

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing the rock as described in the scriptures.

I would encourage you to go to <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info> as I continue to update the site. I have links to several specific features below. Let me know what you think, whether you have any suggestions, or any requests.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

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The Rock

By Jared D. Edson

Matthew 16:14-22

14 And when Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?

15 And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

16 He said unto them, **But whom say ye that I am?**

17 **And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**

18 **And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.**

19 **And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

20 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

21 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus, the Christ.

22 From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

There are many peculiar beliefs to be found in the world concerning Jesus, the Church, the Gospel he taught, his apostles, and how religious authority has been handed down through history. Very often it seems that the loudest voice is the one that is accepted, even when there are clear reasons for why it might not be the most correct.

The interpretation that many have concerning this passage is that Jesus “clearly” meant to say that Peter is the rock upon which Jesus would build his church. This interpretation is most clearly claimed by the Catholic church, which claims that Peter was the first bishop of Rome, or in other words, the first Pope in the church, and that the “strength” of the Catholic church comes from being built upon Peter – the rock that Jesus declared him to be.

That interpretation begins to crumble into dust when viewing other scriptures and the writings of the other apostles. Consider this – just after declaring that “Peter is the rock” (as some claim) – Jesus had to rebuke the devil which had just tempted Peter.

Matthew 16:23-24

23 Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be done unto thee.

24 **But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan;** thou art an offense unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

That is a pretty bad start, isn't it? The Rock was nowhere near as strong as we would hope it should be. Mere seconds after Jesus declared him to be the Rock, Jesus had to cast a devil out of that Rock.

One could argue then that Jesus meant that **eventually** when he was converted Peter would become that Rock. Jesus didn't give a particular timeframe for the fulfillment of this prophecy about the church being built up, so we still need to provide some evidence that this is what Jesus meant before we can make that conclusion.

We need to turn to other scriptures for evidence of who "the Rock" was declared to be so that we can rest comfortably with understanding it.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea,
2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat,
4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and **that Rock was Christ**.
5 But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Paul did not seem to believe that the Rock was Peter, but Christ.

Jesus made some rather more indirect references to whom the chief cornerstone was, several times in fact:

Matthew 21:42-48

42 And Jesus said unto them, When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?
43 They said unto him, He will destroy those miserable, wicked men and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons.
44 **Jesus said unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doings, and it is marvelous in our eyes.**
45 Therefore, say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.
46 **For whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.**
47 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke of them.
48 And they said among themselves, Shall this man think that he alone can spoil this great kingdom? And they were angry with him.

In this and other passages in Mark and Luke referring to the same conversation, the Pharisees perceived that Jesus spoke of himself as the stone which became the head of the corner. Using similar language, Peter further spelled out the meaning of the prophecy to those who ordered the execution of Jesus, as if to tell us that Jesus did not refer to Peter as the rock, or stone. Instead, he directly addresses the prophecy by saying Jesus is the stone that the builders set at naught.

Acts 4:8-12

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel,

9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole,

10 Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

Paul further expanded on this in his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:13-21

13 But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us,

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby,

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off and to them that were nigh.

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God,

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone,

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord,

Peter again defers to Jesus as this foundation:

1 Peter 2:5-8

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore, also it is contained in the scripture: Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you, therefore, who believe, he is precious--but unto them who are disobedient, who stumble at the word, through disobedience, whereunto they were appointed, **a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.**

8 For the stone which the builders disallowed is become the head of the corner.

The original prophecy came through David and later is expanded upon by Isaiah:

Psalms 118:19-23

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord,
20 **This gate of the Lord**, into which the righteous shall enter.

21 I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me and **art become my salvation.**

22 The stone which the builders refused has become the headstone of the corner.

23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

Isaiah 28:14-17

14 Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.

15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement, when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.

16 Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste.

17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

Many of these passages refer to the chief cornerstone as Christ, but didn't Jesus plainly say that Peter was the "rock," and not necessarily the chief cornerstone? That may not be the case, for we see many other scriptures referring to the Lord as the "rock."

