

# KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

By Arlen L. Chirwood

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens...” (Matt. 16:19a).

Matt. 16:19 is one of the most misunderstood verses in Scripture. But allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, a clear understanding of the verse can, instead, be derived.

And, allowing Scripture to interpret itself in this manner, something inseparably related will be presented first; then the matter at hand can be properly addressed and understood.

## Angelic Activity in Scripture

When Christ returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, He will be accompanied by an innumerable host of angels who will be instrumental in executing His will and purpose in matters which must be brought to pass preceding His reign.

Throughout Scripture angels are seen as far more active in the Lord’s affairs, as they pertain to man, than many realize. Scripture often refers to the Lord acting in a particular realm, while also referring to angels acting in this same realm. In this respect, though angels are the executors, it is the Lord Who is looked upon in a foremost sense as bringing the matter to pass. That is, the Lord assigns and empowers certain angels for particular tasks; and once these tasks are carried out, the matter is looked upon as being done by the Lord Himself.

Possibly two of the most instructive instances of the preceding can be seen in the destruction of the

cities of the plain during the days of Abraham in Gen. 18, 19 and the removal of Nebuchadnezzar from his throne for seven years during the days of Daniel in Dan. 4:1ff. Also, comparing these two instances provides an insight into heavenly angelic courts which God has established (apparently alluded to in Matt. 5:22 through a reference to corresponding earthly courts) and the power with which angels acting in these courts on His behalf have been vested.

In the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, because of his ascribing to himself that which belonged to God alone (*cf.* 4:17, 30), was removed from the throne and driven into the field to eat grass as the oxen. The entire matter — judicial issues and determinations, the passing of the sentence, and the execution of the sentence — was carried out by angels, though the “most High [God Himself]” was specifically said to be the One Who brought the matter to pass.

Nebuchadnezzar had been delivered into the charge of angels called “watchers,” who had made certain decisions which resulted in a decree concerning him; and these decisions, resulting in the decree, were also ascribed to the “most High” (4:17, 24).

The “decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones” (v. 17) can only point to angelic activity in heavenly courts concerning matters relating to individuals on earth. It seems apparent that the angels in this passage possessed a specially imparted wisdom and knowledge, allowing them *to act within the scope of fixed laws to fulfill the perfect will of God concerning particular matters, apart from any immediate command from God. In so doing, the actions of these angels were looked upon as actions of the Lord Himself.*

(Undoubtedly the same thing is in view in Daniel chapter five where decisions were made and a decree was issued concerning Belshazzar. Note that Belshazzar was reminded of a time in Nebuchadnezzar’s life when similar action had to be taken for a similar reason [vv. 18-23].

The days of Belshazzar’s kingdom were at an end; he had been weighed in the balances and

found wanting, and his kingdom, apparently within the scope of decisions and determinations made by angels in the heavenly courts, had been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians [vv. 24-31].)

Understanding the working of these heavenly courts, the same thing can be seen in Genesis chapters eighteen and nineteen. The Lord, accompanied by two angels, appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre. The purpose of this visit concerned the impending destruction of the cities in the Jordan plain. Comparing this section in Genesis with Daniel chapter four, it would appear clear that judicial decisions concerning these cities had already been made in the heavenly courts; and the “decree of the watchers” had already been rendered (*cf.* Gen. 18:17-22).

The Lord remained with Abraham, and the two angels accompanying the Lord went on down into the Jordan plain to carry out the previously rendered decree. Everything relating to the destruction of these cities was apparently done by angels. In the light of Daniel chapter four, it would appear clear that they were the ones who had made the decisions and rendered the decree; and the Genesis account clearly shows that they were the executors of the decree. However, the same thing can be said of the Lord (*cf.* 18:20-33; 19:11-13, 16, 24, 29).

It is the same as in Daniel chapter four. Angelic activity in this realm — because of their ability to act within the scope of the perfect will of God — is looked upon as being done by the Lord Himself.

Immediately preceding Christ’s return, during the Tribulation, angels will be very instrumental in carrying out decrees through executing judgment upon the earth-dwellers; and their actions will be looked upon as those of the Lord Himself (Rev. 6:12-17; 8:1ff; 9:1ff; 11:18; 15:1; 16:1ff). Angelic activity in the heavenly courts, as it pertains to those upon the earth, will evidently be carried out in a climactic sense and on an intensified basis during the Tribulation.

