



Is the Papacy in the Bible?

Answering Wes Huff's claim that Matthew 16:18 is "not a statement about Petrine supremacy," that Peter had no successors, and that Rome's primacy only "crystallizes" centuries later.

THE CLAIM — WES HUFF, "6 REASONS WHY I'M NOT ROMAN CATHOLIC" (YOUTUBE, FROM 14:45)

That Matthew 16:18 is not about Petrine supremacy: with Augustine, the "rock" is Christ or Peter's confession, and the Greek (*Petros/petra*) proves it. That even if Peter were the rock, nothing implies successors. That for a century after Jesus there was no single bishop of Rome (Ignatius is silent; Hermas and Clement speak of plural "presiding elders"). That Stephen of Rome (256) was the first to make a Petrine claim, that Sylvester's absence from Nicaea (325) shows Rome had no special standing, and that Roman supremacy only crystallizes under Damasus, Leo, and Gelasius.

ANSWER NO. 1 — THE TEXT HUFF NEVER MENTIONS

The Key of David: Isaiah 22 is the blueprint for Matthew 16

Seven centuries before Caesarea Philippi, God described the office Jesus would give Peter. In Isaiah 22 the steward "over the house" of the Davidic king — the prime minister — is deposed (Shebna) and replaced (Eliakim). The office outlives the man:

"I will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 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."

— ISAIAH 22:21–22 (C. 700 B.C.)

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

— MATTHEW 16:18–19

Jesus, the Son of David (Mt 1:1), who Himself holds "the key of David" (Rev 3:7), hands His keys to one man. Every first-century Jew heard the echo: Peter is being installed as the steward of the King's house. Three things follow that Huff's reading cannot explain: (1) the keys go to "you" — singular — the same "you" just renamed Rock; (2) a steward's office is by definition succeeded (Shebna → Eliakim); (3) the steward is called "father" — which is all the word *Pope* means.

2. Even Protestant scholars: the rock is Peter

Jesus spoke Aramaic: "You are *Kepha*, and on this *kepha* I will build my Church" — the same word twice, which is why the New Testament keeps "Cephas" as Peter's name (Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 1:12; Gal 2:9). Greek needed the masculine *Petros* for a man's name; "this rock" points to the nearest referent — the man just renamed.

"If it were not for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken 'rock' to be anything or anyone other than Peter."

— D. A. CARSON (EVANGELICAL), EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: MATTHEW

W. F. Albright & C. S. Mann (Protestant, *Anchor Bible: Matthew*): "Peter as the Rock will be the foundation of the future community."

3. Augustine cuts both ways

Huff leans on Augustine's *Tractates on John*. But Augustine, reviewing his own works, admitted he had read the rock both ways and told the reader to "choose which of these two opinions is the more probable" (*Retractions* 1.20.1). And the same Augustine anchored the true Church in Peter's chair:

"...the Roman Church, in which the primacy of the apostolic chair has always flourished."

— ST. AUGUSTINE, LETTER 43:7 (A.D. 397)

Three years later he recited the succession by name — "to Peter succeeded Linus, to Linus Clement..." — down to the pope of his own day (Letter 53:2, A.D. 400). You cannot borrow Augustine's exegesis and discard his ecclesiology.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The keys were not invented in Rome. They were forged in Jerusalem, in the house of David — and the Son of David handed them to Peter.

One, Twelve, Seventy: The Shape of the Kingdom

The Church did not evolve a hierarchy. The Son of David inherited one — and staffed it, from a pattern God had encoded in Israel a thousand years earlier.

