

**The Church of the Servant King**  
**Survey of the Bible Series**  
**The Gospel of Luke**

SB\_LK9B\_Peter's Confession

**Peter's Confession (9:18-20 cf. Matt 16:13-20)**

Peter's answer that Jesus was "the Christ of God" (v. 20) was an acknowledgment that Jesus was the Messiah. The Greek word  $\text{Χριστός}$  is the same as the Hebrew word for *Messiah* and means *the anointed One*. Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. the Old Testament) were very clear that the Messiah was more than a human; he was God (Is 9:6; Jer 23:5-6; Mic 5:2).

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace. (Is 9:6)

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a **Branch of righteousness; a King** shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called; **The Lord Our Righteousness**. (Jer 23:5-6)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel **Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting**. (Mic 5:2)

Luke does not record the more lengthy exchange between Peter and Jesus as Matthew does. In that exchange recorded in **Matthew 16:17-19**, Jesus says:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter [ $\text{Πέτρος}$ ] – **Petros**], and on this rock [ $\text{πέτρα}$  - **petra**] I will build My church [ $\text{ἐκκλησία}$  – **assembly**], and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*, and *whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*.

I've italicized the phrases that have been the subject of much controversy and the basis for the argument advanced by the Roman Catholic Church that Peter was the first pope.

Did Jesus mean that He would build his church on Peter so that Peter was the first Pope – the argument advanced by the Roman Catholic Church? Or, did Jesus mean that He would build his "church" on Himself, the Rock ( $\text{πέτρα}$ ), whereas Peter ( $\text{Πέτρος}$  – stone) was really just a chip of the Rock – the argument advanced by many Protestants? Accordingly, I have the following observations and comments to make in this regard:

- Some exegetical observations include:
  - The Greek word for *Peter* is  $\text{Πέτρος}$  (*petros*) and is in the masculine gender.
  - The Greek word for *Rock* is  $\text{πέτρα}$  (*petra*) and is in the feminine gender.
  - The Greek word for church is  $\text{ἐκκλησία}$  (*ekklesia*) and means *assembly*.
- Building on these exegetical observations, here are some interpretive comments:
  - The future tense of the verb "I will build" indicates that the foundation of the "church" is yet to come.
  - Much is sometimes made of the distinction between  $\text{Πέτρος}$  (rock, stone – masc. gender) and  $\text{πέτρα}$  (rock – fem. gender).
    - It is argued that the rock on which the "church" (as in the Church Age "church" and body of Christ) is to be built is not Peter, who is a mere stone, but Jesus himself, the rock of foundation (cf. 1 Pe 2:5-8).

- Had Jesus wanted to say that Peter was a stone in contrast with Jesus the Rock, the more common word would have been ●(□□) (lithos) which refers to a stone of any size. However, if Jesus had used ●(□□), there would have been no pun or play on words (i.e. petros – petra).
- Jesus is using a figure of speech in Matthew 16:18 known as a *metaphor*, i.e. one term is used to represent something else. [Note: a simile is a figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared, e.g. “he is solid like a tree.”] In His metaphor, Jesus is saying He will build His church on a *rock*. The *rock* is the metaphorical term.
- The problem with metaphors in the Bible is that sometimes broad generalizations can be made about their meaning in all instances based upon their use in one passage, e.g.
  - Some have opined that leaven always represents evil; however, we have seen other studies that it is not always so in the Bible, e.g. the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33.
  - Jesus is said to be the church’s foundation in 1 Co 3:11; however, in Eph 2:19-20, the apostles and the prophets are the foundation and Jesus is the cornerstone.
  - In Matt 16:18, Peter has the keys, yet in Re 1:18 and 3:7, Jesus has the keys.
  - In Jn 9:5, Jesus is the light of the world, yet in Matt 5:14, His disciples are.
- Metaphors should be interpreted based upon their immediate context
- In this passage, Jesus is the builder of the “church”, therefore it would be using mixed metaphors to see Him as the foundation also.
- We must allow that an objective analysis of this passage could see Peter in some way being the foundation of the “church”, yet not force us to adopt the Roman Catholic views of papal succession, infallibility, or the priority of Peter.
  - Eph 2:20 does indicate that the apostles and the prophets are the foundation of the Church
  - Peter and the other apostles would not have understood Jesus’ reference to the “church” as anything other than an *assembly* of those who believed in Jesus. They had no concept of the New Testament Church of Acts that would consist of Jews and Gentiles

