

## Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Papacy

### Ancient Jewish Literature

1. Mishnah: a collection of oral traditions of the Rabbis (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.), compiled by Rabbi Judah the Patriarch ca. 200 A.D.
2. Babylonian Talmud: a thirty-volume collection of rabbinic traditions, in the shape of a commentary on the tractates in the Mishnah
3. Midrash Rabbah: ancient rabbinic commentary on the books of the Bible. (1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.)
4. Aramaic Targums: ancient Jewish translations and adaptations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, the language of the people (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.—5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)

### Jesus, Peter, and the “Keys of the Kingdom”

And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, *you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*” (Matthew 16:13-19)

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### 1. The “Foundation Stone” in Jewish Tradition

#### The “Foundation Stone” (*’Eben Shetiyah*)

[On the day of Atonement, the High Priest] went through the Sanctuary until he came to the space between the two curtains separating the Sanctuary from the Holy of Holies.... When he reached the Ark he put the fire-pan between the two bars. He heaped up the incense on the coals and the whole place became filled with smoke. He came out by the way he went in, and in the outer space he prayed a short prayer. But he did not prolong his prayer lest he put Israel in terror. *After the Ark was taken away a stone remained there from the time of the early prophets and it was called “Shetiyah.”* It was higher than the ground by three fingerbreadths. On this he used to put... (Mishnah, *Yoma* [Day of Atonement] 5:2)

#### The Foundation Stone: the Center of the World

“*And it was called Shetiyah [foundation].*” A Tanna taught: [It was so called] because *from it the world was founded.* We were taught in accord with the view that the world was started [created] from Zion on... Rabbi Isaac the Smith said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, cast a stone into the ocean, from which the world then was founded as it is said: ‘Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the corner stone thereof?’ (Job 38:38). But the Sages said: The world was started [created] from Zion, as it is said... “Out of Zion, the perfection of the world” (Ps 50:2). (Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* [The Day of Atonement] 54a-54b)

## 2. The Keys of the Kingdom in Jewish Tradition

### The Keys Were Kept by the Temple Priests in a Rock

...for although there be four courses of the priests, and everyone of them have above five thousand men in them, yet do they officiate on certain days only; and when those days are over, other *priests* succeed in the performance of their sacrifices, and assemble together at midday, and *receive the keys of the temple* (Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.108).

And there was a place there... whereon lay *a slab of marble in which was fixed a ring and a chain on which hung the keys*. When the time was come to lock up [the Temple Court] he lifted up the slab by the ring and took the keys from the chain. *The priest locked [the gates] from inside while a Levite slept outside*. When he had finished locking [the gates] he put back the keys on the chain and the slab in its place, put his mattress over it, and went to sleep (Mishnah *Middoth* 1.9).

### The Captain of the Temple and the Keys

Thus also, before the Jews rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war [in 67-70 A.D.]... *the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] Temple*, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron... *was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night*. Now, those that kept watch in the Temple came hereupon running to *the captain of the Temple*, and told him of it: who then came up there, and not without great difficulty, and *was able to shut the gate again*. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and *that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies*. So these publicly declared that this signal foreshadowed the desolation that was coming upon them. (Josephus, *War* 6:293-96)

### The Destruction of the Temple and the Keys of the Kingdom

“Our Rabbis have taught: When the First Temple was about to be destroyed bands upon bands of young priests with *the keys of the Temple* in their hands assembled and mounted the roof of the Temple and exclaimed, ‘*Master of the Universe, as we did not have the merit to be faithful treasurers these keys are handed back into Thy keeping*’. *They then threw the keys up towards heaven. And there emerged the figure of a hand and received the keys from them*. Whereupon they jumped and fell into the fire.” (Babylonian Talmud, *Ta’anith* 29a)

“What did [Jeconiah] do?—He collected all the keys of the Temple and ascended the roof [of the Temple], and said, “Lord of the Universe! Seeing that we have hitherto not proved worthy stewards, faithful custodians for Thee, from now and henceforth, behold Thy Keys are Thine.” Two Amoraim [differ as to what followed]. One said: *A kind of fiery hand descended and took them from him; the other said: As he threw them upward they did not come down any more.*” (*Leviticus Rabbah* 19.6).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus* (trans. J. Israelstam and J. J. Slotki; London/New York: The Soncino Press, 1983), 247.

