

UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS FOR JUDAH

Genesis 49: 8-12 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

As Jacob called his twelve sons together, he already had spoken to his three eldest sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi. They were not given the family birthright of Jacob, because of their awful sins of lust, anger and vengeance. Gathered around Jacob's bed, it was Judah's turn, the fourth son of Leah, to kneel before his father to receive his blessing. Tracing the age of Jacob back to his approximate birth in 1838 BC, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, was born in 1767 when Jacob was already an old man of 71 years of age—not as old as Abraham, at age 100 when Isaac was born. Reuben was 78 then as he knelt to receive his blessing. Judah was born in 1764 when Jacob was 74. Judah was 75 when his blessing came. Joseph was born in 1760 BC, when Jacob was 78. Joseph was 71 and Benjamin was 55. Jacob's last-born son, Benjamin, was born when Jacob was already 93. These Hebrew boys were grown men—in an age spread of 78 down to 55. Judah had heard his father say to his 12 sons, "Gather around and I will tell you what will happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob. Listen, hearken to your father Israel."

Would Judah, too, lose the birth right of the firstborn? As he listened to what his father Jacob said to his three older brothers, did he start to think, "Oh my, I am in trouble too. What will my father say to me?" Judah perhaps was ready to kick himself as he perhaps knelt for his blessing. It's been well said before, "If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn't be able to sit down for weeks." Judah had been no angel—no better of a man than his brothers Reuben, Simeon, or Levi. He was treacherous in suggesting his brothers should make a profit and sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt—Gen. 37: 26-28. Judah participated in the cruel deception of Jacob, his father leading him to believe that a ferocious animal had devoured his favorite son--Gen 37:33. What's more, Judah stepped outside God's boundary for Hebrew sons and married a Canaanite woman, outside God's covenant, who bore him three sons—two were evil whom God killed, Er and Onan. Gen 38:1-10. Then Judah wrongly judged his daughter-in-law as responsible for the death of his two eldest sons, so he defrauded her with false promises, denying giving Tamar to Shelah-- Gen 38:11,14. Later, Judah slept with his daughter-in-law, thinking she was a temple prostitute--Gen 38:13-15. When Judah discovered that Tamar was pregnant, he self-righteously and hypocritically condemned her for immorality and ordered her to be burned to death--Gen 38:24, until he discovered his daughter in law was pregnant by his incestuous act.

Perhaps for Judah, kneeling before his father to hear his blessing, may have seemed to him like waiting for the verdict in a courtroom. When a case is

examined in a courtroom, not everyone arrives with the same agenda. The prosecutor hopes to make the case to convict the defendant. The accused, if innocent, looks for vindication. The defendant who is guilty, looks for mercy. The judge, on the other hand, is supposed to be interested only in seeing that justice is done, though judges also are often unjust. But this wasn't a courtroom. This was a death-bed blessing of Jacob's 75-year old, fourth son, Judah who certainly was not a better example than his three elder brothers. Why should God or Judah's father, Jacob chose Judah? One thing is clear, if it was about genes, Judah was done. If it was about keeping rules and being obedient, he was done for. If it was about tradition, he was born three boys too late. If it were about being different, a true and godly man of God, Joseph should get the birthright, hands-down. Joseph stood out among his twelve brothers. He already had been singled out for a word of special blessing by his father before all the brothers got together. Jacob was set apart by God and by Jacob to receive special blessings. Joseph was given the place of the first born and he received a double portion of his father's inheritance. That double portion was given to his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

God knew perfectly well that Judah was unworthy of ruling his brothers, unworthy of receiving the birthright. From a human point-of-view, the one most worthy of the birthright was Joseph. He maintained his integrity in the face of his brothers' betrayal. Joseph refused in Potiphar's house, to fall into sin with his master's wife. Joseph showed loving concern for Pharaoh's officials, the baker and the butler who were in prison with him. Joseph didn't allow bitterness to consume him when he finally revealed himself to his brothers. He was quick to forgive when most of us are not, quick to forgive, when he determined his brothers' repentance was real. But **the birthright**—who would be the leader of this family? If it's not about genes, or rule keeping or tradition or comparison or worthiness, what would be the reason Judah should ever get the birthright from his father Jacob? Beloved, it is about God's choosing and God's grace. Out of grace, God chose someone unworthy like Judah. Out of grace, God keeps choosing unworthy people like you and me. Now let's examine this birthright blessing, not the double inheritance for Joseph given to Ephraim and Manasseh, but the birthright blessing. What lessons in Jacob's blessing of Judah with the family birthright, stand out to teach us lessons we should never forget?

