

The Promise to Judah

Key Verse: *“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”*
—Genesis 49:10

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 49:8-12

AS THE END OF JACOB’S life drew near, he called for his twelve sons, and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.” (Gen. 49:1,2) Jacob then proceeded to explain to his sons that one of them would be destined to receive special praise from his brethren.

After speaking quite harshly of his first three sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Jacob then turned to Judah. “Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies.” (vs. 8) This is followed by our Key Verse, in which Jacob stated that a “sceptre,” or right to rule, would someday be invested in Judah’s progeny. In proportion as they had faith in God’s promises, all the other tribes would now look to Judah, expecting blessings to come through him in due time.

God’s promise to Abraham, renewed to Isaac and to Jacob, was that from their posterity would come a great deliverer who would not only bless them as a family and as a nation, but would also bless “all families of the earth.” (Gen. 12:3) It looked for a time as though Moses, the great lawgiver and deliverer of Israel, might be the one promised,

but he was not from the tribe of Judah. He spoke prophetically, however, of someone to come in the future. “God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me.”—Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22

When King David arose from the promised tribe of Judah, Israel’s victories during his reign led to lofty expectations of an extended kingdom, whose influence would grow and embrace the world. Furthermore, when David’s son Solomon began to reign, and his world-renowned wisdom and greatness were at their height, it looked as though the crown of universal dominion was within Israel’s grasp. However, due to pride and a lack of obedience to God, their joy was turned to disappointment when after Solomon’s death their kingdom was first divided, and then eventually overturned. In humiliation, the people who had expected to rule and bless all nations were carried as captives to Babylon.—Ps. 137:1-9

Though the crown was removed from Israel, and the power to govern themselves was taken from them, the “sceptre,” or right to rule conveyed originally in God’s promise to Judah, was not removed. (Ezek. 21:26,27) The original promise to Israel must be fulfilled, and so the scepter remained until the coming of Shiloh, another name signifying the Messiah of promise. The one whose “right it is” to rule is Jesus, “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” and the “Prince of Peace.” (Rev. 5:5; Isa. 9:6,7) Jesus was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” (Heb. 7:26). He also kept and fulfilled Israel’s law perfectly, the only Israelite to ever do so.—Matt. 5:17,18

Jesus, by birth, was of the tribe of Judah, the kingly tribe. Yet, when he laid down his perfect life as a ransom offering, he took Israel’s Law “out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” (Col. 2:14) Jesus thus secured for his subjects, both Jew and Gentile, forgiveness of sins and recovery from sin and death in his Father’s kingdom, in which he will reign as “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”—I Tim. 6:15 ■