

On Palm Sunday An Ancient Prophecy Got Fulfilled. How Do We Respond?

Gen 49:1-12 (Text: Gen 49:8-12)

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(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Today is Palm Sunday – a day on which we remember our Lord Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem!

And this morning, when we heard a sermon on Matthew 21, we saw in awe and amazement how our Lord Jesus fulfilled to the letter a prophecy made 500 years earlier by the prophet Zechariah (Zech 9:9).

And, in that sermon we also pointed out how some people – despite clear evidence that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy – just would/will not believe; yes, how some people, just like most Pharisees in Jesus’ day, simply reject Jesus (God’s love-gift to mankind).

Well, this afternoon, as we open up our Old-Testament text (Gn 49:8-12), I pray that we will again be stunned and in awe of God who, in Jesus Christ, was fulfilling yet another prophecy – a prophecy which is about 1,300 years older than the one of Zech 9 – yes, a prophecy which God gave through the patriarch, Jacob (around 1800 BC), as Jacob was lying on his deathbed while blessing his sons!

And it is especially Jacob’s blessing on his son, Judah, which interests us, for, you see, because you & I know the events of Palm Sunday as well as Christ’s resurrection from the dead, you and I can clearly see how Christ is the one whom Jacob, by God’s Holy Spirit, was referring to!

Now, what Jacob, by the Holy Spirit, prophesied in our text about the coming Saviour, can be summed up by three words...

- Ruler
- Prince of Peace
- Forever

Ruler (v.8-9)

My brother & sister, look what father Jacob does! Although Judah was Jacob’s fourth son (not his first), Jacob gave him the highest position!

Yes, Jacob skips his three older sons and confers the rulership on his fourth son, Judah!

Why?!

Well, are not the sins of the older three sons mentioned in what their father told them on his deathbed!?

Yes, Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn son, did not get the highest blessing, because he once committed adultery with his father’s concubine, a woman called Bilhah!¹

¹ Cf. Gen 49:4 *Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!*

Also cf. Gen 35:22 *While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine. And Israel heard of it.*

Also cf. 1 Chron 5:1-3 (especially v.1), *The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, so that he could not be enrolled as the oldest son; ² though Judah became strong among his brothers and a chief*

And although Simeon and Levi were standing second and third in the queue for the highest blessing, they too did not get it, because their violence was too much for their father!²

But Judah, the fourth son, it is *he* who received the highest blessing; yes, out of Judah's tribe would Israel's rulers come – also the Ultimate Ruler!

Judah!

My brother & sister (boys & girls), do you know what the name *Judah* means? (Perhaps some of you have the name Judah as name or middle name)

It means, “He will be praised!”³

So, keeping in mind this meaning of the name Judah, father Jacob uses wordplay, when he says (in v.8), “**Judah, your brothers shall** (indeed)⁴ **praise you.**”⁵

But Judah's tribe would not just be praised; no, they would become a strong and courageous tribe! As v. 8 says, *the hand (power) of Judah would be on the neck of his enemies, and his brothers would bow down before him* – yes, Judah & his tribe would be conquerors & rulers!

And look, is this not why father Jacob compares Judah with a young lion!?

But look, Jacob does not compare Judah with a *rampant*, always tearing, always raging & roaming lion, but with a lion that couches and lies down, a lion that enjoys the satisfaction of his power and success. Yes, Judah would have the stately composure of a Lion that stretches itself out after a feast, and no one dares rousing him up! That's what it means to be truly great.⁶ Yes, Judah's brothers would respect him for who he would be!

Well, let's stop here for a moment, for, you see, here's something significant!

What is that?

