

**LIVING GODS WILL**

**The Apostle**

**PETER**



**Saint Peter, the Prince of the Apostles**

**Born:** 1 AD, Bethsaida near the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

**Died:** Between AD 64 and 68 (aged 62–67), Rome, Italy

**Death:** Crucified Upside Down in Rome

“**Peter**” wasn’t his birth name (**Simon** was)

He was the son of **Jonah** and the brother of the **Apostle Andrew**.

He was a **fisherman** and the first **Pope** of Rome

## The Apostle Peter authored 2 books of the Holy Bible

1. The Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter
2. The Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter

**Saint Peter** also known as **Simon Peter, Simeon, Simon, Cephas, or Peter** the Apostle, was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ, and the first leader of the early Church.

Peter was crucified in Rome under Emperor Nero. He is traditionally counted as the first Bishop of Rome—or pope—and also by Eastern Christian tradition as the first Patriarch of Antioch. The ancient Christian churches all venerate Peter as a major saint and as the founder of the Church of Antioch and the Roman Church.

Two general epistles in the New Testament are ascribed to Peter, **The Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, The Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter.**

Peter's life story is told in the four canonical gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, New Testament letters, the non-canonical Gospel of the Hebrews and other Early Church accounts of his life and death. In the New Testament, he is among the first of the disciples called during Jesus' ministry. Peter became the first listed apostle ordained by Jesus in the early church.

Peter was a fisherman in Bethsaida (**John 1:44**). He was named Simon, son of Jonah or John. The three Synoptic Gospels recount how Peter's mother-in-law was healed by Jesus at their home in Capernaum (**Matthew 8:14–17, Mark 1:29–31, Luke 4:38**); this passage clearly depicts Peter as being married. 1 Corinthians 9:5 has also been taken to imply that he was married.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Peter (then Simon) was a fisherman along with his brother, **Andrew**, and the sons of Zebedee, **James and John**. The Gospel of John also depicts Peter fishing, even after the resurrection of Jesus, in the story of the Catch of 153 fish. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus called Simon and his brother Andrew to be "**fishers of men**" (**Matthew 4:18–19, Mark 1:16–17**).

A Franciscan church is built upon the traditional site of Apostle Peter's house. In Luke, Simon Peter owns the boat that Jesus uses to preach to the multitudes who were pressing on him at the shore of Lake Gennesaret (**Luke 5:3**).

Jesus then amazes Simon and his companions James and John (Andrew is not mentioned) by telling them to lower their nets, whereupon they catch a huge number of fish. Immediately after this, they follow him (**Luke 5:4–11**).

The Gospel of John gives a comparable account of "**The First Disciples**" (**John 1:35–42**). In John, the readers are told that it was two disciples of **John the Baptist** (Andrew and an unnamed disciple) who heard John the Baptist announce Jesus as the "**Lamb of God**" and then followed Jesus. Andrew then went to his brother Simon, saying, "**We have found the Messiah**", and then brought Simon to Jesus.

Three of the four gospels – Matthew, Mark and John – recount the story of Jesus walking on water. **Matthew** additionally describes Peter walking on water for a moment but beginning to sink when his faith wavers (**Matthew 14:28–31**).

At the beginning of the Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet, but when Jesus threatened him with: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me", Peter replied: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (**John 13:2–11**). The washing of feet is often repeated in the service of worship on Maundy Thursday by some Christian denominations.

The three Synoptic Gospels all mention that, when Jesus was arrested, one of his companions cut off the ear of a servant of the High Priest of Israel (**Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50**). The Gospel of John also includes this event and names Peter as the swordsman and **Malchus** as the victim (**John 18:10**). Luke adds that Jesus touched the ear and miraculously healed it (**Luke 22:49–51**). This healing of the servant's ear is the last of the 37 miracles attributed to Jesus in the Bible.

