

December 13, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND

TITLE: THE SCEPTER, Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17, 19 (*The First Signs of Christmas #3*)

Just under two weeks to Christmas. What are the signs? Any change from a couple weeks ago? We are in the middle of an Advent series, *The First Signs of Christmas*, examining four word-pictures of the promise of Jesus' coming from the earliest books of the Bible. The first image is the *Seed* (from Genesis 3). Last week we looked at the *Spokesperson/Prophet* from the book of Deuteronomy. Today we will consider a third metaphor mentioned in the books of Genesis and Numbers, the *Scepter*.

There are various words translated *scepter* in the Old Testament. Sometimes the word can mean *rod*, *staff* or *stick* in other contexts. What is a scepter? Who uses one? A **scepter**, depending on the culture, had various shapes and designs, but it was not so much a functional tool as **a representative instrument of power, specifically the power of the King**.

Let's look to God's word together. Read Genesis 49:8-12. Genesis 49 is the blessing by Jacob of his sons before his death. Judah, Jacob's third son, will be the one who is viewed as the head above all the other sons and their families. Jacob speaks prophetically of what the future will be for his sons and their descendants. He describes **Judah as a lion**, a metaphor that continues throughout Scripture and remains to some extent even today. Let me give you an example. What animal represents the U.S.? Eagle. What about Russia? Bear. Verse 10 speaks of the rulers coming from the tribe of Judah. The second half of the verse says that this ruling is temporary until the One Who will come. **The ruling of Judah's descendants will anticipate this King Who will come.** Verses 11 and 12 indicate the abundance that will come and also uses the colors of deep red and white to indicate something more about this ruler.

What does a king do? Judges. Rules. Fights wars against those opposing Him. Makes decisions that are to benefit all of his subjects.

Now turn to Numbers 24. Read 24:17-19. Before we talk about what is said in the verses, does anything strike you as odd about this passage? Who speaks it? Who is Balaam? What is amazing is that **God speaks through a pagan prophet** hired by King Balak of Moab to tell of **Israel's eventual dominance over Moab and also of One Who will come**. Again, the image is that of a king, the King. Here the image of a star is also used, also indicating royalty. We'll come back to the star next week.

People understood these verses as not just a reference to the rulers from Judah, but also to the coming Messiah. The Genesis and Numbers words are given roughly 1,800 and 1,400 years before He comes. Let's go to another passage

about 400 years later, or 1,000 years before Jesus comes. The LORD gives a promise to King David (from the tribe of Judah). *"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."* 2 Samuel 7:16 (cf. 1 Chronicles 28:4)

Psalm 2 is understood as a messianic psalm, i.e. although it may have been written to honor the present King, it really is about the Messiah. *He said to me, "You are my Son, today I have become your Father." Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.* Psalm 2:7-9 (cf. 60:7; 108:8) This image speaks of the power of the One to come and what He will ultimately do to those who oppose Him.

Psalm 72 is written about Solomon, but is not limited to him. *All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.* Psalm 72:11 What I find particularly significant is the link to the promise given to Abraham. *All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.* Psalm 72:17 Again, the Jewish people understood this psalm to be a messianic psalm, i.e. descriptive of the coming Messiah.

Let's go three hundred years later to about 700 B.C. Isaiah writes, *To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.* Isaiah 9:6-7 (cf. 11:1-5)

A contemporary of Isaiah is the prophet Micah. *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."* Micah 5:2 The Jewish people understood this verse to refer to the place where Messiah would be born.

Fast forward 100+ years to Jeremiah. *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."* Jeremiah 23:5-6

A few years later Ezekiel speaks of the judgment on Jerusalem, but also the hope to come. *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it belongs; to him I will give it."* Ezekiel 21:26-27

Daniel writes, *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”* Daniel 7:13-14

Over 500 years later, likely the year 2 B.C., the angel Gabriel tells Mary of the son she will bear. *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* Luke 1:32-33

Nine months later angels announce to shepherds that Christ (Messiah) the Lord is born in the city of David, Bethlehem. Some months after His birth Magi from the east travel to Judea, stop at Jerusalem and ask, *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”* Matthew 2:2 The chief priests and teachers of the law link this person with Messiah . . . and Bethlehem. The Magi present the infant Jesus with kingly gifts.

