

The Source of the Royal-Messianic Theme:

Genesis 49:8-12

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A Paper

Presented to

Jan Verbruggen, PhD

Western Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

OT 660—Messiah in the Old Testament

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April 3, 2022

## Introduction

Claus Westermann comments that for a passage to be messianic, it must involve the promise of a king who brings salvation in the latter days. Yet when it comes to Genesis 49:8-12, Westermann rejects a messianic reading because the only criterion that is met is “the coming of a future king.” He rather contends that the events of Genesis 49 specifically involve “the historical reality under David and Solomon.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, to Westermann, Genesis 49:8-12 cannot be viewed as a messianic passage.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Westermann is Kevin Chen who notes that although David and Solomon achieved several things promised to Judah in Genesis 49:8-12, David and Solomon did not do these things in *the latter days* and therefore must be disqualified from discussions of fulfillment.<sup>3</sup> Also in contrast to Westermann, and writing a century prior, David Baron remarks, “that all antiquity agrees in interpreting it of a personal messiah.”<sup>4</sup> He makes this conclusion by citing LXX, Onkelos, Jonathan, Jerusalem, other ancient rabbinic sources and Rashi, who identifies Shiloh with the messianic king.

Messianism in the Book of Genesis is a subject of great debate; however, that debate is largely limited to the last century. Genesis 3:15 and 49:8-12 are the center of that debate. Is God promising some form of eschatological reality or a struggle between humanity and animals? Are we to believe Jacob actually uttered these words without any knowledge of the future Davidic dynasty that would rise from his lineage or that this was added later in Israel’s history to legitimate Solomonic sovereignty?<sup>5</sup> While this paper is limited to Genesis 49:8-12, its connection to 3:15 is unavoidable. I intend to argue in the direction of Baron that Genesis 49:8-

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<sup>1</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1986) 230-232.

<sup>2</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip Satterthwaite, Richard Hess, and Gordon Wenham (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1995) 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2019) 115.

<sup>4</sup> David Baron, *Rays of Messiah’s Glory* (Jerusalem: Yanetz Ltd., 1886) 258.

<sup>5</sup> Kent Sparks, “Genesis 49 and the Tribal List Tradition in Ancient Israel.” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 115, no.3 (2003) 330-331.

12 is (1) a summary of the Meta-Narrative of Joseph, (2) the culmination of the messianic hope in Genesis, and (3) one of the primary sources for the development of the royal messianic hope in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible.

To make this argument, I will outline the debates surrounding the translation of two key words/phrases from Genesis 49:10, as these two tend to direct the interpretation one takes for the remainder of the passage.<sup>6</sup> I will then walk through thematic connections with other Pre-Joseph passages from Genesis. This will set the stage for seeing Judah's blessing as modeled after the larger story (meta-narrative) of Joseph *from Jacob's perspective*. This meta-narrative will affect how we interpret the passage. While others have seen this meta-narrative component as a reason to view Judah's blessing as ironic or a curse, I will suggest that this solidifies the blessing as positive, in contrast with the previous three brothers who are cursed. After this, I will walk through thematic connections with later messianic passages in the Hebrew Bible (HB) and New Testament (NT) that I contend use Genesis 49:8-12 as a messianic *source*.

## **Translating *Shiloh* and *Ad-Kee***

### *1. Shiloh*

There are no fewer than six positions for translating this critical word from Gen. 49:10.

The first position, argued by Hengstenberg and Atkinson, is that Shiloh is a seed-form reference to what will be revealed as the Prince of Peace. This view relies on an emendation from the Akkadian word for "prince," but also rifts off the shared identification of the root word

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<sup>6</sup> While there are other difficult words/phrases worth noting, space restraints preclude me. I have observed, however, that the translation one takes for *Shiloh* and *ad-kee* largely directs how they translate/interpret the other issues in the passage. This is why I have chosen just these two.

with Shalom and Solomon. Hengstenberg offers up other passages where the messianic age is marked by peace.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Shiloh is a reference to the *pacifying* effect of the messiah.<sup>8</sup>

The second position is that *Shiloh* should be understood as a place wherein the presence of God resided prior to Jerusalem. However, what the passage strongly suggests is permanent or final is deemed as temporary by this position.<sup>9</sup> This is ultimately why Steiner believes this position has been abandoned.<sup>10</sup>

The third position is that we should emend *Shiloh* in order for it to refer to Shelah, the son of Judah. This position is propagated by Pseudo-Jonathan and by John Calvin. Later in this study, I will walk through the need to see Judah's blessing as a recapitulation of Joseph's meta-narrative from Jacob's perspective. This third view comes into that discussion from authors that see an ironic twist rather than a blessing. Like his three older brothers, '*Shiloh*' (if taken to mean *Shelah*) is an embarrassing reference to Judah's sexual impropriety with Tamar, which inadvertently satisfied the levirate duty of his youngest son Shelah who Judah withheld from Tamar.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth position is to translate *Shiloh* as "tribute comes to him." This is the position of Alter, Alexander, Abernethy and Goswell.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Alter, this position has its roots in

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<sup>7</sup> Ps. 72; Zech. 9:10; Jer. 23:6; Isa. 9:5; 11

<sup>8</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1970) 30; Basil F. C. Atkinson, *The Pocket Commentary of the Bible: Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957) 430.

<sup>9</sup> Baron, 260; J. P. Peters, "Jacob's Blessing." *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* 6 (1886) 105.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Steiner, "Poetic Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization and Three Difficult Phrases in Jacob's Blessing." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 2 (2010) 219.

<sup>11</sup> Edwin M. Good, "The 'Blessing' on Judah, Gen 49 8-12." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82, no. 4 (1963) 429; Charles Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfillment of Redemption through the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988) 95-96.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1: The Five Books of Moses Torah: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) 195; W. L. Moran, "Gen 49,10 and its Use in Ez 21,32." *Biblica* 39, no. 4 (1958) 412; Nahum Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 336-337.

“the Middle Ages, which breaks up the word ‘Shiloh’ and vocalizes it differently as *Shai lo*.”<sup>13</sup> Identifying the unexpressed subject is a point of debate.<sup>14</sup> Does tribute come to him, as in the wielder of the scepter or does tribute come to the scepter itself. The grammar leads toward the latter. Kaiser ultimately rejects this position because one is forced to identify the unexpressed subject broadly as the tribal scepter rather than specifically as an individual (and eschatological) Judahite.<sup>15</sup>

The fifth position is to translate *Shiloh* as the name of the Messiah. In opposition to this position, Charles Briggs suggests this is a 16<sup>th</sup> century invention with little exegetical support. He said, “All the ancient versions and interpretations take a different view of the form.”<sup>16</sup> However, as mentioned in the introduction, Rashi held this view.<sup>17</sup> Moore, a modern Jewish scholar, suggests that the early designation of Shiloh as a messianic name follows a pattern of other early rabbis crafting names for messiah close to their own. He suggests that messiah as “Shiloh” was crafted by Rabbi R. Shela and thus should not be taken seriously.<sup>18</sup> Cohen, another modern Jewish scholar, provides others examples of this naming phenomena mentioned by Moore, but contrary to Moore, Cohen says it was an appropriate and normal practice. Moreover, Targum Onkelos, Babylonia, and Jerusalem (which date in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) refer to Messiah as “Shiloh.”<sup>19</sup> So Briggs assessment that this is a 16<sup>th</sup> century invention is simply incorrect. Lastly, while Kaiser himself translates “Shiloh” in the position that follows, he does

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<sup>13</sup> Alter, 194.