Well, that the Bible gives us no indication that the man Judah *himself*, in his lifetime, ruled over his brothers! Yet, several incidents show us that Judah's *offspring* (i.e., the *tribe* of Judah) did have that first-ranking position:

- Judah's tribe took the first position when Israel marched & when they camped in formation⁷ – a clear symbol of Judah's prominent position among the tribes!
- It was also Judah's tribe that opened the attack on the Canaanites that were still left in the land.⁸

came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph),³ the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

² Cf. Gen 49:5-7 *Simeon and Levi are brothers;*

weapons of violence are their swords. ⁶Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstringed oxen. ⁷Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

³ Yehūdāh = יהודה ...as if der. from Hoph. of הָיָה = *praised, object of praise* (on הָיָה cf. Hiph. הִיָּחַדְתָּ ψ 28:7, הִיָּחַדְתָּ Ne 11:17)...” (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 397). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁴ The word “indeed” might well be inserted, seeing that the Hebrew verb *yōdūkhā* (יְהַלְלֶינָה) is in the jussive! Yes, it's a Hif'il Imperfect *Jussive* 3rd Person Masculine Plural with Pronominal Suffix Second Person Masculine Singular. Thus, it should be rendered either as, “Let your brothers praise you,” or as “Your brothers shall *indeed* praise you!”

⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ge 49:8). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁶ My partial emendation and adaptation from the well-said words of Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 91–92). Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁷ Nm 2:2,3; 7:12; 10:14

⁸ Judges 1:1ff

- It was Judah’s tribe that was ordered by God to start war on the tribe of Benjamin after the great sexual sin committed by that tribe!⁹
- Again, the first judge, Othniel, came from the tribe of Judah.¹⁰
- But look! Here is a high point when, finally, God chose *David* from the tribe of Judah to become king over Israel! Was it not *then* that Judah’s position was raised so that Judah finally received that sceptre (of v.10) over his brothers!?!¹¹

So, about seven-hundred years after Jacob had pronounced this prophecy of Judah – yes seven-hundred years since father Jacob’s death – God Almighty, who lives forever and who spans all time and who remembers His promises, brought this prophecy to fulfilment – a first fulfilment, we must say, for the ultimate Ruler, Christ, was still to come!

Well, so far Point 1: “Ruler”
Here is point 2...

He Will Be Prince of Peace (v.10-12)

We read in v.10 that the *sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet...*

What does this verse mean?

I mean, what does it mean that the ruler’s staff will not depart from between Judah’s feet? Well, as a ruler in those days used to sit and rule, he held the long ruler’s staff in his hand, but the bottom end of the staff was anchored on the ground between his feet while resting against his knee!

Thus, the ruler’s staff would not depart from Judah until... – until what?

Well, here we have some differences between the various English translations. And I mention this only for *this* reason: i.e., because I know that, among us, we have different English Bible versions!

If you’re sitting with the NIV on your lap, then you will see it says, “*The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come.*”¹²

The ESV says, “...*until tribute comes to him.*”

The NASB says, “...*until Shiloh comes.*”

Well, to cut a long story short, I have peace of mind & heart that the NASB is the closest to the original language and has interpreted the Hebrew word “Shiloh” in the best possible manner!¹³

So, what does Shiloh mean?¹⁴

⁹ Judges 20:18

¹⁰ Judges 3:9ff.

¹¹ 1 Chron 28:4

¹² For a parallel phrase cf. Ezek 21:27b (NASB), *This also will be no more until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.* Compare especially the Hebrew text (= Ezek 21:32b, :הַמְשַׁפֵּט וְהַתְּיִי: אֲשֶׁר-לֵךְ) with the Hebrew text of Gen 49:10b, *until He comes to whom it belongs* (עַד כִּי-יָבֹא שִׁלְהָ).

¹³ Cf. the very thorough and well-balanced discussion by Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). [Commentary on the Old Testament](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 252–259). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

¹⁴ Well, firstly, it was a *place name* – the place Shiloh where Israel’s tent of meeting was at the time of the Judges. But, in our text, Shiloh stands for a *person’s* name! So, much the same as Enoch and Shechem were names of *places* as well as of *persons* – and much the same as Wellington, Hamilton, Hastings and Palmerston are also *place* and *personal* names, so was Shiloh not just a *place* name, but also a *person’s* name!

So, what does v.10 then say?

Well, it says that “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until the person called *Shiloh* comes!”

Well, Shiloh is a title for the Messiah!¹⁵ And it is related to a Hebrew word that means “rest” and “prosperity.”¹⁶

And no wonder, v. 11 & 12 now describe *that time* of rest/prosperity which was to come under Shiloh!

