

Upon This Rock: Identifying the Stone & the Rock in Mt 16:18: the Parenthesis in Jn 1:42, the Wise Man in Mt 7:24-25, the Lord in 1 Cor 3:11, the Stones in 1 Pet 2:5

11. Simon is Peter's real name which is made evident on the occasion of his being introduced to the Lord by his brother Andrew in:

John 1:42 - Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon [Hebrew: שִׁמְעוֹן *Shim'on* or *Simeon*; Greek translation: Σίμων, *Simōn*] the son of John; you shall be called Cephas [The Lord spoke Aramaic: כִּפָּא *Keypha*; John's Greek transliteration: Κηφᾶς, *Kēphas*]" (which is translated Peter [Πέτρος, *Petros*]). [See visual: "The Names of the First Apostle"]

12. The Lord addresses the fisherman by his legal name, Simon the son of John. If he were Anglo-Saxon his name would be Simon Johnson. Then Jesus issues him a sobriquet which we might call "Rocky." It is a descriptive diminutive nickname which is important in the interpretation of this passage.
13. The Aramaic *kēypha*' means "rock" but its Greek translation, *petros*, means "stone" or a "part of a rock." We will see the significance of all of this when we get to Matthew 16:18.
14. Nevertheless, in John 1:42 the Lord has set up a paronomasia, a play on words, which He used in Matthew 16.
15. This play on words will introduce a prophecy concerning Peter's delegated authority with reference to the new dispensation of the Church.
16. In Matthew 16:17, the Lord indicates to "Simon" that his ability to correctly identify Him as the Christ, or Messiah, was not from Simon's personal perceptive abilities but instead it was by means of divine revelation from God the Father.
17. Still, Peter is the first to make a significant advance in understanding the Lord's identity and purpose and so Jesus selects him for a special mission that includes an investiture and a commission.
18. First comes the pun, and it is this play on words that has caused a ruckus for almost two millennia about who has authority over the people who make up the body of Christ.

IV. MATTHEW 16:18

Matthew 16:18 - "And I also say to you that you are Peter, [Πέτρος, *Petros*] and upon this rock [Πέτρα, *Petra*] I will build My church [ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*]; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

1. It is agreed among many theologians that our Lord most likely spoke Aramaic. This is a Semitic language, closely related to Hebrew and Phoenician, which originated in Syria to the north of Israel. It has two major dialects; eastern Aramaic called Chaldee and its western vernacular called Syriac. Our Lord's dialect of the Syriac branch of the language is called Galilean Aramaic.

2. The question that arises from verse 18 has to do with the pun that is created from Simon's nickname. "Peter" is the masculine proper noun Πέτρος, *Petros*. This is followed by the prepositional phrase "upon this rock" where the word "rock" is the locative of place from the feminine noun πέτρα, *petra*.
3. *Petros* means "little stone" whereas *petra* is the word for a massive "rock." However this is not the case in the Aramaic where the words for "Peter" and for "rock" are exactly the same: כִּיפָא *Kēypha'*.
4. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* in its article on the pope asserts that since in the Aramaic "rock" refers to Peter then it is upon him that Jesus intends to build His church:

The proof that Christ constituted St. Peter head of His Church is found in Matthew 16:17-19 where the office is solemnly promised to the Apostle. The word for Peter and for rock in the original Aramaic is one and the same; this renders it evident that the various attempts to explain the term "rock" as having reference not to Peter himself but to something else are misinterpretations. It is Peter who is the rock of the Church.

5. It is true that the Lord spoke in Aramaic. However, the intent and meaning of our Lord's statements to Peter as recorded in John 1:42 and Matthew 16:18 must be evaluated from the original language of the New Testament.
6. The apostles John and Matthew wrote their Gospels under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit whose language of choice was Koinē Greek, not Galilean Aramaic.
7. In John 1:42, the apostle added an instructive parenthesis to his record of the initial meeting between the Lord and Simon:

John 1:42 - Jesus looked at Simon, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas [כִּיפָא *Kēypha'* is Aramaic translated by John into Koinē Greek as Κηφᾶς, *Kēphas*]" (which is translated Peter [here John gives the Greek transliteration: Πέτρος, *Petros*]).

