

## GENESIS 49:8-12 (THE BLESSING UPON JUDAH)

**Introduction:** As Jacob blesses his sons, a celestial drama is revealed, one which was placed in the heavens by God to show us the work He would accomplish through His Son Jesus. Astrology is forbidden in the Bible because it attempts to reveal our future and the choices we should make from the creation rather than the Creator.

But what God has revealed in the constellations was intended to reveal Jesus and how God would conduct His affairs. There is a world of difference between the two. For example, if we use the Bible for divination, then we are misusing what God has given us. But if we use the Bible to see Jesus and His plan for the ages, then we are following what God intended for us to see.

**Text Verse:** In Judah God is known;  
His name is great in Israel.

2 In Salem also is His tabernacle,  
And His dwelling place in Zion.

3 There He broke the arrows of the bow,  
The shield and sword of battle. Selah Psalm 76:1-3

Today, we will see Jacob's blessing upon Judah, his fourth son. Through Judah, will come Christ the Lord. Not only is this revealed in the Bible, but it is also revealed in the very sky above us. And the Bible shows us how. So let's turn to that precious word again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

### **I. The Praise of His Brothers (verses 8, 9)**

<sup>8</sup> **“Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;**

Judah was the fourth son born to Jacob and the fourth son born to Leah. His birth is recorded in Genesis 29:35, which reads -

"And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'Now I will praise the LORD.' Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing."  
Genesis 29:35

This first part of verse 8 is intended as a play on words, just as it was at his birth. The name Judah means "praise" and Jacob acknowledges that it is his brothers who will praise him. In other words, as his name is, so is he. The word translated as "praise" is an elegant variation of the name Judah.

It is a delightfully palpable sentence which is lost in translation, but in Hebrew it reads, *Yehuda, attah yodukha akhekha* (1:12). The same word for "praise" here is used numerous times elsewhere in the Bible, such as this verse from Psalm 111:1 -

"Praise the LORD!  
I will **praise** the LORD with *my* whole heart,  
In the assembly of the upright and *in* the congregation." Psalm 111:1

The term "Jew" that we know today comes directly from the name Judah and like Jacob's words now, Paul uses the term in a pun. There in Romans 2:28, 29 we read this -

"For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup> but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God." Romans 2:28, 29

Jacob's note in this prophecy is that God was praised *for* him at his birth, God was praised *by* him, such as in the psalm I cited, and God is praised *in* him because Jesus descends from the tribe of Judah. Because of this, his brothers shall, and indeed do, praise him - *Yehuda, attah yodukha akhekha*.

Already, at the very beginning of his oracle, Jacob has placed Judah above his brothers. In this now, and for the rest of the prophecy, we can be certain that the words are not pronounced based on Jacob's exceptional love for him.

That already belongs to Joseph. His advancement of Judah above his brothers is a direct result of the Spirit of God and prophecy which now rests on him. Being the first of the brothers means that he will be first of the tribes. And this is seen with all surety throughout the rest of Scripture. Judah first began to attain ascendancy when he spoke on behalf of all the brothers before Joseph revealed himself to them. After that, he was sent by Jacob ahead of the others as they traveled to Egypt to point the way to Goshen.

In the future, Judah will be the first tribe to break down and march ahead of the other tribes as they carry the Ark of the Covenant in the wilderness on the way to Canaan. Once in Canaan, Judah will repeatedly be selected as the first of the tribes to go into battle.

After Joshua's death, Judah will have the first lot of land assigned to them as it is divided among the tribes. It is a land which is very large and very fertile. The first judge of Israel will be Othniel, of the tribe of Judah. From Judah will come the great king, David.

All of this is intended to teach us a lesson. Judah, meaning "praise," sets the example for each of us. In all things, let praise go first. If we can remember this simple lesson which has been revealed to us in these many patterns concerning Judah, we will always succeed in our endeavors. Praise the Lord first and praise the Lord always. Let the praise of the Lord never depart from you.

In these first words of Jacob to Judah, there is an ultimate fulfillment found in Jesus. It is through Him that we offer our own sacrifice of praise to God. In Hebrews 13, we read this -

"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name." Hebrews 13:15

In the end, it is all about Jesus. Every word testifies to this.

