

A Biblical Case Study of the Leadership of Simon Peter

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In the narratives of Matthew 4:18-20 the reader is introduced to Simon Peter. He is the apostle upon whom Jesus Christ declared that his followers would depend. Simon Peter is often referred to as the head of the early church. The narrative reads, "Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Moreover, He said to them, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. The gospels describe Simon Peter as coming from the fishing village of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter was born in Bethsaida (in Galilee, Israel.) By profession, he was a fisherman. His father (also a fisherman) was named Jona; his brother, the apostle Andrew. He and his brother (Andrew), along with their partners (the apostles James and John) were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Zebedee (the father of James and John) was also a partner (Luke 5:11). The narratives of Matthew 16:13-20 reveal that Simon got the name "Peter" when Jesus said he would build his church on this rock. ("Peter" comes from the Greek for "rock"). Paul sometimes called him "Cephas," (Gal. 2; 1 Cor. 1) which means the same thing in the Aramaic.

In the narratives of the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John, the reader sees the impulsive side of Simon, the fisherman: In the narratives of Luke 5:1-11 Peter's humility is demonstrated by an incident after a night of fruitless fishing. Peter and the other fishermen were met by Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. After Jesus asked Peter to cast out his net, Peter objected, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word, I will let down the nets." Almost immediately, they caught an enormous load of fish which was so heavy that their nets began to break. "They beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink." Overcome with the difference between Jesus and himself; the humbled Peter fell at Jesus' feet "saying, 'depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'" Jesus then promised that the fishermen would become

fishers of men (Luke 5:1-11). He impulsively tried to kill the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear (John 18:10).

In the narratives of the synoptic gospels and Acts Peter's name appears on all of the lists of the apostles and his being called by Jesus appears in all. The account recorded in the Gospel of Matthew has Jesus bestowing the name *Peter* on Simon. This account can be found in Matthew 16:13-20. It states, "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say, John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Jesus' followers had seen him perform miracles repeatedly—he healed the sick (Matt. 8:2-4; John 4:46-54), raised the dead (Luke 7:11-17; John 11), and walked on water (John 6:15-21). Peter did the same (Acts 3:1-11; 9:32-42; Matt. 14:22-33) and because of those miracles, many believed his teachings (John 6:2).

By default Peter becomes the leader of the remaining disciples who had been with Jesus. He told the others that they should choose someone to replace Judas Iscariot, who had committed suicide after delivering Jesus to His oppressors. In Matt. 10:1-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, Acts 1:13 there is evidence that Peter was first in authority among the apostles. Whenever they were named Peter headed the list. In the narratives we read, "Peter and those who were with him" (Luke 9:32). Peter was the one who generally spoke for the apostles (Matt. 18:21, Mark 8:29, Luke 12:41, John 6:68-69), and he figured in many of the most dramatic scenes (Matt. 14:28-32, Matt. 17:24-27, Mark 10:23-28). On the day of Pentecost it was Peter who first

preached to the crowds (Acts 2:14-40), and he worked the first healing in the Church age (Acts 3:6-7). It is Peter who is given Christ's flock to shepherd (John 21:17). An angel was sent to announce the resurrection to Peter (Mark 16:7), and the risen Christ first appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34). He headed the meeting that elected Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:13-26), and he received the first converts (Acts 2:41). He inflicted the first punishment (Acts 5:1-11), and excommunicated the first heretic (Acts 8:18-23). He led the first council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), and announced the first dogmatic decision (Acts 15:7-11). It was to Peter that the revelation came that Gentiles were to be baptized and accepted as Christians (Acts 10:46-48).

In the narratives of the Gospel of John, the Book of Acts, and the Epistle of 1 Peter we read of Peter's leadership. From his turning point as a "shepherd of God's flock" in John 21, to his development as the committed leader of the Book of Acts, to his final emergence as the humble "co-elder" in his Epistle of 1 Peter, Peter emerges with renewed conviction as the leader of thousands of new followers in the Book of Acts.

On the day of Pentecost Peter preached and then asked his listeners for a commitment to be baptized as a result of what he had said (Acts 2:37-38, 41). On that day Peter demonstrated his ability to touch lives, to make connections, and to inspire followers. People were "pricked in their hearts" and decided to reorder their lives and turn to God. The multitude of three thousand souls was encouraged to adopt Christianity. As Jesus had done while still alive, Peter had the eleven stand with him (Matt. 9:18-26; Matt. 17:1-8; Matt 26:37). Peter involved James and John in shouldering his burdens and responsibilities (Acts 3:1-11; 4:5-30; 8:14-25; 14:17; 15).

In Acts 4 we read that both Peter and John were arrested and later had to appear before the Sanhedrin due to their preaching. This was after they had healed the crippled beggar. He points to his Master Jesus and commands to the lame "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,

Walk”. When Peter and John were arrested, they were inspired and fearless in their testimony because they were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8). The officers “saw the boldness of Peter and John” and marveled (Acts 4: 13).

Even after Peter and John’s miraculous delivery from jail by God’s Angels, the leaders remained hardened in their attitudes and made even greater efforts to crush the Truth. Acts 5:16 informs us that the Apostles of Jesus Christ performed numerous miraculous signs and wonders among the people, and that they were highly regarded by them. The people began bringing their sick ones into the streets and laying them on beds and mats so that Saint Peter’s shadow might fall on them and they be healed. The numbers of believers grew more and more each day. The consequence of this great manifestation of God’s love and grace was fervent persecution by the leaders who, because of their intense jealousy, had the Apostles arrested and put in jail— an act which unexpectedly resulted in an even greater following of the people.

Acts 5:27-32 testify of Peter’s new courage, unlike the time that he denied knowing Jesus: After Jesus’ arrest the authorities took him to court, Peter sat outside with others who had come to the event. Someone said to Peter, “You are one of his disciples, aren’t you?” Peter responded by saying that he never knew the man. People approached Simon Peter two other times and questioned him about his relationship with Jesus. Peter denied that he even knew Jesus at all. During the third time that they asked him about knowing Jesus, his denial became intense. He even “began to curse and swear,” perhaps relapsing into habits from his earlier life (Matthew 26:73-74). Peter cursed to say, “I never knew the man!” (John 18:15-27). After his third denial, Peter’s conscience led him to run off from the court area where he found a private place to cry. In a turn of events, the narratives now show Peter daringly declaring that it is man’s duty to obey God rather than human authority when the two conflict.

In The narratives of Acts chapter 5 we read of the highlights of the unwavering mindset of God's Apostles under Peter's leadership. In Acts 9:31 we read, "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. The church was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. The church grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. Simon Peter, the lowly fisherman became a mighty fisher of men. Het changed and shaped the world forever and is still proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ through his gospel (written by Mark), the book of Acts, and through the epistles of 1 and II Peter.

Questions:

1. Discuss why Peter became the leader of the Apostles.
2. Discuss how you would categorize Peter's leadership style. Why?
3. In what ways does the Holy Spirt enhance the ministry of Contemporary leaders?