

A Series of Bad Decisions

Genesis 38

Last time, we began our study of the life of Joseph. We were moving along through Joseph's story at a pretty good clip—we know his age, his profession, his godly (though not sinless) character, his work ethic, his father's favor on him and the hatred that that incited from his brothers. Like a modern bingeworthy TV show, that episode ended with Joseph living as a slave in the household of Potiphar. *"Tune in next time for the EXCITING CONCLUSION,"* but SURPRISE! We don't!

There are other characters in any story, and from time to time, usually at very climactic moments, the story changes direction. Just when you were really getting attached to one person's story, you start following another person or group, and you're like, *"Wait! I wanted to hear more about THAT OTHER GUY!"* Well, that's what's happening tonight as our focus continues following JUDAH.

In a series about the life of Joseph, tonight's passages of scripture can seem like an interruption of "the main story." However, the events that continue to unfold in Judah's life lay the foundation for the work the Lord is going to do in his life later. Picking up where we left off last week, we find JUDAH'S IN A BAD PLACE, and his downward spiral is only beginning. In verse one we read that...

Genesis 38:1-5

1 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. 2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, 3 and 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 Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.

Previously, we saw that it was Judah who came up with the brilliant idea of SELLING HIS BROTHER to foreigners instead of killing him (Genesis 37:26). *"Why kill him when WE CAN GET PAID?!"* he thought!

Judah and his brothers bloody up Joseph's coat and deliver it to their father, saying "they found it." Remember, when Joseph went to check on his brothers as his father had asked him, he wasn't merely running out behind the house. The trek from Hebron to Shechem was just shy of 50 MILES! Then, when he didn't find his brothers shepherding the flocks there, he went another 15 MILES to Dothan. This was a MULTIPLE DAY journey. Joseph would have to take provisions and camp along the way. Such time and distance afforded GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR MISFORTUNE. *"Here, dad. We found this on our return home. Do you recognize it?"* Then they leave him to arrive at his own conclusions. **"A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is WITHOUT DOUBT torn to pieces."** The boys must've done a very convincing job on Joseph's coat; Jacob had no doubt about the fate of his favorite son.

