

Lecture 4: Judah's Scepter, the Exodus, and the Covenant at Sinai

Introduction to Biblical Theology · Dr. Thomas Schreiner · The Master's Seminary · 27 minutes

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Before you watch

Genesis closes with the seed preserved but in the wrong place, and a startling promise: the scepter belongs to Judah. Dr. Schreiner follows the story into Exodus: a serpent-hearted king killing babies, a weak deliverer, plagues that answer Pharaoh's own question, a Passover night, and a covenant at Sinai that is gracious before it asks anything. Listen for how the promise of offspring quietly becomes the promise of a king.

The lecture, section by section

1. Joseph and the preserved seed

The Joseph narrative is the preservation of the seed through the Egyptian sojourn. But the story leaves Israel in the wrong place: the family of promise is in Egypt, not the land, and the worldwide blessing is not yet going out.

2. Judah's scepter: a king is coming

Genesis 38 and 49 quietly narrow the promise. The scepter will not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs, and the peoples will obey him: the promise of offspring will be fulfilled through a king. Surprisingly the king comes through Judah rather than Joseph, and the story supplies the rationale: Reuben forfeited his place by taking his father's concubine, Simeon and Levi by their violence at Shechem, and Judah, next in line, is not excluded even after Genesis 38. Grace again, running through an unlikely man.

3. Is there a covenant with Adam? (from the Q&A)

Asked about it, Schreiner lays out his case, defended at length in his short book *Covenant*. Hosea 6:7 says Israel, like Adam, transgressed the covenant, and the attempt to read Adam there as a place name falters: the only place-name use is in Joshua, where no such betrayal occurs. Second Samuel 7 shows a covenant can be made without the word, since God's covenant with David is only called one later. And Romans 5 sets Adam and Christ over humanity as two heads, a relationship Schreiner argues only covenant explains; the rival seminal view, for all the stature of its defenders, leaves the parallel with Christ unexplained. Eden was covenantal, with stipulations, blessing, and curse, even though Genesis never uses the word.

4. Levi's reversal

A second question draws out a thread worth keeping. Simeon and Levi lost a landed allotment for the outrage at Shechem, yet Levi's obedience at the golden calf is later rewarded with the priesthood. The reversal concerns place and service in the land, not salvation, and it shows judgment and reward both running along the line of obedience.

5. Exodus opens with babies

The book of Exodus opens with fruitfulness: the people multiply, the promise being fulfilled before our eyes. And immediately the old war resumes. Pharaoh, the offspring of the serpent, sets out to kill the babies; Ezekiel will call him the great dragon, and Revelation 12 shows the dragon behind every such king. Israel is God's firstborn son, and the LORD will strike the firstborn of Egypt: the battle of the seeds, now between a nation and a throne.

6. The exodus is redemption

The exodus becomes the Bible's grammar of salvation. The New Testament's language of redemption is drawn from this deliverance, a typological pattern: what God did in bringing Israel out of Egypt corresponds to, and anticipates, what he does in Jesus Christ, and the fulfillment always escalates beyond the pattern.

7. Moses the weak deliverer

God's chosen deliverer feels wholly inadequate, and Schreiner presses the point pastorally: God uses the weak and the humble. To feel gifted, adequate, equal to the work is a dangerous place for any servant of God; to feel insufficient is to stand where Moses stood, and where grace does its work.

8. I AM, and the bridegroom of blood

God reveals himself as the covenant-keeping God, I AM, and pledges to free his people. On the road to Egypt comes the strange episode of Exodus 4, where the LORD confronts Moses because his own sons are uncircumcised. The deliverer had not kept the covenant sign in his own house, and the covenant mediator cannot be a covenant transgressor.

9. Pharaoh's question answered

Pharaoh opens the contest with contempt: who is the LORD? The plagues are the answer, and by the end he knows there is no one like the LORD in all the earth. Exodus 9, which Paul takes up in Romans 9, states the purpose plainly: I could have stretched out my hand and wiped you away; I have let you live to show you my power, and so that my name would be proclaimed in all the earth. Even the mightiest hostile ruler serves the fame of God's name, and God works his purposes under such rulers still.

10. Hardening: sovereignty and guilt together

The narrative says both that Pharaoh hardened his heart and that God hardened it. Schreiner argues that fundamentally God hardened it, and yet Pharaoh's guilt stands untouched. Psalm 105 says the same of the nation: God turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people, and their hatred was still their sin. Scripture holds divine sovereignty and human accountability together without offering a philosophical resolution, and God is never the author of evil.

11. The Passover fulfilled in Christ

The blood on the doorposts anticipates the cross: Christ our Passover has been sacrificed, Paul writes, so cleanse out the old leaven, the picture of evil removed from God's delivered people. The Last Supper was a Passover meal, and the Passover sacrifice finds its fulfillment in the death of Jesus.

12. The covenant at Sinai: gracious, not legalistic

Exodus 19 to 24 presents the covenant in a form like the ancient treaties between a great king and his people, with God as the covenant Lord. Schreiner rejects outright the old note in the original Scofield Bible that Israel should have refused the law: a terrible misreading. The covenant is not legalism, because God chose this people in love, and Deuteronomy 7 grounds that love in nothing but itself: he loved them because he loved them. The law was given after the deliverance, never as the means of earning it, and Israel is called to be a kingdom of priests, a new Adam in the garden of Canaan, a blessing to the world.

13. Gracious, yet conditional

Grace does not make the covenant unconditional. The thunder and darkness of Exodus 19 stand behind Hebrews 12's contrast with Zion and the new covenant; Israel must keep the covenant's stipulations to enjoy fellowship with God. The Sabbath is the covenant's sign, a weekly embodiment of Israel's rest in her God.

14. The Ten Commandments: God first in everything

The commandments are not a list of detached rules; they reveal whether God is Lord of the heart. Schreiner notes Gerhard von Rad's observation that Israel's demand for exclusive worship stands alone in the history of religion, and then presses further: the first and tenth commandments are the same commandment, for what you covet is your god, which is why Paul calls covetousness idolatry. Every command flows from the first. Stealing worships security; adultery worships pleasure. Each one asks a single question: who is God in this heart?

Scripture in this lecture

Genesis 38, 49; Exodus 1, 4, 9, 12, 19, 20, 24, 32; Deuteronomy 7; 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 105; Hosea 6; Ezekiel 29; Romans 5, 9; 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 12; Revelation 12

Key terms

Judah's scepter

Genesis 49's promise that rule belongs to Judah's line until the one comes to whom it belongs: the offspring promise become a royal promise.

The covenant with Adam

Schreiner's argument from Hosea 6:7, the wordless covenant with David, and Romans 5's two heads, that Eden was covenantal though Genesis never uses the word.

Typology

A God-designed pattern in which an earlier deliverance, person, or institution corresponds to and anticipates a greater fulfillment, as the exodus does the cross.

The bridegroom of blood

The Exodus 4 episode teaching that the covenant mediator cannot himself be a covenant transgressor; God's deliverer must bear the covenant sign in his own house.

Hardening

Fundamentally God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh hardened his own, and his guilt stands: sovereignty and accountability held together without resolution.

Suzerain treaty form

The shape of Exodus 19 to 24, a great king binding a people to himself, with the deliverance already accomplished before a single command is given.

Comprehension check

Circle your answers, then check them against the key on the last page.