Simon Peter was twice arraigned, with **John**, before the Sanhedrin and directly defied them (**Acts 4:7–22, Acts 5:18–42**). After receiving a vision from God that allowed for the eating of previously unclean animals, Peter takes a missionary journey to Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea (**Acts 9:32–Acts 10:2**), becoming instrumental in the decision to evangelize the Gentiles (**Acts 10**). Simon Peter applied the message of the vision on clean animals to the gentiles and follows his meeting with **Cornelius** the Centurion by claiming that 'God shows no partiality (**Acts 10**).'

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria (**Acts 8:14**). **Peter/Cephas** is mentioned briefly in the opening chapter of one of the Pauline epistles, Epistle to the Galatians, which mentions a trip by Paul the Apostle to Jerusalem where he meets Peter (**Galatians 1:18**). Peter features again in Galatians, fourteen years later, when Paul (now with **Barnabas and Titus**) returned to Jerusalem (**Galatians 2:7–9**). When Peter came to Antioch, Paul opposed Peter to his face "because he [Peter] was in the wrong" (**Galatians 2:11**).

**Acts 12** narrates how Peter, who was in Jerusalem, was put into prison by **Agrippa I** (A.D. 42–44), but was rescued by an angel. After his liberation Peter left Jerusalem to go to "another place" (**Acts 12:1–18**). Concerning Peter's subsequent activity there is no further connected information from the extant sources, although there are short notices of certain individual episodes of his later life.

The Gospels and Acts portray Peter as the most prominent apostle, though he denied Jesus three times during the events of the crucifixion.

According to the Christian tradition, Peter was the first to whom Jesus appeared, balancing Peter's denial and restoring his position.

Peter is regarded as the first leader of the early Church, though he was soon eclipsed in this leadership by **James the Just**, "**the Brother of the Lord**." Because Peter was the first to whom Jesus appeared, the leadership of Peter forms the basis of the Apostolic succession and the institutional power of orthodoxy, as the heirs of Peter, and is described as "the rock" on which the church will be built.

Peter is always listed first among the Twelve Apostles in the gospels and in the Book of Acts (**Acts 1:13**). He is also frequently mentioned in the gospels as forming with **James the Elder** and **John** a special group within the Twelve Apostles, present at incidents at which the others were not present, such as at the **Transfiguration** of Jesus, at the raising of **Jairus'** daughter and at the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter often confesses his faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Peter is often depicted in the gospels as spokesman of all the Apostles. Peter is their spokesman at several events, he conducts the election of **Matthias**, his opinion in the debate over converting Gentiles was crucial, etc. The author of the Acts of the Apostles portrays Peter as central figure within the early Christian community.

All four canonical gospels recount that, during the **Last Supper**, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny him three times before the following cockcrow ("**before the cock crows twice**" in Mark's account). The three Synoptics and John describe the three denials as follows:

1. A denial when a female servant of the high priest spots Simon Peter, saying that he had been with Jesus. According to Mark (but not in all manuscripts), "the rooster crowed". Only Luke and John mention a fire by which Peter was warming himself among other people: according to Luke, Peter was "sitting"; according to John, he was "standing".
2. A denial when Simon Peter had gone out to the gateway, away from the firelight, but the same servant girl (**Mark**) or another servant girl (**Matthew**) or a man (**Luke** and also John, for whom, though, this is the third denial) told the bystanders he was a follower of Jesus. According to John, "the rooster crowed". The Gospel of John places the second denial while Peter was still warming himself at the fire, and gives as the occasion of the third denial a claim by someone to have seen him in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested.
3. A denial came when Peter's Galilean accent was taken as proof that he was indeed a disciple of Jesus. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke, "the rooster crowed". Matthew adds that it was his accent that gave him away as coming from Galilee. Luke deviates slightly from this by stating that, rather than a crowd accusing Simon Peter, it was a third individual. John does not mention the Galilean accent.

In the Gospel of Luke is a record of Christ telling Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

In a reminiscent scene in John's epilogue, Peter affirms three times that he loves Jesus.

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians contains a list of resurrection appearances of Jesus, the first of which is an appearance to Peter. Here, Paul apparently follows an early tradition that Peter was the first to see the risen Christ, which, however, did not seem to have survived to the time when the gospels were written.