Deuteronomy 32:4 **He is the Rock**; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

Deuteronomy 32:15 But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxen fat; thou art grown thick; thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook **God** which made him and lightly esteemed **the Rock of his salvation.**

Deuteronomy 32:18 **Of the Rock that begat thee** thou art unmindful and hast forgotten **God that formed thee.**

1 Samuel 2:2 There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none besides thee; **neither is there any rock like our God.**

2 Samuel 22:2 And he said, **The Lord is my rock**, and my fortress, and my deliverer,

2 Samuel 22:3 **The God of my rock**; in him will I trust; he is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my savior; thou savest me from violence.

2 Samuel 22:47 **The Lord liveth**; and blessed be **my rock**; and **exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation**.

2 Samuel 23:3 **The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me**, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

Psalms 18:2 **The Lord is my rock**, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Psalms 18:31 For who is God save the Lord? Or **who is a rock save our God**,

Psalms 18:46 **The Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock**; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.

Psalms 28:1 Unto thee will I cry, **O Lord, my rock**; be not silent to me, lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.

Psalms 42:9 I will say unto **God, my rock**, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Psalms 62:2 **He only is my rock and my salvation**; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.

Psalms 62:6 **He only is my rock and my salvation**; he is my defense; I shall not be moved.

Psalms 62:7 **In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength** and my refuge is in God.

Psalms 78:35 And they remembered that **God was their Rock** and the high God **their Redeemer**.

Psalms 89:26 He shall cry unto me, **Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation**.

Psalms 92:15 To show that **the Lord is upright; he is my rock**, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Psalms 94:22 But the Lord is my defense; and **my God is the rock** of my refuge.

Psalms 95:1 Oh, come, let us **sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation**.

Isaiah 17:10 Because thou hast forgotten **the God of thy salvation** and hast not been mindful of **the Rock of thy strength**, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants and shalt set it with strange slips;

With the many passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament, including Peter's own testimony which shows that the Lord our God is the Rock of our salvation -- which constitutes a preponderance of evidence -- how are we to reconcile the interpretation that Jesus declared Peter to be the rock upon which the church would be built?

Let's revisit our opening scripture:

Matthew 16:16-20

16 He said unto them, **But whom say ye that I am?**

17 **And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**

18 And Jesus answered and said unto him, **Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.**

19 And I say also unto thee, **That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

20 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The Catholic church focuses on the phrase “thou art Peter” and the word “rock” while ignoring one little bitty word – “this.” It is not accidentally placed, but it is thoroughly ignored by those that seek to promote Peter’s station in the church.

We notice in careful reading that Jesus does not directly or indirectly (by suggestion) refer to Peter himself as the rock, but Jesus said “upon this rock”. Why didn’t Jesus just plainly say, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon **you/thee** I will build my church...”? Instead, there must be something else that Jesus meant, otherwise he would not have chosen his words so carefully.

We must look at what the antecedent -- the “thing” that a word is previously defined from -- for what the word “this” references, since it is clearly not a pronoun referencing Peter himself. “This” is an object reference, so we need to go back earlier to trace the origin of this object. We are brought to the previous verse:

Matthew 16:18 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not **revealed this unto thee**, but my Father who is in heaven.

Clearly, the Father did not reveal to Peter that he (Peter) was the “this” object being referred to. But what is the “this” object that was revealed to Peter? We go back further still to the verse previous to this one:

17 And Simon Peter answered and said, ***Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.***

The order of events matters, and should not be ignored, because the context of the whole passage depends on this order of events.

1. Peter declared that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
2. Jesus says that flesh and blood have not revealed “this” to him (Peter), but rather that the Father had revealed it (“this”).
3. Jesus says that upon “this” rock the church would be built.

The revelation by the Father to men that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God is the “this” that Jesus referred to, not Peter himself.

Catholic doctrine presumes that the use of “Peter” and “rock” is a pun in the Greek language put there by the writer to reference “Petros” (the masculine word for “rock”) with “petra” (the feminine word for rock) to indicate Paul being the male husband to the female church. Such silly antics to achieve a doctrine that contradicts all other scripture seems far-fetched for any legitimacy. Petros the petra indeed.

