

The Parable of the Two Trains

Part III

by Mark Webb

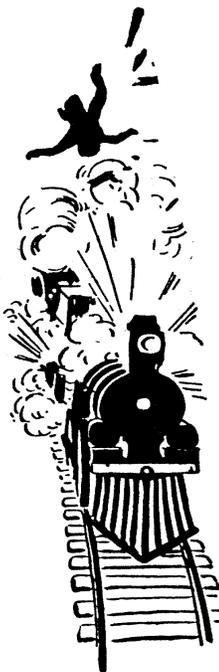
In my first article, I sought to illustrate Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism using the figure of trains, tracks, and engineers. Covenant Theology was depicted as one train (*i.e. God's people*) running through history on one track (*i.e. one covenant of grace*) picking up passengers as it goes. At the appropriate time, Christ replaces Moses as engineer (*i.e. a change of covenant administrators*). Dispensationalism was depicted as two separate trains (*i.e. Israel and the Church*) running one at a time through history on two separate tracks (*i.e. two distinct covenants*), with Moses the engineer of one train and Christ the engineer of the other.

In my last article, I set forth an alternative model: A train called "Moses" runs through the Old Testament age bringing its passengers over to a station where a train called "Jesus" awaits on another set of tracks. A call goes out that all passengers are to board this new train. Most refuse to do so and remain in their seats. The "Jesus" train leaves the station and now runs through the New Testament age, while the "Moses" train shortly thereafter

derails. This new model, as opposed to the other two, emphasizes what I call *transition* — *i.e.* those in Jesus' day were not told to "sit tight" but to "enter" a Kingdom.

Transference

In addition to *transition*, a second principle is required of any covenantal model seeking to fit the Biblical data: *transference*. By this term, I simply mean what Christ declares at the conclusion of the parable of the householder in Matt. 21:43: "Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it." Note that privileges (See "Two Trains" on page 2) were to be taken from Israel and *transferred* to a



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Two Trains

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new nation. What is the identity of this “*new nation*”? I suggest that it’s the one spoken of in I Peter 2:9, *i.e.* the Church. What I’m calling *transference* is termed by others the *replacement motif*. As the name implies, this viewpoint sees the church as a *replacement* for Israel in redemptive history. The benefits and blessings, promises and privileges, once the possession and future prospect of the nation of Israel, are now given to the Church (*See Eph. 2:11-13*). Before dismissing this notion as incompatible with a God Who never repents or alters His purpose, stop and consider how often it is that those who wind up with blessing in the New Testament have it because it was forfeited by others (*e.g. The Parable of the Householder — Matt 21:33-44; The Parable of the Marriage Feast — Matt. 22:1-10; The grafting of wild olive branches into the good olive tree — Rom. 11:16-24*) This problem—that a God Who never changes His purpose has transferred blessing from Israel to the Church—is the very difficulty Paul is answering in Rom. 9-11. There was the appearance that God’s Word had “*taken no effect*” (*Rom. 9:6*). There was the appearance that God had “*cast away His people*” (*Rom. 11:1*). But such was emphatically not the case! For Paul demonstrates that it was always God’s purpose to bring together in one body all who believe on His Son, whether Jew or Gentile.

The Key to the Keys

Many texts could be cited to support this principle of *transference*. I’ve decided, however, to center upon one where the principle is not readily apparent upon first reading. After digging deeper, however, I trust it will become clear that this text gives striking confirmation to the general pattern stated above. Consider the account of Peter’s confession in Matt. 16:13-19. In verse 19, Jesus promises to give Peter something He calls the

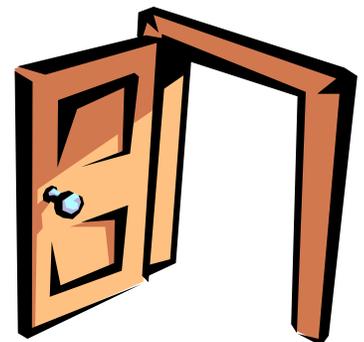
“*keys of the kingdom*”. This is a “key” passage, if you’ll excuse the pun! I believe scripture will interpret scripture, if we’ll but let it. So, let’s take a little excursion through scripture to try to get a handle on this passage.

What are the Keys?



