

## Why Judah?

This week's reading from Parashat Vayechi (*Shemot / Genesis 47:28-50:26*) contains the final chapters of the book of Genesis. The opening verses tell us that Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years and his total life span was 147 years. Before Jacob died he asked Joseph saying *47:30 but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.* And he said, *'I will do as you have said.'* (NASB) Jacob tells Joseph that his two sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) will be his (*48:5*) and declares that Joseph's descendents after him shall be called after their names (*48:6*). Jacob blesses Joseph's children placing Ephraim (second born) before Manasseh (first born) saying the younger will be greater than the older (*48:10-20*). Jacob then proceeds to proclaim a blessing over his children. In the midst of Jacob's blessing over his sons he provides us with a Messianic expectation in his statements to Judah saying, *49:10 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.* (NASB) The statements that Jacob declares over Judah appear to make a distinction between him and his brothers. Studying Judah's life, why are such great things said about Judah as compared to his brothers? What is it about Judah that sets him apart to be given a messianic expectation of greatness?

### ספר בראשית פרק מט Bereshit / Genesis 49:8-12

ה יהודה אמה יודוה אחיה ידה  
בערף אביה ישתחוו לה בני  
אביה: ט גור אריה יהודה מטורף  
בני עליה פרע רבץ פאריה וכל  
ביא מי יקימנו: י לא-יסור שבט  
מיהודה ומחוקק מבין רגליו עד  
פי-יבא שילה ולו יקהת עמים: יא  
אסרי לגפן עירה [עירו] ולשרקה  
בני אתנו פבס פינן לבשו ובדם-  
ענבים מינן ולבן-שנים מחלב:

*49:8 '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. 49:9 '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? 49:10 '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. 49:11 '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. 49:12 'His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk. (NASB)*

Judah was not a perfect character according to the Torah's description of his life. The Scriptures tell us that he was the one who was motivated by profit to get rid of their brother Joseph (*Bereshit / Genesis 37:26*). He did not behave as a righteous man in faith with his daughter-in-law Tamar (*Bereshit / Genesis 38:26*), and he had sex with her as a prostitute (*Bereshit / Genesis 38:18*). He did however show good character when he interceded and offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin his brother (*Bereshit / Genesis 44:18-34*). Jacob describes the blessing over Judah saying his brothers will praise him, he will be as a lion, the scepter will not pass from between his feet, and to him will

be the obedience of the people. These things are describing a person having a leadership position among his brothers. Why do you think the Lord chose Judah as the one to pass on these things?

Studying Midrash Rabbah, it is interesting to note that Parashat 97, the entire midrash is devoted to Jacob blessing his sons. According to the midrash, Judah takes pre-eminence in the rabbinic discussions on Jacob's blessing over his sons. A few select sections from Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 97 are shown here to illustrate what the rabbis have to say about Judah.

***Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 97***

*Judah, Thee will your brother praise (Bereshit / Genesis 49:8). Because you confessed, your brethren will praise you in this world and in the future world. And in accordance with the blessing of his father Jacob thirty kings were descended from him, as it says, Now these are the generations of Perez... David (Ruth 4:18); count David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat until Jeconiah and Zedekiah and you will find thirty. And so it will be in the future world (the Messianic Era), And David MY servant will be their prince for ever (Ezekiel 37:25).*



*From the tribe of Judah sacrifices were first offered at the dedication of the Altar; from the tribe of Judah came forth Caleb. Furthermore, Judah was the first in the journeys of Israel, as it says, And in the first place the standard of the camp of the children of Judah set forward (Bamidbar / Numbers 10:14); likewise when they pitched their camps; Now these that pitch on the east side toward the sun rising will be of the standard of the camp of Judah (Bamidbar / Numbers 2:3).*



*From Judah there came forth Othniel, the first of the Princes who were the Judges, as it says, And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a savior to the children of Israel, who saved them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother (Joshua 3:9). From the tribe of Judah came forth Boaz. The throne of Israel was given to Judah through the righteous David, to him and to his sons was a covenant made with salt, as it says, and the Lord said unto Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul? Fill your horn with oil and go, I will send you to Jesse the Beth-lehemite; for I have provided unto Me a king among his sons (1 Samuel 17:1), wherever "unto Me" occurs it means for all time.*



*Furthermore, the royal Messiah will be descended from the tribe of Judah, as it says, And it will come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse, that stands for an ensign of the peoples, unto him will the nations seek (Isaiah 11:10). Thus, from the tribe of Judah were descend-*

*ed Solomon, who built the first Temple, him will be descended the royal Messiah, who will rebuild the Temple. Thus, we find these two tribes, Judah and Levi, are the most distinguished in their lineage of all Israel since in them were royalty and priesthood.*

In Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 97, the rabbis say that Judah's brethren will praise him in this world and in the world to come. How did his brother praise him in this world? The rabbis say this leadership position among his brothers meant that kings of Israel would come from Judah. The connection is made to David and the Future Messiah, God's ultimate leader, who would eventually come from the tribe of Judah. Various examples are given in the Tanach to demonstrate Judah's pre-eminence, Judah sacrificed first to dedicate the altar, Caleb came from Judah, and Judah was the first to lead the way being encamped on the east side of Israel (*Bamidbar / Numbers 2:3*). The midrash provides examples of princes. Midrash Rabbah states that *"the royal Messiah will be descended from the tribe of Judah, as it says, And it will come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse, that stands for an ensign of the peoples, unto him will the nations seek (Isaiah 11:10)."* It is interesting to note the messianic significance of this blessing, both the Aramaic Targumim and the rabbis attest that these verses speak of the Messiah.

The Torah states, *49:10 '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.* It is interesting to note, in the narrative in the Torah, the leadership prophecy took some 640 years to fulfill in part with the reign of David, the first of Judah's dynasty of kings. In addition to this, the prophecy took some 1600 years to be complete in Yeshua the Messiah. Note from David until the time of king Herod, a prince of Judah was head over Israel (*One could consider Daniel as a leader in the captivity in Babylon.*). The promise was that Israel would keep this scepter until Shiloh comes. Even under foreign servitude, Israel had a limited right to self-rule, until the first century. at which time, under Herod and the Romans, Israel's right to capital punishment was taken away.

The remaining portion of the blessing to Judah says, *49:11 '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. 49:12 'His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk. (NASB)* This is a close description of Yeshua's life and of Judah's wealth. The blessing contains a description of the choice vine, whose garments are washed in wine, and whose teeth are white from milk. Wine as a reference to the dulling of pain, and milk to nourishment, life, and health.

In looking at the life of Judah and his character, there is some difficulty to see why the tribe of Judah should become so prominent among the tribes of Israel. In the narrative from the last three Parshiot, we learn that Joseph lived a righteous life. In Parashat Vayechi Joseph was blessed with the birthright in place of Reuben, the firstborn. We learn how the name of *"Israel"* is passed on to his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The rabbis pick up on this in the rabbinic literature and consequentially us Ephraim as a reference to all of Israel. According to the Scriptures, the Lord God chose Judah and his descendants to occupy a special place in His plan through the ages. The prophecy God gave to Jacob at the end of his life concerning his sons' descendants *"in the latter days"*

revealed a special blessing for the tribe of Judah (*Bereshit / Genesis 49:1-10*). In Jacob's blessing of Judah, he said, "*Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people*" (*Bereshit / Genesis 49:8-10*). The Lord God looked at Judah as a strong warrior and likening him to a young lion sleeping in its den after devouring its prey. Perhaps it was this strength of character and determination that God foresaw in this tribe that influenced Him to choose Judah to be His lawgiver and the tribe from which His Son would later be born (*Hebrews 7:14*). David was inspired by *Bereshit / Genesis 49* to twice say in the Psalms that "*Judah is My lawgiver*" (*Tehillim / Psalms 60:7 and 108:8*). The Apostle Paul said, "*What advantage then has the Jew? ... Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles [that which was spoken or commanded] of God*" (*Romans 3:1-2*). Throughout the centuries, Judah (the Yehudim) have faithfully preserved the Scriptures. After the death of Joshua, God chose the tribe of Judah to take the lead in conquering the nations who were living in the land promised to the children of Abraham (*Judges 1:2*). The book of Judges in the first few chapters tell us that the tribe of Judah was aggressive and strong in driving out the Canaanites in the southern half of the land of Canaan. In the time of King David, the tabernacle of God had long been in Shiloh in the territory of Joseph. David set the stage for the temple to be built on Mount Zion, the place where the Scriptures say Zion "*which He (God) loved,*" will be moved to the tribe of Judah (*Tehillim / Psalm 78:67-70*). The Lord God chose David to be His shepherd and Jerusalem (Mount Zion) for His place to dwell. The Lord also chose David to hold the "*scepter,*" a symbol of kingship that would always remain in the tribe of Judah (*Bereshit / Genesis 49:10, Tehillim / Psalm 89:34-37*). The prophet Zechariah, following the prophecy of the invasion of Israel and Jerusalem, announced the good news of the coming of the Messiah saying, "*And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth*" (*Zechariah 14:4, 9*). The prophet Jeremiah also spoke of this same time when he said, "*In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" (*Jeremiah 23:6*).

The good news that comes from the tribe of Judah into this world is the "*Lion of the tribe of Judah,*" Yeshua the Messiah (*Revelation 5:5*), who came, laid his life down for ours, and raised from the grave to life everlasting. O one day he will return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and the tribe of Judah, all of Israel will finally accept the Lord's Redeemer (*Romans 11:26*). Have you accepted, believed, and received the Lord's redeemer in your life?