

The Scepter Given to Judah

Gen 35:22-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12

SS Lesson for 09/25/2022

Devotional Scriptures: Micah 5:2-4; Jer 30:18-22

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Key Verse: Gen 49:10

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Kingship because God declared Judah His scepter (Ps 60:7)

Kingship because it was promised to last forever (2 Sam 7:16)

Kingship because had planned it from the beginning (Mic 5:2)

Blessed with success (11)

Success for those who trust in God (Prov 28:25)

Success for those who have many godly advisers (Prov 15:22)

Success for those who commit themselves to God (Prov 16:3)

Success for those who abide in God (John 15:7)

Blessed with pleasing God (12)

Pleasing God must be our goal (Eph 5:10)

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

At the beginning of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, God promised to make Abraham “a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). From these descendants God declared that “kings will come” (17:6; see 17:16, 20). However, situations regarding offspring (see Genesis 16:1; 18:13; 30:1) and family conflict (see 16:4–5; 25:19–34; 27:1–41) arose. These situations might have led Abraham’s family to doubt God’s promises. Yet God remained faithful, even repeating his promises (see 35:11). Abraham’s grandson Jacob fathered 12 sons; the descendants of these sons became the tribes of Israel. Scripture provides two primary methods of counting the tribes. The first method lists tribes with an inheritance of land (see Numbers 1:5–15; 2:3–32; Joshua 13–19). Under this method, Joseph’s sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) were counted as tribes. The descendants of Levi were not included in this numbering of the 12 tribes since they were not to receive an inheritance of land (13:33). The second method lists tribes by the name of each tribe’s patriarch (Genesis 46:8–25; 49:3–27; Deuteronomy 27:12–14; 1 Chronicles 2:2). Under this method, the descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim were instead listed as the tribe of Joseph. Through Jacob’s family, God’s promise of royalty would come. He would choose neither Jacob’s oldest son (Reuben) nor his favorite son (Benjamin) to be the ancestor of the royal line. Rather, out of Judah would come an eternal kingdom.

Key Verse: Gen 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Judah’s Family (Gen 35:22-26)

22 And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

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

24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin;

25 the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali;

26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

Sons of Leah (22-23)

Reuben the sexual sinner (Gen 49:3-4)

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power. 4 Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.

Simeon and Levi the murderers (Gen 49:5)

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers, their swords are weapons of violence.

Judah blessed with leadership (Gen 49:8)

8 "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you.

Issachar conceived with price of mandrakes (Gen 30:15-18)

15 But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." 16 So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night. 17 God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

Zebulun the warrior (Judges 4:6)

6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor.

Sons of Rachel (24)

Joseph the family savior (Gen 42:1-2)

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" 2 He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

Benjamin the youngest (Gen 42:4)

4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

Sons of Bilhah (25)

Dan's descendants powerless in battle (Judges 1:34-35)

34 The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. 35 And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the house of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor.

Naphtali's descendants full of valor (Judges 5:18)

18 The people of Zebulun risked their very lives; so did Naphtali on the heights of the field.

Sons of Zilpah (26)

Gad's descendants settled ease of the Jordan River (Joshua 13:8)

8 The other half of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites had received the inheritance that Moses had given them east of the Jordan, as he, the servant of the Lord, had assigned it to them.

Asher's descendants produced rich food (Gen 49:20)

20 "Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king.

Judah's Humbling (Gen 38:24-26)

24 And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry." So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

25 When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Please determine whose these are, the signet and cord, and staff."

26 So Judah acknowledged them and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he never knew her again.

Tamar's charged with harlotry (24)

Charged because of a bad original decision (Gen 38:11)

11 Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He may die too, just like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

Charged because of a deceitful plot (Gen 38:13-20)

13 When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep," 14 she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. 16 Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you." "And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked. 17 "I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said. "Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked. 18 He said, "What pledge should I give you?" "Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. 19 After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again. 20 Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her.

Charged because of crafty identity (Prov 7:10)

10 Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

Charged because of being a sinful act (1 Cor 6:16)

16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

Tamar's revelation (25)

Revelation because God hates lying and dishonesty (Zech 8:16-17)

16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the Lord.

Revelation because it's the only way to be in fellowship with God (Ps 15:1-2)

1 Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? 2 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart

Revelation because in truth there is freedom (John 8:32)

32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Revelation because only God judges at the appointed time (1 Cor 4:5)

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Tamar blessed with righteousness (26)

A righteousness that comes from treating others well (1 Sam 24:17)

17 "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.

A righteousness because of God's grace (John 8:5-11)

5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

A righteousness that comes from trusting God's guidance (Ps 139:23-24)

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

A righteousness because God counts faith as righteousness (Rom 4:5)

5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Judah's Ruler (Gen 49:10-12)

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

11 Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.

12 His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

Blessed with kingship (10)

Kingship because of prophecy (Num 24:17)

17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.

Kingship because God declared Judah His scepter (Ps 60:7)

7 Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter.

