SALT Church

Genesis 38

"Unexpected Grace"

November 4, 2026

"In the Beginning"

RECAP:

- Chapter 37 "Seeing The Unseen"
  - Joseph, Jacobs favorite child was given a series of dreams that would be used to encourage him through some very difficult days.
  - In this chapter we learned how to look for what God was doing rather than what man was doing.
  - Joseph had been sent some 60 miles from his father and his home to take supplies to his brothers.
  - He arrives to a hostile group who beats him, strips him of his clothes, and sells him into slavery.
  - We closed chapter 37 with Joseph being sold to Potiphar as a slave.

Genesis 38 is a break in the action from Joseph's life as we focus on Judah the son of Jacob.

- Judah is the line in which the Kings of Israel will come.
  - Although the first King of Israel will com from the tribe of Benjamin it is Judah that will give us King David, Solomon, and King Jesus.
- Genesis 38 is a shocking chapter as it reveals shocking details about the personal lives of God's people.
- In everything that we are going to discuss tonight we must keep in mind that the sovereign God of all things was not surprised.
  - God will eventually speak through His servant Jacob and when He does it will be very clear that Judah's family line will be the one that produces the kings of Israel.
    - Let's look at how the kingly line came down to just one man and one woman.

Genesis 38

38 Now it happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

- There are a few things that we must remember.
  - Abraham and Isaac forbid their sons to marry Canaanite women.

- Therefore we conclude that Jacob who had been instructed not to marry Canaanite women had [assed this along to his own sons.
- Rueben who had done the unspeakable and slept with one of Jacobs wives was no longer considered to be the air apparent.
- Simeon and Levi were up next but they had defiled themselves by leading a murderous rage against Shechem.
- This left Judah as the top dog but he would soon follow suit in disobedience.

So, Judah goes to visit a Canaanite friend whose name is Hirah.

- Benjamin Franklin said, "If you lie with dogs you will get up with fleas."
- We should also pay attention to the verbiage here: "***Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite"***
    - This was Canaanite country and Judah knew it.

2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua;

- It is interesting to me that we do not know her name.
    - She is the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua
        - The Canaanite women were known to be sensual.
        - It is clear that this was lust at 1st sight.

and he took her and went in to her.

- The language that the Holy Spirit speaks through Moses is quick and direct.
- Although quick and direct this relationship last for years for this nameless Canaanite woman gives Judah three sons.

3 So she conceived and bore a son, and he named him Er.

- Er means to be watchful or alert.
    - I don't think Judah was either of those things.

4 Then she conceived again and bore a son, and she named him Onan.

- Ironically Onan means an abundance of strength/reproductive power.

5 And she bore still another son, and she named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.

- Shelah means "petition or request."

6 Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.

- Don't miss the fact that Judah chose Tamar for his son Er.
- She was also a Canaanite.
    - This will explain her reaction to future events

7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of Yahweh, so Yahweh put him to death.

- Think about all of the evil people in the world
    - What must you do to have God the Father take you out?

8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up a seed for your brother."

- This should be no problem for a guy whose name means "an abundance of strength/reproductive power."
    - What an odd custom!
    - He was the odd custom of the day:
        - The older son "Er" would be the son who would inherit the birthright.
            - The birthright was a double portion that was like an insurance policy if someone in the family needed help.
            - Once Er is dead, Onan had the responsibility to marry and impregnate Tamar therefore giving Er an heir.
                - That son would then be named after Er and he would assume the birthright.
                    - Onan wanted the birthright for himself and that is where things go sideways.

9 And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it happened that when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted it on the ground in order not to give seed to his brother.

- You won't see that Bible verse on a t-shirt or coffee cup!
- He wanted his brothers share of his inheritance.
    - We need math to help us understand what we are talking about.

3 sons would normally mean everyone gets a third.

- In their culture the inheritance was divided by 4

- Everyone received a quarter with the oldest son receiving 2 quarters as the protector of the family "the birth-right"

If Er has no heir then Onan would receive 2/3's and Shelah receives 1/3.

- 4 out 3 people have issues with fractions.

10 But what he did was displeasing in the sight of Yahweh; so He put him to death also.

- There are so many emotions involved with this story.
  - Poor Tamar!!!
    - Poor Judah, two sons dead and the only thing they have in common is Tamar and disobedience towards God.

I want to bring us back to some Biblical truths:

- The wages of sin is death
- The world had been destroyed because of disobedience
- These men were half-Hebrew and half-Canaanite which God had forbidden.
- Judah had heard about Uncle Esau and what he had done but Judah did it anyway.
  - Now Judah is dealing with the pain of sinning against the Lord.
    - Two sons dead and only one son left.

Don't forget that all of this is occurring while Joseph is remaining celibate while serving as a slave to Potiphar.

- Joseph will eventually be falsely accused of rape because he refused to sleep with his masters wife.

11 Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"; for he thought, "I am afraid lest he also die like his brothers." So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

- What a mess!
  - You and I know what is really going on.
  - Judah believes that his daughter-in-law is cursed and he has no desire to turn his only son over to her so that he would die.

