

## The Peg in Isaiah 22 and Petrine Succession

By Steve Ray

A Protestant friend who is currently splashing in the Tiber and scrambling out on the Catholic side wrote and asked about the Peg of Isaiah 22:23–25. Below is his query and my response.

He wrote: >>>The only issue which has unsettled me scripturally which I have not been able to find an answer that suits me is that of the peg in Isaiah 22. As Matthew 16 is a key passage in understanding an aspect of the foundations of the Catholic church, I tried to research it and apply the typologies and allusions from the passages and I remain unsettled. It seems as though it states that the peg driven into a firm place will hold a great burden which seems to be referring to what could be the Catholic Church, as the Catholic Church seems to be in a firm place and holds a great burden of upholding the truth. However, it bothers me that the peg is said to break by the weight of the burden. If the peg is referring to Jerusalem, as you alluded to, I am also curious how this passage relates to the keys given to Eliakhim and Peter. <<<

We have here two different things. **First** it is a historical situation dealing with a real steward, having nothing to do with a "prophecy" about Peter or the future kingdom of Christ. There was a steward Shebna who ruled at the time and he was bad. So, another steward, Eliakim, was going to take his place. The successor would also end up in trouble and as the new peg he would also eventually be removed. There was no promise of infallibility for stewards back then :-)

*The Jerome Biblical Commentary* comments:

"Is 22:25. This prose supplement describes the ultimate downfall of Eliakim, brought to disaster by dispensing patronage to members of his own family. Nepotism had loosened the firmly secured peg and the whole family went down in Eliakim's collapse. From Is 36:3, 22; 37:2, it would seem that Shebna's downfall was not complete, for he appears in these passages, dating from 701, as a royal secretary. This discrepancy would argue for a demotion rather than a complete expulsion from royal service; of course, it may be that Shebna later suffered total disgrace when the folly of his pro-Egyptian policy became evident" (Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. (1996, c1968). *The Jerome Biblical commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Vol 1, pg. 276).

*Word Biblical Commentary* comments:

"*In that day* looks beyond the setting of vv 15–24 dealing with Shebna's demotion to announce Yahweh's reversal of the announcement that Eliakim will

take Shebna's place. He is no better and must now be removed" (Watts, J. D. W. (2002). *Vol. 24: Word Biblical Commentary : Isaiah 1–33. Word Biblical Commentary* (Page 292). Dallas: Word, Incorporated).

So, in Isaiah 22 the actual historical situation is what is being referred to. I do not believe it is a "prophecy" of any downfall of the future papacy, any more than the previous verses are a prophecy of a future papacy. Rather it was simply a prophecy about the inevitable downfall of Shebna and then also of Eliakim—eventually. Actually, Isaiah 22 is should not be considered a prophecy about the future papacy at all. Which brings me to my 2nd point.

**Second**, Isaiah 22 is a historical situation in the kingdom of Judah. It is not a prophecy—it is history. (Isaiah 52–53 and Isaiah 7:14 are prophecies.) Isaiah 22 gives us a glimpse back in time, a glimpse at a delegated office under the king in the Jewish monarchy. So, why do we use it in relation to Mt. 16 and the Papacy? Because King Jesus is planning and establishing his new eternal kingdom. What was the model? What every Jew knew, their own history in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Jesus used words and a context that corresponded to what they knew—their own history, their own kingdom. It is called cultural literacy. Today, in our democratic world (actually our country is a republic and not a democracy—a world of difference) Jesus would have possibly referred to the Vice Presidency or the Secretary of State.

So, Isaiah 22 is used to set the historical backdrop for the restored kingdom of David and the restoration of the offices of that kingdom (Mary is raised to the office of Queen Mother [cp. 1 Kings 2:19]; we are elevated to the office of "the Friend of the King [cp. Jn 15:15]). Jesus is alluding to something every Jew knew—the keys of the kingdom. The keys meant royal authority delegated by the king. Not ONLY delegated authority, but successive authority. When one steward dies or is removed, another takes his place. Thus the successors of Peter.

This is political stuff, but also eternal. The earthly political situation is being used to give you a visual trajectory for the spiritual political situation. Jesus is King. He has an eternal kingdom (Dan 7:13–14). The kingdom will resemble what the Jews already know because what Jesus is founding is not a democracy but a kingdom. And kingdoms have stewards and the steward of THIS kingdom will be Peter.

But what about the broken peg? Eliakim would also fail. He was the peg driven into the wall but he too, like Shebna would wiggle loose over time and fail. Sinful man—ah, what a curse. Someone would eventually take his place and probably fail too, just like the queen mothers of the Old Testament most of the time failed to live up to their high position. But, there was no promise of the Holy Spirit leading them, or protecting them, or guiding them into all truth. They were merely political figures whereas the office holders of the Eternal Kingdom are much more AND now the Holy Spirit is involved.

So, to conclude: first, Eliakim is not a prophecy about Peter. We only refer to Isaiah 22 as a historical reference to explain what a Royal Steward (the *One Over the House*) actually is and to provide the obvious reference to Jesus' words. Second, even if we WANT to use it as a prophecy of the future, I would see it as a warning that the Jewish kingdom, economy and official offices would all fail God—and they did. God destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70 to make it official. The tent (maybe the "church" of the Old Testament) eventually falls to be replaced by a new tent with a more sure peg.

Interestingly, some Evangelical commentaries say Jesus is the peg. Take Matthew Henry for example "

"Eliakim was compared to a nail in a sure place; all his family are said to depend upon him. In eastern houses, rows of large spikes were built up in the walls. Upon these the moveables and utensils were hung. Our Lord Jesus is as a nail in a sure place. That soul cannot perish, nor that concern fall to the ground, which is by faith hung upon Christ. He will set before the believer an open door, which no man can shut, and bring both body and soul to eternal glory. But those who neglect so great salvation will find, that when he shutteth none can open, whether it be shutting out from heaven, or shutting up in hell for ever" (*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Is 22:15). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.)

If they take their projections to the limit, then Jesus is a peg that will eventually break loose and fall. I hardly think that is any more a qualified interpretation than to say the loosened peg must refer to Peter and his successors.

New wine had to be placed in new wineskins. The temporary economy of the Old Covenant was insufficient. The peg would eventually fall and be replaced again by a peg that would NEVER fall—which the papacy never has. But I don't think we need to go this far with Isaiah 22—I think it is stretching the bounds of hermeneutics.

Remember the stone jars of water for purification at the wedding of Cana (Jn 2:1–11)? It was a sign of the failure of Judaism. Jesus replaced the inadequate water of Jewish purification with the wine of the New Covenant. In the same way, the secular royalty and its offices of the Old Covenant were not sufficient to keep the Kingdom of God on track, so the new covenant was established to replace the old. In the same way, the old peg which continually broke loose in the Old Covenant is now replaced by the peg that will never break loose until King Jesus comes again to reveal the kingdom in a glorious manner. At that point no peg will be needed for the office of royal steward will have become a thing of the past. The delegated keys will be returned to the King has come back to receive us to himself on the Last Day.