

Q: Did Jesus appoint Peter to a perpetual office (Pope) as head of His Church in Matthew 16:13-20? (Part 2)

In my last column, we looked at Biblical evidence showing Jesus clearly appointing Peter as head of His Church. While many Protestant theologians are now starting to admit this point, they draw the line at conceding that his position was also an actual office that would have successors to our present day.

Perhaps the best response to this objection comes from the historical writings of the Early Church Fathers who overwhelmingly understood **Matthew 16:13-20** (“*you are Peter, upon this rock I will build my church*”) as instituting a perpetual office, and that there would be an authoritative successor to Peter after his death. We will look at some of these stunning quotes in my next column (**Part 3**).

But **Matthew 16** itself provides an ample answer to this question of succession as well, as there is much more happening here than one might see at first glance. Throughout the New Testament, the inspired authors frequently quote from the Old Testament -to give a deeper context to what they are writing, and often to indicate a fulfillment of a prior Old Testament teaching or prophecy.

In **Matthew 16:16-19**, Jesus is actually paralleling **Isaiah 22:19-22**, a passage that describes the vacating and filling of the office of “prime minister” in the Davidic Kingdom, an office started centuries ago by King David himself. Notice the striking similarity between the two phrases here, particularly towards the end: “*I will thrust you (Shebna) from your office... and I will... commit your authority to his (Eliakim’s) hand; and he shall be a father (“pope” means “papa”, a child’s name for father in Latin) to... the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place.*”

The whole point of this **Isaiah 22** parallel is to shed light on what Jesus is doing with Peter here. He is appointing him to this very office, a perpetual office in the unending Kingdom of David, of which Jesus is now both the fulfillment and rightful heir: “*the Lord God will give him [Jesus] the throne of David his father and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (**Luke 1:32-33**).

The New Testament fulfillment of this perpetual Davidic Kingdom office of the King’s “prime minister” is the office of Pope, the head of Jesus’ Church, and in **Matthew 16**, Peter is appointed by Jesus’ to this very office!

We see a similar filling of the office of Apostle in **Acts 1:16-26** after the death of Judas, with Peter (because he was the Pope!) authoritatively proclaiming: “*the holy Spirit spoke beforehand through the mouth of David, concerning Judas... ‘Let his*

encampment become desolate... And: 'May another take his office.' ". Now if Judas had an office to be filled, how much more Peter, the head of the Apostles!

Because the office of Peter is such an important point regarding legitimate authority in the Christian Church today, many have simply rejected this declaration by Jesus, and all the consistent testimony of the early Church, and have tried to suggest that Jesus was not really founding His church on Peter at all.

The first objection states that in **Mat 16:18**, the original inspired Greek text reads, "*You are 'Petros' [Peter] and upon this 'Petra' [rock] I will build my church*". The argument goes that, because petros and petra are different words, Jesus is not really building His church on Peter here. But in Greek, just like in French, there can be masculine and feminine forms of the same word, and this is the case with petros and petra. They are not essentially different words, but are synonyms for the **same** word. Simon's new name would be rendered as Petros rather than Petra simply because you would never give a man the female form of a word for his name. The point is, Jesus is saying to Peter, you are rock and upon this rock I will build My church.

Incidentally, when Jesus gave Simon his new name of Kephas/Petros (John 1:42), up until then, this name had been reserved for God alone! Whenever God changes someone's name in Scripture, it always indicates He has something important in mind for them. (e.g. Saul becomes Paul, Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel). And in this case, Peter has received a particularly special name indeed, so we should expect that God has something very important in mind for him...

Others respond that Jesus isn't actually building His Church on Peter, the person, here, but on his "confession of faith": "*you are the Messiah*". Now obviously Peter's statement that Jesus is the Messiah is of critical importance, and in fact is actually further evidence of God's special guidance of Peter alone, apart from the other Apostles. But regardless, straightforward grammar tells us that such a theory just can't be true. In both English and Greek grammar, the statement, "*this rock*", must refer to the closest noun in the same sentence, and that is "*Peter*", **NOT** his "confession of faith" some two sentences earlier!

And not only that, the context of these verses is all about Peter and what Jesus is giving him. In fact Jesus refers to Peter no less than nine times in three verses here: "*Blessed are you, Simon... You are Peter... you... you... you...*"! It's all about Peter.

Evangelical scholar, Dr Oscar Cullman, writing in one of the most respected Greek dictionaries around, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, summarizes our above two points from an unbiased, scholarly Protestant perspective writing: The obvious pun which has made its way into the Greek text . . . suggests a material identity between petra and Petros . . . as it is impossible to differentiate strictly between the two words. . . . Petros himself **is this petra**, not just his faith or his confession. . . . The idea of the Reformers that he is referring to the faith of Peter is

quite inconceivable. . . . For there is no reference here to the faith of Peter. Rather, the parallelism of “thou art Rock” and “on this rock I will build” shows that the second rock can only be the same as the first. It is thus evident that Jesus is referring to Peter, to whom he has given the name Rock. . . . To this extent Roman Catholic exegesis is right and all Protestant attempts to evade this interpretation are to be rejected.”

Stay tuned for Part 3 where we’ll look at the early Church and see whether we historically see a successor to St. Peter’s office or not... and we do!

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