

Peter and the Rock and a Correct Exegesis of the Greek Text

The following letter together with my answer may hold some interest for some of my readers regarding my book on *Peter and the Rock* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, Vol. 58, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990) and the correct exegesis of Matthew's words.

Dear Mr. Caragounis,

Greetings! My name is J. P. and I hope you can take a moment to help me out by either answering my question or directing me to a resource that can.

I direct my question to you as you were quoted in an article titled: "The Exegetical Examination of Matthew 16:18" by Brittany C. Burnette on bible.org and you seemed to be extremely knowledgeable regarding Biblical Greek. Here is the link if you are interested:

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2701

Please forgive my ignorance, but even after reading the quotation, since I am to this time in my life mostly unfamiliar with any Greek, I still have a question regarding possible words that Jesus could have spoken, or Matthew could have written in Matthew 16:18. My question is: Could Jesus have spoken (or Matthew written) "petros" in both places in Matthew 16:18 if he wanted to show that "Peter" and "this Rock" were the same? In other words, would it be improper or incorrect for Jesus' statement to be: "And I also say to you that you are Peter (Petros), and on this rock (petros) I will build My church...?"

I sincerely hope you can take a moment to respond to my question as I greatly desire to gain a better understanding of this passage.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your response with great

anticipation!

Very sincerely,
J. P.

Here is my answer to Mr J. P.'s question

10 November 2007

Dear Mr P.,

I noticed your letter by chance today in my back-up mail service, because it was evidently deleted from my In Box. It is important that emails have a recognizable subject, such as «A New Testament question», «A point of Greek grammar», etc., so I know it is not a SPAM. I get too many of them as well as viruses, and therefore I discard without opening all mail that lacks a recognizable address or subject.

Now, to your question. In my book *Peter and the Rock* I make it clear that the two terms «petra» (= rock) and «petros» (=stone) are distinguished in Greek literature. For example, Greeks do not build on a *petros* (a stone that can be lifted up by hand and be thrown away), but they build on a *petra* (rock foundation, a rock in the sub-soil or rocky subsoil).

Ms Burnette makes some inexcusable errors in referring to me. First, she mixes me up with the Reformers and other older interpreters, trying to anchor my views in that way. My study is purely linguistic and exegetical and I indicate what is possible and what is impossible in Greek. If this evidence does not suit her, because she has a different agenda, it is her problem. Second, she writes: «Against Caragounis, Ridderbos argues that ...». Now, Caragounis' book was published in 1990, while Ridderbos' book appeared in 1987! How, then, can Ridderbos argue against Caragounis?

Ms Burnette seems to adopt the more usual interpretation today (apparently on the principle that «in the multitude of councillors there is safety»), based on a poor understanding of Greek. Greek is usually regarded as a dead language, which the scholar can treat as he/she pleases on his/her procrustian bed. This only reveals that this sort of exegesis comes from persons who have no living contact with Greek, although on the surface they do quote Greek words, giving the impression that they are experts in Greek. But to quote a few Greek words and to know first hand how the language functions, are two quite different things.

You will find the evidence extensively given in my book, mentioned above.
All the best,

Chrys C. Caragounis