

Genesis (2011) 38B

- Joseph has been sent away from his family, and meanwhile his brothers and his father go on with their lives in Canaan
 - It will be 22 years before Jacob leads his family to Egypt to join Joseph
 - And in all those 22 years, we have but one chapter telling us about life in Jacob's household – Chapter 38
 - The focus of the chapter is Judah, the man who now carries the seed promise, the one through whom we know God plans to bring the Messiah
 - Judah is no saint...he has already demonstrated that
 - Like his brothers, he was willing to kill Joseph
 - Ultimately, he was the one to suggest selling him into slavery
 - And so far in Chapter 38 we've seen him take a Canaanite woman as a wife, a woman who is never named and is soon to die
 - Judah's choice was a serious departure from the choices his forefathers made when choosing a mate
 - He has hitched his wagon to the cursed Canaanites, against God's wishes
 - As God has proclaimed, any Canaanite family will bear the curse and must one day cease to exist
 - We were introduced to Judah's three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah
 - As Er reached his teens, Judah found a wife for Er; a woman called Tamar
 - Er's character reflected the Canaanite curse, as he was evil and displeased God
 - So the Lord kills him
 - Likewise, Onan, Er's brother, marries Tamar as part of a levirate marriage or brother-in-law marriage
 - But Onan refuses to give Tamar children since it threatened his desire to receive the birthright

- So God kills him too
- Judah is to be the tribal line to receive the privilege of birthing kings – he carries the seed promise God gave Abraham
 - Ultimately, this line will bring forth The King, the Messiah
 - But it seems clear that if the Lord is to bring the Messiah through Judah's line, then something must intervene to change the current direction of this family
 - Already, the Lord has intervened to put two sons to death, thus preventing the line of Messiah from tracing through Canaanite descendants
 - But there is still the matter of Judah, now without a wife...he still needs an heir
 - And there's Tamar, a widow living in Judah's house waiting to marry Judah's final son, Shelah
 - But Judah refuses to allow the marriage
 - So no one is getting married, no one is having babies
- But as we've seen so many times already, the Lord is steadily moving the storyline in the direction He desires using the sin of this family as His muse
 - The brothers sent Joseph into slavery, but the Lord's hand was clearly evident in that outcome
 - And now as Judah's repeated sins have left his family on the brink of ruin, the Lord intervenes to protect the seed promise that Judah carries

Gen. 38:12 Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

Gen. 38:13 It was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

Gen. 38:14 So she removed her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway 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.

- At this point in the story, we learn that Judah's unnamed wife dies
 - This resulted in Judah engaging in a period of mourning, as we've seen before

- After this time is complete, normal routines return
- And in this case, the time to shear the sheep arrives
 - The shearers were located a distance of about 12 miles from Judah's home in Adullam in the Shephelah
 - So he travels along with a friend
- The time to shear the sheep was usually a time of great revelry
 - The days were long and filled with hard work, but the evenings were a time to feast and cut loose
 - It was also an occasion limited to men, so boys will be boys
- As Tamar learns that her father-in-law has decided to attend the shearing, it told her three things
 - First, it indicated that the period of mourning was over
 - Secondly, it told her that he would be in a place and state of mind to celebrate
 - Finally, it told her that Shelah would never be her husband
 - For Judah to leave the family home for this event and not take Shelah with him meant that Shelah was now old enough to watch over things
 - With Judah's wife gone, the only person left in the family to watch over the estate was Shelah
 - And yet Judah hasn't permitted the marriage
- So Tamar decides to take matters into her own hands
 - The thing any woman feared the most was to be made a widow without a son to care for her
 - According to the levirate marriage law, Tamar is betrothed to Shelah
 - This means she can't marry another, but she must wait for Judah to permit the marriage
 - Judah was now sinning against Tamar by denying her the opportunity to have a husband

- But a woman has one tool at her disposal that she can use to even the odds
 - She can use her body, and use it to steal what she can't obtain legitimately
 - And that's what Tamar does
- Tamar removes her widow's garments and puts on a very unique outfit
 - First, she puts on a veil
 - The mention of a veil is a reference to a wedding veil
 - In this day, prostitution was legal
 - The uniform of a prostitute was to dress up as a bride on her wedding night
 - So when Tamar appears in public in this outfit, she will be advertising herself as a prostitute
 - Of course the veil will also serve a useful purpose of hiding her identity
 - Furthermore, she wrapped herself
 - The wrapping refers to the particular clothing of temple prostitutes
 - Temple prostitutes were a different class of prostitutes
 - Under the law of the time, only certain cultic prostitutes could wear such apparel
 - Finally, Tamar stations herself in the gate of the city of Enaim to await for Judah
 - This city sits directly between Adullam and Timnah, so she is hoping to catch Judah upon his return

[Gen. 38:15](#) When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face.
[Gen. 38:16](#) 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?"