GOD CHOOSES WHOM HE CHOOSES, BUT OFTEN, IT IS THOSE WHOM HE IS CHANGING, WHO ARE WILLING TO CONFESS SIN—(I.)

Notice Genesis 49: 8a. "Judah, your brothers shall praise you..." Jacob did not appoint Joseph to receive the birthright. Jacob chose a man known for lying, a self-righteous, hypocritical, lustful, carnal, incestuous man. How could this be? Some of us would say Jacob chose Judah because he was changing, and God foreknew

He would change, and we would base our view on Romans 8: 29 and I Peter 1: 1. Roman 8: 29 states, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.” I Peter 1: 1 states, “To those who are elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” Others of us would say that God through Jacob chose Judah, and because God chose Judah, he was changing. We would point to Acts 13: 48, which states, “And as many as were appointed to eternal life, believed.” Both views are right, but most often those views are not held together as part of God’s mystery. God’s foreknowledge gives no credit to us who believe, but rather highlights the prior sovereign omniscience of Almighty God. God’s election, predestination, and choosing of us gives no discredit to our believing, but rather focuses on God’s prior choosing.

Now notice with me that rather than debate about which came first, the chicken or the egg, God wants us to see that He was changing this man, Judah, changing him mightily and the change is first evidenced in Judah’s willingness to admit and confess his personal sins as well as his corporate sins committed with his brothers. God chose Judah. Jacob chose Judah. Now, watch with me as we see the result of God's choosing and the result of Judah’s confessing. The results in Judah’s life were all of God’s grace, transforming him from an evil man to a godly leader. What happened? We may have forgotten how early this work in Judah started when he confessed and repented of his evil deeds concerning his daughter-in-law, Tamar, whom he denied his third son in levirate marriage, and with whom he committed adulterous incest, thinking she was a prostitute. Turn to Genesis 38: 24-26. Listen. “About three months later (after sleeping with Tamar unknowingly) Judah was told, “Tamar, your daughter in law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality. And Judah said, “Bring her out, and let her be burned. As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, “By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant. And she said, “Please identify whose, these are, the signet and the cord and the staff. Then Judah identified them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son, Shelah. And Judah did not know her again.” What a humbling word as Judah “fessed up”!

What a change from a proud hypocrite ready to burn his daughter-in-law to a humbled man confessing his own sin and seeing the woman he violated as more righteous than he was. God’s changes were happening in this humbled man way back when Judah was in his early forties. Then twenty years later, when Joseph's silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and Joseph threatened to make Benjamin his slave, do you remember what Judah did? Judah stepped forward and begged to take Benjamin's place--Gen 44:33-34, as a type of Christ, he laid down his life so Benjamin could go home to his father Jacob. Judah was foreshadowing what Jesus did for us as our Redeemer. But just moments before offering himself to Joseph as

a ransom for Benjamin, Judah confessed his sin and all his brother's sins in Genesis 44: 16 by telling Joseph, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found." This patriarch, Judah, whose pride was ripped open, who was humbled before his family who now all knew his sin, this man 20 years later, like cream rising to the top, spoke confession of sin first for himself and then for his brothers. The mystery of how God does His work in our lives was slowly being unveiled as Judah was becoming the first-born to receive the birthright with its blessing to rule over his brothers. Before we leave this matter, I call us all to realize what blights us from growing—it's justifying ourselves as Reuben did, it's pointing out our brother or our spouse's faults, but clinging to our pride and justifying ourselves. Don't expect God to show you more and more of Himself until you let Him expose your sin, admit, confess it, repent of it, and let Him choose His way to change you. Secondly,

GOD BLESSES BY HIS GRACE WITH BLESSINGS THAT WE ARE NOT WORTHY TO RECEIVE, SUCH AS A SCEPTER AND A STAFF – (II.)

Notice Genesis 49: 8-9 – "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?" What a blessing! Can you believe it? Judah must have looked up into his daddy's eyes and seen the face of God reflected in Jacob's face. How could it be? Look at these birthright blessings one by one. (1) **Judah, your brothers shall praise you.** Praise is a play on Judah's name. His mother Leah said at Judah's birth, when she bore her 4th son, "This time I will praise the Lord!" Leah praised the Lord for Judah's birth and Jacob prophesied that Judah's brothers would praise his noble character, which in spite of all his sins, like David to come, Judah was a changed man and his brothers knew it and could not help but speak of the change to him, praising him. Judah began to live up to the standard God placed before him, living up to his name and he founded the royal tribe that gave Israel her kings, some of whom were godly leaders, and ultimately, the tribe from which would come, Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. (2) **Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies.** Judah as a tribe was a conquering tribe and a ruling tribe. The tribe of Judah stayed faithful to the Davidic line when the nation divided many years later. Jacob here pictured Judah with his hand on the nape of the neck of his enemies who tried to escape him, as Judah leaped upon them and threw them to the ground. (3) **Your brothers shall bow before you.** This brother Judah his brothers called "Praise," by overthrowing his enemies, led his brothers to come bow at his feet, as they had bowed to Joseph.

(4) **Judah is a lion's cub, from the prey.** This doesn't mean a young cub lion, but a young lion in the freshness of his newly matured strength, pictured by Jacob as having captured and eaten his prey. (5) **My son, you have gone up; He stooped down; he crouched as a lion.** Going up to the den, crouching with power, and then lying down in the bold security of a mature lion, Jacob pictured Judah as being the top lion in the den. (6) **And as a lioness, who dares rouse him?** A lioness guarding her cub will back down to no lion, male or female. The life of her cubs is on the line. Jacob said Judah would lead his brothers, as a lioness guarding her cubs. With Judah as the lion of the tribes of Israel, this starts the foreshadowing of Jesus. Revelation 5: 5 states, "Weep no more; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." But John goes even further to show the tenderness of this Lion, for our Redeemer as a lamb laid down His life for you and me. And we read in the very next verse, in Revelation 5: 6, "And between the throne and the four living creatures, and among the elders, I saw a Lamb, standing, as though it had been slain." When Jesus returns, the Lamb of God, he will return, beloved, as the Lion. Revelation 19: 16 states, "On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." The lion as king of the forest, masters his prey, as a young lion springing on it, as an old lion crouching and terrible if roused, invincible in battle and war. As a lioness, he guards his own without an equal.

GOD FULFILLS HIS BLESSINGS IN THE MOST INTERESTING AND UNPREDICTABLE WAYS – (III.) Notice Genesis 49: 10. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, (UNTIL Shiloh comes) until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." Judah (and Messiah Jesus foreshadowed here) was a legitimate prince our lawful ruler. Did you hear the two key words as Jacob begins this part of Judah's blessing? Judah was promised a "scepter" and a "ruler's staff." A scepter is a long staff with an ornamental and decorated head used to represent royal authority. Do you remember Queen Esther who approached King Xerxes in the inner court without being summoned? The king normally killed those who dared to do this. But with Queen Esther, God led Xerxes to hold out to her the golden scepter that was in his hand, sparing her life, and later saving the Jewish people. The scepter given to Judah by Jacob, **sheybet**, is the symbol of rule, dominion, and the capacity to teach, instruct and correct. You may remember the sheybet is the term used in Proverbs for the rod of God and the rod of authority parents are to use to instruct their sons and daughters. Judah was given the scepter over his brothers. Judah was also promised, a ruler's staff—**mechoqeq** or **chaqaq**. Chaqaq means to hack, engrave on stone, or give out laws, enacting a decree. Jacob gave Judah authority. A businessman with unethical practice,s once told Mark Twain of a pilgrimage he hoped to make some day. "Before I die," he said, "I will climb

Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top.” Mark Twain was not impressed. “I have a better idea” he retorted. “You should stay at home in Boston and keep the Ten Commandments. Judah was called to be the authority, lay down the rules and the law with his brothers and be their example of following God’s authority. But the whole has a pivot. What’s the pivot?”

