

## GOD'S KING CAME THROUGH JUDAH

Genesis 49:9-12

**TEXT:** *You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

We've often noted the "telescopic nature" of Old Testament prophecy. By telescopic, we mean to say that while we see fulfillments up close, there also is the ultimate fulfillment that is seen far away. Like a telescope, we are to open it up, stretch out its full length and observe what is to be seen in the future.

The Scripture before us this morning is such a prophecy. As old Jacob, whose name the Lord had changed to Israel, gathers his sons together to receive his blessing before he dies, the Holy Spirit causes him to utter this prophecy that is often heard during the Christmas Season: *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.* While prophetic information is revealed to Judah and his brothers concerning the Lord's gracious blessings to be poured out upon him and his descendants, the prophetic telescope is extended to see that the Lord is speaking about His King that is to come through Judah: *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.* That King is Jesus. And the greatest blessing that is to come to Judah personally as well as to all mankind through this King Jesus is the forgiveness of sins.

We stretch out the prophetic telescope from the moment Israel utters this amazing blessing upon his son and we look some 1000 years into their future to see one of the world's greatest kings: David. David was a descendant of Judah, and the Bible's history of David's rise to power and the greatness of the Kingdom of Israel during his reign would be remembered as Israel's golden years for the next 1000 years.

Jacob's prophecy is in the form of Hebrew poetry. The poetic imagery Jacob uses speaks of a future of power, like a lion, and prosperity like the abundance of wine and grapes. The golden years of David's kingdom were certainly years of great power and abundance. Those golden years continued throughout the reign of David's son, Solomon.

But stretch the telescope out another 1000 years beyond David and Solomon. By that time the glory of David and Solomon's kingdom had been long gone. Israel had divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The past 1000 years since the Golden Years of David had been marked with war and bloodshed, famines and hard times. The people of Israel were still looking for that Descendant of Judah who was the Lord over David, the Lord Himself who would be the Son of David, the one prophesied by Isaiah to be born of a virgin in the town Micah had designated for the virgin birth: David's home town of Bethlehem. That would be Jesus!

Next Sunday is the last Sunday of the Epiphany Season: Transfiguration Sunday. Our Gospel Lesson will be the account of that amazing event when Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, to a mountain where suddenly he was transfigured before their eyes. His body and clothing shone like lightning. He was there speaking to Moses who lived 1500 years earlier, and to Elijah who had lived some 900 years earlier. The Bible says that they were discussing the events that were about to take place at Jerusalem, specifically, Jesus crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. Years later, Peter would write about this: ***We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*** 2 Pe 1 Jesus is God's King who was to come through Judah. Jesus, the King who would win the victory of Satan, sin and death by His death and resurrection.

Peter says that there can be no doubt about the fact that Jesus is God's King who came through ancient Judah. If there is doubt, then it is because that person does not believe ***the word of the prophets***. To us, Peter says concerning this word of the prophets, or "The Bible": ***and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...*** And so we will do that right now. That Jesus is God's King means to you and to me what it meant to Judah: MY SINS ARE FORGIVEN!

Now let's collapse the telescope of prophecy. When Jacob uttered this amazing prophecy about Judah and the coming of Jesus, Judah was shaking in his boots. He was forth in line for his blessing from father Israel. His older brothers, Rueben, Simeon and Levi had just received their blessing from Dad. But instead of blessings there was an accounting of their past sins. Rueben had shamed his father by having had an affair with one of his wives. No blessing for you, Rueben! Then their father had brought up a shameless massacre of an innocent village by Simeon and Levi. No blessings for you, Simeon and Levi! What would Israel say about Judah? Judah had committed some horrible sins. He had committed adultery with one of his daughters-in-law who had disguised herself as a Canaanite temple prostitute. He had participated in the selling of their brother Joseph into slavery. What sin would father bring up to justify that there would be no blessings for him?

This was an important exercise of faith. His sons were sinful and they needed to be reminded of their sins. So are we. We live among a people and a culture that today thinks that what the Bible calls sin is no sin at all. They shout and call you names if you quote Scripture and say that idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals and the greedy will go to hell. They laugh at you if you talk about virginity until marriage and that sex before marriage is sin. Pretty soon, all that mocking and yelling and screaming at us causes us to believe that because we don't do those things like the proud and perverted out there, then we are NOT so bad and that we will be saved because we are believers. NO ONE WILL BE SAVED BECAUSE THEY ARE BELIEVERS, as if that were some virtue that I chose to do! We will be saved ONLY because Jesus, our King, won the victory

over sin, death and the devil, purchased and won us with His holy precious blood. Like Judah, we can only stand there shaking in our boots waiting to hear what God has to say about me! NO BLESSING FOR YOU!

Then opens to telescope of prophecy, focusing their eyes on the coming of God's King and Savior. No sins of Judah are even mentioned. Instead the Savior King would come through Judah, for the forgiveness of ALL SINS! For Judah's sins as well as for Reuben, Simeon, Levi, for you and for me! Did Judah deserve this blessing? Everyone knew that he did not. But that this Blessing was the forgiveness of sins for all, even Reuben, Simeon and Levi could rejoice! See! The Savior who comes through their brother Judah will take away all their sins! Those sins will be remembered no more, just as Judah's sins are not even mentioned at all.

So it will be on Judgment Day. As David writes: *Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- who forgives all your sins ... He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* Ps 103 That's what Judah and his brothers learned that day when God revealed that His King was to come to us through Judah. They learned of Jesus who forgives all man's sins, theirs and ours. Amen.