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A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“Jacob’s Prophecy: A Prologue to the New Testament”¹

by

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¹ Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).
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Introduction

The Book of Genesis closes with the Patriarch Jacob, who had been renamed “Israel,” calling his sons and grandsons to him, and saying, inter alia:

Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father....

Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

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.³

In *The City of God*, Augustine of Hippo demonstrated that this utterance of the Patriarch Jacob, in Genesis 49:10, was a prophecy about Christ; and that it also prophesied that Christ would appear at a precise moment in the history of the Jews, so as to prevent the absence of a “scepter” or a “prince” from reigning in Jerusalem; that is to say, “Shiloh” would appear right when the non-Israelite king Herod the Great had taken the throne of Israel.

According to Augustine, Jacob’s prophetic prediction is fully explained, or brought to fruition, “in the books of the Maccabees”⁴ and in the history of the Jews leading up to the reign of King Herod the Great, “a king of foreign birth,”⁵ during the period when ancient Judea had “began to be Roman tributaries.”⁶

Thus, in order to fulfill Jacob’s prophecy in Genesis 49:10, Christ was born during the time of King Herod’s reign and when the sovereignty of ancient Judea had fallen completely into the hands of the Roman empire.

³ Genesis 49: 2, 9-10.

⁴ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 655-656.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Chapter One

“The Patriarch Jacob’s Prophecy about Jesus Christ”

The Patriarch Jacob (1791 to 1644 BC) was the grandson of the Patriarch Abraham. He was born in ancient Palestine and died in Egypt in, circa, 1644 BC. Just before he died, he gathered all twelve of his sons before him and blessed each one of them. But his blessing to his son Judah was most interesting.

However, I think that it is important to digress a moment here and say a few words about Judah. There was nothing particularly noble about Judah’s character. Judah was not the eldest son. He was the fourth son behind Rueben, Simon, and Levi. Judah had participated in a conspiracy and cover-up to sell his brother Joseph into slavery.⁷ We may surmise that the honor passed from the older brothers to Judah, because these older brothers were, in fact, more sinful than Judah.⁸

Nevertheless, the Patriarch Jacob predicted, in Genesis 49:10, that through Judah shall the princes or kings of Israel reign forever, as follows:

Orthodox Jewish Bible: Genesis 49:10 (“The shevet (sceptre) shall not depart from Yehudah, nor a Mekhokek (Lawgiver) from between his raglayim, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall be the obedience of the amim (peoples, nations).”)

New King James Version: Genesis 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.”)

International Version: Genesis 49:10 (“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.”)

Augustine’s Version as quoted in *The City of God*: Genesis 49:10 (“A prince shall not fail out of Judah, nor a leader from his thighs,

⁷ Genesis 37: 26.

⁸ Genesis 34: 1-31.

until those things come which are laid up for him; and He is the expectation of the nations.”⁹

Of this very prophecy, Augustine of Hippo says, “Jacob died in Egypt a hundred and forty-seven years old, after he had, when dying, blessed his sons and his grandsons by Joseph, and prophesied most plainly of Christ, saying in the blessing of Judah, ‘A prince shall not fail out of Judah, nor a leader from his thighs, until those things come which are laid up for him; and He is the expectation of the nations.’”¹⁰

Similarly, Ray Pritchard has recently written in a blog titled, “Jacob: A Messiah will Come from Judah,” the following insightful analysis, to wit:

The scepter (the sign of regal authority) would rest with Judah until “Shiloh” comes. “Shiloh” is either a proper name for the Messiah, or it is a Hebrew contraction meaning “he to whom it (the scepter) belongs.” If it is a proper name, then “Shiloh” means “the one who brings peace.” That may well be correct, since Isaiah 9:6-7 calls Messiah the “Prince of Peace.” If it is a Hebrew contraction, Jacob is prophesying the Messiah will be the rightful ruler of the world. Both thoughts are true, and it is possible both thoughts are intended by the expression “Shiloh.”

Here is a simple outline of Jacob’s prophecy concerning Judah in Genesis 49:8-12:

Judah will be the dominant tribe in Israel (v. 8).

Judah will be lion-like in courage and strength (v. 9).

The Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah (v. 10)

His coming brings peace, joy and prosperity (v. 11-12)

Although Jacob predicts dominance for Judah, this prophecy was not fulfilled for many centuries. Israel’s earliest leaders came from other tribes:

⁹ *The City of God*, supra, p. 614.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Moses from Levi

Joshua from Ephraim

Gideon from Manasseh

Samson from Dan

Samuel from Ephraim

Saul from Benjamin

But after Saul was rejected, God chose a man from the tribe of Judah to be king. That man was David.¹¹

Of course, the Book of Matthew opens with a genealogy linking Jesus of Nazareth (i.e., Christ) to King David— and so the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob was fulfilled.¹²

¹¹ Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/jacob-messiah-come-from-judah-ray-pritchard/>

¹² Matthew 1:1-17 (“So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David unto the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.”)

