

# OpenTheo

## Q&A#114 Why is the Apostle Peter Called Simon Bar-Jonah?

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Today's question: "I found it odd that Jesus would address Peter as "Simon bar-Jonah" after his declaration of Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:17) -- not because it's uncommon for men to be referred to as "the son of" someone in the biblical text, but because the occurrence takes place so soon (in the text) after Jesus' declaration that the only sign that the "wicked and adulterous generation" would receive was "the sign of [what I assume to be the prophet] Jonah" (16:4). Do you see anything beyond the coincidental double appearance of the name Jonah here?"

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### Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, I found it odd that Jesus would address Peter as Simon Bar-Jonah after his declaration of Jesus as the Christ, Matthew 16, 17. Not because it's uncommon for men to be referred to as the son of someone in the biblical text, but

because the occurrence takes place so soon in the text, after Jesus' declaration, the only sign that the wicked and adulterous generation would receive was the sign of what I assume to be the prophet, Jonah.

16.4 Do you see anything beyond the coincidental double appearance of the name Jonah here? This is a good observation. It's the sort of detail that we need to have our eyes open for. What we make of it is a different question, but these are the sorts of details that as you notice, they will lead you into interesting places.

And if you collect enough of these details, you can maybe discover something significant. When we're looking at the story of the Gospels, we'll see Peter referred to in a number of different ways. And these different ways of referring to Peter are often not accidental.

It's not often that there are variations and those variations occur at significant times and they can take significant forms. So Jesus gives Simon the name Cephas, stone, and associated with Peter, the name Peter. On this rock, I will build my church.

There's a play on words there. And then we see the way that he's referred to as Simon Peter, Simon, son of John. At the beginning and end of the book of John, we see him described as Simon Bar-Jonah here.

We see him described as Simeon in the book of Acts. And there are a number of different occasions where in Acts 15, there are a number of different occasions where we see slight variations on this name. So we can refer to Peter by a host of different terms.

Peter, Simon, Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, Simon Bar-Jonah, Simeon and a few others. And what we're seeing, I think, are significant variations in many places. I've suggested in the past that Luke might be playing upon Simeon in his discussion of the scene in the presentation in the temple.

So Jesus is presented by his parents in the temple. They encounter Simeon and they encounter Anna. Anna is associated with Israel, seven times twelve, 84 years.

And she's someone who has spent her time praying constantly in the temple. This might remind us of the character of Hannah at the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel. And if we look at Luke more generally, we'll see that Luke uses the book of 1 Samuel extensively.

We later see the church on the day of Pentecost, that they go into the church, the temple, on the 40th day. And it's the same day as the presentation, 40th day after Christ's new birth, his resurrection from the dead. And they are praying in the temple with the women.

And the emphasis upon the women's presence is significant there. So you have the

women and then you have the woman at the beginning of the book of Luke who's praying constantly in the temple. And then that relates back to Anna at the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel and the dawn of the kingdom more generally.

What I suggest this means is that there is some sort of parallel between the ascension after 40 days and the presentation in the temple. And also the church's presence in the temple as a site of prayer. Now as they're present there, we have these two characters, Anna and Simeon.

We have the women in prayer and we have the church and the disciples in prayer, the bride of Christ in prayer. We have also someone who gives a primary speech declaring the meaning of these events. In the book of Luke, that's Simeon.

In the book of Acts, it's Simon Peter. And these two characters, I suggest, are associated with each other. So there is a parallel between Simeon and Simon.

What else is going on? When we look at these names in scripture, we'll see that often they connect us back with Old Testament characters. So if we're reading the beginning of the book of Luke, for instance, we'll see Mary can be associated with Miriam. Joseph.

What's the significance of Joseph? Joseph is the son of Jacob. And Joseph, the son of Jacob at the beginning of Matthew, is having all these dreams. And then he takes his family into Egypt to protect them from threat.

Now, we've read that story before in the Old Testament. This is an Old Testament narrative being played out again. We have Elisheba, Elizabeth.

She's the matriarch of the Levites and she's the mother of John the Baptist, the one who comes with this water of washing of purification and announcing the one who will purify the sons of Levi. So we have a number of different connections between Old and New Testament. And I think what we have within the book of John, for instance, is the emphasis upon Peter as the son of John, Simon's son of John.

At the beginning, at the end. And that's associated with John the Baptist, not just Peter's natural father, but also with John the Baptist. It connects him with the ministry of John.

And there's a play at the beginning and the end. The fact that he's referred to in that particular way, but not in between. It's significant.

It creates a parallel and it helps us to read those things against each other. Now, what about Simon as the son of Jonah? When we look at the sign of the prophet Jonah, I think it is referred to Jesus towering in the grave, three days being raised again. And within that particular event, I think that we can look back at the events of Jonah.

And there are ways in which that foreshadows the work of Christ in ways that maybe

would not been attentive to the big fish. What is the big fish? What is the significance of Jonah more generally? Is it just this weird story about a prophet and the odd things that happened to him? Or is there something more going on? Is there a message to Israel? I believe there's a message to Israel that the big fish and I've written upon some of these themes recently. The big fish is Assyria.

Now, when Israel is cast out of the land because of their wickedness, they are cast into the ocean, the ocean of the Gentiles. And they're swallowed up by this big fish of Assyria. And the point of the prophet Jonah's experience is to be a message to Israel that this is a tomb, as it were.