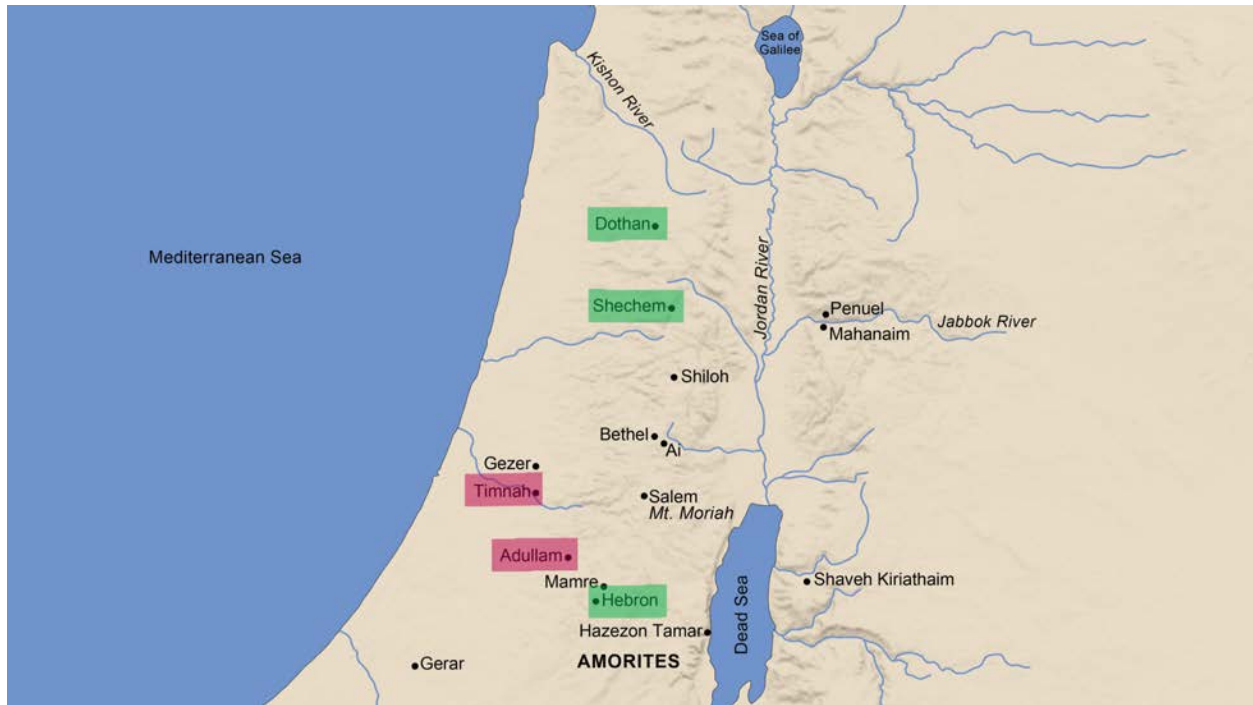
They had completely broken their father's heart. Perhaps they thought their dad deserved such torment for his favoritism; after all, he's the one who created the atmosphere of hatred that led his sons to commit such evil. He was most certainly reaping the deception he had once sown when he deceived his blind father (at the behest of his mom, who favored him over his brother). However, THESE OTHER SONS OF HIS HAD CHOSEN TO DO THIS. Joseph hadn't run away, and they were just trying to cover for him! No, THEY were behind Joseph's disappearance! THEY decided to sell him! THEY decided to trick their father into believing Joseph was dead and gone without a chance to say goodbye or even bury him properly. THEY knew their father had sent him on the perilous journey to check on them, so they knew HE WOULD FOREVER BLAME HIMSELF for Joseph's grizzly demise.

After the despicable deed was done, they tried to comfort him, the whole family (minus one), but to no avail. **"No,"** Jacob said, **"I shall go down to Sheol to my son in mourning."** Again, he couldn't help but sting his sons. For all Jacob knew, Joseph was dead, but the time he had had with Joseph was a GIFT, something to celebrate and thank God for, not go to his grave however many years later still mourning. What's more, he still had a home full of sons (and daughters) who needed and deserved their father's love, but Jacob would only ever love and pine for the son he lost, not cherish those he still had.

Judah said, *"Let's sell him!"* Later on, Judah was among all those saying, *"Dad, it's going to be alright. You'll see. We're still here. We love you. It's going to be okay,"* but Jacob's only response was, *"No, this is it. I'm done. I'll mourn until I die."*

"And it happened at THAT TIME that JUDAH went down from his brothers...." He wasn't LED by God, nor was he SEEKING any opportunity that we can see. He was going AWAY, and what's sad is that he wasn't even going away from his father. He seemingly only knew solidarity with his brothers, not his dad who would forever mourn for his departed brother instead of finally LOVE HIM. Look again at how the Scriptures word it. **"Judah WENT DOWN from his brothers,"** which is usually biblical code for "went further into sin." Judah was in a BAD WAY. Perhaps he hadn't fully thought through the ramifications of selling his brother, but upon hearing Joseph's pleas, "NO! PLEASE! NO! DON'T DO THIS! PLEASE! I'M BEGGING YOU! NO!" and upon seeing Joseph's face as he was hauled off in a cage or led away bound and a rope around his neck, and especially after placing that bloodied robe in his father's hands and watching him BREAK...something happened inside him. Judah's life took a turn, and not for the better.

Having been instrumental in irreparably damaging his family, Judah DISTANCED himself from the devastation, taking strides toward even more sin.



Hebron is highlighted GREEN there near the bottom. To give you some reference, Salem is where JERUSALEM would eventually be located. As you can see, Joseph made quite a journey from Hebron to Dothan as he carried out his father's will. Dad had a lot of confidence in his SEVENTEEN year old son; it speaks to Joseph's character as well as to the capability of young adults whom we often sell short by calling them "teens." Starting again at Hebron and heading northwest, you can see Judah's trajectory to Adullam and eventually to Timnah.

