



What is the "key of David," spoken of in Scripture?

The term "key of David" is only mentioned once in the New Testament, in Revelation 3:7, and a deviation of the term, i.e., "key of the house of David," is only mentioned once in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 22:22.

Before analyzing the meaning of the phrase, "key of David," or, "key of the house of David," let us review Scriptures first which use the term, "key." In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "key" (in the phrase, "key of the house of David"), is "maphteach" It is defined by Young's Analytical Concordance of the Bible, as, "key, opener" or "opening." In addition to Isaiah 22:22, the word is only used two more times, in Judges 3:25, and in 1 Chronicles 9:27. In both cases, the word describes a literal key that opens a literal door to a literal building or room.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for "key," as used in Revelation 3:7, is "kleis." It is a female word and defined by Young's as, "a key." It is used 6 times in the New Testament. In addition to Revelation 3:7, we find it three more times in the book of Revelation, i.e., in Revelation 1:18; 9:1; and 20:1. We also find it used in Matthew 16:19 and in Luke 11:52.

Revelation 9:1 and Revelation 20:1 speak about "the key of the bottomless pit." The "bottomless pit" is the location where Satan and his demons will be bound for a thousand years, after Christ's return (compare, too, Luke 8:31, where the word is translated as, "abyss."). The bottomless pit or abyss describes a (spiritual) future prison for fallen angels, and the "key" to the bottomless pit describes a (spiritual) key to open and shut this prison. The concept of "key" is used in a similar fashion here, as

it is used in Judges 3:25 and 1 Chronicles 9:27.

In addition, we read in Matthew 16:19 that Christ gave Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The context shows that He was revealing to Peter and the other disciples the KNOWLEDGE as to how to enter the Kingdom of God. (For more information, please study our free booklet, "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God.") In Luke 11:52, Christ clarifies this, by saying: "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of KNOWLEDGE. You did not enter in, and those who were entering in you hindered." (The parallel scripture in Matthew 23:13 shows that Christ was talking about entering the Kingdom of God).

Turning to the book of Revelation, Christ said in Revelation 1:18 that He has the "keys of Hades and Death." In other words, He has the KNOWLEDGE to bestow on us, of how to escape death. Psalm 68:20 tells us: "Our God is the God of salvation; and to God the LORD belong escapes from death." Further, Christ decides, of course, who will be found worthy to enter into eternal life.

We have seen so far that a key opens and shuts a literal building or room, and that it unlocks or opens to our understanding the knowledge of how to escape death and how to enter the kingdom of God.

Turning to Revelation 3:7-8, we find that the word, "key" is used in exactly the same way, when it talks about the "key of David." The passage reads, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: 'I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.'"

Christ reveals that it is He who has the key of David, and that it is He who opens and shuts. We also read that Christ gave "the church in Philadelphia" (Revelation 3:7) "an open door."

Our Update # 107 discusses in detail the concept of the "open door." One of the meanings is the ongoing obligation and ability of God's Church to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. In the process of preaching the gospel message, some will be called and obtain the knowledge of how to enter the Kingdom. The key of David, then, has to have some kind of nexus with the preaching of the gospel message and the response by some to the message.

As we explain on pages 39-42 of our booklet, "And Lawlessness Will Abound," God made a covenant with David and his descendants. According to that covenant, there would always sit a descendant of David on the throne of David. This throne exists today on earth, and Jesus Christ will return to an existing throne, and He, as a descendant of David, will then sit on that throne and rule from it. Therefore, the "key of David" is associated with the knowledge of where the throne of David is today, and who are today the modern nations of the houses of Israel and Judah (as the throne of David would always rule over "Israel."). The booklet also explains that God made His covenant with David because David kept God's Law. In Isaiah 55:3, the new or "everlasting" covenant is described as "the sure mercies of David."

We are told in Scripture that we will rule on this earth, with and under Christ, sitting on thrones (compare Matthew 19:28). The rule of the saints on this earth is clearly part of the gospel message. In fact, only when we have entered the Kingdom of God as Spirit beings, will we be able to rule with Christ on this earth. We will then be part of the Kingdom or Family of God, ruling - as God beings - over man. King David will be in the Kingdom of God. He, too, will be a member of the God Family at that time. Jeremiah 30:9 prophesies: "But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will RAISE UP for them." (Compare, too, Hosea 3:5).

God's covenant with David makes it possible that Christians, when they are born again as Spirit beings, can rule, with and under Christ, in the Kingdom of God. Christ came as a human being to

qualify so that God the Father would "give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). We will share in Christ's rule in Jerusalem (Daniel 7:27; Isaiah 2:1-4), which will be established first over the modern houses of Israel and Judah. We understand, of course, that God's government and rule "upon the throne of David and over His kingdom" (Isaiah 9:7) will increase and finally include all nations (compare Isaiah 66:18-20).

