

THE BLESSING OF JUDAH AS GENERATIVE EXPECTATION

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ABSTRACT

As authors of Scripture cite and interpret earlier passages of Scripture, they create networks of expectation. The blessing of Judah in Genesis, for example, sparked advances and expectations in Balaam's oracles, 2 Samuel 7:14–15, Ezekiel 19:10–14, Zechariah 9:9, Psalm 2:7–9, and 1 Chronicles 28:4 that together lead to the gospel of Messiah. Examining such networks of expectation offers insight into the dynamics of progressive revelation.

INTRODUCTION

BY NEARLY ANY STANDARD, authors of Scripture seem soaked through with Scripture. This deep investment leads to the natural continuity that runs through Scripture and at times generates breathtaking advances. An example is seen in the expectations that develop from the blessing of Judah in Genesis 49:8–12. Every line of this blessing houses suggestive connotations. These connotations, when combined with fulfillments and new expectations elsewhere in Scripture, generate further expectations for the Judah-king. As these build on each other, they create a network of progressive revelation leading to the gospel of Messiah.

After introducing the blessing of Judah in Genesis, the present study briefly evaluates expectations that grow from this scriptural tradition. These include parts of Balaam's third and fourth oracles, part of the Davidic covenant presented by Nathan, a dark parody in Ezekiel 19, a prequel to the blessing of Judah in Zechariah 9:9, the blending of the blessing of Judah with Balaam's oracle of the star and the Davidic covenant in Psalm 2, and the blending of the blessing of Judah with the Davidic covenant in David's address in 1

Chronicles 28. These and more give rise to the New Testament’s use of the network of Judah-king expectations. After surveying these individually, this article will summarize the function of the Judah-king network of scriptural expectations.

The following translation and notes can serve as a reference for the discussion that follows.¹

Judah [*yehudah* יהודה], you,
 your brothers will praise [*yodu* יודו] you,
 your hand upon the neck of your enemies,
 the sons of your father shall bow down before you.
⁹ A young lion, Judah, from the prey you go up,
 like a lion he crouches and lies down, and like a lioness—
 who dares rouse him?
¹⁰ The scepter shall not turn aside from Judah,
 nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
 until² that which belongs to him comes,³

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all Scripture translation is the author’s. The translations are intentionally overly literal for the purposes of the present study.

² Richard C. Steiner removes the Masoretic accents and enhances other ambiguities of Genesis 49:10 with special focus on the semantic and syntactical function of עַד as “until,” “ever,” and “forever.” “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:10: On the Lexical and Syntactical Ambiguities of עַד as Reflected in the Prophecies of Nathan, Ahijah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 1 (2013): 33–60. The Masoretic *’atnach* (אֲנָח) denotes the A line as “the scepter shall not turn aside from Judah ...” (לֹא יִסּוּר אֲנָח מִיְהוּדָה ...) and the B line as starting with “until ...” (... עַד). Steiner suggests two readings if the *’atnach* were placed on עַד making it the end of the A line (with other adjustments): “The scepter shall not depart from Judah ... ever” or “If the scepter departs from Judah ... it shall not do so forever” (36). One problem confronting Steiner’s radical proposal is the need to rely on the evidence of innerbiblical exegesis of Ahijah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah (1 Kgs 11:38–39; Ezek 21:30–31; Zech 9:9), who each allegedly presuppose the alternate readings— עַד as “ever” or “forever” in Genesis 49:10. These prophets do not require forever-language from Genesis 49:10 once it appears in the Davidic covenant with its many references to “forever” עַד־עוֹלָם/עוֹלָם (2 Sam 7:13; 23:5; cf. Ps 72:5, 7, 15, 17, 19; 89:4 [5]; etc.). The forever-language of the Davidic covenant eliminates the reasons to creatively massage the syntax of Genesis 49:10.

³ The term *shiloh* שִׁילֹה (Qere reads it as שִׁילֹו since שִׁילֹה is one of several archaic forms in the blessing) is a special problem and typically has multiple glosses in the margins of modern committee translations, e.g., “until tribute comes to him,” “until Shiloh comes,” “until he comes to Shiloh,” or “until he comes to whom it belongs” (NRSV). The second and third options regard שִׁילֹה as referring to Shiloh, though it is never spelled this way elsewhere in Scripture. The first option is based on taking שִׁ as a relative pronoun (with the sense of “who/which/that” אֲשֶׁר) and לֹה (לֹה + ל) as “belongs to him,” and then “that which belongs to him” is glossed as “tribute,” since tribute is brought to royal figures. A lesser alternative of this option makes a small emendation (לֹה + שִׁ) with שִׁ as “gift” (Isa 18:7; Ps 68:29 [30]; 76:12), but in these other uses it is the object of “bring” יָבֵל (Hoph or Hiph), which does not appear in Genesis 49:10 (see Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Ar-*

and the obedience of the peoples is his.
¹¹ Binding his jack to the vine,
 his purebred donkey to a choice vine,⁴
 he washes his garment in wine,
 and his robe in the blood of grapes.
¹² His eyes darker than wine,
 and his teeth whiter than milk (Gen 49:8–12).

GENESIS AND THE BLESSING OF JUDAH

Genesis bears on the blessing of Judah, while the blessing of Judah in turn bears on Genesis; each needs to be considered in turn.⁵ The book of Genesis contributes to the significance of the blessing of Judah in at least three ways: the naming of Judah, Judah's progression to the blessing, and royal expectations.

First, the naming story of Judah stands apart among the naming stories of the first eleven male offspring of Jacob. The naming stories typically use wordplays on the sons' names as commentary on the baby competition between Leah and Rachel. Both women seem interested in the quantity of male children, Leah to win Ja-

amaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 2:1476, s.v. יָשׁוּ). If Psalm 72 makes interpretive allusions to Genesis centered on the blessing of Judah refracted through the Davidic covenant—a viable option in spite of several moving parts—the psalmist glosses יָשׁוּ as though it says “that which belongs to him” with the sense of “tribute” (תְּרוּמָה) (Ps 72:10). See Gary Edward Schnittjer, *The Torah Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 186–87. Also see Serge Frolov, “Judah Comes to Shiloh: Genesis 49:10ba, One More Time,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 417–22; Richard C. Steiner, “Poetic Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization and Three Difficult Phrases in Jacob’s Blessing: יָתֵר שְׂאֵת (Gen 49:3), יְצוּעֵי עֶלְהָ (49:4), and בָּבֶרֶשׁ (49:10),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 2 (2010): 219–26. There are no convincing views of this term or Genesis 49:10.

⁴ On “jack” and “purebred donkey,” see footnote 30 in the discussion of Zechariah 9:9 below.

