

JUDAH AND THE MESSIANIC PROMISE

Jacob blessed his twelve sons prophetically. Of the twelve, Judah was chosen to be the line through whom Messiah would come forth:

Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.... Judah is a lion's whelp

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the peoples be. (1)

It is amazing that Judah was chosen to be the one whom his brethren would praise, who is promised the Scepter of ruler ship to whom the nations would gather. Judah was one of the eight brothers who conspired to kill Jacob's beloved son, Joseph. Neither was he morally upright with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, whom he mistook as a prostitute and with whom he had illicit sexual relations. It would have been more natural for Jacob to choose Joseph, Benjamin, his favorite, or perhaps the oldest, Reuben, to impart the special blessing. In the case of Judah, the mystery of God's overruling grace stands in bas-relief.

The Midrash and Rashi (the foremost Medieval rabbinic interpreter of Scripture) comment that Jacob really wanted to reveal to his children the mystery of the future messianic end of days, but was thwarted in his desire. Rabbi Yehudah in the name of R. Eliezar Bar Avina said: Two men had the End revealed to them, but it became hidden away from them later on; they are Jacob and Daniel.... Jacob here says, "... that I may tell you which shall befall you in the last days," but goes on to speak and to rebuke Reuben instead.(2) Likewise, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan reads: When the twelve tribes of Jacob assembled and surrounded Jacob's golden couch on which he rested[they thought that he would reveal to them the ultimate blessings and comforts]; and after the glory of the Shekina of the Lord had been revealed to him, the time when the King, Messiah, was going to come was concealed from him.(3)



It is clear that this opinion arose about Jacob because he declares that he is going to tell them what will happen b'aharitha'yamim (in the last days), and,

instead, starts to rebuke Reuben for being "unstable as water." There are two possible explanations as to why Jacob dealt first with Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, before focusing on Judah. First, they were older than Judah. Second, there was a need to explain why they were not selected to receive the great promise to bring forth the Messiah. In any event, Jacob did proceed to reveal the last days when he blessed Judah, prophesying that the scepter would not depart from Judah until Shiloh come, and that the nations would gather to him. Shiloh Is The Messiah. The reasons for concluding that Shiloh is another name for the Messiah are manifold. The prophet Ezekiel seems to refer "scepter" prophecy and to the term Shiloh when he prophesies "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until He comes whose right it is."(4) The Hebrew word for "whose right it is" is asher-lo, which is basically the same word used in the scepter prophecy for "Shiloh." Since the asher-lo of Ezekiel appears to be a reference to the Messiah, it is fair to assign a messianic interpretation to the Shiloh of Jacob's prophecy.

That Shiloh is the Messiah is reflected in the Aramaic Targum of Onkelos where the phrase is rendered, *until Messiah comes to whom belongs the kingdom....* (5) Similarly, Pseudo-Jonathan paraphrases the scripture, "until the time that King Messiah shall come...."(6) The Talmud also lends support to the interpretation that Shiloh was a reference to the Messiah: Rabbi Yohanan taught that all the world was created for the Messiah. What is His name? The School of Sheeloh taught: His name is Shiloh as it is written ([Genesis 49:10](#)) 'Until Shiloh come and unto Him shall the gathering of the peoples be.(7) The same exegesis is followed in Midrashic passages. Midrash Rabbah Genesis states: 'He stooped down, he couched like a lion' ([Genesis 49:9](#)). Some interpret it to mean, 'He couched, ' that is, He waited from Zedekiah until King Messiah. (8) Similarly, Midrash Tanhuma relates the passage to King Messiah when it states: 'The scepter shall not depart.' This means the kingly throne....'The lawgiver from between his feet,'...refers to the time when the King will come to whom belongs the Kingdom. The Yalkut relates the word Shiloh as a contraction of shai-ladonai, words which appear in the Book of Isaiah meaning "gift to the Lord. " It achieves the same result and interprets the term to relate to the Messiah: 'Until Shiloh shall come; He is called by the name of Shiloh because all the nations are destined to bring gifts to Israel and to King Messiah, as it is written, 'In that day shall the present be brought to the Lord of hosts.'(9) Judah **Shall Legislate Until Messiah Come**. During the great controversies in the Middle Ages between advocates of rabbinic Judaism and its opponents, believers in Yeshua invoked the prophetic passage that "the scepter should not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh come," as proof the Messiahship of Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth. They maintained that there was a

continuity of leadership in Judea until Yeshua came, then it had ceased. The rabbinic scholars maintained that this could not be, since the Judean kingdom had come to an end in 586 B.C.E., close to 600 years before Yeshua.