The pivot is UNTIL—UNTIL WHAT? Judah was given this authority and rule with his royal tribe until Shiloh comes, or until tribute comes. This Shiloh was not the place where Eli failed to discipline his lustful sons. This Shiloh was not the place of a great battle in the Civil War. This Shiloh is a Person, and the proper name of a Person. Shiloh in Hebrew means Rest or Rest-Giver. When Messiah, the Rest-Giver comes, then Judah’s capacity for rule and sovereignty would be lost. That rule of Judah came to a climax when Shiloh came in the fullness of time. The people becoming aware of who Shiloh really was, willingly stopped their giving of tribute to Judah and those who know Jesus, the Rest-Giver of Hebrews 3 and 4, those who know Him, willingly give Him their obedience. Yes, Judah—you are your brother’s Praise, as you all praise the Lord. But Shiloh, he is your peace, your rest. Shiloh speaks peace from heaven—peace on earth. And when Shiloh comes the second time, all wars will cease, and all nations will be one in Him. Shiloh literally comes from a shortened spelling of **Selloh**. Selloh or Shiloh means “til what is His comes, to whom it belongs. When this word **selloh** is used again by Ezekiel in Ezek. 21: 24, 27, the words are addressed to the last king of Judah—“Remove the mitre or turban, and take off the crown, **until** He come whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.” We are almost done, but our # 4 lesson is:

GOD DESIRES OUR LIVES TO POINT TO OUR MESSIAH, EVEN AS ALL JUDAH’S BLESSINGS POINTED PAST HIM TO SHILOH-MESSIAH

– (IV.) Notice Genesis 49: 11-12 states, “Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than snow.” Jacob was looking at Judah, and now Judah must have noticed, Jacob must have been looking above his head, looking down through time until Shiloh, our Messiah Jesus would come. No more did Jacob see Judah, but now only Shiloh, to whom we give our Tribute. Jacob was through blessing Judah, and now he was blessing his coming Messiah, Shiloh. In this Messianic blessing, Jacob is looking at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, expanding on what the prophet Zechariah 9:9 would prophesy. It was Jacob’s telling us of the meekness and lowliness of Shiloh, our Prince of Peace. Though He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He came as the Lamb of God. He did not as the kings of Judah, multiply horses for pomp and fame. No, he would come riding on the foal of a donkey, a donkey colt, coming as the King of peace, the Rest-Giver that the Jews rejected.

Oh, do these words of dying Jacob give you thrills and chills? Do they make you cry, “Come, Lord Jesus!?” This unbroken colt would be tied to a grape vine for it was at its Master’s bidding. Jesus said, “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” Jacob was tying this blessing upon the Choice Vine, Shiloh, Messiah, Jesus. But Jacob looked beyond the first coming of Shiloh to the second coming of Shiloh. The prophet Isaiah would begin with Jacob’s words and be more specific about Shiloh in Isaiah 63: 1-6. Is this not what Jacob saw when he saw Shiloh’s garments washed in wine. This is Shiloh who died for our sins, and there is a Fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. Now Jacob saw Shiloh, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, not as the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, but as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than snow. What will it be like when we see Shiloh whom Jacob saw. Oh, the sparkling brilliance of His eyes and the charming beauty of Jesus, the charming whiteness of the teeth of our Bridegroom. I call you all today to come to Shiloh—Messiah Jesus, whom our forefather Jacob saw so clearly across the millennia. He came binding his foal He rode on a vine, yet his donkey’s colt to Himself, the choice Vine. Come to Him who will win the final battle and He will do it all by Himself for He is El-Shaddai, God Almighty. Come to Jesus, beloved. Thank Him He still chooses people like us who are not worthy, but whom he assigns with his unpredictable and remarkable tasks regardless of our age. He doesn’t say—at 147—you are too old, or your past is too sinful. He doesn’t say, “You are too entrenched to do my work.” He is still waiting on all the Jacob’s among us who will speak His word, do His bidding, and finish the work He gives us to do. May the blessing of Jacob on Judah thrill your souls. I love you. Amen.