What do these “*keys*” represent? An examination of related passages dealing with the subject of keys turns up Rev. 1:18. As John beholds the risen, glorified Christ, Jesus tells him that He possesses “*keys*” — “*the keys of hell and death*”. Seven letters to the churches in Asia now follow in Rev. 2-3. Each letter begins by identifying its Sender, and it does that by referencing some feature of John’s description of Christ in Rev. 1 (*e.g.* the One with the seven stars in His hand, or the One Whose eyes are as a flame of fire, etc.) In Rev. 3:7, at the beginning of the letter to the church in Philadelphia, the Sender is identified as having a “*key*”, which identifies Him with the One described in Rev. 1:18. This time, however, it’s not “*the keys of hell and death*”, as we would expect, but “*the key of David*”, a key “*that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.*” Why the difference? The simplest explanation is that these two texts are actually saying the same thing, using different words to express it. The reader is expected to understand that the “*keys*” of a kingdom are a symbolic way of representing different aspects of a king’s sovereign authority. For instance, your key chain most likely holds a number of keys—to your car, your home, your office, etc. Each of these represents an area of life where you have the right to enter, to lock, or to open. In Christ’s case, the “*keys*” on His key chain represent His power over the grave, His power over death, as well as this “*key of David*” — *i.e.* His Messianic rule upon David’s throne (*See Luke 1:32 and Acts 2:29-32*). (*See “Two Trains” on page 4*)

Giving the Keys



Sermon Snips



Pagan Darkness

There was this romantic view back in the last century that civilization is really our problem. That if we could just find the uncivilized man that we would find an unspoiled man. So there were novels written like *Tarzan*. You probably thought *Tarzan* was a story about a boy raised by apes out in the jungle. *Tarzan* was a novel that presented this very romantic view of the fact, that the real noble man among us, is this man like Tarzan, who was raised out there in the jungle, far from civilization, far from Christianity that messes us all up. He was raised out there without the guilt trip that Judeo-Christian ethics places upon him. He's the really noble guy and really he had no problems until he came back to civilization. Get him in civilization and then he had problems. Life was so much better out there in the jungle! Well, my friend, you may have those romantic ideas about the *unspoiled noble savage* but let me tell you — go live with him and he will kill you and eat your liver! That's what the noble savage does! Don't let anybody kid you. David said it very well in Psalm 74, Oh Lord “*have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.*” You get away from the light of God, my friend, and life becomes cruel beyond belief.

Now I know that we decry the things that are going on in our culture. But, my friend, we still are the recipients of a wonderful thing in the influence that the Gospel had a hundred, two hundred years ago. I know we are coasting, we are out of gas, but we are benefiting from that influence, that left over influence, that so influenced our forefathers. But, my friend, you get out in the other places of the world — why is it if you look around for places to live on this planet — where do you want to go? Where will life be paradisiacal? Borneo, Bangladesh?!? Where do you want to go? Is it just accidental that those places that you and I would pick, if we had to hand pick a place to live on this globe, just happen to be those lands that were most influenced by the Gospel? Is that just accidental? I don't think so. Well the light is being extinguished in Judah at Manasseh's hand and as the light of God's word and God's influence is being extinguished the flood of pagan practice creeps back in. That's exactly what's going on in our culture with abortion. It's what the pagans have been doing for centuries. They think nothing of it. It's just Christianity that does away with practices like that. You let the light of Christianity begin to dim and the darkness of paganism rushes right back in.

From “*The God Who Humbles Kings*” by Mark Webb

Arise, My Soul, Arise

Arise, my soul, arise.
Shake off thy guilty fears.
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety Stands,
Before the Throne my Surety Stands;
My name is written upon His hands.

He ever lives above
For me to intercede,
His all redeeming love,
His precious blood to plead.
His blood atoned for all our race,
His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers;
They strongly plead for me.
“Forgive him, oh, forgive,” they cry,
“Forgive him, oh, forgive,” they cry,
“Nor let that ransomed sinner die.”

