

Introduction: Part 7

Historical Setting

- **The Importance of Historical Setting**

It is *critical* to understand the historical setting within which a passage or book of the Bible was given. This “anchors” the text in the stream of real history allowing the reader understand aspects of the context that would otherwise be missed.

Knowledge of the historical setting also safeguards our interpretation from common errors such as: (1) lifting verses out of context; (2) failure to understand the purpose of the passage; (3) inability to appreciate the contribution of the book or passage to the full sweep of biblical revelation; (4) misapplication of predictions; (5) shallowness of application.

Throne of David

- **Promise to David**

In the early days of the kingdom of Israel, when all of Israel was unified under King David, God made an astounding promise to David:

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 (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

God said that David’s house (dynasty), kingdom, and throne would be eternal. This is an important promise we must consider in our study of the Book of Daniel because the book records the historical interruption in the reign from the throne of David, known as the *Times of the Gentiles*. In view of the promise given to David, the events of chapter 1 of Daniel are intended to raise a series of questions in the mind of the Jews and today’s reader: “What happened to God’s promise to David? Has it been canceled? Will it ever be fulfilled? If so, how?” Answering these questions becomes the thrust of much of the prophetic content within the book.

- **Promise to Solomon**

We find the promise reiterated and clarified to David's son Solomon:

And the LORD said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' " (1 Kings 9:3-5).

The condition which God incorporates into this promise is of great importance to an understanding of the Book of Daniel: "If you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom... You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel." It is Israel's failure to keep this condition which triggers the major historical events of the Book of Daniel.

A Dwindling Kingdom

- **Civil War**

The failure to keep God's statutes and judgments began even within the lifetime of Solomon. In his old age, through the influence of his foreign wives, Solomon was induced to sanction the worship of idols. God responded by visiting the king's house with chastisement—leading to the revolt of ten of the twelve tribes upon Solomon's death. Even so, God preserved the Davidic kingdom through the continued loyalty of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin centered at Jerusalem with the temple. During this time of the divided kingdom, the ten tribes under the rule of Jeroboam constituted the northern kingdom (often referred to as "Israel" or "Samaria") while the two tribes under the rule of Solomon's son Rehoboam formed the southern kingdom (often referred to as "Judah").

- **Northern Kingdom Falls to Assyria**

For most of the period of the divided kingdom, the sins of the northern kingdom are the more flagrant of the two kingdoms. Golden calves (idols) are set up in the northern kingdom as a substitute for the proscribed worship of God which was to take place in Jerusalem within the southern kingdom. Many of the rulers of the northern kingdom were particularly evil (e.g., Omri, Ahab). After many years of rule characterized by idolatry and disobedience to God, the northern kingdom fell to Assyria (2K. 17:5-23).

Southern Kingdom Alone

- **Davidic Throne Favored**
The southern kingdom of Judah had outlasted the northern kingdom of Israel for a number of reasons. Partly due to the influence of some godly kings who occasionally interrupted the otherwise dismal record of leadership (e.g., Hezekiah, Josiah). But the *most important factor in her continued rule beyond the fall of the northern kingdom was God's promise concerning the Davidic throne and favor toward His "house," the temple, which stood in the midst of Jerusalem.*
- **Much Given, Much Required**
The Scriptures teach the principle that to whomever much light is given, much is required (Amos 3:2; Luke 12:48). For the southern kingdom of Judah, with the Davidic throne and the temple in her midst, God had correspondingly higher expectations (Eze. 16:51-52). Eventually, the disobedience, idolatry, and injustice that characterized the very throne of David became so great that God's hand was forced to bring judgment. There were periods when it appeared the southern kingdom might turn around, but eventually the die was cast: the reign of the rulers after Hezekiah constituted a "Countdown to Captivity" which was not to be averted.

Shifting Powers

- **Tools of Judgment**
During the final stages of the southern kingdom, a major regional power shift was taking place. The Assyrian empire would diminish in influence to be supplanted by the Babylonian and, eventually, Medo-Persian empires (Jer. 50:17; 51:11, 28). In a similar way in which God had used Assyria to judge the northern kingdom, Babylon would be used to judge the southern kingdom. Babylon, in turn, would be judged by its overthrow by Medo-Persia.
- **Rise of Neo-Babylonia**
Winds of change began in 626 B.C. when the Neo-Babylonian dynasty began under Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar. The Neo-Babylonian power joined with the Medes in the destruction of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, in 612 B.C. The remnant of Assyrian power relocated to Haran, only to face defeat by the Babylonians and Medes in 611 B.C. As Assyrian dominance faded, Egypt attempted to step into the power vacuum in western Palestine.
- **Assyria, Egypt, Babylon**
From the perspective of the kings of Judah, the regional power shift involved three major powers: Assyria, then Egypt, then Babylon. It was during these times that one of the most godly kings of Judah, Josiah, lost his life opposing Egyptian forces. The historic role which Babylon played in the eventual downfall of the southern kingdom, bringing an end to rule from the throne of David, is important to understand. The biblical significance of Babylon is seen in numerous prophetic passages, especially the six major chapters which prophesy concerning her judgment (Isa. 13; 14; Jer. 50; 51; Rev. 17; 18).