For reference to the Catholic dogma, we read the following:

<https://instituteofcatholicculture.org/articles/thou-art-peter-part-ii/>

In the Greek text of Matthew 16:18 there is a peculiarity that can be confusing. The word used for Peter, as Oswald notes, is *Petros*, whereas the following word translated as rock is *petra*. “Thou art *Petros* and upon this *petra* I will build my Church.” Why is there a difference? In the original Aramaic in which the text was written, there is only one word that would be used for “rock” in this case, and that is *kepha*, a masculine noun. “Thou art *Kepha* and upon this *kepha* I will build my Church.” Translating the text into Greek is where the difficulty occurs. In Greek, the word for rock is *petra*, a feminine noun, and according to Greek grammatical rules, a man cannot be named with a feminine case ending. Thus, to deal with this problem the translator was forced to replace the feminine ending of *petra* (-a) with a masculine ending (-os), modifying a Greek word to fit the particular circumstance. The exact translation into English would read, “thou art Rock and upon this rock I will build my Church,” leaving no room for misunderstanding.)

Again, completely ignoring what the “this” references, the context is completely lost.

We can see how the Catholic church – and a few others – have taken this meaning and focused on one verse rather than the preponderance of evidence and a forced loss of context to defend an incorrect reading of scripture.

The importance of the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the son of the living God, is far more important to our understanding of how the church is supposed to live than to how it can be used to consolidate power in earthly hands.

How has Catholicism – and by extension most of Protestant Catholicism – used the flawed understanding of the passage (and evidently all other passages referring to God as the Rock) to promote their origins, and thus to grow their church?

Catholics generally believe that Peter was the first bishop of Rome, or in other words, the first Pope (the word “pope” meaning “papa” or “father”, often meaning “spiritual father”) of the Catholic church. Here is a listing of what the Catholic church claims to be the first popes – from the online Catholic Encyclopedia:

<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12272b.htm>

St. Peter (32-67)

St. Linus (67-76)
St. Anacletus (Cletus) (76-88)
St. Clement I (88-97)
St. Evaristus (97-105)
St. Alexander I (105-115)

Up to the current time there are reported to have been 267 popes including the current pope, who also happens to be the first American pope to be elected – Leo XIV (Robert Francis Cardinal Prevost).

(Incidentally, other branches of what might be considered “Catholic” include the Eastern Catholic churches and the Roman Catholic Church, while other forms of Christian religion include Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches, some of which are based on patriarchies instead of papal -pope- based hierarchies, in addition to the myriad protestant and pentecostal churches that have sprung up in the last several hundred years.)

It is the claim by Catholic doctrine that Jesus appointed Peter to be the rock of the church, which serves as the primary claim to authority by the Catholic church today. We can see that this is an erroneous claim by virtue of the seemingly intentional misread of just one verse of scripture. But what a difference it makes!

True spiritual authority comes from God. By the time Jesus began his ministry, the authority of the pharisees and scribes had become a birthright handed down from father to son, and thus there were “noble” houses among the Levites who carried more or less authority in the nation of Israel. Jesus’ expounding of doctrine and understanding showed a clear difference in authority from what preceded him.

Mark 1:20 And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

Luke 4:36 And they were all amazed and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! For with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.

Yet it was even in their own scriptures that they were given to know that authority – priesthood authority – was given by God because the Psalmist David had declared it so in his prophetic song:

Psalms 110:1-4

1 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

2 The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

3 Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning; thou hast the dew of thy youth.

4 The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was the high priest of Salem who lived in the days of Abraham, and to identify legitimate priesthood authority through someone that was not a Levite, clearly shows that authority is God's to give and not for man to give. We are reminded in the book of Hebrews about this:

Hebrews 5:1-6

1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins,

2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

4 And no man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee--

6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,

Thus we find that true spiritual authority is declared by God himself, and not after the order of men. The revelation of Jesus Christ is therefore dismissed in Catholic doctrine in favor of "church" authority – by a long line of elected popes.

What Jesus did in his ministry was, for lack of a better word, a revelation to those who saw it and understood. The authority that came from Jesus brought to the minds and memory of those in the church the understanding that the living God is their source of life and peace, and that there is no substitute for the very real Jesus Christ. Jesus knew this and stated it outright to Peter, perhaps less for Peter to know and more because the other disciples needed to know. A living God is able to reveal these things to us now, so we are not limited to only the testimonies of others.

There are many churches today which profess the authority of scripture, while the scriptures testify of Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith.