

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 38

WE PAUSE OUR LOOK AT THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF JOSEPH TO READ OF A BIZARRE AND TROUBLING STORY ABOUT JACOB'S 4TH SON, JUDAH. IF BROUGHT TO LIFE ON THE BIG SCREEN, THIS STORY IS PROBABLY RATED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN PG-13 AND R. SO AS WE BEGIN GENESIS 38, BUCKLE UP AND PUT THE LITTLE ONES TO BED EARLY.

GENESIS 38:1-5 - JUDAH'S CHILDREN

JUDAH TRAVELS TO VISIT A FRIEND NAMED HIRAH WHO WAS A CANAANITE FROM ADULLAM (V. 1). WHILE THERE HE SEES AND PURSUES AN UNNAMED DAUGHTER OF A MAN NAMED SHUA. THE LANGUAGE "HE TOOK HER" DESCRIBES THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING THIS WOMAN AS HIS WIFE AND HE "WENT INTO HER" IS A EUPHEMISM FOR SEXUAL INTERCOURSE.

JUDAH'S FIRSTBORN IS NAMED **ER**. HIS SECOND SON IS NAMED **ONAN**. HIS THIRD SON IS NAMED **SHELAH**.

GENESIS 38:6-11 - PROBLEMS IN JUDAH'S HOUSE

HERE'S WHERE THINGS GET A LITTLE RISQUE. JUDAH GETS HIS ELDEST SON, **ER**, A WIFE. HER NAME IS TAMAR. VERSE 7 GIVES US A QUICK AND MATTER OF FACT DESCRIPTION THAT "ER...WAS EVIL AND SO THE LORD TOOK HIS LIFE." WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HE DID THAT WAS EVIL. WE DON'T KNOW THIS JUDGMENT WAS METED OUT, BUT THOSE ARE THE FACTS WHICH SET UP THE REST OF THE STORY.

AS WAS CUSTOMARY IN THIS CULTURE AND WOULD LATER BE CODIFIED IN THE MOSAIC LAW, UPON THE DEATH OF A MARRIED MAN, HIS BROTHERS WOULD STEP IN TO CARE FOR HIS WIDOW BUT WELCOMING HIS WIFE INTO HIS HOUSE AND MARRYING HER. THIS SOUNDS LIKE A STRANGE PRACTICE TO US, BUT WE ARE FORGETTING THAT THERE WERE NO CAREER PATHS FOR "INDEPENDENT WOMEN" OR LIFE INSURANCE PAYMENTS FOR BENEFICIARIES. THIS WAS THEIR WAY OF TAKING CARE OF THE WIDOW AND CHILDREN, ENSURING THEY WEREN'T TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF AND THAT THEY AND THEIR FUTURES WERE SAFE.

SO AS THEIR CUSTOM WOULD BE, JUDAH INSTRUCTS HIS SECOND BORN, **ONAN**, TO TAKE **TAMAR** AS HIS WIFE AND ENCOURAGES HIM TO HAVE CHILDREN TO GIVE A LEGACY FOR **ER**. THIS SEEMS SIMPLE ON THE SURFACE BUT THE REST OF THE STORY SEEMS TO TELL US THAT JUDAH WAS ASKING ONAN NOT TO HAVE TAMAR AS HIS WIFE AND HAVE HIS OWN CHILDREN, BUT TO HAVE CHILDREN WITH TAMAR THAT WOULD THEN BE CONSIDERED ER'S OFFSPRING, AND THUS HEIRS TO THE FAMILY INHERITANCE. AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, ONAN WAS NOT HAPPY ABOUT THIS.

SO HE OBEYS THE ORDER TO MARRY TAMAR BUT ENSURES THAT EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE HAVING SEX, ONAN WILL "WASTE HIS SEED" (*YES THAT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS*) RATHER THAN ALLOWING TAMAR TO BECOME PREGNANT. GOD IS NOT AT ALL HAPPY ABOUT THIS, SO HE JUDGES ONAN AS WELL AND ONAN DIES (V. 10).

JUDAH SEEMS TO THINK TAMAR IS THE CAUSE OF HIS TWO SONS DEATHS AND SENDS HER BACK TO HER FATHER'S HOUSE UNTIL SHELAH, JUDAH'S YOUNGEST GROWS UP AND CAN MARRY HER. QUITE THE WILD STORY. BUT IT'S NOT OVER YET!

GENESIS 38:12-19 - TAMAR TRICKS JUDAH

SOME TIME LATER, JUDAH'S WIFE DIES. AFTER HIS MOURNING PERIOD ENDS, JUDAH RETURNS TO VISIT HIS OLD FRIEND HIRAH THE ADULLAMITE (WHO WAS MENTIONED IN V. 1). THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE JUDAH FIRST MET HIS OWN WIFE AND WHERE HIS SONS WERE BORN, AND LIKELY NEAR WHERE TAMAR WAS LIVING.

