

Genesis 38 | It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. <sup>2</sup> There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, <sup>3</sup> and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. <sup>4</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. <sup>5</sup> Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.

<sup>6</sup> And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. <sup>7</sup> But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. <sup>8</sup> Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. <sup>11</sup> Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up"—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father's house.

<sup>12</sup> In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. <sup>13</sup> And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," <sup>14</sup> she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. <sup>15</sup> When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. <sup>16</sup> He turned to her at the roadside and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" <sup>17</sup> He answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." And she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it—" <sup>18</sup> He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "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. <sup>19</sup> Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

<sup>20</sup> When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. <sup>21</sup> And he asked the men of the place, "Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?" And they said, "No cult prostitute has been here." <sup>22</sup> So he returned to Judah and said, "I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, 'No cult prostitute has been here.'" <sup>23</sup> And Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her."

<sup>24</sup> About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." <sup>25</sup> As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet

and the cord and the staff.” <sup>26</sup> Then Judah identified them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not know her again.

<sup>27</sup> When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. <sup>28</sup> And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” <sup>29</sup> But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” Therefore his name was called Perez. <sup>30</sup> Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

## Genesis 38 | Judah & Tamar

If I were to write a musical with singing nuns about this section in Genesis, I would have a refrain, “How do you solve a problem like Judah?” Here in the middle of Joseph’s story there is a dramatic scene change. Our minds should be thinking, What happened to Joseph after he was kidnapped and sold into slavery? But we’re interrupted with a brutal incestuous story about Judah. In this story, Judah is the anti-Joseph. But the Bible is never done surprising you. The obvious child of promise is Joseph. His righteousness is inspiring. Yet God chooses Judah. One way to make sense of this is to simply acknowledge the surprise of the Gospel.

Romans 5:6-8 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We must understand that God saves sinners. He rescues the unrighteous. And the means of his sovereign choice demonstrates his desired ends. God seeks and saves sinners.

### 1. Bad Company

Genesis 38:1-2 | It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. <sup>2</sup> There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her,

This story of Judah’s descent begins with a literal descent. Down and south. These are bad in the Genesis story. Egypt is south, the bottom end of the world and Joseph is headed there against his will, but Judah goes down of his own accord. Why? Its simple really, he made a friend. This friend, Hirah, is not particularly evil, in fact he is better understood as an ordinary Canaanite. And in this friendship Judah becomes an ordinary Canaanite himself. And in so doing he marries an ordinary Canaanite woman. The Daughter of Shua.

Friendship with the world is enmity with God. I’ll say it again, “My son if sinners entice you, do not consent.” I’ll say it again, “do not be deceived, bad company ruins good

morals.” Your ordinary relationships shape your morals. But in our world this is also our media consumption. Where do you norm? The threat to the church has always been becoming ordinary. The truth of our world post fall is that which is ordinary is a pull towards death. In all cultures throughout history this is clearly perceived in a Godless sexual ethic, and it is in a godless sexual ethic that women are hurt most. This is true then and true now.

Judah has three sons with his wife the Canaanite woman; Er, Onan, and Shela. He marries his oldest son, Er, to a woman named Tamar. Er, because of his wickedness is killed by the Lord. Tamar is widowed. Yet, she holds the right to offspring of the heir of Judah. Therefore Er’s brother Onan, second born of Judah, is required to take Tamar as his wife and provide her with offspring. Their offspring would then be the heir of Judah. But would not be Onan’s heir. Onan, refusing to except the responsibility of this relationship continually wastes his seed on the ground. The Lord sees this wickedness of Onan and kills him.

Tamar is twice widowed by the wickedness of her husband, and her right to the heir of Judah is robbed from her in the pattern of sex without responsibility. Now this verse doesn’t have much to say with regards to married couples timing their conception. Yet, it offers a clear condemnation from the Lord against having sex while disregarding the procreative responsibility that sex entails. Our culture’s whole sexual revolution is a denial of the responsibility that sex entails, in the pattern of Onan. This is true of the fundamentals of hookup culture, porn, and the LGBTQ movement. It is a normalization of irresponsible (and I mean that technically) sex, and the result is death.

Genesis 38:11 | Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, “Remain a widow in your father’s house, till Shelah my son grows up”—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father’s house.

Now Judah, tells Tamar to hang on, understanding her right to an heir. And yet he withholds from her his youngest son. He thinks she is some sort of bad omen. Thus he had normalized the pattern of death in his family.

## **2. Judah’s Double Standard**

Genesis 38:12 In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua’s daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

The second phase of the story begins with another excursion with Judah’s friend, Hirah the Adullamite. He is heading to another town to sheer his sheep. Tamar, his daughter in-law hears of Judah’s coming into town. And she positions herself, veiled as a cult prostitute at an intermediary town along the way. She saw that Judah had not given her his youngest

son. She knew she had been cheated and rejected. How confident she must have been regarding the character of Judah to merely position herself as a prostitute along the way. He sees her, the veiled prostitute, and propositions her. They make a deal.

Genesis 38:17-18 He answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." And she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it—" <sup>18</sup> He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "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.

In an upside down world, sometimes an upside down action brings it back around. The Bible offers no condemnation of Tamar's actions here, although her deception along with Judah's licentiousness find a stark mirror in next week's story of Joseph. He was far more cheated than Tamar, and far more pressured than Judah. Yet he remains faithful and true.

In a comedic moment, Judah sends his friend Hirah back to provide the Goat and receive back his pledged signet and staff. It is worth noting that the signet and staff are no less than his name and authority. Because here is the reality, there is no valueless sex. It is either wildly beneficial or costly. And there is one context in existence in which the benefits of sex can be experienced. A man and woman in marriage. It is a simple reality. Well, Hirah of course can't find the cult prostitute, because there isn't one, Judah recommends they stop looking, "Or they will be laughed at." Don't you see how the whole of Judah's moral compass had become the opinions of his peers.

Genesis 38:24 About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned."

Can you see the absurdity of this double standard in Judah's mind? Oh but isn't this merely the position of the scriptures? Fools interpret the scripture as against women. It is the Lord who says,

Hosea 4:14 I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

### **3. The Turn**

Genesis 38:25 As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff."

Can you imagine the moment, when the signet, the chord and the staff are revealed. This is the moment of truth for Judah, and the question is how he will respond when the reality comes breaking in.

Genesis 38:26 | Then Judah identified them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not know her again.

Tamar gives birth to twins. The firstborn, barely, is Perez. It is through Perez that the line of David comes and Tamar enters the Genealogy of our Lord.

Matthew 1:3 | and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.

What do we do with a story like this.

1. Be warned. The sexual ethic of our world is corrupting. Men repent of irresponsible sex. Do not be fooled into celebrating our cultures sexual ethic, it leads to death.
2. Let us see this hope that God saves sinners. And his purposes will succeed through the faithlessness of Judah, or the faithfulness of Joseph. Let us therefore hold fast to him.