

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

(Interpretation of part of verse Matthew 16.19)

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Foreword

A few years ago, when I returned to God, I had a great desire to understand His word written in the Bible. I was reading, contemplating, investigating. Often I had the opportunity to talk to other believers. In such talks the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus Christ promised to Peter in Matthew 16.19, were mentioned also. Various believers tried to explain to me what keys these were and what was their impact in the present days. However, what these people were saying to me was not making much sense. What they were saying to me did not make a clear picture, moreover it either was not based on the Bible, or it was contradicting the Bible.

My desire to understand the meaning of the keys was so great that I had prayed to God for the grace to understand the keys of the kingdom of heaven. At any occasion I also kept asking the brothers that were more mature in faith, about the meaning of the keys. Now, dear reader, I would like to share the knowledge I have got about the keys of the kingdom of heaven that are talked about in *Matthew 16.19*.

I rejoice that I can gladly thank God at this place for my beloved brother Peter Pavelka, who was giving me a lot of love during the years while we were joined in the ministry of the gospel, and also later in personal communications. I thank him for the time he always made for me, and I know that not only for me but others, too. Anytime I turned to him with a need for help, advice, or interpretation he shared with me the wisdom that he was richly endowed with.

Drahoslav Vajda

The promise of the keys

The Lord Jesus Christ chose twelve disciples during His first coming to this Earth. He was teaching them God's truths, He was disclosing God's secrets to them, and He was preparing them for the future events. Once He asked His disciples who do men say that He is. At that time Peter answered to Him: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God! And Jesus Christ answered and said to him among others: ... *and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...*, *Matthew 16.19*. The Lord Jesus Christ promised to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven be given to him. Let us now contemplate on and consider these keys. Let us seek the meaning of the keys, and seek when and where apostle Peter received the keys and for what sake.

What can be understood by the promise:
„... and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...“.

For complete context please read verses 17 to 19 in Matthew chapter 16. From these verses we can understand that here the words of Jesus Christ addressed directly to apostle Peter are recorded. In these words (*... and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...*) and in the context of this verse we can observe the following facts:

- The keys regard the kingdom of heaven only, and nothing else.
- The keys were promised to Peter only, and to nobody else.
- This promise was given to Peter by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The word keys reads in plural. That means it regards several, at least two, keys.

Special attention should be paid to the first two facts, because, as we realize them, we prevent ourselves from serious mistakes.

Let us pose several questions linked with these facts.

- How many keys there are?
- What is the purpose of the keys?
- When did Peter receive the keys?
- Where did Peter receive the keys?
- Since the keys are the keys of the kingdom of heaven, what is understood under the kingdom of heaven and in what sense is it mentioned here?

We will seek answers to these questions directly in the Bible. The Bible is self-explanatory and that is why we will seek the answers nowhere else but in the Bible.

First we have to realize that the keys were promised to Peter by Jesus Christ in the authority of God and in accordance with the will of God, *John 7.16-19* and *John 8.38*. This is why we can say with certainty that the promise on the keys was fulfilled and that Peter has received the keys for sure.

What can be understood under the kingdom of heaven in this verse?

We will not deal with the kingdom of heaven extensively here. Let us however realize, that when we talk about a kingdom, we talk about a rule of a king, and under the kingdom we can understand a territory under the king's rule or the people under the king's rule, the people representing such kingdom. When talking about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, which is the same, by the kingdom we understand the rule of God, which implies that God is the king. This is important to realize, if we want to understand the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The presence and rule of God personally is dealt with.

It ought to be like that when the Lord Jesus Christ first came to this earth. He came as the promised king. And it shall be like that also after His second coming He will come as the king and he will be the king. He will rule, being personally present. This second period is known from the Bible as the thousand-year kingdom.

And how is it now with the kingdom of heaven at this earth?

There is only one kingdom of God, but it can manifest itself in various forms. We have already mentioned one of its forms, the thousand-year kingdom. There will be another form of the kingdom after the judgment, when there will be the new heaven and the new earth. If Peter received the keys of the kingdom, then what is the form of the kingdom under consideration? Is there now, in this time on earth, a kingdom of heaven present? Yes there is! Now, at this time the kingdom of heaven is present here on earth. It is the kingdom in the sense of verse *Romans 14.17* „for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit“. It is a kingdom where God is personally present in the person of the Holy Spirit. It is righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit.

It is a kingdom that is revealed, visible via the church. The church, the body of Christ, is being built, linked, and unified by the Holy Spirit. The church and the Holy Spirit are inseparably linked. The church simply does not exist without the Holy Spirit.

When looking up in the Bible when and where, at which place, did Peter receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven, we must look for a place and time where both Peter and the Holy Spirit have to be present personally. Without Peter it cannot be the keys mentioned in *Matthew 16.19* and without the Holy Spirit we cannot deal with the kingdom of heaven at the present time. We will see that it is written so in the Bible.

I find that the most simple that we can comprehend is that Peter received the keys during his earthly life. From the Bible we can understand that the soul of a new-born man departs to the Lord after the physical death, *2Corinthians 5.8-9* and *Philippians 1.21-25*, from where there is no return until the second coming of the Lord Jesus, *1Thessalonians 4.13-18* and also that the

soul of the dead does not communicate with this physical world anymore and it is not in touch with it, *Luke 16.25-31*. From this we can understand, and we will see that it is so, that Peter received these promised keys during his earthly life.

The purpose of the keys

For me the most difficult to understand was the purpose of the keys. Let me explain why. I had a fixed idea, that the purpose of the keys is just to unlock something so that one can get in somewhere inside with the help of the keys, for example to open an apartment and come in. Namely - to enter somewhere. This was my case with regards to the keys that were promised to Peter. My idea linked with these keys, and many interpretations were pointing to it as well, that Peter received the keys so that also other people could enter the kingdom of heaven. To enter meaning to come inside. Only after I have understood that the purpose of the keys is not just this, I could understand the keys themselves. I have understood that the purpose of the keys is not only to enter the kingdom of heaven by using the keys, but also for the kingdom of heaven to be „unlocked“, so that the kingdom of heaven can proliferate and that people can get into it. Shortly said the purpose of the keys that were given to Peter was that the kingdom of heaven could proliferate and that the people would have the opportunity to enter it and dwell in it, *Colossians 1.12-13*. Only after I have understood this, I got to understand what keys, where and when did Peter receive.

In order that someone can enter somewhere, that, what he is supposed to enter, must already exist. This is the case of the kingdom of heaven, too. For the kingdom of heaven to be able to proliferate and for people to be able to enter it, first there had to be the kingdom of heaven here on earth, it must have come down on earth, it first must have come to earth. Note also the issue of the kingdom of heaven.

When we want to find the keys of the kingdom of heaven that were promised to Peter and to understand the keys, we must seek at a place where there were both Peter and the Holy Spirit present.

Let us take the Bible in our hands and thoroughly search for the keys of the kingdom of heaven, those that Peter had received as it was promised to him by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first key

What happened on Pentecost?

The Lord Jesus Christ died after being crucified, He was laid down in a grave, and He was resurrected, on the third day He rose from dead. He was seen by His disciples, He dwelled with them for 40 days, taught them the kingdom of God, *Acts 1.3* and then He was taken up to heaven. He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the power of the

Holy Spirit. The disciples dwelled together in Jerusalem in the upper room. On the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and the disciples were filled with Him suddenly. They were filled with the Holy Spirit as the Lord Jesus Christ promised to them, *Acts 1.5* and *Acts 2.34*. This was the moment of the origin of the church. This was the moment when the kingdom of heaven came down to earth. Here and in this way, in Jerusalem, in the moment of the Holy Spirit coming down onto these about 120 disciples the church arose and the kingdom of heaven came down on earth. Here on earth the kingdom of heaven appeared through the Holy Spirit and those 120 disciples.

In the power of the Holy Spirit Peter stood up and preached to the present Jews from every nation under heaven. He preached the crucified, from dead raised and glorified Jesus Christ, *Acts 2.36*. What was the result of Peter's preaching? In verse *Acts 2.41* we read that about three thousand souls were added to them, that is the already arisen church grew in number by these three thousand that received and believed on this day, and that through the church thus the kingdom of heaven could be seen to all peoples, *Acts 2.47*. Peter unlocked the kingdom of heaven through the preached word of God and these three thousand new-believers entered the kingdom.

Here in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost the kingdom of heaven came among the people through the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. Here in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost Peter received the first key. Through his preaching the kingdom of heaven was unlocked for the first time. Here, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of heaven came, here it started proliferating among the people, and the people could enter it (more accurately said: they could be moved into it by God, since before they were in the kingdom of satan, *Colossians 1.13*). The Holy Spirit was here and Peter was here.

