

## The Keys to the Kingdom

By Jim Myers

*Comments and Questions for your Consideration*

- (1) The actual name of Jesus.
- (2) The word “I” was inserted here by later copyists. See if it is in your translation.
- (3) Son of Man – The mighty superhuman judge of the Last Judgment.
- (4) Since Jesus and John the Baptist were alive at the same time the insertion makes readers wonder about the response of his followers.
- (5) See John 1:41
- (6) See John 1:42
- (7) See Psalm 107:32 in Septuagint – Greek word translated as “church” appears.
- (8) Hades = Sheol, the abode of the dead.
- (9) Kingdom of Heaven – A divinely willed movement spreading among the

Matthew 16 records a conversation between Jesus and his followers that became the cornerstone claim for divine authority by the Roman Catholic Church. It took place in the northern region of Israel known as Caesarea Philippi.



*Caesarea Philippi, earlier known as Paneas, was a center of pagan worship. In 20 BCE, during the Roman times, it was transferred to the control of Herod the Great who built a temple there to Caesar Augustus. After Herod died in 4 BCE, it came under the authority of Herod's son Philip who renamed it Caesarea Philippi after Tiberius Caesar and himself.*

**Yeshua** <sup>(1)</sup>: Who do men say that <sup>(2)</sup> the Son of Man <sup>(3)</sup> is?

**Followers:** Some say John the Baptist <sup>(4)</sup>, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

**Yeshua:** But who do you say that I am?

**Simon son of Jonah:** You are the Messiah <sup>(5)</sup>, the Son of the living God.

**Yeshua:** Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Cephas <sup>(6)</sup>, and on this rock I will build my congregation <sup>(7)</sup>, and the gates of Sheol <sup>(8)</sup> shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven <sup>(9)</sup>, and whatever you **bind** on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you **loose** on earth will be loosed in heaven.

**Yeshua:** Do not tell anyone that I am the Messiah. <sup>(10)</sup>

This conversation is loaded with words that modern readers must view through the eyes of the Jewish culture of the first century if they want to accurately understand the message of the original author. Just replacing the familiar names *Jesus* and *Peter* with *Yeshua* and *Cephas* have a dramatic affect. **Rabbi Shmuley Boteach** reflects the challenges facing those who attempt to understand the historical Jesus in a *Jerusalem Post* article <sup>(11)</sup>:

people on the earth.  
The domain of  
God's rule.

Jesus Christ is the most famous Jew of all time, but is today remembered as a Christian.

(10) Divinely  
appointed leader of  
the Kingdom of  
God.

Surprisingly, the Jewish community has accepted this distortion of history, and tends to regard Jesus as an apostate. How odd that the Jews would accept a Christian version of one of their brethren rather than seeking to discover the man entombed beneath the myth.

(11) December 7,  
2005

Like a mummy whose bandages must be removed, 2,000 years of Christian gauze must be stripped away so we may discover the Jewish Jesus. We may do so by reading the original story of Jesus in the New Testament, before it was modified by Pauline and Lucan editors, who worked after the failed Jewish rebellion against Rome in the years 66-70, and whose intention it was to make Jesus less Jewish and more Roman, less a political rebel against Roman rule and more a Jewish religious revolutionary who inveighed against a corrupt Jewish hierarchy.

(12) The role of  
Jesus is highly  
debated, but the  
fact that the hated  
Romans become  
the "good guys"  
raises many  
questions about  
the agendas of  
those who copied  
the New  
Testament texts.

These Christian editors hid the real Jesus' message of political revolution against Rome, thereby transforming him into a sound-bite-speaking do-gooder who loved the Romans and hated his people. <sup>(12)</sup>

(13) Direct line of  
authority from  
Jesus to the  
current pope.

What did the act of handing the "keys of the Kingdom" to Cephas signify 2000 years ago in ancient Israel? For centuries Christians have been taught that this act laid the foundation upon which all future claims of Church authority would rest, especially the Roman Catholic Church doctrine of Apostolic Succession. <sup>(13)</sup>

(14) See  
"Apostolic  
Succession"  
Wikipedia & New  
Advent  
Encyclopedia.

The Catholic Church has traditionally claimed a unique leadership role in that the apostle Peter, believed to be named by Jesus as leader of the apostles and as a focus of their unity, became the first Bishop of Rome, whose successors would accordingly become leaders as well. <sup>(14)</sup>

(15) What effect  
would it have on  
modern  
Christianity if  
these verses did  
not support the  
claims of  
Apostolic  
Succession?

