

Judah's Troubled Family

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Messiah; Redeemer; Judah / Genesis 38

In Genesis 38, Moses interrupts the narrative flow with the account of Judah and Tamar in which the seed promise is almost wasted on Judah and his troubled family.

Pre-Sermon Comments

If there is one maverick molecule in all the universe, then God is not sovereign.
And if God is not sovereign, He is not God. ~ RC Sproul

Psalm 24:1 LSB

¹ The earth is Yahweh's, as well as its fullness, The world, and those who dwell in it.

The menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.
~ Ernest Henley

Review

Genesis 37:4 LSB

⁴ And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and so they hated him and could not speak to him in peace.

Genesis 37:14 LSB

¹⁴ Then he said to him, “Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

Genesis 37:15–16 LSB

¹⁵ And a man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” ¹⁶ And he said, “I am seeking my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*.”

Genesis 37:17 LSB

¹⁷ Then the man said, “They have journeyed from here; for I heard *them* saying, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

Genesis 37:22 LSB

²² Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not put forth your hands against him”—that he might deliver him out of their hands to return him to his father.

Genesis 37:27–28 LSB

²⁷ “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our *own* flesh.” And his brothers listened. ²⁸ Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him* up and lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Genesis 37:31–32 LSB

³¹ So they took Joseph’s tunic and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; ³² and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, “We found this; please recognize *it*—whether it is your son’s tunic or not.”

Genesis 37:36 LSB

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

Proposition and Outline

In [Genesis 38](#), Moses interrupts the narrative flow with the account of Judah and Tamar in which the seed promise is almost wasted on Judah and his troubled family.

- Judah's Evil Seed ([Gen 38:1-10](#))
- Judah's Endangered Daughter-in-law ([Gen 38:11-14](#))
- Judah's Expensive Pledge ([Gen 38:15-19](#))
- Judah's Empty Search ([Gen 38:20-23](#))
- Judah's Egotistical Condemnation ([Gen 38:24](#))
- Judah's Earth-Shattering Admission ([Gen 38:25-26](#))
- Judah's unExpected Seed ([Gen 38:27-30](#))

Judah's Evil Seed ([Gen 38:1-10](#))

Genesis 38:1 LSB

¹ Now it happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

1 Samuel 22:1 LSB

¹ So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and his brothers and all his father's household heard *of it* and went down there to him.

Deuteronomy 12:31 LSB

³¹ "You shall not do thus toward Yahweh your God, for every abominable act which Yahweh hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

Leviticus 18:24-30 LSB

²⁴ 'So do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. ²⁵ 'So the land has

become defiled, and I have brought its punishment upon it. And the land has vomited out its inhabitants.²⁶ ‘But as for you, you shall keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, *neither* the native nor the sojourner who sojourns among you²⁷ (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled);²⁸ so that the land will not vomit you out, should you defile it, as it has vomited out the nation which has been before you.²⁹ ‘For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people.³⁰ ‘Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not do any of the abominable statutes which have been done before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am Yahweh your God.’”

Genesis 38:2 LSB

² And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her.

Genesis 38:3–5 LSB

³ So she conceived and bore a son, and he named him Er. ⁴ Then she conceived again and bore a son, and she named him Onan. ⁵ And she bore still another son, and she named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.

Genesis 24:3 LSB

³ and I will make you swear by Yahweh, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live,

Genesis 28:1–2 LSB

¹ So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and commanded him and said to him, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.” ² “Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.

Genesis 26:34–35 LSB

³⁴ And Esau was forty years old, and he took as a wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and *also* Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵ and they brought bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 38:6–7 LSB

⁶ Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of Yahweh, so Yahweh put him to death.

Genesis 38:8 LSB

⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up a seed for your brother.”

Genesis 38:9 LSB

⁹ And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it happened that when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted it on the ground in order not to give seed to his brother.

Genesis 38:9 ESV

⁹ But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother.

Genesis 38:10 LSB

¹⁰ But what he did was displeasing in the sight of Yahweh; so He put him to death also.

Judah's Endangered Daughter-in-law ([Gen 38:11-14](#))

Genesis 38:11 LSB

¹¹ Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up”; for he thought, “*I am afraid* lest he also die like his brothers.” So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

Genesis 38:12 LSB

¹² And after a considerable time, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. Then Judah was comforted, and he went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

Genesis 38:13 LSB

¹³ Then it was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

Genesis 38:14 LSB

¹⁴ So she removed her widow's garments from herself and covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself. And she sat at the entrance of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife.

Judah's Expensive Pledge ([Gen 38:15-19](#))

Genesis 38:15-16 LSB

¹⁵ Then Judah saw her, and he thought she *was* a harlot, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶ So he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

Genesis 38:17 LSB

¹⁷ He said, therefore, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you send *it*?"

Genesis 38:18 LSB

¹⁸ Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave *them* to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

Genesis 38:19 LSB

¹⁹ Then she arose and went. And she removed her veil from herself and put on her widow's garments.

