

# Pentwater Bible Church

*The Strange Case of Judah & Tamar*

*Genesis Message Seventy-Three*

*Genesis 38: 1-30*



Judah and Tamar by Emile Verneet, 1840

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## Genesis Message Seventy-Three

### Judah and Tamar

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#### Review:

JOSEPH IS SOLD

Genesis 37: 25-36

The opening verses describe how Joseph was actually sold. Joseph's charge from his father in visiting the brothers was to check on their activities to determine if they were engaged in nefarious goings-on as before. He was in the pit and some suggest that it was Simeon who threw him in. All were guilty in the collusion to harm him. His brothers had decided to follow Reuben's request and keep him in the cistern instead of killing him outright. However since Reuben was not telling them that his personal hidden agenda was to rescue Joseph afterward they saw an opportunity to market Joseph as a slave to the Ishmaelites. They were a semi-nomadic group of traders from the Transjordan. Judah took the opportunity to propose to his brethren to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. *"What profit is it,"* he said, *"if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites; and let not our hand be upon him (in other words to kill him), for he is our brother, our flesh."* Judah may have had a slight change of heart and did not want to kill him as Reuben was also so minded. The others saw this a good opportunity too.

They were so insensitive to Joseph that while he was in the cistern crying out for mercy they were making merry and enjoying a meal. In fact they admitted to this at a later time. Their hatred for him was so strong that they had hardened their hearts toward his torment as he cried to them to be released.

Genesis 42: 21

The brothers were near a trade route that crossed the Jordan near Gilead in what is today Jordan. It then wound through the Jezreel valley toward the Mediterranean coastal area and then turned southward at Megiddo so as to connect with the ancient trade route from Damascus to Egypt known as the Via Marais. The Ishmaelites had goods that represented their trading prowess. This seemed like a good opportunity to broker a trade for Joseph. The caravan was laden with spices: **גִּבְעַת**, *Nehchoat* which is a gum-tragacanth; **צִרְיִי**, *Tsoree* balsam, for which Gilead was celebrated (Genesis 43:11; Jeremiah 8:22; 46:11); and **לִטְ**, *Loat* ladanum, the fragrant resin of the cistus-rose.

There is an exchange of terminology between Ishmaelites and Midianites. The Midianites were a tribe of the progeny of one of Keturah's son Midian who she had with Abraham as his second wife. Judges 8: 22-26 connects those two tribes together. Then Joseph's brothers *drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver.* The general idea was that the Midianites would

take him to Egypt and sell him, off into the slave markets there. The text does not reveal exactly what the brothers' thought would happen to Joseph. They just wanted him out of their life. Their wrath at Joseph would end up praising God.

The meager price of twenty pieces of silver they got for Joseph later became the price which Moses fixed as the value of a boy between 5 and 20 (Leviticus 27:5), the average price of a slave being 30 shekels (Exodus 21:32).

They did not tell Reuben what became of Joseph because he would have told Jacob that his favorite son was still alive. So they concocted a story of his death by wild animals. This whole process obviously frustrated Reuben to find that Joseph was gone and now he was unable to rescue him. He was extremely distraught when they told him Joseph was dead. He said after renting his clothes "*The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?*" Normally, this phrase means that a person has died. So he must have been led to believe that Joseph died. Then the brothers took Joseph's coat and dipped it in the blood of a recent slain he-goat. They did not want to face their father with this news so they sent someone else.

They expected Jacob's response, which was to *rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and then he, mourned for his son many days*. His sons and daughters came to comfort him but he did not want them comforting him and said, "*For I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning.*" *And his father wept for him*. What a sad state of circumstances for Jacob to believe he lost his favorite son so early in the boy's life. It is easy to imagine the depth of his grief. He was sure it would last his entire life. Sheol is the place where the Old Testament people went before the sacrifice of Christ. There were multiple compartments depending on the destination God assigned to them (See Attached Chart). The faithful and the unfaithful both entered Sheol when the spirit separated from the body.