You are probably aware of the teaching that Peter was the first pope and he passed the "keys" on to the his successor, from whom they were passed to each succeeding pope of the Roman Catholic Church. The doctrine of Apostolic Succession is the primary argument the Catholic Church has used to prove that other Christian churches are not the "true" Church. In order for this claim to be valid Peter would have to had been aware of and believed doctrines that would not be formulated for another 300 years. Maybe Jesus had something else in mind and was simply doing something that had been done many times before by other Jewish teachers. <sup>(15)</sup>

(16) Shouldn't this  
be the primary  
goal of everyone  
that believes in  
Jesus?

Our goal is to do our best to understand Matthew's account in the same manner as he understood it. We want to know what Jesus's message meant to him and the group gathered around him. <sup>(16)</sup> The text provides us with two very important clues that will help us reach that goal – *bind* and *loose*. The context in which they are used makes it clear that Jesus is using them in a very specific manner.

The power of binding and loosing was always claimed by the Pharisees. . . This does not mean that, as the learned men, they merely decided what, according to the Law, was forbidden or allowed, but that they possessed and

(17) See “Jewish Encyclopedia.”

(18) These terms have been used to support beliefs from casting out demons to “name it and claim” theologies.

(19) The Mishnah is the Oral Law.

(20) booth

(21) Festival commemorating the Exodus and the time the Israelites lived in the wilderness in booth.

(22) Different interpretations may have been the primary issue between them, not different religions.

(23) Is this a clue as to how Jesus viewed gentiles? Doesn't sound like he had any thoughts of including them as members?

(24) The Greek word used here is **amhn**, a transliteration of the Hebrew word **!mea'**. The English transliteration is “AMEN.” See 1 Chronicles 16:36.

(25) “Avot” is the “Sayings of the

exercised the power of tying or untying a thing by the spell of their divine authority, just as they could, by the power vested in them, pronounce and revoke an anathema upon a person. The various schools had the power "to bind and to loose"; that is, to forbid and to permit (Hag. 3b).<sup>(17)</sup>

**Bind** and **loose**<sup>(18)</sup> are technical terms that had very specific meanings for Jesus, just as they still do today in modern rabbinic circles. “**Bind**” means to “**forbid**,” while “**loose**” means “**permit**.” Two of the most famous teachers in rabbinic history were Shammai and Hillel, who lived very close to the same time as Jesus. Below is a quote from the Mishnah<sup>(19)</sup>, which is found in Sukkah 1:1.

A sukkah<sup>(20)</sup> which is taller than twenty amot is unfit for use, [however], Rabbi Yehudah **permits** it. One which is not ten tephachim tall, or which does not contain three walls or which has more sun than shade, is unfit for use. [Regarding] an old sukkah- the House of Shammai **bound (forbid)** it and the House of Hillel **loosed (permitted)** it. What is an old sukkah? Anything which he made, thirty days before the festival [of Sukkot].<sup>(21)</sup> However, if he made it for the sake of the festival, even [if he made it] from the beginning of the year, it is fit for use.

Shammai's followers wouldn't be allowed to use the sukkah, while Hillel's were permitted. The fact that Jesus bestowed this authority upon Cephas would indicate that he believed that his followers would require similar rulings in the future. It also implies that Jesus and the Pharisees held some common beliefs about the Torah and the manner in which it should be interpreted.<sup>(22)</sup>

Matthew provides another account in which bind and lose are used, this is in chapter 18 verses 15-18. This time I am going to translate the two terms in the way that the first century Jews would have understood them.

Now if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the congregation. But if he refuses even to hear the congregation, let him be to you like **the gentile**<sup>(23)</sup> and a tax collector. **Amen!**<sup>(24)</sup> I say to you, whatever you **prohibit** on earth will be **prohibited** in heaven, and whatever you **permit** on earth will be **permitted** in heaven.

**Yoke** was also a word that the early rabbis like to use to describe the relationship of an observant Jew and his relationship of the Torah (Law). Oxen were familiar to the inhabitants of ancient Israel as automobiles are to us today. They knew about yokes and how they were to be used and not used. A core teaching that was probably familiar to Jesus and his followers is found in the Mishnah (Avot 3:6).

Every one who takes upon himself the **yoke of the Torah** removes from his shoulders the yoke of government and daily sorrows. But whoever removes the **yoke of the Torah** will be burdened with the yoke of government and daily sorrows.<sup>(25)</sup>

Fathers.”