⁵ The present study has something very different in mind from the elaborate comparisons drawn between Genesis 49:8–12 and Genesis 37–38 by Edwin M. Good, “The ‘Blessing’ of Judah, Gen 49 8–12,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82, no. 4 (1963): 427–32, or Calum M. Carmichael, “Some Sayings in Genesis 49,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4 (1969): 435–44. Good notes the relationship between the word of Jacob to Reuben (Gen 49:3–4) and his incest (35:22) and between the word to Simeon and Levi (49:5–7) and the incident of Genesis 34. He applies the same sort of logic to the word to Judah and the events in Genesis 37 and 38 (429). To make the comparison work, Carmichael regards Jacob’s word to Judah in 49:8–12 as an ironic rebuke (438). Several of the extravagant comparisons require unlikely textual emendations—like Shiloh 49:10 שִׁילָה corrected to Shelah שְׁלֵה, Judah’s third son (Good, “The ‘Blessing’ of Judah,” 430). These problematic suggestions, however, invite hypothetical questions of what Jacob would have said to Judah had he not transformed from treachery to leadership.

cob's favor and Rachel to have more than Leah. The dark, ironic naming of Rachel's first son after years of infertility illustrates the high point of the pattern: "She named him Yoseph [יֹסֵף], saying, 'May Yahweh add [יֹסֵף] to me another son'" (Gen 30:24). Joseph's name signals that he is a means to his mother's ambitions. In sharp contrast to the other naming stories, Leah names her fourth male child as an act of gratitude: "She said, 'This time I praise [יְהוָה] Yahweh.' Therefore she named him Yehudah" (יְהוּדָה; 29:35). The verbal root of Leah's praise (יָדָה) prepares for the use of the same verb at the head of the blessing: "Judah [יְהוּדָה], you, your brothers will praise [יְדַבֵּר] you" (49:8).

Second, the main storyline features Judah progressing from despicable man to beneficiary of Israel's highest legacy.⁶ Dramatic events and providential "accidents" train readers to pay attention to who gets the birthright and who gets the blessing. Known patterns—the choice of younger over older, infertility before the promised offspring's birth, and the choice of the beloved son—invite readers to expect that Benjamin, the youngest son of the favorite, temporarily infertile wife, should be beneficiary and heir of Israel. Genesis 37 ends, as expected, with the moral disqualification of Judah and his sibling co-conspirators, while Joseph's slavery in Egypt ends his hopes as benefactor.⁷ Readers become suspicious due to the extensive attention to Judah's continued treachery and Joseph's rise to power (38; 39–41). The drama features a double-twist resolution, with the birthright going to Joseph and the blessing to Judah (see 1 Chron 5:1–2).

Reading the narrative backward and forward reveals a series of related terms that explain how and why Judah secures the blessing. The "pledge" (עֲרֻבֹן) Tamar shows him leads to his confession, "She is righteous, not I" (Gen 38:26). Von Rad identifies the incongruity of this accolade for Tamar: "But what in the world has this to do with our concept of righteousness?"⁸ Judah's declaration pro-

⁶ For further explanation of the transformation of Judah, see Schnittjer, *The Torah Story*, ch. 9; and see Benjamin D. Giffone, "Israel's Only Son?: The Complexity of Benjaminite Identity between Judah and Joseph," *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 3 (2019): 966–69. For a detailed study of sibling rivalry and forgiveness in Genesis 44 that fails to connect the context with Judah's earlier confession, see Alex C. H. Lee and G. Geoffrey Harper, "Dodging the Question?: The Rhetorical Function of the Formula in the Book of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 70, no. 2 (2019): 161–83.

⁷ Judah's treachery (Gen 37:26–27) joins him with Reuben (35:22) and Levi and Simeon (ch. 34), who are disqualified from blessing.

⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 1:374. The comparative sense of the מִן in יְהוּדָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל Gen 38:26 is not expressed quite correctly by "she is more righteous than I." The sense

nounces his own moral bankruptcy and simultaneously signifies righteousness as the currency of Genesis. When Judah offers himself as substitute for his brother, he uses a verb from the same root—“Your servant became a pledge [עֵרַב] for the youth” (44:32)—which connects his surprising change of character to his earlier confession. From the reader’s limited vantage point, this confession of unrighteousness looks like the pivot to a new version of Judah. Where before he committed great treacheries against his brother and daughter-in-law, he now leads the way to face justice: “Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house” (44:14). By his sacrificial speech, Judah brings a temporary end to the plague of sibling rivalry running across the generations and reunites Israel with his beloved son (44:16–34). In human perspective Judah earns the blessing. Judah’s humiliation leads to his blessing.

Third, Genesis houses a series of royal expectations in addition to the blessing of Judah. These include the expectation of the woman’s seed to overcome the serpent’s seed (3:15); kings of peoples who will come from Abraham (17:6), from Sarah (17:16), and from Jacob (35:11); and the dominion of Jacob (27:29). But of these several royal expectations, only Jacob’s blessing enjoys verbal agreement with the blessing of Judah (27:29; 49:8), leaving possible relationships between the others an open question within Genesis.

Contextual elements in the royal expectations of Genesis educate readers on how formal expectations work. Readers learn that the word of blessing cannot be revoked once uttered, even if spoken to a deceiver who comes under false pretenses (27:35). Moreover, divine oracles that correspond in detail to human testaments—that the younger will rule over the older (25:23) and that one will be lord over his brothers (27:29)—raise the profile of formal blessing above mere parental desires. The divine word to Jacob extends the Abrahamic covenant to his offspring, bearing on the testaments to his sons (28:13–15; 35:11–12).

To summarize this point: The relationship of several royal expectations remains open within the horizon of Genesis. These royal expectations invite later scriptural expectations and fulfillments to

is a “comparison of exclusion” and may be more accurately expressed by “she is righteous, not I.” See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §14.4d.15 (265); E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., ed. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), §133b n. 2; Richard J. Clifford, “Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2004): 530–31. For interaction with views of Genesis 38:26, see Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: “Will the Righteous Seed Survive? In the Muthos-logical Movement from Complication to Dénouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 194.

build on them. Formal pronouncement of a father’s testament is irrevocable. Narrative context integrates divine covenantal pronouncements into the parental blessings of the Hebrew ancestors.

The blessing of Judah also offers commentary on Genesis in ways that relate to the ability of the blessing to generate expectations. The present survey focuses on only three elements, namely, the “last days” context, what the brothers hear, and what Jacob thinks he is saying.

First, Jacob describes the proclamations concerning his sons as expectations for “the last days.” The beginning days and the last days frame the book of Genesis (1:3–2:4; 49:1). This implies, not too subtly, that the Genesis narrative sets the course for the entire human story. The blessing of Judah puts in words the most prominent expectation of the ending of the human drama. The story that begins with the creation of the heavens and earth ends with the rule of the Judah-king.

Second, the blessing of Judah needs to be “heard” through the ears of the brotherhood gathered around their father (49:1). Characters’ purview guides the interpretation of discourse embedded within narrative. The blessings of Israel’s sons do not float as detached abstractions; Jacob delivers them to his sons, who attend to him as he dies.

The context naturally shifts the question from, What is the meaning of the statement “the sons of your father shall bow down before you”? to, What do the brothers think when Jacob says “the sons of your father shall bow down before you”? Readers can deduce the brothers’ realization that the dreams Joseph boasted of to his brothers depict what the Judah-king will one day achieve. The rule of Joseph prefigures expectations for the Judah-king.⁹

Third, readers contextualize Jacob’s view of his blessing on Judah with what they know about his story. Jacob knew from the blessing he stole from Esau that the Judah-king would rule over the sons of Israel. But Jacob connected this to a larger dominion over the nations. Note how he exegetically advances the blessing:

[Isaac said to Jacob:] “May peoples serve you and bow down before you. Be lord over your brothers! May the sons of your mother bow down before you” (27:29).

[Jacob says to Judah:] “Judah, you, your brothers will praise you,

⁹ See, for example, John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 235; Samuel Emadi, “Covenant, Typology, and the Story of Joseph,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 69, no. 1 (2018): 17–20.

your hand upon the neck of your enemies, the sons of your father shall bow down before you" (49:8).

