

## The Primacy of Peter In Sacred Scripture

Mark 8:27–30

<sup>27</sup> Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” <sup>28</sup> They said in reply, “John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets.” <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter said to him in reply, “You are the Messiah.” <sup>30</sup> Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Luke 9:18–21

<sup>18</sup> Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” <sup>19</sup> They said in reply, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, ‘One of the ancient prophets has arisen.’ ” <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter said in reply, “The Messiah of God.” <sup>21</sup> He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone.

### Matthew 16:13-20:

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16j</sup> Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. <sup>18</sup> And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20m</sup> Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah. <sup>1</sup>

### Where did this occur?

Jesus is in a secluded *region* of Caesarea Philippi, not in Caesarea Philippi proper, as Luke mentions.

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<sup>1</sup> *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Mt 16:13–20.

In Caesarea Philippi there is an ancient pagan temple next to a cliff, and some wrongly claim when Jesus said to Peter, "You are the rock," Jesus was near the cliff, and that's the rock."<sup>2</sup>

### On the identity of Jesus:

[Jesus] asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Jesus frequently refers to himself as the Son of Man. The title comes from the Book of Daniel and is a subject for another time. In response, the apostles give him a of sample of the confusion that exists about the identity of Jesus.

"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

- Some think Jesus is John the Baptist because his preaching is so much like John the Baptist.
- Some think he's Elijah. Elijah was expected to return as the harbinger of the Messiah and the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel, an apocalyptic figure
- Some think he's Jeremiah. Jeremiah was the great persecuted prophet who foretold the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. Like Jesus, Jeremiah not only taught but also performed signs in the temple and elsewhere and was greatly persecuted. There are many similarities between Jesus and Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup> Further, the reference to Jeremiah is only in Matthew, not in Mark or Luke. Why?

All those people are dead. Jeremiah had been dead for centuries, but it suggests people recognize that Jesus is superhuman with supernatural powers and thus assume that he must be the spirit of one of these prophets come back from the dead. None of the answers are correct, indicating a lack of understanding of Jesus's identity.

He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"<sup>16j</sup> Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, [note the definite article] *the* Son of the *living* God."

Note that Simon Peter speaks on behalf of the twelve. Over and over again in the Gospels, Simon emerges as the leader of the twelve Apostles. If you look at tabulations of the number of times people were named in the New Testament, Jesus is obviously named the most frequently, but Peter is second both in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. He is

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<sup>2</sup> Fr. Stanley Jaki, in his book "And on This Rock: The Witness of One Land and Two Covenants" writes about Caesarea Philippi, (he had never actually been there) and writes about the meaning of the keys given to Peter, and talks about (pulpit fiction) a cliff, a rock-like structure with a big abyss or cave, the Gates of Sheol, Hades, will not prevail against. There's a little cave in the cliff face, but it's hogwash.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Knowles, JEREMIAH IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: The Rejected-Prophet Motif in Matthaean Redaction



unquestionably the leader of the twelve disciples and will frequently will speak on behalf of the other apostles.

Christ, the Greek word is *Christos*, literally meaning “*the anointed one*” is the Greek word for *mashiach*, the Hebrew word *Messiah*, also meaning *anointed one*, the term that was used to describe the anointed kings of Israel.

Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah [Aramaic for *son of Jonah*], for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

“Blessed are you ...” Peter gets his own beatitude. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are you when men persecute you. Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah.

He's told “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.” This does not come from you. This comes from my Father who is in heaven. The Greek word for revealed is *apocalypse*.

### **Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter**

This is the first time that we know of where someone receives the name “Rock.”

His Jewish name was Simon. Simon is a Greek form of Simeon. Simon was one of the twelve sons of Jacob and a very prominent figure in ancient Israel, hence a common name for Jewish boys. Simeon is how he would have been called to by his parents, family, friends, and even by the fellow apostles.

Why does this matter? In Old Testament, whenever God changes someone's name it's always a momentous occasion. Abram, meaning “exalted father,” though he had no children, is changed by God to Abraham meaning “father of a multitude”.

And I say to you, *you are Peter* [*petros*], ...

In the Greek here it says you are *petros*, a masculine word which refers to a little stone, a pebble.

... and upon this rock [*petra*] I will build my Church, ...

Now Jesus uses a different word, *petra*.

*Petra* is feminine. It's usually the term that's used for a *foundation stone*.

This has become the subject of a *huge* amount of discussion, especially among non-Catholic Christians who want to make the case that Peter is not the rock on which the Church is built. They claim Jesus says that Peter is *petros*, but what he's going to build on is a *petra*.” Some well-meaning but ignorant Catholics will say that it doesn't matter because Jesus spoke Aramaic. In Aramaic, rock is *Cephas*, and no issue exists. But we don't know that Jesus didn't say this in Greek. Jesus very likely spoke Greek. The critical issue is that Jesus cannot call Peter *petra* because that is a feminine word. He can't give Peter a feminine name and say “Blessed are you, *Patrina*,” so

he calls Peter the name closest to *petra*, which is the masculine term *petros*. You cannot use *petros* as a foundation stone since the masculine word refers to a little stone. He can't say he's going to build, grammatically, on a *petros*, hence he says he's going to build on a *petra*, so Peter gets a masculine name, and the Church is built on a reliable foundation, a rock.

When Jesus says, "On this rock I will build my Church," what does the word church mean? In Greek, the word church, *ek kaléō*, "to call out" or *ecclesia*, or *assembly*. It was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to refer to the assembly of Israel into the temple to worship the Lord. So Jesus is describing Peter as the foundation of his assembly, of his Church that he is going to establish, the new Israel.

If *ecclesia* as a church is related to the Temple in Jerusalem, there was a very important rock in the Temple in Jerusalem called the *eben shetiah*, the *foundation stone*. In ancient rabbinic writings like the Mishna (traditions from the time of Jesus), in the holy of holies there was a special stone, the foundation stone, where the Ark of the covenant sat before it was taken away by Jeremiah at the time of the Babylonian exile. So at the time of Jesus, whenever the high priest would go into the temple to offer sacrifice, since there was no ark, he would actually sprinkle the blood of the day of atonement (Yom Kippur) on the foundation stone, the *eben shetiah*. It was the foundation of the Temple and the foundation of the *ecclesia*, the Assembly of God's people, worshipping the Lord in the Temple.

*...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys<sup>15</sup> of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ...*

Technically, in the Greek this literally reads:

*"Whatever you bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will have already been loosed in heaven."*

The text is usually not translated this way to make it flow better in English. But properly translated it means Peter is going to be constrained by God in his pronouncements of what he is binding and loosing.

*Then he commanded his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (Matt 16:13-20)*

### **Old Testament support of the text.**

There is important Davidic imagery in the text. Certainly, Jesus is *the* Son of God, but in a Jewish context, a son of God would be understood a son of David, since in the Old Testament, *the* son of God is typically how one refers to the Davidic King. Peter pronounced Jesus to be The Christ, the Son of God. In Matthew's genealogy Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David.

One of the most consequential chapters in the Old Testament is 2 Samuel 7, where God promises David that he will give him a son who will build a house to God's name. Briefly, David wants to



build a temple, but God says, no, I'm going to build you a house (a dynasty), but your royal son, your descendent, will build a house for me. We read:

*"Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house [a royal dynasty]. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam 7:11-14, 16)*

In 2 Samuel there is an inseparable connection between the kingdom of David and proper worship of God in the temple. In 2 Chronicles 13 the northern tribes try to form their own kingdom (Israel) with their own priesthood and rituals, and they're condemned because the true temple is in Jerusalem and the Kingdom of the Lord is in the hands of the sons of David because they've got the true temple.

In 2 Samuel 7, also in 1 Chronicles 17, as well as in the writings of the Jewish Roman historian Josephus, tell about God promising David a kingdom. When the Davidic King is called the son of God, it is all almost always in a context of describing the temple, and in particular, of the son of David (Solomon) building of and association with the temple. So, if Solomon is the son of God, it's because he builds the temple. Now Peter says, "You are the Christ" That's Davidic, implicitly. Matthew 1:1:

*"This is the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David."*

Christ is Davidic. "You are the Christ, *the Son of God.*" So, Son of God is Davidic. And then what does Jesus say? "Blessed are you ..." Then he says, "You are rock, and on this rock I will build ..."

Build what? The Son of David builds a temple. The point is that the Church is the temple. Jesus is the son of David, and he is going to build the temple.

### **The imagery of the keys**

*...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys<sup>15</sup> of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ...*

When the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, including Thomas Aquinas, speak on the authority of the priesthood, they typically refer to the keys of the kingdom as evidence of sacerdotal, priestly authority. Why are keys a priestly symbol?

In Matthew 16 Jesus is being identified as a true Davidic Messiah, the true Davidic temple builder. After Peter identifies him as the Messiah, Jesus says, "I'm going to give you the keys."

The language of “the keys” is an allusion to a passage in Isaiah 22. Isaiah is describing the kingdom of David about 800 years before the time of Jesus and delivers an oracle against a wicked man named Shebna who is getting fired by God and being replaced by another man, Eliakim.

At that time there was a certain office in the kingdom that was second only to the King. The second in command was a figure called the *al bayith*, literally the “over the house.” He was the leader over the house of David and had full authority and was second in rank only to the King. A modern analogy would be the Prime Minister of the kingdom of David. So in Isaiah 22. The prophet is speaking to the Prime Minister whose name name is Shebna, a wicked man who is going to die and have his office given to a man named Eliakim.

Isaiah (22:19) says, speaking to Shebna, the wicked Prime Minister:

In that day I will call my servant Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, and I will clothe him with your [Shebna's] robe [*kâthoneth* in Hebrew], and will bind your girdle [*'abnet*] on him [a belt], and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah [Eliakim is going to be a father to the people]. 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.

This is the key to unlocking the meaning of keys in Matthew 16 ☺. Peter being given the keys is an allusion to Isaiah 22.

Isaiah is prophesying to Shebna that the office of prime minister is going to be taken away from him and passed on to Eliakim. Notice that the office of prime minister is exactly that, an office. This means it doesn't stop with the death of one man. It gets passed down person-to-person throughout the centuries. It's an office that has succession.

Who holds this office of Prime Minister? The one who has the keys of the house of David, indicating that the king had entrusted royal authority over the kingdom to him.

One aspect of prime minister is to be a father to the Kingdom. The king the father of the kingdom, but the Prime Minister participates in the fatherhood of the king, so he will act as a father to the kingdom by leading it, and governing it, and guiding it. Note the root for the word Pope is Papa, so when we call someone the Pope, we are literally referring to him as the father of the church.

Further, when the prime minister opens, none shall shut, and when he shuts, none shall open. It's an expression of his ruling authority, binding authority, not just symbolic authority, over the people. He has the power to make final decisions.

In Aramaic, binding and loosing and opening and shutting are closely related, and keys are a symbol for this authority to opening and shutting, binding and losing.



And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. And they will hang on him the whole weight of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons. (Isaiah 22:20–22)

So just as all the weight to the house is going to be on Peter, the Church is going to be built on Peter, just as the weight of the house is on Eliakim.

Who is Eliakim? Who is Shebna? What does Eliakim wear? The coat or robe, and the girdle.

In the Old Testament, the **only** person who wears both of those things is the high priest. In Leviticus chapter 8, for example:

“Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.

This is when Aaron and the priests are ordained.

And he put on him the coat, and girded him with the *girdle* [*’abnet* , same word used in Isaiah 22], and clothed him with the *robe* [*kâthoneth*, same word that's used in Isaiah 22]. . .” (Lev 8:6–7)

In the Targums, the Aramaic translations of the Old Testament, the Jewish interpreters tell us Eliakim is the high priest. The Targums are not word for word, and they elaborate on things a bit. This is helpful because it shows how words and ideas expressed in the Old Testament were interpreted. From the Targum on Isaiah 22:

“And I will thrust you from your place and throw you down from your *ministry* [That's what God says to Shebna]. And it will come to pass in that time that I will exalt my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, and I will clothe him with your *robe*, and gird him with your *cincture*, and place your authority in his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place *the key of the sanctuary* and the authority of the house of David in his hand . . .” (Targum on Isaiah 22:19–22)

The “key” is understood to be the priestly key. Priests and keys went together in the Old Testament. The priests were the ones who had the authority over the keys of the temple. In 1 Chronicles we read that the priests had charge of the key to open temple in the morning:

“But the four principal gatekeepers, who were Levites, were entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. They would spend the night stationed around the house of God, because they had to guard it; and *they had charge of the key* for opening it each morning.” (1 Chr 9:26–27)

We read this in Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, who tells us that there were different divisions. We know from Luke. Zechariah was in the temple serving because his division was on duty at the time. He was the one who was chosen by lot to offer incense in the holy place. Priests would serve according to their family line in divisions.

In Jesus's day, the different divisions would have to come and transfer over the authority. According to Josephus they did that through an elaborate ritual in the temple involving the handing over of the keys. So we see this in Josephus:

“... for although there be four courses of the priests, and everyone of them have above five thousand men in them, yet do they officiate on certain days only; and when those days are over, other priests succeed in the performance of their sacrifices, and assemble together at midday, and receive *the keys of the temple*, and the vessels by tale, without anything relating to food or drink being carried into the temple.” (Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.108).

The Mishna [the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions known as the Oral Torah] tells us that the priests used to sleep with the keys of the temple in their hand.

“[The priests] used to sleep with *the keys of the Temple Court in their hand*” (*m. Mid.* 1:8).

In Matthew 16 Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the temple builder. So, the natural question is, “Who is in charge of this temple?” And Jesus is saying, “It's you Peter. I'm giving you the keys.”

The keys are important because it is what you pass on when somebody else has authority, and right after the scene Jesus is going to announce for the first time that he is going to suffer and die. **Now** he can announce that he will suffer and die because he's identified who has the keys, Peter.

From the Avot of Rabbi Nathan as well as in other Jewish works we read:

“This verse [Zechariah 11:1] refers to the High Priests who were in the Temple, who took their *keys* in their hands and [what did they do? they] *threw them up to the sky*, ...

It is a Jewish tradition, before the temple was destroyed, that the priests went to the temple, took the keys of the temple, and threw up into the sky saying:

... saying to the Holy One, blessed be He, “Master of the Universe, here are your keys which you have handed over to us, for we have not been trustworthy *stewards* [the same language for Eliakim and Shebna in Isaiah 22] to do the King's work and to eat of the King's table” (*Avot of Rabbi Nathan* 4:5).

So the priests lose their priestly authority, symbolized by the keys.

In another rabbinic tradition, Rabbi Eliezer says Shebna was a high priest.

“[Rabbi] Eleazar said he [=Shebna] was a High Priest.” (*Lev. Rab.* 5.5)

Before Thomas Aquinas wrote his masterful commentary on Matthew he wrote a commentary on Isaiah, which was his first major work. Writing on Isaiah 22, Aquinas quotes Jerome and other Church Fathers who understand Eliakim as the high priest and the keys are those to the temple.



When Jesus says to Peter, "You are the rock, and on this rock I will build my Church," he's using the imagery of Davidic Messianism. Jesus is the Messiah who is going to build the true temple, the Church.

The Church is the true temple and is governed by Peter who is the earthly high priest. The keys the symbol of an authority that is passed over. Just as Shebna is out and Eliakim is in, one day Peter will die. The point of giving the keys symbolizes the need to pass on the authority, Apostolic Succession. It's all there in Matthew 16:16-19 with support from the Old Testament.

Church Fathers like Jerome and Eusebius understood this. Peter is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. On Earth Peter has the keys of the kingdom of heaven because the kingdom of heaven is being made present through the ministry of the Church through which were baptized and to receive the sacraments through which we are able to enter into communion with Christ.

In Matthew 16 Jesus is making Peter the Prime Minister of the kingdom of God. He is giving Peter the office of the *al bayith*, of the "over the house" of his church. That means Peter is second in rank only to Jesus, the King. He's given the key of royal authority over the Church, meaning he has power over the Church second only to Christ. As Prime Minister he acts as a father to the Church, which is why it became customary very quickly in the ancient Church to refer to him, the Bishop of Rome, as Papa, as the Pope. Finally, he the power to make binding decisions, or having teaching authority over the Church.

By the first century A.D., binding and loosing were technical terms that the rabbis used to refer to authoritative teaching. For a rabbi to bind something meant that they taught something that everyone had to believe, and if they would loose it, they would allow people to have a diversity of opinion about it. Recall in Matthew 23 Jesus says the Pharisees bind heavy burdens that people aren't able to bear. That language there of binding heavy burdens is the language of the Pharisees' teaching authority, and their teachings were considered binding in the first century. Jesus here is transferring that teaching authority Peter himself.

Note that Jesus doesn't say whatever heaven decides Peter will agree with. He says whatever Peter teaches will be ratified by God in heaven. It's a radical authority to teach that Jesus is giving to Peter when he gives him the power to bind and to loose.

Jesus is making Peter the Prime Minister of the kingdom of God. If Jesus is alluding to Isaiah 22, which is the only text that has all these parallels with Matthew 16, then by definition the authority that he's now giving to Peter as the rock isn't going to stop with Peter, because it's not just Peter's power, it's an office. And just like after Shebna died the office passed to Eliakim, so now after Peter dies, the office, and the authority, and the power, and the role as father and the keys are going to be passed on to Peter's successor as Bishop of Rome. Those successors of Peter, the Bishops of Rome are going to become what we call today the Popes.

They act as fathers to the universal Church, second in rank to Christ, the King himself. So the papacy is not a medieval invention as some claim, or that the word Pope isn't anywhere in the Bible, therefore Catholics are un-biblical in assuming that the Pope has the supreme authority over the Church on earth is not true.

By far the best commentary on the Gospel of Matthew is written by two Protestant scholars named W.D. Davies and Dale Allison [W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 8-18* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005), 638.] and is widely regarded as one of the most exhaustive and authoritative modern commentaries Matthew. This is what Davies and Allison say about Matthew 16:

The major opinion of modern exegetes, which has it that Peter, as a sort of supreme rabbi or prime minister of the kingdom, is in Matthew 16:19 given teaching authority, given that is the power to declare what is permitted and what is not permitted.

Peter can decide by doctrinal decision what Christians must and must not do. This is the traditional Roman Catholic understanding, with the proviso that Peter had successors.<sup>2</sup>

Most scholars today, even Protestant scholars, recognize that in Matthew 16 Jesus is making Peter the supreme rabbi and prime minister over the Church who can tell Christians what they must and must not do, and what they can believe and what they must not believe.

The Pope has binding authority in matters of faith and morals, and admit that the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation of this passage is right, with one exception. They don't agree that Peter had successors. But he has to have successors because of Isaiah 22. The point of that passage is that the office of prime minister moves from one man to the other. When Shebna dies it goes to Eliakim, and when Eliakim dies it goes to his successors.

A much older commentary, the writings of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, a second century martyr, in his famous work *Against Heresies*, written about 180 A.D., wrote this about the Church at Rome and Peter's successors:

[T]he very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also the faith preached to men... comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church [meaning the Church at Rome], on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere... The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up



the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate [Linus was Peter's successor]... To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement ... To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Soter having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.

Irenaeus is saying the way we know we have the true faith of the Church is that it's been handed down to us by the twelve bishops who were the successors to Peter in Rome; and that already in the second century there was a recognition that the Church of Rome had primacy among all the churches and that all the faithful everywhere had to agree with it. The papacy is something established by Jesus himself on Peter as the foundation stone of his Church, and it reveals to us that the papacy, far from being a medieval invention, is something that is thoroughly rooted in Judaism and thoroughly rooted in the will and the intention Jesus himself.

### **An interesting detail**

Later, in Matthew 18:18, Jesus say to all the other apostles:

*Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Here Jesus gives to the 12 when he gave Peter, except there's a difference. In Matthew 16, when Jesus says to Peter, "Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven," in the Greek it says, "bound in the heavens," οὐρανοῖς in the plural. In Matthew 18, where it says, "bound in heaven," in the singular.

Thomas Newberry and George Ricker Berry, *The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004), Mt 16:19.

*Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

- Matthew 16:19 τῶν οὐρανῶν (of the heavens) to Peter
- Matthew 18:18 τῷ οὐρανῷ (the heaven) to the apostles

In the early Church Origen pointed said this shows that Petrine authority is unique among apostolic authority. The other apostles do not have authority in the way Peter does. There is a hierarchy. Peter exercises authority of binding and loosing, but not in isolation. Peter has the authority of binding and loosing along with the other eleven, but in a unique way.

To say the Church has the authority in the Church to bind and to loose, it's the authority of the apostles and not all believers in the same way.

*Again, amen I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it shall be done for you by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Matt 18:15-20)*

Jesus' Divine Presence is found in the community because the Church is the temple, but not in some kind of like charismatic, spontaneous way with no structural dimension. Peter has the keys, and he exercises that authority of having the keys of the kingdom as the high priest and leader of the New Covenant community. He is the leader of the New Covenant community with the authority to bind to and the loose like the other eleven, though Peter has an authority to bind and loose that's unlike the other apostles. They exercise their authority in communion with him, which is why, as Joseph Ratzinger in his book, *Called to Communion* (a fantastic book), points out that the pope can never excommunicate all of the other bishops and the bishops can never make binding decisions apart from the successor of Peter. Peter represents the unity of all the successors of the apostles, the unity of the twelve. Peter embodies that unity in himself, and the apostles constitute that community, that authoritative structure, that Peter is meant to embody. The two need each other. You can't say I'm with the Pope and not with the bishops and you can't say I'm with the bishops and not with the Pope.

To say,

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”*

The authority of the Church is certainly assumed in this. The only time Jesus ever talks about “the Church” in the Gospel is in Matthew 16 and Matthew 18, and when he uses the word Church, the word that he uses *ἐκκλησία*, *ecclesia*, but *ecclesia* is a translation of a Hebrew word *qahal* in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. *Qahal* is the term that's typically used for the liturgical assembly of Israel. So when is the Church, Church? When she gathers as the temple. When she gathers for worship. When she gathers for the liturgy in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus gave the power to bind and loose to the other apostles as well in Matthew 18. All the bishops, as successors to the Apostles, have teaching authority; however, Jesus only gives the keys of the kingdom to Peter and Peter alone, because Peter and Peter alone is chief of the twelve Apostles and prime minister of the Kingdom of God.

**Differences between the accounts found Matthew and Mark**



Matthew 16:13-23:

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16j</sup> Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. <sup>18</sup> And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." <sup>20m</sup> Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah. <sup>21</sup> From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." <sup>23</sup> He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

As Catholics we like Matthew's version. Critical biblical scholars will say, no, that actually didn't happen. Matthew made it up because Matthew is taking his material from Mark's gospel. They claim (incorrectly, I believe) that Mark's gospel is written first.

Let's look at the story in Mark 8:22-26. This story is only found in Mark's gospel.

<sup>22</sup> When they arrived at Bethsaida, they brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on him and asked, "Do you see anything?" <sup>24</sup> Looking up he replied, "I see people looking like trees and walking." <sup>25</sup> Then he laid hands on his eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly. <sup>26</sup> Then he sent him home and said, "Do not even go into the village."

Now, immediately following this story:

<sup>27</sup> Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup> They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." <sup>30</sup> Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

What did Mark leave out of that story of Peter's confession? "Son of the living God," and "Blessed are you, Peter." In Mark, Peter doesn't get a beatitude. Also, Peter doesn't get the keys! Why?

Why does only Mark have the story of the healing of the blind man? From where does Mark get his gospel? Mark is Peter's scribe. Mark's gospel is an account of Peter's preaching in Rome.

So why does Mark's gospel leave out Peter getting his own beatitude? Because Peter didn't go around saying, "Hey, guess who got the keys and no one else?" "Guess who got his own beatitude?" Peter didn't do that. In fact, when you read Mark's gospel, Peter **always** looks bad. He **never** looks good, not even one time. Why? Because Peter was humble in his preaching.

But in the gospel of Matthew, now there are positive stories about Peter.

So why does Mark have the story of the healing of the blind man before Peter's confession? It's not in Matthew or Luke. Because when Peter told the story of his confession, he told it with the story of the blind man, because Peter wanted to emphasize that when he confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, he was like the blind man who only had partial vision.

The man was given sight, but it was blurry. Jesus healed him a second time and then he could see clearly. Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah, but he thinks he's some kind of military Messiah, because as soon as Peter hears Jesus is going up to Jerusalem to die Peter says that is not going to happen, and Jesus says, get behind me Satan.

Mark wants to emphasize what Peter emphasized, and that is that Peter understood that Jesus was the Messiah, but he only had partial vision of that. Matthew wants to emphasize the momentous nature of Peter's confession, even though it was partial, which he acknowledges, because he goes on to tell the story of get behind me Satan.

The different evangelists want to emphasize different things. Matthew wants to emphasize the way Peter *does* see something huge. And so he records Jesus's words to Peter. Matthew is adding something. Mark leaves something out because Peter left it out of his preaching because of his humility. And this is where reading the gospel in the light of the Church tradition helps us to see things that you otherwise wouldn't be able to see if you simply approach the gospels with a hermeneutic of suspicion.

### **Peter and the office of the new Jonah**

In John 20:16, Jesus calls Simon "son of John,"

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

This conflicts with the gospel Matthew 16:16 where Peter's father has a different name:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

Jonah and John are altogether different names. The prophet Yona (יונה), Jonah, which means dove, was given a peace mission to Nineveh, one that he didn't want. Nineveh is the enemy of Israel and Jonah a Patriot, a nationalist, and wants Nineveh wiped out and obliterated, while God has mercy on the Ninevites and wants them to convert.



Unlike today, Jonah is actually an extraordinarily rare name. It's not just a rare name, it's just not a name. In the rest of the Old Testament and in all known first century Jewish sources no one has that name. So that So for Peter's father's to be named Jonah would be extraordinarily rare.

The most popular Jewish names were all after the Maccabean sons who crushed the Gentile enemies. Judas was the most popular name. Two apostles after named Judas. Another popular Jewish name was Simon, after Simon Maccabaeus. There was Jonathan Maccabaeus, so John was common. Parents want their children, the next generation, to be like the Maccabees who are going to liberate Israel from Rome.

So is Peter's father named John or Jonah? So there seems to be a contradiction in scripture, but as St. Augustine said, "Contradictions are always apparent." They are intended to make us dive deeper into the story and understand things at a deeper level.

What does Jesus mean when he says, "blessed are you Simon bar Yona?" Peter just gave Jesus two titles, the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of the living God. Jesus is going to respond in turn and honor Simon with two titles, Simon bar Jonah, and rock.

In Matthew 7:24, Jesus calls the wise man one who builds his house on rock. Which Old Testament figure was known for his wisdom? Solomon. In Matthew 12:42, Jesus says:

"There is something greater than Solomon here."

Solomon is also known for building the temple on the rock at Mount Moriah according to 1 Chronicles 3:1-3. Today, this is called the Dome of the Rock with a Muslim Mosque built on it with the golden dome that is iconic of Jerusalem. It's believed that is the rock where Abraham offered up Isaac and where Solomon built the first temple. Note the parallels. Jesus is acting like a new Solomon and is calling Peter rock, saying he is going to build his Church on that rock just as the temple was built on the rock.

But why bar Jonah? Now Matthew was (probably) originally written in the in the language of the Hebrews, which was Aramaic, their spoken language. In a first century synagogue Jews would hear the Scriptures in Hebrew, and then have another reading in Aramaic, the Targum, since not everyone understood Hebrew, much like Latin vs. the vernacular in the Church today.

Keep in mind that the gospels as we know them today are written in Greek for a Greek audience since Greek was the lingua franca of the first century and the language that the educated could understand. Still, the original Aramaic is preserved a few times as it is here, and the reason he is called "bar Yonah" might be to stress that Jonah is not Peter's father's name, so the Aramaic idiom is retained to recognize this as a title. To call Peter is "bar Jonah" means he's the son of the prophet Jonah.

This is a hypothesis, but there is evidence for this. Jonah comes up earlier in at the beginning of Matthew 16:4. People ask Jesus for a sign, and Jesus says:

<sup>4</sup> An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

We know a relationship to the sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41. Jesus says:

An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. <sup>40</sup> Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. <sup>41</sup> At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here.

But this doesn't exhaust the Jonah typology and significance of the son of Jonah being related to Peter.

### **What is the sign of Jonah?**

Jonah is sent to preach to the enemy of Israel, Nineveh, and they repent. So, how is Peter a son of Jonah? The idea of prophets having spiritual sons and disciples is very prevalent in the Old Testament. For example, in 2 Kings 2:11-12 and elsewhere:

Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind, <sup>12</sup> and Elisha saw it happen. He cried out, "My father! my father!"

The disciple of a prophet is called his spiritual son. The rabbis adopt this understanding, and St. Paul says (1 Cor 4:15):

<sup>15</sup> Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

So Paul would call himself a father to the Corinthians. Similarity to Timothy (1 Tim 1:1):

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, <sup>2</sup> to Timothy, my true child in faith: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Also Titus (Tit 1:4):

<sup>4</sup> to Titus, my true child in our common faith: grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our savior.

When Peter says:

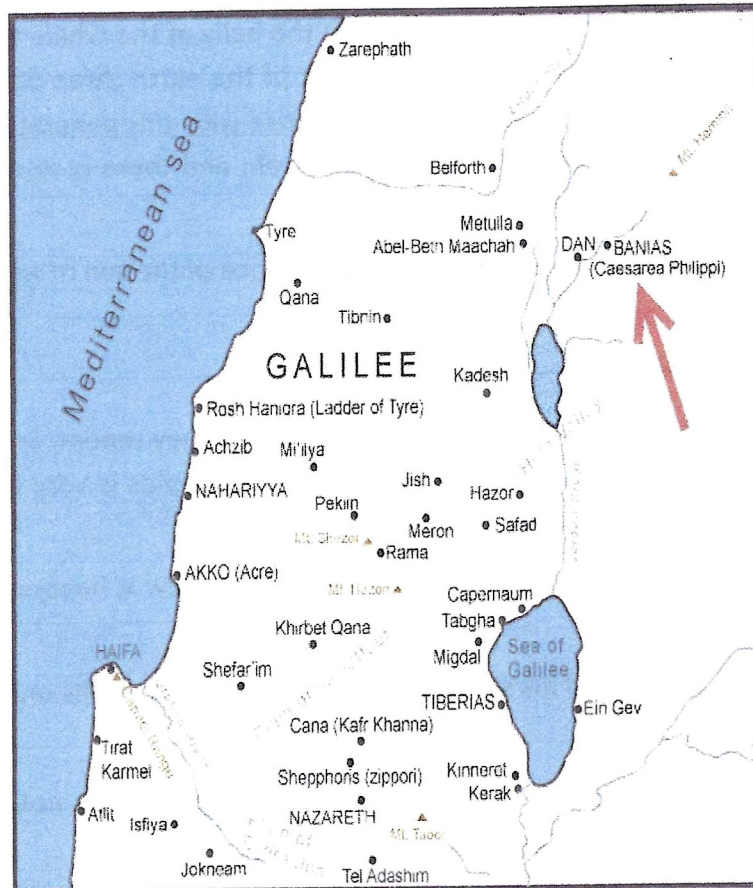
You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Here, Peter is acting like a prophet. Peter makes a prophetic declaration that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God as a revelation from the Father pronounced before the Twelve. So Jesus says:



Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

Since Peter speaks as a prophet, he's given a prophetic title. Jesus calls him "bar Jonah," a son of the prophet Jonah."



