

Judah Leaves His Family (Gen. 38:1-5)

1 It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. 2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her. 3 So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. 4 She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. 5 And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him.

- Why did Judah leave home?
- Judah’s social circle now includes Canaanites, and he marries one as well. We don’t know why he married her. It could have been for her beauty or her wealth.
- Perhaps Judah is hoping for a better future for himself as he starts over, and he has three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. (“Watching,” “Strong,” and “Prayer”)
- Judah was at a place called *Chezib*, which means “False.”

The Death of Judah’s Sons (Gen. 38:6-11)

6 Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. 8 And Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.” 9 But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother’s wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. 10 And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also.

11 Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, “Remain a widow in your father’s house till my son Shelah is grown.” For he said, “Lest he also die like his brothers.” And Tamar went and dwelt in her father’s house.

- We don’t know anything about Tamar (“palm tree”) except that she was likely a Canaanite as well.
- Judah’s hopes for his family are about to turn to tragedy. The wickedness of Er was apparently extreme. God was “watching.”

Levirate Marriage

- The term *levirate* comes from the Latin word for brother-in-law. Under this practice a brother-in-law was expected to take his brother’s widow as his own wife and raise up children for his deceased brother.
- These children would not be considered the children of the biological father, but the children of the deceased. This was later a part of the Law of Moses.
- These cultures valued group identity, and they highly valued the inheritance. They also desired to protect widows.
- Men were not always willing to follow this custom. You were being asked to potentially undercut your own economic future.

The Tragedy Of Onan

- Onan refuses his levirate duty. His sin had nothing to do with self-stimulation, as it commonly thought. It was in his failure to consummate the marriage to Tamar.

Judah's Neglect Of Tamar

- As a father-in-law Judah has theoretical authority over Tamar, but he is not willing to take her under his own roof.
- He sends her back to her own home until Shelah is grown.

Tamar's Deception (Gen. 38:12-19)

12 Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 14 So she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which was on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife.

15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face. 16 Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.

So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

17 And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock."

So she said, "Will you give me a pledge till you send it?"

18 Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?"

So she said, "Your signet and cord, and your staff that is in your hand." Then he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. 19 So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.

- Tamar likely developed this ruse because this was her only way to have something for herself and have justice.

- The payment Judah proposes is a goat. This is an interesting picture in Genesis. In the family of Abraham, there is a recurring theme of deception. There is a person who is chosen for blessing, and there is a disguise or deception, and a goat is involved, which is a picture of sin or needing to atone for sin.
- Judah foolishly gives her a valuable pledge, really the most valuable things he had, representing all of his identity and wealth. In a strange way he was, in this way, giving her everything he had actually been supposed to give her all along.

In The Place of Seeing

- The Hebrew can indicate to us that Tamar and Judah had this encounter in a place called *Enaim*. The NKJV calls it an *open place*, but some other translations will say something to the effect that Tamar *sat at the entrance to Enaim*. (ESV) Why does this matter?
- *Enaim* means *judgment*, figuratively, but literally it means *eyes*. This is a hidden key to this entire story. All of the important story points here concern Judah seeing and recognizing things, or perhaps with not seeing and recognizing things!
 - First, Judah saw things wrong concerning what kind of person Tamar was.
 - Second, Judah could not see that he was doing an injustice to Tamar.
 - Then we see Tamar veiling herself so that her eyes couldn't be seen.

Making Good On A Pledge (Gen. 38:20-24)

20 And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. 21 Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who was openly by the roadside?" And they said, "There was no harlot in this place."

22 So he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this place."

23 Then Judah said, "Let her take them for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

24 And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry."

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

- Judah is just willing to let go of his important personal items.
- Now we notice another form of seeing wrongly or misjudging. Notice that Judah has the same religious spirit of judgment that would pop up later in other people.

Surprise! (Gen. 38:25-26)

25 When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Please determine whose these are—the signet and cord, and staff." 26 So Judah acknowledged them and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he never knew her again.

- Here is some more seeing, more recognizing. This translation happens to use the word "determine," but in Hebrew it means *to discern* or *recognize*. In fact, this is the same word (*nakar*) that is used when Isaac failed to recognize Jacob, and when Jacob recognized that the bloody coat belonged to Joseph. Moses uses the same word again and says that Judah acknowledged them.

- However, the more important thing happening here is that Judah is recognizing that Tamar has actually been more righteous than he
- This is a powerful step in the development of Judah’s character. He has come to the place where he can recognize his wrongdoing. This is the first time we see any humility of this kind on the part of any of the brothers.

Twins And More Twins! (Gen. 38:27-30)

27 Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins were in her womb. 28 And so it was, when she was giving birth, that the one put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and bound it on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” 29 Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, “How did you break through? This breach be upon you!” Therefore his name was called Perez. 30 Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

- Once again we have a story of twins, and God seeming to choose the one who was second, or the one who was less likely to be chosen if custom were being followed.
- Perez means a breach, and Zerah means dawning or shining. Both of these men would become the ancestors of many illustrious people.

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