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A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

PETER AND CEPHAS: ONE AND THE SAME

Bart D. Ehrman, in a recent issue of this journal, has urged that Simon Peter and Cephas were two different people.¹ Earlier in our century K. Lake, M. Goguel, and D. W. Riddle entertained the very same notion,² and it can be found as early as the second century CE, in the *Epistula Apostolorum* and Clement of Alexandria, as well as in later Christian tradition (see below). Thus Ehrman's position is not novel. Rather, he has simply mustered support for a thesis already known to, if rejected by, most NT scholars. Nonetheless, as Ehrman has rightly remarked, the possibility of distinguishing between Cephas and Simon Peter is, in the critical literature, regularly raised only in passing and all too swiftly dismissed. That is, the standard identification is, as a rule, affirmed without benefit of argument.³ In view of this fact, and in view of Ehrman's attempt to resurrect the minority position, it is my purpose to set forth the reasons for identifying Simon Peter with Cephas. I shall begin by reviewing Ehrman's case and finish by collecting the evidence on the other side.

Ehrman commences by demonstrating that the idea of two separate persons is attested in the second century (*Epistula Apostolorum* 2 [eth]); Clement of Alexandria *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.12.2), the third and fourth centuries (Pseudo-Hippolytus, *De lxx discipulis; Praedicatio Pauli apud* Pseudo-Cyprian, *De rebaptismate* 17; Pseudo-Dorotheus, *De lxx discipulis domini et xii apostolis*; the Egyptian Apostolic Church Order), the seventh century (*Chronicon Pascale*), the ninth century (Codex Sinaiticus Syriacus 10), and the tenth century (the apostolic list wrongly attributed to Symeon Logothetes).⁴ Most of the sources just cited are apostolic lists, and because the lists differ in many ways (above all, in some Cephas belongs to the twelve, in others to the seventy), one supposes "that the distinction between Cephas and Peter was being perpetuated on more than the literary level, that is, that the tradition existed outside of the lists themselves" (p. 465).⁵ Whence then the tradition? The usual explanation is that it was a way of letting Peter off the hook: the person Paul opposed at Antioch—namely, Cephas—was someone other than Simon Peter. Ehrman himself concedes that "there is a good deal to be said for this view, given the circumstances that several of our sources state explicitly that Paul did in fact confront this otherwise unknown

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, "Cephas and Peter," *JBL* 109 (1990) 463–74.

² K. Lake, "Simon, Cephas, Peter," *HTR* 14 (1921) 95–97; M. Goguel, *La Foi à la résurrection de Jésus dans le Christianisme primitif* (Paris: Leroux, 1933) 272–75; D. W. Riddle, "The Cephas-Peter Problem, and a Possible Solution," *JBL* 59 (1940) 169–80. Goguel doubted the traditional identification but still held it more probable than not. Lake believed there was a Simon Cephas and a Simon Peter. Riddle, whose article I find confused and confusing, seems to think there was a Simon and a Cephas (p. 179)—although he begins by strongly implying that Galatians 2 indicates that there was a Peter and a Cephas (pp. 169–70).

³ E.g., J. A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic *Kēphā* and Peter's Name in the New Testament," in *To Advance the Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 114–15.

⁴ See T. Schermann, *Prophetarum Vitae Fabulosae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907) 182.

⁵ But for the possibility of a literary connection between the Apostolic Church Order and the *Epistula Apostolorum*, see W. Bauer, "The Picture of the Apostle in Early Christian Tradition," in E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. W. Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 2. 36 (the references to Baumstark, Haase, Schmidt).

person in Antioch" (p. 466). But he counters with two points: (1) "none of the sources that draws this distinction actually *makes* anything of it—that is, none of them uses it for any explicit apologetic ends" (p. 466); (2) in several sources, including the earliest (*Epistula Apostolorum*), Cephas is not one of the seventy but a member of the more important twelve, so can we automatically assume that the tradition in the *Epistula Apostolorum* and elsewhere was born of apologetics?

