

The Bones Of Peter

by Dr. W. A. Criswell

Simon Peter is addressed by our Lord Jesus in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew in these words: "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Because of this passage, there is a vast system of religion built upon Simon Peter. Three things in this ecclesiastical system are avowed about him.

1. *That Peter ruled the church.*
2. *That Peter ruled the church in Rome.*

Jerome (d. 240 A.D.) declared that Peter, after being first bishop at Antioch, and after laboring in Pontus, Galatia, Asia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia, went to Rome in the second year of Claudius (about 42 A.D.) to oppose Simon Magus, and was bishop of that church for 25 years, finally being crucified head downward in the last year of Nero's reign (67 A.D.) and was buried on the Vatican hill.

3. *That Peter's tomb and his bones are under the high altar of St. Peter's church in Rome.*

There is no intimation in the Scriptures that the words of our Saviour addressed to Simon Peter made him ruler and head of the church. In the Greek there is a play upon his name - "Thou art Petros (a stone) and upon this petra (a stratum of stone) I will build my church." First Peter 2:5 says, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." First Corinthians 3:11 says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus." The meaning is self-evident. The foundation, "the petra," upon which Christ will build His church is His deity, which Simon Peter has just confessed upon a revelation from the Father. The stones out of which Christ will erect His church are believing disciples, one of whom is Peter himself.

The keys of the kingdom here given to Peter as a representative disciple, with the authority of binding and loosing, are given to all the disciples in Matthew 18:18 and in John 20:23.

Peter in the Early Churches

Was Peter ever the ruler of the church? Of any church any time, any place? Not that anybody knows of. The pastor and leader of the church at Jerusalem was James, the Lord's brother (Acts 12:17; 15: 13-21; 21:18; Gal 2:9.) This Scriptural account of James is confirmed by Josephus in his Antiquities XX, 9,1,

where James' martyrdom is described. Josephus never heard of Simon Peter, but the Jewish historian knows all about the faithful pastor and leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem.

Notice in Acts 8:14 that Peter is "sent" by the apostles along with John to Samaria. Peter is not doing the sending; somebody else is.

Notice in Acts 15:14-21 that at the Jerusalem conference, after Peter made his speech and Paul and Barnabas made their speeches, it is James who delivers the final verdict.

Was Peter Ever in Rome?

The second avowal of the Roman hierarchy concerning Peter is that he was bishop at Rome from 42 A.D. to 67 A.D., when he was crucified under Nero. If Peter was in Rome during those years, then the New Testament cannot be relied upon. There is not the faintest, slightest historical foundation for the fiction that Peter ever saw the city of Rome.

1. Paul was converted about 37 A.D. He says in the first chapter of Galatians (Gal. 1:13-18) that after his conversion he went into Arabia, "then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days." This takes us to 40 A.D., and Peter is still in Jerusalem.

2. Sometime during those days Peter made his missionary journey through the western part of Judea, to Lydda, to Joppa, to Caesarea, and back to Jerusalem (Acts 9, 10, 11). Then came the imprisonment under Herod Agrippa I and the miraculous deliverance by the angel of the Lord (Acts 12). Peter then "went down from Judea to Caesarea and there abode" (Acts 12:19). Herod Agrippa died not long after these events (Acts 12:20-23). Josephus says that the death of Agrippa occurred in the fourth year of the reign of Claudius. This would be about 45 A.D., and Peter is still in Palestine.

3. Paul writes in the second chapter of Galatians that fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem to visit Simon Peter he went again to see him. The first journey was 40 A.D.; fourteen years later brings us to 54 A.D., and Peter is still in Palestine.

4. Peter returns the visit and goes to Antioch where Paul is working. This occasioned the famous interview between the two recorded in Galatians 2:11-14. Peter is still in the Orient, not in Rome.

5. After 54 A.D., and after the Antioch visit, the Apostle Peter makes an extensive missionary journey or journeys throughout the Roman provinces of the East. On these missionary tours Peter takes his wife (I Cor. 9:5). They labor in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. So vast a work and so great a territory must have consumed several years. This would take us, therefore, to at least 60 A.D., and Peter and his wife are still not in Rome but in the East.

6. In about 58 A.D. Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome. In the last chapter of that epistle, Paul salutes twenty-seven persons, but he never mentions Simon Peter. If Peter were "governing" the church at Rome, it is most strange that Paul should never refer to him.

Romans 1:13 shows that the church at Rome was a Gentile church. At the Jerusalem conference (Gal. 2:9), it was agreed that Peter should go to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles.

The gospel ministry of Paul was motivated by a great principle which he clearly repeats in Romans 15:20: "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." A like avowal is made in I Corinthians 10:15,16. Where no other apostle has been, there Paul wanted to go. Having written this plainly to the people at Rome, his desire to go to the Roman city would be inexplicable if Peter were already there, or had been there for years.

7. Paul's first Roman imprisonment took place about 60 A.D. to 64 A.D. from his prison the Apostle to the Gentiles wrote four letters - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. In these letters he mentions many of his fellow Christians who are in the city, but he never once refers to Simon Peter.

8. Paul's second Roman imprisonment brought him martyrdom. This occurred about 67 A.D. Just before he died Paul wrote a letter to Timothy, our "II Timothy." In that final letter the apostle mentions many people but plainly says that "only Luke is with me." There is never a reference to Peter.

We have gone throughout those years of 42 A.D. to 67 A.D., the years Peter is supposed to have been the prince and bishop and ruler of the church at Rome. There is not a suggestion anywhere that such a thing was true. Rather the New Testament clearly and plainly denies the fiction.

Babylon and Rome

In I Peter 5:13, Peter says, "The church that is at Babylon saluteth you." Some suppose "Babylon" is a cryptic word for Rome.

There is no evidence that Rome was ever called "Babylon" until after the Book of the Revelation was written. The Revelation was written about 95 A.D., many years after the death of Simon Peter. If I Peter 5:13 refers to Rome, then Simon Peter did not write the letter and we have a forgery in the Bible.

Peter's method and manner of writing are in no sense apocalyptic. He is direct and matter-of-fact. That this man Peter, plain of speech almost to bluntness, should interject into the midst of his personal explanations and final salutations such a mystical epithet, with no hint of what he means by it, is beyond credulity. Peter says the elect in Babylon send greetings to the Jews of the Dispersion in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. "Babylon" is no more cryptic than "Pontus," "Asia," or the rest. He means what he says. His "Babylon" is the Babylon on the Euphrates. It is a part of that eastern world where Peter lived his life and did his work.

Babylon in the time of Simon Peter was no longer a great world capital, but it was still inhabited by a colony of people, mostly Jews. Among those Hebrew friends he won many to Christ, and those Jewish Christians sent greetings to their fellow-Jewish Christians in Asia Minor where Peter had previously done a blessed missionary work.

Unbiased historians and the Scriptural records indicate that Peter died and was buried either in Mesopotamia or Asia Minor. The Pope of Rome will be able to find plenty of bones beneath the Vatican

hills, where Christians by the thousands were murdered and buried by pagan and papal persecutors back when Rome ruled the world. But these bones prove nothing except that the Roman hierarchy is frantic in its efforts to find something that will give a semblance of justification to their false claims that Peter was connected with the papal system.

Peter was never in Rome. Nor was he ruler over any church. Nor did he have any keys to give to anybody else to hand down to others. He was a stone, one out of many with which God is building His spiritual house in earth and in heaven.