

## Birthright Blessings Delayed for 2,520 Years

God promised the birthright blessings of Israel's national greatness to the descendants of Joseph through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh—Manasseh becoming a great single nation and Ephraim becoming a great company of nations (see Genesis 48; 35:11; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). Yet when would these birthright promises be fulfilled? God had made them *unconditional* to the descendants of Abraham (Genesis 22:15-18). But *He* would decide the proper time frame.

Would God have given the blessings to Israel shortly after the nation was first formed when it came out of Egypt? Yes—if Israel had obeyed Him as outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. (While the blessings themselves were unconditional, God was free to attach conditions as to *when* He would give them.)

### National punishment

But God warned in the same chapters that if they *disobeyed* Him, there would be grim national punishment. And sadly, this is what transpired again and again, these rebellious people making things still worse for themselves. Notice what God told them: “And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you *seven times more* for your sins” (Leviticus 26:18). The phrase “seven times more” is translated from the Hebrew *sheba' yasaf*, the first word simply meaning “seven” and the second meaning “to add, increase, do again” (Strong's Nos. 7651, 3254, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, 1992). Combined, the words convey the sense of “multiplied times seven” or “sevenfold”—here indicating that the punishment is to increase to an intensity seven times greater than before.

Continuing in Leviticus 26, God lists some of the increased punishments. Yet what if they *still* would not obey? “Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you *seven times more plagues*, according to your sins” (verse 21). The plagues upon them would be increased seven times *yet again!*

But despite the terrible punishment God warned of and later actually brought on the Israelites, they still refused to heed and obey Him. What did He say would happen in that case? “And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet *seven times* for your sins” (verses 23-24). We should notice something different here. The word “more” (*yasaf*) does not occur after “seven times” as it did in the previous verses. This does not, then, seem to be talking about a sevenfold increase in intensity as before.

The word *sheba'* (“seven”), it should be pointed out, can also refer to duration, continuation or repetition of an action over a period of time. In Psalm 119:164 and Proverbs 24:16, “seven times” (Hebrew *sheba'*) refers to something being repeated seven times. The same is apparently true of the “seven times” of Leviticus 26:24. It seems to indicate a specific punishment being repeated seven times. And if it is a *repeated* punishment, then each episode must be of *equal*

*duration*. This would mean seven successive time periods that make up one long period of punishment.

## Scripture interprets Scripture

Now we should ask: Are there any other examples in Scripture of God using “seven times” to correctively punish someone? Yes—that of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. To humble this arrogant ruler, God decreed that the king would be reduced to eating grass with the cattle for a set period of time: “And *seven times* shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” (Daniel 4:32). For *seven literal years*, Nebuchadnezzar was out of his mind, grazing with the oxen. So here is an indication that a biblical “time” equals a year.

But we must be careful here. A “time” is not a 365-day solar year, as we understand it today. In the ancient past, a year was considered to be 360 days, based on 12 30-day months. To illustrate, Noah’s Flood was exactly five months—equal to 150 days (Genesis 7:11, 24; 8:4). So each month was exactly 30 days—and 12 months would have been 360 days.

Can we find a place in the Bible where “times” specifically refers to 360-day years? Yes. Revelation 12:14 mentions “a time and times and half a time” as the duration in which certain of God’s people will be protected just before Christ’s return. A “time” would be a 360-day year. “Times” implies the smallest plural, since it is unspecified—thus *two* years of 360 days each. “Half a time,” then, is 180 days. Adding these figures together, we get  $360 + (2 \times 360) + 180 = 1,260$  days (3\_ years, a time frame also described in Revelation 11:3). Interestingly, we see a time period of 42 months used in Revelation 13:5. Considering these months as having 30-days each (as already explained), they would add up to  $42 \times 30 = 1,260$  days. This all supports a biblical “time” being a year of 12 30-day months or 360 days.

Surprisingly, though, while a *time* can indicate a year of 360 days, we should also recognize that a day itself may also represent a 360-day year. Indeed, it is an accepted principle among students of Bible prophecy that “days” can sometimes represent years. Indeed, when referring to punishment upon the Israelites, the “day-for-a-year principle” was clearly established with them early on. For their lack of faith and resultant disobedience in refusing to enter the Promised Land when God first commanded them to, He punished them by *delaying* or *withholding* their possession of the land for a specific period of time. Notice: “According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection” (Numbers 14:34).

Centuries later, God told the prophet Ezekiel to act out an imaginary siege against Israel by lying on his left side for 390 days—and against Judah, by lying on his other side for 40 days. God told Ezekiel, “I have laid on you a day for each year” (Ezekiel 4:6). Thus, a day for an individual here represents an entire year for a nation.

