

# 6

## A SCEPTER

*Numbers 24:16-17*

### AUTHORITY

AN old man living on a gentleman's estate in England was accustomed to using the wealthy baron's private walk when going to a nearby chapel. The man was in poor health and it saved him considerable time by taking this convenient route. Unfortunately, an unkind neighbor informed the baron of this repeated transgression and the baron began watching for the transgressor.

One day when the infirm man was walking to the house of God, he nearly bumped into the baron just as he entered his private path.

"What right have you to be on this path?" asked the baron.

"No right at all, sir," the elderly saint answered. "But I thought you wouldn't mind if an old man who has lived on your estate so many years used your private path to walk to God's house, especially as it's so much farther the other way."

"Give me your walking stick!" the baron said sternly. The trembling saint gave the man his stick, not knowing what to expect. To his surprise, the well-dressed gentlemen, with a kind smile, handed him his own walking stick, beautifully adorned with his family crest in solid gold.

"Here, my good man," said the baron in a gentle voice. "If anyone asks you again what right you have in walking this way, show them this crest and tell them I gave it to you!"

So it is with Jesus, who has given us the privilege and power to

use His name. And further, according to Numbers 24:16-17, our Lord is described as "a Scepter" for all those who would choose to live and pray in His name.

### KNOWING THIS NAME

A scepter is a staff, pole, or rodlike object held by a king as a symbol of His authority. Scepters come in varied lengths, and, although usually made of wood, they are often covered with precious metal and crowned with jewels. In Psalm 74:2 and Jeremiah 51:19 Israel is described as the Lord's *shaybet*, the Hebrew word for scepter. This same word is translated in the King James Version as "the rod of his inheritance." The next verse explains that God was going to use Israel as His instrument ("battle ax" or "war club") by which He would overthrow His enemies (see Jer. 51:19-23).

Although the King James Version translates *shaybet* in the above passages as "a rod," both the New King James Version and the New International Version translate the word in a more personal way as "the tribe of My inheritance."

So a scepter may involve more than merely an object—it also can refer to a person in whom authority is vested. This is even true in our time. For example, in modern day Britain the expression "to scepter" is used as a verb. When an offspring of a monarch is endowed with the same sovereign authority, it is said he or she is "sceptered," or invested with royal authority.

Interestingly, one of the clearest prophecies of the coming Messiah in all of Scripture (and our text for this lesson) is brought by one of its most ambivalent characters—Balaam. Several of the most quoted promises about the Messiah come from his lips. But like Judas, Balaam, who seems to have begun in the Spirit, falls into sin and dies as a tragic commentary on the effect of sinfulness. Nonetheless, it is Balaam who spoke these words by the Holy Spirit: "A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult" (Num. 24:17).

The significance of this prophecy at the time it was given was that Moab was the most immediate obstacle for hindering Israel's wilderness progress. En route toward their promised possession, Israel was being hindered by the troops of Moab. In this prophecy, God was saying that this present adversary ultimately would

be cast down by reason of a promised Ruler—a Scepter—who would some day rise out of Israel.

Every Bible scholar acknowledges that this prophecy foretells the coming Messiah. Christ is that Scepter of authority. And He Himself declared, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Paul adds, "He is the head . . . that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). Thus, having been "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33), Christ Himself has become the representation—the Incarnate Scepter—of the living God's total authority over all things in this world and in the world to come, including earth, heaven, and even hell itself. As Kathe Wood's simple chorus "Lord of Heaven, Lord of Earth" proclaims:

He is Lord of heaven,  
 Lord of earth;  
 Lord of all that ever shall be;  
 Lord of heaven,  
 Lord of earth;  
 Lord of all that is to come.

### LIVING THIS NAME

Our best understanding of the practical meaning of Christ, our Scepter of authority, is perhaps best summed up in the moving account of Esther, a young woman who faced the crisis of a potential holocaust some four hundred years before Christ. Just as this young Jewess was being crowned the bride of Persia's emperor, Ahasuerus, the entire Jewish race was scheduled for annihilation throughout the Persian empire. Naturally, Esther wanted to plead for justice and deliverance for her people, but she faced a serious dilemma. Access to the king's court was by invitation only—even for the queen. To enter his throne room uninvited was to risk immediate death. And yet the crisis would not wait for an invitation.

The story of the entire book bearing the queen's name turns on that telling moment when Esther ventures into the court on her own initiative. For a few anxious moments the fate of an entire nation hangs in the balance. Suddenly Ahasuerus acts. Lovingly he extends his scepter and invites Esther to approach him and touch it.

The action of extending the scepter meant that Esther had been received into the king's favor, and that her request need only be spoken. The queen had touched the symbol of authority and every power represented in that scepter was now at her disposal.

