

SIMON, WHOSE SURNAME IS PETER

THE apostle Peter is referred to by name 118 times in the Gospels and 70 times in the other books of the N.T. His name takes six distinct forms: Simon (or Symeon), Simon bar Jona (or "son of John") Simon (or Symeon) Peter, Simon whose surname is Peter (or "called Peter" or "surnamed Peter"), Peter, and Cephas. A study of the way in which the different authors use these forms gives rise to some interesting reflections.

I. THE CARE TAKEN OVER QUOTATIONS

In his own narration in the Acts, Luke uniformly writes of him as Peter, the name by which he came generally to be known by the Church. But in the story of the conversion of Cornelius, the angelic message to the latter describes him as "Simon whose surname is Peter", to distinguish him from Simon the tanner with whom he lodged, and the same description is used by the messengers (Acts x. 5, 18, 32). Whether Luke derived his information directly from Peter or the centurion or from some intermediate source, he was careful to preserve the actual words.

The same care is observable in his recording of the words of James to the Council in Jerusalem (Acts xv. 14, R.V.), where he is called Symeon, the Aramaic form of the name by which he was familiarly known in Jerusalem (cf. Luke ii. 25; Acts xiii. 1).

Once again, in the account of the Resurrection, after using himself the name Peter (Luke xxiv. 12), Luke tells how the other disciples called him Simon (verse 34).

It has frequently been pointed out that there is greater verbal agreement between the evangelists when they are repeating the words of Christ than in their own narratives, and the passages we are examining illustrate this, for our Lord's modes of address to Peter differ noticeably from their own usage.

The name Simon bar Jona ("son of John") occurs only three times, and always as employed by Christ. Matthew reproduces it in its Aramaic form in connection with Peter's great confession (xvi. 17). In John's Gospel this address comes in our Lord's first words to Peter (i. 42), and again in the threefold question by the lakeside after His Resurrection (xxi. 15 ff.).

Here it assumes the Greek form as more suited to a wide circle of readers. It is significant that this form of the name occurs nowhere else.

On three other occasions, each recorded by only one of the evangelists, our Lord calls him Simon, which would be the most natural form of address. The first of these is when Matthew, the quondam tax-gatherer, tells how the Lord instructed Peter how to find money for the payment of the tribute: Matthew calls him Peter, but Christ Simon (xvii. 24 f.). The second was at the Last Supper, when He commenced His solemn warning concerning his denial with the words "Simon, Simon . . .", though soon after, as if to remind him of his own confession, he continued, "I tell thee, Peter . . ." (Luke xxii. 31, 34). Finally, it is Mark who informs us how Christ singled out Peter from among the sleepers in the garden with the words, "Simon, couldst thou not watch with me one hour?" (xiv. 37).

II. THE GENUINENESS OF THE APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

No books have had more doubt cast upon their genuineness than the Gospels of Matthew and John in these latter days, and the second epistle of Peter from early times.

Yet Matthew's use of Peter's names is just what might have been expected of this apostle, whose call came not long before Simon received his surname. In his narrative he is described simply as Peter, but when first mentioned, "Simon called Peter" (iv. 18), and in connection with his confession, "Simon Peter" (xvi. 16). A later writer would not have invented the saying of Christ in the following verse (17), and the Aramaic form "bar Jona" corresponds with the tradition that Matthew first wrote his Gospel in Hebrew.

It is interesting that John reproduces this name also, but on different occasions; its use may have been to distinguish from the other Simon. But is it really credible that it was invented by the mythical presbyter of Ephesus? In his narrative, John uses Simon Peter and Peter about an equal number of times; the former is never used by Mark, and only once by Luke. It would seem that John still thought of him as Simon, but was conscious that to his readers he would be known as Peter.

The use of the Aramaic form Symeon in 2 Pet. i. 1 is especially interesting; for it is to the last degree improbable that a forger would have invented such an opening. The objection

urged against the genuineness of this epistle, that it differs in style from the former, is surely not very intelligent, though very common. This form of the name was used by James (Acts xv. 14), and known by the dwellers in Jerusalem. If it be necessary to seek a reason why Peter should use it here, it may be found in the suggestion that this epistle, apparently intended for a wider circle of readers than the earlier one, was in the first instance despatched from Babylon¹ to Jerusalem.

Seeing that all the evangelists and Paul also use more than one appellation for Peter, why should the apostle himself not use either one or both of his names at his own discretion?

III. THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE EVANGELISTS

In the Gospels 58 of the mentions of Peter's name are peculiar to one evangelist only: the other occasions number only 26, if we count each separate occasion as one only.

The information vouchsafed through one writer often supplements that which comes from another. John alone tells, in a vivid recollection of the earliest days, of the *promise* of the name Cephas (i. 42); whilst Matthew alone records its *fulfilment* (xvi. 18). We find Matthew also telling of Peter's *question* regarding forgiveness of a brother (xviii. 21), to which the *answer* only is found in Luke (xvii. 3 f.).

Luke on the other hand records the question, "Lord, speakest Thou this parable to us, or even to all?" (xii. 41) and we find the answer in Mark xiii. 37.

Again, John tells us (xviii. 15-18) how he himself brought Peter into the high priest's palace, where he "stood and warmed himself", whilst Mark adds that the maid *saw* Peter doing so (xiv. 67). Mark records the angelic message that the women should carry word to Peter (xvi. 7), and John's account shows that they obeyed (xx. 2).

These may seem small points, but their cumulative value is by no means negligible.