- Sure enough Judah sees Tamar and assumes she is a prostitute from the temple, but her covered face conceals her identity
 - Judah stops to secure her services
 - And this begins the negotiating process for Tamar's price
 - Tamar knows that Judah won't be carrying anything of significant value
 - Her intent is to obtain something personal of Judah's, something that will tie him to this night
 - Tamar's intent is to become a wife and a mother, and this scheme is her last opportunity
 - She will entice Judah in the hope of being impregnated
 - This will force Judah's hand, requiring him to marry her
 - Technically, this was allowed under the levirate marriage rules
 - If no brother was available to marry the woman, another male relative, including a father-in-law could fulfill the duty
 - But in this case, a brother was available, so Judah could not legally marry her
 - Yet because Judah prevented her from having his son, she takes the next best alternative
 - So she is seeking something from Judah that she has a right to expect, that is a husband and heir
 - But she is going after the right thing in the wrong way
 - But if her plan works and Tamar turns up pregnant one day, she will be in a heap of trouble
 - She will be accused of adultery and put to death
 - So she needs something to tie Judah to the moment, which can protect her later in the event she is found with child

Gen. 38:17 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?"

[Gen. 38:18](#) He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your seal 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.

[Gen. 38:19](#) Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments.

[Gen. 38:20](#) When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her.

[Gen. 38:21](#) He asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here."

[Gen. 38:22](#) So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no temple prostitute here.'"

[Gen. 38:23](#) Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her."

- Judah offers to pay with a goat from his herd, but of course his herd is in the field
 - So his promise is to deliver a goat later
 - Essentially, Judah wants Tamar's services on credit
 - Tamar counted on this, and so she is prepared with a response
 - Tamar asks Judah for three things that were intensely personal yet of little value to someone other than the owner
 - She asks for Judah's seal, a ring used to seal documents in wax
 - This was essentially Judah's driver's license
 - Secondly, she asked for his cord, which is the necklace upon which the ring hung around his neck
 - This was essentially Judah's wallet
 - Finally, she asked for his staff, which was the unique tool of a shepherd
 - That was like the keys to Judah's work truck
 - By taking these things, a prostitute would be assured that the owner would return for them as promised, since they were personally valuable

- But Judah would be willing to let them go temporarily because they had no intrinsic value to a prostitute, so she would be unlikely to run off with them
- But run off she did
- Tamar took Judah's personal items and fled, returning to her father's house and donning her widow's garments
 - Meanwhile, Judah sends his friend back with the goat as payment
 - He expects to find the prostitute in the city waiting for payment
 - But she is gone
 - Hirah searches in the town asking about the temple prostitute that was working the area
 - But of course no one knew anything about a prostitute
 - Rather than search harder, Judah decides to drop the whole thing
 - Otherwise, he will look the fool
 - But of course now Tamar has the proof she needs to stay alive

[Gen. 38:24](#) Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "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!"

[Gen. 38:25](#) 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 examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?"

[Gen. 38:26](#) 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 have relations with her again.

- Nature takes its course, and three months later Tamar starts to show her pregnancy
 - Naturally, everyone assumes Tamar has been fooling around on the side
 - In that culture, prostitution was permitted and accepted if not approved
 - But adultery was punishable by death

- So when Judah is told of her sin, he reacts in the traditional way declaring she must be put to death
 - As the patriarch living in a patriarchal period of history, he had the authority to do this
 - This is an age before nations and governments as we know them today
 - City states were the largest ruling entities
 - And these were simply large clans ruled by a patriarch
 - So patriarchs were the law
 - But as Tamar is brought out to be burned, she brings Judah's ring, cord and staff with her
 - She presents them to him and says these belong to the father of the child...do you recognize them?
- Judah's response is an important moment in the story of this family
 - Judah immediately recognized the items, of course
 - How could he not?
 - And as he stared at them, I imagine a flood of memory and emotion ran through his mind
 - He's caught up in righteous indignation at the prospect of killing his daughter-in-law over her adultery
 - Then suddenly he's remembering a night with a prostitute
 - And he connects the dots and understands the situation in a flash
 - This is the moment of truth in Judah's life
 - From this moment he could go one of two ways
 - On the one hand Judah could react in anger and disgust
 - He could deny the accusation
 - Only his close friend would have known the truth

- Judah could have killed Tamar anyway and covered up his part in the tragedy
 - He's done this before
 - After all, Judah was the one to suggest that Joseph be sold into slavery
 - He had to sit and eat while listening to his brother's pleas for freedom
 - He had to carry that bloodstained coat to his father and repeat that concocted story with sincerity
- But that episode with Joseph was too much to bear, and it drove Judah out of the house and into the arms of a Canaanite woman
 - Now he's faced with a similar choice
 - Does he lie? Does he let injustice stand? Does he run again?
- Or does Judah take Option #2? Does Judah repent?
 - In v.26 Judah takes the second option
 - He declares that Tamar was more righteous than he was
 - Or said another way, he is declaring that he bears greater guilt than she does for her situation
 - Because Judah has denied Tamar from marrying his last son
 - Notice that Judah isn't just confessing of his sin of laying with Tamar
 - He is also confessing that he was acting in sin when he denied her a husband
 - Judah's turning point reflects a theme common in Genesis
 - Abraham started as Abram
 - Israel started as Jacob
 - And here we see Judah becoming a new man also
 - He is shown his sin, a sin God brings upon Judah for good purposes

