

October 7, 2007 (LS)

**THE KING OF THE BEASTS  
GENESIS 49.8-12**

**Summary:** *Judah is blessed to rule the house of Israel (and, by extension, the world) with all of the privileges that come with that position. But those privileges are not for himself alone but for the sake of those he rules.*

**D JUDAH: THE KING OF BEASTS (8-12)**

**“Praise” for his dominion (8):** Word to Judah is two sections marked by the use of his name (vv. 8 & 9). This with the length of the passage contributes to his exaltation over his brothers (cp. Joseph).

Three phrases in v. 8. The first and last are parallel and the middle forms the heart of the structure.

*Judah as ‘praise.’* Judah = praise. Realized at birth (cf. 29.35; Leah, “I will now praise YHWH.”). He is living up to his name.

*His brothers will praise him.* This is explained in the parallel line as his brothers (‘father’s children’) bowing down before him.

This has to do with his assumption of the rule in the house of Israel. Judah will be the king in Israel. This will wait to be fulfilled for ten generations when David becomes king when all brothers bow before him (cf. Ruth 4.18-22; cp. Deut 23.2; and 2 Sam 5)

An image-bearing king takes dominion over his enemies. Judah will have his hand on the neck of his enemies. (*Hand* might be a play on words with Judah in Hebrew.)

The hand “grasps,” or takes power over something. Cf. David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17 (esp. v. 57, “in his hand”)

**Promise of continued dominion (9-10):** several images relating to Judah’s rule.

**The lion:** The king of beasts; cf. Prov 30.30

Connection between animals and humans evident from the beginning. We learn about who we are and what we are to be doing (in some respects) from the animals. Cf. Gen 2 where Adam learns about his “alone” condition from watching the animals.

Mathews: “Three of seven Hebrew words for ‘lion’ appear in this single verse. There may be a sense of movement or growth by Judah in the verse by the change in lion imagery from a young ‘cub’ (*gur*) to a ‘lion’ (*aryeh*).”

Judah begins here as a lion’s cub or whelp. Means that Jacob/Israel is a lion. (Note “my son”) What is true about each of these sons is true about Israel as a whole in some respect. Cf. Num 23.24; 24.8

Just as Israel as a nation was a priestly nation but had specific priests, so Israel will also be a kingly nation with a specific king. That king will come from the tribe of Judah.

But again, there is a movement, a progression, a maturing as a lion. He moves from a cub to becoming a full grown lion who conquers the prey and rules. So it will be in Israel.

**“Crouching” lion over the prey:** “Who is his prey?” Prey = enemies (v. 8).

A lion that “bows/stoops” and “crouches.” Allusion back to Genesis 4 and the offerings of Cain and Abel. Cain’s rejected. Abel’s accepted. Cain becomes angry. 4.7, “If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is **crouching** at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

Sin *crouching* at the door seems to refer to the serpent who is on his belly at the door of the Garden. If the Garden is to be re-entered, the serpent must literally be mastered/conquered. Cain’s responsibility as firstborn is to take dominion over the serpent.

“He lies down” (v. 9) is the same word used in Gen 4.7 translated “crouching.” Judah is now the one crouching at the door having conquered the serpent. He is the king of beasts!

Partially fulfilled in the arrangements of the tribes around the tabernacle—the new Garden—later in their history. Judah is positioned on the east side, or at the door, of the Tabernacle. Cf. Num 2.3.

Who shall rouse him? - Who will oppose him and make him angry? You don't want to make the Lion angry.

**The scepter** (v. 10): The scepter may have an allusion back to the time when Judah gave up his staff (a different word but conceptually linked) to Tamar (ch. 38).

Judah willingly handed over his rule to what he believed to be a Gentile prostitute. But now, through his repentance, he has been given his staff back, and an even greater staff. And this scepter will not depart from the line/house of Judah.

“nor a lawgiver from between his feet” - The “between the feet” reference seems to be referring to progeny. I.e., children come from “between the feet” (which can also be a euphemism for private parts in Scripture).

“until Shiloh comes” - various possibilities for translation. (1) Shiloh as a place name (i.e., where the tabernacle resided for a long time). This is least likely.

(2) Break up the Hebrew word into two words so that it is translated “until tribute comes to him” (NRSV; ESV). This doesn't really mess with the text and is quite plausible.

(3) Different reading from other texts. Other translations and manuscripts have “until he comes to whom it [i.e., the scepter] belongs.” Theologically acceptable, but on shaky textual ground.

(4) “Shiloh” is a Messianic title. Ancient Jewish commentators accepted this. Problem: Shiloh is never mentioned elsewhere explicitly with Messiah. The Hebrew root *-l-h-* creates all sorts of word plays. *Shelah*, son of Judah. Solmon (Heb. *shelomo*) also has affinity with this root.

Messiah = true Shelah and true Solomon. He is the one whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (Dan 4.3, 34; 7.14, 27). Of the increase of his government there will be no end (Isa 9.7). He will rule from the River to the ends of the earth (Ps 72.8).

#### **Spoils of dominion (11-12):**

**Donkeys and vines:** The donkey is a regal animal. It is the animal that carries kings. That fact is established right here.

David has a mule (“half-donkey”) upon which he rides and also upon which Solomon is declared to be king (1Kgs 1.33ff.). The donkey, as a lowly beast of burden, is the true king's mount.

“Bound/tied” to the vine. Sign of wealth (?). Possibly. Only a wealthy man wouldn't care that his donkey ate the grapes and vine.

Vine/Choice Vine = Israel (cf. Isa 5.1ff.; Ps 80). The vine is also the son (Ps 80). Judah's regal mount is tied to Israel. Judah rules in Israel; i.e., he rules the sons of Israel.

One will come who will untie the donkey and ride it. **Mark 11:2**, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. **Untie** it and bring it.” The entrance of the king into Jerusalem.

**Wine and milk:** Wine = product of dominion. Wine = rest (cp. Noah)

Washing garments/clothes in wine/blood of grapes. Abundance, yes. But also mission/responsibility of the king.

Clothing matches vocation. Your clothes “glorify” you. Images God. God clothes himself with the beautiful Tabernacle and has his servants/image-bearing priests clothed in glory and beauty. Part of the vocation.

Judah's garments are washed in wine/the blood of grapes. The vine produces grapes from which the wine comes. The vine, who is also the son, must be crushed, his garments/his glory washed in blood. Cp. Rev 19.13ff.

Eyes = instruments of judgment/discernment. Teeth = instruments of execution of judgment.

(1) Jesus Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has conquered the enemy.

(2) Our kingly status is a privilege and a calling to give ourselves in sacrifice for others.