It is characteristic of the same congruence together with variation that in the list of the twelve no two evangelists are *exactly* alike in the way they attach Peter's surname to his name; they all know that the surname was given him by the Lord, though only Matthew includes it in his record of the event.

¹ See article, "Babylon on the Nile", by the present writer in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY xvi (1944), pp. 138 ff.

IV. PETER AND THE EVANGELISTS

Of the four evangelists, Matthew and John were companions of Peter, and Mark must have often met him at his mother's house (Acts xii. 12) after the Resurrection, and probably before (Mark xiv. 51). He was certainly with him at Babylon (1 Pet. v. 13), and early tradition describes him as Peter's follower and interpreter.

There is no record of a meeting between Luke and Peter; but they may have met in early days at Antioch, or during Paul's two years' imprisonment in Caesarea either in that city or in Jerusalem, or perhaps in Egypt.

Be this as it may, the mentions of Peter's name peculiar to each evangelist show that each had independent access to information concerning him.

John appears to have been present on every occasion when Peter is mentioned, an undesigned coincidence which tends to confirm the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel.

Matthew was present when Jesus bade Peter come to Him on the lake, which he alone records, and they were together "in the house" at Capernaum when Christ gave Peter instruction concerning the tribute money (cf. Matt. xvii. 25; xviii. 1 with Mark ix. 33). Matthew's account of Peter's denial is clearly independent in some points, and may have been obtained either from Peter himself or from John.

The references peculiar to Mark include four occasions where he singles out Peter for special mention (i. 36; xi. 21; xiii. 3; xvi. 7). These are just such as others would report in general terms whilst Peter would recall his own share in them. On the third of these Peter was doubtless the spokesman. James and John and Andrew were with him. Would anyone else have put the names in that order?

On three notable occasions Luke's account shows a striking independence, and in each case reflects Peter's inner feelings and point of view.

In the story of his official calling (Luke v. 1-11) it is recalled how Andrew and he left *his* boat ("which was Simon's") and were washing their nets (James and John were *mending* theirs, Mark i. 19), how the boat was requisitioned for preaching, and how they beckoned their partners in the other boat. How interested he was in the boats! Then follows his astonishment,

his deep sense of sin, and then how they brought the boats to land and followed Him. Mark's account may well represent the more succinct form which the story took in Peter's catechetical teaching; but that of Luke must surely have come straight from Peter's lips.

Luke's account of the Transfiguration also is seen through Peter's eyes. We can almost hear him say, "Behold, there talked with Him two men"; we feel his awe as they "appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem", and we enter into his feelings as he, with his companions, was heavy with sleep, knew not what he said, and feared as they entered the cloud (ix. 28-36).

The third occasion was that of Peter's trial, where he relates how "earnestly" the maid looked at him, the interval of an hour between the second and third accusation, and how "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter" (xxii. 56-62).

Were Peter to read the four Gospels as we have them to-day, there is doubtless much that he could explain, but we may rest assured that there is nothing that he would need to explain away.

V. PETER AND PAUL

Apart from the Gospels and Acts, the only places where Peter is mentioned are in the epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, and in the opening verses of his own.

In writing to the Galatians, Paul uses Peter's surname in both the Aramaic and Greek forms, and this is clearly responsible for a considerable variety of readings. According to the most probable, he begins with Cephas (i. 18), then uses Peter (ii. 7 f.), and finally reverts again to Cephas (ii. 9, 11, 14, R.V.), and we may hazard a guess why he does so. At the outset he is relating a former experience which suggests to him the name by which he then knew his fellow-apostle. When he begins to comment upon his own mission and apostleship, his thoughts centre now upon his readers, to whom the name Peter would be the more familiar. In ii. 9 personal experience is again uppermost in his thoughts and he uses Cephas again. It is common knowledge that persons who are bilingual, such as those Swiss people who speak both French and German, turn easily from the one language to the other as some fresh association suggests the change.

As regards the Corinthians, the section who said, "I am of Cephas" (i. 12; iii. 22) would certainly be Jews, and probably those who clung most to their Jewish customs, including the Hebrew language. At least *they* said Cephas, and Paul's usage is an echo of theirs. A similar consideration applies to its use in connection with Peter's journeyings with his wife. Paul retains the same form when recounting the Lord's appearances on the Resurrection Day, when again his thoughts would revert to Jerusalem.

Incidentally, Paul's usage of the names is so different from Luke's as to support the belief that the evangelist did not obtain his special information regarding Peter indirectly through his great leader Paul.

VI. A SIDE-LIGHT ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

Finally, this study of names shows how precarious, not to say utterly misleading, are the conclusions based upon the use in the Pentateuch of alternative names for God, or for particular persons, places, or tribes.

Not only may one person have more than one appellation, but we have seen how in Peter's case six different forms of the name existed, and how Matthew and John each used five of them in different connections. How fantastic would be the result of an analysis of the New Testament upon the basis of the criteria sometimes relied upon in the Old!

Here we can trace different shades of reference, and to a large extent we can trace the causes which led the speakers or writers to the particular form used on each occasion. Doubtless in the O.T. also there were similar shades of meaning; indeed, we know this in respect of Elohim and Jehovah, or of the names Jacob and Israel. So, too, Midianites and Ishmaelites may have referred to the same people, Sinai and Horeb to the same place, without of necessity being exactly the same in meaning and reference. The use of either alternative would sometimes (as in the cases we have considered above) be dictated by its suitability, and at others be all but a matter of chance; but certainly no author would be rigidly confined to one alternative only.

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