You see, the picture language of v.11-12 describes such an abundance of peace and rest that whereas, normally, no one would dare tie a donkey to a precious vine, now, due to the abundance of wine – symbol of peace – this Ruler would not hesitate to do it!

But hang on! Did you notice that v.11 does not say this Ruler (this Shilo) would tie His *horse* to a vine, but His *donkey*? In fact, v.11 says, “...his donkey’s colt.”

My brother & sister, can you see in what striking manner Jacob’s prophecy ties in with Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech 9:9) which we heard this morning, and which highlighted the fact that Israel’s Messiah-King would not come on a war horse, but in meekness on a donkey – in fact, the foal/colt of a donkey?

So, can you see how, on Palm Sunday, our Lord Jesus fulfilled not only Zechariah’s prophecy but also that of Jacob (of our text)?

See how Jacob's prophecy meant that Israel's true king would come from the tribe of Judah, and that in some way he would be associated with the colt of a donkey?

See how what is only hinted at in our text (Gen 49:11) was made plain in the Gospel: that Jesus, the Son of David, from the tribe of Judah, rode into Jerusalem as Israel's rightful king?¹⁷

Can you see how God’s prophecies, made over thousands of years, are fulfilled? Yes, can you see God’s covenant faithfulness to His promises?

Back to the nature of Shilo’s reign...

My brother & sister, father Jacob’s next words are filled with hyperbole (exaggeration or embellishment):

You see, everybody knows that no one would dare wash his clothes in wine! But, just to point out how abundant the wine would be during Shiloh’s reign, Jacob says that Shiloh would wash his clothes in wine! Of course, this is not to be taken literally but symbolically, i.e., in the sense that abundance of wine symbolises abundance of peace – a heavenly peace which only he has who has had his sins forgiven in Christ!

Well, once again, father Jacob uses hyperbole when he says that Shiloh’s eyes would be dull from wine and his teeth white from milk!

Of course, the intention is not to make Judah or his tribe or even Shiloh/Messiah out as drunkards, but to indicate how prosperous & restful Shiloh’s reign would be!

When did the first fulfilment of this prophecy happen? Well, was it not with the restful kingship of Solomon, son of King David, from the tribe of... *Judah*!?

¹⁵ Cf. Keil & Delitzsch (ibid) for, “We regard *Shiloh*, therefore, as a title of the Messiah, in common with the entire Jewish synagogue and the whole Christian Church, in which, although there may be uncertainty as to the grammatical interpretation of the word, there is perfect agreement as to the fact that the patriarch is here proclaiming the coming of the Messiah.”

¹⁶ For the Hebrew word-root *shalah* (שָׁלַח = be at ease/rest) cf. e.g. Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 1017). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Also, cf. the noun *shalū* (שָׁלוֹם = prosperity) related to *shalah* (Brown, Driver & Briggs, ibid).

Also, cf. Delitzsch who suggested this Hebrew phrase in v.10 should be translated as, “...till rest comes...” (Keil & Delitzsch, ibid)

¹⁷ My adaptation of the words of **Ryken, Philip**. *The Coming of the King: what Christ’s triumphal entry means to you*. [<https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2006/march/comingoftheking032006.html>]

My brother & sister, hear what God told David (in 1 Chron 22:9) ... ***“Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days.”***

“His name shall be *Solomon!*” – which means *Peaceful!*

See the link with Shiloh (which means *rest/prosperity!*)?¹⁸

And Shiloh is *Christ* the Giver of *true* rest & peace for all who receive Him – a spiritual and inner peace!

And has not this spiritual & inner peace been experienced and felt right through the history of the Church – yes, even despite times of outward un-peace?

Just remember the Apostle Paul who suffered so much hardship for the Gospel. This is what he said (in Rm 5:1-5), ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Shiloh).... Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings...”***¹⁹

Remember the peace which St Augustine found when he found Shiloh; and the peace which Francis of Assisi found in Shiloh – and Martin Luther and Blaise Pascal and John Newton, and so on and so on...?

That’s the peace you have if you receive Shiloh – the peace that passes understanding!