<sup>14</sup> Moran, 409.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 51.

<sup>16</sup> Briggs, 95.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Smyth, “The Prophecy Concerning Juda: Gen. 49:8-12.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1945) 299.

<sup>18</sup> George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: Volume 2* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975) 348-349.

<sup>19</sup> Abraham Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1949) 347.

recognize the supplied “he” associated with Shiloh to be a “cryptic but shorthand” reference to the Messiah’s identity/name.<sup>20</sup>

The sixth position, and the one I take, is to translate *Shiloh* as “he, to whom it belongs, comes.” This view follows closely the LXX reading, and is held by Briggs, Kaiser, and Sailhamer.<sup>21</sup> Atkinson questions the validity of using the LXX since it relies on an emendation of the MT.<sup>22</sup> However, note that Atkinson holds the first position above, which itself relies on an emendation to an Akkadian term to reach his own conclusion. His critique against the use of emendation is therefore surprisingly unwarranted. Due to the ambiguity with this word and passage, there is emendation all around. The position that requires no emendation is that which refers to *Shiloh* as a place/city, the position Steiner noted has been abandoned. Kaiser remarks that there are 38 Hebrew manuscripts that read the ambiguous nature of the passage in this way, confirming its strength and viability.<sup>23</sup> The rendering, “...he, to whom it belongs, comes...” relies more heavily than the other on intertextual connections to strengthen the likelihood of this position.

We will touch on some of these intertextual connections in a later section; however, one is worth noting now, as it pertains to two different directions one could take with Genesis 49:8-12 under this third view. Briggs and Kaiser both rely heavily on Ezekiel 21:26-27, which parallels thematically and in syntax:

“This is what the LORD God says: Remove the turban, and take off the crown. Things will not remain as they are; exalt the lowly and bring down the exalted. A ruin, a ruin, I will make it a ruin! Yet this will not happen *until he comes*; I have given the judgment *to him*.”

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<sup>20</sup> Kaiser, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Briggs, 94; Kaiser, 51; John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 235.

<sup>22</sup> Atkinson, 430.

<sup>23</sup> Kaiser, 51.

So what is the eschatological Judahite to inherit? Briggs sees Messiah's inheritance as the Promised Land whereas Kaiser sees it as "dominion over the world."<sup>24</sup> While there are certainly allusions to the Promised Land in Genesis 49:11-12 that should not be ignored, the word central to the debate in v. 10 is more closely linked with the scepter. Therefore, with Kaiser, the "him" to which it belongs is the eschatological Judahite wielding the scepter, and the "that which belongs" is the scepter-wielder's dominion over Israel that extends to the ends of the earth.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. *Ad-Kee*

There are four recognizable positions on how to translate *ad kee* in Gen. 49:10.

The first is a carryover position from the sexual-irony rendering of Shiloh (the third position in the *Shiloh* sub-section above). This position argues that in reminding Judah of his sexual impropriety by denying Tamar his son Shelah, whatever is promised here will take place *when* Er is given what is due to him, namely an heir by Shelah with Tamar.<sup>26</sup> But an heir *was* provided *prior* to this death-bed gathering—an heir by Judah himself. It is, however, one of those twins born to Tamar through whom David arises in the Judahite lineage; therefore, this view cannot be totally ignored, despite its deficiencies.<sup>27</sup>

The second position is that Judah will cease to be a tribe, but not until *after* Messiah comes. Hengstenberg argued for this because the genealogical records were destroyed in AD 70 along with the temple, thus precluding any messiahs after Jesus from claiming and confirming

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<sup>24</sup> Kaiser, 51; Briggs, 94-96.

<sup>25</sup> Gilmore Guyot, "Messianism in the Book of Genesis." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1951) 420.

<sup>26</sup> Calum Carmichael, "Some Sayings in Genesis 49." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4 (1969) 439; Sebastien Doane, "An Ass in a Lion's Skin: The Subversion of Judah's Hegemonic Masculinity in Genesis 38." *Postscripts* 11, no. 2 (2020) 242.

<sup>27</sup> Good, 430; Philip Culbertson, "Blessing Jacob's Sons, Inheriting Family Myths" *Sewanee Theological Review* 37, no. 1 (1993) 70.

Judahite origin. Thus after Jesus came, Judah ceased from begin a tribe. In other words, the scepter *will* depart from Judah, and *did* depart from Judah, but not *until* the “Shiloh” came.<sup>28</sup>

The third position is that the tribe of Judah will be the one to receive royalty in the future, not then at the bedside. This is argued with the fact that it is Joseph who receives the birthright, and the seed continued through Ephraim until the kingdoms split. Atkinson argues for this because “the scepter of Israel...was given to David of Bethlehem, a member of the tribe of Judah, in whose house it remained until the nation was taken captive and lost its independence altogether. After that no king reigned till Christ came.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, “after assuming royal power at his ascension [Christ] would never relinquish it till he brings forth judgment unto victory.”<sup>30</sup> One of the strengths to this position is it relies more heavily than the others on the introductory comment by Jacob in Gen. 49:1 that he is speaking of things to occur in the latter days, and therefore sees this in an eschatological sense rather than an immediate-historical sense.<sup>31</sup> This position necessitates that the scepter *must* depart from Judah *prior* to the dawning of messiah at the time of the exile, which has led some to speculate that whatever is to be made of *Shiloh* in Gen. 49:10 actually occurred around 586 B.C.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth position, and the one that I take, is that there will be an unbroken Judahite rule *when* or *once* messiah comes to what belongs to him, namely global leadership. This is argued with the LXX, which swaps out the Hebrew *shebet* “scepter” with the Greek *archon* “leader,” suggesting Judah will never lack a leader. Kaiser argues that the *global* element of messiah’s reign necessitates the brokenness of Judah’s rule when messiah comes.<sup>33</sup> But we should not

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<sup>28</sup> Hengstenberg, 31-32.

<sup>29</sup> Atkinson, 429.

<sup>30</sup> Atkinson, 430.

<sup>31</sup> Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 325. Joel D. Heck, “A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no. 585 (1990) 20.

<sup>32</sup> Marco Treves, “Shiloh (Genesis 49:10.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 3 (1966) 354.

