

# The Scepter Will Not Depart from Judah Until He Comes to Whom It Belongs

## 49: 8-12

**DIG:** What was so special about Judah? Why was he favored over his brothers? What was Judah's **far eschatological future**?

**REFLECT:** If you are a believer, Judah's blessing is your blessing because you are royalty and a child of King Jesus. What is your evidence for that?

Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will continue to bow down to you. Judah is a lion's cub; my son, you will stand over the prey. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness - who cares to provoke him. The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until He comes to whom [obedience] it belongs; and it is He whom the [Gentile nations] will obey (49:8-10).

Here the focus turns away from the past to the future.<sup>769</sup> **Jacob** had little good to say about his first three **sons**, but his fourth **son Judah** was the first to receive a true blessing. **Jacob** prophesied with a play on words when he said: **Judah, your brothers will praise you**, literally, it means *praise you will your brothers praise* (49:8a), because **Judah** means *praise*. He will be a **praise** himself, but more importantly, he will be a **praise** to **ADONAI** because this is the tribe that **the Messiah** will come from. Because of this, **Judah will be praised** by all his other **brothers**.

Then **Ya'akov** said: **Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies**, pointing to superiority and triumph in war (**Genesis 49:8b; Second Samuel 22:41; Psalm 18:40**). **Jacob** predicted a fierce lion-like dominance of **Judah** over his **enemies** and his **brothers**.

Because **Judah** had fully redeemed his character (see **Kd - Then Judah said to Isra'el, Send Benjamin with Me and I Will Guarantee His Safety**) from his compliance with **Joseph** being sold by his **brothers** (37:12-36), and his seedy encounter with **Tamar** (38:1-30), his future was one of glory and blessing to the world.<sup>770</sup> It is obvious from the rest of the Bible that he did in fact become the leading **tribe**. **Judah** was to be **praised** indeed. The descendants of **Judah** would be first in importance, their **brothers** would acknowledge his superiority, they would have victory over **their** enemies, royal authority and kingly administration by **the Lion of the Tribe of Judah** (**Revelation 5:5**). Therefore, there is an aspect of the **near historical future** and an aspect of the **far eschatological future** in each part of **Jacob's** prophecy concerning **Judah**.

In the **near historical future**, Ya'akov prophesied about Judah and said: **Your father's sons will continue to bow down to you (49:8c)**. Although the rights of the firstborn belonged to Joseph, Judah was first in importance over his brothers because the Messiah would come through him (**First Chronicles 5:1-2**). This is why his brothers would continue to bow down to Judah. He will be the preeminent, leading tribe. In the **far eschatological future**, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Judah's descendant, Jesus Christ, is Lord (**Philippians 2:10-11**).

In the **near historical future**, Jacob employed a simile to describe him. He said: **Judah is a lion's cub; my son, you will stand over the prey (49:9a)**. This is a youthful cub, not the old retired lion at the zoo. Prophetically, Judah will lead the charge. Even today, all Jews outside the tribe of Levi, claim to be from Judah! What more proof do we need to see to validate Jacob's prophecy? **Judah! Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Judah! Your brothers will bow down to you. Judah! Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness - who cares to provoke him (49:9b)? His son was like a strong and powerful lion.** As a result of this verse, the lion of Judah became a favorite image in Jewish art and a symbol of the Messiah. John reminds us of this when he writes of the **far eschatological future**: **The Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed (Revelation 5:5)**.

In the **near historical future**, Ya'akov prophesied that: **The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet (49:10a)**. The scepter was the symbol of royalty, and emphasized Judah's right to rule. In its earliest form the scepter was a long staff, which the king held in his hand when speaking publicly, and when he sat upon his throne he rested the base between his feet.<sup>771</sup> So God declares that the only tribe that would have the scepter, or the right to rule would be Judah. All the kosher kings would come from Judah; any king that ADONAI has designated to rule the Jews must come from the tribe of Judah. In the **far eschatological future**, this passage points to the Second Coming when Yeshua ha-Meshiach comes to set up His Kingdom for a thousand years. At that time, He will have the right to rule, and the obedience of the Gentile nations will be His.

