

Genesis 49:10-12 - Jacob's Blessing for Judah

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Genesis contains the Gospel promise of a future ruler (lawgiver). Jacob blessed Judah in a special way that was distinct from the blessing of his other sons. Perhaps Judah's opposition - weak though it may have been - to his brothers' wanting to kill Joseph, and suggesting that they sell him instead (Genesis 37:26-27), may have had some bearing on that. A descendant of Judah (i.e., a member of the tribe of Judah) will reign over Israel and the peoples shall obey him. Israel will live in a place of peace and plenty. The verses from Jacob's blessing to Judah promising the rule over Israel are difficult to understand without comparing English translations and their accompanying commentaries explaining the original Hebrew text.

The ESV translation reads like this: *"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; ¹ and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. ² Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk."* ³ (Genesis 49:10-12/ESV)

The KJV translation (Bible Study tools) reads like this: *"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."* (Genesis 49:10-12/KJV)

The phrase *"until tribute comes to him"*, is rendered in some Bible translations as *"until Shiloh comes"*. A slight difference in how the Hebrew is read results in the sense of *"until he comes to whom it belongs"*, *"until Shiloh comes"*, or *"until he comes to Shiloh"*. The meaning of the word "Shiloh" is obscure and has been translated differently over the centuries according to the theology and other understanding of commentators. The Septuagint (Greek), Syriac, and Targum (Aramaic) texts have these meanings. ⁴ An alternate translation of the Greek could be *"until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of nations."* ⁵ One

¹ Bryan Chapell, ed. Note on Genesis 49:10, *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) p. 70. Regarding Genesis 49:10 *"until tribute comes to him"* other Bible translations render this line as *"until Shiloh comes"*. A slight revocalization of the Hebrew yields the sense of until he comes to whom it belongs. According to the *Gospel Transformation Bible (ESV)* notes the Septuagint (Greek), Syriac, and Targum (Aramaic) texts have the sense of one of the following: *"until he comes to whom it belongs"*; *"until Shiloh comes"*; or *"until he comes to Shiloh."*

² Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, trans. Notes on Genesis 49:1-11, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 2015) p. 67. An alternate translation of the Greek could be: *"A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of nations."*

³ Verses 11 and 12 are metaphorical; promises of our heavenly destination where we shall have joy and no want.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, ed. Note on Genesis 49:10, *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013) p. 70.

⁵ Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, trans. Notes on Genesis 49:1-11, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 2015) p. 67.

Jewish source (citing Rashi) ⁶ sees the verse like this: “Shiloh refers to the Messiah to whom the kingdom belongs. The word *until* does not mean that Judah’s ascendancy will end with the coming of Messiah. To the contrary, the sense of the verse is that once Messiah begins to reign, Judah’s blessing will become fully realized, for all the nations will acknowledge him and pay homage to him.” ⁷ “Shiloh” is a combination of the Hebrew words meaning “a gift to him”, as it is said “*they will bring a gift to him who is to be feared*” (Psalm 76:12). ⁸ Clearly this translation refers to a future coming of the Messiah which we Christians see as the Second Coming of Jesus according to Him:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matthew 24:29-31/ESV)

As Christians, we believe that the phrase, “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him*” has three interpretations. First, the Divine Civil and Ceremonial Law ended with the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. Israel’s leadership has not exercised either civil rule over or the conduct of Temple sacrifice since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. ⁹

Second, we see “*and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples*” as pertaining to the Church - the body of Christian believers both Jew and Gentile. That pertains to the eternal rule of the Messiah, ¹⁰ whom we know to be Jesus. The eternal rule in this world is “by the Word alone without arms and force” for those who believe in salvation by Jesus’ atonement. ¹¹ The eternal

⁶ See “Rashi” under Authors and Organizations Mentioned in the Article and Bibliography.

⁷ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, ed. *Tanach* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2011) pp. 126-127. According to this source (citing Rashi) “Shiloh refers to the Messiah to whom the kingdom belongs. The word *until* does not mean that Judah’s ascendancy will end with the coming of Messiah. To the contrary, the sense of the verse is that once Messiah begins to reign, Judah’s blessing will become fully realized, for all the nations will acknowledge him and pay homage to him.”

⁸ Lubavitch HQ Internet Committee, “Bereishit - Genesis - Chapter 49”, *The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary*, Accessed November 10, 2015, http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8244#showrashi=true.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 45-50, Luther’s Works, American Edition, Volume 8*. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown, ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015) pp. 238-245.

¹⁰ Rabbi Nosson Scherman, ed. *Tanach* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2011) pp. 126-127. According to this source (citing Rashi) “Shiloh refers to the Messiah to whom the kingdom belongs. The word *until* does not mean that Judah’s ascendancy will end with the coming of Messiah. To the contrary, the sense of the verse is that once Messiah begins to reign, Judah’s blessing will become fully realized, for all the nations will acknowledge him and pay homage to him.”

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 45-50, Luther’s Works, American Edition, Volume 8*. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown, ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015) p. 245.

John Calvin, *Biblical Commentaries of John Calvin*, “Genesis 49:1-33, John King, trans. John B. Hare, ed. Internet Sacred Text Archive (ISTA). Accessed November 8, 2015. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/>.

Matthew Henry, “Genesis 49:8-12”, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete)*, The Bible Study Tools Staff, ed. Accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/>.

rule in the next life is one in which we shall live in perfect obedience adoring, worshipping, praising and glorifying Him.

Third, we have the verses “*Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.*” In the existence that we know, the donkey would neither feast on grapes, nor be tethered long to a vine which could not resist its pull. The cleaning of garments is an expression of an abundance of wine, and the redness of the eyes is consistent with having wine in such an abundance as to drink until one has his fill. The whiteness of teeth is an expression of an abundance of milk from the animals that would feast in meadows abundant with grass.¹² These verses speak metaphorically of peace and abundance in a perfect kingdom. The paradise that they describe did not and has not existed on earth. Rather, Jacob prophesied about the “wonderful kingdom of Christ and its riches” in which we can partially live now on earth by our faith in Jesus and His salvation work, and in which we shall fully live after our death and resurrection.¹³

Authors and Organizations Mentioned in the Bibliography

Name	Brief Biography
Brenton, Sir Lancelot C.L.	Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton was the second of four children of Sir Jahleel Brenton, 1st Baronet, a Vice Admiral in the British Royal Navy who was made a baronet for services to the crown. Lancelot Brenton inherited his father’s title. However, he did not inherit his father's acceptance of war. When he re-edited his father's biography he made it clear that he was a pacifist. He trained for the ministry at Oriel College, Oxford, and was ordained by the Church of England in 1830. By December 1831 he had left the Established Church to found an independent chapel in Bath with a friend, William Moreshead. By 1835 this chapel was associated with the Plymouth Brethren and by 1837 Brenton was contributing to <i>The Christian Witness</i> , an early Brethren journal, and appears to have cemented his relationship with the emerging Brethren movement. On the death of his father in 1844, He became Sir Charles. He moved to the Isle of Wight from Bath in 1849 where, although married, he died childless, the second and last Baronet of his line. His translation of the Septuagint was the second English translation available.[6] It was first released in 1844 and has gone through several reprints and formats in the over a century and a half since.
Chapell, Bryan	Bryan Chapell Dr. Bryan Chapell is highly regarded in the evangelical community as a preacher, teacher, and author. He began his ministry pastoring in churches that include Glen Ridge Presbyterian Church in St. Louis (1976), Woodburn Presbyterian Church in Woodburn, Ill. (1976-80), and Bethel Reformed Presbyterian Church in Sparta, IL.

John Wesley, “Genesis 49:10”, Wesley's Explanatory Notes, Accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/>.

Thomas Constable, “Genesis 49:8-12”, Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable, Accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dcc/>.

Rev. Edward A. Engelbrecht, ed. Notes on Genesis 49:10-11, *The Lutheran Study Bible (English Standard Version)* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009) pp. 90–91.

¹² Abraham Joseph Rosenberg, “Bereishit - Genesis - Chapter 49”, *The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary*, Accessed November 11, 2015, http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8244#showrashi=true. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) (1040 - 1105) was the outstanding [Jewish] Biblical commentator of the Middle Ages.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 45-50, Luther’s Works, American Edition, Volume 8*. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown, ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015) pp.246-272

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Name	Brief Biography
	<p>(1980-1986). He then joined the Covenant faculty fulltime in 1986 and has since served as a professor, Department Chair, Seminary Dean, Executive Vice President, and from 1994-2012, he served as the institution's President. He has also served as President of Christ College in Taiwan. From 2012-2013, he served as Chancellor of Covenant Seminary, representing the school both nationally and internationally through leadership and speaking responsibilities in organizations throughout the world.</p> <p>Bryan became the Senior Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in 2013. His academic expertise is in homiletics (i.e., preaching). His book, <i>Christ-Centered Preaching</i>, is a standard text in seminaries worldwide.</p>
Engelbrecht, Rev. Edward A.	<p>Rev. Edward A. Engelbrecht is Senior Editor for Professional and Academic Books & Bible Resources, Concordia Publishing House and General Editor, <i>The Lutheran Study Bible</i>. He is general editor for the 2015 ECPA Christian Book Award Finalist "Lutheran Bible Companion" and a contributing editor to the 2012 ECPA Christian Book Award Finalist "The Story Bible." He is known as a writer and editor who makes biblical studies and theology understandable. Persons as diverse as Jewish scholar Emanuel Tov of Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the moms at <i>Christian Children's Book Review</i> have commended his publications.</p>
Henry, Matthew	<p>Matthew Henry (18 October 1662 – 22 June 1714) was an English commentator on the Bible and Presbyterian minister. He was born at Broad Oak, a farmhouse on the borders of Flintshire and Shropshire. His father, Philip Henry, had just been ejected under the Act of Uniformity 1662. Unlike most of his fellow-sufferers, Philip possessed some private means, and was thus able to give his son a good education. Matthew went first to a school at Islington, and then to Gray's Inn. He soon gave up his legal studies for theology, and in 1687 became minister of a Presbyterian congregation at Chester. He moved again in 1712 to Mare Street, Hackney. Two years later (22 June 1714), he died suddenly of apoplexy at the Queen's Aid House (41 High Street) in Nantwich while on a journey from Chester to London.</p>
Lubavitch HQ Internet Committee	<p>The Lubavitch HQ Internet Committee uses Internet technology to unite Jews worldwide, empower them with knowledge of their 3,300 year-old tradition, and foster within them a deeper connection to Judaism's rituals and faith.</p>
Luther, Martin	<p>Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 in Eisleben in the Holy Roman Empire - in what is today southern Germany. He died 18 February 1546. He was the second son born to Hans and Margarete (Lindemann) Luther. He later entered the Augustinian Monastery at Erfurt. In 1513, he began his first lectures on the Psalms. In these lectures, Luther's critique of the theological world around him began to take shape. Later, in lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Romans (in 1515/16) his critique became more noticeable. It was during these lectures that Luther finally found the assurance that had evaded him for years. The discovery that changed Luther's life ultimately changed the course of Church history and the history of Europe. He had recovered the doctrine of justification by grace alone.</p>
Rashi	<p>Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) (1040 - 1105) was the outstanding [Jewish] Biblical commentator of the Middle Ages. He was born in Troyes, France and survived the massacres of the First Crusade through Europe. He was a fantastic scholar and studied with the greatest student of Rabbenu Gershom of Mainz. At twenty-five, he founded his own academy in France. Rashi's commentary on the Bible was unique. His concern was for every word in the text which need elaboration or explanation. Moreover, he used the fewest words possible in his commentaries. Most of his explanations were not written by him. Apparently, students would ask him questions about the text, or he would rhetorically ask questions about specific words, and a student would write his short, lucid answers in the margin of the parchment text. These answers comprise Rashi's commentary. We now have the answers, but the trick to studying Rashi is to figure out what the problem was with the text or the grammar of a given word.</p>

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