Isaac envisioned the nations willingly serving Esau (unwittingly Jacob) but saw him forcefully asserting dominion over his own brothers/kindred (imperative "Be lord!"), a natural view in light of their dysfunctional family dynamics. Jacob, however, reverses the opposition. The brothers praise the Judah-king and bow before him. The willing service of the sons of Israel brackets the Judah-king's forceful assertion of his rule on the necks of the enemies.

In sum, the blessing of Judah in the context of Genesis is an irrevocable expectation for the coming king. He will rule over Israel and the nations in the last days, that is, as the climactic event of the human drama initiated in Genesis. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant as it relates to bringing blessing to all families of the earth is bound up with the rule of the Judah-king. The blessing of Judah provides fertile opportunity for numerous exegetical advances of revelation by scriptural authors. The next sections unpack representative examples of the scriptural use of the blessing of Judah from different genres and historical contexts.

BALAAAM'S ORACLES

Balaam's oracles make a series of interpretive allusions to several covenantal and redemptive scriptural traditions, including quotations of part of the blessing of Judah in the second and third oracles and a possible allusion in the fourth oracle. Part of Balaam's exegetical advancement comes from blending two or more scriptural traditions.¹⁰ Amid many moving parts, the present study needs to focus narrowly on elements bearing directly on the blessing of Judah. Balaam's second and third oracles interrelate by how they use allusions to the Abrahamic covenant, the blessing of Judah, and exodus traditions to speak of Yahweh's present protection over Israel against malicious prophetic curses (bold, italics, and underlined words signify verbal parallels at the level of common roots):¹¹

[Yahweh says to Abraham:] "*I shall bless those who bless you, but the*

¹⁰ The concept of "interpretive blends" is built on but broader than Michael Fishbane's helpful term "legal blend," which speaks of interpreting one scriptural context in the light of another. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 110–19, 134–36.

¹¹ Similar comparisons of this set of passages from Genesis and Numbers have been made by others. See James Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 264.

one who treats you as contemptible *I shall curse*, and all the families of the earth will be blessed by you” (Gen 12:3).¹²

[Isaac says to Jacob:] “*May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed*” (27:29).

[Jacob says to Judah:] “A young lion, Judah, from the prey you go up. **Like a lion he crouches** and lies down, **and like a lioness—who dares rouse him?**” (49:9).

[In the second oracle Balaam says:] “God brings them out of Egypt, like horns of a wild ox. Surely there is no divination against Jacob, and no evil spells against Israel. It will be said of Jacob and Israel, “What God has done.” Look, a people **like a lioness rising up. Like a lion** they get themselves up, and they will not lie down until they eat prey and drink the blood of the slain” (Num 23:22–24).

[In the third oracle Balaam says:] “God brings him out of Egypt, like horns of a wild ox. . . . **Like a lion he crouches and lies down, and like a lioness—who dares rouse him?** *May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed*” (24:8–9).

The major burden of Balaam’s second and third oracles amounts to protecting Israel from Balaam’s curses by the power of the word of God. There can be “no divination against Israel” (23:23) because those who try to curse Israel bring a curse upon themselves (24:9). Balaam makes these claims of Israel because the people share in the promises of both the Abrahamic covenant and the blessing of Judah. The lion simile of the blessing of Judah also speaks a warning to any who would seek to harm this dangerous people.

The interpretive blending of the lion simile from the blessing of Judah with the blessing and cursing oath of the Abrahamic covenant demonstrates more than continuity; it suggests shared identity within the redemptive work of God. For Balaam the royal expectations of the blessing of Judah can stand with the blessing and cursing oath of the Abrahamic covenant because the Judah-king will rule over the chosen nation. While the relationship of these two divine expectations is not spelled out directly in Genesis, the oracles of Balaam demonstrate the crucial role of the royal expectations of Judah for the people of the covenant. This naturally leads to additional developments in Balaam’s fourth oracle.

While the third oracle mentions the exaltation of Jacob’s king (24:7), the fourth oracle turns on extended royal expectations of the “star of Jacob, the scepter of Israel” (24:17). Based on the use of the

¹² The disputed sense of the Niphal of יְבָרְכוּ in Genesis 12:3 (passive “they will be blessed” versus reflexive “they will bless themselves/one another”) falls outside the present study.

lion simile from the blessing of Judah, “the scepter [שֵׁבֶט] of Israel” in Numbers 24:17 seems to parallel “the scepter [שֵׁבֶט] of Judah” in Genesis 49:10. If so, Balaam expands on Jacob’s expectations “your hand upon the neck of your enemies” and “the obedience of the peoples is his” (Gen 49:8, 10). Balaam speaks of the scepter smashing the head/border of Moab and Sheth and possessing Edom (Num 24:17–18). The promise that the royal figure of Israel will take possession correlates with the covenantal promises that the Hebrew ancestors will take possession of their enemies’ cities (Gen 22:17; 27:37). The object of the scepter’s smashing needs more attention, since a royal figure smashing heads evokes the expectation of the seed of the woman.

Will the scepter of Israel in Numbers 24:17 smash the “borderlands” (קַרְקַר, MT) or the “skull” (קַדְקַד, SP) of Moab and Sheth? The majority of modern committee translations follow the Samaritan Pentateuch and the paraphrase in Jeremiah 48:45 (MT) and so read, “It shall crush the forehead of Moab” (Num 24:17, ESV).¹³ The similarity between resh (ר) and dalet (ד) in paleo-Hebrew and Aramaic scripts makes scribal corruption possible. One element of evidence that has not received adequate attention is the somewhat common use of “smash the skull [qdqd]” in the Ugaritic myths (15th c. BC).¹⁴ The frequent appearances of the Ugaritic stock phrase combined with the Samaritan Pentateuch reading and Jeremiah 48:45 support emendation. Treating Moab in a manner fit for the seed of the serpent accords with the details of David’s defeat of Moab and Isaiah’s use of Moab (2 Sam 8:2; Isa 25:10–12).¹⁵ Whether to credit Balaam or Jeremiah with the interpretive intervention of using the head of Moab as a symbolic stand-in for the serpent is not critical here. If Balaam is responsible, then it looks

¹³ See BHS note on Numbers 24:17. NRSV and KJV follow the Masoretic text (“crush the borderlands of Moab”) while others (NIV, JPS, etc.) follow the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Masoretic text of Jeremiah 48:45 (“crush the forehead of Moab”). Note that Jeremiah 48:45–46 (an addition in the Masoretic text) presents an interpretive paraphrastic blend of Numbers 21:28, 24:17, and 29:29 that “corrects” the theology of the ancient sages quoted in Numbers 21:27–30 by taking away credit from Chemosh.

¹⁴ See, e.g., “Baal and Yam,” 2.iv.25; “Baal’s Palace,” 3.v.32; 4.vii.4. For convenient transliterations, see J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2nd ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 1978), 44, 53, 64.

¹⁵ Hamilton suggests that Moab in Numbers 24:17 corresponds to the seed of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. His argument is based on broad thematic similarities but no additional evidence (Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman,” 265–66). Rashi’s comment on Numbers 24:17 sees David’s actions in 2 Samuel 8:2 as a fulfillment of Balaam’s prophecy.

like another interpretive blend—the scepter of Israel smashing the head of Moab—of the imagery of the royal expectations of the seed of the woman and the Judah-king (Gen 3:15; 49:10).

