

People of the Bible

Peter

Peter was first known as “Simon Bar-Jonah” (Matthew 16:17) meaning “Simon, son of John, sometimes rendered Jonas or Jonah. (John 21:15-17). We know nothing more about his parents. Peter was from the village of Bethsaida in the province of Galilee. His brother Andrew brought him to Jesus. (John 1:40-42) They were both fishermen and both were disciples of John the Baptist before John pointed them to Jesus. (John 1:35-37) Jesus called both to be “fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:18-19; Mark 1:16-17) Andrew and Peter were heirs to a family fishing business, centered in Capernaum. They caught fish on the Sea of Galilee. It is also likely that Peter and John knew each other very well. They were probably lifelong friends, business associate, and neighbors. When Jesus first met Simon, Jesus renamed him “Peter.” (John 1:42) It means pebble and not the rock that the Roman Catholic says the Church is built.

Much has been made of Peter’s temperament. He was not particularly modest, but usually was self-assertive. Peter is often depicted in the gospels as the spokesman of all the Apostles. Peter was impulsive. He often acted first and thought second. Peter was a rare combination of courage and cowardice, of great strength and regrettable instability. There was one redeeming factor about Peter’s character and that was his keen sense of sin. He was extremely sensitive and tender in his spirit in this respect. (Luke 5:8)

His various actions that reflect his character are recorded in the Bible. Some of them are listed below where he:

- Walked on water when Jesus invited him to do so. (Matthew 14:28-29)
- Began to sink when he saw the wind and cried out for help. (Matthew 14:30-31)
- Made a great confession of Christ. (Matthew 16:18)
- Rebuked Jesus for speaking about His death and is called Satan and a stumbling block to Jesus. (Matthew 16:23)
- Is chosen to witness the Transfiguration. (Matthew 17:1-8)
- Makes a “did not know what to say” statement at Transfiguration. (Mark 9:6)
- Fell asleep when Jesus needed him in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:36-46)
- Tried to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane by cutting off the ear of Malchus who was a servant of the High Priest. (John 18:10-11)
- Denied Jesus three times. (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-72)
- Wept bitterly after realizing he had denied Jesus just as Jesus had predicted. (Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62)
- Was the first person to enter the empty tomb, although the women and John had seen it before him. (Luke 24:1-12)
- Confessed his love for Christ three times. (John 21:15-19)
- Wonders about the fate of John as opposed to his own future. (John 21:20-23)
- Preached a courageous Pentecost sermon. (Acts 2:14-41)
- Was one of the “pillars of the church” (John and James the brother of Jesus were the others.) who defended the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian movement. (Galatians 2:9) Peter even went to Cornelius house which showed his endorsement of ministry to the Gentiles. (Acts 10:1-11:18)
- Was rebuked by Paul for treating Gentile converts as inferior to Jewish Christians. (Galatians 2:11-21)

After a while the initial group of followers began to go into individual ministries. Peter, too, got involved in ministries. Peter is said to have begun the church at Antioch and later the church in Rome. The Gospel of Mark was traditionally thought to show the influence of Peter's preaching and eyewitness memories. Peter wrote two general epistles named after him.

How did Peter's life end? We know that Jesus told Peter he would die a martyr. (John 21:18-19) But Scripture doesn't record the death of Peter. All records of early church history indicate that Peter was crucified. It is said that he insisted on being crucified upside down because he wasn't worthy to die as his Lord had died.