

We're going to begin reading through the Epistles of Peter. Few figures in the New Testament feel as vivid and relatable as Simon Peter—impulsive, devoted, sometimes baffling, and yet deeply loved by the Lord. Peter wrote two letters which bear his name.

Overview

The Apostle Peter writes his first letter to comfort and encourage believers enduring intense persecution and hardship for their faith. He powerfully reminds them of their true identity: they are chosen by God, set apart, and called to live holy lives even in the midst of suffering.

Throughout the letter, Peter urges Christians to anchor themselves in Christ's humility, to face trials with genuine joy, and to love one another deeply. He provides practical instructions on submitting to authority, honoring earthly relationships, and always being prepared to give a gentle defense for the hope within them. Ultimately, 1 Peter teaches that while suffering for Christ is a natural part of the Christian journey, God will eternally reward and strengthen His faithful followers.

Key Verse

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4:12-13)

Key Truth

Suffering is an opportunity to walk in our Lord's steps and live as pilgrims in a pagan world.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..." (1 Peter 3:15)

Getting to Know Peter

Peter's original name in Hebrew was Simeon (often rendered Simon in the New Testament). It's a Greek name with a similar sound. His father was Jonah, so he's called Simon bar-Jonah—Simon, son of Jonah. He was married (we learn this from Mark 1), and it appears that during his missionary years his wife accompanied him, since there are passing references that suggest that.

His hometown was Bethsaida, on the northern—almost northeastern—shore of the Sea of Galilee. Interestingly, Bethsaida was largely Greek in character. Yet Peter also had a home in Capernaum, another town on the northern shore. Capernaum became a major center of Jesus' Galilean ministry, and what many believe was Peter's home there has been excavated. It seems to have expanded into a gathering place—almost like an early meeting hall.

Peter spoke Aramaic, apparently with a noticeable northern accent. He maintained the devotion and outlook of his people. Though he was a fisherman, he seems to have been a sincere Jewish observer. He wasn't formally trained in the Law, but his literacy is not in doubt—especially when you see the maturity of his preaching and writing after the coming of the Holy Spirit.

His brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, and it's very possible Peter was influenced by John's ministry before fully following Jesus.

A Glimpse into His World

It's fascinating that archaeologists recovered a first-century fishing boat from the Sea of Galilee during the drought years of 1985–1986. The waterline dropped unusually low, and a boat about 26 feet long and roughly 7 feet wide was found in the mud. It was painstakingly preserved, and carbon dating placed it roughly between 60 B.C. and A.D. 60—right in the timeframe of the Gospels. We can't say it was Peter's boat, but it gives a vivid sense of the kind of vessel Jesus and the disciples would have used.

Peter's Calling Came in Stages

John's Gospel describes activity before the Galilean ministry began. Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus (John 1:42). Later, Peter was called by the lakeside to follow more directly (Mark 1). And after that, he was called into the inner band of the Twelve. Those steps can confuse people, but they help us see that discipleship often unfolds in phases: introduction, invitation, deeper commitment, then greater responsibility.

At that first meeting, Jesus gave Simon a new name. In Aramaic it's Cephas (rock/stone). The Greek form is Petros. It wasn't a common personal name before that—more like a nickname that became his identity.

Caesarea Philippi and the Great Confession

Later, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked a question that still divides the world:

"But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

Peter answered in one of his finest moments:

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus responded:

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 16:17).

Then comes a passage that has been misunderstood for centuries:

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18).

The wordplay matters. Peter is "stone," but the foundation isn't Peter's personality or status; the church is built on the truth Peter confessed—Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Scripture repeatedly anchors the foundation in Christ Himself (compare 1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 2:19–22). The church is not built by apostles or institutions; Jesus said, "I will build My church."

The Whiplash of Peter's Humanity

Immediately after this high point, Jesus began explaining His coming suffering, death, and resurrection:

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things... and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Matthew 16:21).

Peter then did what Peter often does—he spoke too quickly and too confidently:

“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 16:22).

And Jesus sharply corrected him:

“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:23).

That scene is painfully relatable. We can confess Christ with sincerity—and then, moments later, resist His will when it conflicts with our comfort, our expectations, or our plans. We may not use Peter's words, but we do the same thing when prayer becomes a way of trying to manage God instead of surrendering to God.

The Inner Circle

Among Jesus' wider followers were the Seventy, then the Twelve—and within the Twelve there were three who repeatedly formed an inner circle: Peter, James, and John. They were present at key moments: Jairus's daughter being raised from the dead, the Transfiguration, and the agony in Gethsemane. Peter's leadership often showed itself in how quickly he spoke, how boldly he acted, and how often he represented the group.

Peter's Denial and Restoration

We all know Peter's denials. In the chaos after Gethsemane, he denied the Lord three times (see Matthew 26). Yet after the resurrection, an angel told the women:

“But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him.” (Mark 16:7).

That phrase—“and Peter”—is pure mercy. Peter is singled out not to be shamed, but to be restored.

In John 21, Jesus reinstated Peter publicly. Three times He asked if Peter loved Him, and three times He commissioned him:

“Feed My lambs... Tend My sheep... Feed My sheep.” (John 21:15–17).

Peter's failure was real, but it wasn't final. Christ's restoration was purposeful: Peter wasn't merely forgiven—he was entrusted again.

A Changed Man After the Spirit Came

When you compare Peter's stumbling moments in the Gospels with his sermons in Acts 2 and Acts 3, the contrast is striking. The difference is not personality management. The difference is spiritual

power. After Pentecost, Peter becomes clear, bold, Scripture-saturated, and Christ-centered. It's a living example of how God can transform a believer—not by erasing their humanity, but by filling their life with holy strength.