Message of the Prophets

- **God's Messengers**

As the northern and southern kingdoms continued in their godless behavior, God sent faithful prophets to warn the rulers and their people. These warnings consisted of two main themes: (1) God's continued patience and offer of grace and forgiveness in response to repentance; (2) God's sure judgment in response to continued hard-heartedness.

During the twilight of Judah, the prophets which ministered to the southern kingdom included Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk. During the Babylonian Captivity, Daniel and Ezekiel ministered to the nation. Upon the decree of Cyrus and the return of the remnant to rebuild the temple and city of Jerusalem, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi ministered. A survey of the writings of these prophets helps the us understand the historical context surrounding the downfall, captivity, and restoration of Israel during this period.

- **Condition of the Nation**

The prophets which God dutifully sent to warn the southern kingdom made it abundantly clear that the kingdom of Judah was sick and near unto death. The symptoms of her sickness manifested themselves in matters of faith and worship as well as socio-political practices. The prophets repeatedly emphasized the lack of justice which characterized the dealings of the rulers and the people, especially those in positions of responsibility. The hearts of the people had grown unresponsive to God's truth. Although they had access to the truth, their hearts were hard: they would not receive correction. In their rejection of God, the nation was deep into idolatry of the grossest sort. False prophets abounded who opposed the message of the true prophets. At times, there was the appearance of a response to the message of God on the part of the people, but generally it was superficial—their lives betraying a deeply-rooted case of religious hypocrisy

Factors in Judgment

- **Ungodly Rulers**

It is a fearful principle within Scripture that the people suffer for the sins of their leaders (e.g., 2S. 24:17). In some cases, this result is due to the simple fact that the people are part of the political entity which is affected by the actions of their leaders. In other cases it is because the leaders, in their error or apostasy, actively lead the nation by example so that the people themselves emulate the leaders. Instead of serving as models of righteous behavior, they model godlessness (Ps. 125:3). Although God opposes all ungodly leadership, when the ruler occupies the throne of David, as did the kings of Judah, this is particularly egregious because this geopolitical throne was intended to reflect God's righteous rule (e.g., Isa. 9:6-7).

- **God's Patience**

God showed great patience with the southern kingdom. If we consider the ministry of Jeremiah alone, he prophesied warning to Judah for a period of 40 years (626-586 B.C.). This is a relatively long time and witnesses to the patience of God in withholding judgment.

During this period, God gave a great deal of information concerning the nature of the judgment which would follow. He revealed that the instrument of His judgment would be the growing regional superpower: Babylon. He also indicated that the overthrow of Judah would be by way of siege and that they would suffer famine, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem by fire. As a result, the nation would be carted off to Babylon for a period of seventy years. Rather than resisting this judgment from God, the people were encouraged to prosper in Babylon and seek the well-being of the city.

- **Restoration**

Because God is perfectly righteous, in the face of continued rebellion He *must* bring judgment. Even so, His heart is always oriented toward forgiveness and restoration, even in the midst of judgment, “ ‘Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ says the Lord GOD, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’ ” (Ezekiel 18:23). In the midst of judgment, God always preserves a faithful remnant which serves at least three functions: (1) fulfilling His promise never to terminate the nation of Israel and the throne of David (Ps. 89:35-37; Jer. 31:35-37; 33:20-26 cf. Rev. 12:1); (2) preserving a line of promise which finds fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom yet to come (e.g., Mtt. 19:28); (3) faithfully carrying forward the message of God to future generations (Ps. 102:18; 145:4; John 17:20; 20:29). As Paul did in his day, Jeremiah communicated God’s promise to preserve a faithful remnant (Jer. 44:28 cf. Rom. 9:27; 11:5).

Countdown to Captivity

- #5 - Josiah

Josiah begin his reign while a boy of only eight (2K. 22:1) and reigned for 31 years. His reign was patterned after the godly king Hezekiah. He initiated repairs to the temple whereupon the high priest Hilkiah rediscovered the book of the Law which had been neglected for many years (2K. 22:8). Upon reading the Law, it became apparent just how far Israel had neglected her duties causing Josiah to repent of the ungodliness of the nation. But it was “too little too late”—God confirmed through the prophetess Huldah that judgment would not be averted (2K. 22:16-17). (This could also be known from the prophecy previously given to Hezekiah that Babylon would eventually cart off Israel’s treasures and some from among her people: 2K. 20:12-18.) Nevertheless Josiah continued following closely in the footsteps of his great-grandfather Hezekiah by instituting religious reforms.

“Josiah’s reign was the final ray of light before the darkness of idolatry and foreign intrigue settled over the Davidic Throne.”

--Charles Dyer

- #4 - Jehoahaz (Shallum)

After the death of king Josiah, his son Jehoahaz reigned. He proved to be an ungodly king who reigned for only three months before being deposed by Pharaoh Necho and taken to Egypt where he eventually died (2K. 23:31-34; 2Chr. 36:1-4; Jer. 22:1-12).