(26) International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, revised edition, © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.



*The decision to follow the Torah was compared to a yoke placed upon an ox. Just as a yoke is used to steer the ox, the “yoke of the Torah” steers the direction of the man as walks the path of life. A man’s understanding of the Torah will be determined by the interpretations of the teacher. We see this in the words of Jesus.*

(27) “The Law & the Prophets” are two sections of the Jewish Bible.

(28) See #24.

(29) The smallest

Hebrew letter **Y** – translated as “jot” in KJV.

(30) Small decorative marks added to Hebrew letters by scribes, translated as “tittle” in KJV. See three mark on top of letter below.



Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his followers, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in **Moses' seat**. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they **bind heavy burdens**, hard to bear, and **lay them on men's shoulders**; but they will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matthew 23:1-4)

Laying heavy burdens upon the shoulders of men clearly raises the image of a heavy yoke being placed upon an ox. Notice that Jesus also mentioned something called “Moses’ seat,” which would be like the one pictured below.



With their backs toward Jerusalem the elders of the synagogue sat facing the people. The most prominent elder sat in the **stone seat** on a raised platform next to the ark containing the scrolls. From here teachers expounded the Mosaic law. This seat symbolized their authority as interpreters of the law in unbroken succession from Moses. <sup>(26)</sup>

Modern Christianity is so far removed from its Jewish roots that many of the original meanings of the words of Jesus have been completely lost. In their place we find gentile doctrines that would not have been understood by either Jesus or his followers. Doctrines of “grace” and “not being under the law” dominate modern Christianity to such an extent that anything related to the Law is viewed as repulsive and irrelevant. Pay close attention to what Jesus says about the Law:

(31) Do Christian doctrines of “Grace” and “Faith” destroy or fulfill the Law & Prophets? Was it the goal of Jesus to interpret the Law correctly?

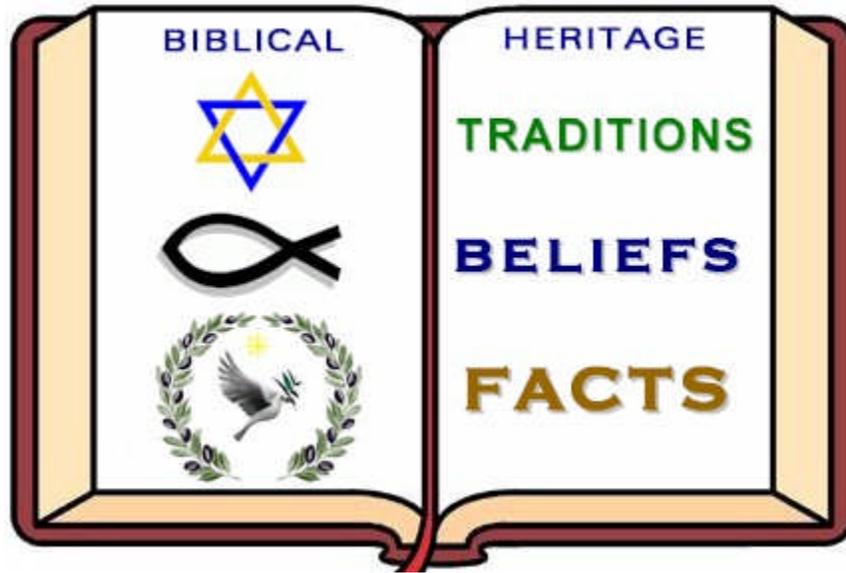
Do not think that I came to destroy **the Law or the Prophets.** <sup>(27)</sup> I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>(28)</sup> Amen! I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one **Yod** <sup>(29)</sup> or a **small decorative mark** <sup>(30)</sup> will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled. <sup>(31)</sup> (Matthew 5:17-18)

(32) The Hebrew Synoptic Gospels. tyndale.cam.ac.uk/

How does one destroy the Law? In rabbinic argumentation "**destroy**" means "**misinterpret**" while "**fulfill**" means "**correctly interpret.**" <sup>(31)</sup> The intention is not to weaken the Law by misinterpreting it. By properly interpreting it, Jesus would make it more lasting. Heaven and earth would be destroyed before he would cause anything to disappear from the Law. <sup>(32)</sup> Shouldn't the goal of every follower of Jesus be to learn the Law and what Jesus **prohibited** and **permitted**? **BHC**

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