Abraham bought land in Canaan in which to bury his beloved Sarah; he bought the parcel of land with the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:17). Later on, we see Jacob purchase land in Canaan on which to settle (Genesis 33:19). Both instances, I believe, evince the patriarch's faith in the promise of God to eventually give them all of the land. I don't believe they were attempting to speed up the process at all; they just had no worries about buying land or burying loved ones in it. While we have no record of Isaac purchasing land in Canaan, we still see him put down roots (or WELLS, really) in Canaan as he clearly settled in Beersheba (Genesis 26).

While it's true that, as Judah wandered from his family, he went further into Canaan, he displayed no such faith in God's promise of land or any initiative to lay hold of that promise or rest in it. He doesn't exert his influence over that region, but instead he immerses himself in the people and their culture. He seems to be WANDERING, and his marriage is further evidence of this. Tell me, from where did Abraham take a wife for Isaac? From his kin, right? YOU KNOW Judah and his brothers had heard that story! How about Jacob? Where'd he get his wife (wives)? Same place, right? From his Uncle Laban. ISAAC TOLD JACOB not to take a wife from among the Canaanites! YOU KNOW Judah had heard the

story of Jacob's time with Laban. How about Judah? Where does he go? What does he do? He marries a Canaanite woman and plunges himself deeper into CANAANITE CULTURE.

Do you see how Judah makes one wrong turn after another? HE'S IN CRISIS. HE'S SPIRALING. He led the charge to sell his brother. He participated in deceiving his father about it. Now he's wandered off on his own, living and marrying among the pagan Canaanites, and his descent to rock bottom isn't over. We read...

Genesis 38:6-8

6 And 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 put him to death. 8 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.

Now, if you're following along in your Bible, you'll notice that verse nine is somewhat graphic. For the sake of young ears in the room, I'm just going to say that Onan refused. Oh, he took her for his wife and was pleased to have sexual relations with her, but every time he did, he made sure to do so in a way that prevented her from becoming pregnant because he knew the child would not be his. He got what he wanted, but he didn't give Tamar what she wanted or needed. For this reason, in verse 10, we read...

Genesis 38:10-11

10 And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. 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.

Er was wicked. The nature or extent of his wickedness isn't disclosed in Scripture, but we know it was bad enough that the Lord ENDED HIM for it. Because of Er's passing, Judah gave Tamar to his next oldest son, Onan, and tasked him with impregnating her so she could bear a SON who would carry on the name of her deceased husband, Er. This is a practice known as Levirate (LE-veer-it) Marriage, and contrary to what the sound or spelling of that word makes you think, it has nothing to do with Judah's brother Levi. The word comes from the Latin word *Levir*, which means "a husband's brother." This ancient practice of not allowing a family line to be broken was vitally import. It predates the Mosaic Law, though it was later codified into the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This system ensured that childless widows were cared for by quickly getting them remarried (it was a MARRIAGE), and it ensured that the deceased husband's name would not be lost to history. Moses wrote...

Deuteronomy 25:5-6

5 If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

That said, when the FATHER OF THE DECEASED HUSBAND died, the child conceived through the levirate marriage would inherit his deceased father's share. THIS is what Onan refused to allow. Er was wicked, but in my opinion, ONAN WAS WORSE. With Er dead, the inheritance would eventually be DIVIDED IN HALF between him and his younger brother, Shelah. If Tamar had conceived by Onan, the child would've received the inheritance that Er would've received upon Judah's death, a THREE-WAY SPLIT of their future inheritance. ONAN WANTED MORE STUFF! He didn't want to sire a son who would eventually inherit alongside him and Shelah. However, as I mentioned earlier, this didn't hinder him from using Tamar for sexual pleasure. Genesis records that Onan would stop himself from impregnating Tamar "**WHENEVER he had sexual relations with his brother's wife,**" meaning that this was a REGULAR occurrence. Oh, he was happy to have sex with her, but he made sure she never conceived and bore an heir to his brother. Therefore, God took him out.