**8 (con't) Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;**

To have one's hand on the neck of their enemies is an expression indicating the conquest of, and victory over, them. In the book of Job, we read his feelings of defeat before God who afflicted him. In his discourse, he uses this same terminology -

<sup>11</sup> "God has delivered me to the ungodly,  
And turned me over to the hands of the wicked.

<sup>12</sup> I was at ease, but He has shattered me;  
He also has taken *me* by my neck, and shaken me to pieces;  
He has set me up for His target..." Job 16:11, 12

This prophecy by Jacob is exactly fulfilled in the Psalms. In Psalm 18:39, 40, we read this from the hand of David -

"For You have armed me with strength for the battle;  
You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.

<sup>40</sup> You have also given me the necks of my enemies,  
So that I destroyed those who hated me." Psalm 18:39, 40

In this is more than just a literal fulfillment by David, but it is found in Christ, the ultimate King of the Jews. He has conquered not only the physical enemies of God's people, but all the spiritual ones as well. In Him sin is defeated, Satan is destroyed, and death is conquered. This then is what is intended in these words.

**8 (con't) Your father's children shall bow down before you.**

Once again, Jacob makes a prophecy that one would think he would have bestowed upon Joseph. In Genesis 37, we read this -

"Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more. <sup>6</sup> So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: <sup>7</sup> There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.'" Genesis 37:5-7

Jacob's words though are directed by the Spirit of God and not the knowledge he already possessed and leaned upon. Reuben in his blessing was called the "excellency of dignity and the excellency of power." But he was told he would not excel. Now that honor is transferred to Judah. Jacob's sons would bow down before him.

After God selected David, who was from Judah, to replace Saul as the king of Israel, the kingly line continued on through him all the way to Jesus. And it is to Jesus, as Paul records in Philippians 2, this honor ultimately belongs -

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:9-11

"Every knee" includes the knee of every descendant of every brother of Judah. No person is exempted from the honor which will be bestowed upon Jesus Christ.

*It was fitting for Him, our Lord Jesus  
For whom are all things, and by whom they are as well  
In bringing many sons to glory, even us  
As the precious words of Scripture do tell*

*To make the Captain of our salvation  
Perfect through sufferings, His great tribulation*

*For both He who sanctifies  
And those who are being sanctified too  
Are all one, in His death each of us dies  
A marvel in how His children He does accrue*

*For which reason He is not ashamed  
To call them brothers, you and me too  
Saying "I will declare Your name to my brethren  
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You*

## **<sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion's whelp;**

Jacob now assigns a striking metaphor to Judah which will continue to be used until the last book of the Bible, that of a lion. He begins with calling him "a lion's whelp." This is a young lion, one of little power. At this point in the history of Judah, he is one among his brothers, with no seeming advantage above them.

However, as a lion, he will act, and as a lion he will grow. He begins like all cats do, feisty and full of activity. And yet cats follow their own course not worrying about their surroundings as they explore. This has been seen clearly in Judah already.

But this is seen in Jesus as well. Very little is recorded of his youth, but at the age of 12, Luke tells us that Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem after a feast while His family headed back to Nazareth, not realizing he stayed behind.

When they found Him, He was in the temple sitting among the teachers, both listening and asking questions. As a lion would be curious of its surroundings, so Jesus acted in the same manner. There He was in the temple, astonishing His audience with His prowess.

**<sup>9</sup> (con't) From the prey, my son, you have gone up.**

As the lion matures, they take hold of their own prey and they "go up" with it normally to their mountain lairs to eat. The tribe of Judah eventually matured into a grown lion in its own right. It became the largest of the tribes and was known for its many conquests, defeating prey in all directions as they prospered.

In Jesus' life, He also matured into a formidable Lion. The enemies would gather and He would defeat them. Whether they were the enemies of physical afflictions, demons, the leaders of Israel, or even the devil, He would easily overcome them by standing on the word of God.

<sup>9 (con't)</sup> **He bows down, he lies down as a lion;**

The symbolism here is of a lion that crouches in a satisfied way over his prey, with no worries about it being taken from him as he devours it. Eventually, he is satisfied with his victory and filled with the meal and he enjoys rest and repose as he lies down. He is at peace and he has no fears.