12 And after a considerable time, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. Then Judah was comforted, and he went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

- There is a lot going on here:
    - A lot of time has passed and it has become clear to Tamar that Judah will never give her to him.
    - Judah's nameless Canaanite wife dies.
    - "***Then Judah was comforted***" means that he mourned for his wife seven days.
    - After Judah's mourning period he heads back to the place where it all began, to see his Canaanite friend Hirah.

13 Then it was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 14 So she removed her widow's garments from herself and covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself. And she sat at the entrance 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.

- Tamar knows a few things:
    - Judah will never allow her to marry Shelah
    - She is a Canaanite woman so she is familiar with the Canaanite customs.
        - Meaning that she knows that the Canaanite prostitutes will be selling fertility to the arriving men.
    - She also knows what kind of man Judah is, he likes the Canaanite women.
        - He will be seeking comfort in their attention.
        - She disguises herself as a prostitute and waits at the gate for Judah to arrive.

15 Then Judah saw her, and he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. 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?" 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?" 18 Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "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.

- Pure romance!
    - This is so messed up!
        - What is it with this family and deception by goat?

- Isaac was deceived by Jacob with goat skin and goat meat.
- Jacob was deceived when Joseph's coat was dipped into the blood of a goat.
- Now, Judah is promising a goat in return for sexual favors.

Something else you should know:

- His signet was his stamp that identified him (think drivers license)
- His cord would be the small rope that the signet would hang on around his neck.
- His staff was a personal piece that everyone would recognize as his. (think SS number)

Where is God in all of this?

Isaiah 66:9

9 Shall I bring to the point of breaking forth and not cause birth?" says Yahweh. "Or shall I who causes birth shut *the womb*?" says your God.

Psalms 139:13-14

13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

God is all over this!

Side note) Did you notice that Judah had no issue making Tamar wait but when his own desires took over there was no waiting.

19 Then she arose and went. And she removed her veil from herself and put on her widow's garments.

- This is not how it was supposed to be.
- Clearly God has a higher expectation for his people (especially the men) or he would not have taken Er and Onan out.
- What a mess!

Think about what has just happened:

- Tamar has just secured a child from Judah
- This is important because the Bible never mentions a wife of Shelah.

- In 1 Chronicles it mentions that Shelah had a son but his family line disappears into the pages of history.

20 Then Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take the pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. 21 So he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the cult prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no cult prostitute here." 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 cult prostitute here.'"23 Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. Behold, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her."

- "I did my part" and "don't tell anyone I don't want to be the laughing stock of my people."
- In other words he knew what he had done was wrong.

24 Now it happened about three months later that it was told to Judah saying, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot,

- That's a true statement by the way!
  - Be careful when you pull for the underdog, sin is sin even if it is done with the best intention.

and behold, she is also with child by harlotry."

- Tamar knew this day would come
- She had hidden the children for as long as she could.
  - Yup twins!!!!
    - Can you imagine how big she was?

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

- Maybe Judah can start the fire with the log that is in his own eye!

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."

- There is so much going on here:
  - If she pulls this off, she and her boys are taken care of for the rest of their lives.
  - If she is wrong, she burns at the stake.

And she said, "Please recognize this and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?"

- Never mind!

- My bad!
- Oh my!

[26] And 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 know her again.

- Life is so much better when we confess
- Judah took a much-needed step towards becoming the man that he should be.
- There would be no happy marriage for these two for Judah "never knew her again."
- But Tamar will be honored more than once within the lineage of Jesus our Messiah

[27] Now it happened at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb.

- Twins again!

[28] And it happened, 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."

[29] And then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. So she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez.

- Perez means "burst forth"

[30] Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.

- Zerah means brightness
- Both of these boys are listed in the line of Jesus found in Matthew 1.
- But guess who else is listed in Matthew 1
    - Tamar
        - She is one of five women listed in the lineage of Jesus.
        - Tamar a Canaanite prostitute
        - Rehab a Canaanite prostitute
        - Ruth who was a Moabite
        - Bathsheba who was a Hittite adulterer
        - Mary, a virgin Jewish girl pure in heart

So we must ask the question:

- Why would God list 4 gentile women within the lineage of the Messiah?
- Three of which have very questionable past.
    - Why not list Sarah, Rachael, and Rebecca?
        - What is God trying to say to us?

I think the answer is found in Luke 2

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms and blessed God, and said,
29 "Now Master, You are releasing Your slave in peace,
According to Your word.
30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,
31 Which You prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 A Light for revelation to the Gentiles,
And for the glory of Your people Israel."

I think the reason four Gentile women with very questionable past are listed in the lineage of Jesus (as opposed to many Jewish women that could have been listed) is the very reason Simeon said "A Light for revelation to the Gentiles."

- Jesus said that He came to seek and save the lost
    - You can't get much more lost than to be a pagan prostitute!

But there is one other hidden treasure and it is found in the last chapter of

Matthew 28

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

What we see in Matthew is the Gospel of Jesus Christ

- It begins with the shocking revelation that Jesus has come to seek and save the lost from all walks of life.
- But Matthew draws his readers attention to the fact that God has been doing this from the beginning and His people have not.
- Matthew sandwiches the gospel by drawing gospel to a close with a reminder that Gentile sinners are welcome should they confess, repent, and become disciples of Jesus Christ.