	OLD COVENANT PATTERN	FULFILLED BY THE SON OF DAVID	THE CHURCH TODAY
1 THE CHIEF STEWARD "OVER THE HOUSE"	The prime minister of the king Joseph set "over my house," wearing Pharaoh's own signet ring (Gen 41:40–44). Eliakim, "over the household," bearing the key of David and called "a father" to Jerusalem (Isa 22:20–23; 2 Kgs 18:18). He governs in the king's name — and, critically, in the king's absence .	Peter — and Peter alone Alone receives the keys (Mt 16:19). Alone is prayed for: "that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31–32). Alone is charged three times: "Feed my lambs... tend my sheep... feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15–17). Named first in every list of the Twelve — "first, Simon" (Mt 10:2).	The Pope Bishop of Rome, successor of Peter, "father" (<i>papa</i>) of the household while the King is at the Father's right hand. He does not fill a power vacuum. He fills an office — one Isaiah described seven centuries before Christmas.
12 THE OFFICERS WHO FEED THE HOUSEHOLD	Twelve princes, twelve officers Twelve princes of the tribes at Sinai, twelve pillars, one blood covenant (Ex 24:4–8). "Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household" (1 Kgs 4:7).	The Twelve Apostles Twelve baskets gathered after the feeding of the five thousand (Mt 14:20). The new covenant in His blood sealed with the Twelve (Lk 22:20). "You will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt 19:28). When Judas falls, the office is refilled: "his office let another take" (Acts 1:20).	The bishops The college of the Apostles' successors, in union with Peter's successor, feeding the people of God with Word and Sacrament in the King's name. The office belongs to the structure of the Kingdom — not merely to the men who first held it.
70 THE ELDERS WHO SHARE THE SPIRIT	Seventy elders of Israel Seventy elders go up the mountain with Moses (Ex 24:1, 9). God takes "some of the spirit" that is on Moses and puts it on seventy elders "that they may bear the burden of the people with you" (Num 11:16–17, 24–25). Israel's council kept the number: seventy, plus one who presides.	The Seventy sent by Jesus "The Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come" (Lk 10:1). Their authority is His: "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10:16).	The priests The presbyters who share the bishop's burden and Spirit — the Church's own Rite of Ordination of priests still recalls the seventy elders on whom God poured out the spirit of Moses.

Peter in the New Testament — the data Huff's reading has to explain away

- Named over 190 times; the next Apostle (John) roughly 30.
- Jesus teaches from Peter's boat (Lk 5:3) and pays the Temple tax "for me and for yourself" (Mt 17:27).
- Leads the election of Judas' successor (Acts 1:15); preaches first at Pentecost (Acts 2:14); first miracle (Acts 3:6); first judgment (Acts 5:3).
- Paul goes up to Jerusalem "to visit Cephas" and stays fifteen days (Gal 1:18).
- First in all four lists of the Twelve (Mt 10:2; Mk 3:16; Lk 6:14; Acts 1:13); "Simon and those with him" (Mk 1:36).
- The angel: "tell his disciples **and Peter**" (Mk 16:7); the risen Lord appears to Cephas before the Twelve (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).
- Opens the Church to the Gentiles (Acts 10); at the Council of Jerusalem, "after much debate, Peter rose" — and "all the assembly kept silence" (Acts 15:7, 12).
- And the Queen Mother belongs to the same blueprint: 1 Kgs 2:19 → Lk 1:32; Rev 12. One kingdom, one design.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A kingdom has a king, a steward with the keys, a council of twelve, and elders who share the Spirit. The Kingdom of the Son of David has exactly that — from the first chapter of Acts.

The Papacy: The Earliest Witnesses

Dated and located witnesses to Peter's chair in Rome — every one of them before the “crystallization” Huff dates to Damasus, Leo, and Gelasius.

■ Scripture ■ Rome exercises authority — and is obeyed ■ Witness to Peter's chair & succession

THE APOSTOLIC AGE — A.D. 30–100

- c. 30–33 ● **The Keys — and the Flock** CAESAREA PHILIPPI / TIBERIAS
Jesus renames Simon “Rock” and gives him alone the keys of the Davidic steward (Mt 16:18–19; Isa 22:22); prays for him alone — “strengthen your brethren” (Lk 22:32); and sets one shepherd over the whole flock (Jn 21:15–17).
- c. 64–67 ● **Peter martyred in Rome** ROME
Attested by Clement, Ignatius, Dionysius of Corinth, Irenaeus, Gaius, and Tertullian — and by the tomb beneath St. Peter's.
- c. 96 ● **Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians** ROME → CORINTH
With the Apostle John still alive at Ephesus — far closer to Corinth — Rome orders a church founded by Paul to restore its deposed presbyters: “If anyone disobey the things which have been said by Him through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger” (ch. 59). Corinth obeyed; the letter was still read there seventy years later.