- #3 - Jehoiakim (Eliakim)

After deposing of his father Jehoahaz, Eliakim was appointed as a vassal king by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt and renamed Jehoiakim. Like his father before him, he was an evil king (2K. 23:37). He reigned 11 years. It was during his reign that Daniel was taken captive to Babylon. In his 4th year, the battle of Carchemish also took place during which Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Necho marking the beginning of Babylon’s ascendancy over Egypt in the region of Palestine (Jer. 25:1; 45:1; 36:1; 46:2). Thereafter, Jehoiakim was made vassal king of Babylonian by Nebuchadnezzar until late 601 when Nebuchadnezzar suffered defeat while advancing on Egypt whereupon Jehoiakim switched allegiance to Egypt (2K. 24:1). This proved to be a fatal mistake when in 598 Babylon attacked Jerusalem and Jehoiakim was killed.

- **#2 - Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah)**
Upon the death of his father Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah or Coniah) reigned for a period of three months before he surrendered to Babylon. After surrendering to Babylon, he was deported and his uncle, Mattaniah was installed as vassal king and renamed Zedekiah (2K. 24:12-16). Treasures were carried out from the king's house and the temple (2K. 24:13) in fulfillment of the Word of the Lord given to Hezekiah by Isaiah (2K. 20:16-19). Ten thousand captives were taken to Babylon (2K. 24:14), including Ezekiel (Eze. 1:2) and Mordecai's great-grandfather Kish (Est. 2:5-6). Jehoiachin was imprisoned in Babylon until the reign of Evil Merodach (who reigned after the death of Nebuchadnezzar). He remained in Babylon and was provided for by the king (2K. 25:30).
- **#1 - Zedekiah (Mattaniah)**
The final king to reign over Judah was Zedekiah, who reigned for 11 years as a vassal king subject to Babylon. Like all the kings following Josiah's reign, he was evil. When a new Egyptian Pharaoh (Hophra) came to the throne in 588 B.C., Zedekiah took the occasion to rebel against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar responded by the siege which led to the final downfall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the city and temple, and the deportation of the majority who were left. In fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecies that Zedekiah would be taken to Babylon but never see it, his sons were killed before him, his eyes were put out, and he was taken to Babylon where he died (Jer. 39:6-7; 52:9-11; 2K. 25:6-7 cf. Eze. 12:13; 17:16). After capturing Jerusalem, the Babylonians burned the leader's houses and the temple and broke down the city walls.

Times of the Gentiles

- **Davidic Scepter Judged**
In the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, it seemed as if the kingdom of Israel had come to a close. After beginning with the struggles of Saul and David and reaching its apex under David's son Solomon, the divided kingdom had initiated a protracted period of decline culminating in the fall of both the northern kingdom of Israel (after 200 years) and the southern kingdom of Judah (after over 300 years). Most significantly, no longer could anyone point to a throne in Jerusalem from which a Davidic king ruled. Jeremiah's words to Jehoiachin had come to pass, "Say to the king and to the queen mother, 'Humble yourselves; Sit down, For your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory.'" (Jeremiah 13:18). God was duty bound by His own Word to Solomon to discipline any Davidic son who's rule abused the throne (2Chr. 7:17-22). Ezekiel predicted God's judgment against the ruling scepter of David (Eze. 21:10-27). This period is known as the "Times of the Gentiles" which will not come to an end until the second coming of Christ, "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24).

- **David's Throne vs. God's Throne**

“Several factors indicate that David’s throne is separate and distinct from God’s throne in heaven. First, several descendants of David have sat on his throne, but only one of his descendants ever sits on the right hand of God’s throne in heaven. That descendant is Jesus Christ (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 8:1; 12:2). Second, David’s throne was not established before his lifetime (2S. 7:16-17). By contrast, since God has always ruled over His creation, His throne in heaven was established long before David’s throne (Ps. 93:1-2). Third, since God’s throne in heaven was established long before David’s throne and since God’s throne was established forever (Lam. 5:19), then it was not necessary for God to promise to establish David’s throne forever (2S. 7:16) if they are the same throne. Fourth, David’s throne was on the earth, not in heaven. David and his descendants who sat on his throne exercised an earthly, ruling authority. They never exercised ruling authority in or from heaven. By contrast, as noted earlier, the Bible indicates that God’s throne is in heaven. Fifth, the Bible’s consistent description of David’s throne indicates that it belongs to David. When God talked to David about his throne, God referred to it as ‘thy throne’ (2S. 7:16; Ps. 89:4; 132:12). When God mentioned David’s throne to others, He referred to it as ‘his throne’ (Ps. 89:29; Jer. 33:21), ‘David’s throne’ (Jer. 13:13), and ‘the throne of David’ (Jer. 17:25; 22:2, 4, 30). By contrast, the Scriptures’ consistent description of the throne in heaven indicates that it belongs to God the Father.”

--Renald Showers