

**THE APOSTLE PETER:
HIS LIFE
AND LETTERS**

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BY

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THE discourses and epistles of Peter inserted in the following pages are given in a revised version. Important deviations from the received text are noted in the margin.

It has not been thought necessary to append Scripture references in the ordinary course of the narrative. These, however, are inserted in all cases of doubt or difficulty.

THE APOSTLE PETER: HIS LIFE AND LETTERS.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING.

1. THE north-western shores of the Sea of Galilee were, in the time of our Lord, the abode of a numerous and busy population. Including Tiberias, nine cities are said to have bordered the now solitary lake; while the fertile plain of Genesaret, and the uplands beyond, were crowded with towns and villages. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in a description probably somewhat overcharged, declares that even the smaller towns of the region contained fifteen thousand inhabitants each;¹ and modern writers have found the nearest parallel to this part of Palestine in the manufacturing districts of England.² The fisheries of the lake, equally with the tillage of the valleys, gave profitable employment to thousands; and fleets of vessels, large and small, lay moored in the bays, or sped over the waters. The Gospel history itself gives incidental attestation to the populousness of the district. "Great multitudes" are repeatedly mentioned, "from cities, and villages, and towns." Once, a company of "five thousand

¹ *Wars*, III. iii. 2.

² *Stanley's Sinai and Palestine*, p. 376.

men," and again, "four thousand, beside women and children," were gathered, from one corner of the region, to a "desert place" on the north-eastern shore. Capernaum, lying upon the great highway from Damascus to the south, possessed a considerable Roman garrison,¹ as well as an important station for collecting customs.² But many of these towns have not even left a name; of scarcely any can the site be satisfactorily identified. So complete is the desolation into which those cities have fallen, in which "most of the Redeemer's mighty works were done," and which "repeated not."

2. One of the most important of these Galilean lakeside towns was BETHSaida. Situated, as its name implies, upon the edge of a great "fishing field," extending to the opposite shore, it naturally became the home of a community of fishermen.³ Here dwelt Jonah or Jonas, a man of whom we know nothing, save as the father of ANDREW

¹ See Luke vii. 2, 3. ² See Matt. ix. 9; also 10, "many publicans."

³ "The place soon asserted its right to the name Bethsaida by the exceeding abundance of the fish we saw tumbling in the waters. The hot springs flowing in here over these rocks, and a little further on in larger volume over a clean beaten sand, warm all the ambient shallows for a hundred feet from shore, and as much vegetable matter is brought down by the springs, and probably also insects which have fallen in, all these dainties are half-cooked when they enter the lake. Evidently the fish agree to dine on these hot joints, and therefore in a large semicircle they crowd the water by myriads round the warm river mouth. Their backs are above the surface as they bask or sunbath, and jostle, crowded in the water. They gambol and splash, and the calm sea, fringed by a reeking cloud of vapour, has beyond this belt of living fish a long row of cormorants feeding on the half-boiled fish, as the fish have fed on insects under-done. White gulls poise in flocks behind the grebes or cormorants, and beyond these again ducks bustle about on the water or whiff in the air. The whole is a most curious scene, and probably it has been thus from day to day for many thousand years. I paddled along the curved line of fishes' backs and flashing tails. Some leaped into the air, others struck my boat or my paddle. Dense shoals moved in brigades as if by concert or command. But the hubbub around in the water, and the feathered mob in the sky, were all unheeded now, for we had come in full view of the land of Gennesareth."—MCGREGOR. *Red Sea on the Jordan*, pp. 344-5.

and his more illustrious brother SIMON PÉTER. When the two are first introduced to us upon the sacred page, they have removed to the neighbouring upland town of Capernaum, dwelling in a house of their own.¹ That they were in comparatively easy circumstances, may be gathered not only from their possession of this property, but from Simon's ownership of a fishing vessel.² They were not then of the very poorest: so that the declaration afterwards made by the apostle, "We have left all and followed Thee," was not a mere empty boast.

3. The early training of the youthful fishermen can but be conjectured from the nature of their employment and the habits of the time. Every brave and hardy quality would be nurtured by an avocation requiring strength, endurance, skill, and often exposing to sudden perils. Of book learning they had apparently but little. In the estimation of the Jewish magnates they were "unlearned and ignorant men."³ Their pronunciation, hard and harsh, betrayed them as Galileans.⁴ Yet the instruction common to the better class of youths in all Jewish cities would not be withheld from them. Capernaum had its synagogue,⁵ with staff of scribes; and the sons of Jonas were undoubtedly indoctrinated with the elements of Hebrew learning and tradition. That Simon could use his pen in after days, with a precision and elegance not greatly inferior to that of Paul himself, must in part be attributed to his early culture. At the same time he would be rigidly imbued with Jewish modes of thought. That he was of the sect of the Pharisees, we are nowhere informed: it is indeed improbable; but it is sufficiently apparent that, from the first, he shared the beliefs, the traditional

¹ "Peter's house," Matt. viii. 14. "The home of Simon and Andrew," Mark i. 29. See Luke iv. 38. ² Luke v. 3. ³ Acts iv. 13.

⁴ Matt. xxvi. 73. "The Galileans could not properly pronounce the gutturals, and used *th* for *sh*." ⁵ Luke viii. 41.

hopes, and the narrow principles of his countrymen. It may be observed, that the immediate neighbourhood of the heathen, in "the coasts of Tyre and Sidon," bordering upon "the land of Zabulon and Naphtali," did not tend to make the Jewish inhabitants of the latter more tolerant or lax. Rather did these cling the more earnestly to their ancestral faith, as their proud distinction from their Syrian fellow-subjects. For at this time the Roman yoke embraced all; though every Jew burned with the secret hope that by the sudden advent of a deliverer, a king, the hateful tyranny would be dispossessed, and the land become once more the heritage of JEHOUAH. These hopes and dreams give a tone not only to much of the Apostle's words and acts during the earthly life of Christ, but to his epistles also; when he was able to estimate these anticipations, and understand their deep meaning, in the light of the Christian faith.

4. Simon was most probably the elder brother. His name, a Greek form of the Hebrew Simeon, was a common one among the Jews; as many as ten, perhaps eleven, Simons or Simeons appearing in the New Testament.* It was undoubtedly the meaning of the name, rather than any honourable remembrance of the son of Jacob so called, which caused it to be so frequently bestowed. For SIMON is *Hearing*† "God hath heard me" was the word of grateful parents—akin to SAMUEL, and correlative with SAVI, or *asked of God*.

5. To what tribe the family of Jonas belonged, we have no means of knowing. Bethsaida itself was in the territory of Naphtali; but this decides nothing, as the scattered fragments of the Ten Tribes which had returned to the land of their fathers, had by no means re-settled in their

* See *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* for the enumeration.

† Not *hearer*, as frequently stated.

early tribal homes. The Galileans, in fact, were a mixed race, and it is remarkable that two of Christ's disciples from Bethsaida had *Greek* names—Philip, and Andrew himself. This fact may betoken a Gentile admixture in the respective families: it is at least remarkable that the old tribal distinctions are so little recognised in the New Testament history, all being absorbed in the general appellation of *Γαλιλαῖοι*; while still the existence of the "twelve tribes" is distinctly recognised.¹ The record of our Lord's descent from the tribe of Judah stands alone, no other genealogy appears: the probability being that the old lines of demarcation had become effaced, and the twelve tribes commingled into one nation.

¹ Acts xxi. 7. — St. Ananias of Asher, Luke ii. 26; Paul of Benjamin, Phil. iii. 5; Barnabas of Levi, Acts iv. 26. The priesthood would keep the Levitic tribe distinct.