Kingship because it was promised to last forever (2 Sam 7:16)

16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

Kingship because had planned it from the beginning (Mic 5:2)

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Blessed with success (11)

Success for those who trust in God (Prov 28:25)

25 A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper.

Success for those who have many godly advisers (Prov 15:22)

22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Success for those who commit themselves to God (Prov 16:3)

3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

Success for those who abide in God (John 15:7)

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Blessed with pleasing God (12)

Pleasing God must be our goal (Eph 5:10)

10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Pleasing God because that is what the Kingdom of God is all about (Rom 14:13-18)

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Pleasing God because it leads to living a life that is peaceful and quiet (1 Tim 2:1-3)

1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Questions Which Provide the Key to this Passage

You may not agree with the answers which I find in this text, but I am convinced that none of us will understand the passage without answering a few key questions.

- (1) Did every detail of Jacob's prophecy come to pass? If not, why not?
- (2) What purpose does this prophecy serve for the sons of Jacob, since none of them will live to see the fulfillment of them in Canaan?
- (3) What reasons did Moses have for recording this conversation between Jacob and his sons?
- (4) Why did Reuben, Simeon, and Levi receive a rebuke from their father for their sinful actions, when Judah, just as great a sinner (chapter 38), received the greatest blessing of all the sons, as he would be the forefather of the Messiah?
- (5) What can we learn from these prophecies?

Observations Concerning the Prophecy of Jacob Regarding His Offspring

Before we give our attention to some of the details of the prophecies of this passage, it would benefit us to look at the passage as a whole. Several characteristics can be identified.

First of all, these are the last words of Jacob. The prophecy is literally the final word of Jacob, spoken with his dying breath.

When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people (Genesis 49:33).

The dying words of any man should not be taken lightly, much less those spoken by a patriarch and recorded under the superintendence of the Spirit of God.

Second, this is poetry. We might tend to think that a man's last words, spoken with great effort, should be disorganized and difficult to follow. A look at this passage in the NASV reveals that we are dealing with Hebrew poetry, for the form is noticeably different from the preceding pages. There are numerous indications that these final words of Jacob were thought out carefully in advance. Jacob's words are ones that have been carefully planned and probably rehearsed.

Third, this is more than poetry, it is prophecy. While the form is poetry, the substance is prophecy. Jacob's words reveal "things to come" for his descendants. As a rule, the prophecy is general. It is not intended to spell out the future for Jacob's sons as individuals, but as tribal leaders. The future which is foretold is the future of the nation as manifested in the twelve tribes (cf. verse 28). Normally the prophecy will not speak of a particular place, nor of a certain person, nor of a specific point in time, but of the character and disposition of the various tribes throughout their history. This forewarns us that we must be careful to look for fulfillment which is too specific.

Fourth, the words spoken by Jacob are a blessing:

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, everyone with the blessing appropriate to him (Genesis 49:28).

All the sons of Jacob were blessed in that they were to be a part of the nation Israel. All would enter into the land of Canaan and have an inheritance there.

Some would certainly receive a greater blessing than others. Even those who were rebuked by Jacob and whose future was portrayed as dismal were blessed, as we shall point out later.

Fifth, the future which is foretold is not independent of the past, but an extension of it. Moses told us that every one of the sons was given "the blessing appropriate to him" (verse 28). As we think our way through these blessings of Jacob we find that each of them was related to the past. The blessings of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, were based upon the sins which they had committed in the past. Joseph, on the other hand, had been bitterly attacked, but had remained faithful (verses 23-24). Others found their blessings related to the name they had been given at their birth. Judah, derived from the Hebrew root, 'to praise' (cf. 29:35), is now prophesied to be praised by his brothers (49:8). Dan whose name seems to be the participle meaning 'to judge' (cf. 30:6), is foretold that he will "judge his People" (49:16). Prophecy, then, is not detached from history, but an extension of it into the future.

Judah (49:8-12)

After learning of Judah's folly in Genesis 38 we would not expect him to prosper spiritually, but Jacob's words speak of a bright future for his descendants:

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine. And his teeth white from milk (Genesis 49:8-12).

The pre-eminence which was taken from Reuben is clearly transferred to his younger brother, Judah (cf. also I Chronicles 5:2). He would not only rule over his brothers in the days to come, but he would also prevail over his enemies (verse 8). His military might is compared to the strength of a lion (verse 9). Verse 10 has long been held to be a messianic prophecy by both Jews and Christians, but the precise meaning of "Shiloh" is uncertain. It is either a reference to a place, as it is elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g. Joshua 18:1,8,9; 19:51; I Samuel 1:13, etc.), or it may refer to the person of the Messiah.

The prosperity of the tribe of Judah is depicted in verses 11 and 12. He will be so blessed in the vineyard that his vines will be strong enough to hold fast a young donkey, and the produce of the vine will be so abundant that he could, so to speak, wash his garments in its wine. In other words, wine will be as abundant as water. The quantity would be sufficient to more than meet a man's capacity to consume it, thus the reddening of the eyes (verse 12). The cattle will prosper such that milk will also be readily available (verse 12).

