

Day Four

Closing the chapter, read Genesis 38:24-30.

Stoning would have been the appropriate punishment for adultery. What might have accounted for Judah's insistence that Tamar be burned?

Although Tamar's actions are not approved, Judah's actions are reprehensible. What is your reaction to what Tamar did?

Tamar could have screamed and yelled and accused Judah to his face and denounced him before all his family. What do her actions suggest?

Pay close attention to what Judah said after the truth comes out. (Reread 38:26.) He does not actually fully commend Tamar's actions. What does he say?

What do his words imply about how he understood his own actions?

Judah has not yet (apparently) owned his own (and his family's) wickedness. There is no mention of his awareness of his sin in selling his brother into slavery or his deceiving his own father. He seems unmoved by his own turning from his family and turning to a pagan woman as wife. He is out of touch with the wickedness of his own sons which results in their deaths. And he seems--until this moment--relatively unconcerned about his own unacceptable actions with a woman he assumed was a prostitute. And yet, right in this moment, there is a glimmer of light. Judah apparently admits that he is less than righteous. How does seeing that impact the way you read this story?

What does that insight do for the way you understand how this account about Judah might fit into the overall story of Joseph?

Day Five

If we pull back a bit from our close-up look at this account in Genesis 38, there are some trajectories that might help us see a greater picture of what God is up to. Start by rereading Genesis 38:27-30.

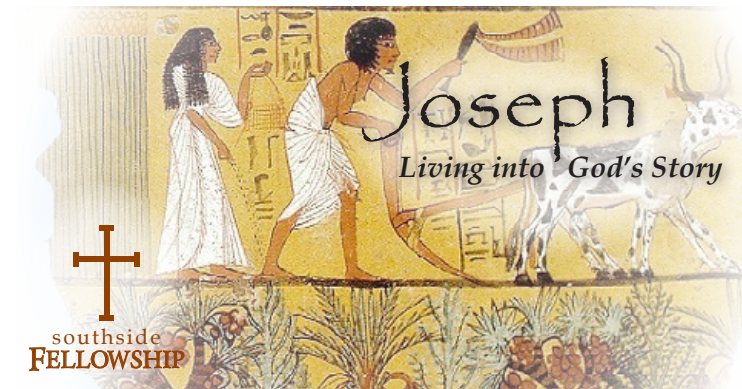
Chapter 38 closes with the names of Tamar's two sons. Perez is mentioned about a dozen times after this point in time in the Old Testament. What does Ruth 4:17-22 tell you about this son born to Tamar?

How does Luke 3:23-33 add to your understanding of what happened through the birth of this son, Perez, born to Tamar through the "unconventional" means we have been reading about?

Judah, who we meet (and dislike!) is next in view some years later. Read Genesis 43:1-10 and 44:14-34 (we will study these sections a bit later, but for now just get a "feel" for Judah). What is your impression of Judah in these later portions?

The only thing we are told about Judah between his selling his brother off and deceiving his father and his pledging his life for his brother and his seeking to do good to his father is Genesis 38. What has happened to Judah?

Grace is amazing. Out of the very heart of corrupt living and wickedness, God is transforming people (like Judah) and advancing His plan (developing the lineage of the future king of Israel and, ultimately, the Messiah Himself!). This doesn't excuse evil or justify living in sin, but it does underscore for us that God's grace . . . (You finish the thought!) . . .



Weekly Devotional Guide

February 14, 2010

Genesis 38: Things Get a Bit Messy

Day One

Joseph is on his way--to Egypt, into slavery, cut off from his family. His brothers, in hatred, have sold him. They deceived their father, and have concluded they are now done with "that dreamer."

Why did they not kill Joseph? Seemingly, Judah was able to convince his brothers that it made more sense to sell Joseph for profit. Did Judah prevail over the others because of his great moral character? It's unlikely, seeing the light that chapter 38 shines on Judah.