Fast forward thirty years. Jesus goes to John to be baptized by him and a voice from heaven declares Jesus to be His beloved Son. What is the very next thing that happens? Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness where He is **tempted** by Satan. How? **With power and position and prominence.** He offers Jesus all of earth as His kingdom.

After John was put in prison Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:14-15 People begin to flock to Him, but he said, *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”* Luke 4:43 Nathanel calls Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel (John 1:49). To the Pharisee Nicodemus who comes to speak with him at night, Jesus says that he must be born again if he is to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). Following His feeding of the 5,000 with the five small loaves and two fish, people believe Jesus to be the Prophet. *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.* John 6:15

Throughout His ministry **Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God: what it is like, who is the greatest, how to enter it.** James and John’s mother requests that her sons be given the places of honor at Jesus’ right and left in His kingdom (Matthew 20:21). When He is questioned by Pilate as to whether He is a king, Jesus replies that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36-37). Pilate has a notice fastened to His cross, declaring Him to be King of the Jews. One of the thieves crucified with Jesus asks that Jesus remember him when He comes into His kingdom (Luke 23:42).

The forty days after His resurrection Jesus speaks to the apostles about the kingdom of God, but they think He means restoring the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:3-8). The book of Acts records that preaching about the kingdom of God was the central theme of Philip (Acts 8:12) and Paul (Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). It's not about do's and don'ts, but about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). It's not a matter of talk, but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20). **Those who insist on continuing to live in sin will not have God's kingdom to look forward to as their inheritance, but the good news is that when we come to Christ in faith, He rescues us from sin and its penalty to life** (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-25; Ephesians 5:3-11; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 12:28; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:3-11).

In the book of Revelation John describes the heavenly scene which proclaims that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed (Revelation 5:5, 9-10; 11:15; 12:10).

We don't have kings these days, although some politicians act as though they are. We give the title *King* to a NASCAR driver and entertainers. We sometimes think of ourselves as kings.

- ◆ Who/what is king of my heart?

The way I live is a direct window into my heart. It reflects the things I value and treasure. Jesus' disputes with the Pharisees and other religious leaders were often over outward practices that were for the people, not for God.

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within (or among) you." Luke 17:20-21

God's rule, yes, will one day be realized, but our attention is not so much to try to determine the when and where. **God's rule is about Who is king of my life, my heart.**

- ◆ What would Jesus' rule in my life look like?

Do the values by which I live match up with those God's word says are important? Remember, **to determine what our values are we should look at what we give our time, money and effort.** If you are really serious, ask someone who knows you to list the top five or ten things in your life based on their observation.

Now, **every person's values are different, reflecting the different gifts and passions that God uses in who He is making me.** So, my life does not have

to look like yours or yours like mine. The real question is, *Does my life reflect love for God and others as most important?* Jesus said those are the two greatest commandments (Matthew 22:37-38). *Am I allowing God to use my life to bring other people to Him and then help them to grow to be His disciples?* Jesus' last instructions before ascending to heaven began this way, "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me, so make disciples, going, baptizing and teaching in My name with My words." (Matthew 28:18-20) Those are orders from our King.

What rules your heart? What would it look like if Jesus were in charge?

- ◆ What needs to change today for Jesus to be King?

Is it my speech? How I view possessions? The time I spend or don't spend with my children? What about my quiet time with God? **What one thing is God by His Spirit asking of you to yield to Him, to let Him do, to let Him change? Will you let Him?** *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.* 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Conclusion. The Bible says there will be a last battle, when Jesus comes, He Who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Paul writes, *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.* 1 Corinthians 15:24 But **that end is only the beginning.** *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. . . And they will reign for ever and ever.* Revelation 22:3-4, 5 (Pray.)