The believers' argument, however, ran like this: Judah was to have prominence until Shiloh comes. Shiloh is interpreted to be the Messiah in traditional Jewish thought and writings. Zedekiah was the last king in Judah before the Babylonian captivity. He was blinded, and his children killed. (10) Yet there was another legitimate Judean king in Babylonian prison during the captivity - Jehoiachin. He was liberated from prison by the Babylonian king. According to Scripture, one of Joboiachin's descendants was Zerubabel, the leader of the returning exiles under King Cyrus. The returning exiles looked to Zerubabel and his descendants for political leadership in Judea. There was continuity of leadership right down to the destruction of the Second Temple. At that time the Sanhedrin's authority ceased. Even when the Hasmoneans (who were not descendants of Judah, David, Jehoiachin and Zerubabel) took over leadership in 167 B.C.E., the country was still called Judea. The Hasmoneans, however, were not the rightful rulers because they were from a Levitical, non-Davidic and non-Judean lineage. In fact, the religious Jewish leadership denounced the political rule of the Hasmoneans. The dispute continued, and the Hasmonean leadership killed 800 leading Pharisees. Those who were faithful to God's word never submitted themselves to the illegitimate rule of the Hasmoneans, but instead to the Judean ruling religious body that they recognized. The scepter did not, in fact, depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between "his feet" until after 30 C.E., the time when Yeshua of Nazareth was crucified. Quite interestingly, the rabbis taught that changes occurred 40 years before the Temple was destroyed. The lot for the goat to be sacrificed ceased to come up on the right hand of the High Priest as previously; the crimson cloth they put out on Yom Kippur would not turn white as it had before;(11) the Western light would not keep burning as before; and the doors of the Temple no longer open of themselves. (12)

The Nations Shall Obey Messiah Ve-lo yikhat amim is translated "and to him shall the gathering of the peoples be." Midrash Tanhuma agrees with this translation and relates it to the "root of Jesse" prophecy spoken by Isaiah: 'Velo YikhatAmim' means the One to Whom in the future the nations shall gather, as it is written in [Isaiah 1:10](#) 'A root of Jesse who shall stand for an ensign of the peoples. To Him shall the nations seek.' Another legitimate translation of the phrase ve-lo yikhat is "to whom the peoples shall render obedience." This translation is consistent with the Jerusalem Bible and the Aramaic Targumim. Pursuant to this understanding, the goyim (gentiles) will gather and obey the Messiah. Jacob, in pronouncing this prophecy upon

Judah, was simply referring back to the messianic promise given to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, that "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Prophets in later centuries received additional light on the subject of the Messiah who would attract the nations. Isaiah foresaw that Messiah would become an "ensign" to the nations.'(13) Both Isaiah and the prophet Micah looked forward to the time when "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established and all nations shall flow unto it."(14) It is well to remember that Jonah was ordered to preach to the gentiles in Nineveh in order to save them from God's wrath. God explains his compassion for the Gentiles with the words, "And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city?"(15) Finally, the prophet Zechariah looked forward to the day in the messianic age to come when: "It shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations, even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying we will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you."(16)

References: (1)[Genesis 49:8-10](#) (2)Midrash Rabbah [Genesis 98:3](#) (3)J.W. Ethridye, The Targum of Onkels & Jonathan Ben Uzzicl on the Pentateuch with The Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum from the Chaldee(KTAV 1968) [hereafter referred to as Eth-eridge] p.329; John Bowker, The Targums & Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretation of Scripture (Cambridge 1969) p. 277. (4) Ezekiel 21:27 (5) See F.theridye, p.152 (6)Ibid at p.331. (7) Sanhedrin 98b (8) Midrash Rabbah[Genesis 98:7](#) (9) Yalkut 160; see Alfred Edersheim. The Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah (Wm. B. Eerdmans 1977) p.712. (10)[II Kings 25:7](#) (11) Rosh Hashanah 3lb (12) Yoma 39b (13) The Hebrew word translated ensign is nes. Nes is usually translated miracle. (14)[Isaiah 2:2](#); [Micah 4:1](#) (15) [Jonah 4:11](#) (16) [Zechariah 8:23](#).

What The Rabbis Known of the Messiah by Rachmiel Frydland
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