Well, that was Point 2: “He will be Prince of Peace.”

Here’s the last point...

He Will Rule Forever (v.10)

My brother & sister, did you hear the word “until” in v.10 – ***“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes...”***?

Does *until* here mean, as soon as Shiloh comes, *that* will be the end of Judah’s blessed reign?

Not at all!

No, rather, with *until*, the Hebrew language suggests that Judah’s reign would continue and reach its climax in Shiloh!²⁰ And, with the benefit of hindsight, you & I know that Judah’s reign actually did reach its climax & fulfilment in Shiloh!

Shiloh worked peace not only through His death, but also through His rising from the dead – proof that He was the One from the woman’s seed who would crush satan’s head (And so fulfilled God’s promise of Gen 3:15).

Now?

Will that sceptre ever depart from between Judah’s feet?

¹⁸ Also cf. Hofmann (apud Keil & Delitzsch, *ibid*), “For no objection can really be sustained against thus regarding it as a personal name, in closest analogy to שְׁלֹמֹה (Solomon).”

¹⁹ Rm 5:1-5 ***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.***

²⁰ Cf. “עַד (i.e. ‘until’) has not an exclusive signification here, but merely abstracts what precedes from what follows the given *terminus ad quem* (‘time from which’), as in Gen. 26:13, or like עַד לְשָׁנָה Gen. 28:15, Ps. 112:8, or עַד Ps. 110:1, and εως Matt. 5:18” (Keil & Delitzsch, *ibid*).

Also cf. “Clauses introduced by עַד, עַד כִּי, or עַד אֲשֶׁר, sometimes express a limit which is not absolute (terminating the preceding action), but only relative, beyond which the action or state described in the principal clause still continues... with imperfect in Gen 49:10” (Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar as edited and enlarged by the late E. Kautzsch – edition A.E. Cowley. Oxford : At the Clarendon. p. 503 par.164f).

No! Never ever!

Shiloh now rules forever!

And now, when we open our Bibles at the Book of Revelation so that we can get a top-of-the-hill viewpoint over all of world history, what do we see?

Well, Rv 5:5 tells us that the peaceful “Lamb” (Shiloh) is, at the same time, also that very *Lion* from the tribe of *Judah* mentioned in v.9 of our text: ***And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”***

We want to conclude with this question: What does our text tell us about Jacob’s God?

Well, more than anything, does it not tell us that He is faithful – faithful to His promises made to Adam & Eve; His promises made to Abraham; His promises made through father Jacob in our text; to David, etc.?

I love the answer given by the Heidelberg Catechism’s LD 6,

The holy gospel tells me. God Himself began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later, He proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets, and portrayed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; finally, He fulfilled it through His own dear Son.

So, again, what does this prophecy of father Jacob – yes, what does this prophecy and its fulfilment tell you & me about Jacob’s God?

Well, does this not bring you & me on our knees before our Almighty God?

Yes, does not this prophecy & its fulfilment convince you that Someone greater than time – someone whose life is not restricted to one human generation – has planned, is steering and bringing to fulfilment all that He promised to do!?

Indeed, what, to God, were the seven-hundred years between Jacob’s deathbed prophecy and its first fulfilment in Kings David and Solomon!? Were seven-hundred years too long for the God of the universe to remember His promise? And what about the 1,800 years between Jacob and Shiloh/Messiah? Were *they* too long for God so that they would wipe His memory of what He had promised?

No! Not at all!

Not even the thousands of years between Paradise and Shiloh and between Shiloh and us are too much for the One who is God over/of time – for whom a thousand years are like one night-watch!

And so?

Well, have you & I perhaps been guilty of thinking deep inside, “Ah, Christ will never again return, for, look, it’s now been two-thousand years since His ascension into heaven!”? “I mean, has He not forgotten us?” “Is God even real?”

My brother & sister, how will the Timeless One ever forget – He who has a track-record of keeping His promises over thousands of years!?

Just look at the Shiloh prophecy and its fulfilment!

Stand in awe of God!

Do not doubt! But believe!

AMEN (2410 words excluding footnotes)