Recalls this takes place in the region of Caesarea Philippi. There are remnants of a pagan temple to the god Pan in Caesarea Philippi built by the Greeks in 332 BC but no longer of significance during the Roman occupation at the time of Jesus. Herod the Great built an enormous temple in honor of Caesar Augustus there which gives the place the name Caesarea Philippi. It's the Caesarea, i.e., a temple to Caesar, in the territory of Herod's son, Philip. Herod the Great built two other temples, one in the Northern Kingdom's capital of Samaria (or Sebastia. In Greek *Sebastia* means *Augustine*, in honor of Caesar Augustus). The third temple was in a port city on the Northern coast of Israel called Caesarea Marittima, the Caesarea on the Sea, today the city of Joppa.

Of course, the Jews didn't like pagan temples, especially those honoring the emperor, so Herod builds these in these outlying areas. The temple in Caesarea Philippi is far north of Israel in a region where there are not many devout Jews as there are in Jerusalem and Galilee. The temple is in Samaria (Sebastia) was in Samaritan territory and the Jews didn't care about the Samaritans.

Herod could never get away with building such a temple in Jerusalem as it would have led to riots and war.

When Jesus takes the apostles into the district of Caesarea Philippi, the dominant building by far was the temple Herod the Great built to honor of Caesar Augustus. Philip, the son of Herod the Great who reigned during the time of Jesus put an image of that temple on his coins as it was the greatest building in his whole kingdom.

With that context, Jesus takes the disciples up to Caesarea Philippi before he asking them, “Who do people say the son of man is?” When Jesus says, “Who do you say that I am?”, Peter replies, “You are the Christ, the son of the *living* God.” Living God is an ancient Hebraic expression found in Isaiah and elsewhere among the prophets. The Jews identify God as the living God versus the gods of the idols and the nations who are *dead* gods. When there's a conflict with idolatry and idols of the gods, the God of Israel is highlighted as the *living* God.

In Isaiah 44:9-10, 17-20, Isaiah ridicules dead idols:

<sup>9</sup> Those who fashion idols are all nothing;  
their precious works are of no avail.

They are their witnesses:  
they see nothing, know nothing,  
and so they are put to shame.

<sup>10</sup> Who would fashion a god or cast an idol,  
that is of no use?

He prays to it and says,  
“Help me! You are my god!”

<sup>18</sup> They do not know, do not understand;  
their eyes are too clouded to see,  
their minds, to perceive.

<sup>19</sup> He does not think clearly;  
he lacks the wit and knowledge to say,  
“Half the wood I burned in the fire,  
on its embers I baked bread,  
I roasted meat and ate.

Shall I turn the rest into an abomination?  
Shall I worship a block of wood?”

<sup>20</sup> He is chasing ashes!  
A deluded mind has led him astray;  
He cannot save himself,  
does not say, “This thing in my right hand—is it not a fraud?”

Now, Peter could have said, “You are the son of God. Why does he say, “You are the son of the *living* God? Because in the region of Caesarea Philippi the enormous temple built by Herod



honoring Caesar Augustus as a god is visible for miles. Peter calls Jesus the son of the *living* God, unlike Augustus, the son of a dead god, Julius. In the first century, the worship of Caesar under the title son of god was the fastest growing religion.

So, Jesus takes Peter and the disciples up to Caesarea Philippi where Caesar is worshiped and there he asks the question, "Who do you say that I am?" There, in sight of the temple that gives homage and honor and worship to Caesar, that Peter professes, you are the Christ, the Messiah, the son of the *living* God, unlike Caesar, the son of a *dead* god.

Jesus is preparing Peter for his mission. Peter will be sent to Rome, where he will have to profess Jesus as Lord and as the son of living God, contrary to the Roman Imperial propaganda. The Romans will not take well to the Christian gospel because it proclaims Jesus as Lord and son of God, a title given to Caesar. Ultimately Peter would be put on trial and executed by the Roman emperor. The title of a prophet bar Jonah is appropriate, because Jonah is sent to the enemy capital of Israel, Nineveh, to preach repentance, and the Ninevites repent. Peter is sent to the enemy of Israel, Rome, where he will preach and the Romans will ultimately repent and the empire will and convert. Peter is sent as Jonah is sent.

There is another connection between Peter and Jonah that supports Peter as bar Yona in Acts 10, this time in a Caesarea Marittima, the location of another great Pagan temple. Acts 10:

<sup>1</sup> Now in Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Cohort called the Italica, <sup>2</sup> devout and God-fearing along with his whole household, who used to give alms generously to the Jewish people and pray to God constantly.