### **PRAYING THIS NAME**

And so it is when we come to the Father in Jesus' name, our promised Scepter, our access to God's holiest of holies is insured by open invitation. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace . . ." (Heb. 4:16). We have a Savior who is able to "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15) and by whose almightiness our most demanding obstacle may be faced in the authority of His name, our Scepter.

To pray with this kind of authority is to pray as Martin Luther prayed in 1540 when his close friend Frederick Myconius lay dying. Attending physicians had given Myconius only a few days to live, and so he wrote a farewell letter to Luther, his cherished friend.

When Luther received the letter he was so incensed that Frederick Myconius would consider "dying on him" at such a crucial time in the reformation of the Church that he immediately sat down and wrote a fearless reply. Assured within that God would keep his friend alive at least long enough to receive his response, Martin Luther wrote these astounding words: "I command thee in the name of God to live because I still have need of thee in the work of reforming the church! The Lord will never let me hear that thou art dead, but will permit thee to survive me." The brief but poignant letter concluded, "For this I am praying, this is my will and may my will be done—because I seek only to glorify the name of God."

Not only did Myconius live long enough to receive Luther's reply, but the moment he read the reformer's authoritative words he felt as if God Himself had breathed new life into his body. In a few days Myconius was restored to complete health and ultimately outlived Luther by two months!

Thus, praying today in Jesus' name, our Scepter, is praying with the full authority God invested in His Son. Just as Christ commanded situations to change by His authority, so we can command obstacles to move by that same authority simply because this privilege has been extended to us.

When Jesus told His disciples to "ask anything in my name" (John 14:13-14) He used a Greek expression that also can mean "make a claim based on my name." To understand precisely what Jesus meant in using these words consider the record of the early church and the way Jesus' disciples interpreted the words, for they heard Jesus speak them in their own language.

The first recorded instance of Christ's disciples "claiming" or "using" His name is found in Acts 3 where we discover Peter and John visiting the temple for prayer. As they approached the gate a i-rippled man pleads for financial aid. Boldly Peter assumes what might be described as an authoritative "prayer stance" (see Acts 3:6). And although some might question whether this is prayer at all, it clearly is an instance of exercising "the power of attorney" given by Christ to His disciples in the Upper Room just hours before He went to Gethsemane.

Note carefully the nature of Peter's prayer. He doesn't expressly ask God to do anything in Jesus' name; rather he makes a claim based on Christ's name. He employs the authority of Jesus' name and commands the crippled man to rise and walk. Seconds later, but only after Peter actually lifts him up, a further act of authority, the man goes "walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3:8).

So exercising our authority in Jesus' name, our Scepter, may go beyond merely asking our Lord to grant a particular request. It may mean we actually command a situation to change in Jesus' name simply because Christ has already given us that authority. He said, "Whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed' . . . and does not doubt in his heart . . . he shall have whatever he says" (M.iik 11:23).

### **TODAY'S PRAYER**

I come to You, Father

to praise You and to express my humility

over the fact that You have arranged for my exaltation

It is too much for me to bear at times

As I think how readily You share the power

of Your throne with Your redeemed.

This day I open my life to Your Holy Spirit

to help me live in the dimensions of Jesus's name—the Scepter

I reach to touch Your power and Your authority  
that my need and my fears may be overcome  
in those mighty resources.

Lord Jesus, I reach to touch You with the gratitude  
of knowing You are touchable—  
that You know my feelings, and You are sensitive  
to every need, pain, or cry

And, Holy Spirit, I welcome "your assistance.  
Help me to so live this day in the name of  
him who is the Scepter,  
that I may rise above all power and dominion  
that would seek  
to drag me down or defeat me.

Through Jesus' triumph and power I take the  
place of authority He has given me—  
as I live in Him—  
in Jesus' name!  
Amen.

## HALLOWING THIS NAME

Blessed and Only Potentate—1 Tim. 6:15

Crown of Glory—Isa. 28:5

Diadem of Beauty—Isa. 28:5

Ensign of the People—Isa. 11:10 (KJV)

Faithful Witness—Rev. 1:5

Glorious Throne to His Father's House—Isa. 22:23

Jehovah-Nissi (The Lord My Banner)—Exod. 17:15

King of Glory—Ps. 24:10

King of Kings—Rev 17:14

King of the Saints—Rev. 15:3

King over All the Earth—Zech. 14:9

One Who Shall Have Dominion—Num. 24:19

Polished Shaft—Isa. 49:2

Prince of Princes—Dan. 8:25

Rod of Your Strength—Ps. 110:2

Rod from the Stem of Jesse—Isa. 11:1

Ruler—Micah 5:2