

## POPULAR STORIES

### CHAPTER 14

#### THE STORY OF JUDAH AND TAMAR

Genesis 38: 1-30

God thoughts and ways are not ours. God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than ours. (Is 55: 8-9) What appears to us to be nothing more than sinners rebelling against God is God sovereignly ruling over all things—even our sins—for the glory of his dear Son and the salvation of his people. As we read of the sins of the saints in our text, we must remember that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Nothing bears witness to this truth like the sinners included in Christ's earthly genealogy. These are a few things we see in our subject today, "The Story of Judah and Tamar."

At the end of Genesis 37, Joseph's brother's sold him into slavery to be carried to Egypt. The story of Joseph seems to continue two chapters later in Genesis 39 when he arrives in Egypt. Genesis 38 seems out of place. But when we come to a passage like this remember the Holy Spirit of God made Moses to put the story here for a reason.

Genesis 37 ends with Joseph on his way from his father's house to Egypt. The picture is of the Son of God on his way from God the Father's house from eternity, on his way to this earth, to this Egypt, to become a servant in order to save his brethren from our sins. How would Christ come into this Egypt? God purposed from eternity that Christ would come into this world through the line of Judah.

Genesis 49:10: The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Genesis 38 is the story of God's sovereign rule and superabounding grace to cause Judah to beget Phares of Tamar through whom Christ came into this Egypt, exactly as God purposed he would. It is a small glimpse of all man's sin and rebellion throughout all ages, even now, which Christ overrules to bring to pass his sovereign, eternal purpose. We will take this chapter verse by verse.

#### OUR SIN

First, we see the sin in us that God has always had to overrule since our fall in Adam.

Since the fall of man in Adam, our sin has caused us to go one direction—down—**Genesis 38: 1: And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down.**

"At that time" Judah rejected his father's will for Joseph to reign over him by rejecting Joseph himself. In the garden in Adam, all mankind rejected God and his Son, Christ Jesus. We all continue to do while dead in our sins.

John 3: 18: He that believeth on [THE Son] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Joh 3:17-18)

When we sinned in Adam all sinners separated ourselves from God and his house—**Genesis 38: 1: Judah went down from his brethren.**

The one house in all the earth where God made his name to be declared was the house of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—Judah went down from God and his brethren, from God's house. The enmity of the natural heart is: to forsake God, forsake God's people, forsake God's gospel. Our sins have separated us from God and from the brethren of his house. (Is 59: 2)

Since the fall, all sinners choose the friendship of the world rather than the friendship of God—**Genesis 38: 1:...and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.**

It is impossible to be the friend of the world and the friend of God. God said through James,

James 4:4: Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

By nature, all sinners choose to be married to this world rather than Christ—**Genesis 38: 2: And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah** [her father's name was Shuah. It means riches]; **and he took her, and went in unto her.**

Judah forsook the bride of Christ—and took a strange bride of Canaanites—the riches of the world forsaking the unsearchable riches of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11: 2: I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3: But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2Co 11:2-3)

Since sin entered we bring forth only the fruit of sin and death—**Genesis 38: 3: And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. 4; And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. 5; And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. 6: And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. 7: And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.**

Judah chose a pagan wife: the fruit produced was a firstborn son, wicked in the sight of the LORD and the LORD slew him—dead fruit. The only thing sinners bring forth in our flesh is dead fruit.

Romans 6: 21: What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

In Judah's second son, we see the sinful heart which loves of the pleasures of the world but hates Christ—**Genesis 38: 8: And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.**

Let me explain this carefully so we all get it. It is important in understanding the rest of the chapter. If the firstborn son died without children, the next oldest brother was required to marry his wife and raise up a firstborn son. That son would not be his, but would be the firstborn son of his brother who had died. The reason is of utmost importance. God promised in the garden that Messiah would come into the world as “the Seed of Woman.” God said to the devil:

Genesis 3: 15: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Then God narrowed it down, promising Abraham that Christ would come into this world through Abraham's lineage: God choose Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then Judah, then Pharez who was to be born of Tamar. So Christ would be called “the lion of the tribe of Judah.” (Gen 22: 18; Gal 3: 16; Rev 5: 5)

So from the time God declared his gospel, every believer looked for Christ. Even Eve looked for the Messiah to be born in her day. She thought she had Christ when she gave birth to Cain. Likewise, in Israel, only in Israel, every believing husband, every believing wife, looked for the Messiah to be born at any time. Christ is the Salvation his people wait for.

So by Onan's actions, we see the heart of the sinner. He took the fleshly pleasures given him from the woman but rejected God's covenant, despising Christ the Promised Seed—**Genesis 38: 9: And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, [he took the pleasures of the world] that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. [he rejected Christ] 10: And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.**

This is not a passage forbidding birth control as so many vainly preach. Onan did what Esau did when he sold his birthright. He despised the covenant of grace, despised God's promised Christ, and traded salvation for a momentary gratifying of his flesh. The natural heart of sin loves and abuses the fleshly pleasures God gives in the world but hates and refuses Christ the Firstborn. This was the thing that displeased the LORD; wherefore he slew him.

But notice, Judah did the same thing. He falsely promised Tamar that she would eventually marry his third son when Judah had no intentions of giving Tamar to his son—**Genesis 38: 11: Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.**

Judah considered Tamar "a black widow." He blamed the death of his sons on Tamar. So Judah had no intention of giving Tamar to marry Shelah, "Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did." Doing so, Judah despised God's covenant and despised God's Son, the same as Onan.

But God destroyed Judah's sons for this! Why not Judah? One reason. It was because of the sovereign, electing grace of God. "Who maketh thee to differ?" God's grace alone. Do you see God's great electing, saving grace! Judah was as sinful as his sons but God chose Judah. Judah was no different than the pagan Shuah or Hiram but God chose Judah. There was nothing good in Judah. Yet, God spared him by grace alone for Christ's sake alone. Judah was a chosen child of God. Judah was the one through whom Christ would come into this Egypt. For Christ's sake God saved Judah.

Now, for our first point, see in all of this sin that this is the sin that has existed in all men since the fall of Adam. More importantly, it is the sin in all God's elect since the fall, generation after generation after generation, even now. The one reason God did not destroy us all is for the sake of Christ his Son. God chose a people in Christ. Christ came into this Egypt through the tribe of Judah and saved us from our sins. Christ is the Redeemer, the Firstborn among brethren as God promised in his gospel from the beginning.

## **GREAT FAITH**

Next, we see an example of great faith in Tamar—**Genesis 38: 12: And in process of time the daughter of Shuah, Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 3: And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep. 14: And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife.**

This last sentence shows us one of several ways we know that Tamar's actions were motivated by a heart of faith, "she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife." Tamar believed the gospel of God's promised Messiah—which Judah and his sons despised.

Therefore, in faith, she set her heart on having the promised Messiah no matter what it cost her. That is what true faith does. God makes his child willing to have Christ no matter the cost.

Notice, sin was mixed with what Tamar did. We are not excusing the sin. But it shows us that even when our inner man is set on Christ in faith, our old man is yet full of sin. Sin is mixed with all we do. Every believer has an old man of sin and a new man that is faithful and without sin born of God. This is why we must have Christ alone as our only Righteousness and Holiness. But if we can overlook the sin, we can see that this was an example of faith.

True faith causes us to give up our so-called "good reputation" and take our place as a sinner before God—that is what Tamar was willing to do in order to have Christ—**Genesis 38: 15: When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face. [For the sake of Christ, Tamar was willing to give up her good reputation, be counted a sinner?] 16: And [Judah] turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) [Judah sins yet again] And she said,**

**What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? 17: And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it? 18: And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him.**

We are not suggesting anyone do what Tamar did physically. We recognize that Tamar took these items from Judah to protect herself later. But look at this spiritually.

Tamar was willing to give up her good reputation and take her place as a lowly sinner—a harlot. That is what you and I must do if we would have Christ because that is what we are by nature. We must confess our sins. She did this “for a kid of the flock.” The believer’s heart’s motive is for Christ the Lamb of God. Until the lamb was sent she was given a pledge—an earnest. God gives his child the earnest of the Spirit until Christ comes for his purchased possession. The signet is like Christ’s blood whereby the new covenant of grace is written in his blood. The neverending bracelets are like the everlasting covenant of grace in Christ Jesus. The staff is like the staff of Christ our Shepherd whereby we are comforted. Tamar did this because she believed the gospel of God concerning Christ the Promised Seed. She would spare no cost to have Christ.

### **CONVERSION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH**

Next, we see an example of conversion and righteousness through faith in Christ. Though we hide our sins under self-righteousness and hypocrisy, God shall confront his child with our sins and make us willing to take our place as the sinner. Then through faith we shall have Christ and be made righteous in Christ—**Genesis 38: 19: And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. 20: And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman’s hand: but he found her not.** [Judah is a sinner hiding in his sins. He would not even go himself for fear of being exposed] **21: Then [his friend the Adullamite] asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place. 22: And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place. 23: And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.**

Judah hides his sins under a cloak of self-righteousness lest he be ashamed. He was willing to forsake these items which picture Christ so that he would not be ashamed because of his sins. That is the reason Christ says the unbeliever will not come to Christ, let he should be reproved for his sins. (Jn 3: 19-21)