Two wicked sons of Judah...DEAD. Then we read something curious. Judah promised to give Tamar to his third son Shelah, but he puts her off with the EXCUSE that he needed to grow up first. We know it was an excuse because of Moses' inspired ASIDE in verse ELEVEN, revealing that "**[Judah] feared that [Shelah] would die, LIKE HIS BROTHERS.**" That last phrase, "**like his brothers,**" is KEY. What does this say of Shelah if Judah was afraid he would die "**like his brothers?**" It's doubtful that Judah saw Tamar as some sort of "BLACK WIDOW" whose lovers were all somehow cursed to die. No, I believe it indicates that Judah knew EXACTLY HOW WICKED ALL OF HIS SONS WERE. I think he knew about Onan's SELFISH, HEDONISTIC HEART and knew that the same wicked heart beat in Shelah's chest too, and I believe he knew it because his sons ALL TOOK AFTER HIM! Keep reading in verse 12...

Genesis 38:12-19

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. 13 And when Tamar was told, Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, 14 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. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. 16 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? 17 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— 18 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. 19 Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

We don't know exactly how much time passed "**in the course of time,**" but according to verse 14, we know it was enough time that "**[Tamar] saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.**" Again, levirate marriage was a bona fide MARRIAGE, not merely a duty to be carried out by an unattached family member.

Judah's unnamed wife died, and after he had mourned her, he and his buddy Hirah went up to his sheep-shearers in Timnah. Sadly, Tamar had Judah's number. I say "sadly" only because of what this says about Judah's character (or more accurately, the lack thereof). Tamar knew that, when Judah had been "comforted" after his wife's death, he would be looking for some "feminine comfort." As a Canaanite, Tamar also knew that the cult prostitutes would be out at this time of the year offering their sexual services, and that Judah was likely to avail himself of those services. These women were likely devotees to the goddess Ishtar or Anat. They would dress in a veil (like a symbolic bride to a god like Baal), and they would position themselves near or on the way to a shrine. Men would use the service of cult prostitutes prior to planting fields or during other important seasons like when the flocks were lambing or BEING SHEARED, seemingly reenacting the divine marriage between the gods. They believed this LEWD ACT honored the gods and somehow secured their blessing for abundance in the fields and flocks. Yeah, I'm sure that's what all those farmers were thinking....

As soon as she heard where Judah was heading, and having a good idea of what he was looking for, Tamar enacted a scheme that came together so swiftly that it almost seems premeditated, and perhaps it was. She disguised herself as one of these prostitutes and laid in wait for her unsuspecting father-in-law, and just as she had predicted, here he came. He wanted to have sex with this prostitute, but he couldn't pay her, and I see the providence of God in this. Yes, what Tamar was getting ready to do was immoral and deceptive—two things that are NOT of God—but He was determined to allow it. Had Judah had payment in hand, Tamar would've had nothing to exonerate herself with later. Remember, she was BETROTHED to Shelah, and though Judah had no intentions of actually giving her to him, her actions would still be seen not only as immoral, but ADULTEROUS. She could be put to death for this. SHE WAS TRAPPED. The only way she was ever going to bear children and live to raise them in her predicament was to conceive them in a compromising scenario like the one she had concocted. And that plan was no longer to bear children in the name of her dead husband; she was going to have the child of Judah himself.

"I'll send you a goat," Judah said. *"Not good enough,"* Tamar said. *"I need a pledge that you'll actually do it,"* and she demanded Judah's signet, which he wore around his neck on a cord, and his staff. These were two items of IDENTIFICATION. One commentator described the articles Tamar requested as Judah's driver's license and social security card, and I think that's an apt description of their significance. The signet wasn't a ring as some might suppose...



