

NEW TESTAMENT FACTS ABOUT THE APOSTLE PETER

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WHAT DO THE GOSPELS AND ACTS SAY?

Jesus told Simon he was giving him the additional name of Peter, but there is only one record (Luke 22:34) of his ever calling him by that name. And he never conferred anything more on him than he did on all the other apostles. "Binding" and "loosing" was for all of them (Matt 18:18). All the apostles did so, and soulwinners now use "the keys" when they lead people to Christ. Peter claimed no superiority: "I am also an elder" (1 Pet 5:1). Would James and John have asked to sit at Jesus' right and left if Peter had already been promised that highest of honors (Matt 20:21-24)? Gentile rulers exercised dominion over others, "but it shall not be so among you" (20:26). "One is your Master, even Christ, and all of you are brothers." "Whoever humbles himself shall be honored" (23:10-12). There is nothing in the gospels to demonstrate Petrine primacy.

If Christ had appointed Peter over the Church, why did not Peter appoint Matthias as Judas' successor instead of having the 120 Christians to vote on doing so (Acts 1:26)? The apostles appointed Peter and John to visit the Samaritan Christians that Philip had won to Christ (8:14). Peter was "called on the carpet" and had to defend himself before the apostles for baptizing Gentiles (11:1-3). And if Peter was the top mogul over Christians, how is it that James presided over the Jerusalem conference that decided about the status of Gentile believers and announced the decision they came to by saying: "My judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God" (15:19)? In the rest of Acts the Apostle Paul, not Peter, is the prominent person. Peter is not even mentioned again.

WHAT IS THE PICTURE IN THE EPISTLES?

In 1 Cor 1:12 Paul rebuked Christians for claiming that they belonged to "Paul, Apollos or Cephas [Peter]." Note that Peter was the third one named. And 12:28 states: "God has appointed in the Church first apostles"—not just one apostle. In Gal 2:9 the statement is made that Paul "should go to the Gentiles and they [James, Peter and John] to the circumcised." James' name is first. Rome was very much in Gentile territory. There is no mention of Peter's ever going there. Besides, it had been assigned to Paul. And 2:11-16 records that Paul rebuked Peter in the Antioch church for "separating himself, fearing the circumcision party." "I opposed Cephas face to face . . . before them all." How humiliating for Peter!

HOW DID PETER USE THE WORD "ROCK"?

"Come to him, to that living rock [*lithos* = a small or large rock (Matt 27:60, 66)]. . . and like living rocks [*lithoi*] be yourselves built into a spiritual house" (1

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Pet 2:4-5). This is a re-echo of what Christ said to Peter in Matt 16:18. "Behold, I am laying in Zion a rock, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame" (Isa 28:16; 1 Pet 2:6). "A stone [*lithos*] that will make men stumble, and a rock [*petra*] that will make them fall" (Isa 8:14; 1 Pet 2:8). This is proof that the words for "rock" were used interchangeably. But *petros* and *petra* were never used interchangeably. *Petra*, however, according to Liddell and Scott, was used most frequently as a mass or large number of rocks. For that reason I suggest translating Matt 16:18 as follows: "You are a rock [*petros*], and upon such/this-type-of rock [*petra*] I will build my Church." The apostle Paul agreed with Peter that Christ was the Rock and even that it was he who provided water for the Israelites when Moses struck the *petra* (1 Cor 10:4). And he stated (Eph 2:20) that Christ was the Cornerstone ("the most basic element," Webster) of the foundation of the apostles and prophets on which Christians are built. Peter was only one of the many built upon it. There is no question that he was a dynamic leader and was marvelously used to win others to Christ during his lifetime. The apostle Paul, however, was the outstanding apostle. In his clarity of thought and expression, in his many epistles and in his witnessing before rulers in the provinces and even in Rome, he outranked all others.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EARLIEST CHURCH FATHERS?

Cyprian *Ep.* 27: "The Church is founded upon the bishops." Origen *Comm.* (on Matt 16:18): "The rock is every disciple of Christ." Hilary *De Trin.* 6.36-37: "Upon this rock of confession is the building up of the Church. This faith is the foundation of the Church. . . . This faith has the keys of the heavenly kingdom." Jerome *Comm.* (on Amos 6:12): "Christ is the Rock, who granted to his apostles that they should be called 'rocks.'" Augustine *Retractions* 1.21: "Christ was the Rock whom Simon confessed, as the whole Church confesses him." Chrysostom *Hom.* 54.3: "I say unto thee, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church'—that is, on the faith of his confession." These quotations give authentic evidence that outstanding fathers agreed with the NT that Christ is the Foundation (*petra*) of our faith and of the Church and that all regenerate believers, beginning with the apostles, are "rocks" (*petroi*) built upon him.