At the same time, his enemies are vexed by him, always on the alert should he raise himself again to go on the prowl. As a full mature lion, satisfied with the catching of his prey, Judah found itself in this position as well. In 1 Kings 4:25, we read this about the state of affairs in Judah -

"And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon." 1 Kings 4:25

And this is the state of affairs for the Lord too. After His victory over His enemies, Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." He is in a contented state which defines the completion of His work on our behalf. But a lion in such a state is still lion. Christ is never inattentive to His surroundings...

<sup>9 (con't)</sup> **And as a lion, who shall rouse him?**

The word for "lion" here is an entirely different one than what was said a moment ago. This lion is a fully mature lion, maybe even a lioness which is more fierce than the male, resenting angrily when it is disturbed from its rest.

A lioness is also the caretaker of the cubs and will defend them with ferocity. When Judah had finally subdued her enemies and the people were at rest, the other nations sought peace with them. Many treaties were made in an attempt to pacify them and stay their desire to conquer them as well.

In Ezra 4:20, in a letter from King Artaxerxes, the following is noted about Judah -

"There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all *the region* beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them." Ezra 4:20

In Isaiah 31:4, this same terminology that Jacob now uses is applied to the Lord -

For thus the LORD has spoken to me:

"As a lion roars,

And a young lion over his prey

(When a multitude of shepherds is summoned against him,

*He* will not be afraid of their voice

Nor be disturbed by their noise),

So the LORD of hosts will come down

To fight for Mount Zion and for its hill." Isaiah 31:4

The Lord, even now, is reposing in majesty, but someday, He will rise from that position. After the church age, Israel will again be at the center of His focus. And like a lion in defense of her cubs, He will be prepared to defend His children.

Many verses scattered throughout the Bible reflect this metaphor. So, let's take a moment to evaluate the Lord, our great Lion. Either directly called a Lion, or using the symbolism of rising up as one, He is the defender of Israel and the protector of His people. In Isaiah 28, the Lord is said to rise up and break out in His anger -

"For the bed is too short to stretch out *on*,

And the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself *in it*.

<sup>21</sup> For the LORD will rise up as *at* Mount Perazim,

He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—

That He may do His work, His awesome work,

And bring to pass His act, His unusual act.

<sup>22</sup> Now therefore, do not be mockers,

Lest your bonds be made strong;

For I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts,

A destruction determined even upon the whole earth." Isaiah 28

In Hosea 5, the Lord is likened to a lion to fight against His own people when they depart from Him -

“When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
And Judah *saw* his wound,  
Then Ephraim went to Assyria  
And sent to King Jareb;  
Yet he cannot cure you,  
Nor heal you of your wound.

<sup>14</sup> For I *will be* like a lion to Ephraim,  
And like a young lion to the house of Judah.  
I, *even I*, will tear *them* and go away;  
I will take *them* away, and no one shall rescue.

<sup>15</sup> I will return again to My place  
Till they acknowledge their offense.  
Then they will seek My face;  
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.” Hosea 5:13-15

However, in Hosea 11 the Lord is likened to a lion who will roar for His people, re-gathering them to the land of Israel -

“They shall walk after the LORD.  
He will roar like a lion.  
When He roars,  
Then *His* sons shall come trembling from the west;  
<sup>11</sup> They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt,  
Like a dove from the land of Assyria.  
And I will let them dwell in their houses,  
Says the LORD.” Hosea 11

In Joel 3, speaking of the tribulation period of the future, we get a hint as to the ferocity of the Lord -

“The LORD also will roar from Zion,  
And utter His voice from Jerusalem;  
The heavens and earth will shake;  
But the LORD will be a shelter for His people,  
And the strength of the children of Israel.” Joel 3:16

And finally, we see that the Lord, Jehovah of the Old Testament, is the Lord Jesus revealed in the New. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is given the scroll to open -

"But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." Revelation 5:5

Jacob has prophesied over Judah in words which point directly to the Messiah. Time and again, his prophecies have echoed throughout history and have alighted on the Lion of the tribe of Judah, our Lord Jesus.

*They shall walk after the Lord  
He will roar like a lion at that time  
When he roars, as the Bible does record  
Then His sons shall come to a land sublime*

*They shall come trembling from Egypt like a bird  
And from the land of Assyria like a dove  
And He will let them dwell in their houses  
Because He is the covenant keeping God of love*

## **II. Until Shiloh Comes (verse 10)**

**<sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah,**

The scepter is the symbol of rule and authority. This was prophesied by Jacob as ultimately going to Judah and staying there. Judah would be the predominate tribe and the ruling tribe. Eventually, the term "Judah" became synonymous with "Israel." To Judah was given the rule and the acknowledgment of that rule is in the scepter.

