

FPFWC Christian Development



God Calls Abraham's Family

September 2022

Fall Quarter

September 24, 2022

Lesson #4 – The Scepter Given to Judah

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12

Key Verse – “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”—Genesis 49:10

ICE BREAKER –

1. How should a person respond when confronted with their unrighteous or sinful decisions?
2. Why is it important to dwell on the promises of God when experiencing moments of doubt?

LESSON BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, God promised to make Abraham “a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). From these descendants God declared that “kings shall come” (17:6; see 17:16, 20).

However, situations regarding offspring (see Genesis 16:1; 18:13; 30:1) and family conflict (see 16:4–5; 25:19–34; 27:1–41) arose. These situations might have led Abraham’s family to doubt God’s promises. Yet God remained faithful, even repeating His promises (see 35:11).

Abraham’s grandson Jacob fathered 12 sons; the descendants of these sons became the tribes of Israel. Scripture provides two primary methods of counting the tribes. The first method lists tribes with an inheritance of land (see Numbers 1:5–15; 2:3–32; Joshua 13–19). Under this method, Joseph’s sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) were counted as tribes. The descendants of Levi were not included in this numbering of the 12 tribes since they were not to receive an inheritance of land (13:33).

The second method lists tribes by the name of each tribe’s patriarch (Genesis 46:8–25; 49:3–27; Deuteronomy 27:12–14; 1 Chronicles 2:2). Under this method, the descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim were instead listed as the tribe of Joseph.

Through Jacob’s family, God’s promise of royalty would come. He would choose neither Jacob’s oldest son (Reuben) nor his favorite son (Benjamin) to be the ancestor of the royal line. Rather, out of Judah would come an eternal kingdom.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Gen. 35:22b-26 - The “records of the generations of Isaac” (25:19) ends here with a summary look at God’s overall blessing of **Isaac**. God’s material blessing of Isaac (and Jacob) is evident in his “full quiver” (to employ the terminology of

Ps 127:4–5) of sons—that is, in addition to Jacob and Esau, his **twelve grandsons** from whom the promised nation (see Gn 12:2) would descend. God’s blessing of Isaac is further indicated by the reference to him dying as **an old man of ripe age** (35:29), or translated literally, “satisfied of (i.e., with his) days.” This phrase also hints at God’s spiritual blessing of Isaac (that he knew God and was known by God). In addition to Isaac, the other four occurrences of the terms “ripe” age and full of “days” in Scripture all describe men who died as believers, mature in faith: Job (Jb 42:17), Abraham (Gn 25:8), David (1Ch 23:1; 29:28); and Jehoiada (2Ch 24:15). Isaac’s two sons, formerly at odds with each other but having reconciled (Gn 33:1–17), came together in peace to bury their father.

38:14–26. Tamar therefore undertook to deceive Judah, following the pattern of one’s mischief returning “upon his own head” (Ps 7:16). As Judah took the lead in deceiving Jacob by lying about Joseph being killed by a wild beast, so now was he himself deceived. She disguised herself so that **Judah ... thought she was a harlot** (v. 15) ... **and he went in to her, and she conceived** (v. 18). **Three months later**, when her pregnancy became noticeable, Judah accused her of **harlotry** (*zenunim*, lit., “illicit [i.e., extramarital] sex”) and commanded that she **be burned** (v. 24). Judah’s “turning point” then came when she revealed that he was in fact the father, whereupon Judah was resolutely (and very publicly!) confronted with his sins: (1) his failure to show compassion and do his “duty” toward Tamar (as well as his son Er) by giving her to Shelah as his wife; (2) his engaging in illicit sex with a harlot (as he thought Tamar to be); and (3) his hypocrisy in mercilessly calling for the execution of Tamar (and her baby) for the very same sin that he had committed—*with her*, as he now realized. Expressive of his contrition, Judah declared, **Tamar is more righteous than I** (v. 26). True, Tamar was *more* upright than Judah in the drama of this chapter, but certainly not perfectly righteous, for though the conception of a son from Judah’s line was her right, the way in which she went about ensuring that conception was still sinful. However, the declaration of righteousness is not really a statement about her better morals than Judah’s. Rather it is derived from the overarching purpose of this chapter, namely, to explain the preservation of the line of Judah, which will ultimately produce the Messianic king (49:8–12). Hence, it is evil to be unconcerned with preserving the promised line as evident in the behavior of Onan, who refused to raise up seed for his brother, and Judah, who also refused to give his youngest son as a husband to Tamar to raise up seed for his line. In contrast, Tamar demonstrated that she was indeed righteous, not by practicing deception or harlotry, but by being concerned with the preservation of the promised line, through which the messianic king would come.

