

## **Vayechi - Royalty, the Bracha of Yehuda** **by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

Bereishis 49:8-12 we read of the bracha that Yaakov gave to his son Yehuda. Yehuda always demonstrated leadership as we see in many incidents in Sefer Bereishis. Yaakov gave a special bracha to Yehuda, among other brachos that this quality should remain with Yehuda for all times. In verse 10 we read, 'The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda nor a scholar from among his descendents until Shiloh arrives and to him nations will assemble.' This is understood by most of the commentators as references to Yehuda's royalty and his eternal leadership role for Am Yisroel.

Rashi explains that from Dovid Hamelech and onwards Yehuda will remain the king. Even when Am Yisroel was living in Bavel there was a *Reish Galusa* [literally Head of Exile], a ruling family descending from Dovid Hamelech, that was leading the people there and had authority from the government. This lasted even during the period of the second Bais Hamikdash and a few hundred years thereafter. Rashi further explains that this was to remain through the days of Moshiach who is referred to as Shiloh from the expression in Tehillim 86:12 that Melech Hamoshiach is the one the entire world will send gifts to as we read there will bring *shai*, gifts to the revered one. The next verses describing the abundance of wine, milk, according to Rashi, can be understood also as an aspect of royalty as the king's family is entitled to lush, fertile lands producing an abundance of desired commodities.

The Ramban, on the above verses, also explains how royalty is to come from Yehuda. However, the Ramban explains that it does not mean it will never stop at all. After all, we see in Devarin 28:36 where punishments are enumerated for not following the Torah's ways that the king will be captured. Rather, Yaakov's bracha was that the kingship will always be in Yehuda's hands as a legacy. There will be times that the leadership will be given over

to great individuals from other tribes but these phases of leadership will only be temporary. King Shaul, from Binyamin, was temporary because the people were wrong to ask for a king. The Ramban proposes that if King Shaul did not sin, he would have remained a king over Binyamin and maybe Menasheh and Ephraim, sons from the same mother. Another possibility is that he would have been some sort of Vice-Ruler under the king from Yehuda. In any case, any leadership from another tribe will only be a temporary leadership. This also explains why the northern kingdom of Yisroel kept changing over to different families unlike the southern kingdom of Yehuda which remained in the hands of the House of Dovid. Any kingship not from the Tribe of Yehuda cannot have that sense of eternal, blue-blooded sovereignty. Furthermore, the Ramban states that this was why the Chashmonaim, the heroes of the Chanukah episode, failed as true leaders and started fighting among them. They were Kohanim and obviously, not from Yehuda. Even if they did the proper thing by stepping up for leadership at the time of the Syrian-Greek persecution, as soon as life was stable again, the leadership should have been turned over to the tribe of Yehuda. Since it was not, by very definition, the Chashmonaen dynasty would have to end in failure. This is the understanding of Ramban.

Interestingly, the Rashbam and Chizkuni understand this verse to refer to the time of Rechavam, Shlomo Hamelech's son and no further. They understand Shiloh in that verse to refer to the prophet Achiyah Hashiloni whom we are told in melachim I 11:29 went to appoint Yeravam ben Nevat as king over ten tribes. Achiyah made twelve tears into Yeravam's cloak and told Yeravam to take ten of them, symbolically stating that he will have rule over ten tribes. Most of the major commentators, however, do not follow this approach. In fact, Melachim I 11:34 it states explicitly that Yeravam is not getting the entire kingship for the sake of Dovid. Furthermore, the Metzudos Dovid on this chapter of Melachim I understands from the ten cuts that Yehuda and Binyamin were to

remain in the hands of the House of Dovid to hold the royalty for the future.

Indeed, we see that the true leadership of Am Yisroel is the house of Dovid from the Tribe of Yehuda. It was Yaakov's bracha to his son Yehuda based on Yehuda's demonstration of the qualities of a leader. Yehuda showed the ability to take control of a situation and influence others to do what needed to be done at the time. We see that his brothers recognized this ability. In Berieshis the Torah states that Yehuda went away from his brothers. Rashi tells us there that the brothers were blaming Yehuda for their father's sorrow. If Yehuda would have said to bring Yosef back to their father instead of selling him, they all would have listened. We see that the brothers looked to Yehuda as their leader. The Netziv points out the Gemarah in Gittin 56b tells us that one of the three things that Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai asked from Vespasian was to spare the family of Rabbi Shimon Ben Gamliel. This was to assure the continuity of the House of Dovid. For it is from the house of Dovid Moshiach will descend and therefore the legacy continues. May we all merit seeing the arrival of Melech Hamoshiach the reestablishment of the house of Dovid as our leaders in inspiring the whole world to serve Hashem and proclaiming Hashem as our king. Amen.