**<sup>10 (con't)</sup> Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,**

Most modern versions say "ruler's staff" instead of lawgiver. The idea is that the ruler would rest his staff between his feet while sitting on his throne. The older versions, saying lawgiver, implies that a line of lawgivers

would descend from Judah. The symbolism of procreation being intended when it says "between his feet."

In the end, they have the same meaning. The scepter is the symbol of rule and so whether it is a person or a thing being spoken of, the idea of rule is what is being conveyed. This rule would continue on, unabated in Judah until a specific point in time...

<sup>10</sup> (con't) **Until Shiloh comes;**

The word Shiloh is understood by almost every scholar, Jewish and Christian alike, to be speaking of the coming Messiah. The exact meaning of the word Shiloh is debated, and it could even be a play on several words. It is from the same root as *shalah*, which is "peace." But it may also be a play on words from a verse used in Ezekiel 21:27 -

"Overthrown, overthrown,  
I will make it overthrown!  
It shall be no *longer*,  
Until He comes whose **right** it is,  
And I will give it *to Him*." Ezekiel 21:27

Shiloh would then mean "that which belongs to him." It is the right to rule which is mentioned in the scepter and in the lawgiver. If it is a pun, then it is speaking both of the Prince of Peace mentioned in the famous passage of Isaiah 9:6, and also of the true Lawgiver, mentioned in Isaiah 33:22, which says -

"(For the LORD *is* our Judge,  
The LORD *is* our Lawgiver,  
The LORD *is* our King;  
He will save us)..." Isaiah 33:22

And so a dual meaning is probable. Both speak of Christ the Lord. And we see this in Paul's writings. In Ephesians 2, he calls Christ our peace and in Galatians 3, he says this about Him and the law -

"What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. <sup>20</sup> Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one." Galatians 3:19, 20

Judah was the lawgiver until the true Lawgiver came from Judah.

<sup>10</sup> (con't) **And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.**

This is speaking of Shiloh, not Judah. However, because Jesus descends from Judah, it in essence still applies to him as well, but in a more splendid form than before. It is to Christ Jesus, of the tribe of Judah, to whom the obedience of the people will come. Everything so far has pointed to the work of God in Christ. It is all about Jesus.

### **III. The Blood of Grapes (verses 11, 12)**

<sup>11</sup> **Binding his donkey to the vine,**

In the land of Judah, vines were more than in great abundance, as they are again today. So much so that a donkey could be tied to them almost anywhere. This then shows the immense productivity and fruitfulness of the land where Judah would dwell.

<sup>11</sup> (con't) **And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,**

The "choice vine" is literally "the vine of Sorek." It has a purple berry without any seeds and it is highly valued. And yet, it would be so common that that the donkey's colt would be tied to it. As these words are given by the Spirit through Jacob, it asks us to look at what their ultimate fulfillment is.

The same terms for donkey and donkey's colt are used in Zechariah 9:9 which speak of the coming Messiah -

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your King is coming to you;  
He *is* just and having salvation,  
Lowly and riding on a donkey,  
A colt, the foal of a donkey." Zechariah 9:9

But even the vine has a fulfillment in Him. In John 15, Jesus calls Himself the "true Vine." Under the law, donkeys are considered unclean animals and thus they represent the gentiles - impure and ignorant of spiritual matters and yet we are tied to the true Vine, Jesus, by faith.

11 (con't) **He washed his garments in wine,**

In the land of Judah, wine would be so common, it could be used like water for the most ordinary purpose, even washing clothes.

11 (con't) **And his clothes in the blood of grapes.**

Next Jacob prophesies that he would wash his clothes in the blood of grapes.

In this seemingly odd parallel thought, there is again a prophetic fulfillment. In Jesus, we have both a Kinsman Redeemer and an Avenger of blood. Both terms come from the same Hebrew word, *goel*. As our Kinsman Redeemer, Christ put on garments of flesh and became like us in His human nature.

He, in fact did wash his clothes (His flesh) in His own blood, becoming entirely red in His apparel, from head to foot in order to redeem us. His bloody garment became our righteousness. And Christ is also our Avenger of blood. In Isaiah 63, we see His work as the Avenger of His people -

"Who *is* this who comes from Edom,  
With dyed garments from Bozrah,  
This *One who is* glorious in His apparel,  
Traveling in the greatness of His strength?—  
'I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.'

