

# Simon Peter, from Fisherman to Fisher of Men

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The video version of this teaching is at: <https://youtu.be/4kfIIDUYVE4>

The scripture reading is 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:1-2:3

Simon Peter, also known as Cephus, was one of the first men chosen by Yeshua as a disciple. The life of Peter was irrevocably changed by his encounter with Yeshua on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Peter and his brother Andrew were tending their nets and fishing near the shore when Yeshua first chose them to be His disciples.

Matthew 4:18-20 NKJV 18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

As we journey with Peter through the gospels, we see a man who exhibits many conflicting characteristics and behaviors. Peter is head-strong and opinionated and not afraid to speak his mind. He sometimes acts out of an emotional response rather than facing problems and life's situations in a reasoned and low-key manner. On the night of Yeshua's arrest while praying in the Garden, Peter was ready to take up a sword to defend his master Rabbi. Yet, just a few hours later denied that he even knew Yeshua.

Such was the man who would go on to become perhaps the greatest of all disciples from among the original twelve. Peter would not only oversee one of the greatest spiritual awakenings in the history of the Roman world but would also face the same fate as that of Messiah Yeshua.

Peter very well could have written his own account of the teachings of the Master Yeshua having been with Yeshua throughout His entire ministry. Simon Peter committed his life to memorizing and preserving the teachings of Yeshua following the traditions of oral transmission which was the primary method of religious education of that time.

Paul makes a direct reference to oral tradition in his second letter to Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:1-3 NKJV 1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

The author of the gospel of Mark was a disciple of Peter and received the teachings of Yeshua second-hand through him. Clement of Alexandria records that the believers of Rome requested that Mark compose a book of the teaching of Yeshua as told by Peter.

"As Peter had preached the word publicly at Rome and declared the gospel by the Spirit, Many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And after composing the gospel, Mark gave it to those who had requested it."<sup>i</sup>

The Greek of Mark's gospel is ragged and inarticulate, containing many Hebraic grammatical forms and reads like a hyper-literal translation of a Hebrew original. It would have been difficult for a native Greek speaker to read and understand. Yet despite this shortcoming, Mark's gospel account remained quite popular going

forward with many scribes copying and distributing it throughout the Roman world. Today we would say that it “went viral!”

How did Peter end up in Rome anyway? After Yeshua’s resurrection and the beginning of the congregation of believers that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah, Peter, James and John the sons of Zebedee, and James the brother of Yeshua emerged as leaders of this new sect of Judaism. Peter, with his outgoing personality, was the one who traveled throughout Israel and, later, Asia strengthening the growing body of believers.

Acts 9:32 NKJV 32 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.

When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem in 58 CE amid rumors that he was teaching the Jewish believers to forsake Torah, confusion and dissension arose among the followers of the Way. Was Paul really teaching Jews to forsake Torah? James stayed in Jerusalem to combat the rumors there while Peter and John immediately left Jerusalem to travel throughout Asia and Macedonia to dispel these rumors and set the record straight. Peter traveled throughout Asia, Galatia, Cappadocia, and elsewhere eventually arriving in Rome following Paul’s release and departure.

Silas who was traveling with Peter, announced his intention to return to Anatolia at which point Peter asked that he carry a letter to the new believers left behind in the area of the Black Sea.

1 Peter 1:1-2 NKJV 1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

It is apparent that Peter is addressing his letter to Gentiles. The Greek word used in verse one translated as “pilgrims” is *par-ep-id’-ay-mos* number 3927 in the Strong’s concordance meaning, an alien alongside, a resident foreigner, pilgrim or stranger.

Peter follows the leading of Paul in addressing the new Gentile believers also making the distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcised. Peter, however, does not go so far as to teach that a Gentile should always remain uncircumcised, that is remaining in the status as a God-fearer and not undergoing a conversion and a complete assimilation into the Jewish community. Peter appears to be more neutral on Gentile conversion than Paul was.

Peter next greets his readers with a kind of doxology, reminding them of the hope in Messiah.

1 Peter 1:3-5 NKJV 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter strove to remind these new believers, as they face the persecution and trials that they have so far faced and will continue to face as former pagan Gentiles, to stand strong against the difficulties that lay ahead. He reminds them that, although they have not seen and experienced Yeshua themselves as Peter had, their faith is worth far more than any golden idols of their past lives.

1 Peter 1:6-9 NKJV 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that

perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen, you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.

Peter then reminds these believers that the salvation through Messiah Yeshua was foretold in the scriptures from the beginning. He tells them that this salvation was promised to them as Gentiles.

1 Peter 1:10-12 NKJV 10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he goes a step further than Peter stating that this salvation was granted to them even while they remained in a life of sin.

Romans 5:8-10 NKJV 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Citing dozens of scriptures, John MacArthur in his commentary on 1<sup>st</sup> Peter states:

"The message of the Bible is that even though man cannot save himself from the eternal, damning consequences of his sin, God can and will rescue from condemnation all those who trust Him and believe His Word"<sup>ii</sup>

After reminding his readers of their salvation, Peter goes on to tell them to live up to the standard to which they are called; to live before God as obedient children and not return to their former ways despite the temptations.

