

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

The Humbling of Judah – Genesis 38

Some critical questions:

- 1) _____ is this in the text?
- 2) _____ in the world is going on here?
- 3) _____ do we assess the ethics on display?
- 4) _____ are we supposed to apply this to our understanding of God, redemption history, and our own lives?

Part 1: Sin, Judgment, and the Threat to Judah's Lineage

38 At that time Judah left his brothers and settled near an Adullamite named Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua; he took her as a wife and slept with her. ³She conceived and gave birth to a son, and he named him Er. ⁴She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and named him Onan. ⁵She gave birth to another son and named him Shelah. It was at Chezib that she gave birth to him.

⁶Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷Now Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the Lord's sight, and the Lord put him to death. ⁸Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife. Perform your duty as her brother-in-law and produce offspring for your brother."

⁹But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he released his semen on the ground so that he would not produce offspring for his brother.

¹⁰What he did was evil in the Lord's sight, so he put him to death also.

¹¹Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He might die too, like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

Genesis 38:1-11

What we know:

Judah left his brothers – probably a good thing – and married a Canaanite woman – not a good thing – who bore him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. (Remember that they were commanded to not take Canaanite women as wives – Genesis 24:3)

Judah found a wife (Tamar) for his 1st son (Er), but before he could have children, God killed him because he was _____.

Judah's 2nd son (Onan) then had the responsibility to carry on his brother's line, but refused his duty because he wanted the rights of the firstborn for himself. God judged him for that and killed him, too. (Perhaps he was evil in general, but we just don't know.)

Judah should then have given Tamar to his 3rd son (Shelah), but he reneged on his responsibility under levirate law and deceitfully withheld Shelah and placed the family lineage in _____.

Part 2: The Deception of Tamar and the Humbling of Judah

¹²After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had finished mourning, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers. ¹³Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

¹⁴So she took off her widow's clothes, veiled her face, covered herself, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had grown up, she had not been given to him as a wife.

¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶He went over to her and said, "Come, let me sleep with you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.

She said, "What will you give me for sleeping with me?"

¹⁷"I will send you a young goat from my flock," he replied.

But she said, "Only if you leave something with me until you send it."

¹⁸"What should I give you?" he asked.

She answered, "Your signet ring, your cord, and the staff in your hand." So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. ¹⁹She got up and left, then removed her veil and put her widow's clothes back on.

²⁰When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get back the items he had left with the woman, he could not find her. ²¹He asked the men of the place, "Where is the cult prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?"

"There has been no cult prostitute here," they answered.

²²So the Adullamite returned to Judah, saying, "I couldn't find her, and besides, the men of the place said, 'There has been no cult prostitute here.' "

²³Judah replied, "Let her keep the items for herself; otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send this young goat, but you couldn't find her."

²⁴About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law, Tamar, has been acting like a prostitute, and now she is pregnant."

"Bring her out," Judah said, "and let her be burned to death!"

²⁵As she was being brought out, she sent her father-in-law this message: "I am pregnant by the man to whom these items belong." And she added, "Examine them. Whose signet ring, cord, and staff are these?"

²⁶Judah recognized them and said, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her intimately again.

Genesis 38:12-26

What we know:

Judah, now a widow, takes a friend on a business trip. While there he visits who he thinks is a prostitute.

As it turns out, it's Tamar, his daughter-in-law, who has staged an elaborate scheme in order to continue her family line by getting _____.

She negotiates a _____ with Judah (yes – I know ... surreal) who pledges a _____. Not having a goat on hand, he leaves what amounts to a _____: his seal and his staff.

Tamar became pregnant.

When Judah goes back with the goat (and to get his belongings), no “prostitute” can be found. He decided not to pursue the recovery of his seal and staff so that he would not be _____.

3 months later, word comes to him that Tamar has been _____ and is now pregnant (and unmarried.) He pronounces the sentence of _____ for her sin.

When he does, she produces his seal and staff. Uh-oh.

In humiliation, he renounces the judgment, acknowledges his own sin, but does not (and rightfully so) take her as his wife.

Judah’s _____ continues ...

“The text of Scripture does not cast any moral judgment on Tamar. Delitzsch may have been too generous in calling her a saint, but she is presented in the Bible in a most favorable light (Ruth 4:12). It is not appropriate to judge her by Christian ethics, for in her culture at that time, her actions, though very dangerous for her, were within the law. She had the right to have a child by the nearest of kin to her deceased husband. She played on the vice of Judah to bear this child, and her deception worked.”¹

Part 3: The Vindication of Tamar

²⁷ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb. ²⁸ As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife took it and tied a scarlet thread around it, announcing, “This one came out first.” ²⁹ But then he pulled his hand back, out came his brother, and she said, “What a breakout you have made for yourself!” So he was named Perez. ³⁰ Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread tied to his hand, came out, and was named Zerah.

Genesis 38:27-30

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram ... ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Matthew 1:1-3, 16

Tamar is the first of five women in the genealogy of Christ. There is Tamar (v. 3), Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v. 5), Bathsheba (identified as “the wife of Uriah,” v. 6), and Mary (v. 16). Notably absent are the great mothers of Israel: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel.

All four of Mary’s predecessors were _____. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabitess, and Bathsheba was a Hittite.

¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*, 617.

Some **lessons to apply**:

God judges evil _____.

Sin is _____.

_____ is especially ugly.

Conviction _____ us.

Repentance _____ us.

Forgiveness _____ us.

Righteousness _____ us.

God is _____ and works through _____ people and situations.

He restores what is _____.

He is always at work, not just when we are "_____".

God is relentlessly committed to _____ with us.

God – in Christ – brings salvation to _____.

Final note: This chapter is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*.

Next week: Genesis 39 – Joseph, Blessed of God