

Upon This Rock: Jesus or Peter?

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Upon This Rock: Jesus or Peter?

Introduction

There are many Christians who believe that the church that Jesus Christ built is founded upon Peter. They believe this in part because of the discourse between the Apostle Peter and Jesus as recorded in the gospel of Matthew. Let's take a look at this using the NASB95 translation of the bible.

Matthew 16:18

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Many believe that Jesus is calling Peter the rock upon which His church will be built. Is this an accurate understanding of the text? Let's do a bit of exegesis and see what is being discussed here.

The bolded word in brackets is the original koine Greek that was used in the New Testament.

Matthew 16:18

"I also say to you that you are **Peter <Petros>**, and upon this **rock <petra>** I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

We see that Petros is the Greek word **Petrov** and the NASB always translates it as the proper name Peter or Peter's. The King James bible does so in all occurrences except one, in John 1:42 where it translates Petros as stone.

John 1:42 KJ Authorized Version

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, (**Khfav**) which is by interpretation, A stone (**Petrov**).

John 1:42 NASB95

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter) **Petrov**.

We see then that the koine Greek term **Petrov** should always be translated as the proper name Peter, which does indeed mean stone. The word translated as Cephas is the Aramaic word **Khfav**, which was a fairly common language in the time of Jesus by the Jews. This was Peter's true name prior to it being changed by Jesus.

Let's return again to Matthew 16:18 and examine the word **petra** that is translated rock.

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Matthew 16:18

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (**petra**) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Jesus was saying, you are **Petros**, and upon this **Petra** I will build my ekklesia. To whom or what is Jesus referring to with the term **petra**? Is Jesus referring to Peter as the rock? Let's examine how rock is used in the bible.

The word translated rock is **petra**. It means a large mass of rock like a boulder, cliff or ledge. It is used to represent firmness and strength. It is also used to represent Jesus as our Rock. (See Scriptures section of this study for occurrences of the word **petra**.)

1 Corinthians 10:4

and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock **<4073 petra>** which followed them; and the rock **<4073 petra>** was Christ.

Romans 9:33

just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE **<3037 liyov lithos>** OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK **<4073 petra>** OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

It is in this context that Jesus was instructing Peter. Jesus was teaching Peter that He, the Christ/Messiah is the rock or foundation upon which the church is built.

Matthew 7:25

"And the rain fell, and the **floods came**, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Jesus is the firm foundation upon which His <ekklesia> translated church is founded. It is through our Rock of Salvation, Jesus that gives His church the solid foundation to withstand the attacks of the evil one who slams against the saints of God. Now let's review this verse with this solid understanding.

Matthew 16:18

"I also say to you that you are **Peter, (Petros)** and upon this **rock (petra, Yeshua haMachiach)** I will build My ekklesia/church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Let's continue in verse 19 as Yeshua instructs Peter on the authority and powers to be given to the ekklesia/called out assembly and not an individual.

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Matthew 16:19

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Barnes New Testament Notes, renders it this way, "A key is an instrument for opening a door. He that is in possession of it (*the keys*) has the power of access, and has a general care and administration of a house. Hence, in the Bible, a key is used as a symbol of superintendence, an emblem of power and authority."

Jesus is instructing Peter that the ekklesia holds the keys ... the emblem of power and authority for access ... to the kingdom of heaven. Dispensationalism attempts to draw a sharp distinction between the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of God, even though Scriptures do not support any such distinction. (see Appendice C of the study on Dispensationalism, *Kingdom of God verse Kingdom of Heaven: Different Places?*)

Jesus is instructing Peter that the universal ekklesia is the body of Messiah/Christ and that the ekklesia is the "access" to Salvation through Yeshua. The binding and loosing has to do with the power and authority of the body of Christ. (see eBook study on church, and the ecclesiology section of our doctrinal beliefs statement.)

Definitions

4074. *Petrov Petros*; (pet'-ros)

a noun akin to **4073**, used as a proper name; apparently a primary word; TDNT-6:100,835; n pr m "a stone" or "a boulder," *Peter*, one of the twelve apostles:—

NAS-Peter (150), Peter's (5).

AV-Peter 161, stone 1; 162

Peter = "a rock or a stone"

1) one of the twelve disciples of Jesus

4073 *petra* *petra* (pet'-ra)

a (large mass of) *rock*:—

from the same as **4074**; TDNT-6:95,834; n f

NAS-rock (10), rocks (3), rocky (2).

AV-rock 16; 16

1) a rock, cliff or ledge

1a) a projecting rock, crag, rocky ground

1b) a rock, a large stone

1c) metaph. a man like a rock, by reason of his firmness and strength of soul

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3037 *liyov lithos* (lee'-thos)

apparently a primary word; TDNT-4:268,534; n m ; a *stone*:—

NAS-another (4), millstone* (1), stone (38), stone's (1), stones (15).

AV-stone 49, one stone 4, another 4, stumbling stone + 4348 2, mill stone + 3457 1;

1) a stone

1a) of small stones

1b) of building stones

1c) metaph. of Christ

Scriptures

4073 *petra* (pet'-ra)

Matthew 7:24-25

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the **rock <4073 petra>**.

25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the **rock <4073 petra>**.

Matthew 16:18

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this **rock <4073 petra>** I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matthew 27:51

And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the **rocks <4073 petra>** were split.

Matthew 27:60

and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the **rock <4073 petra>**; and he rolled a large **stone <3037. lithos>** against the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Mark 15:46

Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the **rock <4073 petra>**; and he rolled a **stone <3037. lithos>** against the entrance of the tomb.

Luke 6:48

he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the **rock <4073 petra>**; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

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Luke 8:6

"Other *seed* fell on **rocky <4073 petra> soil**, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.

Luke 8:13

"Those on the **rocky <4073 petra> soil** are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

Romans 9:33

just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A **STONE <3037 lithos> OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK <4073 petra> OF OFFENSE**, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

1 Corinthians 10:4

and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual **rock <4073 petra>** which followed them; and the **rock <4073 petra>** was Christ.

1 Peter 2:8

and, "A **STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK <4073 petra> OF OFFENSE**"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.

Revelation 6:15

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the **rocks <4073 petra>** of the mountains;

Revelation 6:16

and they *said to the mountains and to the **rocks <4073 petra>**, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;