

What can we learn from the tribe of Judah?

Each of the twelve sons of Israel / Jacob received a blessing from his father just before Jacob's death. The twelve sons were the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the blessing contained prophetic information about the future of each tribe. In the case of the tribe of Judah, Jacob prophesied, "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. 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" (Genesis 49:8-12).

Each part of Jacob's prophecy for the tribe of Judah reveals something about the people of that tribe, their history, and the spiritual application we can draw from it. In verse 8, Jacob prophesies that Judah's brothers would praise him. Judah's name signifies praise and was given him by his mother, her heart being filled with praises to God for him (Genesis 29:35). The strength and power of the tribe is also foretold in verse 8. Verse 9 uses the imagery of both a lion and the lion's cub to portray the tribe of Judah. Judah was comparable to a young lion for his strength, courage, and vitality and to a mature lion in that the line of Judah contained those of national prominence and kingship, including David and Solomon.

The scepter not departing from Judah until "he comes to whom it belongs" is a Messianic prophecy. The name "Shiloh" appears in this verse in several translations, a word that

refers to the Messiah. Commentators differ on the exact meaning of this somewhat obscure passage, but all agree that He who comes to obtain the obedience of the nations can be none other than Christ. The rest of the passage, verses 11-12, refers to the great abundance of riches that would belong to the tribe of Judah. So wealthy and blessed would they be that they would be able to tie a donkey to the choicest grapevine and allow him to eat his fill, an indication of the abundance that would belong to Judah.

The second application of verses 11-12, and the one that pertains to Christians today, is the abundance of spiritual riches available to us in Christ, the great quantity of spiritual blessings flowing from the love of God, which come to us through Christ, which are comparable to wine and milk. The riches include His word and His statutes and Christ Himself, the Bread of Life. These may also be applied to Christ and to His human nature, which was like a garment dipped in blood through His sufferings and death. Isaiah 63:1-3 contains this same imagery. It can also refer to His church and His people whose garments are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13-14).