The first six sons referred to are the offspring of Jacob and Leah. The next four are the sons of the concubines of Rachel and Leah. The last two sons are the children of Jacob and Rachel, the wife of his preference.

Conclusion

Having given a very brief explanation of the prophecies of Jacob concerning each of his sons, we must return to our original questions if we are to gain a grasp of the purposes of prophecy.

(1) Did every detail of Jacob's prophecy come to pass, as he predicted? I believe we can say with a fair degree of confidence that the answer is no. For example, Zebulun did not dwell at the seashore (verse 13). Also, we must remember that while Levi is rather harshly rebuked by his father here, and he is said to be dispersed among his brethren (verse 7), he is to become the head of the priestly tribe. In this position there is great blessing.

What explanation can we give for the fact that some prophecies are not precisely fulfilled, as we have come to expect? First, let me remind you that God's purposes for Israel are not yet complete:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS" (Romans 11:25-27).

The promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were never fully realized in Israel's history, and thus they are still viewed to be future. How can we be surprised, then, that some prophecies are not yet fulfilled?

Secondly (and this will sound like a great heresy) God never intended to fulfill every prophecy. Before you turn me off and tear up this page, let me explain what I am saying. While most prophecies are specific and certain of their fulfillment, not all are so. Some prophecies are God's warning of what would come to pass if men did not repent and change their attitudes and actions. This is why Jonah had no intention of prophesying impending judgment to the Ninevites:

When God saw their deeds and that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 3:10-4:2).

Some years later, the truth which Jonah knew was clearly stated by the prophet Jeremiah:

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it, if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it, if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

(2) What purpose does this prophecy serve the sons of Israel, since they will all die before God causes the nation to return to Canaan? For the twelve sons of Jacob, the primary lesson I see is that their character not only affects their own destiny, but also the conduct of future generations and the consequences which that conduct conceives. In other words, the sons of Jacob are reminded of the lesson which Jacob had himself recently learned, that present actions have future results and repercussions. Jacob's deceptiveness could be seen in his two sons, Simeon and Levi. The prophecies of Jacob remind his sons that what they are tends to shape what the nation will be in years to come. If they live godly lives, this will be a blessing to coming generations. If they are godless, the nation will likewise reap the consequences:

"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ... Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever! Go, say to them, 'Return to your tents.' But as for you, stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess." So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess (Deuteronomy 5:9, 29-33).

(3) Why did Moses record the words of Jacob? What did the ancient Israelites learn from them? The lesson for those Israelites was precisely that which Jacob sought to teach his sons, that present actions tend to shape the

future. The early chapters of Deuteronomy (such as Deut. 5:9, 29-33, quoted above) record Moses' attempt to underscore the importance of trusting and obeying God, for present and future blessing.

(4) Why did Reuben, Simeon and Levi receive rebuke from their father for their past sins while Judah is greatly blessed? Genesis 38 surely teaches us that Judah, like his brothers, was guilty of misconduct. But there is a significant difference between Judah and Reuben (for example). We are never told that Reuben repented of his evil, or that he changed his conduct significantly. Judah, when faced with his sin, confessed it and forsook it:

And Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again (Genesis 38:26).

Furthermore, Reuben's response to their distress in Egypt was to "pass the buck" by telling his brothers, in effect, "I told you so" (42:22). Judah, on the other hand, took full responsibility for the safety of Benjamin (43:8-10) and offered himself as a hostage in place of his youngest brother (48:18ff.).

These observations bring us to the purpose of Jacob's prophecy, and thus the purpose of all prophecy. Here, we can find the meaning of the many prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled, whether in our day or not.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/purpose-prophecy-genesis-491-28>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Promises regarding the royal descendant of Judah were fulfilled in two ways. First, they were fulfilled through the Davidic monarchy. David, a descendant of Judah, ruled Israel in power given by God (see 2 Samuel 7:5–15). David partially fulfilled the prophecy; his rule was a shadow of the royalty to come. The second way Judah's promises were fulfilled was through the promised eternal king (2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Jeremiah 33:17; see Psalm 45:6). The Old Testament prophets looked for "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1) who would gather all people (11:10–16). His rule would be one of peace and righteousness from the throne of David (9:7) and the tribe of Judah (Jeremiah 23:5–6; Micah 5:2). The New Testament writers interpreted these promises to apply to Jesus (see Matthew 2:1–6; Luke 1:32; Hebrews 7:14). As king, Jesus would bring salvation to the world (Luke 2:29–32). His kingdom, inaugurated at his first coming, would be fulfilled in his second coming to earth (see Revelation 2:26–27; 5:5; 19:15). Judah and his family were by no means ideal ancestors for royalty, they were marked by rivalry, strife, and dysfunction. Judah's life, in particular, was filled with unrighteous acts. He was a wreck and an unlikely choice to be the ancestor of royalty. However, God's plan of redemption is transformative. He led a dysfunctional family to become the nation of Israel. From this family would emerge the Savior of the world. He turns wrecks into royals!