8. The Lord spoke *Keypha'* which means "rock" in Aramaic but John is led by the Holy Spirit to instruct us that *Keypha'*, "a rock," is to be translated into the Greek as *Petros*, "a stone."
 9. Thus, in Matthew 16:18, we read this account of the Lord's comments to Peter as inspired by the Holy Spirit:
- Matthew 16:18 -** "And I also say to you that you are Peter [Πέτρος, *Petros*: "a stone"], and upon this rock [Πέτρα, *Petra*: "rock"] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."
10. The Catholics assert that the "rock" is Peter; Protestants have a mixed view, some claiming that it refers to Christ while others contend it makes reference to Peter's confession of the Gospel in Matthew 16:16.

11. First of all let's look at the etymology of the words. Dr. Julius R. Mantey is co-author with H. E. Dana of one of the more popular Greek grammars, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillian Co., 1927, 1955). Dr. Mantey wrote an article entitled *Evidence that the Perfect Tense in Matthew 16:19 is Mistranslated*. In this article he writes the following with reference to the words *petros* and *petra*:

In a study of every occurrence of the words for rocks in the Old and New Testaments, the books of Xenophon, Diodorus Siculus, Josephus, Strabo, and Plutarch we discovered that the most prevalent meaning of πέτρα (*petra*) was a mass or cluster of rocks such as a cliff. In about one third of its usages it meant either a huge boulder or bedrock.

Πέτρος (*petros*) always denoted a small rock or stone. It never had the connotation of πέτρα (*petra*). Πέτροι (*petroi*) were used most frequently to throw at enemies.

According to Liddell and Scott πέτρα (*petra*) (rock, a mass of rocks) and πέτρος (*petros*) were never used interchangeably [A *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1397-98]. There is no example in good authors of πέτρα (*petra*) with the significance of πέτρος (*petros*). Πέτρος (*petros*), a stone, piece of rock, is thus distinguished from πέτρα (*petra*).¹
12. Consequently, we must distinguish between our Lord's historical comment to Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration in Caesarea Philippi and the divine inspiration of Matthew under the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
13. The pun was set up by our Lord at his first meeting with Simon in John 1:42 where the significance of the Greek translation of *Kēypha*' is purposefully pointed out to be πέτρος (*petros*).
14. At the Sermon on the Mount the Lord makes clear, through metaphor, the material of a wise man's foundation:

Matthew 7:24 - "Everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock [πέτρα, *petra*].

v. 25 - "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock [πέτρα, *petra*].
15. The Lord is affirmed by Paul to be the church's foundation in:

1 Corinthians 3:11 - For no man can lay a foundation [θεμέλιος, *themelios*: **metaphorical for Christ**] other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
16. In Matthew 7:24 the Lord indicates that His words heard and acted upon may be compared to a house built upon a foundation of bedrock. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 this bedrock foundation is said to be Jesus Christ.

¹ Julius R. Mantey, "Evidence that the Perfect Tense in Matthew 16:19 is Mistranslated," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 58 (1939), 243-249.

17. Consequently the “rock” of Matthew 16:18 may be viewed as either the gospel which Peter acted upon in verse 16 or the Lord who is said to be the foundation in 1 Corinthians 3:11.
18. The answer of whether the “rock” is the gospel or Jesus Christ is discovered by examining what is to be built on the foundation. The Lord says, “... upon this rock [πέτρα, *petra*: “rock”] I will build My church.”
19. The word for “church” is the feminine singular noun ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia* and it refers in a general sense to any assembly of individuals.
20. The question is, “To what kind of assembly does the Lord refer?” In Scripture, the assembly of believers can be classified in two ways: (1) the local assembly of believers for the function of worship, or (2) the totality of the body of Christ that makes up the “spiritual house” referred to by Peter in:
1 Peter 2:5 - You, as living stones [λίθος, *lithos*], are being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.