...but rather a cylindrical seal with a mirror image incision that would be rolled across a piece of clay to make an official seal, essentially signing the document. This is an example of one such seal FROM CANAAN that dates back to around 1700 - 1550 BC (during the Egyptian bondage) according to its provenance. Can you make out the storks or cranes under the clouds? Isn't that NEAT?! From another angle you would be able to see the hole bored through the length so that it could be worn like a bead on a cord. It's easy to see how a signet would quickly identify someone, but a person's staff was also clearly identifiable. Now, don't ask me what's so distinctively identifying about a walking stick. All I can figure is that they must've looked something like this...



People would've take one look at that and said, "Oh, yeah, that's Judah's alright. No doubt about it..." Haha. Yeah, it probably didn't look exactly like that, but the type of wood, the shape of the wood, perhaps some sort of carving on it, or something tied to or inlayed in it, it all would've served to

distinguish one person's staff from another. So, having received these items, Tamar received Judah (he being none the wiser), and as intended, conceived by him. Back to dad's house and into her widow's garments...

So, up to this point, JUDAH HAS sold his brother into slavery, made his father think he was dead, immersed himself in Canaanite culture, married a Canaanite woman, raised three sons as wicked or more so than himself, condemned his daughter-in-law to childless widowhood for the rest of her life, trapping her in a betrothal that would never be fulfilled, and after his wife died, he indulged in sex with a woman he thought was a conduit to being blessed by the pagan gods of the Canaanites. HAVE I LEFT ANYTHING OUT? It really starts to pile up. Judah's a piece of work, isn't he?

Now, I know it sounds like I'm being HARD ON JUDAH. Such a list of indictments against him certainly makes it hard to think much of him. Believe me, I get it. I'm reminded that I'm no better than him. I'm also reminded to try and see this account from God's perspective. How did God view Judah's wickedness? With disgust and anger...and PITY, right? Because how did God view Judah? As BELOVED! **"God [showed] his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).** The intention of this chapter of Scripture isn't to glorify Judah's sinful past as some tend to do when giving their testimony. It also isn't meant to EXCORIATE Judah and thereby make ourselves feel better about our own sin. As I said when we started out tonight, Judah is SPIRALING, and no, he hasn't hit bottom yet. But you know what else? God wasn't done with Judah yet either. There's tremendous encouragement to be had with regard to our own struggle with sin as well as instruction for handling others in the midst of their own struggle as we observe the depths to which Judah sank and from which the Lord would deliver him. Keep reading...

Genesis 38:20-23

20 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. 21 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. 22 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. 23 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.

Now, don't you reckon this little tidbit could've been skipped? You could've jumped from verse 19 to 24, and the account of Tamar conceiving by Judah could've flowed smoothly into the account of Tamar's pregnancy being discovered by Judah. However, this portion of the account accomplishes two things. First, it makes clear to the reader that Tamar had no intention of returning the pledge items; they were FAR MORE VALUABLE to her in her situation than a goat. Tamar's got plans for that signet, cord, and staff; they're going to pop up again later.

There's another observation to be made from this section. Remember, this entire chapter is about JUDAH'S SPIRAL. Sure, Tamar and her actions feature prominently in the account, but its overarching purpose is to show HOW FAR JUDAH HAD FALLEN. In these four verses, the Holy Spirit inspired Moses

to record WHAT A FOOL Judah had become. Isn't it TELLING that Judah sent the goat by a courier (his friend Hirah) rather than taking it himself? Then, when she couldn't be found, Judah called off the search and accepted the loss because THAT WAS BETTER than making everyone and his brother privy to his encounter with the cult prostitute. He knew he would look FOOLISH, which to some degree means that he knew he had BEEN foolish. HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHO HE HAD SLEPT WITH! He wanted to keep it on the down-low, but here we are reading about it almost 4,000 years later. **"Your sin will find you out,"** as it says in Numbers (Numbers 32:23). The reader knows that Tamar has a plan. She would see to it that EVERYONE FOUND OUT. We read...

Genesis 38:24-26

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. 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. 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.

