

Searching For Israel (Part Four): The Kingdom And The Key

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In Isaiah 22:22, the prophet refers to "the key of the house of David." Alluding to this passage, the New Testament bears witness of the existence of this key in Revelation 3:7, where Christ makes reference to Himself: "He who has the key of David. . . ." What is this key? What does it open? This article will explore the history of the house of David with the aim of answering these questions.

In the early days, the children of Israel benefited from a highly centralized form of government called a theocracy—the rule of God. It was top-down government, pyramidal in structure, with God as the capstone. The famous Pyramid of Gaza, the so-called Great Pyramid, is emblematic of this form of government: It is truncated; its top part, representing the upper echelons of government, is missing. The capstone of God's government is not on this planet, but in heaven. That is where the capital is.

Israel, in the days of the theocracy, lacked a capital city. There was no need for one, for Israel's government, unlike every other government in the world, was not based on the earth. In reality, the missing capital city, which testifies of Israel's lack of *human* government, was in heaven.

This is not to say human beings were totally absent in Israel's theocratic government. Not at all. God used humans as His agents; He enforced His laws, judgments, and statutes through a human being who served as His administrator. Moses and Joshua, as well as the judges later, served in this capacity. It is interesting to note that the judges felt no need to build a capital city; they administrated God's government from his (or her) town of residence. For instance, Samuel judged from his home at Ramah, although he made a yearly circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah (I Samuel 7:16-17).

The people became restive under this form of government when the aging Samuel, who was the last judge, established his corrupt sons as judges. "They turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice" (I Samuel 8:3). Samuel complied with the peoples' request to give "us a king to judge us like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:5). Therefore, in the course of time, Israel changed from being a theocracy (the rule of God) to a monarchy (the rule of a king, or monarch). Under its first king, the Benjamite Saul, Israel became a political confederation of its twelve tribes.

Over time, Saul's leadership faltered under the pressures and prestige of power. God replaced him with David, of the tribe of Judah. II Samuel 5:4-5 relates that he ruled for seven and a half years over Judah from Hebron, when, at the death of the last remnants of Saul's dynasty, "all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel" (verse 3).

David then took two unprecedented steps. At least no one *in Israel* had ever undertaken them.

1. He established a capital city. II Samuel 5:9, 11 relates how he

dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. Then David built all around from the Millo and inward. . . . Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters and masons. And they built David a house.

Through his relationships with Gentile nations, David established a house for himself in Jerusalem, which became the capital of the Kingdom of Israel. David ruled over all the tribes.

2. Struck by the fact that he "dwel[t] in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains" (II Samuel 7:2), *David proposed building a house for God, a Temple*. God rejected that idea, saying that it was inappropriate for the warrior David, a man who had shed much blood, to construct a Temple (I Chronicles 28:3).

God's response to David's proposal to erect a Temple is significant. For, in the midst of that reply, speaking through the prophet Nathan, He makes an extraordinary promise. This response appears in II Samuel 7:5-9, 11-16 (see I Chronicles 17:7-14 as a parallel passage):

Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places where I have walked with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" . . . I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. . . . Also, the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.

Established Forever

Here is an unconditional promise: "Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (verse 16). Speaking of Solomon, David's son who was later to build the Temple his father had proposed (verses 12-13), God says that His "mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you" (verse 15).

The prophet Jeremiah reaffirms that David's throne will rule Israel, and will do so forever: "For thus says the Lord: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel'" (Jeremiah 33: 17). Jeremiah's prophecy, which in context is part of a prophecy about Israel in the Millennium, emphasizes that there will always be a monarch ruling "the house of Israel." David's throne, the authority of his dynasty, is not limited to the tribe of Judah, whence David himself sprang, but extends over the entire house of Israel (see also II Chronicles 5:2). We should not expect, therefore, to find David's dynasty in a *Gentile* nation; God says it will rule Israel.

The promise of an eternal throne—an everlasting dynasty—is a reaffirmation of what Jacob by faith had come to understand centuries before. Speaking of Judah's descendants in the "last days," he prophesied that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Genesis 49:10). "Timing is everything," we noted in an earlier article. There would be a period of time when Judah would not bear rule.

However, once God placed the scepter in Judah's hand, we can expect that the house of David would rule ever after. Clearly, God placed the scepter in David's hand. We can therefore count on David's dynasty to rule over Israel in perpetuity.

The same faith that worked in Jacob was at work in David when he speaks confidently of God's steadfast love to his posterity. In Psalm 89:35-37, David says that God has "sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and His throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky. Selah."

The Scepter and the Birthright

God's promise of power to David and His promise of wealth to Joseph are not contradictory, for there is an important distinction between the *birthright* and the *scepter*. As we saw in the previous issue, God chose Joseph—specifically, Ephraim and Manasseh—to be the recipients of the great *physical* blessings associated with the birthright. We see this specifically in Jacob's blessing of Joseph's boys, recorded in Genesis 48:12-20, as well as the blessings listed in Deuteronomy 33:13-17. To use Jacob's words, the birthright blessing would be "up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills" (Genesis 49:26). This is a promise of great wealth and prosperity.

God chose Judah, however, to serve as the scepter tribe, that is, the tribe that would bear rule over the descendants of Abraham. The psalmist Asaph writes that God "rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved" (Psalm 78:67-68).

Asaph pinpoints David as the first king to come out of Judah: "He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance" (verses 70-71).

One Last Point

Perhaps the most remarkable part of the "key of the house of David" is the *ownership* of David's throne. I Chronicles 29:23 records that, after David's death, "Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father." David and Solomon sat on God's throne!

The Queen of Sheba provides a second witness to this incredible truth. This apparently Gentile woman understood an important fact about Solomon's throne: "Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on His throne to be king for the Lord your God!" (II Chronicles 9:8).

Remarkably, God twice refers to David's throne as *His own*. It is God's in the sense that Christ will eventually inherit it. Christ, "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1), will return to earth, claiming His rightful place as "King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9). In Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet Isaiah writes of the "Prince of Peace" who will eventually sit on David's throne:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.

This Child, this Son, whom we know is Jesus Christ, is the Shiloh of Genesis 49:10. There, Jacob prophesies that "to Him shall be the obedience of the people." Christ is of the lineage of David (Luke 3:23-31); He will ultimately sit on David's throne—forever.

Summarizing, David's throne is

- » an everlasting one (II Samuel 7:15-16),
- » the throne Christ will claim upon His return (Isaiah 9:6-7), and
- » the throne ruling over "the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 33:17).

This knowledge is the key of David. It is clear that it is a vital search criterion to identifying the whereabouts and identity of Israel.

Looking in aggregate at the promises God made to the patriarchs and to David, we begin to grasp their almost unimaginable scope. Israel will have

- » an everlasting inheritance of land (Genesis 13:14-15; Genesis 17:8),
- » an everlasting dynasty to rule that land (II Samuel 7:15-16; Genesis 49:10), and
- » an everlasting King to rule the inhabitants of the land (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Now, here are some *specific* search criteria. In no way can these characteristics be applied to just any kingdom throughout the years, or to just any group of people one might select. We are beginning to zero in on Israel today.

Nevertheless, God has provided us with still more markers to identify Israel. Next month, we will focus on David's son and heir, Solomon. Speaking of Solomon, God tells David: "If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men" (II Samuel 7:14). Well, Solomon did indeed sin. What were the effects of his sin, and what are the historical consequences of the "blows of the sons of men"?