

“The Scepter Will Not Depart from Judah”
 First Advent Midweek Service, December 4, 2019
 Genesis 49:8-10
 Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado
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For our meditations on God’s Word during these Advent Midweek Services, I am inviting you to think with me along the lines of the Messiah’s family tree. According to His human nature, Jesus had a history. He came from a specific people. He came from a specific family. He had a lineage, an ancestry.

God’s things do not happen in the abstract. They happen in concrete history. In Jesus, God, who is pure Spirit, meets us in the concrete reality of our existence. He enters our history, not in the sense that God in His being becomes as history develops; but in the sense of coming to us where we are, as well as directing history according to His ultimate redeeming purposes under the cross. For Advent shows us God accomplishing His purposes even though human history shows itself going mad in its sinful idolatry, rebellious lawlessness, and destructive violence. God manages history in His Sovereignty according to promise and fulfillment. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of promise.

To get started we need to go back to the beginning, to the garden of Eden, to Adam and Eve, to the serpent and the forbidden fruit.

Eve took some of the forbidden fruit and ate (Genesis 3:6). She gave some to her husband, Adam, who was with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6). Then their eyes were opened, not to the wisdom and deification that the Devil had promised through the serpent, but to shame, and guilt, and fear of God’s wrath (Genesis 3:7, 10).

Immediately, God promised that a seed of Eve would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). This promise introduces us to a couple important things that are thematic of God’s redemptive history. One important thing is seed or offspring. An offspring of Eve, a specific “he” would do something critically important to the Devil. He would crush the Serpent’s head. He would destroy the Devil’s work.

And that is the second thing: destroying the Devil’s work. Adam and Eve knew the Devil’s work quite well: sin, shame, guilt, greed, the blame-game, strife not peace, frustration not rest, fear of God being angry rather than implicit faith in God’s goodness and blessing; and then there is also death, with its fear and pain.

They knew in their experience that they were taught all this by the Devil, because all of this was new to them when the Serpent came—though it is not new to us.

So, when they heard a promise from God right away that a Son of Eve would crush the Serpent’s head, they knew it would mean that He would destroy the Devil’s work. For sin was the thing that changed everything about their existence. And death was the penalty imposed for sin.

We could follow the promise through the so-called “godly line of Seth.” Seth being a son of Adam and Eve. We follow that line to Abraham.

God promised to Abraham that in his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Blessing not curse or judgment. Life not death. Forgiveness of sins, and peace and rest with God.

Isaac became the necessary promised son to keep the story going. The Lord promised Isaac. Isaac was born.

Then we follow the story to Jacob, son of Isaac. The LORD changes Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:28). Jacob has 12 sons. This brings us to Genesis 49.

We see the promise of the devil-destroying Son being narrowed down from an offspring of Eve to Abraham; then through Isaac to Jacob, who is called Israel by the LORD. And where does the story go from there? It goes to Judah, one of Israel's sons, a tribe of Israel.

Genesis chapter 49 opens with Jacob, that is, Israel, on his deathbed. He blesses his twelve sons. This is not just well wishing, but divine instruction and prophesy. It is especially prophetic when it comes to Judah (Genesis 49:8-12).

Judah, your brothers shall praise you and bow down to you. Judah will have the lasting rule. Judah, you are like a lion.

The Apostle John calls Jesus the lion of the tribe of Judah and proclaims that He has conquered (Revelation 5:5).

And then we get to the heart of it: 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 peoples" (Genesis 49:10).

The scepter: this means kingly rule. Kingly rule, the throne of God's kingdom, will never depart from Judah. This goes along with lawgiver.

But what does this have to do with the promised Son of Eve? Here it is: Shiloh.

There is controversy about this Shiloh. This word in Hebrew, however, is a proper noun. Jacob is being given by the LORD to see prophetically the coming of a man who is Shiloh.

This is important because this word is related to the verb in Hebrew, Shalah. This verb means to be at rest or at ease. It can also mean to be at peace.

So, Shiloh is the rest-giver. The peace-giver.

Now think of what Jesus said, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

Jesus is Shiloh.

Think of this in contrast to what we just said Adam and Eve began immediately to know in their experience, in their disobedience: sin, fear, guilt, anger, strife, shame, frustration; death.

Now think of rest-giver, peace-giver. Shiloh is the answer to sin and death. Shiloh is going the same way as the Son of Eve who would destroy the Devil's work.

Shiloh will come from Judah. Micah 5:2 confirms this. This verse was quoted by Matthew (2:6), "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

That the scepter would never depart from Judah until Shiloh comes was preserved during the awful times of the falling away of Israel and Judah into idolatry and captivity. The kingdom of Israel in the north was destroyed in its idolatry, never to rise again. The kingdom of Judah was also destroyed and taken captive. Yet the promise was that a remnant from Judah would be preserved and would return to Jerusalem one day. The kingdom of Judah would be preserved because out of Judah would come the one who would be ruler in Israel.

Dear Christian, God knows what He is doing, even as human beings in their arrogance and lawlessness seem to be driving history. But they are not driving history. God is. Human beings do what they do. God is always responding and accomplishing His purposes in spite of it. Beneath the surface of history, that appears like lawlessness and sin are in control, or even that the Devil is in control, God is working His purposes.

This means that history is taking place before our eyes under the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross means that though it appears like the lawlessness of sinful humans prevails and God loses, God is accomplishing redemption and turning the tables on lawless men. God is turning the tables on the Devil and destroying the Devil's work. God wins in Jesus. The Devil loses. And God wants you to win along with Him.

When it appears in your own life that God is losing, He is not. You are being redeemed under the sign of the cross. God's victory in Christ over sin and death through death and resurrection is undergirding you. We see this by faith because we see our need for redemption.

And history is taking place before our eyes according to promise and fulfillment. God promised. He promised that the kingdom would remain with Judah and that Shiloh would come from Judah. He came. He was rightful heir to the throne, but He was crowned with a crown of thorns. Yet, He won for Himself a kingdom with a different crown. He won it in resurrection. The crown He took and wears is life obtaining victory over death and destroying the Devil's work. It is the crown of everlasting life. His kingdom and reign never dies, never fails, and never ends. And He reigns this way for you.

The Devil lies crushed under His feet. And He gives you peace and rest in the forgiveness of sins and promise of life over death. He is Shiloh, rest-giver, peace-giver, for you.

This part of promise and fulfillment has been fulfilled. There is promise yet to come in the promise of Jesus's appearing once again in glory and power at the end of this age. Advent teaches us that God rules in His sovereignty by promise and fulfillment. He promised Jesus's coming the first time and accomplished it. We can be sure the promise of Jesus's return will be fulfilled.

Let us then say by faith in Shiloh, our dear Lord Jesus who has come: Amen. Come Lord Jesus; come once again in your everlasting reign. Amen.