<sup>33</sup> Kaiser, 52.



conclude that the scepter will depart. Rather, when Shiloh comes, the unbroken succession of messiah's reign will at least culminate and continue on eternally (cf. later messianic prophecies, particularly 2 Sam. 7). Additionally, we have a similar syntax in Genesis 28:15. "Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you *until* I have done what I have promised you." Certainly this would not suggest that when God fulfills what he promised that he would no longer be with him.<sup>34</sup> Thus, with Varner, "The promise given in Genesis 49:10 is not that the scepter will depart from Judah, but that in Shiloh the scepter will reach its greatest glory and extent," namely over the nations.<sup>35</sup> There is ambiguity in Gen. 49:8-12 as to whether the royal lineage *prior* to the eschatological Judahite comes would be broken or not, or whether "the scepter will shine with equal glory at all times;"<sup>36</sup> but what is clear is that when messiah comes, then the reign of messiah would be unbroken. Whereas in the third position above, my critique was that it necessitates a broken dynasty; Genesis 49 does not necessitate a broken Judahite dynasty; rather, it merely allows for it.

### **Messianism from Adam to Jacob**

Before summarizing the messianic trajectory from Adam to Jacob, it is helpful to answer why such a summary is necessary. Alexander writes, "Given that the book of Genesis, as it has come down to us, is a continuous narrative, it is important to appreciate the overall picture which it portrays. Significantly, this picture is only constructed gradually."<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Chen, channeling Sailhamer, remarks that "a compositional approach to the Pentateuch treats every

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<sup>34</sup> Smyth, 295.

<sup>35</sup> William Varner, *Jacob's Dozen: A Prophetic Look at the Tribes of Israel* (Bellmawr: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1987) 33.

<sup>36</sup> Smyth, 294.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, 37.

passage as integral to the whole work.”<sup>38</sup> Smyth also helpfully remarks, “It must be kept in mind that [early Christian writers and Fathers] explain Old Testament prophecies not as isolated texts of Scripture, but as of one piece with all the other prophecies, taken both in their literal and typical senses.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, while we should expect what is presented in the beginning of Genesis to be repeated, we should also be able to see these initial expectations built upon and conclude with a more expansive vision for what the initial entailed.

The book of Genesis begins with the Edenic ideal for the world and humanity, which is broken almost immediately. In the aftermath of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, God curses the serpent and included in that curse is a promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). The pressing question for the writer of Genesis is tracing the trajectory and progressively defining the identity of this seed.

While Eve’s response to her birth of Cain may suggest she thought Cain was the seed, the events that soon transpired proved otherwise. However, Gen. 5:1-3 plainly continues this seed-lineage through Seth, from whom we reach Noah. In a thematic repeat of the Eden narrative, the seed-lineage is continued through Shem, from whom we reach Abram. Abram is called by God out of Babylon to begin a new humanity, and Abraham obeyed. God’s programmatic promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 involved the possession of a land, the procurement of seed; and that his seed would bless the nations. Aspects of this promise are repeated throughout Abraham’s life. In the blessing of Melchizedek, Abraham (who is portrayed as a king) is told his seed will possess their enemies (14:19-20); Abraham is told kings will come from his lineage (17:6); and after passing the Isaac-test God promises that Abraham’s seed will possess their enemies and bless the nations (22:17-18); thus casting a *royal* element onto this seed-lineage.

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<sup>38</sup> Chen, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Smyth, 304.

Yet Isaac was not the royal-seed, for God promised to Isaac's wife Rebekah that her offspring would possess their enemies (24:60), and tells Isaac himself that his offspring would bless the nations (26:4). God's promises to Abraham are yet in the future. Albeit through deception, Isaac blessed Jacob with words Jacob repeats to his own sons throughout Genesis 49. Isaac says that the sons of Jacob's mother would bow to him and, along with the nations, worship him. Isaac repeats the blessing/curse aspect of God's promise to Abraham (27:29). Moreover, God promises Jacob that his descendants will bless the nations, possess the Promised Land (28:13-18), and that kings would come from his lineage (35:11).

Tracing the trajectory of the seed from Adam to Jacob reveals a pattern of promises: 1) the seed appears to be an individual, not a collective, for Moses is less concerned with the genealogies of the children of the patriarchs who are *not* part of the seed-lineage; 2) the continuity of this seed-lineage is primarily dependent upon God himself who frequently opens the womb of barren mothers;<sup>40</sup> 3) the seed will be a king; 4) the royal seed will rule his own people; 5) the royal seed will be a source of blessing for the nations of the world; and 6) the royal seed will rule from the Promised Land.

Alexander summarizes, "Foremost among these [motifs] is the expectation of a divinely appointed king who will play a vital role in mediating God's blessing throughout the earth."<sup>41</sup> In the words of Guyot: "While the sons of Jacob were to be the progenitors of the messianic race, this does not mean that all were to participate equally in the messianic promises."<sup>42</sup> As the Jacob narrative concludes and Moses shifts to the final portion of Genesis, the question remains: from and through whom will the promise of royal lineage continue? "The text of Genesis reveals an

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<sup>40</sup> Alexander, 23; Gary Edward Schnittjer, "The Blessing of Judah as Generative Expectation." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177, no. 1 (2020) 18.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Guyot, 419.

anticipation of a royal seed descending from the patriarchs.”Although Joseph receives the birthright, it is indeed Judah who is the recipient of the royal promise, “as the progenitor of the future King Messiah in Jacob’s oracle.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, by the end of Genesis “we will see how kingship figures into God’s program for Eve’s offspring” fulfilling the creation mandate initially intended for Adam and Eve.<sup>44</sup> The mere seed of Eve has transformed into a royal seed for the nations.

### **Judah’s Blessing as a Summary of the Joseph Meta-Narrative**

Genesis 49:8-12 comes as the fourth blessing of Jacob to his sons. Sons 1-3 do not get blessed; rather they are cursed because of their sinful actions earlier in life related to sexual impropriety and violence. Judah, however, receives a positive blessing.<sup>45</sup> While the blessing of Judah has tremendous implications for the remainder of biblical history, we cannot ignore the significant place of Joseph. Joseph’s blessing is just as long, and Jacob is quite explicit that Joseph received the birthright (v. 26). This is further shown by Genesis 48 when Jacob first blesses Ephraim and Manasseh *in the place of* Reuben and Simeon (v. 5; cf. 1 Chron. 5:1-2).

Jacob gathers his sons around him so he can tell them what will take place in the latter days (49:1). Aside from Joseph receiving the birthright from Jacob, the implications of the blessings and curses are to be seen as taking place in the future and not necessarily contemporaneous to the utterance. In *Jubilees*, the entirety of Genesis 49 is summarized in a single verse: “Israel blessed his sons before he died and told them everything that would befall

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<sup>43</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, “Genesis 49:8-12” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Press, 2019) 281.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell, *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020) 14; Oren Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan* (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2015) 37.

<sup>45</sup> Chen, 139.

them in the land of Egypt; he made known to them what would come upon them *in the last days*, blessed them, and gave Joseph two portions in the land” (45:14).