Yet, if we are God’s elect then God will confront us with our sin and make us to know we are a sinner—**Genesis 38: 24: 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 also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.**

We see Judah’s hypocrisy. He is guilty yet he wants Tamar branded so all will know she is an adulteress. This is every unbeliever by nature. We are guilty yet we blame others and exalt ourselves over others by nature. But God reveals our sins by revealing Christ unto us. We see here that Judah’s sin was revealed to him by these items which represent Christ—**Genesis 38: 25: 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 bracelets, and staff.**

Judah is a child of God’s grace. For every child of grace, eventually, God will expose our sins before our own face as he did Judah here. He will do so by revealing Christ in us.

But there is something else here. Judah is type of the law. The law first accuses us of sin. But if we come before the justice of God with Christ as our Pledge, with Christ our Righteousness, the law shall declare us righteous and know us no more as sinners—**Genesis 38: 26: And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.**

By having the pledge, the law declared Tamar righteous and the law knew her again no more. Sinner, having Christ through faith, we are made the righteousness of God in him and the law declares us righteous and says nothing else to the believer.

Tamar's actions were motivated by faith. Judah said, "She hath been more righteous than I." She knew Shelah would not be her husband and she must have the Christ.

Also, though sin was mixed with Tamar's actions, God used her faithfulness by which God quickened Judah and bring him to repentance and faith in Christ. It appears God converted Judah right here. He not only confessed his sins, he saw and believed God's promise of the Messiah—"because that I gave her not to Shelah my son." So we see in Tamar and in Judah an example of repentance and faith in Christ which God gives his child.

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

## **GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY**

Lastly, we see in all of this, God's sovereignty to bring about his eternal purpose. We have seen all this sin and rebellion in Judah. It is a small glimpse of the sin and rebellion in God's elect generation after generation.

Yet, to show his great sovereign power and grace, God not only saved Judah and Tamar, God not only saved all his elect in every age, God also worked everything together according to his purpose so that his Son would come into this Egypt through the very tribe God promised he would. God overruled all the sin in each of his people and in all men throughout every generation. God determined before the foundation of the world that Christ would come into this world through the line of Judah: through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, then Judah who would beget Pharez of Tamar and so it would go on down the line to Christ himself.

Will God overrule the sins in men? What if some small detail gets out of order? What if another child is born before Pharez? That cannot happen because God is in control of even the smallest details. So we read—**Genesis 38: 27: And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. 28: And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. 29: And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: [so this was the firstborn instead of the other] and she said, How hast thou broken forth? [to the nurse it was a miracle, she had never seen anything like it. How? By God's will and sovereign power] this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. 30: And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.**

Pharez means "breach" or "the breaker." He is a type of Christ the Firstborn. Christ is called "The Breaker."

Micah 2: 13, The Breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them.

Now look at the generation of Christ in Matthew 1:

Matthew 1: 1: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and **Jacob begat Judas** and his brethren; 3 **And Judas begat Phares** and **Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom;**...5: And Salmon begat Booz of Rahab [the harlot]; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth [Moabitess]; and Obed begat Jesse; 6: And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; [Bathsheba the adultress]...16: And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (Mt 1:1-16)

Seeing all these sinners in Christ's genealogy—was it a necessity that Christ be not born of man's seed but of the Holy Ghost? Indeed. Christ is his own Righteousness and Holiness.

Four women are listed in Christ's genealogy and all four are sinners. The women represent Christ's bride, the church. But seeing Christ identified with sinners even in his genealogy declares Christ came into the world to save sinners. Do you see yourself in Judah's sin and rebellion? Aren't you thankful for God's sovereign electing, redeeming, regenerating, keeping grace!

Can God's eternal purpose be frustrated? Is God powerful enough to bring his will to pass? Are his thoughts and ways higher than ours? Yes! Genesis 37 ended with Joseph leaving his father's house on his way to Egypt—a type of Christ leaving his Father to come to this Egypt. Genesis 38 shows us a glimpse of God overruling all things over all time so that Christ would come into this earth from the very tribe God said he would. So Genesis 39 opens with a picture of Christ entering the world—**Genesis 39: 1: And Joseph was brought down to Egypt.**

Brethren, Christ redeemed all God's elect from all our sins by his finished work on the cross. Right now, this same Sovereign God and Savior is working all things together for his people just like he did for Judah and Tamar and Pharez. Just as they looked for him to come the first time, we look for Christ to come the second time. He shall come exactly as God says he will even as he did the first time. Here is our comfort.

Romans 8: 28: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29: For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30: Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31: What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Ro 8:28-31)

**Amen!**