Turning to Isaiah 22, we find a description of the judgment on Shebna, a scribe and steward over the king's house. Although Shebna was a historical figure (Isaiah 36:3; 2 Kings 18:37), this judgment could very well also be directed at an end-time personality, as the context of the prophecy is the Day of the Lord (verses 8, 12 and 20 speak of "that day," a prophetic reference to the Day of the Lord). This end-time "Shebna" could be an unworthy political leader over the modern house of Israel or Judah, or it could perhaps refer to a religious figure in the spiritual house of God - the Church. Isaiah 22 prophesies that "the LORD will throw you [Shebna] away violently, O mighty man, And will surely seize you. He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball Into a large country; there you shall die, and there your glorious chariots Shall be the shame of your master's house. So I will drive you out of your office And from your position he will pull you down" (verses 17-19).

This remarkable prophecy continues in verses 20-25: "Then it shall be IN THAT DAY That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah; I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut, And he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers. IN THAT DAY, says the LORD of hosts, the peg that

is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that was on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken."

Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, was a historical figure who became the steward or prefect over the palace, as had been foretold by Isaiah (compare 2 Kings 18:18; Isaiah 36:3, 22; 37:2). Since the prophecy in Isaiah 22:20 talks about the Day of the Lord, it seems to refer to an additional "Eliakim" who is still to appear. The context of the passage deals with the rulership of the house of David over Israel. Originally, Shebna had been in a trustworthy position in the king's rule. The Nelson Study Bible explains that "the steward had the key that gave him an audience with the king." Scripture foretold that Shebna would be replaced by Eliakim, and that Eliakim was to become "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah." Eliakim would receive the key of the house of David, so "he shall open, and no one shall shut, And he shall shut, and no one shall open." We know from Revelation 3:7 that Jesus Christ is in possession of that very key. It is therefore obvious that the "end-time" Eliakim is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible, points out:

"'key' -- emblem of his office over the house; to 'open' or 'shut'; access rested with him. Upon... shoulder - So keys are sometimes carried in the East, hanging from the kerchief on the shoulder. But the phrase is rather figurative for sustaining the government on one's shoulders. Eliakim, as his name implies, is here plainly a type of... Christ, the Son of 'David,' of whom Isaiah (9:6) uses the same language as the former clause of this verse. In Revelation 3:7, the same language as the latter clause is found."

In reference to Revelation 3:7, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown states:

"...he that hath the key of David - the antitype of Eliakim, to whom the 'key,' the emblem of authority 'over the house of David' was transferred from Shebna, who was removed from the office of

chamberlain or treasurer, as unworthy of it. Christ, the Heir of the throne of David, shall supplant all the less worthy stewards [or one particular steward, perhaps a political or religious figure, see discussion above] who have abused their trust in God's spiritual house, and 'shall reign over the house of Jacob,' literal and spiritual (Luke 1:32, 33), 'for ever,' 'as a Son over His own house' (Heb. 3:2-6). It rests with Christ to open or shut the heavenly palace [the heavenly Jerusalem, verse 12, which will come down to this earth; Revelation 21:9-10], deciding who is, and who is not, to be admitted: as He also opens, or shuts... 'having the keys of hell (the grave) and death (ch. 1:18)."

The New Bible Commentary: Revised, adds the following:

"Jesus is true in the sense of 'true to His word', i.e. faithful. This is spoken in connection with His possessing the key of David, a phrase that recalls 1:18 but actually quotes Is. 22:22; it claims for Christ the power of admitting individuals or shutting them out from the city of David, the new Jerusalem, the Messianic kingdom."

The Nelson Study Bible agrees: "The key of David represents authority as the One who opens and shuts the door in the Davidic kingdom (see Is. 22:22), a prerogative that is Christ's as the rightful 'Son of David' (see Matt. 1:1)."

The Broadman Bible Commentary concurs: "To say that Christ is the one who has the key of David is to affirm his messianic authority to admit or exclude from the messianic kingdom. The Old Testament passage to which this refers (Isa. 22:22) indicated that Eliakim held the keys to David's house... The figure of keys was used elsewhere ([Revelation]1:18) and reference to David is at the close of the book ([Revelation] 22:16)."

In conclusion, Isaiah 22 and Revelation 3 confirm, in light of all the Scriptures quoted herein, that the "key of David" has to do with the knowledge that Christ, the "Son of David," will rule over the nations of Israel and Judah, as well as over the entire earth. It includes the understanding as to who the modern houses of Israel and Judah are,

where they are located today, and where the throne of David can be found. It includes the knowledge that only Christ has the power to give us access to, or reject us from entering God's Kingdom (compare Acts 4:12). It reveals to us how we can avoid paying the death penalty for our sins (compare Romans 6:23; John 8:24); how we can inherit eternal life by entering and becoming members of the Kingdom of God; and how we can qualify to rule, with and under Christ, over the houses of Israel and Judah, and the entire earth.