The Lord was adding the saved ones to the church each day, *Acts 2.47*. The church grew. The number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, *Acts 6.7*. But the church in Jerusalem became persecuted, *Acts 8.1* and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The second key

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere and preached the word of God, *Acts 8.4*. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them, *Acts 8.5*. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip hearing and seeing the miracles that he did, *Acts 8.6*. And there was great joy in that city. They believed what Philip preached on the kingdom of God and on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized, *Acts 8.12*. But the Holy Spirit did not come down onto any one of them; they were just baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When apostles, who were residing in Jerusalem, heard that Samaria received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

What was the relationship between Samaritans and Jews at that time? Bad! The Samaritans and Jews had been separating themselves from one another since the days when the Jews returned from the Babylon captivity. At the time of restoring Jerusalem, there had been

a misunderstanding between them. The Jews were not in fellowship with the Samaritans, they were prejudice against them, they were separated from them. But when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. I think that they were kind of ambassadors, a parliamentary delegation, and through Peter and John these two groups were placated, reconciled. We can gather on the reconciliation from the fact that Peter and John prayed for them, they laid their hands on them, and this is when they received the Holy Spirit, *Acts 8.17*. We can consider it reconciliation, because rarely someone would allow anybody else, who is not reconciled with him, to lay hands upon him. And likely those who lay hands would probably not lay hands on someone who is rejecting them and who does not receive. Laying hands implies uniting. For example: The church came to unity with Barnabas and Paul, they laid hands on them, sent them away for a mission journey and the church stood behind them, *Acts 13.1-4*. Also when sacrificing animals, hands were laid upon the sacrifice, by which the sinner was making himself identical with the sacrifice. In Acts chapter eight we read that the Holy Spirit had not yet come down on any of the Samaritans prior to coming of Peter and John and prior to Peter's and John's prayer for Samaritans and laying hands on them. And so we can say that the Holy Spirit fell on Samaritans only after the reconciliation, because otherwise there would be a division in the church from the very beginning. A church would have arisen in Samaria, too, but the church in Samaria and the church in Judea would have been separated one from another without a preceding reconciliation, and the church as such would have been divided from the very beginning.

The kingdom of heaven came to Samaria, too. Peter was there and the Holy Spirit was there. John was there as well, but from the viewpoint of the promise of the keys it is substantial and more important that Peter and the Holy Spirit were there. In the power of the Holy Spirit miracles were done through Philip, but the Holy Spirit did not come upon any one Samaritan prior to Peter's coming to Samaria.

This was the second key that Peter received. He received it here in Samaria to unlock the kingdom of heaven for Samaria. Thus the kingdom of heaven was extended, it came to Samaria, and the Samaritans could enter it. The Holy Spirit was there and Peter was there.

The third key

The gospel was shared and the kingdom of heaven was proliferating. Churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were multiplying. Thus we are coming to an event that is described in Acts chapter ten.

There was a man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a devout man fearing God, but he was a Gentile. Peter the apostle had a vision while lodging in Joppa, through which he understood that he shall go to Cornelius, *Acts 10.28-29*. He went accompanied by others and preached, proclaimed Jesus Christ and testified about Him in the house of Cornelius, *Acts 10.39*. While Peter was still preaching about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And then all the Jews that came with Peter were astonished, that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out on the Gentiles also, *Acts 10.45*.

In the house of Cornelius, for the first time, the Holy Spirit had been poured out onto the Gentiles, and the kingdom of heaven was opened for the Gentiles also. Although it is written in the Bible, that the apostle to the Gentiles is Paul, *Romans 11.13*, it was Peter through whom the kingdom of heaven was extended to the Gentiles also, *Acts 15.7*.

In the house of Cornelius Peter received the third key of the kingdom of heaven. Here the kingdom of heaven was unlocked for the Gentiles also. The Holy Spirit was present here and Peter was present here.

How many keys did Peter receive?

Until now we spoke of three keys. Peter received them in Jerusalem, Samaria, and in the house of Cornelius. The kingdom of heaven was unlocked for Jews, Samaritans, and for the Gentiles also. In the eyes of God there were these three groups at that time: Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. That is why there were three keys needed, so that the kingdom of heaven was unlocked for all these three groups. The Jews were the chosen people. The Samaritans were a particular people. They originated by blending the remains of the Israeli inhabitants with the Gentile settlers on the territory of Samaria after the Assyrian captivity. Partially they followed the Law of Moses but concurrently they worshiped other pagan gods, *2Kings 17.33-41*. There were three groups of people and thus three keys were needed to unlock the kingdom of God. All three keys were given to Peter as it was promised to him by Jesus Christ. It might appear that no more and no other keys of the kingdom of heaven were needed. But it is not so.

As we already mentioned, three keys have been already used. With the help of these keys the kingdom of God has been unlocked for Jews, Samaritans, and also Gentiles. The kingdom of God came down on in Jerusalem and proliferate throughout Judea, Samaria, and got also into the surrounding countries and people entered it and dwelt in it, *Acts 9.31* and *Acts 11.19-21*. But something strange happened. A problem arose and the kingdom stopped proliferating and people stopped entering it, or there was a menace to their entering the kingdom. This problem needed to be solved. There was an obstacle preventing the kingdom of heaven from proliferating and preventing people from entering the kingdom of heaven. This obstacle needed to be eliminated.