I am not convinced. With regard to the second point, it is not hard to imagine that someone might have wished to salvage Peter's reputation even if it meant tarnishing the institution of the twelve; for that institution—which at one time had Judas as a member and which had no continuing authority—was not nearly as important for many as were the person and authority of Peter himself. In the second and third centuries there was much debate over Peter and his theological and ecclesiastical heritage.⁶ Was there any comparable controversy over the twelve as such? As for Ehrman's first supporting point, even if none of the sources makes anything of the distinction between Peter and Cephas, that would not eliminate an apologetic genesis: origin and subsequent use are obviously two different things. Furthermore, Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.12.2, has this: "Clement, in the fifth book of his *Hypotyposes*, in which he mentions Cephas, of whom Paul writes: 'When he came to Antioch, I withstood him to his face,' says that one who happened to have the same name as Peter the apostle was one of the seventy." How much in this line is from Eusebius and how much from Clement we do not know: Clement's work is lost. But at least Eusebius, like some of the apostolic lists mentioned above, introduces Cephas by referring *precisely to the incident at Antioch*—and not, note well, to the first resurrection appearance (1 Cor 15:5) or Paul's initial visit to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18). Why? The answer must lie in the headaches that Galatians 2 gave early Christians. This chapter, which records conflict between two of the church's most important and honored authorities, seemingly impugned Peter's integrity, especially because Acts has the apostle receiving revelation about clean and unclean things (Acts 11)—revelation that should have put him on Paul's side. The Ebionites remembered the incident at Antioch in order to discredit Paul (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.19; cf. *Ep. Petr.* 2). Marcion cited it to discredit Peter (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.20; 5.3). Origen, followed by Jerome and Chrysostom, unpersuasively imagined that Paul and Peter, with the latter playing a false part, concocted the whole affair as a dramatic means of denouncing Judaizers: the two apostles were really at one (so Jerome, *Ep.* 112; idem, *Ep. ad Gal.* preface; Chrysostom, *Hom. in Gal.* 2.11). Non-Christian polemicists referred to Galatians 2 to throw doubt altogether on Christianity: "That wretch Porphyry . . . raised the objection that Peter was rebuked by Paul for not walking uprightly as an evangelical teacher. His desire was to brand the former with error and the latter with impudence . . . [and to show that] the teachers of the church are at variance among themselves" (Jerome, *Ep. ad Gal.* preface). In view of all this it is very difficult to believe that those responsible for originating and later handing on the tradition that Peter and Cephas were two different people were unaware that they had removed a great stumbling block.

Yet in the final analysis it really does not matter whether the intent of the extracanonical sources is apologetic. Even if one were to concede to Ehrman that a careful

⁶ T. V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity* (WUNT 2/15; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985).

reading of the NT, not apologetics, led a few Christians to think of Peter as someone other than Cephas, the question remains: Were those Christians correct? The key is Gal 2:7–9:

When they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reported to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. . . .

According to Ehrman, "whereas Paul mentions Cephas by name eight times in his letters (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14), he mentions Peter only twice (Gal 2:7, 8)," and "what is initially intriguing, and what has been most frequently observed in this connection, is that when he does mention Peter in Gal 2:7–8 he names Cephas in the same breath—and in such a way as to provide no indication that he is referring to the same person" (p. 467). Why the change if Peter = Cephas? "Whoever did not know that *Kephas* was a rough Aramaic equivalent of *Petros*, and who further did not realize that traditionally Cephas and Peter were identified as the same person, would never on the basis of *this* passage [Galatians 2] be led to make the identification themselves" (p. 468).⁷ Reinforcing this contention, in Ehrman's judgment, are, first, 1 Cor 15:5, where the phrase, "he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve," need not imply that Cephas was one of the twelve, and, second, Gal 2:8, which says that Peter was a minister to the circumcised: Gal 2:13 associated Cephas with the uncircumcised (cf. 1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; see pp. 470–73).

Taking the last two points first, certainly 1 Cor 15:5 does not *exclude* the possibility that Cephas was one of the twelve (the text settles nothing), and surely Gal 2:8 cannot be proof that Peter never ministered to Gentiles, just as it cannot be proof that Paul never occupied himself with Jews. Suffice it to observe what Ehrman does not, that in Gal 2:9 Cephas, like James and John, is to go "to the circumcised," while 2:12 has Cephas eating with Gentiles in Antioch.