"Bring her out, and LET HER BE BURNED!" Judah leapt at the opportunity to permanently remove Tamar. Never mind Judah's own immorality. Never mind that he had DOOMED TAMAR to live out her days as a CHILDLESS WIDOW as she waited betrothed to a man to whom she would never be given. Never mind that Judah's sons died, not as a result of some lover's curse brought on by Tamar, but because of THEIR OWN WICKEDNESS, and I believe JUDAH KNEW IT (v. 11). This was Judah's chance to be rid of Tamar once and for all, and he was going to take it!

If this scene were to be captured in a film, it would be such an INTENSE SCENE! The camera would be shaking, darting frantically from face to face. The music would be reaching its crescendo. Our hearts would be pounding as we all held our breaths! THIS IS THE MOMENT! "Tamar's going to DIE!" "Judah's going to be FOUND OUT!" WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN?! The consequences of all of Judah's actions thus far are steps away from catching up with him, but with a fire and a moment's brutality, he can escape them...or so he thinks. However, in His sovereignty, GOD allowed Judah to run recklessly down this path, and He would ensure that Judah's actions caught up with him!

Tamar, for her part, had prepared for this eventuality! Talk about a tricky woman! **"Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff."** Note the similarity to what Judah and his brothers said to Jacob in the last chapter. **"This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not."** "What did she just say? WAIT. Those are MINE!" In the same way Judah (and his brothers) deceived their father, he was deceived. She made sure to get INSURANCE for when she started to show and things got dicey. She thought of everything! Now, I know there's a tendency to laud her for what she did, to make her the hero of the story. Then there are others who look upon Tamar in similar fashion as Judah, completely in the wrong and deserving of death. It's a mess any way you look at it. Do I blame her for what she did? I can't say that I do. However, would I lift up Tamar as an example to be followed? Absolutely NOT.

Tamar is part of Judah's downward spiral, and apparently the part God used to SCARED HIM STRAIGHT! While this scene with Judah and Tamar is a scene of people taking what they believe they deserve (sexual pleasure for Judah and offspring for Tamar) and seemingly getting away with it, once again, IT'S ALL ABOUT GOD—the decisions He allows us to make, how He allows us to hit rock bottom through our actions, and how He sovereignly uses the outcome of our pitiful decisions to bring about HIS PERFECT WILL.

Upon identifying the signet, cord, and staff as his, Judah said, **"She is more righteous than I..."** WHY???" **"...since I did not give her to my son Shelah."** This was Judah's CONFESSION. *"If she's to blame, I'm more to blame. I DROVE HER TO IT."* Such wrath and fierce judgment of burning Tamar to death for her adulterous actions might've been appropriate according to their way had Judah, in good faith, intended to give her to Shelah for a wife. However, given that he had no such intentions and had doomed her to childless widowhood apart from her desperate actions, what else was there for him to do but FORGIVE her?

Now, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that Tamar is the first woman to appear in the genealogy of the Messiah. In the face of an impossible situation, she took matters into her own hands and by God grace gave birth to that generation's link in Jesus' family tree. At the same time, I'm careful not to build her up into a hero; her actions were still immoral and deceptive. I think Victor Hamilton captures the tension of Tamar's story (as well as the stories of Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) well when he wrote...

"Each of these four women had a highly irregular and potentially scandalous marital union. Nevertheless, these unions were, by God's providence, links in the chain to the Messiah. Accordingly, each of them prepares the way for Mary, whose marital situation is also peculiar, given the fact that she is pregnant but has not yet had sexual relations with her betrothed husband Joseph. Thus the inclusion of the likes of Tamar in this family tree on one hand foreshadows the circumstances of the birth of Christ, and on the other hand blunts any attack on Mary. God had worked his will in the midst of whispers of scandal."

It is indeed scandalous. We claim that such passages of scripture are "risqué" or "inappropriate" for young listeners, and I don't argue with that. However, I can't help but wonder if our discomfort with such passages isn't actually due to the fact that they portray our sinful hearts more vividly and accurately than any other passage. Nevertheless, the Lord was glorified to use these events to work in Judah's heart, even including the offspring of this union in the genealogy of His Son, one more picture of WHY He had to come. Finally, we read...

