

September 25, 2022

“The Scepter Given to Judah”
Lesson 4 of Unit

Gen. 35:22b-26
Gen. 38:24-26
Gen. 49:8-12

Intro

In Genesis 17:5, God promises to make Abraham “a father of many nations.” God even says that kings will come from his descendants. Abraham's grandson Jacob fathered 12 sons, which became the 12 tribes of Israel. Interestingly, the promise of a royal line goes through Judah; not through the firstborn Reuben, and not through Jacob's favorite son, Benjamin, the youngest.

Read Genesis 35:22b-26

1. vs. 22b: The statement that Jacob had 12 sons showed God's faithfulness to His promises
He promised Jacob's descendants would be “like the dust of the earth” (28:14) and like “the sand of the sea” (32:12)
2. vs. 23: The sons in the next 4 verses are listed by mother, not by their actual birth order
Leah here in vs. 23 is Jacob's first wife, but he did not love her
He was tricked into marrying her by Leah's father Laban
Nevertheless, she is the mother of 6 (half!) of the sons of Jacob; in order they are...
Reuben: the firstborn usually receives the greatest number of blessings
Reuben lost these because he slept with his father's concubine Bilhah
Simeon / Levi: they fall out of Jacob's favor because of their violence (Gen. 34)
Judah: rises to a position of leadership several times
Gen. 34:25-28: He stops his brothers from killing Joseph
Gen. 44:14-18: Judah intercedes for his brothers before Joseph in Egypt
Gen. 46:28: Jacob sends Judah ahead to lead the way into Goshen
Issachar's blessing from Jacob in 49:14-15 is to be “a strong donkey” and “a slave at forced labor”—hardly the words of blessing for a leader of the nation
Zebulun's descendants are known for being good warriors in Judges
3. vs. 24: Next comes Rachel, the woman that Jacob loves, his second wife
She was initially unable to bear children for Jacob
She bears two sons, the two most favored by Jacob
Joseph: given the coat by his father that showed his favored status
Sold into slavery by brothers, leads Egypt during a 7-year famine
Benjamin: his youngest child, especially favored after Joseph's “disappearance”
Saul, the first king of Israel, is of the tribe of Benjamin
4. vs. 25: Next comes Bilhah, Rachel's servant
She was given to Jacob to bear children when Rachel was unable to conceive
Her two sons were Dan and Naphtali
Dan: named by Rachel—his name means “He judged”, as in God judged in favor of Rachel by allowing her servant to bear children for her

Dan's descendants were large, but they weren't powerful militarily
Naphtali: also named by Rachel—his name means “wrestled”;
Rachel says, “I have wrestled with my sister and I have prevailed”
Naphtali's descendants were known for their valor/bravery
They helped drive the Midianites from the land in Jud. 7:23-25

5. vs. 26: Last comes Zilpah, Leah's servant

Leah gives Zilpah to Jacob to continue having children after she has quit being able to
Her two sons were Gad and Asher
Both sons were noted for raising crops and livestock successfully

Read Genesis 38:24-26

A brief background note before looking at these next three verses. Tamar was the wife of Er, Judah's oldest son. The Lord struck Er down because of his wickedness, so Judah instructed his next son to marry her and father children to her, as Jewish law requires. He refused to father children, and the Lord struck him down as well. Judah sent Tamar back to her father until his next son became old enough to marry her and father children with her. Tamar now has no husband or sons to care for her. But Judah was afraid this son would also die, so he was basically putting Tamar off. Tamar takes matters into her own hands, disguising herself and put herself in a place where prostitutes often were. Judah, whose wife had died some time in the past, saw her, but didn't know it was her. After Jacob gave her a token as a promise of later payment, they had sex and Tamar became pregnant. These next three verses describe what happened next.

6. vs. 24: Judah is told that Tamar has gotten pregnant as a result of being a prostitute

He orders her to be burned to death
Tamar is still considered to be part of Judah's family
She was married to his son; she is supposed to marry the next son in the future

7. vs. 25: Tamar says she is pregnant, and the man responsible gave her the tokens she now shows Judah

She doesn't publicly humiliate Judah (which he deserves)
She lets the items confront his hypocrisy
Tamar shows shrewdness here—she asks for items that show identity, not for their worth

8. vs. 26: Judah is humbled, but does the right thing in response to being confronted

He confesses that he is not as righteous as Tamar
He did not provide for her or allow her to marry his son
Both of these are things he should have done
Both of them have done things contrary to the law and to godly lifestyles
Later, both of them appear in Jesus' lineage in Matthew 1

Read Genesis 49:10-12

Background: When he is about to die, Judah calls his sons together and describes their future (Gen. 49:1-22). What he says about Judah is longer than the others, 5 verses while the next longest is 3, and most only get 1. This shows Judah as being the leader, the one with greater promise and responsibility.

9. vs. 10: Judah says “the scepter will not depart from Judah”

A scepter is a short staff that shows the presence of royalty and of that one’s authority

Judah notes that the scepter “will not depart” from Judah

A king of Judah’s line will rule always (a messianic prophecy relating to Jesus)

Since this staff represents authority, “obedience of the nations shall be his”

He will be a ruler over all the nations (another reference to Jesus)

10. vs. 11: This verse shows the abundance enjoyed by this king

He has donkeys and colts which he ties to a vine

Multiple animals indicates wealth

The land must be his, because he’s not concerned if the animals eat fruit on the vine

He washes his clothes in wine

The idea here is that the wine is as plentiful as water for washing clothes

Having a lot of wine implies that he has many fields for the grapes to grow on

11. vs. 12: Here the king’s appearance is noted

He has dark eyes and “teeth whiter than milk”

The eyes appear “darker than wine” indicating some shade of dark red

This description usually indicates a person’s physical vitality

Straight and white teeth indicate ability to care for them

Application: The promise to keep a king of Judah on the throne was kept in two ways. First, through David’s line. The second way was through the eternal king, Jesus. He was a “shoot of Jesse” who gathered the nations to Himself and gives peace to those who come to Him.

Judah and his family are not ideal perfect candidates for the Messiah to be born to. Judah was unrighteous at time. His family history shows rivalry, strife, and dysfunction. But God’s plan of redemption is transformative. He led and let a dysfunctional family become the nation of Israel. He turns wrecks into royals! That’s His promise to us!!!

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your kingdom in Jesus Christ, and that You invite us to become part of that kingdom, despite our failures. Help us to grow and be transformed into the likeness of Christ, so that we might be good citizens of Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.