<sup>2</sup> Why *is* Your apparel red,  
And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?

<sup>3</sup> I have trodden the winepress alone,  
And from the peoples no one *was* with Me.  
For I have trodden them in My anger,  
And trampled them in My fury;  
Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments,  
And I have stained all My robes." Isaiah 63:1-3

In His return at the end of the tribulation period, we see the fulfillment of this verse from Isaiah realized in Jesus -

"He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." Revelation 19:13

Again as with each set of parallel thoughts, the ultimate fulfillment of these verses is found in the majestic work of Jesus Christ.

<sup>12</sup> **His eyes *are* darker than wine,**

The word "darker" here is used only this once in the Bible. Some translate it as "sparkling," "beautiful," "bright," or "red." The idea given here is a richness of the eye from enjoying the pleasure's of life given by God. It is a state of health and contentment.

<sup>12</sup> (con't) **And his teeth whiter than milk.**

Again, teeth which are whiter than milk implies health and strength. Such teeth belong to the prosperous and well fed, not the poor or underfed. There is a bountiful blessing pronounced upon Judah in this parallel description.

And again, this points to the work of the Messiah. In Him, there is eternal health, abundance, wholeness, and blessing. In Christ there is the free enjoyment of the good things of life which well up into everlasting contentment. Isaiah speaks of this, using the same elements, wine and milk

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“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,  
Come to the waters;  
And you who have no money,  
Come, buy and eat.  
Yes, come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without price.  
<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread,  
And your wages for *what* does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good,  
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.  
<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to Me.  
Hear, and your soul shall live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—  
The sure mercies of David.” Isaiah 55:1-5

In the witness of the stars of heaven that God set in place, Judah is represented by the sign Leo, “the strong lion.” In the heavens, Leo's feet are over the head of Hydra, the great serpent as if descending on it to crush it. A celestial battle reminiscent of the Messiah crushing the serpent's head is seen in this depiction.

Between the feet of Leo is the star Regulus, which means "regal" or "kingship." In verse 10 it said that the scepter would not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh comes.

In an amazing heavenly display, on 17 February 2 BC, the Moon was positioned between Jupiter and Regulus. At 5am, looking at the western horizon, the moon would have been covering up the star Regulus with the lower fifth of it's diameter.

Then 82 days later, on May 8/9th the same conjunction occurred again. This time moon covered up Regulus by the top one fifth of its diameter. In essence, the lawgiver departed from between the feet of Leo. Thus, it was a heavenly sign that the Messiah had arrived.

Again, as in last week's blessings upon Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, everything points ultimately to Jesus Christ, even to the point that the stars

themselves witness to His glory. It is all about Jesus Christ because it is He who reveals the unseen Father to us.

In Him, we see the heart of God who longs to have a relationship with us, but this isn't possible without Jesus. Only He can restore the relationship that was broken between God and man so long ago.

**Closing Verse:** "And it will come to pass in that day That the mountains shall drip with new wine, The hills shall flow with milk, And all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord And water the Valley of Acacias." Joel 3:18

**Next Week:** Genesis 49:13-18 (The Blessing Upon Zebulun, Issachar, and Dan) (125th Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

### **The Praise of His Brothers**

When Jacob blessed Judah his son  
He made him ruler over the tribes of Israel  
A praise among his brothers  
As his prophetic words did foretell

But these words also affect each of us  
His blessing upon Judah was spoken thus:

“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.  
Binding his donkey to the vine,  
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,  
He washed his garments in wine,  
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.  
His eyes are darker than wine,  
And his teeth whiter than milk.

Like all of the Bible, the words point to Jesus  
As the Spirit of God, carried Jacob along  
Giving out clues of the coming Messiah to us  
Words which now fill our heart with song

In Christ we see the beauty of the plan of God  
And in Christ we see His hand upon the ages  
When in this difficult world we trod  
We can contemplate the beauty revealed in the Bible's pages  
There we find God's written and precious word  
Recorded to give us hope, joy, and strength  
It is truly a precious perfect sword  
Given to carry us through life's length

Thank You, O God, for Your superior word  
This gift which reveals Jesus our Lord

Hallelujah and Amen...