Various interpretations of this passage have been presented over the years, all of which are based upon the assumption that the “church” to which Jesus referred was the Church established after Pentecost. The **major interpretations** are:

- Jesus was indicating that He would build His Church upon Himself in contrast to Peter who, although a rock, did not match Jesus. *This view is not really supported by the text.*
- The Church is built upon Peter and the other apostles as the building’s foundation stones (Eph 2:20; Re 21:14). *This doesn’t really explain Jesus’ statements and also implies that Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16 anticipated the Church Age.*
- The Church is built upon Peter’s testimony of faith based upon revelation given to him by the heavenly Father. *This view has some basis in the text assuming a correct understanding of the word “church” in context.*
- Jesus was praising Peter for his accurate statement about Him, and was introducing His work of building the Church on Himself. *This view has some basis in the text and is similar to the previous point.*

While I could accept any of the above interpretations, I prefer the following interpretation:

- Peter was the first to make this confession that “Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
- Peter’s special apostolic authority in the form of the “keys of the kingdom” relates to Peter’s re-offer of the kingdom to Israel (“church” = assembly of Jews in Acts 3 especially 3:19).
  - Peter was granted the privilege of re-offering the kingdom first to Israel.

- Peter had no special authority to bind or loose except the binding or loosing that would occur as a result of Israel's acceptance or rejection of the truth. The same privilege was extended to the other apostles in Matt 18:18.
- A point of confusion: the fact that the word church has a general meaning (i.e. "assembly") and a more technical meaning (i.e. "Church" = body of Christ in a different age) is significant.
  - Jesus' use of the word "church" to refer to an *assembly* of Jews at a point in time future to Matthew 16 and the fact that Peter would re-offer the kingdom to the "church" (non-technical usage, i.e. *assembly* of Jews) in Acts 3 is often confused to be a reference to the "church" of the Church Age.
- I have no major issue with those who view Peter as simply the first among equals (i.e. the other apostles) to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, especially in view of Matthew 18:18.
  - However, to limit the explanation to that point alone ignores the special authority that seems to be conveyed to Peter by our Lord.
- I have no major issue with those who understand that it was upon the same faith to be expressed eventually by all apostles that Jesus would build the Church (i.e. His body in the Church Age).
  - However, to limit the understanding of this passage to that point ignores the distinction between the general and technical uses of the word "church" not to mention the context of Matthew 16.
  - The context of Matthew 16 includes the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus and His apostles were preaching up to that point in the narrative and even after Matthew 16.
- The special authority granted to Peter to re-offer the kingdom to Israel (the assembly/church) which occurred in Acts 3 did not grant to Peter the Pope-like authority that is implied by the RCC's interpretation of this event. For instance:
  - Peter was very prominent in the early Church (Acts 1-2).
  - However, Peter was subject to the other apostles in that he was sent on occasion by the others (e.g. Acts 8:14).
  - He was held accountable by the Jerusalem Church (Acts 11:1-18) and rebuked by Paul (Gal 2:11-14).

In **verse 18b**, Jews would have understood Jesus' reference to the gates of Hades to refer to physical death. The phrase "gates of Hades" or very similar expressions are found in canonical literature (Job 17:16; 38:17; Psa 9:13; 107:18; Isa 38:10), non-canonical Jewish literature, and pagan literature and it refers to death and dying. So, Jesus is saying that even death will not prevent Him from establishing His church (i.e. assembly of believing Jews with specific reference to those who are alive at the beginning of the Messianic reign of Christ). Remember that Hades in the New Testament is synonymous with Sheol in the Old Testament. There are two compartments in Hades, i.e. torments and Abraham's bosom or paradise (Luke 16:22-23). One was the abode of unbelievers and the other the abode of believers of the Age of Israel and prior. Therefore, the gates of Hades referred to death.

In verse 19, the phrases "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" and "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" needs explanation. The phrase "*the keys of the kingdom of heaven*" refers to the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel that occurred in Acts 3. Peter had the privilege of explaining the transition to a new age (e.g. Acts 2:14-39 and 3:11-26). Included within Peter's explanation of the transition to the new age was the re-offer of the Messianic Kingdom to Israel should they repent regarding the Person of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:12-21). Peter possessed the keys to the kingdom in the form of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel.

The phrases "*will be bound*" and "*will be loosed*" are perfect tense verbs (i.e. completed action in past time with results that continue indefinitely). In other words, a more correct translation might be "*shall have been bound in heaven*" and "*shall have been loosed in heaven.*"