THE AGE OF PERSECUTION — A.D. 100–313

- c. 107 ● **Ignatius of Antioch, To the Romans** SMYRNA → ROME
He writes to seven churches. Only Rome is greeted as the church “which presides in the place of the region of the Romans... which presides over love” — and only to Rome does he say, “I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you” (ch. 4). Not silence: deference.
- c. 140–55 ● **Hermas & Polycarp** ROME / SMYRNA → ROME
The *Shepherd of Hermas* names Clement as the man whose “duty” it is to send Rome's writings “to the cities abroad” (Vision 2.4.3). Polycarp, disciple of the Apostle John, travels to Pope Anicetus to settle the Easter question (Eusebius, *Church History* 5.24) — not Rome to him.
- c. 160–80 ● **Hegesippus & Dionysius of Corinth** ROME / CORINTH
Hegesippus compiles Rome's succession list down to Anicetus (HE 4.22). Dionysius writes to Pope Soter that Clement's letter is still read at Corinth (HE 4.23).
- c. 180 ● **Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies 3.3** LYONS, GAUL
“It is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority.” He then names twelve bishops from Linus to Eleutherius, “in this order, and by this succession.”
- c. 190 ● **Pope Victor I and the Easter controversy** ROME → ASIA MINOR
Victor excommunicates the churches of Asia. Irenaeus begs him to be gentle — no one tells him he lacks the authority (HE 5.23–24).
- c. 200 ● **Tertullian** CARTHAGE
Peter, “called the rock on which the Church was to be built, who obtained the keys of the kingdom” (*Prescription* 22); Rome, “from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority of the apostles” (36). By c. 220 he mocks the bishop of Rome as “bishop of bishops” (*On Modesty* 1) — the claim was already being made.
- 251–52 ● **Cyprian of Carthage** CARTHAGE
“The primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one Chair” (*On the Unity of the Church* 4). Schismatics “dare to sail to the chair of Peter, and to the principal church, whence sacerdotal unity has arisen” (Letter 59, to Pope Cornelius). Both before Stephen (254–257).

THE AGE OF COUNCILS — A.D. 313–451

- 325 ● **Council of Nicaea** NICAEA
Canon 6 measures Alexandria's jurisdiction by Rome's: “since the like is customary for the Bishop of Rome also.” No pope attended any of the first seven ecumenical councils in person — absence is the norm, not evidence.
- 341 ● **Pope Julius I to the Eastern bishops** ROME → ANTIOCH
“Are you ignorant that the custom has been for word to be written first to us, and then for a just decision to be passed from this place?” (in Athanasius, *Apology Against the Arians* 35). Twenty-five years before Damasus.
- 343 ● **Council of Sardica** SARDICA (SOFIA)
Canons 3–5: a condemned bishop may appeal to “Julius, bishop of Rome,” “that we may honor the memory of Peter the Apostle.”
- 431 / 451 ● **Ephesus & Chalcedon** ASIA MINOR
At Ephesus the papal legate declares, unopposed, that Peter “lives and exercises judgment in his successors” (Session 3). At Chalcedon the bishops cry: “Peter has spoken through Leo!”

READ IT BACKWARD: every century from the first to the fifth has a dated, located witness to Peter's chair in Rome — and not one writer in those centuries denies Rome a primacy.



Answering Wes Huff, Point by Point

Each of the six assertions from the video, stated fairly — and the Scripture and history that answer it.

CLAIM 1

“The rock is Peter’s confession, not Peter — Augustine said so, and the Greek proves it.”

ANSWER

Jesus spoke Aramaic — one word, *kepha*, twice; that is why the Church kept “Cephas” as Peter’s name (Jn 1:42; Gal 2:9). Matthew needed the masculine *Petros* for a man. Verse 19 settles it: the keys go to “you” — singular — the man just renamed. Augustine himself said “let the reader choose” between the two readings (*Retractations* 1.20.1) and, whichever he chose, taught that “the primacy of the apostolic chair has always flourished” in Rome (Letter 43:7). Leading Evangelical scholars (Carson, France, Keener, Albright) concede the rock is Peter.

CLAIM 2

“Even if Peter is the rock, nothing implies successors.”

