

The Importance of Keys

Commentary for April 15, 2018 — in the Bible and Prophecy

I want to expand somewhat on the subject of keys relating to Isaiah:

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”

• **Isaiah 22:22**

In this verse, the power and authority of Shebna (his name means “vigour”), a court official of King Hezekiah of Judah, was transferred to another official named Eliakim (his name means “God raises” or “God establishes”). The power of such a court official was second only to that of the king. Everything in the king’s household was accessible to Eliakim. This verse is a prophecy of Christ.¹



Iron Key. (From Ancient Thebes, in Egypt.)

Some have wondered at this passage because of the phrase **“lay upon his shoulders.”** I recently came across an interesting and expansive explanation of this phrase in Isaiah²:

“There is some curious information on this subject [of ancient locks] in Parkhurst’s Hebrew Lexicon [5th edition, London, 1807].

‘In the early ages,’ he observes, ‘they made use of certain crooked keys, having an ivory, or wooden, handle. These keys were placed in the holes of doors, and by turning them one way, or the other, the bolt was moved forward, or backward, in order to open, or shut, the door.

This is evident from the testimony of Homer, where he says (*Odyssey*, xxi), that Penelope, wanting to open a wardrobe, took a brass key, very crooked, hafted [the handled carved and fastened] with ivory. On which Eustathius [a Greek commentator on Homer, about 1170 AD] remarks ... that those ancient keys were still in use in his time. The poet Ariston,³ in the *Anthologia*, book vii, gives a key the epithet βαθυκαμπη, i.e., one that is much bent.

These crooked keys were in the shape of a sickle, δρεπανοειδεις, according to Eustathius, but such keys not being easily carried in the hand, on account of their inconvenient form, they were carried on the shoulder, as we have seen our reapers carry on their shoulders, at this day, their sickles, joined and tied together. Callimachus, in his *Hymn to Ceres*, says, that the goddess, having assumed the form of Nicippé, her priestess, carried a key ... “fit to be borne on the shoulder.”



Greek woman carrying a key

¹ Isaiah 22:22 is mostly quoted in Revelation 3:7 and it refers to Christ who will have David’s throne and right to rule given to Him by God the Father, the source of all authority. The earth was given to Christ (as indicated in Psalm 82:8). The **“House of David”** is the Tomb of David. David’s body is still in that sepulcher (Acts 2:29). See **“[The Location and Future Discovery of King David’s Tomb](#).”**

² John Chubb, **[On the Construction of Locks and Keys](#)**, Institution of Civil Engineers, Vol XI, 1850, 4–5.

³ Ariston (d.424 BC) was the father of the Greek philosopher Plato.

It is most probable, that the “crooked keys” here spoken of, were used to fasten and unfasten a simple, horizontal, wooden bar, moving into and out of, a staple on the doorpost, the key being inserted in a hole in the door, at some distance below the bar, and then turned to the right or left by its handle. ...

The word מפתח (key) occurs in Judges 3:25, and in Isaiah 22:22.’”

Keys are “openers,” tools that make passage available. Keys and locks not only keep valuables inside, their purpose is to keep outside those who have no right to access the valuables.

“The key of [the house of] David” in Isaiah 22:22 is absolute. Once shut, no one can open it; once opened, no one can shut it. Why? It is because Christ holds that key. He alone retains the power and authority to open and shut. He alone — no one else. Today we diminish the possession of keys to figuratively honor a person. We give him or her “the keys to the city.” Besides the power and authority, Christ possessing the keys of the House of David is a gift of great honor and trust.

Other Keys Christ Possesses

Besides the Key of David (Revelation 3:7), Christ has other keys, such as the keys, plural, to *hades* and death,

“I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore [for the ages of the ages], Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”

• Revelation 1:18

Christ received His power and authority from God the Father to later raise the dead and empty *hades*. Eventually death will be no more (1 Corinthians 15:20–26). “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (verse 26). God the Father abolished death for Christ. He will do the same for every human being through Christ:

“Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

• 2 Timothy 1:9–10

Christ had the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and He gave the keys to the apostle Peter and the other apostles (Matthew 16:19 and 18:18).⁴ In the future, He will give keys to others to perform specific tasks to accomplish His purposes. One angel will be given a key to open the bottomless pit (Revelation 9:1–3ff). Another angel (perhaps the same one, who knows?) has keys to chain and lock Satan up in that same bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1–3).

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⁴ The lawyers, the teachers of the Law of Moses, had access to the “key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52). They not only prevented the people of Israel from having access to that knowledge, but they denied themselves that truth of the true message of the Scriptures.