In sum, the shakiness of the evidence suggests only a slight possibility that Balaam blended echoes of the expected Judah-king and the seed of the woman in Numbers 24:17. Whatever Balaam had in mind, Jeremiah 48:45 makes the connection explicit. Balaam’s interpretive blend of the Abrahamic covenant and the blessing of Judah, though, features direct citations and enjoys high confidence. At the very least, Balaam’s oracles, along with Jeremiah’s interpretive update, underline the reality that scriptural expectations generate expectations.

NATHAN’S PRESENTATION OF LOYALTY TO THE DAVIDIC HEIR

Nathan’s presentation of divine loyalty to the Davidic ruler uses language from the blessing of Judah. Richard Steiner’s comparison of Genesis 49:10 and 2 Samuel 7:14–16 merits attention. He surveys numerous interpretations from rabbinic traditions and then suppresses the “disambiguating effect of the context” of Genesis 49; that is, he intentionally lifts the phrase out of context to bend it.¹⁶ Steiner claims the phrase normally rendered “the scepter [=dominion] shall not depart from Judah” (לֹא־יָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה) could be taken as “the rod [=punishment] shall not depart from Judah.”¹⁷ Steiner’s main point revolves around Nathan reading עַד of Genesis 49:10 as “until eternity” (עַד־עוֹלָם) twice in 2 Samuel 7:16.¹⁸ Whether this is so depends on the rest of his comparison.

According to Steiner, Nathan reverses and repackages language from Genesis 49:10 to establish the permanence of divine fidelity to David’s offspring. The following comparison has been adjusted from Steiner’s for the present purposes (emphases in bold and italics denote verbal parallels at the level of roots; stylized underscore denotes an interpretive intervention):

The scepter [שֵׁבֶט] **shall not depart** [סוּר Qal] from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until that which belongs to him comes, and the obedience of the peoples is his (Gen 49:10).

¹⁶ Steiner, “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:10,” 43. Steiner’s manifold deductions, proposals, and sub-proposals that prop up his main proposals cannot be listed here.

¹⁷ Steiner, 43.

¹⁸ Steiner, 36, 45.

I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me. When he does wrong I will punish him [יָכַח Hiph] with *the rod* [שֵׁבֶט] of mortals and with wounds inflicted by humans. But my covenantal loyalty **shall not depart** [לֹא־יָסוּר Qal] from him, as **I removed it** [סָרָה Hiph] from Saul, whom **I removed** [סָרָה Hiph] before you (2 Sam 7:14–15).

In commenting on Nathan’s use of scepter/rod (שֵׁבֶט) from the blessing of Judah, Steiner misconstrues the shift of symbolic function (since he intentionally uses it out of context) from “a scepter wielded by a king . . . [to] a rod wielded against a king,” saying, “Jacob’s blessing of Judah can easily be transformed into a curse.”¹⁹ If Steiner rightly detects scriptural use of Scripture, it needs to be contextualized in both the immediate and larger contexts.

Nathan’s well-known wordplay on “house” (בַּיִת) as “temple” for Yahweh and “dynasty” for David fits with pressing the connotations of שֵׁבֶט as “rod” of punishment and “scepter” of dominion.²⁰ But Nathan does not treat punishment by rod as a curse. He says Yahweh’s “covenantal loyalty” (חֶסֶד) will not turn aside from David’s son; so it must stand inclusive of punishment. Nathan may be exegetically advancing the sense of the scepter/rod not turning aside from the Davidic ruler by invoking paternal imagery to align it with covenantal conventions. Elsewhere, correction/punishment signifies Yahweh’s fatherhood of Israel (Deut 8:5). The sage claims, “Yahweh punishes [יָכַח Hiph] the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov 3:12; cf. 3:11; cf. Heb 12:5–11).²¹

Maybe, as Steiner suggests, Nathan uses language from the blessing of Judah to express Yahweh’s covenantal loyalty to David. If he does, the sense of permanence or irrevocability captured in “forever language” stems not from the function of לָעַד in Genesis 49:10, as Steiner suggests, but from the use of “the scepter shall not depart [לֹא־יָסוּר] from Judah” applied to “my covenantal loyalty shall not depart [לֹא־יָסוּר] from him” (2 Sam 7:15).²² More im-

¹⁹ Steiner, 47.

²⁰ See 2 Sam 7:5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29 (2x); cf. 7:1, 2.

²¹ The verb for “punish” (יָכַח) in Deuteronomy 8:5 differs from “punish” (יָכַח) in 2 Samuel 7:14. The latter term is often used of fatherly correction in wisdom contexts (Prov 9:8; 15:12; 19:25). Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2:410, s.v. יָכַח. Proverbs 3:11 uses nouns related to these two roots as pair words for punishment, glossed as “discipline/reproof” in NRSV (מוֹסֵר/יָסָר, תּוֹכַחַת/יָכַח).

²² The concept of “irrevocable” offers an upgrade over “unconditional” because the permanent Davidic covenant came with conditions (e.g., 1 Kgs 2:4). The idea of irrevocability is based on a series of unpublished conference papers by Gordon Johnston, “‘Unconditional’ and ‘Conditional’ Features of the Davidic Covenant in Light of Ancient Near Eastern and Grant Treaties” (paper presented at the national meeting

portantly, paternal devotion stands as the centerpiece of Yahweh’s covenantal fidelity to David. The punishment of the Davidic son underlines Yahweh’s enduring commitment.

EZEKIEL 19 AS SATIRE FLAVORED BY THE BLESSING OF JUDAH

Ezekiel 19 builds a lament around the language of the blessing of Judah—“cub” (גִּיָּר), “lion” (אַרְיֵה), “prey” (טָרֵף), “rise” (עֲלֶה), “crouch” (רָבַץ), “lioness” (לִיָּאָה), “scepter” (שֵׁטֶף), “vine” (גִּפְתָּח), and “blood” (דָּם).²³ In the first part of the parable one of the lioness’s cubs is captured and taken to Egypt (Ezek 19:4) and another to Babylon (19:9). In the second part Ezekiel compares the lioness to a vine whose strongest stem became a scepter transplanted in the wilderness and “overkilled” (19:10–14; cf. 17:9–10).²⁴ Though commentators sometimes offer conflicting allegorical interpretations to correlate the details with historical circumstances, they do so at the expense of the “schematic” lament of glory shamed.²⁵

Ezekiel’s dark satirical lament uses the language and themes of the blessing of Judah to portray the fall of Judah and Davidic rule. The parable functions neither as fulfillment nor expectation, but as lament (19:1, 14). Elsewhere Ezekiel changes unfulfilled ex-

of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, November 2008); Gordon Johnston, “The Nature of the Davidic Covenant in the Light of Intertextual Analysis” (paper presented at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, November 2011); Gordon Johnston, “A Critical Evaluation of Moshe Weinfeld’s Approach to the Davidic Covenant in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants: What Did He Get Right & What Did He Get Wrong?” (paper presented at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, November 2011). See also Herbert W. Bateman IV, Darrell Bock, and Gordon Johnston, *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promise, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), ch. 2, esp. 68–74; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 397.

