

The Scepter Given to Judah

I wish she would say one word to me,” Kiana said. “Mom got another power of attorney, because she was taking all of grandmother’s money.”

Serena halfway listened to her cousins at the next table. The Thomas family were gathered in the plush banquet hall to celebrate their mother, their grandmother, and great-grandmother Pearlie Thomas.

Kiana was talking about Pearlie’s oldest daughter and Serena’s aunt, Viola, who was in failing health and not at the party. The situation was a tangled web of ugliness. There were charges and accusations with conflicting and confusing accounts. Feelings were hurt. Tensions were high. Sides had been taken.

Serena had also momentarily been caught up in the whirlwind. That had been several weeks and one apology ago.

Serena got up from the table to make her way to the front of the room because she was on the program to offer a prayer of thanksgiving. She stopped at her cousins’ table and greeted them with genuine fellowship and love.

As she walked to the front, she asked the Lord again to fill her heart with love. “Lord, You are sovereign. You alone can touch the hearts of men and women,” Serena prayed within herself. “It’s my prayer that all of my family come to know You, O Lord, and do Your will in the ways that You have planned for each and every one of us.”

- 1. Why is it significant that God created families?**
- 2. Why would God let us come from imperfect families?**
- 3. How could God use imperfect families for His purposes?**

LESSON FOCUS: Dedicate your imperfect family to His purposes.
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Judah's Lineage and Deception

Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26, KJV

35:22 Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun:

24 The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:

25 And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali:

26 And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram. . . .

38:24 And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.

26 And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because

Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26, NIV

^{35:22b} 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. . . .

^{38:24} 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

that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

Genesis 35:22-26 recounts the blessings God had already brought Jacob through his children, who became the 12 tribes of Israel and whose descendants inherited Canaan nearly 500 years later. All these children—except Benjamin, whom Rachel died giving birth to after leaving Bethel (Gen. 35:16-20)—had been born during Jacob's 21 years of service to Laban, in Paddan Aram. Judah was the fourth-born son of Jacob—seemingly too distant from inheriting Jacob's birthright.

Sometime after Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:12-36)—and note that it was Judah's idea to sell him rather than kill him as many of his brothers wanted (vss. 26-27)—Genesis 38 provided our first up-close look at Judah, and it was less than flattering. After moving away from his brothers, Judah married a Canaanite woman, Shua, and had three sons. After God had killed the first two sons Er and Onan for their sins (Gen. 38:6-10), Judah promised to give Er's (and Onan's) widow Tamar his third son Shelah—then reneged, apparently out of fear that Shelah would be killed by God as well (vss. 11, 26).

Sometime after Shua's death, Judah solicited a prostitute—Tamar in disguise. She took Judah's seal, cord, and staff as security, then disappeared before Judah could reclaim them (vss. 15-23). Genesis 38:24-26 told the rest of the story: Three months later, it was clear that Tamar was pregnant. Judah declared that she was to be burned to death for her prostitution—which he had committed with her. As Tamar was brought out, she held up Judah's seal, cord, and staff, and declared, "I am pregnant by the man who owns these" (vs. 25). Judah immediately recognized the items and, to his credit, confessed his sins and refused to sleep with Tamar again.

For all its difficulties, this story has a positive ending. Tamar gave birth to twins, Perez and Zerah. Perez' family

line would, nine generations later, lead to King David—and many generations after that, lead to Jesus (see Matt. 1:3).

4. *What's significant about the list described in Genesis 35:22b-26?*

5. *Who was Tamar? What happened between Judah and Tamar?*

6. *How did Judah and Tamar each respond when their actions came to light?*

Judah's Scepter

Genesis 49:10-12, KJV

10 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.

11 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:

12 His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

Genesis 49:10-12, NIV

¹⁰The 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.

¹¹He 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.

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

Decades later, all of Jacob's family was in Egypt. As Jacob prepared to die, he gathered his family around him and pronounced both blessings and curses on his children as he prophesied over them.

Jacob first called out his firstborn son Reuben's "defiling" of his "father's bed" with Rachel's servant (and Dan and

Naphtali's mother) Bilhah (Gen. 35:22), saying "you will no longer excel" (49:4). He condemned Simeon and Levi for their deceit and slaughter of the men of Shechem after the rape of their sister Dinah and asserted that God would "scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel" (vs. 7).

With that, Jacob turned to Judah and pronounced unexpected blessings upon him, especially given his own past sins, Jacob began, "Judah, your brothers will praise you . . . [and] bow down to you" (vs. 8), then compared Judah to a lion (vs. 9). Then came the amazing declaration regarding Judah and his descendants: "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" (vs. 10). The King James Version calls the One who shall come "Shiloh," a word which means, "who it is." Ancient Jewish rabbis believed this was a reference to the coming Messiah.

In time—starting with David—Judah's descendants would rule over Israel. Even more importantly, this prophecy pointed to the coming of the ultimate lion of Judah: Jesus Christ, "to whom [the scepter] belongs . . . and the obedience of the nations shall be his" (vs. 10).

Jacob's prophecy over Judah concluded with a pronouncement of material blessing for his tribe. They would reside in a land suitable for growing vines and grapes, capable of producing so much wine that Judah's descendants could wash their robes in it if they desired. The description is of health and abundance in the land of Judah—including Jerusalem, where Jesus, the King, would die for His people and then reign forever.

7. What were the circumstances surrounding Genesis 49? What did Jacob do before speaking to Judah?

8. What did Jacob prophesy about Judah and his descendants?

9. How did Jacob conclude his prophecy over Judah?

A Father Rejoices

“When the older son. . . came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound’ ” (Luke 15:25-27).

The sound of joy rings in the air as a father rejoices that his wayward son has come home. Although the family was not perfect, the father’s love surpassed the sins of the younger son. The grateful father arranged a grand celebration just because his son had come home. The celebration was about maintaining a strong and supportive family unit for a loved one who recognized his poor decision: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Luke 15:18).

But the prodigal son came home to a broken family. Sadly, his older brother had stayed home, caused no problems, and did what was expected of him. He was angered at the love shown to his brother. He felt as if he should be given a grand feast for himself and friends—why not celebrate his faithfulness? When the father noticed his son was not participating, he went to tell him that although they were an imperfect family, they were still going to dedicate themselves to God’s purposes of being a loving, caring, and accepting family.

That is a mirror of God’s heavenly family. With the parable, we see that both prodigals and children who stay home are welcome in God’s family where love abounds.

10. *How can we serve God if we come from an imperfect family?*

11. *How does knowing that God loves us help with family brokenness?*

12. *What role does forgiveness play in God’s purposes for our families?*

Dedicated to God

The Bible is full of descriptions of imperfect families because there are no perfect families in this world. What we find instead are families that God uses, like Jacob's family, for His purposes. Out of Jacob's imperfect family came the line of people who were the ancestors of Jesus.

► *Dedicate your family to God in the space below. List as many names as you can, and pray a dedication prayer such as, "We are not perfect, but we want to be used by God for His purposes. The dedication starts with me, and I will show His love to these people who He made a part of my family."*

KEY VERSE

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.

—Genesis 49:10, KJV

"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, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 26 through October 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 105:12-25—God Preserves the People.

Tue. Genesis 47:1-12—From Lack to Abundance.

Wed. Exodus 1:8-22—Thriving in Spite of Adversity.

Thu. Acts 7:17-29—God Prepares Moses.

Fri. Acts 7:30-41—Challenges of Heeding God's Call.

Sat. Hebrews 11:23-29—A Faithful Life.

Sun. Exodus 2:1-15—God Raises Up a Deliverer.