



MBS043

A MESSIANIC BIBLE STUDY FROM ARIEL MINISTRIES



THE CONFESSION OF PETER



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*And I also say
unto you, that you
are Peter, and upon
this rock I will
build my church; ...
Matthew 16:18a*



NOTES

INTRODUCTION

The confession of Peter is found in Matthew 16:13-19. We will study this passage in five sections: first, the background of the confession; secondly, the place of the confession; thirdly, the questions of Jesus; fourthly, the response of Jesus; and fifth, the conclusion.

I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE CONFESSION

To understand precisely what the confession of Peter was and the crucial time in which it came, it should be noted that it took place after Jesus was rejected as the Messiah by the leadership and the nation of Israel in Matthew 12. After Yeshua (Jesus) performed one of His key messianic miracles, the leaders rejected His messianic claims on the grounds of demon possession. They then began spreading the teaching all over the country that Jesus was not the Messiah. They claimed that the reason He was able to perform miracles was because Yeshua Himself was possessed, not by some common demon, but by the prince of demons: Beelzebub. From that point on Jesus no longer dealt with the nation as a whole, He dealt with His disciples. When He performed miracles, they were for the purpose of instructing His disciples. When He taught the masses, He taught them only in parables; but when He taught His disciples, He taught them clearly and expounded the meaning of those parables.

Between chapters 12 and 16 of Matthew, in the course of teaching His disciples, Jesus warned them against three types of leaven: the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of the Herodians (Mat. 16:5-12; Mk. 8:13-21). Generally, when the word “leaven” is used symbolically in Scripture, it is always the symbol

of sin, in particular, the sin of false teachings and false doctrines. Yeshua warned His disciples against the false teachings concerning Him which were being propounded by the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. Even though they did not all say the same thing about Jesus, they all had something against Him and taught things which simply were not true.

First, the leaven of the Pharisees was that Jesus was demon possessed.

Secondly, the leaven of the Sadducees was that He was against the Temple service. It was the Sadducees who, at this point of Jewish history, controlled the Temple functions. Annas, Caiaphas, and other high priests were all Sadducees. Because Yeshua began His public ministry by overturning the money changers' tables of the Temple Compound and by chasing out the sellers of the sacrifices (Jn. 2:16), He acted against the economic use of the Temple Compound by the Sadducees. In fact, what was happening in the Temple Compound was called "the bazaar of the sons of Ananias" by the Pharisees themselves. The Sadducees began accusing Jesus of being against Temple worship. Of course, that was not true. Yeshua Himself came to worship at the Temple, but the point is that they had made the House of God a "house of merchandise." This is what Jesus was reacting to.

Thirdly, the leaven of the Herodians was that Yeshua was against Roman rule through the House of Herod. They probably surmised this because of the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist. It was John the Baptist who condemned Herod Antipas for marrying his brother's wife, something that was forbidden under the Law of Moses. It was for his condemnation of this incestuous marriage between Herod Antipas and Herodias that John the Baptist was eventually beheaded. Of course, Yeshua did not sanction that kind of relationship either because it violated the Mosaic Law, the Law which Jesus upheld. Because He agreed with John the Baptist on this point, the Herodians misconstrued, perhaps deliberately, that Yeshua was against Roman rule through the House of Herod. This, too, was not true because Jesus Himself said, "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's" (Mk. 12:17).

These were the three major religious groups, which also served as political groups, and they each had something against Yeshua, so He warned the disciples against these three types of leaven. He taught them not to accept the false teachings, which were being spread around the country by these three different groups concerning His Person.

After training the disciples for a period of time and warning them against these three types of leaven, Jesus brought them to a point where He administered an examination. They had gone through

“school” as learners or disciples of His ministry, now it was time to see if they could pass the test.

NOTES

II. THE PLACE OF THE CONFESSION

It is important to note where this test took place. Matthew 16:13a states: *Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, ...*

Caesarea Philippi was just outside the borders of the Land of Israel in Gentile territory. It was a town that was built at the foot of Mount Hermon, particularly at the foot of a huge, massive cliff-rock. The Greek word for “huge cliff-rock” was *petra*. This *petra* or huge, massive cliff-rock overshadowed the town of Caesarea Philippi. From the base of this huge, massive cliff-rock, a river gushed out. This river, which is now called the Banyas, is one of the four sources of the Jordan River. In the bed of the Banyas River are many small stones or pebbles, which are broken off from this massive cliff-rock as the river shoots out from the base.

The Greek word for “small stone” or “pebble” is *petros*. So *petra* means a “huge, massive cliff-rock” like the one that overshadows Caesarea Philippi, and *petros* means a “small stone” or “pebble” like the ones in the bed of the stream that shoots out from the base of the cliff-rock.

III. THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS

In this examination Yeshua asked two questions. The first question is in Matthew 16:13b: ... *Who do men say that the Son of man is?* “Who are men [the people, not the leaders] saying He was?”