²³ List from Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 357. He also lists “nations” (גוֹיִם), but Genesis 49:8 and 10 say “enemies” (אֹיֵב) and “peoples” (עַמִּים). Many of these terms also appear in Numbers 23:24 and 24:9, which derive from Genesis 49:9. Also note similar language in Deuteronomy 33:20, 22.

²⁴ Greenberg, 355.

²⁵ See competing options in Greenberg, 355–57. Block notes that whereas Ezekiel 17 offers an explanation of its riddle, Ezekiel 19 does not. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 603. Some interpreters suggest that “until judgment comes to whom it belongs” (עַד־בֹּא אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ הַמִּשְׁפֵּט) in Ezekiel 21:27 (32) turns “until it comes to whom it belongs” (עַד־כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילָה/שִׁילוֹ) of Genesis 49:10 into a curse—another potential parody. See W. L. Moran, “Gen 49,10 and Its Use in Ez 21,32,” *Biblica* 39, no. 4 (1958): 416–25; and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 434–35.

pectations in the case of Tyre falling to Nebuchadnezzar (26:1–14 with adjustment in 29:17–10).²⁶ The parody based on the blessing of Judah does not curtail or adjust its expectations. Even after Jerusalem had fallen and the king of Judah had been exiled, Ezekiel prophesied enduring expectation for a Davidic king over a reunited Israel and Judah (34:23–24; 37:24–28).²⁷ In short, the blessing of Judah retains its expectational force even as its language serves in one of Ezekiel’s dark parabolic parodies of judgment.

ZECHARIAH 9:9 AS PREQUEL TO THE BLESSING OF JUDAH

The undated post-exilic oracles in Zechariah 9–11 include an exegetical advancement of part of the blessing of Judah.²⁸ Zechariah speaks the word of Yahweh against a series of Levantine cities from north to south (9:1–7). The campaign halts when Yahweh encamps at his temple, pronouncing his intention to defend it from attack (9:8). At this point the prophet calls on personified Jerusalem to look to the coming of her king (9:9). The powerful invitation builds on part of the blessing of Judah by providing its prequel.

The royal figure of the blessing of Judah rides into a luxurious vineyard. The superabundant vineyards of Judah require the royal figure to tie his mount to a choice vine and wash his garments in wine.²⁹ Zechariah takes good advantage of the mount of the ruler.

²⁶ See Robert Chisholm, “When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 3 (2010): 561–77.

²⁷ Ezekiel’s contemporary Jeremiah likewise prophesied enduring hope for the Davidic covenant and rule even while pronouncing the downfall of the kingdom in his own day (see Jeremiah 23:5–6 and the elaboration on it in 33:15–26 [an addition in the Masoretic text]).

²⁸ Though many scholars note the connection between Zechariah 9:9 and Genesis 49:11, Peterson doubts any relationship. David L. Peterson, “Zechariah 9–14: Methodological Reflections,” in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9–14*, ed. Mark J. Boda et al. (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 217–18. Fishbane sees Zechariah 9:11 as alluding to Genesis 49:11 and regards setting free “your prisoners” (רִצְוֹן) as reversal using a term from Genesis 49:11 (רִצְוֹן) and “waterless pit” in Zechariah 9:11 as using language from Genesis 37:24. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 501–2. These latter suggestions seem unlikely. Others suggest a loose parallel between Genesis 49:10 and Zechariah 9:9, but this faces several difficulties because of the challenges of Genesis 49:10 and lack of verbal parallels other than the exceedingly common word “coming/come” (בֹּא). See Katrina J. A. Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah: A Study of the Formation of a Mantological Wisdom Anthology* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994), 70–72. The context of Zechariah 9:9 has been overinterpreted to use Judah as a people, collectively identified, as the king to whom Zechariah refers. See Adrian M. Leske, “Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2000): 673.

²⁹ Wenham affirms a typical view that the excessive fruitfulness results in tying

Notice the repetition of the distinctive royal mount combined with humility and righteousness (bold signals verbal parallel and italics similarity):

He binds his *jack* [עִירָה] to the vine, his **purebred** [בְּנֵי אֲתוֹנֹת] to a choice vine. He washes his garment in wine, and his robe in the blood of grapes (Gen 49:11).

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and saved, humble and riding on a donkey [חֲמֹר], on a *jack* [עִירָה], a **purebred** [בְּנֵי אֲתוֹנֹת] (Zech 9:9).³⁰

Zechariah offers commentary to personified Jerusalem about the king and his donkey. The king returns to his city righteous and delivered. The prophet does not take advantage of the loose, figural parallel of Solomon riding David's mule at his coronation (1 Kgs 1:38; cf. 2 Sam 16:2).³¹ Instead, the prophet observes the incongruity of the king riding a donkey. Earlier, Jeremiah anticipated Davidic rulers and their officials riding through the gates of Jerusalem on horse-drawn chariots (Jer 17:25; 22:4). In contrast to those possibilities, Zechariah notes that the humble king rides on a donkey.³² The king is righteous and “saved” passive pointing to his re-

the donkey to a choice vine without worrying if it will eat it. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 478.

³⁰ “Jack” (עִירָה) refers to male donkey or donkey stallion and “male offspring of a jenny (female donkey)” (בְּנֵי אֲתוֹנֹת) to a purebred jack. These terms do not indicate youth. The sequence of “donkey terms” starts generally, and each adds something: donkey, then jack/male or donkey stallion, and then purebred (offspring of a jenny). See Kenneth C. Way, “Donkey Domain: Zechariah 9:9 and Lexical Semantics,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 1 (2010): 105–14. The *vavs* connect the increasingly specific series as explanatory glosses. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §154a.1b. The plural term “jennies” (אֲתוֹנֹת) seems to indicate an indefinite singular as a class (§124o).

³¹ Contra Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 417. For a detailed discussion of royal mounts in Scripture, see Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 568–71. Boda concludes that the royal figure is humble, but not because he is riding on a donkey (570).

³² Zechariah possibly deduces the “humble” and “righteous” character of the royal figure by reading the blessing of Judah in light of the imagery of the bride's praise of her king: “In your majesty ride forth in the cause of truth, humility [עֲנָוָה], and righteousness” (Ps 45:5). The term עֲנָוָה may be a *hapax legomenon* for “work” (III-ענה) or may be related to “humbleness” (II-ענה). Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1:855, s.v. עֲנָוָה. If Zechariah 9:9 features an interpretive blend of Genesis 49:11 and Psalm 45:5, then the catchword “praise” (הִלָּל) and general royal themes may have suggested Zechariah's interpretive intervention (Gen 49:8; Ps 45:17 [18]).

liance upon Yahweh.³³ The saved king returning to his city on a lowly donkey draws attention to the significance of the blessing of Judah. The Judah-king rides on a donkey when he comes into the prosperity of his vineyard. Zechariah evokes hope and glory by accenting the humble mount of the coming king.

Mark's use of Zechariah puts the prophet's contribution into perspective. If Zechariah exegetically advances the blessing of Judah by offering its prequel, then Mark exegetically advances a sequel to the prequel by developing imagery from Genesis 49:11.³⁴ These scriptural uses of Scripture retain full continuity with the authoritative traditions that sponsored them. Zechariah and Mark interpretively fill gaps in the storyline of the cited context(s). Table A represents the interpretative advances by suggesting what happens before and after the arrival of the Judah-king.