Finally Joseph was sold again this time to Potiphar in Egypt. This was an officer of Pharaoh and he was the captain of the guard. He was part of the Egyptian military and the term, *the captain of the guard literally means "The Chief of the Executioners."*

### **Today's Message:**

JUDAH SONS AND TAMAR

Genesis 38: 1-11

*<sup>1</sup>And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. <sup>2</sup>And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. And he took her, and went in unto her. <sup>3</sup>And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. <sup>4</sup>And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. <sup>5</sup>And she yet again bare a son, and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. <sup>6</sup>And Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. <sup>7</sup>And Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah. And Jehovah slew him. <sup>8</sup>And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her, and raise up seed to thy brother. <sup>9</sup>And Onan knew that the seed*



Canaanites. The text simply says that *he took her, and went in unto her*. He then had three sons by her: Er (עֵר), Onan, and Shelah. Judah named Er and his wife named Onan and Shelah since he was away in the nearby town of Chezib. Hebrew naming shows the parents wish to commemorate some meaningful event through the child's name. Er means *forsaken or lonely*. Onan means *sorrow* and Shelah means *deception*. This seems to indicate that Judah was quite remorseful over the events that brought Joseph into slavery into Egypt.

When Er was grown he was married to a woman named Tamar. The text further tells us that he was wicked in the sight of Jehovah. The Hebrew word for wicked is *רָע*. It is a designation of a degree of wickedness that merits divine retribution. And in this case his death was the result of Jehovah God taking his life in some undisclosed manner. Jehovah who knows all things was keeping Tamar from this evil man. As a result of his death Judah instructs the second born son Onan to due his duty and “*Go in unto thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her, and raise up seed to thy brother.*” This concept is called the law of levirate marriage. It was codified into the Mosaic Law and became a standard practice (Deuteronomy 25: 5-6, Ruth 4: 5-6; Matthew 22: 24). The idea was to keep the name of the individual who died through his son. Therefore the son would keep the family name alive even though the father was not alive to propagate.

Deuteronomy 25: 5-6

*<sup>5</sup>If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her. <sup>6</sup>And it shall be, that the first-born that she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother that is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel (ASV 1901).*

Onan seemed to have no qualms against marrying Tamar Er's widow. He seemed to accept the easy part of having sexual intercourse with her and accepting his inheritance. Er was first born so he would have gotten Judah's estate when he passed. Er realized this and complied with Judah's instructions. However, Onan realized that the children would not be his per se but that of Er's so during intercourse with Tamar he continually withdrew from her before he deposited his semen into her. Thus, she was not allowed to become pregnant. Some mistakenly teach through this example here that God prohibits contraception. The sin here was, Onan did not want to obey his father and honor his brother by taking up the responsibility that was given to him. Because his sin was in the same category of wickedness of his brother Er the Lord executed His divine will and caused him to die too. Tamar was now a widow again and Judah instructed her to “*Remain a widow in thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown up; for he said, Lest he also die, like his brethren.*” Judah was certainly considering Tamar to have some major issue that both her husbands received divine executions. So he told her that when his third son Shelah was of age she could have him in levirate because he feared that Jehovah would take him too. Judah had no intention of letting Tamar marry Shelah

because of the curse he thought she had. She trusted Judah and went to her father's home to live and wait for Shelah to come of age and marry her.

#### THE STRANGE CASE OF TAMAR AND JUDAH

Genesis 38: 12-26

*<sup>12</sup>And in process of time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheep-shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. <sup>13</sup>And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold, thy father-in-law goeth up to Timnah to shear his sheep. <sup>14</sup>And she put off from her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gate of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she was not given unto him to wife. <sup>15</sup>When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; for she had covered her face. <sup>16</sup>And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Come, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee: for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? <sup>17</sup>And he said, I will send thee a kid of the goats from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it? <sup>18</sup>And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand. And he gave them to her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him. <sup>19</sup>And she arose, and went away, and put off her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. <sup>20</sup>And Judah sent the kid of the goats by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not. <sup>21</sup>Then he asked the men of her place, saying, Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the wayside? And they said, There hath been no prostitute here. <sup>22</sup>And he returned to Judah, and said, I have not found her; and also the men of the place said, There hath been no prostitute here. <sup>23</sup>And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be put to shame: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her. <sup>24</sup>And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter-in-law hath played the harlot; and moreover, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt. <sup>25</sup>When she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff. <sup>26</sup>And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She is more righteous than I; forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more. (ASV 1901)*

So time passed and Judah was making no effort to arrange another levirate marriage between Shuah and Tamar who desired children and not wanting to make a career of widowhood. She was still a young woman. Judah's wife died and he went through a period of ritual mourning as the text says that *and Judah was comforted*. Later

he and his friend Hirah went up to the sheep-shearers. This was a festive time for them and Judah now done with mourning was going to join in the party atmosphere.