1 Peter 1:13-16 NKJV 13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Peter says that they are to "be holy." What does it mean to be holy? How does one obtain holiness? The answer is found in the Torah, specifically in three places in Leviticus: 11:44-45, 19:2 and 20:7. All three of these passages in their broader context speak of obedience to the commandments of God. In that sense holiness then, is equated to keeping God's commandments and living according to them.

Peter goes on to explain how this is to work in their daily lives.

1 Peter 1:17-18 NKJV 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

This is a very misunderstood passage among most modern-day Christians. Adherents of replacement theology would read verse 18 as referring to the tradition of your fathers as being Jewish traditions and practices. But

when we understand exactly who Peter addresses his letter, we understand that he is speaking to former pagan Gentiles and the traditions of which Peter is speaking are those of their former pagan practices handed down over generations.

We will find as we read on in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter that this call to leave all aspects of their paganism behind is a continual theme in Peter's discourse. These Gentiles were facing a nearly no-win situation. They faced both rejection and persecution from much of the Jewish community, the same reaction to Paul's teaching of Gentile inclusion, and they were ostracized and rejected by their friends and relatives in the Gentile community as well. It will not be an easy life for the new Gentile believers. Peter gives them the encouragement they desperately needed and reminds them of their source of strength.

1 Peter 1:19-21 NKJV 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

In verses 17 through 21 Peter is telling the former pagan Gentiles that they have been redeemed. The concept of redemption would not have been unfamiliar to them. In their former pagan practices, they would pay for their own redemption by offering sacrifices to false gods and idols, and by giving their wealth in gold and silver to the priests and prostitutes of the pagan temples. What Peter is explaining is that that kind of redemption is false and ineffective. It is counterfeit to the redemption that only the Creator can provide.

The redemption that God provides is eternal and ordained from the beginning of time. He compares the redemptive blood of Christ to that of a spotless lamb. Such a lamb would carry a great value for the owner in terms of the purity of the wool gleaned from it over its life. To sacrifice it before any wool could be harvested would be costly to say the least.

Peter speaks of those things that are eternal and incorruptible; the redemptive blood of the Lamb and the word of God itself.

1 Peter 1:22-23 NKJV 22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

Peter recognizes that his readers have received a purified heart through the Spirit manifested in their love for each other. The scripture has many examples of the inability of the unrepentant and unredeemed person to demonstrate genuine love. Yeshua admonished some of the Pharisees for their lack of love for one another.

John 5:39-43 NKJV 39 "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. 41 "I do not receive honor from men. 42 "But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

It is only through repentance and the acceptance of salvation by the blood of Yeshua that the capacity to demonstrate this supernatural love can be accomplished. Peter recognizes this trait within these new believers. Paul also recognized this spiritual effect among the believers.

Romans 5:5 NKJV 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Time and again the apostolic writings speak of a Spiritual empowerment. It is this empowerment that fuels the capacity to love the brethren. This Spiritual empowerment is a prime example and manifestation of what it means to be “born again.” This love is consistent with a new life in Messiah Yeshua as the apostle John wrote.

1 John 5:1-2 NKJV 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

Peter uses a quote from the prophet Isaiah to illustrate that to be born again also means that the flesh is dead.

1 Peter 1:24-25 NKJV 24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

Peter says that this is the essence of the gospel! The flesh will fade away and die, but through the saving spirit of God by the blood of Messiah Yeshua, we have eternal life.

Peter finishes his thought with an admonishment to refrain from the fleshly things of the past which have no enduring qualities.

1 Peter 2:1-3 NKJV 1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

This first part of Peter’s letter lays the groundwork for the remainder. Peter goes to great lengths to explain to the new Gentile believers how to conduct their daily lives in light of their faith in Yeshua. He speaks of duty to one another and honor before God. He admonishes them to live a righteous life in their greater society and warns them to expect persecution and rebuke.

Although we do not face the same level of trials and persecutions that the believers did in Peter’s day, we may in the future, and these are still great lessons that we should take to heart. Peter is a prime example of living out the teachings of Yeshua and walking in the true meaning of the Torah.

From a simple fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, Peter’s transformation to a “fisher of men” is a miracle only accomplished through the Holy Spirit and the saving blood of Messiah Yeshua.

Study Questions:

1. What is Peter’s explanation of the concept of “born again” and how does it compare with other scripture?
2. In chapter 1 verses 22 and 23, Peter speaks of a pure heart and how it is manifested in love for one another. What other scriptures speak of a pure heart? How is this purity of heart manifested in other scripture?
3. What specific instruction does Peter give in this opening chapter of his letter, and how does it compare to Torah principles?
4. In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:13 he speaks of Hope in the context of grace through the revelation of Yeshua. Do a little word search in the NT scriptures. How is the word “hope” used and defined? Is there more than one definition and context?

5. In the teaching we mentioned 3 passages of scripture in Leviticus which speak of holiness. What other scripture address the issue of holiness and in what context?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

Bonus: (This question may be addressed in a future teaching as well) Compare the mission and message of Peter to that of Paul. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Is there any contradiction between them?

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<sup>i</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.14:5-7 citing Clement's Eighth Book of Hypotyposes

<sup>ii</sup> John MacArthur, The MacArthur Commentary 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, Moody Press, 2004, p50