

PROFITABLY UNDERSTANDING TRAGICALLY MISUNDERSTOOD BIBLE PASSAGES
Part VII: Understanding Christ's Matthew 16:18 Claim To Build His Church In Relation To Peter
(Matthew 16:13-23)

I. Introduction

- A. The Roman Catholic Church's Confraternity version holds that the "rock" in Matthew 16:18 upon which Jesus would build His Church was Peter, that Church being the Roman Catholic Church, and the "keys" of Matthew 16:19 would then be the infallible authority Peter would wield as pope, and from which all succeeding popes through his line would wield that authority, L. Boettner, Roman Catholicism (1978), p. 104. **Yet, Peter voiced Satan's words in Matthew 16:21-23 for which Jesus corrected him as being fallible, and, even as an Apostle, Peter had to be corrected by Paul for promoting error (Gal. 2:11)!**
- B. Some Protestants hold that Matthew 16:18 **CONTRASTS** Peter with Christ, the "Rock" since the Greek word for "Peter" is *petros* ("a loose stone") and the word for "rock" is *petra*, "a large rock; rock cliff," J. F. Walvoord, Matthew (1974), p. 123. Other Protestants assert the "rock" here is Peter's "profession of faith" in Matthew 16:16, 17, cf. Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Matthew 16:18. **Yet, the Catholic Bible claims Jesus spoke in Aramaic at Matthew 16:18, and the Aramaic word for "Peter" or "rock" in Aramaic is the SAME, i.e., "Cephas," so that Jesus did NOT distinguish between "Peter" and the "rock", but claimed Peter was the rock upon which He would build His Church [in support of the Catholic papacy at Rome] The New American Bible for Catholics, 1986, fn. To Matthew 16:18.**
- C. For blessing, we thus view the verse in its litero-grammatico-historical context to learn what Jesus meant:
- II. Understanding Christ's Matthew 16:18 Claim To Build His Church In Relation To Peter, 16:13-23.**

- A. In seeking to understand Jesus' Matthew 16:18 comments, we note His references to "binding and loosing" in the immediate context of Matthew 16:19 were regularly used in "Rabbinic Canon-Law" in that era, cf. Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 1972 one vol. ed., ii, p. 85.
- B. Thus, we seek to learn what Jesus' words there would have meant to His **Jewish** disciples (as follows):
1. The rabbis in Jesus' era taught that God would not have created the **physical** world unless it rested on some **moral** "foundation of piety and acceptance of God's law," Ibid., p. 82.
 2. Thus, as their rabbinic teaching went, when God was about to build the world, He "beheld that Abraham would arise in the future," so God "said: Behold I have found a Rock (Petra) to build on it, and to found the world,' whence also Abraham is called a Rock (Tsur) as it is said: Look unto the Rock whence ye are hewn.'" (Ibid., p. 83 in citing Yalkut on Numb. 23:9, vol. I, p. 243)
 3. Thus, this rabbinic account uses the **Greek transliteration of *petra*** ("rock") in its **Hebrew** account to picture a **moral principal**, and the **regular Hebrew** word, *tsur* (also meaning "rock") for Abraham!
 4. Hence, Edersheim rightly suggests that **though** Jesus **spoke in ARAMAIC**, He alluded to this rabbinic reference, revealing Peter would be like Abraham in his generation, that: "Thou are Peter (Petros) -- a Stone or Rock -- and upon this Petra -- the Rock, the Petrine -- will I build My Church.'" (Ibid.) **Jesus thus USED a rabbinic phrase Peter understood to convey that UPON the IDEA that Peter had just voiced -- that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God -- He would build His Church! (16:16, 18)**
 5. For this reason, Matthew 16:19 in the Greek Testament reveals the "binding" and "loosing" would be initiated in heaven, not by some papal authority of Peter on the earth, and Peter would only proclaim it:
 - a. The words rendered "shall be bound . . . shall be loosed" in Matthew 16:19 (KJV) literally translated mean "shall **have been** bound . . . shall **have been** loosed. Heaven, not the apostles, initiates all binding and loosing, while the apostles announce these things." (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn.)
 - b. Thus, Peter would one day proclaim God's truth that had been revealed from God to him just as he had recently voiced Christ's true identity that the Father had revealed to him back in Matthew 16:17.

Lesson: Due to the Jewish context involved, and due to the fact that Peter was seen to be fallible in the immediate context (Mtt. 16:21-23) and later as an Apostle (Gal. 2:11ff), in Matthew 16:18, Jesus did NOT claim He would build His church on an infallible papacy headed by Peter! Rather, He would build it upon the great confession Peter had made by the Father's revelation about Jesus' identity!

Application: May we trust Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so enjoy the blessings of salvation and Christian service that come to our lives as they did for Peter who first voiced his great confession!