What actually happened? Where did it happen? Let us observe in the Bible.

The fourth key

There is one more event described in the Bible to be noted in terms of the kingdom of heaven, the Holy Spirit, and Peter.

The disciples were scattered from Jerusalem for the persecution that rose in the time of Stephen and traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, Acts chapter 11. And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned to Lord. Barnabas came from Jerusalem to Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad. Then

Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Paul, who turned to Lord on his way to Damascus, as it is described in chapter 9 of Acts. When Barnabas had found Paul he brought him to Antioch. Churches grew, the gospel was preached, and the kingdom of heaven was proliferating. In Antioch the Holy Spirit called and sent Barnabas and Paul to their first missionary journey, *Acts 13.2+4* and the message of the gospel was brought to Cyprus and to Minor Asia, Barnabas and Paul had established churches and the kingdom of heaven proliferated. When they had come back from the missionary journey to Antioch, they reported to the brethren all that God had done with them and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, *Acts 14.27*.

But certain men came from Judea and stated to the brethren that unless they are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they cannot be saved. Paul and Barnabas came into a dispute with them, *Acts 15.1-2*. There came some confusion, there came hesitation. Thus what are the criteria for being saved? Is circumcision necessary for being saved and is it necessary to keep the Law of Moses to be saved, *Acts 15.5*? How to proceed, when some brethren from Judea claim that circumcision is necessary for salvation? The kingdom of heaven appeared to stand still, as if it remained frozen.

The circumcision – that is already acts of the law, that is not in accordance with grace, that is not the kingdom of God. Are the acts of the law needed for salvation? Is the salvation out of grace along with acts? This issue needed to have been solved. The brethren have gone to Jerusalem and the apostles and elders gathered to consider this matter, *Acts 15.3+6*.

The gathered ones had much of a dispute in this matter. Everybody spoke what he thought was the truth. After much negotiation Peter rose up and said to them, *Acts 15.7*. What he said made everybody silent, *Acts 15.12*. What he said kept all the gathered ones silent. He gave a reason that has been accepted by everyone. Between verse 7, when they all were in a dispute, and verse 12 Peter said something that became a revealed truth to all. This truth is given in verse 11: „*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they*“.

We are saved by the grace through the belief in Jesus Christ and not through the law, not through the acts. The salvation is out of grace and the manner of salvation is the same both for the Jews and the Gentiles. This truth has been revealed and announced through Peter. And this was the fourth key of the kingdom of heaven that Peter received.

Was the Holy Spirit present here? Yes He was! Does the Bible say so? Yes it does! And it does speak about it in a wonderful manner. It is written in Acts chapter 15 verse 28: „*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden ...*“. In this verse also we can see how the Holy Spirit was with the apostles and disciples. Those words: ... *for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...*“ speak of how the Holy Spirit assists, guides, and gives advise to those who belong to Jesus. These words express the love of God and His grace with which God condescends to His children down to their level and leads them, helps them and acknowledges them.

The fourth key was different from the previous three ones, but it was a key as well, that was given to Peter to unlock the existing but locked, frozen, kingdom, which had been locked by those who came down from Judea, *Acts 15.1*. Today the kingdom of heaven is opened and people can enter it.

The kingdom of heaven was unlocked by the fourth key also in a sense that the fourth key has separated two periods, two eras: The period of the law, in which the Jews and the proselytes were required to keep the law of Moses, and the period of grace, in which God awaits the man to believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God. By the fourth key the kingdom of heaven was finally unlocked in the sense of the manner in which to be able to enter it.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the purpose of the keys is twofold. One is that the kingdom of heaven could have proliferated here on earth namely from Jerusalem to the whole world. The latter is that people could have entered the kingdom, namely all the people: the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles.

What we can also say about the keys is that they were single-use keys. Peter received them and used them. These were not such keys that Peter could have later given them to someone else. The opening of the kingdom of heaven – the keys – were given to Peter only. This needs to be recognized very well, namely that the keys were given to Peter only, and that there is no such biblical evidence anywhere, as for the keys to be transferable. The Bible does not state that the keys had been transferred to someone else or that the keys are hereditary. Each key was unique, as you, dear reader, may judge yourself, and each key was destined for a specific purpose. Each key was single and non-repeatable.

The Lord Jesus Christ promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter. This promise was fulfilled. It was Peter through whom the kingdom of heaven was unlocked so that it finally could have come to us also, to you, dear reader, also, so that you, suppose you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior by faith, and you profess Him as your Lord, can experience the kingdom of heaven in your life. So that you can experience the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.