In John's gospel, Peter is the first person to enter the empty tomb, although the women and the beloved disciple see it before him. In Luke's account, the women's report of the empty tomb is dismissed by the apostles, and Peter is the only one who goes to check for himself, running to the tomb. After seeing the grave clothes he goes home, apparently without informing the other disciples.

In the final chapter of the Gospel of John, Peter, in one of the resurrection appearances of Jesus, three times affirmed his love for Jesus, balancing his threefold denial, and Jesus reconfirmed Peter's position. The Church of the Primacy of St. Peter on the Sea of Galilee is seen as the traditional site where Jesus Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection and, according to Catholic tradition, established Peter's supreme jurisdiction over the Christian church.

Peter was considered along with **James the Just** and **John the Apostle** as pillars of the Church. Legitimized by Jesus' appearance, Peter assumed leadership of the group of early followers, forming the Jerusalem ekklēsia mentioned by Paul. He was soon eclipsed in this leadership by James the Just, "the Brother of the Lord."

According to Lüdemann, this was due to the discussions about the strictness of adherence to the Jewish Law, when the more conservative faction of **James the Just** took the overhand over the more liberal position of Peter, who soon lost influence.

According to Dunn, this was not a "usurpation of power," but a consequence of Peter's involvement in missionary activities. The early Church historian Eusebius (c. AD 325) records Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 190) as saying,

For they say that Peter and James (**the Greater**) and John after the ascension of our Savior, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose **James the Just** bishop of Jerusalem.

James D. G. Dunn proposes that Peter was a "**bridge-man**" between the opposing views of Paul and James the Just:

For Peter was probably in fact and effect the bridge-man who did more than any other to hold together the diversity of first-century Christianity. James the brother of Jesus and Paul, the two other most prominent leading figures in first-century Christianity, were too much identified with their respective "brands" of Christianity, at least in the eyes of Christians at the opposite ends of this particular spectrum."

Paul affirms that Peter had the special charge of being apostle to the Jews, just as he, Paul, was apostle to the Gentiles. Some argue James the Just was bishop of Jerusalem whilst Peter was bishop of Rome and that this position at times gave James privilege in some (but not all) situations.

In a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples (**Matthew 16:13–19**), Jesus asks, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The disciples give various answers.

When he asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus then declares:

Blessed are you, **Simon son of Jonah**, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are **Cephas (Peter) (Petros)**, and on this rock (**Petra**) 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.

**Petros** had not previously been used as a name, but in the Greek-speaking world it became a popular Christian name, after the tradition of Peter's prominence in the early Christian church had been established.

According to the Epistle to the **Galatians 2:11**, Peter went to Antioch where Paul rebuked him for following the conservative line regarding the conversion of Gentiles, having meals separate from Gentiles. Subsequent tradition held that Peter had been the first Patriarch of Antioch. According to the writings of **Origen** and **Eusebius** in his Church History (III, 36) Peter would have been the founder of the Church of Antioch.

Later accounts expand on the brief biblical mention of his visit to Antioch. The Liber Pontificalis (9th century) mentions Peter as having served as bishop of Antioch for seven years, and having potentially left his family in the Greek city before his journey to Rome. Claims of direct blood lineage from Simon Peter among the old population of Antioch existed in the 1st century and continue to exist today, notably by certain Semaan families of modern-day Syria and Lebanon. Historians have furnished other evidence of Peter's sojourn in Antioch.

The Clementine literature, a group of related works written in the fourth century but believed to contain materials from earlier centuries, relate information about Peter that may come from earlier traditions. One is that Peter had a group of 12 to 16 followers, whom the Clementine writings name. Another is that it provides an itinerary of Peter's route from Caesarea Maritima to Antioch, where he debated his adversary **Simon Magus**; during this journey he ordained **Zacchaeus** as the first bishop of Caesarea and **Maro** as the first bishop of Tripolis.

**Dionysius**, bishop of Corinth, in his Epistle to the Roman Church under **Pope Soter** (A.D. 165–174) declares that Peter and Paul founded the Church of Rome and the Church of Corinth, and they have lived in Corinth for some time, and finally in Italy where they found death:

You have thus by such an admonition bound together the planting of Peter and of Paul at Rome and Corinth. For both of them planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time.