Tamar became aware of Judah's travel to the party with the sheep shearers with Hirah and she devised a plan to force him into a role of a levir for her. In her contrivance she planned to entrap him. She changed out of her widow's clothes and made herself appear as an adherent of Astarte, which was a sacred prostitute. She then put on a veil, which had several connotations of that day. Brides principally wore them on their wedding night and so did prostitutes wanting to appear as a wholesome bride. So a veiled woman in public gave off the message that she was a prostitute available for sexual intercourse. She had essentially dressed herself as a cult prostitute and waited for Judah to appear at the city gate of Enaim. Her actions while retaliatory for not getting Shuah put her into a doubly sinful situation. She was legally betrothed to Shuah regardless of what Judah was preventing and she was planning on an incestuous relationship with Judah.

When Judah saw her he was enticed by her. She played the role of seductress and lured him into a sexual union. It was Judah who suggested the sex when he said to her, "*Come, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee: for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law.*" He was coming off a period of mourning and was exceptionally vulnerable to temptation of this sort and didn't realize that this was his daughter-in-law in disguise. Tamar who played the role of a prostitute asked for payment for gratifying his sexual desires. This was a normal request from a prostitute. She says, "*What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?*" He promised her a kid of the goats of the flock at a later time for sexual favors now, but she did not trust him and wanted something of more significance as a promissory to pay. She was actually looking for something to provide as evidence proving him to be the father of the child who would come from the union. So Judah asks, "*What pledge shall I give thee?*" She being very savvy says to him in response, "*Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand.*" These three items had identifying significance for her to later prove who the father's child was. The signet was used to seal documents, the cord was a necklace that the ring was kept on, and the staff in his hand established his profession. So she received them and she had sex with him, after which she became pregnant. She then left, removed the veil and put back on the widow's clothes.

Judah then tried to make good on the promise to give her a goat kid. He sent Hirah to her with the payment. He of course wanted his personal items back, which she was holding as a deposit. When Hirah was unable to find her he begins asking *the men of her place, saying, "Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the wayside?"* they just said, "*There hath been no prostitute here.*" Hirah tried to honor Judah's commitment to pay her and when that failed he returned to Judah with the kid. Judah decided to forget the entire incident.

Now comes the revelation to Judah of what actually happened. After three months when Tamar is just entering her second trimester a report was given to Judah that Tamar had become a harlot and she is pregnant as a result of her prostitute activities. So Judah still not knowing that he impregnated her says in response to learning what she did, "*Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.*" He was the patriarch of the clan and had a right to do this since she was guilty of prostitution. During the trial she pleaded, "*By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff.*" Judah then had to confess when he was exposed and

simply admitted his guilt by saying, “*She is more righteous than I; forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.*”

#### TWINS ARE BORN TO JUDAH AND TAMAR

#### Genesis 38: 27-30

*<sup>28</sup>And it came to pass, when she travailed, that one put out a hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. <sup>29</sup>And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself? Therefore his name was called Perez. <sup>30</sup>And afterward came out his brother that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zerah. (ASV 1901)*

This section of Scripture regarding the story of Judah and Tamar ends with the birth of twin sons. When they were about to be born one put his hand out of the womb and the midwife tied a scarlet thread on his hand to indicate he was the first born. However he drew his hand back in and returned into the womb. So the second one was born first. This caused the midwife to say, “*Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself?*” This is a Hebrew play on words, which means you breached a breach or you forged through. This is the meaning of the name Perez who was the first-born. He became a seed son of the Messianic line (Ruth 4: 12, 18-22; Matthew 1:3; Luke 3:33). The second son then came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand and he was named Zerah meaning the shining one probably due to the scarlet thread. This account while seemingly out of place in the story of Joseph traces the Messianic line. It also shows that they were intermarrying into the Canaanites. This is one of the reasons God took Judah and the rest of the family into Egypt. Finally there is a strong contrast illustrated here between Judah and Joseph. One brother was resisting temptation and the other caving in to it.

NEXT WEEK: JOSEPH IN POTIPHAR’S HOUSE

**Please Call or e-mail with any questions or comments.**

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