Chen has shown in an extensive chart the inconsistencies with how the nine most prominent English translations of the Bible (KJV, ASV, JPS, RSV, NAS, NKJV, NIV, ESV, and CSB) render *be’akherit hayyamim* “latter days.” According to Chen, they almost exclusively translate with “latter days” the references *outside* of the Pentateuch (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1), and almost exclusively translate with less-eschatological language the references *inside* the Pentateuch (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29).<sup>46</sup> Within the book of Genesis itself, we begin with “in the beginning” and close with “in the latter days,” suggesting an intentional composition.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, “the prophecy was delivered by one who himself waited for the salvation of Jehovah (Gen. 28:18), and was distinctly announced by him as having reference to the last days, which...signifies the time of Messiah.”<sup>48</sup> The context of the *latter days* is a significant presupposition to understanding the messianic context of Genesis 49:8-12.

Jon Levenson writes, “The story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is not only the longest and most intricate Israelite exemplar of the narrative of the death and resurrection of the beloved son, but also the most explicit.”<sup>49</sup> A careful look will show the formulation of Judah’s blessing mirrors the Joseph meta-narrative *from Jacob’s perspective*.

Joseph, the youngest, is introduced as Jacob’s favorite son (37:3). Joseph had a dream and shared the dream with his brothers, in which his sheaf rose (Qal-Perfect *qum*) and the sheaf

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<sup>46</sup> Chen, 111.

<sup>47</sup> Chen, 113; Sailhamer 233; Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2008) 315.

<sup>48</sup> Baron, 260.

<sup>49</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 143.

of his brothers gathered around it to bow down to Joseph's sheaf (37:7). This was immediately interpreted by the brothers as referring to rulership (v. 8). After sharing another dream of an astrological nature, which also indicated rulership, we are told his father Jacob kept Joseph's dreams in his mind (v. 11).

The brothers, in a fit of jealous anger, desired to kill him. Judah, however, intervened, and suggested they sell Joseph into slavery to Ishmaelites who brought him to Egypt (v. 27). The brothers slaughtered a goat and dipped Joseph's stripped robe into the blood to deceive their father (v. 31). When they presented Joseph's bloody garment to Jacob, he exclaims that Joseph had been torn to pieces; devoured by an animal (v. 33). While others tried comforting him, Jacob believed Joseph was actually dead, declaring he had to go down to Sheol to be with his favorite son Joseph (v. 34-35). Joseph is presented to Jacob as dead, even though he actually was not.<sup>50</sup> The designation of "my son" is used by Jacob of only one son at a time, and always Joseph with the exception of when Jacob believes Joseph is dead; then the designation is passed to Benjamin (42:38). But when Joseph is revealed to be alive, Jacob reverts back and refers only to Joseph with the "my son" designation (45:28).<sup>51</sup>

After Joseph is revealed to the brothers later in the narrative, how they report the news back to their father is also significant: "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler (*mashal*) over all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned, for he did not believe them (45:26). "By opening the Joseph story with the motif of rulership (37:8) and then reintroducing it at these climactic moments (45:8, 26), the narrative directs us to conceptualize Joseph's journey in light of an unexpected ascent to rulership under God's sovereign guidance."<sup>52</sup> This is the death and resurrection

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<sup>50</sup> Carmichael, 442; Good, 429.

<sup>51</sup> Chen, 131.

<sup>52</sup> Abernethy and Goswell, 17.

narrative Levenson refers to. The question still remains: Why then is Joseph not the one to receive the royal-seed-lineage?

As previously mentioned, sons 1-3 are sidestepped for any positive blessings due to sexual impropriety and violence, both of which Judah was personally guilty as well. This has caused some to see in Genesis 49:8-12 in a negative sense. Edwin Good writes, “The whole ‘blessing’ on Judah turns out to be an ironic reflection on Judah’s misdeeds in two earlier incidents, and that in its turn casts a certain irony over the laudatory wordplay of vs. 8.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Carmichael remarks that “surely...Judah is regarded by Jacob as the wild beast who tore Joseph... The Laudatory nature of the saying is thus ironical.”<sup>54</sup> Even Robert Alter says the grammar for v. 9b “could be construed as ‘from the prey *of* my son, you mounted,’ introducing a shadow reference to Judah’s leading part in the plan to pass off Joseph as dead.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, Alter agrees that there is some irony present in Judah’s blessing, and thus suggests the “my son” in Genesis 49:8-12 is *Joseph* not Judah.

However, considering the explicit references to the misdeeds to Judah’s three previous brothers, and considering Judah’s own misdeeds of a similar nature, it would be strange for Jacob to continue cursing a fourth son in a different way than he cursed the previous three.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, aside from Joseph, Judah is the most prominently featured brother in Genesis 37-50, and the various events he is involved in suggest a character formation in the realm of righteous rulership.<sup>57</sup> Despite Judah’s involvement in the violent humiliation of Joseph, he is nonetheless the brother who saved Joseph from death. Ironically, another brother made the suggestion but it wasn’t until Judah made it that the brothers obliged (Gen. 37). Despite Judah’s involvement in

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<sup>53</sup> Good, 432.

<sup>54</sup> Carmichael, 439.

<sup>55</sup> Alter, 194.

<sup>56</sup> Chen, 118.

<sup>57</sup> Contrary to this is the argument that there is no basis to talk about a transformation of character; Merrill, 280.

sexual impropriety with Tamar, he acknowledges his unrighteousness relative to Tamar's righteousness. His expression of repentance is something missing in the episodes of the other brothers' misdeeds (Gen. 38). When the brothers discovered their money and Joseph's silver cup were still in their bags—a test—they returned to Joseph. At their trial, it was *Judah* who represented the brothers in acknowledging their sin and need for justification. Joseph demanded the youngest brother—Jacob's new favorite—be made into a slave but Judah made an impassioned plea, in which he recalled the tearing to pieces of Joseph (v.28). Judah offered himself as a substitute for the younger brother (Gen. 44).<sup>58</sup> Portnoy similarly remarks, “Judah—the one who dreamed up the idea of selling his brother as a slave is now offering himself as a slave. It is in the character of Judah that the story of Joseph comes full circle, the exact meaning of the Hebrew word *tshuva*—to turn.”<sup>59</sup> Portnoy finds Jacob's elevation and identification of Judah as the one through whom the royal-seed-lineage would persist to be most substantially drawn from Judah's repentance and substitutionary offer in this final episode.

Although Joseph received the birthright, he did not receive the royal-seed-lineage. Joseph's blessing is just as many verses in English, but longer in total lines. But since Joseph's blessing—a total of 11 lines—is split between two tribes, the 9 lines given to Judah amount to a priority of Judah over Joseph in Genesis 49.<sup>60</sup> Genesis 49 predates the Levitical priesthood system, but certainly the priestly line that would come from Joseph is supported by the fact that Joseph received the *birthright*. “Jacob's blessings to his sons in Gen. 49 constitute a reformation

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<sup>58</sup> Smyth, 290-291.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall Portnoy, “The Lion, Judah.” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2011) 243.

<sup>60</sup> Merrill, 271.



of the patriarchal birthright, in which the leadership role was split into two.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, Jacob splits the roles of monarch and mediator between his two most prominent sons.

Two questions deserve our attention before moving to the next section. What, if anything, did Joseph fulfill? At the end of the previous section, I summarized the promises made to the patriarchs in six points: The seed would be an individual whose continuity of lineage is dependent wholly on God; this seed would rule as king over his own people in the Promised Land and be a source of blessing to the nations. The promises revealed at the beginning of the Joseph meta-narrative in his dreams were more simply that he would rule over and receive worship from his family. This was certainly expanded upon when Joseph rose to great power in Egypt, for to him the nations streamed to receive salvation. However, while this element of blessing the nations, which was missing from his dream, enabled Joseph to fulfill the contents of his dream (42:6), and while his rise to prominence was entirely at the doing of God (45:8; 50:20), Joseph did not rule as the sovereign ruler from the Promised Land. The Joseph meta-narrative therefore foreshadows what the eschatological reign of *Judah* would look like.<sup>62</sup>

The above has shown that the Joseph meta-narrative prefigures the eschatological reign of Judah, but it also prefigures *how* the eschatological Judahite will reign. The fact that Jacob uses the allusive designation “my son” in Judah’s blessing further shows that Judah’s blessing is modeled after the Joseph meta-narrative from Jacob’s perspective.<sup>63</sup> Although lions normally tear prey, the blessing suggests it is the *lion of Judah* that is torn to pieces itself as the prey.<sup>64</sup> Joseph’s dream about his sheaf arising above the rest of his family remained in his father’s mind

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<sup>61</sup> Geula Twersky, “Genesis 49: The Foundation of Israelite Monarchy and Priesthood.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 3 (2019) 329-333.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander, 36; Sailhamer, 235; Schnittjer, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Chen, 148.

<sup>64</sup> Chen, 130.

(37:11), which led to his father's pivotal question: "Who will raise him?" in Gen. 49:9.<sup>65</sup> While this answer is definitively answered later in the Pentateuch (as shown in the next section), the implied answer from the trajectory of Genesis is that God will raise him.<sup>66</sup> In view of the garment dipped in blood, "this arresting compositional connection suggests that 'Judah,' that is, the Messiah, will die a violent death, just as Jacob believed Joseph to have suffered," but also that God himself would raise this messianic Judahite in the latter days.<sup>67</sup>

Genesis 49:8-12, therefore, "forms an integral part of the overall picture being presented by the writer of Genesis. The king who will arise in the future from the tribe of Judah is clearly linked to the line of 'seed' that is traced throughout the book of Genesis. Through this king God's blessing will be mediated to those nations who accept his authority over them."<sup>68</sup> For Alexander, the key to interpreting Gen. 49:8-12 as messianic is the cohesiveness to the message of Genesis surrounding the 'Seed.' Only then does the trajectory elevate Gen. 49:8-12 to that of messianism.<sup>69</sup> While it would be surprising if the "suffering and death" portrayed in Gen. 3:15 were not picked up by later messianic prophecies, that fact does not preclude other material from being added.<sup>70</sup> For instance, the element of resurrection does not appear in Gen. 3:15. "Genesis 22:1-19 moves in this direction, but not with the clarity and force of Genesis 49:9."<sup>71</sup> Thus, the Joseph meta-narrative, after which Judah's blessing is textually and thematically modeled, provides the basis for seeing the eschatological Judahite as one who will suffer at the hands of his own people, die bloodily, and be raised from Sheol by God via ascension to unceasing power.

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<sup>65</sup> Chen argues convincingly for why the Hiphil-*Qum* question should be rendered in this way; 126.

<sup>66</sup> Chen, 129.

<sup>67</sup> Chen, 127-129, 134.

<sup>68</sup> Alexander, 36.

<sup>69</sup> Alexander, 36-38.

<sup>70</sup> Chen, 134.

<sup>71</sup> Chen, 135.

## Thematic Connections with Later Biblical Revelation

### 1. Continuing the Trajectory of the Royal-Seed-Lineage

Aside from the verbatim quotation of Gen. 49:9 in Num. 24:14, there are other elements of Balaam's "latter days" oracle that reflect the eschatological reality envisaged by Gen. 49:8-12. While referring to Israel's exodus from Egypt, Balaam speaks of an individual who is representative of the nation. This representative Israelite experiences military victory over his enemies. This is reminiscent of the eschatological Judahite having his hand on the neck of his enemies, a symbol of defeat (cf. Gen. 3:15). Similar to Gen. 49:9, the question asked in Num. 24:14, "Who will raise him?" is answered implicitly by the opening line from v. 8: God will raise him by bringing him out of Egypt. It is this individual who Balaam sees in the latter days, *not* in the immediate historical context. This individual is identified as a star, reminiscent to Joseph's second dream (37:9), further demonstrating Joseph's life to prefigure the eschatological Judahite. Lastly, while the shattering of the entrance of "forehead" of Moab is not specific to Gen. 49:8-12, it does suggest a connection with Gen. 3:15, which has already been shown to be connected with 49:8-12. Numbers 24 continues the trajectory of the royal-seed-lineage from Genesis by drawing connections between the promises to Abraham and Judah. The royal-seed of Abraham and of Judah are one in the same. What makes this instance particularly intriguing is that this is a seer without any personal regard for the God of Israel, so it is difficult to say whether Balaam *used* Gen. 49:8-12 as a source.<sup>72</sup> However, the combination of terms and themes, and the explicit repetition of a whole phrase make Numbers 24 unmistakably linked to Genesis 49.

While the allusions between Gen. 49:8-12 and Deut. 18:15, 18 are also minimal, there is one connection worth noting. Joseph's dream of a rising sheaf was seemingly made impossible

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<sup>72</sup> It could be said, however, that the Mosaic author had the intention of connecting these two eschatological poems from a compositional standpoint.

with his perceived death, leading Jacob to ask “Who will raise him?” in Gen. 49:9. Additionally, Balaam asks the same question in Num. 24:14. In both of these instances, the *implied* answer is God himself. As we saw in the Joseph meta-narrative, Joseph attributes his “rise” to power and salvation to God’s purposeful sovereignty rather than their evil misdeeds mixed with chance. Additionally, the one who raised the representative, ruling Israelite from Egypt was God through the exodus. This question twice repeated is definitively answered in Deut. 18. The one who *God* raises is the one to which the people must listen and *obey*.