ANSWER

The keys are the steward’s keys of Isaiah 22 — an office that passed from Shebna to Eliakim. Offices in the Kingdom are succeeded: when Judas fell, “his office let another take” (Acts 1:20). Clement (c. 96) says the Apostles ordered that “other approved men should succeed them in their ministry” (ch. 44); Irenaeus (c. 180) names Peter’s successors one by one; Tertullian (c. 200) appeals to Rome’s “register of bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning” (*Prescription* 32). A foundation is not built for one man’s lifetime — “the powers of death shall not prevail.”

CLAIM 3

“No single bishop of Rome for a century — Ignatius is silent; Hermas and Clement speak of plural elders.”

ANSWER

Titles were fluid even in the New Testament (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5–7; Phil 1:1); fluid titles do not mean no head. Ignatius is not silent — only Rome “presides,” and only to Rome does he decline to “issue commandments... as Peter and Paul.” Watch what Rome **does**: Clement commands Corinth (c. 96); Hermas names Clement as Rome’s voice “to the cities abroad”; Hegesippus (c. 160s) and Irenaeus (c. 180), within living memory, list the single successors from Linus. The argument from silence cuts the other way: no one in three centuries denies Rome a primacy.

CLAIM 4

“Stephen of Rome (256) was the first to make a Petrine claim.”

ANSWER

Cyprian wrote of “the chair of Peter... the principal church, whence sacerdotal unity has arisen” in 252 — to Stephen’s predecessor. Tertullian was mocking Rome’s “bishop of bishops” by c. 220; Victor was excommunicating whole provinces c. 190; Irenaeus demanded agreement with Rome c. 180. Stephen did invoke Matthew 16 against Cyprian on rebaptism — and note the ending: the whole Church followed Rome, not Carthage. Even Cyprian, who fought the ruling, never denied that Rome was Peter’s chair.

CLAIM 5

“Sylvester skipped Nicaea and nobody thought it mattered.”

ANSWER

No pope attended any of the first seven ecumenical councils in person; every one sent legates. That is the norm, not a tell. At Nicaea the Roman legates sign ahead of every patriarch, and Canon 6 uses Rome as the yardstick for Alexandria’s authority. Sixteen years later Pope Julius reminds the East that “the custom has been for word to be written first to us” (341), and Sardica writes Roman appeals into canon law “to honor the memory of Peter” (343).

CLAIM 6

“Roman supremacy only crystallizes under Damasus, Leo, and Gelasius (late 4th–5th c.).”

ANSWER

Development of vocabulary is not invention of office. Apply Huff’s standard consistently and it erases the Trinity (defined 325) and the New Testament canon (listed 382–397). The Petrine office was **exercised** — Clement 96, Victor 190, Julius 341, Sardica 343 — long before it was theorized. What Leo gave the fifth century was the language; the reality was already 350 years old. And every Christian who trusts the 27-book New Testament is trusting the judgment of the very Church that said Rome presides.

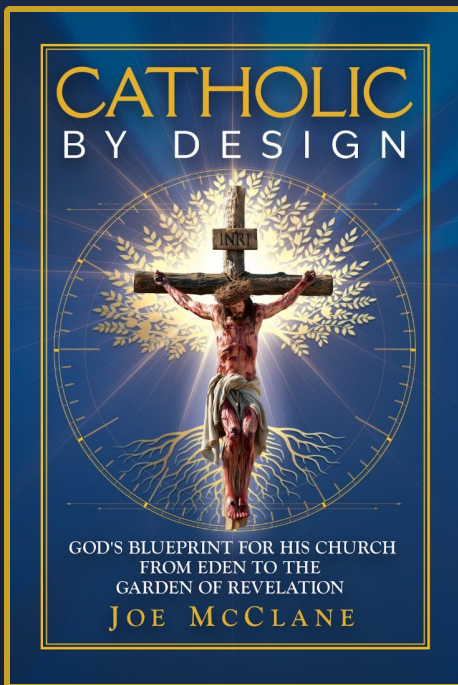
THE BOTTOM LINE

The question is not whether the papacy developed — everything alive develops. The question is whether it was there from the beginning. Isaiah, Matthew, Clement, Ignatius, and Irenaeus say it was.



FROM THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHEAT SHEET

The Kingdom has a steward — because the Kingdom has a King.



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