

PREFACE

So far the lineage of the Christ began with the first woman, passed through Noah's son, Shem, and through him to Abraham. On our way to Genesis 49, let's make a few stops along the way, and quickly trace Him through Isaac and Jacob.

Isaac

We come back into the story of Abraham after Hagar has given birth to Ishmael, in Genesis 17. In v16 God tells Abraham that Sarah will indeed bear him a son—but God makes no mention of a covenant, just that there will be nations and kings that descend from him. Like his wife, Abraham laughs at this. A Lampel paraphrase: *C'mon, be serious, Lord. Look at how old we both are! Why don't we just agree that Ishmael will be the heir.*

But God has other plans.

Read Genesis 17:19.

Now note the difference between what God said about Isaac and what He says about Ishmael.

Read v20-21.**Jacob**

After Isaac was born, not-unexpected conflicts arose between Sarah and Hagar, and Isaac and Ishmael—who was the older of the two. Abraham wasn't too sure what to do about this, and we have God's answer in Genesis 21—which again contrasts the two sons.

Read Genesis 21:12-13.

So Isaac has a son: Jacob. Not long before his father, Isaac, dies, God renamed Jacob and, as promised, established His covenant with Israel and his seed.

Read Genesis 35:10-12.**JUDAH**

For the rest of our time in this session we'll examine the next step in the lineage of the Christ: from Israel (Jacob) to Judah—pointing even to the Messiah Himself. And, once again, the prophecy is not clear and sharp, something everyone agrees on. [\[But I am a merciful teacher, and will spare you most of the minutia of the disagreement.\]](#)

The scene in Genesis 49 is Jacob's deathbed. Just before he is "gathered to his people," Israel gathers his sons around his bed and sets out his prophecies concerning each of them. Normally the first-born son would receive the blessing of the father, and thus preeminence over his siblings. But, as we read in the first portion of the prophecies, Jacob has reasons to skip over the three eldest sons, and set the blessing on the fourth: Judah.

Let's read Jacob's prophecy regarding his son Judah.

Read Genesis 49:8-12.

v8

First off, in v8, Jacob prophesies that the other tribes will look up to the tribe of Judah. It would be preeminent. Did this prophecy come true?

- In Numbers 10:14 we read that when the tribes ordered themselves for traveling through the wilderness, Judah "set out first," leading the rest.
- In Joshua 15:1 we read that when the land in Canaan was apportioned to the tribes, the tribe of Judah received its first, and it was the largest.
- Judah had the largest population of any of the tribes.
- And, as William Varner points out, near the end of the OT period, "the tribe of Judah lent its name to be one of the names for *all* the Israelite people—the 'Judeans' or simply, the 'Jews.'

v9

In v9 Judah is described as a lion: strong, kingly. Did this prophecy come true? Was it a reference to the Messiah?

Read Revelation 5:1-5.

v10

Now, in v10, we come to the central—and most argued—passage of this prophecy.

Read v10.

It all focuses on one word—or, in the NIV and ESV, several words.

NASB: Until Shiloh comes

NKJV: Until Shiloh comes

KJV: Until Shiloh come

NIV: Until he comes to whom it belongs

ESV: Until tribute comes to him

Sidebar: It is at this point that part of me wants to verify my conclusions to you by itemizing the various positions and the evidence for each of them. But my other, wiser part assures me that if I did, you would all either be put to sleep, or leave in protest. (If I read to you Keil's examination of this passage, you would come away with a migraine.) But I'd like to keep my job, so I will just briefly summarize the essentials; for the rest, you are going to have to trust me.

The context of v10 is Jacob prophesying that the (legitimate) throne of Israel [[scepter, ruler's staff](#)] will not leave the tribe of Judah before someone comes, and once he does, he will rule over not just Israel, but the world [[peoples](#)].

The two best, most sensible interpretations of the nucleus of this passage are in essential agreement. As our translations reveal, one camp transliterates the Hebrew *šyḥ* [[shēe-lo'](#)] as a *name* for the Messiah, while the other camp translates it—"he comes to whom it belongs" as a *reference* to the Messiah. Both refer to Messiah, just in different ways. [[The ESV translation is an outlier, and we won't address it.](#)]

So when we recognize this as a Messianic prophecy, we are in agreement with by far the majority of scholars and interpreters—going as far back as the *Targums*, the ancient Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible.

As to the two ways the operative line is translated, we must favor the one which makes it a name for Messiah: Shiloh. The alternate that we see in the NIV (and some others), “Until he comes to whom it belongs,” is accurate only if one letter—one consonant—of the text is changed. It is dangerous—not to mention presumptuous—to go around changing Scripture to fit your preconceived interpretation. Even though the second interpretation does point to Messiah, the first interpretation is favored: Shiloh.

SHILOH

How does *šylyh* refer to Messiah? On what basis do we associate the two?

- The *Talmud* [the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*, explanatory writings come down from the oral law and traditions (the oral Torah) of Judaism] includes this as one of the names of the Messiah.
- The most ancient Jewish commentary on Genesis agrees.
- An association could be made between the Shiloh and *shalom*, Hebrew for peace. The Hebrew *Shiloh* comes from the root *shala*, which means to be tranquil, i.e., secure or successful : - be happy, prosper, be in safety. Hence “peace” included in these Messianic passages:

Read Isaiah 9:6.

Read Micah 5:4-5a.

And, of course, in v2, the prophet says the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem of Judah:

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”
Micah 5:2

[“Too little to be among the clans of Judah” means that it was so insignificant, it wasn’t even included in a number of the city lists of Judah.]

In our last session we saw how through Abraham, the Messiah would bring salvation (“blessings”) to not just Israel, but *all* the nations.

Read Genesis 12:3.

Messiah—the Christ—would not be limited to the people of Israel; His impact, His rule would be world-wide. Now that is affirmed in Genesis 49:10: to Shiloh will be “the obedience of the peoples”—the nations. But vv11-12 flesh out this period of rule; it will also be a time of abundance.

“He ties his foal to the vine,
And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine; vines so commonplace they can be so used
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes. wine so plentiful it can be used as wash-water
His eyes are dull from darker than wine,
And his teeth white from milk.” everyone healthy and robust

This rule—the Messiah’s rule—will stretch far beyond Israel. And if this passage in Genesis 49 remains a bit vague—for the word translated “peoples” is *not* the expected Hebrew *goyim*—then we can confirm it with another Messianic prophecy by the prophet Isaiah.

Read Isaiah 49:5-7.

The recurring theme of this study so far has been that—going all the way back to the Garden of Eden—God would send a Savior, a Redeemer, not just for a tiny nation of Jews, but for all “peoples” everywhere on earth.

Even as the Messianic line itself is narrowing, the scope, the reach of that promised Messiah has expanded—to include every one of us.

Prophecy

Genesis 49:8-12

8 “Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s sons shall bow down to you.

9 “Judah is a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?

10 “The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,

And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

11 “He ties his foal to the vine,
And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.

12 “His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk.”

10 The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs
and the obedience of the nations is his. (NIV)

Christ in the OT

The Judaic Prediction

“The Targums [Ancient Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible] are almost unanimous in giving ‘Shiloh’ a Messianic interpretation for they rendered Genesis 49:10—see Rashi ad loc., Sanhedrin 98b B.T.; Midrash Genesis Rabbah 98.8; 99.8; Tanchumah Vayehi 10; Midrash haGadol I.735-739; Journal of Philology Vol. XIV [1885] pp.4-22), ascribes a Messianic interpretation to the verse: ‘The scepter shall not depart from Judah...until Shiloh comes and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.’ They knew that the ancestral right to kingly leadership, resting in the Davidic line of the tribe of Judah, would cease at the coming of the ‘Messiah, the son of David’ (a common appellation of King Messiah found in rabbinic writings). For the Messiah was the culmination of the royal line originating from David, the first king of the tribe of Judah.”

Fulfillment or Reference

Revelation 5:5

and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’

Psalms 78:67-68

67 He also rejected the tent of Joseph,
And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 But chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion which He loved.

Hebrews 7:14a

For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah...

Isaiah 49:6

Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’