Let's get a little background on Judah, one of Joseph's brothers and a son of Jacob. He is first mentioned in Genesis 29:31-35.

What do the names of the four sons born to Rachel suggest about what Rachel was coming to understand?

What does Judah's name mean? What would you hope for that son with a name like that?

We next see Judah in Genesis 37:26-28. What does Judah do? How do you feel about what he did?

What does this tell you about the kind of man Judah has become?

Let's add one more piece to our picture of Judah. Read Genesis 38:1-5. What is the impression that you get of what Judah does?

What is implied when we are told that he "went down from his brothers"?

The land of Canaan was the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. What do you make of Judah's taking a "Canaanite" woman for his wife? How do you understand the reference to her in an un-named way?

Nearly identical language is used to describe what Shechem did to Dinah, Jacob's daughter (recorded in Genesis 34:1-2; both Shechem's actions and Judah's actions are described as "seeing" and "taking" a woman that leads to a sexual act). What Shechem did was declared, by Jacob's sons, as offensive. With that as background, how might we be led to understand what Judah is doing?

Pulling all these seemingly disparate pieces together, what is the picture that you are left with of Judah?

What might the reason(s) be for giving us such insights right in the midst of the account of Joseph's trouble?

Day Two

We are still in the midst of a sordid tale. Read Genesis 38:6-11. What is your overall impression of what you read here?

In the Old Testament context, because of the necessity of perpetuating a family line to preserve wealth and property, it was considered appropriate (and later explained in the Law) for a widow to have a child by her

deceased husband's brothers or, if necessary, even by her father-in-law. Understanding that, how do you understand the events in 38:6-11?

What did Tamar want?

Although some commentators might try to utilize the account of what happened to Onan to address such issues as birth control, this is clearly *not* what is in focus here. What was Onan's appropriate cultural obligation? What had his father instructed him to do?

Why did Onan not comply?

Don't overlook what we're told. Why did both Er and Onan die?

After his first two sons had been killed, Judah withheld his third (and last) from Tamar. What was he afraid of?

Apparently Judah might have thought that it was Tamar who was somehow "cursed." Both his eldest sons died in relationship with her. There is not indication that Judah even knew what Onan had done; only that he had died when with Tamar. What does this suggest about how Judah thought about his own family? What was he, apparently, oblivious to?

It is not hard to grasp what is being pictured for us in these opening verses of Genesis 38. Judah turns from his brothers. Judah takes a pagan woman for a wife. Judah isn't even around when his last son is born. Judah apparently is unaware of the wickedness of his own sons. Judah's sons not only did wicked things they "were wicked" from God's perspective. What an environment! Seeing this, how does it change your perspective on why God might have had Joseph removed from his "family of origin" and sent to Egypt?

Day Three

Let's press on to the next part of the story. Read Genesis 38:12-26.

What would you assume is motivating Tamar?

The last time Judah was with his "friend" Hirah, he took a Canaanite woman for himself. What happens now, when he is again hanging out with this Adullamite?

When Judah sent Hirah to make good on his pledge, he was thinking of that "prostitute" (38:15). But Hirah referred to her as the "cult prostitute" (38:21). The Canaanites indulged in sexual practices as part of the worship of their gods; apparently Hirah thought of Judah and this woman in that way. What does that tell you about Judah's discernment?

When the woman could not be found so that Judah could redeem the tokens he had left with her, what does he do? Why?

What is it that Judah is most concerned with? What does he tell Hirah he is afraid might happen?

Adding this snapshot to what you already know about Judah, what kind of man do you think Judah was? Why?

Judah appeared to be the "best of the lot" when it came to killing Joseph; he proposed the alternative of selling him. But as we get up close and look at Judah we find a seriously flawed and sin-full man. Yet both Joseph and Judah were raised in the same home, under the same influences. If you didn't already know the story of Joseph (and how things turn out), what might you be thinking about Joseph, way down there in pagan Egypt?