Table A: Zechariah 9:9 as Prequel and Mark 11:1–10 as Setup to Ironic Sequel³⁵

Prequel	Blessing of Judah
Humble king comes riding on a donkey (Zech 9:9)	Judah-king enters his vineyard with his donkey (Gen 49:11)

³³ Boda emphasizes that the Niphal participle “saved” (נָשָׂא) fits within the Davidic tradition of relying on God. Boda, *Book of Zechariah*, 566.

³⁴ Krause draws attention to the twofold “bound” (δέω) and threefold “unbinding” (λύω) of the Lord's mount in Mark 11:2, 4, 5. In Krause's reading this “exhaustive attention” signals that the triumphal entry “reverses” and “destroys” the blessing associated with Zechariah's oracle. Deborah Krause, “The One Who Comes Unbinding the Blessing of Judah: Mark 11.1–10 as a Midrash of Genesis 49.11, Zechariah 9.9, and Psalm 118.25–26,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 143, 149, 150. Krause emphasizes the narrative preliminaries as a vehicle to allude to Genesis 49. She says that “Mark privileges his readers” to have the reverse-Genesis 49:11 narrative context to the Zechariah 9:9-moment, which “erodes” the basis of Zechariah's claims (150). Krause's claim for the importance of the preliminary details fits with what Mark does elsewhere using elaborate pre-stories with narrative function, where preparation for the last supper (Mark 14:12–16) and preparation for burial (14:3–9) serve the needs of interchange between plans of betrayal (14:1–2, 10–11). However, the catchword connection using “come” (ἔρχομαι) in Genesis 49:11; Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26; and Mark 11:10 noted by Krause (145) points to Mark's larger ends for the scriptural allusion cluster of the triumphal entry. The Lord punctuates his story of the killing of the vineyard owner's son by citing Psalm 118:22–23, which reveals the rejected stone becoming a cornerstone (Mark 12:10–11). The triumphal entry signals not a tragic ending—contra Krause—but a profoundly ironic exegetical advancement of the humble king's entry into the city and its larger gospel sequel.

³⁵ Table adapted from Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Torah Story Video Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), DVD, 10–3.

Triumphal Entry

Messiah comes riding on a donkey (Mark 11:1–10)

Sequel

Son of vineyard owner executed as king of the Jews (Mark 12:1–11; 15:26)

PSALM 2:7–9 AS INTERPRETIVE BLEND OF EXPECTATIONS

The middle of Psalm 2 features a powerful poetic interpretation of the Davidic covenant by shifting the speaker and placing it in the context of ancient expectations from Torah, potentially an interpretive blend of the blessing of Judah and Balaam’s fourth oracle. The poet re-voices the covenant at what seems to be the coronation of a Davidic king. Compare Nathan’s version from the Deuteronomistic narrative with that of the psalmist (stylized underscore marks shift in perspective):

[Yahweh says:] “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your seed after you who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. When he does wrong I will punish him with the rod [מִצְרֵף] of mortals and with wounds inflicted by humans” (2 Sam 7:12, 14).³⁶

[The Lord of heaven says:] “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” [The new king says:] “I shall recount the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, You are my son. Today I have begotten you.” (Ps 2:6–7).

The genius of recasting the Davidic covenant within an enthronement moment between Yahweh and his newly adopted son—spoken by the king himself to his divine father—may partially explain why this version of the covenant is so often cited in the New Testament (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5).³⁷

³⁶ For similar versions (in terms of a prophet speaking for Yahweh of the Davidic ruler in third person) see 1 Chronicles 17:11–13; Psalms 89:3–4 (4–5); 132:11. These each exegetically advance the covenant in other directions.

³⁷ The interpretation of coronation as tapping into adoption imagery often turns on reading Psalm 2:7 with Isaiah 9:6–7 (5–6). The Scriptures speak very little about adoption, even lacking legal instructions related to it, which makes interpretive debate lively. For a study of the biblical evidence related to adoption, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, “Adoption,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 2:298–301; Frederick W. Knobloch, “Adoption,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:76–79. For the suggestion that the adoption language refers to literal birth, see J. J. M. Roberts, “Whose Child Is This: Reflections on the Speaking Voice of Isaiah 9:5,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 146–53. Based on ancient Egyptian parallels, Roberts regards the speakers of “for a child is born to us” (Isa 9:6 [5]) as the celestial court (155–56). The identity of the first-person plural speaker needs to be considered in light of the Lord (יְיָ) saying, “Whom shall I

The new king continues to recount what Yahweh decreed to him in terms that echo ancient royal expectations (Ps 2:8–9), and then the psalmist interprets the implications (2:10–12). While “scepter” provides the only verbal parallel to the blessing of Judah, the sense of possessing the nations and teaching them matches themes from the following Torah expectations not found in the biblical versions of the Davidic covenant itself (bold signifies verbal parallels; italics and underscore mark thematic similarities):

Judah . . . your hand on the neck of your enemies, the sons of your father shall bow down before you. *A young lion, Judah, from the prey you go up. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, and like a lioness—who dares rouse him?* **The scepter** (טִּבְטֵן) shall not turn aside from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until that which belongs to him comes, and the obedience of the peoples is his (Gen 49:8–10).

I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near, a star comes out of Jacob, and **a scepter** (טִּבְטֵן) rises from Israel and smashes the borders/foreheads of Moab, the territory/skulls of the people of Sheth. Edom becomes a possession, even Seir a possession of its enemies, and Israel acts powerfully. Then a ruler comes from Jacob and **causes to perish** the survivors of the city (Num 24:17–19).

“Ask me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession. You will break them with a scepter (טִּבְטֵן) of iron; you will shatter them like a potter’s vessel.” Now, kings, be wise! Be warned, rulers of the earth! Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss (the feet) of the son *or he will become angry* and you **will perish** in the way, *for his wrath is quickly kindled*. Graced are all who seek refuge in him (Ps 2:8–12).³⁸

The lack of verbal correspondence, while typical of lyrical recasting, eliminates high confidence of direct intentional dependence. Instead, the psalmist contextualizes the Davidic king within royal Torah-like expectations. The unpredictability of the lionlike Judah-king, along with his use of scepter and ruler’s staff to secure the obedience of the peoples, matches the way the Davidic ruler uses

send? Who will go for us?” (6:8). Goldingay points out that physical birth does not work with Psalm 2:7, since the son heard the decree and spoke his response. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 1:100. See also Gerald Cooke, “The Israelite King as Son of God,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73, no. 2 (1961): 210–11. Goldingay notes a counterpoint affirmation in Psalm 89:26–27 (27–28): “He [the David king] will call out to me [Yahweh], ‘You are my father’ . . . and I will appoint him my firstborn” (Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:100–1).

³⁸ For the suggestion that “kiss the feet” is based on an Akkadian cognate, see Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:731, s.v. קָשַׁל.

his scepter and the warning of the psalmist.³⁹ The rights of the star of Jacob/scepter of Israel to take possession beyond borders by smashing them with his scepter fits the pottery-smashing scepter of the Davidic king. The psalmist advances and expands the profile of the Davidic ruler by explaining his dominion over lesser kings in accord with royal expectations of Torah. The meager lexical parallels make a general connection only a slight possibility, even with the shared thematic imagery.