Not only will this be the case, but angelic activity of the same nature will carry over into events

surrounding Christ's presence upon earth following the Tribulation. In Matt. 13:49, 50, angels are said to perform some of the same activity in relation to saved and unsaved Gentiles which Christ is said to perform in Matt. 25:32ff. Immediately preceding this, angels will have regathered Israel (Matt. 24:31), but elsewhere in Scripture it is the Lord Who regathers His people (Deut. 30:1-4; Isa. 11:10, 11; Jer. 23:7, 8).

Angels will apparently be very active in all matters when Christ returns. The Lord being accompanied by angels at the time of His return points simply to continued angelic activity of a like nature to that which has occurred throughout the whole of Man's Day.

### Binding, Having Already Been Bound

Note that *the same principle* seen in angelic activity, associating their actions with the Lord's actions, exists in connection with *the proclaimed Word among God's people* (Israel past and future, the Church present).

This could perhaps best be seen in Christ's words to Peter in Matt. 16:19, repeated in another setting to all of the disciples later in Matt. 18:18:

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ['in the heavens']; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven ['in the heavens']."

This statement to Peter (which grew out of his confession concerning Christ's true identity [v. 16]), along with the same statement to all the disciples at a later time, has not been understood at all by numerous Christians down through the years. But there is really nothing difficult about that being taught, though a translation problem does exist, and it helps to understand Christ's statement in the light of angelic activity in heavenly courts, as previously discussed.

The translation problem involves the way in which the Greek verbs and participles in the verse ("bind" and "loose") are handled in the English text. The binding and loosing here on earth are present

aorist subjunctives, and the binding and loosing in the heavens are perfect passive participles (same in both Matt. 16:19 and 18:18).

To show this — the aorist subjunctive verbs and the perfect passive participles — the translation should read somewhat along these lines:

"...whatsoever you might bind on earth shall have already been bound in the heavens: and whatsoever you might loose on earth shall have already been loosed in the heavens."

The subjunctive mood shows that which is probable, that expected, though it may not occur. And the perfect tense shows that completed in past time, existing in a finished state during present time.

Those forming the Church [future at that time] are in view in both passages (16:18; 18:17). And when those in the Church act *in complete accord* with that being dealt with in these verses, their actions — exactly as the actions of angels acting under fixed laws in the heavenly courts — will be seen as having already been acted upon in the heavens. In short, with the perfect tense being used in the manner in which it is used [a perfect passive], the actions of those in the Church on earth are seen *as having already been acted upon in the heavens before those in the Church even act* ("bind" and "loose" are simply two words used to express these actions, both on earth and in the heavens).

Now, what is this all about? Can Christians in a Church just come to a conclusion on which they all agree and have that conclusion already be decided in the heavens? That's not exactly the way matters exist, no more so than angels in the heavenly courts can do the same and have their actions seen as the Lord's actions.

Angels in the heavenly courts, in order to have their actions seen as those of the Lord, *must act under fixed laws*; and Christians in the Church today, in order to have their actions seen as having already been performed in the heavens, must do the same. *They must act in complete accord with the revealed Word (exactly as Peter acted in Matt. 16:16).*

*Remaining completely within the scope of the proclaimed Word, that bound or loosed on earth will be seen as having already been bound or loosed in the heavens. This cannot help but be the case, for God must remain true to His Word.*

"The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" [Ps. 12:6].

"Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" [Ps. 119:89].

"...thou hast magnified thy word above thy name [*lit.*, '... You have exalted above all things Your Word and Your Name' (Ps. 138:2b)]."

"To the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God...

And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:1, 2, 14a).

It is *this unchangeable Word* [inseparably associated with the entire Godhead] which is to be proclaimed (II Tim. 4:2); and it is *this unchangeable Word alone which Christians are to adhere to and follow in all matters.*

Man's thoughts about matters are of no moment, though they seemingly may be very good, righteous, or benevolent. The only thing of any moment is that which the Word states.

And when this Word is proclaimed, that stated in Matt. 16:19; 18:18 can't help but be the case in the actions of Christians here on earth (during present time) and in corresponding actions in the heavens (during all past, present, and future time).

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