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Lessons from Jacob's Blessing of Judah

By Jerry Collins

"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. 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? 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. 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. His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk" (Genesis 49:8-12).

Verse 8—Judah, your brothers shall praise you—This is a miniature preview of the kingship of Judah that would span the years until Messiah should come. Because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disqualified themselves, Judah would receive the tribal leadership.

- **Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies**—This is a graphic reference to the humiliation of one's enemies in battle. To expose the neck of one's enemy was a symbolic gesture signifying that the enemy had been conquered (Joshua 10:24).
- **Your father's sons shall bow down to you**—The praise that Judah would receive will also be incorporated into submission and homage by the family. This initial description prefigures the kingly role of the tribe expanded in the remainder of the blessing.

Verse 9—Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up—Jacob used the metaphor of the lion's cub to portray Judah as powerful. The figure of a lion is used for the monarchy in many cultures. The image recalls the ferociousness of Judah's powerful leadership, seizing his prey and bringing it back to the den.

- **He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up?**—In addition to the seizing and bringing back the prey, Judah is pictured as reclining over the prey back in the den. Satiated with the battle and kill, he will be mighty in battle and kingly in repose *and as a lion, who dares rouse him up?*

Verse 10—The scepter shall not depart from Judah—This description moves to the eschatological future, looking beyond the normal period of Israel's history, to the dawn of the messianic age. The *scepter* was the symbol of kingship—it would be Judah's. The Lord anticipated kings in Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14).

- **Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet**—The symbols of royalty, the scepter and now the lawgiver's *staff*, revealed that rulership will never depart from Judah. The figure *from between his feet* could refer to the descendants who would come from his loins. Only Judah's posterity would legitimately rule.
- **Until Shiloh comes**—*Shiloh* means 'to whose it is.' So the scepter and staff, that is, the theocratic administration—would remain in the tribe of Judah until the one comes to whom it belongs. Without much detail, this prophecy provides a hint at the coming of the Messiah.

PT—The genealogy narrowed once more when a specific town within Judah, Bethlehem, was chosen as the site of Messiah's birth (Micah 5:2). Matthew confirmed Jesus possessed all of the credentials to be the Messiah (Matthew 1:1-16). In the throne room of heaven, Jesus is described as *the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David* (Revelation 5:5) whose descent is from the tribe of Judah.

- **and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples**—The character of *Shiloh's* rule will be such that *obedience of the peoples* or nations will dominate that rule. Paul declared that the Father's ultimate purpose for all peoples everywhere is *...at the name of Jesus every knee will bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:10-11).

Verse 11—He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine—Binding a foal to a *vine* and a *choice vine* speaks of a time of great plenty and splendor—in this case most likely the millennium. This prophecy is catching the mood of the time when the curse will have little effect and the land will have great blessing.

- **He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes**—These expressions speak of abundance—it will be a golden age for sure. So much so, that commodities such as wine and the grapes they are made from will be bountiful.

Verse 12—His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk—These images reveal that Israel's experience of thorns and sweat will give way to shouting and feasting. Understood as a symbols of prosperity, the dark or red eyes would be from drinking wine, and the white teeth from drinking milk.

An Application—Everything in the Bible is leading to the emergence of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Everything God is doing in the world is moving to that conclusion. The curse on the earth will be removed. Believers should focus on the supremacy of Jesus Christ and His ushering in of that kingdom rule. Believers should be living in such a way that they are preparing themselves for that rule by how they conduct their lives here on earth.