FIRST CHRONICLES 28:4 AND THE DIVINE ELECTION OF JUDAH

When David announced Solomon's temple-building project, he identified the significance of the divine election of Judah (1 Chr 28:4) in a public address to all Israel (28:1–29:5). David's reason for mentioning Judah amounts to building a case for the temple that stretches back to the ancient days of the Hebrew ancestors. David's desire to make explicit the continuity from antiquity to the Davidic patronage of the temple matches the Chronicler's own efforts. The genealogies move from Adam to David in less than two chapters (1:1; 2:15). The temple mount goes back to the place of David's repentance and even further back to the near sacrifice of Isaac (2 Chr 3:1; cf. 1 Chr 21:24–26; Gen 22:2).

David offers election as a preamble to establish the case that Solomon rules over the kingdom of Yahweh, which makes him ideal for temple patronage (1 Chr 28:5). If the seer Samuel opposed an Israelite monarchy (1 Sam 8:6), David stood at the other end of the spectrum with a human in divine, royal space. He says Yahweh “chose my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel” (1 Chr 28:5; cf. 29:23).⁴⁰ But David does not begin here. He begins with Judah.

Yahweh the God of Israel chose me from among all of my father's household to be king over Israel forever. For he chose Judah to be leader, and from the tribe of Judah he chose the household of my fa-

³⁹ The phrase “kiss (the feet of) the son” in Psalm 2:12 is glossed as “accept instruction” in the Septuagint and Targum. While “accept instruction” broadly corresponds to the imagery of “the obedience of the peoples belongs to him” in Genesis 49:10, lexical parallels are limited to “scepter” in Genesis 49:10 and Psalm 2:9, as noted above. Lack of other concrete parallels makes broad relationship no more than a possibility.

⁴⁰ Evans considers the language identifying Davidic rule and Yahweh's kingdom here and elsewhere in Chronicles an important component in Christ's announcement of the kingdom of God. See Craig A. Evans, “Jesus and the Beginnings of the Christian Canon,” in *When Texts Are Canonized*, ed. Timothy H. Lim, Brown Judaic Studies 359 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2017), 96.

ther, and from my father's sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel (28:4).

While the Chronicler's inclusion of David's speech goes beyond anything else in Scripture regarding the chain of royal election, other partial precedents should be noted. Working backward: Samuel chose David from among Jesse's sons (1 Sam 16:13); Isaiah refers to eschatological hope for the Davidic line as coming from the "stump of Jesse" (Isa 11:1; cf. Mic 5:2 [1]); and the psalmist speaks of the rejection of Joseph/Ephraim as directly corresponding to the choosing of the "tribe [בְּנֵי] of Judah" (Ps 78:67–72).⁴¹ David points back before all of these institutional allusions by speaking of individual persons: Judah, David's father, David, Solomon. Referring to the divine election of Judah makes a sweeping, important extrapolation from Genesis.

David says Yahweh chose Judah as "leader" (רֹאשׁ), a term used in other contexts focused on formal acknowledgment of divine selection (1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 7:8).⁴² At issue here, however, is how this leverages Genesis. The "accidents" of Genesis—Lot getting both of his daughters pregnant (19:33, 35), Isaac blessing Jacob (27:33), Judah having incestuous relations with Tamar (38:16)—seem anemic beside the premeditated vicious crime of Judah and his brothers. Genesis rules out attempts at amelioration like the observation that Judah saved Joseph from his brothers by acting as slave trader (37:26–27).⁴³ Joseph's claim that they acted with

⁴¹ On David's speech in 1 Chronicles 28:4–5, see Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, trans. Anna Barber (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 348–49; Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 488–89; Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10–29*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 927. Blenkinsopp notes an additional allusion to Genesis 49:8–9 in Micah 5:8–9 (7–8). Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 1 (1961): 57. The election of the tribe of Judah versus Joseph/Ephraim in Psalm 78:67 stands whether God abandoning "the tabernacle of Shiloh" (78:60) refers to the ark lost to Philistia and then Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 4–6; so John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *Psalms 42–89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 2:511–12), the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs 17; so Philip Stern, "The Eighth Century Dating of Psalm 78 Re-argued," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 66 [1995]: 59–63), or even some otherwise unknown destruction of Shiloh (see Jer 7:14).

⁴² The term "leader" (רֹאשׁ) in the case of David (1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 7:8) carries the semantic function of "king" (מֶלֶךְ) in 2 Samuel 5:3 (so Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:668, s.v. רֹאשׁ).

⁴³ Contra C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1878), 337. For a mediating view also at odds with the evidence, see Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 353–54.

“evil” intent matches the brothers callously eating after throwing him in a pit and their own guilty memories of his pleas for mercy (37:25; 42:21; 50:20).⁴⁴ David’s claim presupposes that the series of nasty incidents, Judah’s own treachery against his brother and daughter-in-law, and the other narrative details contributing to his becoming leader of Israel, all of it, signifies the divine election of Judah. The Chronicler elsewhere includes the brotherhood’s quest for blessing and birthright in Genesis within his summary judgment that “Judah was the strongest of his brothers and a leader [מִלְחָמָה] would come from him” (1 Chr 5:1). The bold claims of the Chronicler and David regarding the election of Judah pivot on direct connection between the blessing of Judah and the Davidic covenant.

In sum, the Scriptures house many expectations built on the blessing of Judah. The evidence for each context must be considered individually with due attention to the attendant issues. But examining each context alone does not adequately take account of the cumulative force of a mounting number of scriptural traditions reworking the blessing of Judah. Derivative expectations naturally become affiliated with parent expectations. These inherently inter-related expectations need to be considered together.

JUDAH-KING NETWORK

The numerous scriptural uses of the Judah-king expectation form an interpretive network. Sometimes scriptural uses of Scripture go beyond the interpretive relationships of one-time allusions. Certain scriptural contexts attract ongoing interpretation within developing biblical traditions. “Network” here refers to the cumulative interpretive dynamics of an intentionally interconnected scriptural tradition. “Network” implies internal native continuity, in contrast to a metaphor such as “constellation,” where the relations are imposed on the constituents from outside. Messianic exegesis of the Old Testament imposes its own relations between constellations of contexts that may or may not have internal continuity. Both approaches can be part of responsible exegesis. The present focus on networks limits itself to intentionally interconnected scriptural use of Scripture. Though there may be other kinds of scriptural interpretive networks, the focus here is on expectational networks as

⁴⁴ The narrator of Genesis follows the theology of Joseph, who claims God sent him ahead (Gen 39:2, 21; 45:5; 50:20). Genesis also features characters who recognize that God is with Joseph in slavery and prison (39:3, 23).

represented by the Judah-king network. Identifying the dynamic undercurrents of networks attempts to explore an area of the scriptural use of Scripture that has not been handled adequately. The present discussion seeks to get at the “something more” that characterizes network expectations beyond a single context.

Setting aside her answer and the opposing answer offered above, consider the question Krause asks: “Why, if the colt already resides within the imagery of Zechariah, does Mark return to Genesis?”⁴⁵ Krause identifies the situation of scriptural expectations birthed from scriptural expectations. New expectations advance but do not replace parent expectations. This observation relates not to any particular interpretive technique but to the enduring authority of scriptural traditions themselves. The blessing of Judah continues to testify to the enduring hope of Israel even after generating multiple expansive expectations as well as proximate fulfillments. Moreover, the blessing of Judah continues to generate new expectational interpretations even when a network of interconnected interpretations already shapes the contours of many related, derivative expectations. Mark’s decision to allude to the Judah-king expectation as part of his catchphrase interpretive blend of Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118:25–26 is not unprecedented.

