

THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ November 22, 2015



“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. ⁹ You are a lion’s cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? 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. 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.

To him who is the king of kings and Lord of Lords,

One of the great literary works of fiction of our time is *The Lord of the Rings* written by JRR Tolkien. Now, maybe some of you have read the books, maybe others of you have just seen the movies, maybe there are some who really have no interest in the fantasy fiction Tolkien wrote. Whatever your Tolkien background is, I invite you to join me on a journey of not quite so long proportions to the third book of the trilogy. That book is entitled, *Return of the King*, and one of the storylines Tolkien weaves in the novel is that of a wandering nomad named Aragorn. At first glance it may not seem like he is anyone special, but he is in fact the king who the book is titled for. To become king he must claim his birthright, he must reclaim the throne of Gondor, because he is the heir of Isildur, the one true king.

I haven’t taken a survey of people, but I would venture to guess that there may be more people who are more familiar with this fictional story, than are familiar with the story of the lineage of Jesus. For example, I wonder how many people are even familiar with the name Judah and could tell you anything about it. And yet it is through the line of Judah that Jesus came. So who is Judah? Judah was the fourth-born son of Jacob, who is also called Israel. It was from Jacob’s 12 sons that (many of) the tribes of Israel get their name. As we look closer at our first lesson this morning, we see the blessing God bestowed on Judah through his father Israel. The focus of this blessing is on THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH’S LINE.

1. His reign is eternal
2. He rules the nations

It would have been a bittersweet moment for the twelve sons of Jacob. Their father, well along in years, had gotten sick, a sickness from which he knew he would not recover. And so he gathered his sons around him one last time and gave them each a blessing. These blessings were more than just Jacob hoping his sons would be good, upstanding citizens. These were blessings he gave to them using the knowledge he knew of his sons in addition to the Spirit of God. And while God directed each of the blessings that went to each of the sons, he looked with special favor on Judah.

Judah, even though he wasn't the eldest son, had displayed some characteristics of a leader, he became the spokesmen for the brothers during their time in Egypt. But it wasn't just because Judah looked like a leader that Jacob gave him this blessing, but it was because of grace – God's undeserved love. This blessing upon Judah was not just for him, but for his descendants who followed after him, descendants which included Kings David and Solomon, but also descendants like Matthan and Joseph the carpenter. We see the blessing most clearly in verse 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."**

From a human standpoint it seemed like all was going well with the prophecy. David, a descendant of Judah became king over all of Israel, then his son Solomon after him. And for about 400 years the descendants of Judah ruled over at least parts of the Jewish nation. That is until their reign came to a sudden and abrupt halt – by the Babylonian invaders. No longer was there a descendant of Judah ruling over so much as a small territory, let alone the kingdom of Israel. From a human standpoint, the scepter had left the tribe of Judah, the ruler's staff departed from between his feet long before Jesus ever came about.

But that's the thing. God doesn't look at things from a human standpoint. It didn't matter if there was not an earthly ruler from Judah. God was unveiling this prophecy through the course of time. People wondered, and doubted, and lapsed, and rebelled, but God was nothing but faithful to his Word, faithful to his promise. Because like the king of Gondor from *Lord of the Rings*, the royal line of Judah was kept intact. A KING WOULD COME FROM JUDAH'S LINE, but not one they were expecting.

It was in the New Testament book of Galatians that the apostle Paul wrote these words, **"When the time had fully come God sent his Son."** Listen to that first phrase again, **"When the time had fully come."** The meaning behind those words? When the time was just as God had planned, when the time was perfect, he sent his son, THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE. Not only did this make sense in a historical context, it made sense in a God context. This king would not be born in a royal palace, but a humble feeding trough. This king would not wear fine clothes and live in the lap of luxury, but travel from village to village teaching the people. This king would not be pronouncing punishments, but would

have a punishment pronounced on him. Yet through all of this he was a king, and we catch glimpses of that.