That they enter into the death of exile, but God will preserve them even down in Sheol, even down in that place of death. They're swallowed up by this big nation and then they'll be spat out again on dry land. And they can trust God for that.

Later on, you have the Gourd and the Gourd being eaten away by the worm. What is the Gourd? The Gourd is, again, another vision of Assyria. Assyria is this great empire in the north that actually protects them from Israel, from the Aramean kingdoms.

If you look in the Book of Kings, you'll see that Jonah gives a prophecy concerning Israel expanding its borders, even in a time of fairly wicked kings. And what does that mean? I think it means in part that Israel, as the threat of the Arameans was removed, the threat of Damascus, because of the strength of Assyria, it meant that their boundaries could expand. And so they might think about this big nation of Assyria in the north as a threat, but in many ways it is a protecting shade that God has provided for them.

And when that shade is removed, they will feel the full beating force of the sun. And there's a message there about trusting God in the situation of politics, international affairs, where things, forces beyond our control, these big storms of the sea, these big fish that might swallow us up. Whatever it is, that God is in control of that, that God is above these forces.

Now, Christ refers to his death in terms of the Prophet Jonah. Jonah was cast into the sea and was spent three days and three nights in the belly of the big fish and then was spat out. Christ enters into the deep, enters into death, enters into the tomb.

And this is a tomb from which he will be raised again. And so there's an image there of the Prophet Jonah's experience, but also of death and resurrection in exile. So Christ enters into the exile that is akin to the exile that's described by Jonah and the big fish and also Israel and Assyria.

And then he comes out. He's raised again. What then about Peter? What does the name Jonah mean? Jonah means dove.

And that might be part of the meaning here. But the fact that it occurs in such close

proximity, I don't think is accidental. I'm not sure exactly what to make of it.

But here are a few suggestions. What is there about the experience of Peter that might parallel with Jonah? First of all, Jonah is an ambivalent figure. Which way does Jonah go? Is Jonah the faithful prophet that goes to a foreign people? Or is Jonah the one who steps back and doesn't do what he's supposed to do? This is a it's not a straightforwardly good thing to be associated with the character of Jonah.

And here within this passage, we'll see that Peter is a positive figure in his bearing witness. But then also he is someone who has a very negative response the next moment. That he's someone who says that these things shouldn't befall Christ and Christ says, get behind me, Satan.

So the character of Jonah is a figure that can go either way. Later on, we'll see Peter being sent to a seaport and in the seaport of Joppa, he's sent and he brings the message of the gospel to Gentiles. He's the first to be sent to the Gentiles in that particular way.

And so in many respects, he's someone who follows after the example of Jonah. He's one who sent out. He's a fisherman.

He's associated with boats. And we have this more generally within the book of Luke for Luke and Acts. We have an emphasis upon boats and sea journeys later on in the book of Acts, Paul's journey and the shipwreck.

And these play upon the themes of Jonah. So Paul is the prophet who says that everyone needs to remain upon the ship as they go towards the West. And in this in the storm.

Now, that's quite an opposite. And they'll be safe as they stick with him. It's a very different vision from that of the story of Jonah, where you have the prophet going west away from what God has told them to do.

And as he goes west, he is the threat to everyone else on the boat. And so the storm means that he has to be cast off. Rather, in this situation, Paul says that everyone needs to remain with him to be safe as he goes west.

As the prophet being sent to Rome. So there are similar themes being explored there. The connection between Jonah and the juxtaposition between Jonah and the ministry of the apostles.

What else do we see about the events of Peter and his ministry? He's associated with the dove. He's the one who has received the spirit on the day of Pentecost. He pioneers that mission.

He's the dove figure. He's associated with the dove. He's the son of Jonah.

And that might associate him with the spirit and the way that the spirit has establishes

him. Christ, as Christ is associated with Jonah, entering into the belly of the deep, entering into the big fish and then being spat out again on the other side. What we see there, I think, is a connection between Peter and Jesus.

Between Jesus and Peter, that Jesus is like Jonah and Peter is the one who will follow in his footsteps. We'll later see in Acts chapter 12 that Peter has a resurrection experience like Jesus. If you read Acts chapter 12, it's time of Passover.

Peter is taken to prison and he's about to be put to death. And then an angel comes, opens the doors of the prison and brings Peter out through this narrow passage through the street. And then Peter goes and appears to the disciples.

He's seen by a woman. The woman comes and tells the disciples and they don't believe her and they think it's his ghost. And then later on, he comes in and he appears to them and then he largely disappears from the scene.

We see Peter once more in Acts chapter 15, where he's referred to as Simeon. What is happening there? I think that Christ's footsteps are then walked in by Peter. Peter is following what his master has done.

And that, I think, is something of what's being suggested here by Bar-Jonah. What weight we put on this, I wouldn't put that much weight on it. But I think there is a legitimate connection.

And I would commend those who pay attention to those sorts of things. Those are the sorts of details that we should notice. Thank you very much for listening.

Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow. If you would like to ask me a question or something on the series that I'm doing on the story of the family of Abraham, anything like that, leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and other videos like it, and more particularly at the moment, my transcriptions of my videos, please consider supporting me on Patreon or donating using PayPal.

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