:14-15](#); [Mark 1:29-31](#)). (In [I Corinthians 9:5](#), the apostle Paul indicates that Peter was still married more than a quarter century after the founding of the church and that his wife accompanied him on his travels.) In Capernaum, Peter and Andrew owned a fishing business, perhaps in partnership with Zebedee and his sons. While Peter was engaged in this trade, Jesus called him, his brother, and the sons of Zebedee, telling them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" ([Matthew 4:18-22](#)). Jesus made Capernaum the center of His ministry in Galilee.

Before this, Peter, Andrew, and probably John had been disciples of John the Baptist (see [John 1:35-42](#)). Clearly, they believed the prophet when he said that he was the messenger announcing the coming of One greater than he, and when John the Baptist pointed Jesus out as the Lamb of [God](#), Andrew and John immediately followed Him. As soon as he was able, Andrew found Peter and declared that they had found the Messiah.

This event is the earliest indication of Peter's stature among the disciples, which is borne out in multiple passages in the gospels. In every listing of Jesus' disciples, his name invariably heads the list ([Matthew 10:1-4](#); [Mark 3:14-19](#); [Luke 6:13-16](#); [Acts 1:13](#)). He often speaks for the rest of the disciples in their conversations with Jesus (for instance, see [Matthew 16:15-16](#); [John 6:66-69](#)), and he is frequently shown leading others in activities ([Mark 1:36](#); [John 20:1-8](#); [21:1-3](#)).

Peter is also clearly the leader of the "inner circle" of disciples, a small group composed of himself, James, and John. These three alone see Jesus resurrect a young girl ([Luke 8:51](#)), witness His transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-2](#)), and accompany Him to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His arrest ([Mark 14:33](#)).

As for his personality, he seems to have had an impetuous nature; he often speaks or acts before thinking. Of all those in the boat, Peter steps onto the heaving waves of the Sea of Galilee to walk to Jesus on the water ([Matthew 14:25-33](#)). At the transfiguration, he blurts out that tabernacles should be erected to Jesus, [Moses](#), and Elijah ([Luke 9:28-36](#)). He stridently declares that Jesus will never wash his feet ([John 13:8](#)), and later that evening, boasts

that he would never deny his Lord ([Mark 14:27-31](#)). His sword slices off the ear of the high priest's servant ([John 18:10-11](#)). When the fishing disciples recognize Christ on shore, he plunges into the sea to swim to Him ([John 21:7](#)). Finally, after hearing Jesus predict his martyrdom, he asks to know John's fate, receiving a none-of-your-business rebuke ([John 21:21-22](#)).

Yet, after Christ's resurrection, he is a changed man and becomes the leader that Christ had groomed him to be. Peter quickly takes charge of the little flock of disciples, organizing the choosing of a replacement for Judas Iscariot ([Acts 1:15-26](#)). When the Holy Spirit is manifested on the Day of Pentecost, it is Peter who responds to the mockers, preaching a sermon that explains the miracle and convicts thousands to [repent](#) and [be baptized](#) ([Acts 2:14-41](#)). Along with John, Peter heals the lame man in the Temple and preaches in Solomon's Portico (Acts 3). All fear of martyrdom quelled, he boldly responds to the Sanhedrin after their arrest ([Acts 4:1-20](#); also [Acts 5:17-32](#)). He is the one who curses Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)), and he severely rebukes Simon Magus for trying to purchase the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:18-23](#)).

Of all the apostles, Peter is chosen by God to inaugurate the conversion of Gentiles (Acts 10). Not only does he have the position and respect to implement this radical change in thinking, but he is also spiritually astute enough to recognize and respond to Christ's lead in the matter. As he remarks to Cornelius' household, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" ([Acts 10:34-35](#)). He is so convicted of this "new truth" that he vigorously defends this understanding and his actions before a strong Jewish faction in the Jerusalem church, convincing them as well ([Acts 11:1-18](#)). Later, he argues cogently in agreement with Paul and [Barnabas](#) that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised to become members of God's church ([Acts 15:6-11](#)).

As mentioned earlier, in his office as apostle, Peter traveled a great deal; as Jesus puts it in [Acts 1:8](#), ". . . you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The book of Acts details some of these travels within the confines of Israel, and a few verses throughout the New Testament hint at other journeys. Paul informs us that he and Peter had a confrontation in Antioch ([Galatians 2:11](#))—an unfortunate,

hypocritical relapse into Jewish prejudice—and we can assume that Peter traveled to many of the local congregations in Syria and probably Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia. In fact, his first epistle, a message of [hope](#) sent to Christians suffering persecution, ends with a salutation from Babylon ([I Peter 5:13](#)). British tradition claims that he evangelized in Gaul and Britain, fulfilling his mission as an apostle to the house of Israel.

His second epistle was written as a reminder of [the gospel](#) to the church just before his death ([II Peter 1:12-13](#)). Tradition posits that he was martyred in Rome—crucified upside-down—in about AD 67, although this is historically uncertain, as is his burial place. We do know, though, that he will rise in the [first resurrection](#) to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel ([Matthew 19:28](#))—quite a promotion for a brash fisherman from Bethsaida.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by Charles Whitaker (1944-2021)

Peter's first sermon took place on the Day of Pentecost, yet his subject seems to 'fit' the Day of Trumpets. Charles Whitaker explains that the fulfillment of Pentecost begins what will be completed in the fulfillment of Trumpets.

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