A God fearer was a Gentile who believed in Judaism. God fearers typically were observant to Jewish ways though they weren't circumcised. They never made the cut, but they were otherwise observant Jews.

Peter has a vision in Joppa:

<sup>3</sup> One afternoon about three o'clock, he saw plainly in a vision an angel of God come in to him and say to him, "Cornelius." <sup>4</sup> He looked intently at him and, seized with fear, said, "What is it, sir?" He said to him, "Your prayers and almsgiving have ascended as a memorial offering before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send some men to Joppa and summon one Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is staying with another Simon, a tanner, who has a house by the sea." <sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from his staff, <sup>8</sup> explained everything to them, and sent them to Joppa.

Joppa is mentioned only once in the entire Old Testament, and that is in the book of Jonah 1:1-3:

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to Jonah, son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup> Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it; for their wickedness has come before me. <sup>3</sup> But Jonah

made ready to flee to Tarshish, away from the LORD. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down in it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the LORD.

Jonah goes to Joppa to enlist a ship to go west on the Mediterranean in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Jonah doesn't want to go west to Nineveh and thinks he can escape from God and his mission.



<sup>9</sup> The next day, while they were on their way and nearing the city, Peter went up to the roof terrace to pray at about noontime. <sup>10</sup> He was hungry and wished to eat, and while they were making preparations he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw heaven opened and something resembling a large sheet coming down, lowered to the ground by its four corners.

The great sheet, in Greek ὀθόνην, is the sail of a ship.

<sup>12</sup> In it were all the earth's four-legged animals and reptiles and the birds of the sky. <sup>13</sup> A voice said to him, "Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat." <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "Certainly not, sir. For never have I eaten anything profane and unclean." <sup>15</sup> The voice spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane." <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into the sky.

<sup>17</sup> While Peter was in doubt about the meaning of the vision he had seen, the men sent by Cornelius asked for Simon's house and arrived at the entrance. <sup>18</sup> They called out inquiring whether Simon, who is called Peter, was staying there. <sup>19</sup> As Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said [to him], "There are three men here looking for you. <sup>20</sup> So get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them." <sup>21</sup> Then Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your being here?" <sup>22</sup> They answered, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, respected by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear what you have to say." <sup>23</sup> So he invited them in and showed them hospitality.



The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him. <sup>24</sup> On the following day he entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup> When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, paid him homage. <sup>26</sup> Peter, however, raised him up, saying, "Get up. I myself am also a human being." <sup>27</sup> While he conversed with him, he went in and found many people gathered together <sup>28</sup> and said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with, or visit, a Gentile, but God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean. <sup>29</sup> And that is why I came without objection when sent for. May I ask, then, why you summoned me?"

Peter's vision that all foods are clean means that all Gentiles are clean. The distinction between Jew and Gentile is to be abolished.

Peter is called bar Jonah not because his father's name was Jonah. His father's name was John. Jesus had given Peter the vocation and call to be a prophet like Jonah. Peter is in Joppa as the new Jonah, and he will have men from Rome come looking for him. They bring him to Caesarea Marittima where Cornelius and his household hear Peter's preaching, they believe, the Spirit falls upon them, they get baptized, and they are the first Gentiles included in the people of God.

Acts 12 tells of persecution in Judea. Peter gets jailed but angel comes into the prison and releases Peter who goes from Judea to Caesarea and remains there. Peter is in danger in Jerusalem but safe in Caesarea because it is under the jurisdiction of Rome, not Herod, and he has a friend and disciple there, Cornelius. Cornelius is a wealthy, high-ranking Roman officer, a member of the equestrian rank and the Italian cohort. Cornelius secures Peter's safe passage to Rome.

When Peter's tomb was found (during World War II), next to it is ancient graffiti that shows Peter fishing with two fish in the boat. Then in another boat, Jonah's boat, is a whale. Peter is the new Jonah. The early Christians understood this. Jonah becomes one of the favorite artistic images of early Christian iconography in the catacombs because the Romans knew that they're the Nineveh that Peter, the new Jonah, was sent to convert, and Peter fulfilled the mission of Jonah by converting all of Rome.

Much later, in the 16th century, when Michelangelo is commissioned to paint the Pope's private chapel, the Sistine Chapel, he makes a figure of Jonah that's very significant. Michelangelo paints images of the prophets with the image Jonah as the largest. Michelangelo positions Jonah in a particular place. Jonah is depicted on a column. He has a big fish and he looks as though he's about to slip down and fall off the pillar. He has a big fish on his lap and he looks like he's about to slip off, and if he slips off and falls, he will land right in the Pope's chair, because every Pope is called by Jesus Christ to be a bar Jonah, to be a prophet, like Jonah, to go and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God to all the nations, even to the enemy of the people

of God. That is the role of the bar Jonah, the sons of Jonah, the disciples of Peter, the papacy. Michelangelo understood this and reminds the Popes of what their mission was supposed to be.

The Church is the βασιλαιο του Θεού, the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims. Peter is the steward, prime minister, and he is given the keys to the kingdom. Every king had a prime minister and Peter was called to be the prime minister and to rule when the king has gone.

Until the return of the King, the prime ministers, the Popes rule, from Rome, the Capitol of Israel's enemy who converts as the prophecy that Jesus, as Son of God foresaw. The Pope is called Peter bar Jonah. Amen. Amen.