Judah's Empty Search ([Gen 38:20-23](#))

Genesis 38:20 LSB

²⁰ Then Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take the pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her.

Genesis 38:21 LSB

²¹ So he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the cult prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no cult prostitute here."

Genesis 38:22 LSB

²² So he returned to Judah and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no cult prostitute here.'"

Genesis 38:23 LSB

²³ Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. Behold, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her."

Judah's Egotistical Condemnation ([Gen 38:24](#))

Genesis 38:24 LSB

²⁴ Now it happened about three months later that it was told to Judah saying, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

Judah's Earth-Shattering Admission ([Gen 38:25-26](#))

Genesis 38:25 LSB

²⁵ It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please recognize *this* and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?"

Genesis 38:26 LSB

²⁶ And Judah recognized *them* and said, “She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not know her again.

Romans 3:23 LSB

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Judah’s unExpected Seed ([Gen 38:27-30](#))

Genesis 38:27–30 LSB

²⁷ Now it happened at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁸ And it happened, while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet *thread* on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” ²⁹ And then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. So she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” So he was named Perez. ³⁰ Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand; and he was named Zerah.

Genesis 44:1–4 LSB

¹ Then he commanded his house steward, saying, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack. ² “Now put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph had told *him*. ³ As the morning light *broke*, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys. ⁴ Now they had *just* gone out of the city *and* were not far off when Joseph said to his house steward, “Arise, pursue the men; you shall overtake them and say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good?’

Genesis 43:8–9 LSB

⁸ Then Judah said to his father Israel, “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. ⁹ “I myself will be *the* guarantee for him; from my hand you may require him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then I shall bear the sin before you all *my* days.

Genesis 44:12–14 LSB

¹² So he searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city. ¹⁴ Then Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there. So they fell to the ground before him.

Genesis 44:15–17 LSB

¹⁵ And Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed interpret omens?" ¹⁶ So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found." ¹⁷ But he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose possession the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Genesis 44:32–34 LSB

³² "For your servant became a guarantee for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then I shall bear the sin before my father all *my* days.' ³³ "So now, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a slave to my lord, and let the boy go up with his brothers. ³⁴ "For how shall I go up to my father if the boy is not with me, lest I see the evil that would overtake my father?"

Genesis 38:26 LSB

²⁶ And Judah recognized *them* and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again.

Revelation 5:5 LSB

⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Stop crying! Behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 LSB

²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was being betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.

Discussion Questions

Why does [Genesis 38](#) seem out of place in the middle of the Joseph narrative?

What evidence do we see that Judah was becoming influenced by Canaanite culture?

Why were Er and Onan judged so severely by God?

How did Judah fail Tamar?

What was Tamar trying to accomplish through her deception?

Why were Judah's signet, cord, and staff so important?

What irony do you see in Tamar's words, "Please recognize these" ([Gen. 38:25](#))?

What evidence demonstrates that Judah experienced genuine heart change?

How does [Genesis 44](#) show the fruit of Judah's repentance?

Why is Perez's birth so important to the larger biblical story?

What does [Genesis 38](#) teach us about the seriousness of sin?

How does Judah's life illustrate the danger of worldly influences?

Why is Tamar described as "more righteous" than Judah even though her actions were not entirely righteous?

What does this chapter reveal about God's commitment to His covenant promises?

How does [Genesis 38](#) demonstrate that God's plans do not depend upon human faithfulness?

Why do you think Moses interrupts the Joseph story to tell this account?

What does Judah's confession teach us about true repentance?

How is Judah different at the end of [Genesis 38](#) than he was in [Genesis 37](#)?

How does this chapter help prepare us to understand Judah's leadership in [Genesis 43-44](#)?

Why is it significant that the Messiah comes through such a flawed family?

In what ways are we tempted to hide sin like Judah?

Why is it often easier to condemn sin in others than to recognize it in ourselves?

Have you ever experienced a moment when God exposed an area of sin in your life? What was the result?

What are some practical signs of genuine repentance?

How can believers guard against becoming influenced by the culture around them?

What encouragement do you find in the fact that God used deeply flawed people to accomplish His purposes?

How does Judah's story increase your appreciation for God's grace?

What aspect of God's sovereignty in this chapter is most encouraging to you?

How does Judah's transformation give hope to those struggling with past sins?

How does [Genesis 38](#) point us to Christ?

How is Judah's confession ("She is more righteous than I") similar to the attitude required for salvation?

In what ways does Judah foreshadow Christ when he later offers himself in Benjamin's place?

How is Jesus different from Judah?

Why is Jesus uniquely qualified to be our substitute?

How does [Genesis 38](#) magnify the grace of God displayed in the gospel?

Children's Questions

Parent Note

Ages 3-5

Ages 6-9

Ages 10-12

Teen Discussion Questions