The Father hears Him pray,
His dear Anointed One;
He cannot turn away
The presence of His Son.
His Spirit answers to the blood,
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

My God is reconciled;
His pard'ning voice I hear.
He owns me for His child;
I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And, “Father, Abba, Father,” cry.

by Charles Wesley
from “*The Hymnal for Worship
& Celebration*”

Two Trains

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What's the significance of Jesus giving Peter these "keys"? Well, what would it mean for a father to give his teenaged daughter the keys to his car? It doesn't mean he gives her the car, only the right to use it. The father retains absolute control. Further, if she abuses the privilege, Daddy may well take "the T-Bird away", as the song goes! May I suggest the same idea here? When a sovereign "gives" someone the "keys" to his kingdom, he doesn't surrender the kingdom, but makes the recipient a "steward" — *i.e.* someone with authority over a particular area of the kingdom. Further, this authority is not given unconditionally, for it may be taken away if the steward proves unfaithful.

A fascinating passage illustrating this principle, and one very important to our present discussion, is found in Isa. 22:15-25. Isaiah is directed to a man named Shebna, described as a treasurer and the one "over the house" (of David, by implication). He is the chief steward of the king, exercising authority

over the matters of the king's household. However, he is told that he will be cast out of his office, presumably because of his unfaithfulness, and replaced by another, Eliakim. Eliakim is to be clothed with Shebna's vestments and authority. Note especially how Isa. 22:22 describes Eliakim: "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." (Note the similarity of this verse with Rev.



3:7!) To give Eliakim the "key of the house of David" meant that he would now exercise the authority previously held by Shebna.



Where's the Keys?

Will Christ pull the keys promised to Peter out of His pocket? I think not. Isa. 22 gives us a clue. Note that the key given to Eliakim is a key taken from Shebna. It's not a newly manufactured key, but a key already in existence, which is being *transferred* from the one man to the other. Isn't this precisely what Jesus is describing in the Parable of the Householder? Because of their unfaithfulness, those who have custodial care of the nation of Israel are about to lose their rights and privileges. These blessings, says our Lord, will be given to others who will be faithful. If we think of "keys" as a figurative way of representing these privileges, could it not be said that the "keys of the kingdom" would be taken from them and given to others? Based on the scriptural precedent of a *transference* of keys from Shebna to Eliakim, I think this is exactly what Christ is saying. The keys to be given to Peter were keys already in existence and in the hands of others!



Binding and Loosing

A further clue, showing that we are on the right track, is found in what Peter was to do with these keys. He was to "bind" and to "loose". This language gives us insight into who previously possessed these keys, for this is the language of the Scribes. Originally, a Scribe was one who merely copied the Law of Moses. In Ezra's day, however, their role was expanded to become teachers and interpreters of the Law. In Christ's day, the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel and the continuation of those judges appointed under Moses, was comprised of Priests, mainly of the Sadducees, and Scribes, mainly of the Pharisees. These men authoritatively applied the Law to Israel. Lest we (See "Two Trains" on page 6) question the legitimacy of their office,



Bible Game

Below are some scripture references concerning the life of John the Baptist. See if you can fill in the blanks without looking up the answers. All scriptures were taken from the KJV.

1. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him _____ after the name of his father. (Luke 1:59)
 2. And thou, child, shalt be called _____, for thou shalt go before the _____ to prepare his ways. (Luke 1:76)
 3. In _____ days came John the Baptist, preaching in the _____ of _____. (Matthew 3:1)
 4. And the same John had his raiment of _____, and a _____ about his loins; and his meat was _____ and _____. (Matthew 3:4)
 5. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, _____. (John 1:19)
 6. And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, _____. (John 1:20)
 7. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was _____, _____ brother. (John 1:40)
 8. Therefore _____ had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not. (Mark 6:19)
 9. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his _____ made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; and when the daughter of the said _____ came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the kings said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and _____. (Mark 6:21-22)
 10. And when his _____ heard of it, they came and took up his _____ and laid it in a _____. (Mark 6:29)
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Two Trains

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note that Jesus Himself recognizes their authority in Matt. 23:2, saying, *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.”* As such, they were to be obeyed, but not imitated, for they were hypocrites. The exercise of their office is described in verse 4:

*“For they **bind** heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”*



To “bind” was

to lay upon a person an obligation or duty; to “loose” was to absolve a person of a duty. Thus, the authority Peter is to exercise, “binding” and “loosing”, is no new power, but one already in existence — and scripture even associates it with a “key”! Note Luke 11:52, where Jesus declares: *“Woe unto you, lawyers! For ye have taken away the **key** of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in, ye hindered.”*

So “keys” — involving the knowledge of the manner of entering the kingdom, and the power of *binding* and *loosing*, are already in the possession of others. Yet these “keys” are to be taken from them and given to Peter — and not to Peter only, but, as the rest of scripture shows, to the other Apostles as well!



Using the Keys

Do we ever see Peter using these “keys”? Consider Pentecost: Peter is opening the kingdom of heaven to men through the proclamation of the Gospel message. He does the same to the Gentiles in Cornelius’ home. What

about “binding” and “loosing”? This was the constant activity of the Apostles throughout the New Testament. At the council in Jerusalem, they *loose* the Gentile believers from the ritual of circumcision and *bind* them with certain food regulations and with abstaining from fornication (see Acts 15:19-20). In the epistles, the Apostles lay down the rules that are to regulate the faith and conduct of believers and of Christ’s church. By what right do they do this? By the Christ-given authority granted to them as His Apostles! They viewed their commandments to the Church as nothing less than the commandments of Christ (See I Cor. 14:37 for an example).

Conclusion

What does all this mean, and how does it impact the covenantal question? Suppose you are a Jew living in the Old Testament age. How would you know your duty before God? Study the law? Well, the law had to be interpreted and applied, and that was the domain of men like the Scribes. Their job was to determine specifically how God’s law applied to you individually in your unique circumstances. But now, in this New Testament age, where do we go to learn our duty to God? To Rabbis and Scribes? No, we turn to the teaching of the Apostles, *i.e.* the New Testament scripture. Now please do not misunderstand! This is not to say that (See “Two Trains” on page 7)

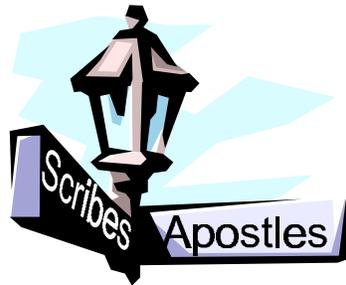
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Two Trains

Continued from page 6

the Old Testament has no authority, or that God's law has no abiding validity — and it's certainly not saying that we are free from duty or law to God. Rather, it's simply to acknowledge that the "keys" have been transferred to the Apostles. The authority to interpret God's Law and to apply it to His people has been passed!

The Apostles are foundational to the Church — see Eph. 2:20. As a foundation determines the scope and extent of the building built upon it, so the teaching of the Apostles prescribes the scope and extent of Christ's Church. Their teaching determines what's "in" and "out", so far as the Church is concerned. They *bind* us with our duty, both as to our faith (what we are to believe) and to our practice (what we are to do). They convey through the New Testament scriptures the "key" of knowledge whereby men may enter the kingdom. But they are not the "cornerstone" of the Church! In no way do they rival or supplant Christ. Neither can their authority be passed down to others, as the fiction of Rome suggests. Yet, we must recognize



that Christ gave them the "keys". The faith once delivered to the saints was, in fact, delivered to the saints through the agency of Christ's Apostles. What we know about Jesus and Gospel truth, we learn, humanly speaking, through the Apostles. Further, the covenantal privileges once belonging to Israel have now been transferred to the Church. The great promises of God are fulfilled in Him, and, therefore, to all who are "in" Him (see II Cor. 1:20). As such, it's not surprising to see promises first enunciated to Israel now quoted and reapplied by the Apostles to the Church (see I Peter 2:9-10 and II Cor. 6:16-18 for examples).

So we see again both continuity and discontinuity: continuity, in that our duty before God is still based on the moral principles of God's law; but discontinuity, in that Christ's Apostles are now interpreting and applying these principles in a new age, to a new people, in a new situation. Now I recognize this observation alone will not settle the various issues arising out of the covenantal question in our day. However, it should give us a hint as to where we ought to start in seeking the answers. We should look to see how the Apostles handled and applied the law. Their teaching, embodied in the New Testament scriptures, should be given a primacy in discovering our duty before God, for, after all, to them were given the "keys".

From the Church Office:

Dear Readers,

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In Christ,
Janet Crawford
Secretary

Conferences

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Date: December 3-5, 1999

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