

Keys to the Kingdom
Matthew 16:18—19

We are in one of the most misunderstood, misinterpreted and mistaught areas of Scripture. Over a billion people from all over the world are led to believe that these verses give authority to today's church. Even among non-churched people the image of Peter as the gatekeeper of heaven is conjured up from this passage in Matthew along with Revelation 21:21. Even fundamental Christians have a poor understanding of the true meaning of verses 18 and 19. For instance John MacArthur understands that loosing and binding relates to forgiving or retaining sins and that Christians have the authority to declare so because we know if someone is saved or not saved. It is not a special authority given to Peter but something we all can declare if we know the other person's status with God (<http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/2319>). Ray Stedman believes the keys Peter was given were used so he could open the door to the new things God was introducing. He did this on the Day of Pentecost when he preached his sermon in Acts 2 (<http://www.raystedman.org/daily-devotions/1-john>). Matthew Henry believed we all have the keys but Peter was the first to receive them because he was the first that opened the door of faith to the Gentiles in Acts 10 (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Matt.xvii.html>). John Wesley taught that the keys were both doctrine and discipline. Peter used these keys to open up the Kingdom of heaven to the Jews and the Gentiles (<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-gospel-according-to-st-matthew/#Chapter+XVI>).

I believe the primary reason there are so many ideas on this portion of Scripture is because most people do not look at Scripture from a proper viewpoint. When Israel and the Church are seen as one entity then all of Scripture is viewed as being applicable for us today with only some things, like the sacrificial system in the Mosaic Law, seen as having passed away. Scripture becomes clear only when viewed through the filter of Israel and the filter of the Church. If people would understand that this passage in Matthew 16 was related strictly to Israel in the future Millennial Kingdom misunderstanding would decrease greatly.

Keys of the Kingdom

The one thing most people agree on is that the keys represent authority. Those who have a key usually have the authority to use the key. When you are given the keys to the car you have the authority to use that car. When you buy a house you do not get the keys until after the paperwork is signed and you officially own the house. When Peter received the keys to the Kingdom he was given authority. Authority over what? This is where many different viewpoints arise.

First, it needs to be understood that the Kingdom in view here is the Millennial Kingdom that Jesus and the Disciples have been preaching for the past three years. It was this same Kingdom that the Disciples asked Jesus about, wondering if He was now going to set it up just before ascending into heaven (Acts 1:6). This is a physical, political Kingdom that will have a heavenly form of government. Instead of the world being controlled by men it will be controlled by God. Instead of being the day of man, it will be the Day of the Lord when God will be Head of all things with Jesus Christ on the throne.

Others will be ruling with Jesus Christ including King David who will be resurrected and will rule from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23—24; 37:24—25; Hosea 3:5). The Disciples are also promised thrones in the Kingdom (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). It is from these thrones that they will be judging or ruling over the world. I believe this is in accordance with the Mosaic Law that sets up a judicial system to judge right from wrong within Israel (Deuteronomy 16:18—20). Since there will eventually be believers and unbelievers in the Millennial Kingdom there will need to be a system in place to deal with Law breakers.

Notice that Peter will be (future tense) given a set of keys and not just one key. How many keys are there in the Kingdom? It seems that Peter will be acting as Chief Justice but will be delegating responsibility and authority to the 11 Disciples who were also promised positions of authority in the Millennial Kingdom.

The Scribes and Pharisees were to inherit this position of authority but because they rejected their Messiah, this position was taken away from them and given to the Disciples (Matthew 21:43). Instead of helping people gain entrance into the Kingdom they closed the door shut to keep people out (Matthew 23:13). They did everything physically possible to retain their power over the people that they lost sight of the spiritual ramifications. The unspiritual will not be able to enter the Kingdom. This is why Jesus told the Disciples to do as the Pharisees said (in obeying the Mosaic Law) but don't do as they do. They were masters at showing piety on the outside but their hearts were evil making them nothing more than hypocrites.

Bind and loosen

This is another phrase that is taken out of context, put into this church age and has caused millions to be averted from the truth. The binding and loosening have to do with the Disciple's judicial power in the Millennial Kingdom and is based on the Mosaic Law. Matthew 18:18 expands on the use of these powers, usually understood in the context of church discipline. This church, however, cannot be thought of as today's local church of believers but is made up of the assembly (Greek: ekklesia) of Kingdom believers including the resurrected dead Old Testament saints, those who were martyred during the Tribulation and those who survived the Tribulation. All will be believers at the beginning of the Kingdom but there will soon be a population of unbelievers through birth.

The Disciples, along with all of believing Israel, will be ruling with Christ in judging the world (Deuteronomy 19:6; Revelation 5:10; Isaiah 60:1—6). They will be using supernatural powers to keep the world in check such as the spiritual gift of knowledge. Peter used this gift to know that Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5. This incident is an example of how the judicial system will work in the Millennial Kingdom.

This system is also described in Matthew 18. The brother, in this case, is another Israelite who is caught in a sin. If when he is confronted privately about his sin he refuses to change then 2—3 witnesses will be called upon to testify (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). If he still refuses to repent then he is brought before the whole assembly and I believe this would be before the Disciples sitting on the 12 thrones of Judgment. This would be equivalent to bringing a matter before the Supreme Court. Those found guilty would be bound while the innocent would be loosed or set free. Their decision is final and whatever they decide has already been agreed upon in heaven.

Going back to Matthew 16:19, in today's vernacular it would read: "...whatever you declare to be bound (legally) has already been bound in heaven and whatever you set free (legally) has already been set free in heaven." This is not how most people understand this verse since they say that it has to do with sins and if the Disciples declare someone bound by sin (unforgiven) or loosed from their sins (forgiven) on earth then God will recognize this and either forgive or not forgive that person. The verse actually says the opposite because the Greek words interpreted as "shall be bound in heaven" and "shall be loosed in heaven" are future, perfect, passive meaning it has already been done in heaven. In other words, the Disciples and the whole Millennial judicial system is based on heavenly principles and the Holy Spirit will be their guide when it comes to making a proper and just decision.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com