

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Prophecy Series

Proph11B – Messianic and Eschatological Prophecies in the Pentateuch

Genesis 49 – Jacob’s Last Words to His Sons – Judah and Joseph

Introduction

In our previous lesson, we examined Jacob’s prophecies relative to all of his sons with the exception of Judah and Joseph. We saw that in verse 1, Jacob makes it very clear that his prophetic blessings are related to the “*last days*” or “*in days to come*.” This same phraseology is used in other contexts to refer to God’s future deliverance of His chosen people.¹ We saw that Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:14 and Moses’ prophecy in Deuteronomy 31:29 that preceded the prophetic Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 were examples of how this phrase was used in a way that gave it Messianic overtones. We then studied the blessing/prophecy pronounced upon each son and observed its relationship to that tribes history. Today, we conclude that study with the blessing/prophecy pronounced upon Judah and Joseph which have the clearest Messianic overtones of all.

Messianic Overtones in Judah and Joseph

Judah – (Ge 49:8-12) – The Messianic aspect of this prophetic blessing has several components as follows:

- ❑ In verse 8, Jacob indicates that Judah was the one who would be praised by his brothers. This verse is a word play on the meaning of Judah’s name – “let God be praised.”² Later in the verse, Jacob indicates that his other children would bow down before Judah. Judah rose to a position of leadership among the twelve sons after Jacob passed over Reuben, Simeon and Levi. Judah had exhibited selfless behavior in front of the Pharaoh’s highest official in regard to his youngest brother, Benjamin (Ge 44:18-34 cf. 43:8-10).
- ❑ In verses 8 and 9, we see that Judah is pictured as a conquering lion – the symbol of royalty. Jacob uses phrases – “your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies” and “from the prey, you have gone up” – which indicate his conquering role. When combined with the imagery we observe in the remainder of the passage, we readily see the conquering Messianic overtones associated with the 2nd Advent.
- ❑ Perhaps the most significant part of this prophecy is the scepter – a reference to the future Messiah, Who would come from the tribe of Judah. With his words in verse 10 – “the scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet” – Jacob predicts that a royal line would descend from Judah. The word “Shiloh” is an obscure word and means “to whom it belongs.”³ Many ancient sources including the Targum (the Aramaic translation of the Old Testament) interpret “Shiloh as a title for the Messiah.
- ❑ In verse 10, the word “people” (NKJV) can be translated “nations.” The use of the plural word for nation by Jacob indicates that Jacob had in view a kingship that extended

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), Zondervan Reference Software.

² John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985), 98.

³ Ibid.

beyond the borders of Israel to include other nations as well.⁴ (See Psa 2:8; Dan 7:13-14 and Re 5:5, 9)

- The imagery of verses 11-12 relates to both the warfare that the Messiah will use to establish His reign (Psa 2; 110; Re 19:11-12) and the abundance of the Messianic kingdom to follow. The poetic language of Jacob indicates the abundance which will characterize the millennial kingdom when there will be an abundance of vines so that they can tether a donkey to them. Wine will be so plentiful that it can be regarded as wash water.⁵
- Jacob's prediction was fulfilled in Christ (Re 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Christ came from the family of David which was a part of the tribe of Judah.
- Later Biblical writers drew heavily from the imagery provided by Jacob. See Isaiah 63:1-6 and Revelation 19:11, 13, 15.

Interpretive Issue: Did Judah's lordship come to an end with the Babylonian captivity so that the scepter did depart from Judah?

Answer: The reference to the scepter did not necessarily refer to the rule of Judah, but probably referred to its existence as a tribe. The genealogy of Jesus given by Matthew is first class evidence that the royal stock was preserved.⁶

Joseph – (Gen 49:22-26) – Joseph is a type of the Lord Jesus in that He was separated from His brethren and exalted to a position of honor and prominence. The substance of Jacob's words to Joseph repeat much of what was said about the other brothers of Judah. The difference in the words to Joseph is in the repetition of the word for blessing (*berakah*). "Whereas Jacob's words regarding the other brothers paint a picture of the future well being of the sons and thus figuratively speak of a future blessing, Jacob's words to Joseph explicitly refer to this future well being as a 'blessing.'"⁷ Some observations about this blessing follow:

- In Joseph, we see the "true Vine" whose fruit for God is the result of living by the spring, "the unmistakable figure of the Blessed Holy Spirit (cf. John 7:38-39)."⁸
- Jacob took up the promise of fruitfulness from the name of Joseph's son Ephraim (which means fruitful) and "lavished the promise of victory (Gen. 49:23-24a) and prosperity (v. 25b) on Joseph's two tribes."⁹
- "In the branches running over the wall we see the blessing reaching out to include the Gentles, outside the Jewish wall."¹⁰
- "Joseph is the type of our Lord as the One who was grieved and hated (Gen. 49:23) but who withstood every attack made upon Him."¹¹

⁴ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), Zondervan Reference Software.

⁵ John Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), 33.

⁶ Carl Armerding, "The Last Words of Jacob: Genesis 49," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112:448 (October, 1955): 326.

⁷ Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

⁸ Armerding, "The Last Words of Jacob: Genesis 49," 327.

⁹ Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 99.

¹⁰ Armerding, "The Last Words of Jacob: Genesis 49," 327.

¹¹ Ibid.

- The “bow” (v. 24) is another reference to the Messiah. He is referred to in this manner in Zechariah 10:4. With regard to Joseph, it is a reference to his strong character – a good strong bow is true, honest and shoots straight.
- The phrase – “the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel” (v. 24) – is another reference to the Messiah. The term “shepherd” would have had great significance for a family such as Jacob’s. A shepherd was despised in Egypt, but had great nobility of character in caring for his flock. David, Jesus’ kingly predecessor, would later be selected from the obscurity of the fields tending the flock. A shepherd learned the principles of benevolent, self-sacrificial care.
- The phrase – “the Stone of Israel” (v. 24) – is full of significance to Jacob and writers after Jacob in Israel’s history:
 - On the occasions when God spoke to him, Jacob (or Israel) erected stone pillars to commemorate the event (28:18).
 - The Stone or the Rock typified stability and trustworthiness.
 - The Messiah would become the “stone of stumbling and ...a rock of offense” (Isa 8:14).
 - He would be pictured as “the stone...cut out of the mountain without hands” (Dan 2:34, 45) which will one day smite the colossal image of a world empire as He prepares to inaugurate His Millennial reign.
- “The exceeding abundant blessings spoken of in Genesis 49:25 and 26 will then flow forth in all of their fullness as did the precious ointment from the head of the high priest (cf. Ps. 133:2). All of this shall be ‘on the crown of the head of Him that was separate from His brethren,’ the true Nazarite, even our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ.”¹²
- “Separate” is also the word used for the Nazarites (Num. 6:1-21). Both Joseph and later Nazirites were separated from others in order to serve God’s holy purposes.¹³

¹² Ibid., 328.

¹³ Earl D. Radmacher, general editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), footnote, 94.