### 3. “Binding” and “Loosing” in Jewish Tradition

#### Josephus on “Binding” and “Loosing”

The Pharisees, a body of Jews with the reputation of excelling the rest of their nation in the observances of religion, and *as exact exponents of the laws...* became at length the real administrators of the state, at liberty to banish and recall, *to loose* (Greek *luein*) and *to bind* (Greek *desmein*) whom they would. In short, the enjoyments of *royal authority* were theirs... [even though Alexandra was the queen]. (Josephus, *War* 1.5.2)

#### The *Cathedra* of Moses and the Power to “Bind and Loose”

##### Scribes and Pharisees

1. “The scribes and Pharisees sit on *Moses’ seat* (Gk *kathedras Mouseos*); therefore do and keep whatever they tell you... (Matthew 23:1-2)
2. “They *bind* (Gk *desmeuousin*) heavy burdens on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.” (Matthew 23:4)
3. “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! For *you key shut* (Gk *kleiete*) *the kingdom of heaven* against people. (Mat 23:13)

##### Peter, Prefect of the Priests

1. The Pope sits on *the seat* of Peter (Lat *cathedra*; Gk *kathedra*) when he teaches authoritatively
2. “Whatever you *bind* (Gk *deses*) on earth *will be bound* (Gk *dedemenon*) in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)
3. Jesus said to Peter: “I give to you [sg.] *the keys* (Gk *kleidas*) *of the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matt 16:19)

#### Modern Protestant Commentary

[T]he major opinion of modern exegetes... [is] that Peter, as a sort of *supreme rabbi* or *prime minister of the kingdom*, is in 16.19 given *teaching authority*, given that is the power to declare what is permitted (cf. the rabbinic *shara’*) and what is not permitted (cf. the rabbinic *’asar*). *Peter can decide by doctrinal decision what Christians must and must not do.* This is the traditional Roman Catholic understanding, with the proviso that Peter had successors. This interpretation of binding and loosing in terms of teaching authority seems to us to be correct... *Peter is the authoritative teacher without peer*” (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:638-39)

## 4. The Priestly ‘Prime Minister’ in Jewish Tradition

### The “Over the House” in the Bible (Isaiah 22)

“Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house (Hb *al bayith*), and say to him: ‘What have you to do here, that you have hewn here a tomb for yourself...? Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man. He will seize firm hold on you, and whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land; there you shall die... I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. In that day, I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your belt on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father’s house. And they will hang on him the whole weight of his father’s house, the offspring of every issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons...” (Isaiah 22:15-24)

### The Priestly Overseer in the Targum on Isaiah 22

Thus says the LORD God of hosts, “Come go to this guardian, to Shebna, who is appointed *over the house*, and you will say to him: What have you do to here and why do you act this way; that you have prepared a place for yourself here?” He has prepared his place on the height, *sets his residence in the rock*. “Behold, the LORD casts you out, a mighty man is cast out, and shame will cover you. *He will take away from you the turban and encircle you with enemies as an encircling wall... there you shall die, and there shall your glorious chariots return in shame, because you did not guard the glory of your master’s house*. And I will thrust you from your place and throw you down from *your ministry*. And it will come to pass in that time that I will exalt my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, and *I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your cincture*, and place your authority in his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place *the key of the Sanctuary* and the authority of the house of David in his hand; and *he will open, and none shall shut; and he will shut, and none shall open*. And I will appoint him *a faithful officer ministering in an enduring place... And all the glorious ones of his father’s house will rely on him, the sons and the sons’s sons, from the princes to the juniors, from the priests wearing the ephod to the sons of the Levites holding the harps*. (Targum on Isaiah 22:15-25)<sup>2</sup>

### The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” The “power of the keys” designates *authority to govern the house of God*, which is the Church... *The power to “bind and lose” connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church*. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom (CCC 553).

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (Aramaic Bible 11; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 44-45 (emphasis added).