

What did Jesus mean when he turned to Peter and said, "Thou art Peter, and upon *this rock* I will build my church?" Was Peter the rock referred to in this statement? (Matthew 16:18)

Much controversy seems to exist over this most famous of statements! Fortunately for us, the answer to this important question is contained within the actual Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. So let's take a closer look!

But first... it is absolutely necessary that we investigate the true meanings behind the words "Peter" and "Rock" from the original Greek language of the New Testament. This will help us to better understand what Jesus is truly saying here.

The Greek word for "Rock" in this verse is pronounced 'Petra' (Strong's #4073 – Greek Dictionary).

- 'Petra' is a feminine noun denoting a "large rock" or cliff, in situ, firm and "immovable."

The Greek word for "Peter" in this verse is pronounced 'Petros' (Strong's #4074 – Greek Dictionary).

- 'Petros' is a masculine noun denoting a "small movable stone" originating from an immovable rock (a Petra).

The idea here is this... a traveler may casually move a small stone (i.e., a petros) with his foot rather easily; however, due to the literary nature of the Greek language, it would be impossible for the same traveler to move a much larger rock, say an immovable rock (i.e., a petra), with his foot. This would be like trying to move an entire mountain with a single kick.

What can we safely conclude from this explanation? Due to the literary nature of the original Greek language, it would be impossible for the "Rock" (Gr. Petra) and "Peter" (Gr. Petros) in verse 18 to refer to the same person, namely Peter.

The words "Upon This Rock (Gr. Petra)" MUST refer back to the last feminine noun discussed in the chapter, and that feminine noun is the Greek word 'homologia', which correctly points back to Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16.

What was Peter's confession (Gr. homologia)?

- Simon Peter answered and said unto Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt.16:16)

And here lies the correct answer to our question!

Peter (Gr. Petros) was NOT the rock (Gr. Petra) upon which Jesus said He would build His church. On the contrary, Jesus said He would build His church upon the foundation of Peter's faith confession (Gr. homologia) in verse sixteen.

The true "Rock" or "Foundation" of the Church is none other than Jesus Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 3:11).