The transformation of Judah plays a significant role in the Genesis narrative in that he becomes the progenitor of the royal and messianic line in Israel (49:8–12). The narrative reveals the change in Judah’s role and standing through subtle clues. For example, early in Genesis, Judah appears to be greedy, calling for Joseph to be sold rather than killed, in order to get monetary benefit from the betrayal of his brother (37:26–27). In this chapter, Judah appears callous and cruel in regard to his daughter-in-law. Moreover, he was indifferent toward his need to maintain the purity of his line (he married a Canaanite woman, 38:2) or even his

responsibility to continue his line. However, after his “turn around” recorded here, the narrative begins to elevate Judah. For example, afterwards Jacob ignores Reuben’s request to return to Egypt (42:37–38) but listens to Judah (43:8–11). Once the brothers return to Egypt for food, Judah is plainly seen as their leader (44:14; 46:28). Moreover, afterwards Judah demonstrates compassion for his brother Benjamin and his father (44:30–34). This transformation sets the stage for Jacob’s oracle that Judah’s line would be ascendant and the source of the future Messiah (49:8–12).

The messianic blessing thus fell to **Judah**; the central focus of Jacob’s pronouncement was on the *preeminence* of the messianic King who would descend from Judah. Specifically four aspects of Judah’s/the Messiah’s preeminence are depicted, beginning with his *preeminence over his brothers*, indicated by **your brothers shall praise you** and, even more significantly, by the parallel clause **your father’s sons shall bow down to you**. This statement uses the same wording that was originally applied to Joseph in 37:10. The point is that, though the family of Israel would bow down to Joseph in the near future, in the far-term they would all bow down to Judah, represented by his descendant, the messianic King, on his eternal throne (cf. 2Sm 7:16).

The future king will also have *preeminence in power*, with the image of a **lion** ready to pounce upon his prey, indicating the victorious power of the future king (cf. Nm 24:9 where the words are virtually identical). This prediction of victorious power is the source of the messianic title in Rv 5:5, “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome.”

Jacob next depicted the future king’s *preeminence over royalty*, first by indicating that he would transcend all the kings of Judah (i.e., the Davidic line) in the *duration* of his rule. Hence, the office of ruler—represented by the terms **scepter** and **staff** (Gn 49:10)—would be successively handed down only **until** that final king would come to take up the royal scepter and staff forever (such being the natural implication of **shall not depart ... until**). Second, the ruler’s preeminence is such that he would transcend all rulers in his very *nature* as the true and rightful king. According to the NASB, the future king’s title is **Shiloh** and has been interpreted in a variety of ways: (1) Shiloh can be a proper name (as in the NASB and in the Talmud in *b. Sanh.* 98b), meaning “peacemaker,” but this cannot be confirmed lexically or by the analogy of Scripture. (2) The word can be derived from a place name, the city of Shiloh, but the Hebrew Bible, despite containing various spellings of the city name, never spells the city name as it does in Gn 49:10. Additionally, the biblical convention is for city names to be derived from those of individuals, not vice versa. (3) The word could be revocalized as *sheloh* and would mean “to whom tribute will be brought.” Support for this reading is derived from the seemingly parallel next phrase, **the obedience of the peoples**, so those who obey will bring tribute. But this translation requires changing the verb form from the active **comes** to the passive “be brought” making possible revocalization unlikely. (4) The word could be a contracted Hebrew word, meaning “to whom it belongs.” The primary objection to this interpretation is that it is only found in a minority of MT manuscripts. However, Walter Kaiser contends that there

is indeed significant textual support for it, with 38 Masoretic manuscripts holding to this reading. Further, it is the source of the LXX's translation, "to whom it belongs." This interpretive view is also supported by Targum Onkelos, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion and seems to have an inner-biblical reference in Ezk 21:25–27, making this the likely interpretation (Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995], 51–52). Hence, the descendant of Judah will be the ultimate and true King of Israel, the One to whom rightful kingship belongs.

Gen. 49:10 - The King will also surpass all the future kings from Judah in the *extent* of his rule, for **to him shall be the obedience of the peoples** (Gn 49:10). The term for **peoples** (*'ammim*) is regularly employed in the singular (*'am*) to denote the entire nation of Israel. So, since it is used in the pl. here, it denotes more than just Israel but the nations of the world obeying the future king.

Jacob then depicted the future king as having *preeminence in wealth*, that is, the ideal abundance of both natural and cultivated provision that will characterize the land under his reign. One will be able to tie **his foal or donkey's colt to the choice vine** (v. 11) without worrying whether the animal will damage it or eat its grapes, for the land will be filled with such vines. Moreover, the amount of choice **wine** these vines produce will be such that one can use it instead of water to wash **his garments** without feeling the slightest shade of loss! These images are of course hyperboles that to underscore the all-pervasive fruitfulness of the Messiah's kingdom, as also depicted, for example, in Jl 3:18: "And in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk." The peoples' physical health during that time will naturally also be ideal, as emphasized by the picture of the King Himself, whose **eyes are dull from** (lit., "darker than") **wine** (i.e., the darkness of his Semitic irises is set off by his healthy eye-whites), **and whose teeth are white from** (lit., "whiter than") **milk**. This picture stands in contrast to the jaundiced yellowing of the whites of one's eyes often present in those suffering from famine and/or malnutrition, along with the attendant yellowing of the teeth that also results from, among other things, a poor diet and old age.

LESSON NUGGET – So, why did Jacob grant Judah this blessing? God had chosen Judah to be the ancestor of Israel's line of kings (that is the meaning of "the scepter will not depart from Judah"). This may have been due to Judah's dramatic change of character (44:33-34). Judah's line would produce the promised Messiah, Jesus.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, Life Application Bible Notes and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary