

The Scepter Given to Judah

Devotional Reading: Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17

Background Scripture: Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:12-19, 24-26; 49:8-12

Today's Scripture: Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12

I. Jacob's Family Genesis 35:22b-26

^{22b} **Jacob had twelve sons:**

²³ **The sons of Leah:**

**Reuben the firstborn of Jacob,
Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar
and Zebulun.**

²⁴ **The sons of Rachel:**

Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵ **The sons of Rachel's servant**

Bilhah:

Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶ **The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah:**

Gad and Asher.

**These were the sons of Jacob, who
were born to him in Paddan
Aram.**

22b. God had promised *Jacob* (also known as Israel) that his descendants would “be like the dust of the earth” (Genesis 28:14) and “like the sand of the sea” (32:12). The existence of Jacob’s *twelve sons* (and their offspring) displayed God’s faithfulness to fulfill these promises.

23. The listing of Jacob’s 12 sons here is not in overall birth order. Instead, the sons are listed from oldest to youngest according to their respective mothers.

Although *Leah* was Jacob’s first wife, he had not intended to marry her. Despite her numerous *sons*, she never experienced the love from Jacob that her sister received.

The scandalous behavior of *Reuben* (Genesis 35:22) caused him to lose the privilege of *the firstborn* (49:3-4).

Simeon and *Levi* fell out of their father’s favor because of their violence (Genesis 49:5). Upon hearing of profane treatment toward their sister, the brothers had responded with violence (34:25).

Judah would rise to a position of leadership among his brothers. While Judah acted unrighteously at times (see Genesis 38), he was uniquely blessed (49:8-12).

Issachar was conceived during a unique situation involving the use of mandrakes (see Genesis 30:15-18), a plant with seemingly aphrodisiac properties.

Warriors of the tribe of *Zebulun* fought valiantly in the days of the judges (see Judges 4:6; 6:35).

24. Jacob’s love for *Rachel* was unparalleled (Genesis 29:30). God miraculously worked to allow her to conceive *Joseph* (30:22-24).

The favor that Joseph experienced from his father led his brothers to hate him (Genesis 37:3-4). They would sell him for 20 shekels of silver (37:28). Due to the wisdom God granted him, Joseph rose to a position of leadership in Egypt (41:39-41). In this situation, he was prepared to deal with a famine—for the good of the whole known world, including his family (42:1-2).

Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own (Genesis 48:5). The descendants of these sons would later be counted as tribes of Israel (Numbers 1:32-35).

As the youngest son of Rachel, *Benjamin* received extra concern from his father (see Genesis 42:4). Though Benjamin's descendants were relatively few in number, Israel's first king came from them (1 Samuel 9:21).

25. When Rachel was unable to conceive, she gave *Bilhah* to Jacob to bear him children (Genesis 30:4). Rachel named Bilhah's first child *Dan* (30:6). His descendants, though many in number, were not powerful militarily.

Descendants of *Naphtali* were lauded for their valor (Judges 5:18). They joined with descendants of Asher and Manasseh to drive the Midianites from the land (7:23-25).

26a. When Leah was unable to conceive, she allowed Jacob to continue fathering children through her *servant Zilpah* (Genesis 30:9).

The descendants of *Gad* settled east of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:1-33; Joshua 13:8). This land was well suited for raising livestock.

Jacob proclaimed the richness of the food produced by *Asher* (Genesis 49:20). Perhaps this declaration foreshadowed the tribe's settlement of the fertile regions of Canaan (Joshua 19:24-31).

26b. Not all *the sons of Jacob* were born in *Paddan Aram*; Benjamin was born in Ephrath, which is Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16-19). Perhaps the inclusion of Paddan Aram referred to the location where Benjamin was conceived (compare 35:9).

II. Judah's Humbling Genesis 38:24-26

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar

is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant."

Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!"

25 As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are."

26 Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

24a. The oldest of Judah's sons, Er, married Tamar. However, Er acted wickedly and was struck dead. Judah directed his second son to father children with Tamar. But that son refused and was also killed.

Judah then sent Tamar to live with her father while waiting for Judah's third son to reach the age of marriage. Tamar took matters into her own hands; she would have a child with her father-in-law. She disguised herself and went to a location where Judah would see her. Judah failed to recognize her and considered her to be a prostitute. Before they had intercourse, she requested a pledge from him as a confirmation of his promised payment to her.

Following an encounter with an apparent prostitute, *Judah* had sent a friend to take back his pledge of payment. But the woman could not be found. *About three months* would pass before Judah would discover her identity.

24b. Judah's judgment was striking and harsh. The Law of Moses did not exist during the time of Judah. It would later prescribe being *burned* as a form of punishment (see Leviticus 20:14; 21:9).

Judah's declaration highlighted the horrific irony of the situation. He demanded capital punishment for his daughter-in-law because of her presumed prostitution.

Further, Judah might have considered Tamar's act to be one of unfaithfulness to his son Shelah, who was still next in line to be given as her husband. However, Judah was the one who had impregnated Tamar.

25. Tamar did not have to state publicly the extent of Judah's involvement. Instead, she forced *her father-in-law* to confront his hypocrisy and consider how he had failed to provide for her. The personal items left behind would reveal *the man* who caused her to become *pregnant*.

26. The revealing of the personal items would have brought great shame on *Judah*. To his credit, he *recognized* the items and acknowledged their implications regarding his own failures. Whether because of his own shame or to hide his immoral act, Judah turned the discussion to Tamar.

His statement that *she is more righteous than I* did not fully justify her. Rather, the statement indicated that Judah's behavior was relatively worse. He had acted unfaithfully and unjustly toward Tamar by preventing his *son Shelah* from marrying her. Judah failed to care for his widowed daughter-in-law. Tamar was in the right to want Judah to honor his obligations. She desired just treatment and forced Judah's hand so that she would receive it.

That Judah *did not sleep with* Tamar *again* indicates that he had no further sexual relations with her. Tamar gave birth to sons (Genesis 38:29-30) who would continue the line of Judah (Ruth 4:12). Both Judah and Tamar were counted in a later genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:3).

III. Judah's Ruler Genesis 49:10-12

**¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from
Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from be-
tween his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall
come**

**and the obedience of the nations
shall be his.**

**¹¹ He will tether his donkey to a vine,
his colt to the choicest branch;
he will wash his garments in wine,
his robes in the blood of grapes.**

**¹² His eyes will be darker than wine,
his teeth whiter than milk.**

10. Jacob's dying proclamation demonstrated his trust in the Lord's promise that kings would come from his descendants. A *scepter* symbolized the presence of royalty and authority.

The declaration described Jacob's hope: a ruler would come from his descendants. Specifically, this ruler would come *from Judah*. The ruler and his kingdom would be permanent and would *not depart*.

He would be like a *ruler's staff* and a lawgiver for the people. He would be so because God himself is the ultimate "lawgiver" (Isaiah 33:22; James 4:12).

11a. The king's abundance is on display through the imagery of grape *vine* and livestock. One can imagine that the king's abundance was so much that he would allow his *donkey* and *colt* to be tied to the vine. Even if the animals ate some of the fruit of the vine, the loss would not have been an issue because of the king's bountiful and fertile crops.

11b. The king's wealth would be on display because *wine* would be as common as laundry water to *wash his garments*. His winepresses would be full so that *his robes* would be saturated *in* freshly pressed grape juice (compare Isaiah 63:2), *the blood of grapes* (compare Deuteronomy 32:14).

12. Prosperity is further evident on the king's face. Some writers of Scripture attribute shades of *red*, like those seen in *wine* or rubies, to a person's physical vigor (example: Lamentations 4:7). Straight white teeth were a desirable physical trait (see Song of Songs 4:2; 6:6).

Involvement Learning

The Scepter Given to Judah

Into the Lesson

What item is unique and meaningful to you?

Does it represent something about your family identity? If so, how?

Key Verse

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.
—Genesis 49:10

Into the Word

Read Genesis 35:22b-26. Note any details about each of the following women and her children:

Leah _____

Rachel _____

Bilhah _____

Zilpah _____

Read Genesis 38:1-30 and answer the following questions:

What actions of Judah were considered unjust?

Why was Tamar considered to be “more righteous” (Genesis 38:26)?

What are possible applications of this story for modern audiences?

Into Life

How are the following words descriptive of a family's response to conflict or dysfunction? *Hide, deny, resign, ignore.*

What is a conflict where peace and reconciliation are needed?

How can you respond to conflict and dysfunction in a God-honoring manner?

Thought to Remember

God transforms wrecks into royals!