

Is there Biblical evidence that Jesus appointed Peter as the first Pope? (Part 1)

A fair question as the word, "Pope", (from the Latin: papa), is not in the Bible. Now the name describing this office would come later, but the office itself started right with Jesus.

I am going to answer this question in 3 parts. First, we will look at the overwhelming evidence pointing to Peter as the unquestionable head of the New Testament (NT) Church. Secondly, we will look at whether or not this position was intended to be an ongoing office with successors. And thirdly, we will look at what the Early Church taught about this, and whether we see successors to Peter in the first centuries of Christianity (and we absolutely **DO!!!**).

First off, Jesus will essentially answer our question for us in **Matthew 16:16-19**, as He clearly builds His Church on Peter saying, *"Blessed are you, Simon... I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Additionally, Jesus re-emphasizes Simon's name change to Peter or Petros here, which literally means "rock" in Greek, the language the NT was written in. So Jesus is essentially saying to Peter, "you are rock, and upon this rock I will build my church".

This also recalls Jesus' parable of the wise builder in **Matthew 7**: Jesus, the wisest of builders, will build His "house", His Church (see **1 Tim 3:15**), on rock, and this church will never fall. Jesus then confirms this in **Mat 16:18**, promising that *"the powers of death shall not prevail against"* His Church. And this church, historically and unarguably, is the Catholic Church! Awesome!

Jesus then gives Peter something He gives to no other person in Scripture: *"the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven"*. This is profound. He is literally investing Peter with His own authority and the keys to Heaven! Additionally, he gives him authority to bind and loose on earth and in heaven (also given to all the Apostles later in **Matthew 18**). This was rabbinic language of the time that referred to the "binding" or authoritative proclaiming of doctrine, and to the forgiveness of sins.

The evidence for Peter as head of the Church continues in **Luke 22:31-32**, where Jesus reveals to Peter that *"Satan has demanded to sift **all of you** like wheat, but I have prayed that **your own faith** may not fail..."* The devil will test **all** the Apostles, but Jesus prays specifically for Peter.

In **John 21:15-17**, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would essentially appoint Peter as His shepherd on earth, three times directing Peter to *"Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep..."*

Feed my sheep.” This was a position thus far reserved for Jesus alone, but here He clearly gives Peter a share in this role.

Peter also heads all NT lists of the Apostles but one, and his name is mentioned over 190 times (St. John is second at 40). In the list of Apostles found in **Matthew 10:2**, Peter is referred to as “*Protos*” (“*First*”) in the original Greek. The word “*protos*” gives a sense of a primacy of order or importance in Greek, indicating that Peter had preeminence over all the Apostles, even though he wasn’t the first called.

Peter also leads a literal litany of firsts in the early years of the Church as well. In **Acts 10** and **15**, Peter confirms that God chose him from all the others to admit the Gentiles into the Church, a massively important NT doctrinal change that God left solely in the hands of Peter. And in **Acts 15:7-12**, he also leads the first church council and gives the doctrinal decision that silences the assembly: “*After much debate... Peter got up and said... “from early days God made his choice among you, that **by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe... we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. And all the assembly kept silence**”.*

Now some contend that James actually lead this council, but clearly, Peter answers the original doctrinal question (how are the Gentiles saved). James simply adds four specific directives at the end concerning lesser matters.

Additionally, Peter would give the first sermon in **Acts 2** – complete with 3000 conversions! In **Acts 3:6-9**, he performs the first healing, and in **Acts 5:15-16**, even his shadow heals the sick and drives out demons. In **Acts 5**, he gives the first ecclesial punishment (Ananias and Saphira), and in **Acts 9**, he performs the first raising from the dead! And in **Gal 1:18-19**, Paul comes to confer with Peter for 15 days, but none of the other Apostles.

Stay tuned for Part 2 where we will examine whether Jesus intended Peter’s position to be a perpetual office (the Papacy), or to end with his death.