Genesis 38:27-30

27 When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. 28 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. 29 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. 30 Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

"The older shall serve the younger." Once again we see the overturning of the natural birthright and the symbolism of the Spirit's supremacy over the natural. We've already seen Abel favored over and above Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph (though, as we'll see, truly Judah) over his three older brothers, and NOW Perez over Zerah. You see, Perez would be the earthly ancestor of the Messiah. Zerah would go on to father the Zerahites, from whom Achan would descend, the Israelite who would break the ban at Jericho and cause the defeat and slaughter of his people at Ai during the conquest of the Promised Land.

At the end of it all, JUDAH IS A PICTURE OF GRACE, just like the rest of us who have been forgiven and cleansed of our sins. Joseph was the favored son, but Judah, the hateful, greedy, faithless, and immoral was the CHOSEN progenitor of the Messiah. Though he spiraled to shameful depths, God wasn't finished with him. We sing on Sundays, **"Your goodness is running after me,"** and God was running after Judah. We sing, **"Even when I don't see it, You're working. Even when I don't feel it You're working. You never stop. You never stop working,"** and that's true. We'll really see God's work in Judah's heart fulfilled more dramatically in Genesis 44, but these, I believe, are the ROCK BOTTOM EVENTS that got him headed back from Timnah to Hebron.

"You're so, SO FAR away from God!" That's the LIE that the Accuser and our flesh whispers into our spirits. *"You've made bad decision after bad decision, TOO MANY to come back from. The DISTANCE between you and God is INSURMOUNTABLE. You'll never catch up. You're on your own now. This is who you'll always be."* THOSE ARE LIES meant to weaken you, meant to weaken your resolve, and to make you feel like you can't approach THE ONLY ONE who can give you the strength and wisdom and grace to overcome, when the truth is that HE WANTS YOU to come! He assures our hearts in Hebrews, reminding us...

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus isn't surprised or shocked by our sin. It certainly doesn't please Him, but it definitely DOESN'T MAKE HIM STOP LOVING US! Jesus, the God-Man, demonstrated His love for us **"in that WHILE we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)**. HIS HEART IS Poured OUT to us in our sin like a parent's heart for a sick or erring child! He doesn't look upon us in our sin-sickness and in disgust shout, *"Ew! Get away from Me!"* No, as we make one sinful decision that weakens us to make another, each rebellious step taking us farther and farther away from Him, He shouts, *"Come back! I'm still here! I still want you! YOU'RE NOT SO FAR GONE THAT I CAN'T CHANGE YOU."* It may take terrible circumstances for Him to get your attention, like the ones that transpired in Judah's life, but this is one of the ways God comes to us. He allows our bad decisions and enforces the painful consequences that follow to bring us

to our senses so that we might STOP, RECOGNIZE where we are, RECOGNIZE our desperate need, TURN AROUND, and begin the journey back. AND HERE'S THE THING! That accusing voice of Satan and our flesh may start to whisper into our spirits those lies from before about how far we are from the Lord and the unlikelihood of "catching up" with Him, but God promised through John that the journey back to Him is only one step long. John wrote...

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.

He said that...

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

As soon as we repent, allowing Him to change our hearts and minds, and in faith call out to Him for forgiveness, THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US IS GONE! We're right BACK TO WALKING WITH HIM, right back to WALKING IN VICTORY! I believe these are the events in Judah's life that God used to STOP HIM so that he would return to Him; as I said, we'll get to enjoy the full, beautiful transformation later, so you've got to keep coming. I love this passage though, because without Genesis 38, there would be no Genesis 44. As we go through this study, we'll see that Joseph's life shatters the narrative that godliness is a formula for worldly success and a problem free life. Tonight, however, we're reminded by Judah's life that God's got GRACE for the wayward when we repent and receive it by faith.