The Chronicler, as noted above, goes out of his way in many places to connect the ancient traditions he recounts to even more ancient scriptural traditions. David argues that the divine election of Davidic rule goes back to Judah, which evokes Judah-king expectations. Like Mark, the Chronicler demonstrates the enduring contribution of the Judah-king expectation itself even in the wake of the Davidic covenant with its own extensive set of connections. New derivative expectations and even an interpretive network do not exhaust but in fact revitalize the generative capacities of parent scriptural expectations.

Table B (see page 39) offers a graphic presentation of the Judah-king network. The orientation (left to right and up and down) merely displays potential relations. There are no arrows, since deciding direction of influence—whether direct or indirect—falls outside the present study.

One way to corroborate the function of scriptural interpreta-

⁴⁵ Krause, “One Who Comes Unbinding the Blessing of Judah,” 149. Similarly, Blenkinsopp explains that Jacob’s blessing of Judah has not been “fully exploited” for interpretation of the evangelists’ accounts of the triumphal entry, “yet it would not, perhaps, be too much to say that they cannot be fully grasped except along the line—a long line—of messianic utilization and interpretation of the Judah oracle” (Blenkinsopp, “Oracle of Judah,” 56–57).

tive networks comes from the New Testament use of Scripture. Beale pushes back against simplistic explanations of common approaches to Scriptures interpreted in the New Testament and Second Temple Judaic traditions. He considers it likely that “NT writers and early Jewish interpreters patterned their interpretation of the OT after the model of the way later OT writers interpreted earlier OT passages.”⁴⁶ Networks—insofar as the Judah-king network represents other networks—support Beale’s claims but go further in two important respects.

First, networks exemplify scriptural interpretations already built into the Scriptures of the New Testament writers. Early Christian exegetes did not begin their christological interpretation of Scripture from scratch in every case, but often took advantage of previous interpretations. The letter to the Hebrews, for example, often refers to Torah contexts by means of “Nakh” interpretations of Torah.⁴⁷ “Nakh” denotes the *Nevi'im*/Prophets and *Ketuvim*/Writings scrolls assembled alongside the Torah scrolls in ancient synagogues; together, the three were eventually referred to as the Tanakh (*Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim*). When the author of Hebrews refers to human dominion over creation, he cites Psalm 8; to the rebellion at Kadesh, Psalm 95; to Melchizedek, Psalm 110; to the failure of the Mosaic covenant, the new covenant in Jeremiah 31; to limitations of tabernacle sacrifices, Psalm 40.⁴⁸ In all of these cases the author to the Hebrews interacts with Torah contexts by means of their derivative scriptural interpretations, many of them part of networks (like the Davidic-covenant network).

Second, scriptural interpretive networks invite rethinking context in the case of the scriptural use of Scripture. One long-running debate concerning the New Testament use of Scripture asks whether interpreters should consider only the cited text itself (atomistic) or take into account the context surrounding the cited text.⁴⁹ This important debate rightly focuses on the proximate hor-

⁴⁶ Greg Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 47.

⁴⁷ This is not a historical comment about canon but a mild anachronism for convenience.

⁴⁸ See Heb 2:6–8; 3:7–11, 15; 4:3, 5, 7, 8; 7:17, 21; 8:8–12; 10:5–7, 16–17.

⁴⁹ See Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 47; G. K. Beale, “The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 263–93; C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 126; Robert Rendall, “Quotation in Scripture as an Index of Wider Reference,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1964): 214–21; Ian Turner, “Going beyond What Is

izontal context but fails to consider the vertical context within Scriptures that are themselves interpretations of Scriptures.

If surrounding horizontal contexts of cited Scriptures sometimes include adjacent elements and at other times an entire chapter or book; so too for vertical contexts. Cited contexts may feature exegetical enhancement of their own cited contexts. And, to the point at hand, the context of some cited Scriptures includes interpretive network dynamics. The enduring generative force of parent expectations on networks signals a rich sense of continuity within progressive revelation. The claim here is not that networks bear on context from the outside, but that interpretive connections of networks are a native part of vertical context.

Because expectational networks are not the only kind, the Judah-king network offers a sample of how other networks might work, for example instructional networks, which in turn need to be assessed. Networks provide a kind of shorthand that can be applied to exegesis of their constituent scriptural contexts. Identifying networks, therefore, stands as an intermediate exegetical goal.

CONCLUSION

The present study offers an exploration of selected scriptural interpretations of the blessing of Judah and identifies the natural interconnectivity of these several contexts.

The Judah-king expectation proves a rich resource for scriptural interpreters. The place of the blessing of Judah within the epilogue to the central storyline of Genesis accounts for sustained interest by scriptural writers. Prophets leveraged the ancient expectation into significant new interpretations of God's will. The promises to Abraham and Judah became linguistically interrelated in Balaam's oracles. The enduring promise to the house of David builds its irrevocable elective force, at least in part, by its relation to the Judah-king expectation (2 Sam 7:14–15; 1 Chr 28:4). The psalmist lyrically re-voices the father-son relationship of the Davidic covenant and situates the king's role within the ancient royal promises of Torah, perhaps loosely developing the king's role in teaching the peoples (Ps 2). Ezekiel satirizes the blessing of Judah in the twilight of the first commonwealth (Ezek 19). Zechariah expands the Judah-king expectation by revealing the prequel to the royal figure tying his donkey to the vine (Zech 9:9). Several of these interpretations of the Judah-king expectation are taken up and

further developed in the New Testament.

Scriptural expectations provide enduring revelation that increases when used. Scriptural contexts that feature interpretation of scriptural expectations should not be regarded as inert or isolated data. They do not replace, exhaust, or diminish but increase the generative power of the parent expectation. Detecting and explaining naturally interconnected expectations offers significant prospects for understanding the dynamics of progressive revelation.

The cumulative dynamics of interconnected scriptural interpretations may be thought of as networks. Identifying networks can provide a summary digest to strengthen exegetical outcomes. Detecting networks should be thought of not as an endgame but as a resource for enriching detailed analysis of the synergy between individual contexts and long-running advancements of expectational scriptural traditions. Networks represent one kind of vertical context, albeit an influential one, residing within constituent texts of interpretive networks. Networks denote the effects of the enduring generative power of Scripture's parent expectations.

Key for Table B:

- High confidence of an intentional relationship—whether direct or indirect in either direction—with verbal parallels of at least three shared roots in nouns, verbs, or other substantial terms, as well as other syntactic and contextual indicators (excluded: pronouns, pronominal suffixes, prepositions, and other common grammatical and syntactical particles).⁵⁰
- Probable relationship—whether direct or indirect—with verbal parallels of at least one substantial root plus other indicators (see above).
- ... Maybe (usually with verbal parallel plus other indicators, see above).

⁵⁰ Some studies mention a common standard of at least three shared terms to count as an intentional quotation/allusion. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 31; Suk Yee Lee, *An Intertextual Analysis of Zechariah 9–10: The Earlier Restoration Expectations of Second Zechariah* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 24. For the present purpose this has been adopted as a minimum standard combined with additional criteria. For one of the more sensible discussions, which insists on syntactical and contextual controls, see Richard L. Schulz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 180 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 222–39. Detecting and evaluating quotation/allusion/echo involve subjective judgments that benefit from stabilizing empirical measures.

Table B: Judah-king Network

