

# Peter Was the Leader of the Early Church

by Sebastian R Fama

Much has been written on the meaning of Matthew 16:19. That is when Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Catholics, of course, acknowledge that Jesus was making Peter the head of His new Church. Our Protestant friends object. Some claim that James was the leader of the new Church. Others claim there was no leader. But Jesus Himself speaks of leaders:

A dispute arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, **and the leader** as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-26).

Notice that Jesus said the leader of the apostles must be one who serves. The point here is that there would be a leader. So, what did Jesus mean in Matthew 16. Did He give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Or, was he speaking in riddles? The book of Acts records the activities of the early Church. Reviewing what each of the apostles did following our Lord's ascension should prove helpful. All the apostles are listed in Acts 1:13. However, only four of them are named for being involved in specific situations. The four are Peter, John, James, and Philip. Their activities can be characterized as follows:

1. **Peter** leads the others in choosing a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26).
2. **Peter** preaches on Pentecost, 3,000 are converted (Acts 2:14-38).
3. **Peter** and John asked for alms (Acts 3:3).
4. **Peter** cures a crippled beggar (Acts 3:4-10).
5. **Peter** once again addresses the public, another 2,000 convert (Acts 3:12-4:4).
6. **Peter** and John brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:7).
7. **Peter** answers the charges of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12).
8. **Peter** and John defy the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19).
9. **Peter** pronounces judgement on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
10. **Peter** and the apostles answer to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-32).
11. **Peter** and John sent to Samaria (Acts 8:14-17).
12. **Peter** denounces Simon for trying to buy the power of Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-24).
13. Philip instructs the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).
14. Philip preaches the Gospel from Azotus to Caesarea (Acts 8:40).
15. **Peter** heals Aneas (Acts 9:33-35).
16. **Peter** raises Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:40-42).
17. An angel of God tells Cornelias to summon **Peter** (Acts 10:4-6).
18. God reveals to **Peter** that Gentiles are acceptable (Acts 10:9-16).
19. **Peter** baptizes the family of Cornelias (Acts 10:34-49).
20. **Peter** defends the decision to baptize Cornelius and the arguing stops (Acts 11:2-18).
21. **Peter** rescued from prison by an angel (Acts 12:6-10).
22. Paul and Barnabas appeal to the apostles at Jerusalem to rule on the Judaizers (Acts 15:2-5).
23. **Peter** rises and presents God's will on the matter (Acts 15:7-11).
24. **James** acknowledges **Peter's** authoritative statement and offers a solution (Acts 15:13-21).
25. **James's** suggestion is accepted by all and passed on for observance (Acts 15:28).
26. **James** is visited by Paul (Acts 21:18).

When Peter speaks at the Council of Jerusalem, he speaks for all. No agreement is needed. When James speaks at the council, it must be approved by all. In the Gospel we see Peter given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). In the book of Acts we see Peter using the keys of the kingdom of heaven. In the Gospel, Peter is told to confirm his brethren (Luke 22:31-32). In the book of Acts we see Peter confirming his brethren. Peter is clearly the leader and visible head of the early Church.