In Galatians 3:16-19, Paul comments on the trajectory of the seed-lineage from Genesis. While Paul does not comment here on Gen. 3:15, we have already shown a connection between Gen. 3:15 and 12:1-3; the seed mentioned in both are one in the same. For our purposes, Paul first identifies the “seed” of Abraham and connects it to the Davidic messiah (Gal. 3:16; cf. 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89).<sup>73</sup> Prior to this passage, he reiterates that the messianic seed of Abraham would bring salvation to the nations, which Paul sees as fulfilled through the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles (v. 8). Second, in commenting on the purpose of the law, Paul identifies this messianic seed as the one who would come in a way that matches almost exactly the syntax of a common Greek variant of Gen. 49:10.<sup>74</sup> Gal. 3:16-19 is undoubtedly an allusion to Gen. 49:10, “until he, to whom it belongs, comes.” To what does this messianic seed come? The promise of Gentile salvation by faith (Gal. 3:14). That Paul uses Gen. 49:8-12 as a messianic source for interacting with God’s promises to Abraham earlier in Genesis has strong merit.

## 2. Judahite Rulership

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<sup>73</sup> J. Thomas Hewitt, “Ancient Messiah Discourse and Paul’s Expression in Galatians 3:19.” *New Testament Studies* 63, no. 3 (2019) 410; Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017) 86.

<sup>74</sup> Hewitt, 406.

The concept of a perpetual Judahite rulership or a dynasty is prevalent in the remainder of the HB. As we have already shown, the royal-seed-lineage was continued through Judah, even though Joseph was in fact given the birthright (1 Chron. 5:2; see also Ps. 60:7; 108:8). 1 Chron. 28:4-6 show David describing himself specifically as a *Judahite* king. The act of God *choosing* Judah to be the source of a never-ending kingship necessarily refers to Gen. 49:8-12 (cf. Ps. 78:67-72). Yet it is clear that David is not the *eschatological* Judahite king because integral to God's promise to David was that one would arise from David own body who would himself be God's beloved son; a son whose name shares similar consonants with the word *Shiloh*. The kingdom this individual occupies as ruler is a "forever" kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Moreover, the prophet Micah, after the days of David, foretells of one individual from an unexpected source *within Judah* who would rule all of Israel yet in the future. Pertinent to Gen. 49:8-12, this individual ruler of Israel from Judah would have victory over his enemies and extend blessing to the ends of the earth (Mic. 5:2-5, 8-9; see also Ps. 2:7-9; Amos 9:11-12; Acts 1:8).

*That* Judah will have rulership is a frequent hope reiterated throughout the HB. While interwoven in the above paragraph, one other point bears mentioning: the rulership of Judah is expected to extend *forever*. *In the midst of the exile*, Jeremiah prophesies that in days to come, God will raise up a Davidic king who will never cease from sitting on the throne of Israel (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-17; cf. Joel 3:20-21). While Gen. 49:8-12 does not explicitly speak about the duration of the reign of Shiloh, the rest of the HB suggests that Judahite rule would not immediately commence; however, once it did commence then it would remain unbroken.<sup>75</sup> The basis for this unbroken rulership, as shown above, is in God's specific *choice* of Judah, a concept sourced in Gen. 49:8-12.

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<sup>75</sup> Atkinson, 429.

### 3. Anticipation of One who Comes

As was noted above in Galatians 3, in Gen. 49:10 the central promise is about one who is coming. This is a designation repeated several times in Mark especially (13:26, 35; 14:62, etc.). Jesus is the one who was promised to come, *ho erchomai*.<sup>76</sup> We will begin this sub-section out of canonical order with Ezekiel 19 and 21 before touching on Isaiah 63 and more significantly Zechariah 9 and the corresponding triumphal entry passages from all four gospel accounts.

Ezekiel takes up a lament against the rulers of Israel, for they have proven themselves *not* to be who they should have been.<sup>77</sup> Their mother, a lioness “lay down among the lions...she brought up one of her cubs, and he became a young lion. After he learned to tear prey, he devoured people. When the nations heard about him, he was caught in their pit...” (19:3-4). In sadness, the lioness mother took another of her cubs but that cub when grown into a young lion did the same as the first, causing now the nations to surround them and take them off into exile (vs. 5-9). What God did for Israel was to set it up for success; it should have sprouted “scepters of rulers,” but it instead has been uprooted and re-planted in the wilderness to be burned (vs. 10-14). Ezekiel’s lament casts fundamental doubt on the future of Israel with their failed kings from Judah who should have ruled with their scepter. Instead, the rulers themselves are the captured lions. Ezekiel 19 is the clearest HB passage alluding to the “lion” that suggests the lion in Gen. 49:8-12 in fact died as the prey, as we suggested in a previous section.

This is continued two chapters later in Ezekiel 21, again speaking against the wicked ruler (v.25). God commands Zedekiah to remove the crown because of his wickedness, for he would not remain the king and would be made a ruin, but not quite yet. This would not happen *until he comes* to whom the execution of judgment against Israel rightfully belongs (vs.26-27).

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 1 (1961) 58.

<sup>77</sup> Moran, 423.

As noted previously, this verse is especially influential for *how* some render *Shiloh* in Gen. 49:10. Ezek. 21:27 has the closest syntactical parallel to Gen. 49:10. The fact that Ezekiel 21 comes so close after Ezekiel 19 with its intertextual connections to Gen. 49:8-12 of a lion who is torn to pieces and failing to wield the scepter satisfactorily makes Ezekiel 21 all the more likely to be alluding also to Gen. 49:8-12.<sup>78</sup> Seemingly in contrast with the previous subsection about the unceasing kingship of Judah, Ezekiel 19 and 21 show a broken Judahite dynasty.<sup>79</sup> However, we should not fail to also mention that after issuing these judgments, Ezekiel prophesies that God will restore the Davidic kingship (Ezek. 34).<sup>80</sup> We must therefore reject the view that Ezekiel intends for an ironic reversal of Gen. 49:8-12.<sup>81</sup> It is clear, however, that Gen. 49:8-12 is a messianic source for Ezekiel in both chapters 19 and 21. So while Ezekiel does portray Judahite kingship as broken, he does not portray it as everlastingly broken for the eschatological Judahite was still to come.

The theme of the one who comes is picked up by Isaiah who, in the aftermath of the penal-substitutionary death of the suffering servant (Isa. 53), portrays the servant who is powerful to save as one who is wearing bloody garments, and who identifies the bloodiness of his garments as the blood of his enemies, not his own (Isa. 63:1-3). The one who comes in Gen. 49:11 is one who washes (*kabash*) his garments in wine/grape blood, clearly an image for blood from conquering the “neck” of his enemies in Gen. 49:8, and the going up (*alah*) from the prey in Gen. 49:9. Both of these terms have priestly connotations to them; Isaiah’s use of Gen. 49 in relation to the servant who provides *atonement* is thus significant. While Gen. 49 makes no clear

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<sup>78</sup> Moran, 417.

<sup>79</sup> Daniel Block, “Bringing Back David: Ezekiel’s Messianic Hope” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip Satterthwaite, Richard Hess, and Gordon Wenham (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1995) 169-170

<sup>80</sup> Merrill, 282; Schnittjer, 27.

