

“There were twelve disciples  
Jesus called to help him Simon Peter, Andrew,  
James, his brother John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew,  
James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas  
and Bartholomew.

He has called us too. He has called us too.  
We are His disciples. We His work must do.”

### **Simon Peter**

When I think of the foremost of the apostles, I think of a man of contrasts. He was certainly a robust man of physical strength, fearless at times, frail of character at moments, spiritually insightful, bold yet compromising and contradictory. Jesus on one occasion spoke derogatorily to him saying, “Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me”.

What do we know of his earliest years?

1. We know him initially as “Simon, the son of John (John 1:42, 21:15)” or “Simon bar Jonah (Matt. 16:17). Simon means “one who hears.”

*The Hebrew equivalent of John is Jonah. Did Jesus mean “Jonah” literally or is Peter a Jonah-figure. Jonah proved disobedient in his call to the Gentiles and ended his life in misery over the Ninevite’s repentance. Is saying a greater than Jonah is here, the man destined to carry the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius?*

2. In his early years, he was engaged as a fisherman in his father’s business with his brother, living initially in Bethsaida, a fishing village near the Sea of Galilee.
3. Later, we find him married and living with his mother-in-law in Capernaum where he seems to be friends or associates in the fishing industry.

Also, in Capernaum Peter, Andrew and their father are partners with the Zebedee’s in the fishing business (Luke 5:10, “who were partners”).

What do we know of his embrace of Jesus?

1. There is some question about Simon being a follower of John the Baptizer before his encounter with Jesus. Peter was receptive to Andrew and willing to accept his brother's advice to come to see Jesus (John 1:40). Andrew was a follower of John, but it is not specifically stated of Simon. Simon was seemingly raised in a Jewish home living in the hope of a promised Messiah/deliverer and educated in the local synagogue
2. Andrew, a follower of John the Baptizer, brought his brother to Jesus, having recognized him as the "Promised One." "He found the Messiah.... He brought him to Jesus (John 1:41)."
3. Jesus changed his name to Peter (or Cephas, "rock") though he was not called as a disciple at that time (John 1:42).
4. Sometime later Jesus encountered Peter and his brother fishing. Seeing them washing their nets, He asked them about their night's catch (it was morning; fishermen plied their trade at night); they had nothing, but Jesus filled the boat. "When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets *began* to break; so, they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink (Luke 5:6-7)." He called both to be His disciples, saying, "I will make you fishers of men (Mark 1:16-17, see also Luke 5:10)."

What instances reveal the complex personality of Peter?

Peter was a person that manifested stark contrasts. Herein lies the paradox of Peter. Often, he was saying and doing the right things, and then, suddenly, his humanity would jump to the fore. He was a "man of the moment," being capable of extreme high and lows.

1. As a fisherman, he was both strong and fearless facing the dangers of his trade (furious storms, darkness). Jesus met him in his world and called him to serve.
  - he was able to drag a net containing 153 fish to shore (John 21:17).
  - he stepped out of a boat onto a raging sea at Jesus' command (Matt. 14:19).
  - when he recognized Jesus through John, he impetuously "threw himself into the sea," overcome with joy (John 21:7).
2. His greatest expressions of insight and devotion were several:
  - In the story of the draft of fish, the occasion of his calling to discipleship, Peter had the right words to say. When the apostles were questioned, at Caesarea Philippi, Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (16:16)."

-His fearlessness expressed on the Day of Pentecost. “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power (Acts 2:22-24).”

Though a very insightful man of the things of God, he, at times, allowed his blindness to conquer him.

- At Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi.  
Following Peter's confession of Jesus' identity ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16: 16), Jesus announced for the first time His death in Jerusalem. Peter was stunned and reprimanded Jesus. Though Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, he had little grasp of the nature of biblical messiahship. Peter so quickly turns from a rock into a stumbling block. He is called "Satan" because, like the devil (4:8–9), Peter offers the kingdom without suffering. Jesus came to do the Father's will; the only way to do that is the Father's way. This means Jerusalem and death, then resurrection and reign.
- At the courtyard of Joseph Caiaphas (Matt. 27:69-75).  
The arrest of Jesus in the garden was Peter's temporary unraveling (tragedy will do that). This is remarkable that this story is recorded at all since Peter was the head of the apostles. Clearly, Peter was fallible. A simple denial (v. 70) led to an oath, not profanity, this time. It is simply a strong denial. A third inquiry brought cursing.
- At Antioch following the Jerusalem Council.  
The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) clarified the point that one need not embrace mosaic circumcision to enter the family of God. Peter, James, and John ("so-called pillars in the church [Gal. 2:9]") affirmed Paul's gospel to the Gentiles. Peter came to Antioch but refused to fellowship later with Gentiles "for fear of the circumcision (2:12)." He crumbled once again! He knew the gospel but the Judaizers despite his clear testimony otherwise (He stated at the council, "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [Acts 15:8-10])."

What do we know of Peter after he left Jerusalem?

1. We know that Peter labored for some time in Antioch about 49 AD within the believing community.
2. We know that Peter labored in Corinth since he was known to the Corinthians and baptized several leading to party factions in the church (I Cor. 1:12, 9:5).
3. We know that when Peter composed his two letters, he resided in Rome (I Pet. 5: 13, "Babylon").
4. He died a martyr's death, crucified upside down, in Rome about 64 AD in one of Nero's purges.

Thoughts:

1. I am impressed how many times Jesus came to Peter through what was familiar to him. At his call to discipleship, he filled his boat with fish. When he renewed Peter after his denials, He brought 153 fish into his net. In both instances, they catch nothing. God has also reached down in our world many times. He is a prayer answering, condescending God!
2. Our weaknesses are no prohibition to His using us. We all have had our "dark days," but they have not interrupted God's sustaining grace and aborted our usefulness. Can you imagine His worst moments. Jesus called him a "Satan figure;" he denied and cursed God; and he denied the gospel he affirmed in Antioch (Paul called it a denial of the "truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14)."
3. Peter loved Jesus as deeply as he was confused about Him because of fear. He allowed confusion and blindness of heart to cause regrets. In reply to three denials, He said to Jesus three times "you know I love you (John 21:15, 16, 17)." At the Last Supper with His disciples, He said to Peter, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet but is completely clean; and you are clean... (John 13:10)" when He sought to wash only his feet. What does this us about our fickle demeanor and the constancy of His commitment to us? Certainty of relationship is not found in our consistency of obedience; it is in the constancy of His character and promises to us. Here is no excuse for dereliction; it is a call to appreciative obedience.