Their answer is found in verse 14: *And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.*

They answered that there was no single opinion about the Person of Jesus, but among the masses there were different opinions. Some believed that Yeshua was John the Baptist, resurrected from the dead. Others believed He was Elijah, the one who was to come according to Malachi 4:5-6. A third opinion was that Jesus was Jeremiah the Prophet. Fourthly, still others believed that He was one of the prophets, perhaps Isaiah or Ezekiel. One thing is very clear: in general, the people recognized the supernatural authority; they connected Him with one of these significant characters of the Old Testament or with John the Baptist of the New Testament. However, they failed to clearly discern who He really was. He was not John the Baptist; He was not Elijah; He was not Jeremiah; He was not Isaiah or any other prophet. Specifically, He was Yeshua the Messiah, and no one else. So concerning the first question of this examination, people, in general, felt that Jesus had supernatural authority and must be a special Person, but they all guessed wrong in that they did not discern Him to be the Messiah Himself.

This leads to the second question in verse 15: *He said unto them, But who say ye that I am?*

The Greek text is much more emphatic because the Greek literally reads: “But you, who do you say that I am?” Would the disciples merely make the same wrong conclusion concerning His supernatural character: that Yeshua was Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah or some other prophet? Or would they believe what the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians had said?

Peter spoke for the disciples and answered the second question correctly. Matthew 16:16 states: *And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

The Greek is much more emphatic here also. The Greek literally reads: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the God, the Living One!” The disciples concluded the correct answer; they passed the examination; they learned their lessons. They knew Jesus to be not merely a supernatural character, they knew Him to be the Messiah Himself.

IV. THE RESPONSE OF JESUS

Yeshua now turned to Peter and made a series of statements.

A. The Source of Peter’s Knowledge

First of all, He said in verse 17: *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in heaven.*

Yeshua first said that what Peter understood was a result of divine illumination, not something he learned from mere human reasoning.

B. The Rock and the Church

The second statement He made to Peter is in verse 18a: *And I also say unto you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; ...*

The key to this statement is the relationship between the name Peter and the word rock. The Roman Catholic Church, of course, has done much concerning this particular passage. It has taught that Peter was the first pope and that he was the rock upon which Jesus was to build His church. Based on this teaching that since Peter was the rock upon which the Church was built, beginning with Peter, then, there has been a continuous line of popes through apostolic succession. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church is the only “true Church” and only the Roman Catholic Church can properly interpret the Scriptures. When they say this, they are saying that Matthew, who wrote the Gospel, did not understand the rudiments, simplicities, and foundations of Greek grammar.

The simple point of Greek grammar is: You cannot modify a masculine by a feminine. A feminine noun can never modify a masculine noun. The word for Peter, petros, is a masculine noun and

means “a small stone or pebble.” Yeshua said, “You are Peter–Petros. You are a small stone—a small pebble—just like the small stones or pebbles in this stream shooting forth from the base of the cliff-rock, which overshadowed the town of Caesarea Philippi.”

On the other hand, when He talked about this rock, the Greek term He used was *petra*. *Petra* is a feminine noun which means “a massive cliff-rock,” just like the one overshadowing Caesarea Philippi. So, Peter is a small stone, which make terrible foundations. You do not build a building on a foundation of small stones. But a house could be built on a solid, massive, huge cliff-rock, because that would be a firm foundation.

So Yeshua said to Peter, *you are Peter* [*petros*, masculine noun, meaning a small stone], *and upon this rock* [*petra*, feminine noun, meaning a huge, massive cliff-rock] *I will build my church*. In other words: “Peter, you are a *petros*, a small stone like the ones in the river that are broken off this cliff. But upon the *petra*, from which you were broken off, I will build My Church.”

It is Jesus who is the massive cliff-rock upon which the Church would be built. It would not be built upon Peter, but upon Peter’s confession: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the God, the Living One!” Peter was not the rock but the small stone which was part of the rock; the rock itself was Peter’s confession. Therefore, the Church was going to be built on the basis of the Messiahship of Yeshua.

C. The Gates of Hell

Jesus states something further in verse 18b: ... *and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*.

This can be interpreted in two ways. One is that all Hell itself will not be able to militate against the building of the Church or defeat the program of the Church. God’s intended program in the Church will find its fulfillment.

There is another interpretation that is more in keeping with the Old Testament, in which the expression “gates of Hades” refers to physical death. This is clearly what it means in places such as Job 38:17; Psalm 9:13; 107:18; Isaiah 38:10; and Jonah 2:6, and is expressed as “gates of death.” What this means is that physical death itself will not be able to defeat the program of the Church. Although it appeared when Yeshua died that His program was a failure; it was by His very death, followed by His resurrection, that the foundation of the Church was laid. Indeed, in this way He became that massive cliff-rock and at the same time served as the chief cornerstone of the foundation itself. The death of Yeshua would not defeat the program of the Church. In fact, the death of Jesus established the program of the Church by laying the foundation for it.

Notice He did not say, “I am building My Church,” as if the progress

and the process were already started. He used a future tense, “I will build my church.” It was future, it had not yet begun. In fact, the Church only began to be built in Acts 2.

Jesus’ death and resurrection was the foundation upon which the Church is built. The death of Yeshua did not prevail against the Church, it laid the foundation for it; nor did the death of the apostles and the subsequent deaths of believers throughout the centuries succeed in defeating the Church. The Church prevailed and God’s intended program will be fulfilled.