Chapter Two

“A Reformed Interpretation of Jacob’s Prophecy”

As Reformed theologians hold the theological conclusions of Augustine of Hippo in very high regards, it is appropriate to analyze both Augustine’s and Calvin’s views on Jacob’s prophecy, as stated in Genesis 49:10.

Now Jacob (i.e., “Israel”), from whom Christ descended, prefigured the Christian Church through whom the blessings of the nations would reach fruition.

Notably, when Jacob’s prophecy about Christ occurred in, circa, 1644 BC, three of the ancient kingdoms, through which this Messianic prophecy would most immediately impact, had not yet come into existence:

Kingdom of Babylon- Jerusalem captured in 597 – 587 BC

Kingdom of the Medes/ Persians- Jerusalem restored, circa, 550- 539 BC

Kingdom of the Hellenistic Greeks- Alexander the Great conquers/ captures Jerusalem, circa, 356- 323 BC

Kingdom of the Romans- Pompey conquers/ captures Jerusalem, circa, 63 BC; King Herod is enthroned as king of Judea in, circa, 37 BC.

The Prophet Daniel had foretold of the coming of a “Son of Man,”¹³ a “Prince of princes,”¹⁴ and a “Messiah the Prince,”¹⁵ whom the Christian church interpreted to be Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.¹⁶

¹³ Daniel 7: 13.

¹⁴ Daniel 8:25.

¹⁵ Daniel 9:25-26.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (United States of America: Renaissance Classics, 2012).

Daniel’s prophecy involved four major kingdoms, which is retold in three different formats, one of which is as follows:

The Four Beasts

Daniel 7:4 “the first beast”	Kingdom of Babylon
Daniel 7:5 “the second beast”	Kingdom of the Medes/Persians
Daniel 7:6 “the third beast”	Kingdom of the Hellenistic Greeks
Daniel 7:7 “the fourth beast”	Kingdom of the Romans

Thus, describing the history of the latter Roman period in *The City of God*, Augustine of Hippo succinctly sets forth the fruition of the Patriarch Jacob’s prophecy as follows:

Pompey then, a most illustrious prince of the Roman people, having entered Judea with an army, took the city, threw open the temple, not with the devotion of a suppliant, but with the authority of a conqueror, and went, not reverently, but profanely, into the holy of holies, where it was lawful for none but the pontiff to enter. Having established Hyrcanus in the pontificate, and set Antipater over the subjugated nation as guardian or procurator, as they were then called, he led Aristobulus with him bound. From that time the Jews also began to be Roman tributaries. Afterward Cassius plundered the very temple. Then after a few years it was their desert to have Herod, a king of foreign birth, in whose reign Christ was born. For the time had now come signified by the prophetic Spirit through the mouth of the patriarch Jacob, when he says, **‘There shall not be lacking a prince out of Judah, nor a teacher from his loins, until He shall come for whom it is reserved; and He is the expectation of the nations.’** There lacked not therefore a Jewish prince of the Jews until that Herod, who was the first king of a foreign race received by them. Therefore it was now the time when He should come for whom that was reserved which is promised in the New Testament, that He should be the expectation of the nations.¹⁷

¹⁷ *The City of God*, supra, p. 656.

Now to confirm Augustine's theory, one must be able to demonstrate that from the time of King Zedekiah, who went into the Babylonian captivity in 597 BC, up to the beginning of the reign of King Herod in 37 BC, that the kingdom of Judah had an unbroken chain of princes or kings. That period of history is contained in Josephus' *The Antiquities of the Jews*, to wit:

- Book 10, "From the Captivity of the Ten Tribes to the First Year of Cyrus";
- Book 11, "From the First Year of Cyrus to the Death of Alexander the Great"; and,
- Book 12, "From the Death of Alexander the Great to the Death of Antigonus."¹⁸

These books show how, even during the Babylonian captivity from 597 to 538 BC, the House of David survived, was acknowledged by the Jewish people, and struggled to maintain its influence.¹⁹

Following the return of the Jews to Judea in 538 BC, there remained some semblance of Jewish princely authority and leadership, whether as a governor, high

¹⁸ Josephus, "The Antiquities of the Jews," *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), pp. 318 - 402. See, also, John Calvin's *Commentaries on the Bible*, stating (on Genesis 49:10):

Yet I confess the question is not yet solved; but I wished to premise this, in order that the Jews, laying aside their disposition to calumniate, may learn calmly to examine the matter itself, with us. Christians are commonly wont to connect perpetual government with the tribe of Judah, in the following manner. When the people returned from banishment, they say, that, in the place of the royal scepter, was the government which lasted to the time of the Maccabees. That afterwards, a third mode of government succeeded, because the chief power of judging rested with the Seventy, who, it appears by history, were chosen out of the regal race. Now, so far was this authority of the royal race from having fallen into decay, that Herod, having been cited before it, with difficulty escaped capital punishment, because he contumaciously withdrew from it. Our commentators, therefore, conclude that, although the royal majesty did not shine brightly from David until Christ, yet some preeminence remained in the tribe of Judah, and thus the oracle was fulfilled.