Until He comes to whom [obedience] belongs; and it is He whom the [Gentile nations] will obey (49:10b). The NASB translates this verse: **until Shiloh comes**. Many sources see Shiloh as a title of Christ. **The Targum** (an Aramaic paraphrase of the TaNaKh) referred these words to Ishmael, the murderer of Governor Gedaliah, but later rabbis more soberly assign them to the Meshiach. **They said that the transmission of authority shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children's children forever, until the Anointed One comes to whom the Kingdom belongs, and to whom the Gentile nations will obey. To this day the Jews teach that the Messiah is not divine.** But two Hebrew words, *shai lo* should be translated *whose it is, or to whom it belongs*.

Similar words were spoken from **Ezeki'el** the prophet: **As for you, you wicked prince of Isra'el, due to be killed, whose day has come.** The wicked prince was Zedekiah. Because he violated his oath of allegiance to Babylon, he would be deposed. His death was so certain that he was addressed as though he had already undergone his punishment. The manner of his punishment is one of the most severe in the Scriptures. His "day" was the day of his judgment. The time of his wickedness of the end pointed to the measure of guilt as being full. Because the pleas of God had fallen on deaf ears, **Ezeki'el** declared that the entire land of Isra'el was ripe for judgment (**Ezeki'el 7:2-3**).

At the time of final **near historical** punishment for the kingdom of Judah in 586 BC, here is what Adonai ELOHIM says: **Take off the turban of the High Priest** (see my commentary on **Exodus Gc - Make a Plate and Engrave On It: Holy to the LORD**), **remove the crown of the king** because this would mark the beginning of the times of the Gentiles (see my commentary on **Revelation JI - Jerusalem Will Be Trampled on by the Gentiles Until the Times of the Gentiles are Fulfilled**). Zedekiah would be the last king: **It will not be as it was.** Indeed, everything would change, King Nebuchadnezzar would come and destroy Jerusalem (**Jeremiah 52:1-30**), and the Jews would be sent away for seventy years of Babylonian Captivity. The once proud king was humbled, and the poorest people of the land (**2 Kings 25:12**) who were allowed to remain took his place in managing the land for Babylon: **the lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. Ruin! Ruin! I will make it a ruin! The crown will not be restored** (**Ezeki'el 21:25-27a**)

Then **49:10b** puts us in the **far eschatological future**:

**Until He comes to whom it rightfully belongs**, or *ad bo asher lo* (**Ezeki'el 21:27b**).

**Until He comes to whom it rightfully belongs**, or *ad bo asher lo* (**Genesis 49:10b**).

These two verses are so parallel that **the great Rabbi Rashi in his commentary on Ezeki'el said that there is a strong connection between Ezeki'el 21 and Genesis 49.** Some have translated **Genesis 49:10a** as: **Until Shiloh comes.** They see **Shiloh** as the city in the Israelite territory of Ephraim where the Tabernacle stood from the time of **Joshua** (**Joshua 18:1**) through the time of **Samuel** (**1 Samuel 1:24**). **She lo** (see above) is not the name of a city, it is a short form of **shiloh** in Hebrew. Consequently, we can look at the two parallel passages above and agree with Rashi that **she lo** is the **Ezeki'el 21** person.

The one who has the right to the throne would be King **Messiah** - the Kosher King from Judah to whom the throne **rightfully belongs**. There were other godly kings from Judah, like David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah and Josiah. But the sad prophecy of **Ezekiel 21** says **remove the crown**, its done. The kosher kings are stopping in 586 BC. There will be no more kings of Judah **until He comes to whom it rightfully belongs** (see my commentary on **Revelation Ce - The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of**

**David Has Triumphed**), and to this very day not one king of **Judah** has been crowned. The Maccabees were Levites. In fact, the Hasmonean Empire ran into trouble precisely because they were priests who tried to become kings later on. What about King Herod? His family was converted to Judaism. He was really a Roman king. In 1948 David Ben-Gurion didn't call himself a king. For about 2,500 years - no king of **Judah**. **This is why Rashi, and many other rabbis believe, that the last King of Judah has to be King Messiah.**