In a strong tradition of the Early Church, Peter is said to have founded the Church in Rome with Paul, served as its bishop, authored two epistles, and then met martyrdom there along with Paul.

The Catholic Church speaks of the pope, the bishop of Rome, as the successor of Saint Peter. This is often interpreted to imply that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome. However, it is also said that the institution of the papacy is not dependent on the idea that Peter was Bishop of Rome or even on his ever having been in Rome.

**St. Clement** of Rome identifies Peter and Paul as the outstanding heroes of the faith. There is no obvious biblical evidence that Peter was ever in Rome, but the first epistle of Peter does mention that "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth **Marcus** my son" (**1 Peter 5:13**). It is not certain whether this refers to the actual Babylon or to Rome, for which Babylon was a common nickname at the time, or to the Jewish diaspora in general, as a recent theory has proposed.

While the church in Rome was already flourishing when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans about AD 57, he greets some fifty people in Rome by name, but not Peter whom he knew. There is also no mention of Peter in Rome later during Paul's two-year stay there in **Acts 28**, about AD 60–62.

The writings of the 1st century Church Father **Ignatius** of Antioch (c. 35–c. 107) refer to Peter and Paul giving admonitions to the Romans, indicating Peter's presence in Rome.

**Irenaeus** of Lyons (c.130–c.202) wrote in the 2nd century that Peter and Paul had been the founders of the Church in Rome and had appointed **Linus** as succeeding bishop.

**Clement** of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) states that "Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome. (A.D. 190)"

According to **Origen** (184–253) and **Eusebius**, "after having first founded the church at Antioch, went away to Rome preaching the Gospel, and he also, after [presiding over] the church in Antioch, presided over that of Rome until his death". After presiding over the church in Antioch by a while, Peter would have been succeeded by **Evodius**, and thereafter by **Ignatius**, who was a student of John the Apostle.

**Lactantius**, in his book called *Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died*, written around 318, noted that "And while **Nero** reigned, the Apostle Peter came to Rome, and, through the power of God committed unto him, wrought certain miracles, and, by turning many to the true religion, built up a faithful and steadfast temple unto the Lord."

**Eusebius** of Caesarea (260/265–339/340) relates that when Peter confronts **Simon Magus** at Judea (mentioned in **Acts 8**), Simon Magus flees to Rome, where the Romans got to regard him as a god. According to Eusebius, his luck did not last long, since God sent Peter to Rome, and Simon was quenched and immediately destroyed.

According to Jerome (327–420) "Peter went to Rome in the second year of Claudius to overthrow Simon Magus, and held the sacerdotal chair there for twenty-five years until the last, that is the fourteenth, year of Nero."

An apocryphal work, the **Actus Vercellenses** (7th century), a Latin text preserved in only one manuscript copy published widely in translation under the title *Acts of Peter*, sets Peter's confrontation with Simon Magus in Rome.

In the epilogue of the Gospel of John, Jesus hints at the death by which Peter would glorify God, saying "when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." This is interpreted by some as a reference to Peter's crucifixion.

Early Church Tradition says that Peter probably died by crucifixion (with arms outstretched) at the time of the Great Fire of Rome in the year 64. This took place three months after the disastrous fire that destroyed Rome for which the emperor (Nero) wished to blame the Christians.

This "dies imperii" (regnal day anniversary) was an important one, exactly ten years after Nero ascended to the throne, and it was 'as usual' accompanied by much bloodshed. Traditionally, Roman authorities sentenced him to death by crucifixion. In accordance with the apocryphal Acts of Peter, he was crucified head down. Tradition also locates his burial place where the **Basilica of Saint Peter** was later built, directly beneath the Basilica's high altar.

**Pope Clement I** (d.99), in his Letter to the Corinthians (**Chapter 5**), written c. 80–98, speaks of Peter's martyrdom in the following terms: "Let us take the noble examples of our own generation. Through jealousy and envy the greatest and most just pillars of the Church were persecuted, and came even unto death. ... Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two but many labors, and at last, having delivered his testimony, departed unto the place of glory due to him."

The death of Peter is attested to by **Tertullian** (c. 155–c. 240) at the end of the 2nd century, in his Prescription Against Heretics, noting that Peter endured a passion like his Lord's: In his work Scorpiace 15, he also speaks of Peter's crucifixion: "The budding faith Nero first made bloody in Rome. There Peter was girded by another, since he was bound to the cross".

**Origen** (184–253) in his Commentary on the Book of Genesis III, quoted by **Eusebius** of Caesaria in his Ecclesiastical History (III, 1), said: "Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer." The Cross of St. Peter inverts the Latin cross based on this refusal, and his claim of being unworthy to die the same way as his Saviour.

**Peter** of Alexandria (d.311), who was bishop of Alexandria and died around A.D. 311, wrote an epistle on Penance, in which he says: "Peter, the first of the apostles, having been often apprehended, and thrown into prison, and treated with ignominy, was last of all crucified at Rome".

**Jerome** (327-420) wrote that "At his Nero's hands Peter received the crown of martyrdom being nailed to the cross with his head towards the ground and his feet raised on high, asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord."

**Caius** in his Disputation Against Proclus (A.D. 198), preserved in part by Eusebius, relates this of the places in which the remains of the apostles Peter and Paul were deposited: "I can point out the trophies of the apostles. For if you are willing to go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way, you will find the trophies of those who founded this Church".

According to Jerome, in his work **De Viris Illustribus** (A.D. 392), "Peter was buried at Rome in the Vatican near the triumphal way where he is venerated by the whole world."

In the early 4th century, the **Emperor Constantine I** decided to honor Peter with a large basilica. Because the precise location of Peter's burial was so firmly fixed in the belief of the Christians of Rome, the church to house the basilica had to be erected on a site that was not convenient to construction.



The slope of the Vatican Hill had to be excavated, even though the church could much more easily have been built on level ground only slightly to the south. There were also moral and legal issues, such as demolishing a cemetery to make room for the building. The focal point of the Basilica, both in its original form and in its later complete reconstruction, is the altar located over what is said to be the point of Peter's burial.

In 1950, **human bones** were found buried underneath the altar of St. Peter's Basilica. The bones have been claimed by many to have been those of Peter. In the 1960s, items from the excavations beneath St Peter's Basilica were re-examined, and the bones of a male person were identified. A forensic examination found them to be a male of about 61 years of age from the 1st century.

This caused Pope Paul VI in 1968 to announce them most likely to be the relics of Apostle Peter. On November 24, 2013, Pope Francis revealed these relics of nine bone fragments for the first time in public during a Mass celebrated in St. Peter's Square.

Church tradition ascribes the epistles First and Second Peter to the Apostle Peter, as does the text of Second Peter itself, an attribution rejected by scholarship. First Peter (**1 Peter 5:13**) implies the author is in "**Babylon**", which has been held to be a coded reference to Rome. If the reference is to Rome, it is the only biblical reference to Peter being there.

Most Biblical scholars believe that "Babylon" is a metaphor for the pagan Roman Empire at the time it persecuted Christians, before the Edict of Milan in 313: perhaps specifically referencing some aspect of Rome's rule (brutality, greed, paganism).

In 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch and the Sibylline oracles, "Babylon" is a cryptic name for Rome. Reinhard Feldmeier speculates that "Babylon" is used to refer to Rome in **1 Peter 5:13**. In **Revelation 17:9** it is said that she sits on "seven mountains", typically understood as the seven hills of Rome. A Roman coin minted under the Emperor Vespasian (c. 70 AD) depicts Rome as a woman sitting on seven hills.

### SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

**Matthew 16:18** Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

**Matthew 16:18** 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. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

**Luke 24:34** saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

**Matthew 10:2** Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother.

**SAINT PETER'S BASILICA, ROME, ITALY**



**The Crucifixion of St. Peter by Michelangelo Caravaggio**