Source: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/genesis-49.html>

¹⁹ Ibid.

priest, prince, or the Sanhedrin (i.e., 70 or 72 Elders/Chief Priests/High Priest, etc.).²⁰

Therefore, Augustine of Hippo's general theological conclusions regarding Genesis 49:10, that Israel (i.e., Judah) suffered no broken chain of princely authority and leadership until the reign of King Herod in 37 BC, but in Herod's reign the rightful heir, Jesus of Nazareth, was born, are substantiated through Jewish history.²¹

The "*scepter*" had not left Judah, from the Patriarch Jacob until the Jewish High Priest Ananelus was murdered by King Herod; nevertheless, during Herod's reign, Christ was born, thus extending the Jewish princely reign. According to the New Testament Early Church, the *eternal reign* of Jesus Christ over all nations was thus commenced at the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in 33/34 AD.²²

This was, thus, the eternal and everlasting kingdom as foretold in the Book of Daniel the Prophet, where he stated that "one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven.... And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an *everlasting dominion*, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."²³

And, finally, the great Reformed theologian John Calvin (1509- 1564) thus construed Genesis 49:10, as follows:

The scepter shall not depart.... Even the Jews will not deny, that while a lower blessing rested on the tribe of Judah, the hope of a better and more excellent condition was herein held forth. They also freely grant another point, that the Messiah is the sole Author of full and solid happiness and glory. We now add a third point, which we may also do, without any opposition from them; namely, that the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Matthew 28:18-20 (And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.)

²³ Daniel 7: 13-14.

kingdom which began from David, was a kind of prelude, and shadowy representation of that greater grace which was delayed, and held in suspense, until the advent of the Messiah....

Until Shiloh come, he says, the scepter, or the dominion, shall remain in Judah.... A kingdom is therefore described to us, which after it has been constituted, will not cease to exist till a more perfect state shall succeed; or, which comes to the same point; Jacob honors the future kingdom of David with this title, because it was to be the token and pledge of that happy glory which had been before ordained for the race of Abraham. In short, the kingdom which he transfers to the tribe of Judah, he declares shall be no common kingdom, because from it, at length, shall proceed the fullness of the promised benediction.

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Here truly he declares that Christ should be a king, *not over one people only, but that under his authority various nations shall be gathered*, that they might coalesce together. I know, indeed, that the word rendered “gathering” is differently expounded by different commentators; but they who derive it from the root (קָהַה,) to make it signify the weakening of the people, rashly and absurdly misapply what is said of the saving dominion of Christ, to the sanguinary pride with which they puffed up. If the word obedience is preferred, (as it is by others,) the sense will remain the same with that which I have followed. For this is the mode in which the gathering together will be effected; namely, that they who before were carried away to different objects of pursuit, will consent together in obedience to one common Head. Now, although Jacob had previously called the tribes about to spring from him by the name of peoples, for the sake of amplification, yet this gathering is of still wider extent. For, whereas he had included the whole body of the nation by their families, when he spoke of the ordinary dominion of Judah, **he now extends the boundaries of a new king: as if he would say, “There shall be kings of the tribe of Judah, who shall be pre eminent among their brethren, and to whom the sons of the same mother shall bow down: but at length He shall follow in succession, who shall subject other peoples unto himself.”** But this, we know, is fulfilled in Christ; to whom was promised the inheritance of the world; under whose yoke the nations are brought; and at whose will they, who before were scattered, are

gathered together. Moreover, *a memorable testimony is here borne to the vocation of the Gentiles, because they were to be introduced into the joint participation of the covenant, in order that they might become one people with the natural descendants of Abraham, under one Head.*²⁴

²⁴ John Calvin's *Commentaries on the Bible* (Genesis 49:10).

Source: <https://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/genesis-49.html>

Conclusion

As a prologue to the opening chapters of the Book of Matthew, the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob regarding his fourth son Judah, at Genesis 49:10, is a powerful one.

When Pontius Pilate ordered that Jesus of Nazareth be crucified in ancient Judea during the year 33/34 AD, he ordered that a sign containing the words “Jesus, King of the Jews,” or words similar, be nailed to the cross above Jesus’s head.²⁵

According to the New Testament Early Church, this crucifixion, followed by Christ’s resurrection, inaugurated an *everlasting* and *eternal kingdom* upon earth—a “new covenant” kingdom.

Of this new kingdom, the Patriarch Jacob had prophesied: “[t]here shall not be lacking a prince out of Judah, nor a teacher from his loins, until He shall come for whom it is reserved; and He is the expectation of the nations.”²⁶

Reformed theology—as both Augustine’s and Calvin’s conclusions demonstrate—hold that the Patriarch Jacob’s prophecy was about the first coming of Christ and of the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

THE END

²⁵ Matthew 27:37.

²⁶ *The City of God*, supra, p. 656 (quoting Genesis 49:10).