



"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."
—William Shakespeare

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The Scepter of the Kingdom of God (Part One)

From early times, a staff or scepter has indicated secular or religious authority. Scepters were used in Egypt as early as the fifteenth century ^{BC} and in Cyprus as early as the twelfth century ^{BC}. Among the early Greeks, the scepter was a long staff used by aged men, the elders among them, and it came to be used by others placed in authority, such as judges, military leaders, and priests. Under the Romans, an ivory scepter was a mark of consular rank. Victorious generals, who received the title of imperator, also used it. Under the Roman Empire, the emperors used a scepter of ivory, tipped with a golden eagle.

[Matthew 27:29](#) records that a reed was placed in Christ's hand as a mock scepter of kingly authority. When Christ returns to earth, He will take the scepter of the [Kingdom of God](#) as a symbol of righteousness, power, and authority. What is the history behind this scepter?

The history begins with a two-fold promise to Abraham. The spiritual and royal promise of the "one Seed," the Messiah, and of salvation through Him and the promise of kingship, the Bible calls "the scepter." But the material and national promises relating to many nations, national wealth, prosperity and power, and possession of the Holy Land, the Bible calls the "birthright."

[God](#) made these two promises, the birthright and the scepter, unconditionally to Abraham and re-promised to [Isaac](#) and Jacob. After Jacob, these two promises became separated. The scepter promise of the kingly line culminating in Christ and of grace through Him was handed on to Jacob's son, Judah, father of the Jews. [Moses](#) records Jacob's prophecy: "The scepter [margin: *symbol of kingship*] shall not depart from Judah, nor lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people" ([Genesis 49:10](#)). "Shiloh" prophetically refers to the Messiah, as Prince of [Peace](#), or as the "Seed of Abraham."

Between Moses and Saul, God ruled Israel through judges. The birthright and scepter promises remained within the twelve tribes of Israel. The birthright was handed down through the tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, while the scepter promise descended through Judah. The Israelites, however, became dissatisfied with God's direct rule and demanded that a man be set up as king ([I Samuel 8:7-9](#)). God chose Saul of the tribe of Benjamin to be the first human king, but he refused to obey God and was rejected.

His successor was a young man of Judah, David son of Jesse. Once God chose David and his house, the scepter was handed down the Jewish kingly line, as [Genesis 49:10](#) had foreseen. [I Chronicles 29:23](#) records, "Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father," and so has every king of the Judaic royal lineage since that time.

Because of Solomon's sins, especially idolatry, God took the nation of Israel, composed of the ten northern tribes, from his son, Rehoboam, and gave it to a servant, Jeroboam ([I Kings 11:31-37](#)). These ten tribes were called by the ancient title of "Israel." The one tribe of Judah (with additions from Benjamin and Levi) remained under Rehoboam and was called "Judah" or "House of Judah." Rehoboam ruled over the new and much smaller Kingdom of Judah, not the Kingdom of Israel.

God kept His promise to David by not abolishing the scepter [promises to Abraham](#), Isaac, and Jacob. He left a son of this promise sitting on the throne over only one tribe, and at the same time, He punished Solomon by taking away the nation of Israel.

For the first time, the birthright and scepter promises were divided between two nations: Israel, headed by Ephraim and Manasseh, had the birthright, while Judah held the scepter. For many generations Israel and Judah remained as separate nations in adjoining territories, with their own separate kings. Because of their sins, the House of Israel, along with the birthright, was driven into Assyrian captivity between 721-718 ^{BC}.

The House of Judah was taken captive to Babylonian exile in three stages between 604 ^{BC} and 585 ^{BC}, the last when King Zedekiah reigned: "Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters, to carry him off to Babylon" ([Jeremiah 39:6-7](#)), where he died in prison. No male heirs to the throne of Judah survived to inherit the throne. However, Jeremiah records that heirs of Zedekiah did survive: Johanan took all the remnant of Judah, including the king's daughters, Jeremiah, and Baruch into Egypt. They eventually escaped with Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 43:5-7](#)).

At this point, an explanation of [Genesis 38:27-30](#), which describes the birth of Pharez and Zerah, the twin sons of Judah, is critical. The firstborn was royal seed, and he and his line would carry the scepter down through history. Zerah reached his hand out of the womb, and a scarlet thread was tied around his hand to mark him as firstborn. But Zerah pulled back his hand, and Pharez was actually born first, causing a breach. The midwife exclaimed, "'How did you break through? This breach be upon you!' Therefore his name was called Pharez." A "breach" is an infraction or violation of a law, obligation, tie or standard; or a temporary gap in continuity. Eventually, this breach would have to be healed.

Many of Zerah's line became wanderers, journeying to the north among the Scythian nations, and their descendants later migrated to Ireland in the days of [King David](#). Meanwhile, the Judah-Pharez-David-Zedekiah line possessed the scepter. [Jesus Christ](#) is also of this line, as Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show.

Since David's dynasty is promised to remain on the throne through all generations forever ([II Samuel 7:16](#)), the healing of the breach could only occur by a marriage between a Pharez heir to the throne and one of the Zerah line. [Ezekiel 21:25-27](#) foretells this:

Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel [Zedekiah], whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord GOD; Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the lowly [Zerah's line], and abase the exalted [Pharez line]. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He [Christ] comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him."

As the prophecy uses "overthrown" three times, the throne was to be overturned three times.

Next time, we will see how God removed the crown of David from the ruling line of Pharez and placed it on the head of a descendant of Zerah, healing the breach.

- Martin G. Collins

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Day of Israel's Calamity](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The day of Israel's calamity is right upon the horizon. One perennial theme of the major and minor prophets is the deplorable faithlessness of Israel, depicted as a fickle, spoiled, pampered, well-dressed streetwalker. To the remnants of this decadent civilization of modern Israel, God provides the book of Proverbs as an antidote. Wisdom is inextricably linked with fear and reverence for God. Without wisdom, genius and brilliance are useless at best and dangerous at worst. Wisdom warns us not to let the world squeeze us into its mold. Unfortunately, as a nation, we have rejected wisdom in favor

of foolishness, bringing about major devastating calamities: famines, pestilence, earthquakes, cosmic disturbances (graphically depicted in Deuteronomy 32, Jeremiah 4, and Ezekiel 2-3,6-7) upon our apostate faithless people after the prior devastation of Gentile nations who didn't have a relationship with God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Searching for Israel \(Part Five\): Solomon and the Divided Kingdom](#)

by Charles Whitaker

As he aged, Solomon listened to his foreign wives and fell into idolatry. For this, Charles Whitaker shows, God divided his kingdom between Israel and Judah, but promised that a king of Judaic lineage will always rule Israel—another search criterion in the quest to locate modern Israel.

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