## How long and from when?

With these principles in mind, we can now return to Leviticus 26 and perhaps better see what the “seven times” in verse 24 refer to. God, it seems, was speaking here of seven prophetic “times” or years with 360 days each. Therefore,  $7 \times 360$  days = 2,520 days. Using the day-for-a-year principle, each *day* here would represent a *year* of national punishment—a *delay* in the promised

blessings (as in Numbers 14:34). This would mean 2,520 *years* that the birthright blessings would be *withheld*.

Thus, at the *end* of 2,520 years, God would at last bestow the blessings of national greatness upon Ephraim and Manasseh. We can be confident of that since the very fact of withholding something for a specific time means that it will no longer be withheld after that period. This does not mean the Israelites would necessarily be righteous or somehow deserving of the birthright at the end of the 2,520 years than they were before. So why would the blessings come at that time? Because they *had* to in order to fulfill God's unconditional promises and prophecies regarding Israel.

While God had not obligated Himself to give the blessings to ancient Israel, He did obligate Himself to give the blessings "in the last days" yet during this age, while Israel still has enemies, before the millennial reign of Christ (compare Genesis 49:1, 22-26; 22:1). And since God elsewhere declared that Israel would experience national punishment just prior to Christ's return, the blessings had to be bestowed some time before that. Since *ancient* Israel did not meet the conditions God gave for receiving the blessings back then, the blessings would have to wait 2,520 years to be given *unconditionally*.

When would the 2,520 years start? The next verse of Leviticus 26 provides the answer: "And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of My covenant... and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy" (verse 25). This terrible consequence came to pass with the Assyrian captivity of Israel in the decades just before 700 B.C.

Amazingly, if we count 2,520 years from almost any significant starting point around the time of Israel's captivity, we arrive at a corresponding significant event in the late 1700s A.D.

### **The birthright finally bestowed**

As our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* explains, the 10 lost tribes of Israel migrated to Northwest Europe. All the Israelite nations of that region were to experience a measure of the blessings promised to Israel in ancient times. But the birthright—the greatest portion of the blessings—was, as already mentioned, to go to Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. As our booklet further explains, Manasseh today is the United States while Ephraim is Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other British-descended people. Indeed, the 2,520-year delay in the blessings helps confirm this identification.

Britain was able to develop into a world power following the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Through the 1600s and 1700s its affluence increased tremendously, as it acquired colonial possessions around the world. Yet we should bear in mind that the blessings were to culminate with Manasseh as a great single nation and Ephraim as a company of nations. This necessitated separating the brother peoples of Ephraim and Manasseh—which did not fully transpire until the time of the American Revolutionary War of Independence. And that is significant.

If we start counting the 2,520 years from the initial incursions of the Assyrian Empire into Israel in the mid-740s to early 730s B.C., the count would end around A.D. 1776 (the signing of the American Declaration of Independence) or 1783 (the Treaty of Paris recognizing that independence). If we start counting from Israel's first and greatest deportation by Assyria (ca. 734-732 B.C.), we arrive at 1787-1789. The United States Constitution was signed in 1787,

ratified in 1788 and put into force in 1789. Through all this the prophesied great single nation of Manasseh was established.

We could also start counting from the three-year siege of Israel's capital city of Samaria (ca. 725-722 B.C.)—the final fall of the Kingdom of Israel, when it experienced its *second* deportation. Counting forward 2,520 years we come to the time that a global power shift occurred. While Britain was already a major power, it was not far and away the dominant power on earth. But during this time frame that would change. When the French emperor Napoleon attempted to seize Egypt, intending to gain control of the Middle East and to eventually wrest India from British control, the British navy stopped him. In 1798, Britain's Admiral Horatio Nelson pursued Napoleon's fleet to Aboukir Bay, Egypt, and then destroyed most of it at the famous Battle of the Nile.

“Overnight, the Mediterranean became an English sea. Napoleon's army, although intact, was stranded in Egypt. Bonaparte could not march to India which was his plan—without a fleet behind to supply him. He tried to move up through the Levant [the countries bordering the Eastern Mediterranean] but a British naval squadron stopped him at Acre. ‘If it had not been for you English, I'd have been Emperor of the East,’ he said later. ‘But wherever there is water to float a ship we are sure to find you in the way’” (*The British Empire*, BBC TV and Time-Life Books, Vol. 1, p. 274). Thus, unquestioned naval supremacy fell to the British—enabling modern Ephraim to become the prophesied company of nations scattered across the globe.

In close proximity to the conclusion of 2,520 years from the fall of Samaria, U.S. federal offices were moved in 1800 from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to a new capital city—Washington, D.C. And just two years later, America made the Louisiana Purchase from a war-wearied and desperate Napoleon, increasing the size of the United States by 140 percent and adding to it some of the richest land on earth. Napoleon is said to have commented, “This accession of territory affirms forever the power of the United States.” Napoleon himself soon fell to the British.

Clearly, God has fulfilled His promises right on schedule.

—Tom Robinson

©2002 United Church of God, *an International Association*