- In fact, notice that Judah was deceived by an outfit, just as he used an outfit to deceive his father
- Once again, we see God visiting the sin of the person upon himself to teach a lesson on the consequences of sin
 - And it has done its good work in bringing Judah's heart into conformance with God's heart
 - Judah has confessed, repented and been restored
- There is no lesson more important to a successful walk as a Christian than to recognize the opportunities God gives us to confess, repent and restore
 - When He gives us the grace to come face to face with our sin and its consequences, make the most of them; don't waste them
 - Drop your guard, let go of pride, understand that God brings these moments because He loves us and knows what is best
 - Without confession, we never face the reality of who we are by nature
 - We never see our sin honestly
 - Nor do we acknowledge its destructive nature
 - It's like having cancer but pretending it isn't something to worry about
 - Without repentance, we won't break the grip sin has on our future
 - We may regret our failure in the moment
 - But without repentance, we'll soon forget that regret and return to sin in time
 - And without restoration, we never feel the sting of sin nor fully experience the suffering it brings
 - Judah restored Tamar to his home and denied both her and himself the opportunity for future relations
 - He couldn't marry her, since it would be adultery
 - But he couldn't give her to his son either, since that would create an incestuous relationship now that Judah had fathered a child with her

- Judah paid a price for his sin, as did Tamar for her sin
- And yet God was able to create good things out of this episode
 - Judah repented, Tamar was saved from unjust death
 - And Judah's line would now continue

[Gen. 38:27](#) It came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb.

[Gen. 38:28](#) Moreover, it took place 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."

[Gen. 38:29](#) But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez.

[Gen. 38:30](#) Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.

- Tamar's pregnancy turns out to be a birth of twins, making her and Rebecca the only women in the Bible to give birth to twins
 - Since Judah is the line to bring the seed promise, it's even more unsurprising to see her with two sons
 - This has been God's method through every step of the patriarchs to this point
 - Abraham had two sons, Isaac had two sons, and Jacob had numerous sons through two wives
 - Now Judah will have twin sons as well
 - And one of these sons will carry the seed promise
 - As the birth takes place, the midwife waits to see who will be born first
 - It was so important to know who would be the birthright holder, that the first son is to be noted and marked carefully
 - One of the sons put an arm out of the womb, meaning it was about to be born first
 - So while the arm was exposed, the midwife ties a red thread around the arm to mark that son as first
 - But just then, the arm goes back into the womb
 - And then the other son is born first

- The second son then comes out, making him the first born
- Once again, the Lord makes a point of reminding His people that He alone decides who will hold the seed promise
 - As the world was ready to declare Zerah the holder of that promise, the Lord intervenes to make clear He was granting it to Perez instead
 - And in fact, Perez will be in the line of the Messiah
 - In fact, exactly ten generations later his family line will produce its first king for Israel, a man named David
 - But Israel's first king came from the tribe of Benjamin, a man named Saul
 - If Judah's line was to be the tribe of kings, why was the first king of Israel taken from Benjamin?
 - Because God's Law says that an illegitimate birth shall prevent a family's descendants from entering the assembly of the Lord

[Deut. 23:2](#) "No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of his descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall enter the assembly of the LORD.

- Perez is the illegitimate son of Judah
 - And David is the tenth generation after Perez
- Most importantly, the Lord has restored the tribe of Judah from the curse of the Canaanites and protected the seed promise
 - None of Judah's three sons could be in the line of Messiah because they were the product of a union between Judah and a Canaanite woman
 - So how did Judah's union with Tamar avoid that same problem?
 - Well remember, we've never been told anything about Tamar's origins
 - All we have is her name
 - The name Tamar means "palm tree"
 - Her name has that meaning only in one language: Hebrew
 - Her name is a Hebrew word, therefore Tamar was a Hebrew

- She was probably the descendant of Abraham and his third wife, Keturah
- Once again, we see the Lord at work to achieve His purposes in the lives of His people
 - He works through lives in even the smallest details
 - He plans things beyond our imagination
 - He bends wills and turns hearts
 - He guides our steps and ensures that we land where necessary
 - And He uses sin, turning all things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose
 - Judah's life was a train wreck, one that threatened to end the seed promise upon which all humanity depends for salvation
 - But God brought Judah conviction, repentance and a son through Tamar to carry the promise forward
 - But through all this soap opera, we come to understand why God needed to bring Israel into Egypt and into captivity
 - For while God is capable of rescuing Judah and his brothers from their own sin
 - The growth and health of the nation depends on a better, long-term solution
 - Next week we turn back to watch what God does next with Joseph in Egypt