<sup>81</sup> Moran, 424; Serge Frolov, “Judah Comes to Shiloh: Genesis 49:10ba, One More Time.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012) 33; Jonathan Downing, “Southcottians and Shiloh: Genesis 49:10 and the Morphology of a Messianic Hope.” *J Bible Receipt* 3, no. 1 (2016) 63.

indication at whose blood the messiah washes his garments in, Isaiah 63 suggests it was the blood of his enemies.

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD” (Ps. 118:26a). The prophecy from Zechariah 9:9-13 regarding the anticipation of one to come riding on a donkey is an important one, as it is referenced in all four gospel accounts in the sense of direct fulfillment. While Matthew and Mark quote the above psalm in their respective narratives as it appears in the psalm, both Luke and John add the designation of “king,” to announce the “king who comes” rather than “he who comes.”<sup>82</sup> Implicit in this is the understanding that Psalm 118:26 refers to the same one of which Zech. 9:9-10 (and Gen. 49:8-12?) speak. For clarity’s sake, I will include the relevant parts of Zech. 9, Matt. 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12 before commenting.

“Behold, your righteous king is coming to you with salvation. He is lowly and riding on a [male] donkey; a [male] colt, the [male] foal of a [female] donkey... his dominion shall be...to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:9-10).

“You will find a [female] donkey tied and a [male] colt with her; untie and bring them to me... This then happened that it might be fulfilled as spoken by the prophet, saying... ‘Behold, your king comes to you, gentle and mounted on a [female] donkey; on a [male] colt; the [male] foal of a beast of burden...’ They brought the [female] donkey and the [male] colt; and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them” (Matt. 21:1-8).

“You will find a [male] colt tied upon which no man has yet sat; untie and bring it... They departed and found the [male] colt tied at the door outside by the street, and they untied it... They brought the [male] colt to Jesus and cast their cloaks upon it and he sat on it” (Mark 11:1-7).

“You will find a [male] colt tied upon which no man has ever sat; untie and bring it... Having departed, those who were sent found it just as he told them... They led it to Jesus and having cast their garments on the [male] colt they put Jesus on it” (Luke 19:26-35).

“Having found Jesus a [neuter] young donkey, he sat on it as it is written: ...behold, your king comes sitting on a [male] colt of a [female] donkey” (John 12:14-15).

I have added the gender of the donkey(s) as they have appeared in these five passages, because there is an apparent discrepancy, specifically in Matthew’s account, that is not easily

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<sup>82</sup> Blenkinsopp, 59.



glossed over with the simply fulfillment of Zechariah afforded by the author. “In mentioning two animals Matthew not only differs from the Hebrew and the Greek text of Zech. 9:9 but also from the tradition that is embodied in the other Gospels.”<sup>83</sup> However, this apparent discrepancy can be resolved by seeing the fulfillment as a conflation of the prophecies of Zechariah 9 and Genesis 49:10-11, which describes the messianic king who comes on the [male] colt] of his [female] donkey. Weren introduces the problem, writing that “the origin of the citation from Zech. 9:9 in Matt. 21:5 has not been conclusively answered.”<sup>84</sup> Blenkinsopp sees reason to see the “untying” as a separate messianic sign from the “ride” referred to in Zechariah, which leads him to ask: “What oracle?”<sup>85</sup> Menken believes the question can be answered by consulting other Scripture passages involving two donkeys; but this inquiry leads him to 2 Sam. 16:1-4 since it also takes place on a mountain like the episode just before Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup> For Blenkinsopp, Weren, and Ferda, the answer is more clearly Genesis 49:11, which not only solves the issue of two animals, but also the issue of those animals’ gender.<sup>87</sup> Ferda remarks that it is a common interpretive tool for biblical writers to conflate multiple related messianic prophecies and yet give only one reference.<sup>88</sup> Kostenberger also remarks that clustering two HB references together is “in keeping with Jewish exegetical practice.”<sup>89</sup>

If this is the case that Genesis 49:11 is a messianic source for Zechariah 9:9 and supplemental background to the gospel writers, then “we have a case in which an intertext has

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<sup>83</sup> W. J. C. Weren, *Studies in Matthew’s Gospel* (Boston: Leiden, 2014) 174.

<sup>84</sup> Weren, 165.

<sup>85</sup> Blenkinsopp, 56.

<sup>86</sup> Maarten Menken, “The Quotations from Zech 9, 9 in Mt 21, 5 and in Jn 12, 15” in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. By Adelbert Denaux (Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 574-575.

<sup>87</sup> Weren, 176; Tucker Ferda, “Doubling Down: Zechariah’s Oracle, Judah’s Blessing, and the Triumphal Entry in Matthew.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2020) 495.

<sup>88</sup> Ferda, 505.

<sup>89</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, “John” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. By G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 431.

been refracted in slightly different ways by three different authors.”<sup>90</sup> Matthew uses Gen. 49:11 to specify the gender of both animals Jesus used to ride on, Mark uses Gen. 49:11 to specify how the animal was found, and John uses Gen. 49:11 to specify the animal Jesus rode. Significantly, Justin Martyr’s interpretation of Matthew 21 says the donkey was tied to a vine, which is a detail found in none of the four gospel accounts nor in Zechariah; however, it is found in Genesis 49:11 (*1 Apol.* 1:32).<sup>91</sup> This suggests that early Christian writers saw the gap between Jesus’ triumphal entry in the gospel accounts and the expressed quotation of Zech. 9:9 to be resolved with Gen. 49:8-12 as a messianic source.

#### 4. The Apocalyptic Summation of Jesus’ Work

About Gen. 49:8-12, Victor Hamilton says, “The New Testament does not appropriate any part of this messianic oracle.”<sup>92</sup> But this view simply cannot be maintained. While Revelation 5:5-6; 7:14; and 19:11-16 have thematic overlaps with the previous section, these are worth mentioning in their own section. Of all the NT passages referenced thus far, Revelation 5:5 remains the most explicit allusion to Genesis 49:8-12, by referring to Jesus as the “*Lion* from the tribe of *Judah*...[who] has *conquered*.” The remainder of Revelation 5 conflates the identity of the “Lion of Judah” with the “Slaughtered Lamb” as the one who is worthy to take and open the scroll. What did the slaughtered lion-lamb do to become worthy? He was slaughtered in order to purchase/redeem people from all the nations for God by his *own* blood (v. 9). I made note that Gen. 49:8-12 is ambiguous as to whose blood is on the eschatological Judahite’s garment; whereas in Isaiah 63:1-3 the blood was from his enemies, the picture provided by Revelation 5 is

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<sup>90</sup> Ferda, 507-508.

<sup>91</sup> Francis M. Young, “Patristic Biblical Interpretation” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 567.

<sup>92</sup> Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 662.

the blood belongs to messiah himself. Thus, with the full view of scripture, the garment in Gen. 49:8-12 is bloodied by both the enemies of the messiah and the messiah himself in what appears to be a mutual death-blow (cf. Gen. 3:15).<sup>93</sup>

Whereas the eschatological Judahite washes his garments in blood in Gen. 49:11, it is all who come out of the great tribulation who themselves wash their garments in the messiah's blood. This washing in blood paradoxically leads to white garments (Rev. 7:14). Moreover, when heaven was opened and John saw the messiah riding on a white horse prepared to return to earth to execute judgment and rule the nations, he was wearing a robe dipped in blood and engraved with his royal name (Rev. 19:11-16). The climactic end of Revelation shows certain elements of Judah's blessing already realized in the person of Jesus; and still other elements yet to be realized. These elements not yet fulfilled should not deter us, however; after all, Judah's blessing is introduced as something to be expected in the latter days (Gen. 49:1).

### **Conclusion: A Translation and Interpretation of Genesis 49:8-12**

In this paper, I argued that Genesis 49:8-12 is a summary of the meta-narrative of Joseph, the culmination of the messianic hope in Genesis, and one of the primary sources for the development of the royal messianic hope in the remainder of the Bible. In light of all of the above, I will now conclude by offering my translation and summarizing my interpretation of this messianic passage.

#### 1. Translation

<sup>8</sup>Judah, may you receive praise from your brothers. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons shall bow in worship before you.

<sup>9</sup>Judah is a lion cub. From the prey, my son, you have offered up. He bows down; he lies down as a lion; as a lioness. Who will raise him?

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<sup>93</sup> Chen, 137.

<sup>10</sup>Neither shall the scepter be removed from Judah nor the staff from between his feet until he, to whom it belongs, comes; to him shall be the peoples' obedience.

<sup>11</sup>His male-donkey is bound to the vine; the female-donkey's male-colt to the choice vine. He washes his garments in wine; his robes in grape blood.

<sup>12</sup>His eyes are dark of wine; his teeth are white of milk.

## 2. Summary of Interpretation

Verse 8 – Jacob blesses Judah in a birthright reshuffle by disqualifying Judah's three older brothers from laying hold to the blessings that would come in regards to the eschatological latter days (Gen. 49:1-7). The first sentence of Judah's blessing begins with *Yehudah atah Yodukah aheka yadeka*, a lengthy alliterative wordplay. Just as Leah praised God for the birth of Judah, whose name means praise, so also will Judah's brothers praise him (Gen. 29:35). The third sentence clarifies who exactly would bow in worshipful praise to Judah: it is not just his three brothers specifically from Leah; but rather all of his brothers from all of his father's women. In other words, it is the remaining eleven who are in view (cf. Gen. 37:9). The second sentence further clarifies the familial relation pronounced in the opening sentence. This alliterative wordplay from the opening sentence extends into the start of the second sentence, suggesting that sentence two is not entirely detached from sentence one and three. Thus, the enemies over whom the eschatological Judahite would conquer are the Israelites themselves, represented via corporate solidarity by the other eleven tribe-heads.

Verse 9 – Drawing upon later allusions from Ezekiel, this eschatological Judahite will be a leader of Israel, demonstrated by his identification as a lion cub that grows into the lion itself. But this eschatological Judahite was rejected and killed by being torn to pieces by his enemies. Unlike the lions depicted in Ezekiel, this lion is not rejected and killed by *foreign* enemies of God, but rather by the Israelites themselves. Yet, this death of the lion of Judah is deemed a sacrificial death offered up to God; a substitutionary sacrifice when seen through the lens of

Judah's role in Joseph's meta-narrative. But this eschatological Judahite's story does not end in death, for the answer to Jacob's rhetorical question, as answered implicitly through the Joseph meta-narrative and Balaam's oracles, and as answered explicitly by the end of the Pentateuch, is that God himself will raise this eschatological Judahite from the dead.

Verse 10 – Only *after* God has raised this eschatological Judahite will the scepter remain unbroken by this individual. While other non-eschatological Judahites would occupy the throne of David, and while non-eschatological Judahite reign would be broken by the exile, this temporary break in the dynasty does not violate Gen. 49:8-12, for it is only the eschatological Judahite's post-resurrection reign that will be unbroken. Moreover, Ezekiel's declaration that the Judahite dynasty *would* be broken in the exile is attached to the hope of an unbroken Judahite reign that was yet in the future; the eschatological Judahite is still a *future* hope at the time of the exile. The everlasting reign would commence when this eschatological Judahite comes, for his rulership, the reception of praise from the Israelites, and the obedience of the non-Israelite Gentile nations, is what is owed to him in this respect. It is owed to him precisely because God chose this eschatological Judahite to reign everlastingly, as demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead; he is God's raised one.

Verse 11a – The coming of this eschatological Judahite to rule, be praised, and obeyed to the ends of the earth will be marked by the two bound donkeys, who are presumed to be unbound for this royal individual. It is these donkeys on which Zechariah (reflecting on Gen. 49:8-12) later says the eschatological Judahite will humbly yet victoriously ride, declaring the salvation of God (Zech. 9:9-10). The salvation of God this eschatological Judahite declares is the same he experiences, namely resurrection from the dead at the hand of God himself.

Verse 11b-12 – The death of the eschatological Judahite is referenced again, this time in regards to the garments stained with his own blood and the blood of his enemies, namely his fellow Israelites whose necks he conquers as the eschatological head-crushing seed of Eve. Rather than washing the blood out of his garments, he washes the blood *into* his garments, with this washing act an inherently priestly act. While most commentators render this final verse: “his eyes are darker *than* wine, and his teeth are whiter *than* milk,” I find this translation lacking. If self-contained comparisons were intended to be made, we may expect these phrased to include a *min* preposition, which is absent from both.<sup>94</sup> Certainly a comparison is intended by means of poetic parallelism, but this comparison should not alter the translation. By making these two lines into self-contained comparisons (darker than wine, whiter than milk), the everlasting reign of the eschatological Judahite is thus marked by an inheritance reminiscent of the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. Rather than self-contained comparisons, I take the comparison as being between the two lines together, namely the darkness contrasted with the whiteness. Since there is repetition between the final sentence of verse 11 and the opening clause of verse 12, I take both wine clauses to refer to the same concept. The blood sacrificially washed into the eschatological Judahite’s garments is depicted as wine. That his eyes were dark with wine would suggest the sacrificial death he experiences is to the fullest extent possible. However pure his words are, it is to that extent of absoluteness of death to which he experiences. The contrast between darkness and the whiteness do not cancel each other out; rather they speak to the utmost extent of the corresponding darkness and whiteness.

Summary – The Joseph meta-narrative, after which Judah’s blessing is textually and thematically modeled, provides the basis for seeing the eschatological Judahite as one who will suffer at the hands of the Israelites, sacrificed in a mutual death-blow (cf. Gen. 3:15), and be

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<sup>94</sup> Gary D. Pratico and Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 53.

raised from the dead by God himself to reign with unceasing power over the Israelites and Gentiles alike from all the ends of the earth. All this is what belongs to the one who comes, Jesus of Nazareth. As noted in the introduction, Westermann says a passage must involve the promise of a king who brings salvation in the latter days in order to be messianic. We have precisely this. Therefore, we must view Genesis 49:8-12 as thoroughly messianic.