

Until Shiloh Comes

(Genesis 49:8-12)

In Genesis 49, Jacob is about to die and gathers his sons before him to tell them what "shall happen to you in the days to come." Son by son, Jacob prophesies concerning their future. Each prophecy is important, but the one of greatest significance is the one given to Judah. Beginning in v. 8, Jacob states things that will happen to Judah; 1) his brothers shall praise him, 2) his hand will be on the neck of his enemies, and 3) Israel's sons "shall bow down" before him. Nothing in Scripture records that any of this happened to Judah personally. Perhaps, instead, this prophecy is speaking about a descendant of Judah.

Verse 9 compares Judah to a lion in three different ways. And in Revelation 5:5, the author writes the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, [who] has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." In the context of the chapter, it is abundantly clear that this Lion is also the Lamb of God, Jesus, who gave His life to save sinners from their sins (5:6-10). The Lion of Judah is Jesus. He is the One worthy of being praised; He has His hand on the neck of His enemies (figuratively), and every knee will bow down before Him one day in the future (Phi 4:10).

A scepter is an object a king possesses to symbolically communicate his authority as the sovereign in a particular region. In verse 10, Jacob states that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet." (This is a couplet which is a way of saying the same thing twice. For example, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psa 19:1). Heavens and sky, declare and proclaim, and glory of God and handiwork are all couplets.) "His feet," in this case, is a euphemism for reproductive organs (1Sa 24:3). The point is that kings will come from Judah until the ultimate king, the final possessor of the scepter, comes. This becomes even clearer in the next couplet. Likewise, the scepter and ruler's staff are referring to the same thing.

The second portion of verse 10 is the most complicated because of the Hebrew word Shiloh. This particular variant of the word appears only here in the Old Testament. While the other Shiloh referring to a village appears throughout the OT. This Shiloh seems to be referring to a person. Some translations transliterate the Hebrew word שִׁילוֹהַ into English, and the reader sees "Shiloh," while others substitute an interpretation like "tribute" or the pronoun "he." The ESV provides a footnote that reads "Hebrew 'until Shiloh comes.'" Strong's Hebrew Lexicon indicates that Shiloh means tranquil and is an epithet of the Messiah (www.blueletterbible.org). Daniel prophesied about one who would atone for sin and bring everlasting righteousness—an anointed one, the ruler. The KJV Bible transliterates māšīaḥ as Messiah (2x), and the English word Messiah was born in 1611 first in Daniel 9:25-26. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Messiah as "the expected king and deliverer of the Jews." Christians believe Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. In fact, the English word Christ means Messiah (John 1:41). Therefore, this reference to Shiloh in v. 10 may indicate that Shiloh will bring tranquility or peace with God.

Shiloh is a king, and people will obey Him as their king. "To Him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (v.10). Christians believe that Jesus is Shiloh, the Messiah, the LORD—the master, the sovereign one. And a central tenet of the NT is that followers of Christ strive to obey him as Lord (John 3:36). All of the eternal age will be characterized by God's people living in obedience to King Jesus and His Father (Acts 17:7).

Verse 11 is filled with imagery of abundance. Vines and grapes grow in such excess that a farmer can hitch a donkey to a vine and have no concern that the animal is eating the vine or grapes. The harvest is consistently plentiful in a way the mind cannot imagine. So much wine is available that one could use wine for washing clothes. Of course, no one washes clothes in wine, so this is poetically figurative. Jesus promised that He would drink of the fruit of the vine again in the kingdom of His Father.

Finally, this prophecy finds fulfillment in the NT in no less than two additional ways. First, in John 2, Jesus produces an abundance of wine from water at the wedding in Cana. Second, Jesus rides a donkey's colt, a foal, into Jerusalem as the king of Israel on the Sunday before his death. The response to the arrival of the King, the Messiah, was one of overwhelming praise to God. The king was on a colt, not a war horse, for He came to bring peace to all who believe He is the Messiah who died for their sins and rose again on the third day (Luke 19:42, 1Co 15:1-3).