When wise men from the East came when he was but a youth, they were searching for **"The king of the Jews,"** when the crowds greeted him on Palm Sunday they shouted, **"Hosanna to the Son of David,"** Jesus himself when he stood before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate declared, **"I am a King."** But these small glimpses of glory were overwhelmed by the majority who rejected him as THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE. He did not fit the bill of what a king should look like, he did not fit the bill for what they were looking for. They wanted a king who would satisfy their bellies and praise their ambitions. But THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE did none of that.

How much different is the world today? Many in the world today do not look to Jesus as THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE, if they did, they would make more of an effort to serve him. Instead, they acknowledge him as a great person, but not Savior, he just doesn't conform what they're looking for. Who can blame them? We cannot prove by history or current events that Jesus is Savior and king, in fact when you look around at who seems to be ruling the world, it certainly doesn't seem to be Jesus. If this is the way Jesus is my king, then I don't want it, many seem to say, just like they did 2,000 years ago. Many just want a king to satisfy their bellies and praise their ambitions. But THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE does none of that.

THE KING FROM JUDAH'S LINE cannot be seen by the world, but he can be seen by the Word. He who is the eternal ruler of wind and wave spoke and the storm was stilled. By his eternal authority he made the paralytic walk *and* forgave his sins. To the demons: "Come out." To the dead: "Arise. Stand up. Come forth." Power and authority of him who is from eternity to eternity. Revelation identifies the Risen Christ with the Lion of Judah and calls him "King of kings." So do we.

(2)

This lion of Judah, this King of kings is ruling right now. He is ruling in the hearts of his people. But even this is not where his reign ends. The end of verse 10 shows us the ultimate end goal of his reign: **"and the obedience of the nations shall be his."**

Why is this the case? Because Jesus did not just come down to earth to rescue scumbags like you and me, he came to rescue the whole world and all the scumbags in it. Once again, his appearance is deceiving with his borrowed manger, borrowed boat, borrowed donkey, borrowed upper room, and borrowed grave. People mocked him for his claims from the soldiers who crucified him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" to the sarcastic placard placed above the cross.

But THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE remained up there on the cross, even when his enemies mocked him to save himself. And we can thank God that Jesus didn't

listen to them. Because he had something bigger in mind than settling a petty score, he had something bigger in mind than just being king of the Jews, he had in mind to be king of the nations. And on that cross, he bore the weight, the punishment of the world's sin (yours and mine included). He suffered the agonies of hell on that cross as his own Father turned his back on him. He did that so that people from all nations could be drawn to him. He provides to them free of charge the blessing of salvation and so much more.

The way in which he comes now doesn't seem anymore glorious and special. Sometimes we think that something this great should come with more fanfare, but it doesn't. He still comes in a humble way – not with the sword, but with the Word. Jesus comes through simple preaching, he comes through baptism, and he comes through the Lord's Supper. These are things that are easily despised and vulnerable. We might think that the more effective way is to use guilt, or to add flash, or to dress up what we do, but it is the simple means of grace – in his Word and in his sacraments that make subjects for the king and from every nation by the gospel's power.

But when we think about THE KING WHO CAME FROM JUDAH'S LINE, we must never think that only those who are his subjects will be obedient to him. For while he came to save the world, many in the world have rejected him. Yet, they will be held accountable for their actions. At the end of the gospel of Matthew, he describes that Jesus will come with power and great glory to call all mankind to account. It is on that day that “**every knee will bow,**” I might add willingly or unwillingly. For obedience belongs to him

In *Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn, the wandering nomad does claim the throne of his ancestors, despite for the longest time not looking the part of a king. Those who doubted his claim to rule, they had to deal with the consequences following his return, but to those who supported him, they could rejoice in a time of peace. A similar story has not yet taken place but is recorded for us in the Bible. On the Last Day, a king will return in glorious majesty – a majesty that is hidden to many right now. On that day, those who doubted his claim to rule in their hearts, they will deal with the eternal consequences of their unbelief, but to those who supported him, we can rejoice in an ultimate time of peace.

Nothing we do or think changes this fact. Nothing that others do or think changes this fact. Our Lord is the lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the rightful heir, not just of the tribes of Israel, but over all nations and all obedience belongs to him. May we rejoice in this truth, and encourage others to do the same. For we enjoy joyful service now and glorious service in eternity. Amen.