Historically, this prophecy has already been fulfilled. Once the tribe of **Judah**, under King David, attained leadership over the nation, **the scepter** (or the symbol of the king) never departed from **Judah** until after **Christ** was born.<sup>772</sup> About that time the Romans, who had the right to rule, took away the right of capital punishment from the Jews. This changed the death penalty from stoning to the Roman method of the cross for the Jews (**John 18:31-32**). **When this happened, the high priest went throughout the city of Yerushalayim wearing sackcloth and ashes saying, "Woe to us for the scepter has been taken from Judah and he to whom it belongs has not come."** They thought the word of **the LORD** had been broken because they did not know that up in a Nazareth carpenter's shop, **Jesus Christ**, the **One to whom the scepter** belonged, the **One to whom obedience** belonged, had come and **Genesis 49:10** had been fulfilled.

The promise of a personal **Messiah** began in the garden of Eden. **And ADONAI said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel (Genesis 3:15).** Through all the ages, men have looked for the coming **Savior**, and this was certainly true of **Jacob**. The old patriarch would surely be expected to express that hope in his prophecy. This promise to **Judah** must indeed be **Jacob's** specific reference to that hope. Centuries later, **Isaiah** seemed to have these prophecies in mind when he first spoke of the coming **child of the virgin (Isaiah 7:20)**, and then went on to say that **His** name would be the **Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7)**. **The obedience of the Gentile nations**, which **Ya'akov** prophesied, corresponds clearly to **God's** messianic promise to **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**, that **through their coming Seed, all the peoples on earth will be blessed (12:3b).**<sup>773</sup>

In the **near historical future**, not only would **Judah's** tribe be strong and courageous, but his land would also be productive and fruitful. **He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch (49:11a).** Normally this would not be a good thing to do because his **donkey** or his **colt** would merely tear out the **vine** or **branch**. The point is that when **Judah** entered the Promise Land, these **vines** and **branches** would be so strong that he will be able to **tether his donkey** or **colt** to them. **Wine** is a symbol of abundance. **The rabbis teach that the Meshiach will be recognized as riding on his donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Luke 19:28-40).** In the **far eschatological future** when the **Messiah** returns, **Isra'el** will be a paradise (**Isaiah 35:1-2**). The tribe of **Judah** will have one portion of land, and it will border the territory of **Reuben** from east to west (**Ezekiel 48:7**).

In the **near historical future**, **Jacob** said that when **Judah's** descendants returned to Canaan, their land would be very productive. **His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk (49:12)**. Their **eyes will be bright from wine**, and their **teeth will be white from drinking much milk**. These are the picturesque ways of describing the suitability of **Judah's** territory for vineyards, which is true to this very day. However, in the **far eschatological future**, the **Meshiach** will come in judgment. **He will wash His garments in wine, and His robes in the blood of grapes (49:11b)**. This is also depicted in **Isaiah 63:1-8** where the prophet saw the **Messiah** returning at **Bozrah** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Kg - The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**) with His garments stained crimson.

And when **Christ** returns, we will return with Him. **The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean**. During His thousand-year reign, **He will rule the nations with an iron scepter (Psalm 2:8-9)**. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of **ADONAI, God of heaven's armies (Revelation 19:14-15 CJB)**. At that time **Jesus** will be the King who will hold the iron scepter. He will swiftly judge all sin and instantly put down any rebellion. Using the same imagery of ruling with an iron scepter, **Yeshua** promised that believers would rule under Him in the messianic Kingdom: **To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the Gentile nations. He shall rule them with an iron scepter and he will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from My Father (Revelation 2:26-27)**. Therefore, because we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation belonging to **God (First Peter 2:9)**, we will be priests of **God and of Christ** and will reign with Him for a thousand years (**Revelation 20:6**). Believers now serve as priests by worshipping **ADONAI** and leading others to the knowledge of Him, and we will also serve in that same way during the millennial Kingdom.<sup>774</sup> We are blessed to be royalty; we will rule under **Christ with an iron scepter** because we are children of the King.

Up to this point **Ya'akov** had prophesied in the natural order of his children through **Leah**. But now that progression takes a different turn.