But what of Gal 2:7–8? This is the crux of Ehrman's argument. Is Paul's switch from "Peter" to "Cephas" really that odd if the two were one? Ancient writers, who in this were no different from modern writers, frequently used synonyms to avoid certain types of repetition, including the repetition of proper names.⁸ In the *Testament of Jacob* the hero is sometimes "Jacob," sometimes "Israel," sometimes "Jacob-Israel"—even in the same paragraph. In *Jos. Asen.* 22:2 the narrator informs us: "And *Jacob* heard about Joseph his son, and *Israel* went to Egypt . . ." Riddle wrote, regarding Galatians 2: "It is indeed curious, if Peter and Cephas were the same person, that Paul should have used the two names for the same person in the same sentence."⁹ But

⁷ But the Galatians certainly did not have only Galatians 2 to hand. Paul's epistle clearly presupposes that its recipients already know much about James and Cephas and John. There is therefore no reason to suppose that if "Peter" and "Cephas" were two names for one person, the Galatians would not have known it. On the contrary, they would have read Galatians 2 as have most since, namely, with the assumption Peter = Cephas.

⁸ In addition to what follows, see the examples from the papyri in R. Calderini, *Aegyptus* 21 (1941) 249–52.

⁹ Riddle, "The Cephas-Peter Problem," 171.

two names for the same person in the same sentence is exactly what we have in *Jos. Asen.* 22:2. So too Mark 14:37: "He [Jesus] came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter: 'Simon, are you asleep?'" The variation here is purely stylistic (cf. John 21:15–19). The evangelist could just as easily have written: "and he said to Simon: 'Peter . . .'" Compare Luke 22:31–34: "'Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you . . .'" And he said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison, and to death.' Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow . . .'" Note also that in Acts Peter is sometimes called "Peter," other times "Simon Peter," sometimes "Simon," and once "Simeon," while John Mark is usually "John Mark," but once just "Mark," and another time just "John." Although source criticism may help account for some of the variations I have cited, we also have here to do with a compositional trait of several authors: they liked to vary names. Perhaps Paul did too, in which case we might look no further for an explanation of Galatians 2. (The avoidance of repetition explains the use of "Christ," "Jesus Christ," and "Jesus" in Rom 8:9–11 and elsewhere in Paul and shows that the motive I have tentatively imputed to the apostle would not have been foreign to him.)

I do not insist that the transition from "Peter" to "Cephas" in Galatians 2 must be stylistic, only that it could be. There are other possibilities. That a pre-Pauline text lies behind Gal 2:7 is perhaps not as questionable as Ehrman thinks. His observation that *πιστεύω* + accusative, *ἀκροβυστία*—*περιτομή*, *ἀποστολή*, and *ἐνεργεῖν* are Pauline does not counter H. D. Betz's proposal that "the non-Pauline notions of the 'gospel of the circumcision' and 'of uncircumcision' as well as the name 'Peter' may very well come from an underlying official statement," and that "rather than 'quoting' from the written protocol, Paul reminds the readers of the agreements by using the terms upon which the parties had agreed."¹⁰ There is also perhaps something to be said for the proposal that an allusion to the material now embedded in Matt 16:17–19 (Peter as the rock) should be detected.¹¹

I should now like to turn from Ehrman's presentation and submit the evidence which indicates that "Cephas" and "Peter" name one man.

1. Πέτρος means "stone" and (as a sometime synonym for πέτρα) "rock," whereas κήφας is a Greek rendering of the Aramaic *kēpā*, which means "craig," "stone," or "rock."¹² Hence πέτρος and κήφας are near synonyms. Furthermore, in pre-Christian sources *Kēpā* as a proper name is attested only once, and Πέτρος as a proper name not at all.¹³ Does it not stretch credulity to maintain that earliest Christianity had among its outstanding leaders two men with exceedingly rare (sur)names or nicknames with the same sense? And if *Kēpā* was not a name given at birth but a

¹⁰ H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 97.

¹¹ See D. Wenham, "Paul's Use of the Jesus Tradition: Three Samples," in *Gospel Perspectives Volume 5: The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels* (ed. D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 24–28. Interestingly enough, *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 17.19 combines a clear allusion to Matt 16:18 with a clear allusion to Gal 2:11.

¹² See Fitzmyer, "Aramaic *Kēpā*," 112–24.

¹³ *Ibid.* On the other hand, C. C. Caragounis argues that "in view of the predilection of the ancients for names derived from πέτρα/πέτρος . . . it is only natural to suppose that Πέτρος was in existence [in pre-Christian times], though no examples of it before the Christian era have turned up as yet" (*Peter and the Rock* [BZAW 58; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990] 24); and Caragounis can demonstrate pagan use of the name in the first and second centuries CE.

nickname with symbolic significance bestowed by Jesus (so Matt 16:17–19), would we not expect it to be translated for the benefit of Greek-speaking Christians, with the result that *Kēpā* would also be known as Πέτρος? (Compare Acts 9:36–43, where Ταβθά [= Aramaic *tabyētā*] is also called Δορκάς [Greek for gazelle]; John 11:16; 20:24; and 21:2, where Θωμάς is named Δίδυμος ["twin," translating Aramaic *t'ōmā*]; Mark 3:17, where βοανηργές is translated by "sons of thunder";¹⁴ and Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13, where ὁ ζηλωτής [in "Simon the zealot"] probably translates Aramaic *qan'ān* = "zealot," "enthusiast" [cf. Matt 10:4 = Mark 3:18: ὁ Καναναῖος].)

2. John 1:42 has this: "Jesus looked at him [Simon Peter] and said: 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)." According to Ehrman, "even a close reading of John 1:42 does not necessarily preclude the possibility that we have two persons going under the same epithet among Jesus' early followers" (p. 473 n. 33). How this is to be harmonized with his earlier statement (p. 466) that in the Fourth Gospel "the identification of Cephas and Peter is made unequivocally," I am unsure. But that aside, if one simply weighs probabilities, surely John 1:42 is nearly certain evidence that the author of John and/or his tradition knew not of one disciple named Peter and another named Cephas but of one Simon who was called "Cephas" and "Peter." One might to be sure reply that John and/or his tradition mistakenly conflated Peter and Cephas because it was known that their names meant the same thing. But that would be sheer speculation, and the more dubious given that John's tradition seems to have had independent and presumably reliable information about several of Jesus' first followers (e.g., Jesus drew disciples from the Baptist movement; Philip and Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida; Simon was the "son of John"; see 1:35–36, 42, 44).

3. In 1 Cor 15:5 Paul reports that Jesus appeared first of all to Cephas. The canonical Gospels do not, at least in their present forms, appear to narrate this encounter. But Luke 24:34 ("The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon") presupposes it (as may Luke 22:32, where Jesus says to Peter: "When you [σύ] have turned again, strengthen your brethren"). So while 1 Cor 15:5 makes Cephas the first to see the risen Lord, Luke (if we exclude the women) gives the same distinction to Peter. The inference is obvious (although one could, in theory, urge that the author of Luke, being under the delusion that Simon Peter = Cephas, used "Simon" when he should have used "Cephas").

4. In Gal 2:9 Paul uses the phrase "James and Cephas and John," implying that these three—he calls them "pillars"—were the outstanding figures or leaders in the primitive Jerusalem community. What do we find in Acts? Simon Peter is often paired with John (e.g., 3:1–26; 4:1–31; 8:14), once with James (15:1–21); and the three men are clearly the dominant figures among the so-called "Hebrews" (1:13, 15–26; 2:1–42; 8:14–24; 11:1–18; 15:1–21; 21:18; etc.). Again the same inference, Peter = Cephas, commends itself.

5. Why, if Peter ≠ Cephas, do the traditions in Acts have nothing at all to say about the latter? A man associated with John and James (Gal 2:9), a so-called "pillar" (Gal 2:9), who needed no introduction to the Galatians (1:18), the first to whom the Lord appeared (1 Cor 15:5), who was as important to some Corinthians as Paul and Apollos (1 Cor 1:12), and who was the object of Paul's first trek to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18)—How did such a one manage to leave no sure trace of himself in the NT apart

¹⁴ See J. T. Rook, "Boanerges, Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17)," *JBL* 100 (1981) 94–95.

from Paul's epistles? Or should we suspect that, apart from Paul's epistles, every tradition about Cephas came to be, through conscious or unconscious error, a tradition about Peter?

6. Paul says that Peter was an "apostle" entrusted with the mission to the circumcision (Gal 2:8). Paul says that Cephas was an "apostle" entrusted with the ministry to the circumcision (Gal 1:18-19; 2:9).

7. *1 Clem.* 47.3 names Cephas: "Truly he [Paul] wrote to you [the Corinthians] in the Spirit about himself and Cephas and Apollos because even then you had split into factions." *1 Clem.* 5.4 names Peter: "There was Peter, who, because of unrighteous jealousy, endured not one or two trials but many, and thus having given his testimony went to his appointed place of glory." Although one could contend that the author of *1 Clement* did not identify Cephas with Peter, I suspect the truth is otherwise. "Cephas" is used in *1 Clem.* 47.3 because the language of 1 Cor 1:12 is being employed. What of 5.4? It is introduced by these words: "Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars (στῦλοι) were persecuted and fought to the death. Let us set before our eyes the good apostles." One is reminded of Gal 2:9, where James and Cephas and John are στῦλοι; and we could well have here an allusion to or a borrowing from that verse, because Clement had access to several of Paul's epistles, including probably Galatians.¹⁵ But if so, then Clement has drawn upon language about Cephas to introduce remarks about Peter, which would make *1 Clement* an early witness, one independent of John, for the equation Peter = Cephas.

8. It is instructive to set side by side the facts about Cephas as related by Paul and the traditions about Peter as found in the canonical Gospels and Acts:

Peter

His name means "rock"
The Lord appeared to him first
(Luke 22:32; 24:34)
He was a Jew and a prominent
leader of the primitive Jerusalem
community (Acts 1-15)
He was associated with both
James and John (see p. 493)
He participated in the Gentile
mission (Acts 10-15)

He was married (Mark 1:30 par.)
He was of fickle character
(Mark 14 par.)
He knew Paul personally
(Acts 15)
He was an itinerant missionary
(Acts 1-15)

Cephas

His name means "rock"
The Lord appeared to him first
(1 Cor 15:5)
He was a Jew and a prominent
leader of the primitive Jerusalem
community (Galatians 1-2)
He was associated with both
James and John (Gal 2:9)
He participated in the Gentile
mission (Galatians 2; this is probably
also implicit in 1 Corinthians)

He was married (1 Cor 9:5)
He was of fickle character
(Galatians 2)
He knew Paul personally
(Galatians 1-2)
He was an itinerant missionary
(1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; and Gal 2:11,
taken together, strongly imply this)

¹⁵ D. A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (NovTSup 34; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 195-237.

He came into conflict with
Jerusalem Christians over eating
with the uncircumcised (Acts 11)

He came into conflict with
Jerusalem Christians over eating
with the uncircumcised (Galatians 2)

What Ehrman would make of these parallels I do not know (he does not discuss them), and I freely concede that they do not, in the strict sense, prove that Peter was Cephas. But that matters little, for apodictic certainty is beyond our reach: as historians we trade only in probabilities. One can always ignore what is likely, wave the magic wand of skepticism, and doubt anything. Using, for example, the extreme methods deployed by Riddle,¹⁶ one could surmise that the author of Acts received traditions about a man named Saul and traditions about a man named Paul, and because the two traditions shared certain features, they came to be fused. I trust that such a hypothesis, which has in its favor the undeniable fact that Paul does not once call himself Saul, would, if put forward, fail to gain a hearing. Doubt can enlarge itself too much (as when it rejects the clear testimony of John 1:42). This is not to say that we can dismiss, simply because it seems improbable, the proposition that there were in earliest Christianity two important men both with a rare name meaning "rock." History does offer queer factual conjunctions. St. John Colombini, whose feast day is July 31, was converted through reading the lives of the saints, founded a religious order known as the Jesuati, was suppressed by a pope named Clement, and died in Italy. St. Ignatius Loyola's feast day is also July 31, and he too was converted through reading the lives of the saints and founded a religious order known as the Jesuits that was suppressed by a pope named Clement, and he died in Italy. Fortunately for us, however, such incredible coincidences are infrequent (which is why they are incredible); and, therefore, in lieu of more solid evidence to the contrary, are we not compelled to believe that Peter and Cephas were one and the same?

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¹⁶ Not, let me hasten to add, by Ehrman. I find Ehrman unconvincing, not unreasonable.