D. The Keys of the Kingdom

The fourth statement Yeshua made to Peter is found in verse 19a: *I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: ...*

It is this statement that has originated all the stories, cartoons, and jokes about Peter’s standing at the “Pearly Gates,” determining who would or would not be allowed to enter into Heaven. However, that is not the meaning of this passage. Peter does not have the authority to decide who will or who will not enter into Heaven. On the contrary, that decision is made upon the basis of the acceptance or rejection of Jesus.

The purpose of the keys is to open and close doors. The emphasis is on the opening of the door. In this context, it is the opening of the door of the Church (v. 18). Peter was given “the keys of the kingdom,” the keys of the Church. He was to open the door to three groups of people living in his day: the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. It was up to Peter to open the door to each one of these groups. Once he opened the door to that particular group, it stayed open for that group. Peter used the keys to open the door for all three groups in the Book of Acts.

First, the door was opened to the Jews. In Acts 2, Peter preached his first sermon after being baptized by the Holy Spirit and many Jews believed. It is by Spirit baptism that the Church came into being. This is the reason that all believers are baptized into the Church—the Body of the Messiah—by the Holy Spirit, when they believe (I Cor. 12:13). In Acts 2, Peter opened the door of the Church to the Jews and, from then on, it stayed open for the Jewish people.

Next, he opened the door for the Samaritans in Acts 8. What is interesting is that the first one to preach the gospel to the Samaritans was not Peter, but Philip. Although Philip preached the gospel, and although many of the Samaritans believed it and were baptized by water, none of them were baptized by the Spirit. Thus none of them were able to enter into the Church. What is the problem? The problem was not that they were not spiritual enough. Far from it! Rather, the problem was that, even though Philip preached the gospel, he did not have the keys. Later, the Jerusalem Church sent Peter to

Samaria and, by the laying on of hands by the Apostle Peter, the Samaritans were baptized by the Holy Spirit and able to enter into the Body of the Messiah. From then on, the door stayed open for the Samaritans. In Acts 8, Peter used his keys to open the door of the Church to the Samaritans.

Finally, the door was opened for the Gentiles. In Acts 9, Paul was saved and commissioned to be the apostle to the Gentiles. While Paul received the commission to be the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul did not have the keys. In Acts 10, Peter preached the gospel to the House of Cornelius, a house of Gentiles. As he was preaching, they believed his message, were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of the Messiah, and became members of the Church. At that point, Peter opened the door to the Gentiles by the use of his keys. From then on the door stayed open to Gentiles. Now the way was open for Paul to fulfill his commission. Beginning in Acts 13 and throughout the remainder of the Book of Acts, there is the record of Paul's activities as the apostle among the Gentiles.

Peter had the keys, which meant that he was responsible for opening the door: first to the Jews, which he fulfilled in Acts 2; then to the Samaritans, which he fulfilled in Acts 8; and then to the Gentiles, which he fulfilled in Acts 10.

E. Binding and Loosing

The fifth and final statement Yeshua is made to Peter in Matthew 16:19b: ... *and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

At this point, Peter was given the right to bind and to loose, though later it was given to the other apostles as well. What do the terms "binding" and "loosing" mean? Notice that in this context, it has nothing to do with the binding or the loosing of Satan. From the Jewish frame of reference, the terms "binding" and "loosing" were used in two ways among the rabbis. It was used in a judicial sense and in a legislative sense.

In a legislative sense, to bind meant "to forbid something," and to loose meant, "to permit something." The Pharisees took upon themselves this authority. They claimed to have the authority to permit that which the Law may have forbidden and to forbid that which the Law may have permitted.

When it was used in a judicial sense, to bind meant "to punish," and to loose meant, "to release from punishment."

What Jesus gave to Peter and later to the other apostles was something unique to apostolic authority. The apostles had the authority to bind and to loose both in the area of legislation and judicial punishment. First, legislatively the apostles were given the authority to permit and

to forbid. This is the authority they exercised throughout their epistles. In the New Testament Epistles, the apostles used apostolic authority to forbid things, which formally were permitted, and to permit things which were formally forbidden. Because they lied to the Holy Spirit, Ananias and Sapphira were bound for punishment by Peter as an example of legislative usage in Acts 5. They were killed because Peter bound them for punishment, using apostolic authority.

This authority to bind and to loose in the area of legislation and judicial punishment was something that came with apostolic authority and was never passed down through apostolic succession. Later generations of the Church had no right to this kind of authority, even though the Roman Catholic Church has often claimed this type of authority for itself. That was not the intent of apostolic authority.

The only place the Church has the right to bind and to loose is not in the area of judicial punishment as far as life and death are concerned, nor in the area of legislation where they have the right to pass new laws which are not found in Scripture. The one area in which the Church has the right to bind and to loose is the area of church discipline (Mat. 18:16-20). In this area, to bind would mean, “to excommunicate” and to loose would mean, “not to excommunicate.”

V. CONCLUSION

The confession of Peter and the response of Yeshua set the stage for the establishment of the Church and the recording of New Testament Scriptures through apostolic authority.✠

NOTES

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