1. Why is Israel's time in Egypt a problem even while the seed is preserved?
 - A. The people stopped multiplying
 - B. Joseph lost his position
 - C. The famine returned
 - D. The seed is in the wrong place, and the worldwide blessing is not going out
2. From which son does Genesis 49 say the scepter will not depart?
 - A. Reuben
 - B. Joseph
 - C. Judah
 - D. Benjamin
3. Why were Reuben, Simeon, and Levi passed over for the scepter?
 - A. Their sins: Reuben with his father's concubine, Simeon and Levi at Shechem
 - B. They were too young
 - C. They stayed in Canaan
 - D. They married foreign wives
4. Which verse does Schreiner read as saying Israel, like Adam, transgressed the covenant?
 - A. Psalm 105:25
 - B. Hosea 6:7
 - C. Isaiah 14:14
 - D. Joshua 24:2
5. What does the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 demonstrate?
 - A. Covenants require a written document
 - B. Only priests may make covenants
 - C. A covenant can be made without the word covenant appearing
 - D. David refused God's covenant

6. How was the tribe of Levi's earlier sin reversed?
 - A. Their obedience at the golden calf was rewarded with the priesthood
 - B. They conquered Jericho
 - C. They built the ark
 - D. Moses annulled the judgment
7. In the exodus story, Pharaoh plays which role?
 - A. A neutral ruler caught in events
 - B. The offspring of the serpent, striking at the promised offspring
 - C. A misguided reformer
 - D. Israel's rightful king
8. What does the lecture say typology always involves?
 - A. Exact repetition
 - B. Allegory detached from history
 - C. Decline from the original
 - D. Escalation: the fulfillment is greater than the pattern
9. Why did the LORD confront Moses on the road to Egypt?
 - A. He doubted the promise
 - B. He had not kept the covenant sign in his own household
 - C. He had killed the Egyptian
 - D. He feared Pharaoh
10. According to Exodus 9, why did God let Pharaoh live?
 - A. Because Pharaoh repented
 - B. Because Moses interceded
 - C. To reward Egypt's kindness to Joseph
 - D. To show his power and make his name known in all the earth
11. How does Scripture speak of Pharaoh's hardening?
 - A. Only Pharaoh hardened himself
 - B. Only God hardened him, so Pharaoh bears no guilt
 - C. Fundamentally God hardened it, Pharaoh hardened his own, and Pharaoh remains guilty
 - D. The text never says
12. Why is the covenant at Sinai not legalistic?
 - A. Because it contains no commands
 - B. Because God delivered and loved Israel first, and gave the law after
 - C. Because Israel kept it perfectly
 - D. Because it bound only the priests

Talk it over

1. Feeling inadequate, Schreiner says, is a good place for a servant of God to stand, because God uses the weak. Where has a quiet sense of adequacy crept into your serving, and what would Moses' posture look like there?

2. The first and tenth commandments are the same commandment: what you covet is your god. Take one commandment you keep easily on the outside. What does it expose when it is read as a question about worship?
3. God gave the law after he delivered Israel, never as the way to earn deliverance. Where do you catch yourself, or your children, living that order in reverse?

One verse to carry

Genesis 49:10, the promise narrowing to a throne: the scepter will not leave Judah until the one comes to whom it belongs, and the peoples will obey him.

Go further

Dr. Schreiner mentions his own short book *Covenant*, from Crossway, where the case for the covenant with Adam is set out in full. *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum remains the course companion.

Lecture 4 Comprehension Check

1. D. The seed is in the wrong place, and the worldwide blessing is not going out (*outline section 1*)
2. C. Judah (*outline section 2*)
3. A. Their sins: Reuben with his father's concubine, Simeon and Levi at Shechem (*outline section 2*)
4. B. Hosea 6:7 (*outline section 3*)
5. C. A covenant can be made without the word covenant appearing (*outline section 3*)
6. A. Their obedience at the golden calf was rewarded with the priesthood (*outline section 4*)
7. B. The offspring of the serpent, striking at the promised offspring (*outline section 5*)
8. D. Escalation: the fulfillment is greater than the pattern (*outline section 6*)
9. B. He had not kept the covenant sign in his own household (*outline section 8*)
10. D. To show his power and make his name known in all the earth (*outline section 9*)
11. C. Fundamentally God hardened it, Pharaoh hardened his own, and Pharaoh remains guilty (*outline section 10*)
12. B. Because God delivered and loved Israel first, and gave the law after (*outline section 12*)