TAMAR IS TOLD THAT JUDAH IS BACK IN TOWN. APPARENTLY THE TWO OF THEM HADN'T BEEN IN TOUCH IN A WHILE. REMEMBER, TAMAR IS WAITING, AS A WIDOW, FOR JUDAH'S SON SHELAH TO GROW UP. JUDAH, FOR HIS PART SENT TAMAR AWAY BECAUSE HE THINKS SHE'S BAD LUCK. WHEN TAMAR GOES TO SEE WHAT JUDAH IS UP TO, SHE NOTICES THAT SHELAH IS NOW ALL GROWN UP AND HASN'T TAKEN HER AS HIS WIFE (V. 14).

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS VERY STRANGE. TAMAR HAS REMOVED THE CLOTHES THAT IDENTIFY HER HAS A WIDOW AND IS WEARING GARMENTS WHICH MAKE HER LOOK LIKE A PROSTITUTE. SHE'S ALSO STANDING ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD ALONE. JUDAH SEES THIS "HARLOT" AND ASKS TO HAVE SEX WITH HER FOR THE PRICE OF A YOUNG GOAT (V. 17).

TAMAR NEGOTIATES TO HAVE A "PLEDGE" GIVEN TO HER UNTIL THE GOAT PAYMENT IS SUPPLIED AND HOLDS ON TO JUDAH'S SEAL, CORD AND STAFF. THESE ITEMS WOULD HAVE BEEN SPECIFIC IDENTIFIERS OF JUDAH (AS OPPOSED TO RANDOM ITEMS THAT COULD BELONG TO ANYONE). THE TWO OF THEM HAVE SEX AND TAMAR BECOMES PREGNANT.

GENESIS 38:20-23 - THE CASE OF THE MISSING PROSTITUTE

SOON AFTER, JUDAH SENDS THE YOUNG GOAT (AKA THE MONEY) VIA HIS FRIEND THE ADULLAMITE. GIVING THE GOAT WILL GET BACK JUDAH'S PERSONAL ITEMS. WHEN THE MAN ARRIVES, HE CAN'T FIND THE PROSTITUTE AND NO ONE AROUND KNOWS OF ONE WHO HAS BEEN IN THAT REGION. JUDAH ACCEPTS THE LOSS OF HIS ITEMS. HE DOESN'T WANT TO GO BACK AND LOOK FOR A PROSTITUTE BECAUSE OF THE SHAME THAT WOULD ACCOMPANY THAT ENDEAVOR. HE'D RATHER LOSE HIS SEAL AND STAFF THAN HIS HONOR. WHAT A GUY!

GENESIS 38:24-26 - LOOK WHO IS RIGHTEOUS NOW?!

THREE MONTHS GO BY AND JUDAH GETS BACK TO NORMAL LIFE. IT IS REPORTED TO HIM THAT HIS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW TAMAR IS PREGNANT. SHE WAS A WIDOW, ENGAGED TO MARRY SHELAH. THE FACT THAT SHE IS PREGNANT INDICATES SHE HAS HAD SEX WITH SOMEONE OTHER THAN SHELAH. JUDAH IS FURIOUS (*BRING HER OUT AND LET HER BE BURNED!* 38:24).

BUT IF WE'RE HONEST, JUDAH IS PROBABLY ALSO RELIEVED. HE THOUGHT OF TAMAR AS THE REASON WHY HIS TWO SONS WERE DEAD. HE HAD TAKEN NO THOUGHT OF THE EVIL OF HIS OWN BOYS BUT PLACED BLAME ON TAMAR FOR THEIR DEATH. AND SO NOW THAT TAMAR HAS CLEARLY COMMITTED FORNICATION, JUDAH CAN FIND A NEW WIFE FOR HIS LAST SON!

JUDAH IS QUICK TO JUDGE AND SHADY IN HIS DEALINGS. HE IS HOLDING TAMAR TO THE LETTER OF THE LAW AND EXCUSING HIS OWN GROSS BEHAVIOR. SURE, THE FACT THAT HE HAD SEX WITH A PROSTITUTE AND THEN KEPT IS QUIET IS BAD, BUT HE ALSO HAD BEEN AVOIDING TAMAR AND KEEPING HIS NOW GROWN UP SON AWAY FROM HER, BREAKING HIS COMMITMENT TO CARE FOR HIS WIDOWED DAUGHTER IN LAW.

AND TAMAR, WHO GETS MIXED UP IN THIS WHOLE MESS, AND IS PART OF THE DYSFUNCTION HERSELF, IS PRETTY SHARP. HER PLAN WAS TO USE JUDAH'S OWN PRIDE AGAINST HIM AND IT WORKED. AS SHE IS BEING BROUGHT OUT TO BE KILLED SHE OFFERS UP EVIDENCE OF WHO IS THE FATHER OF HER CHILD. WHAT DO YOU KNOW, BUT THE ITEMS ALL BELONG TO HER ZEALOUS ACCUSER, JUDAH!

TAMAR'S PLAN IS SO POWERFULLY CONVICTING THAT JUDAH IS INSTANTLY HUMBLLED. HE CALLS HER THE "RIGHTEOUS" ONE AND ADMITS HE HAD BEEN UNFAITHFUL TO HIS WORD TO CARE FOR HER AND GIVE HER TO HIS SON.

GENESIS 38:27-30 - TAMAR GIVES BIRTH TO JUDAH'S TWIN SONS

TAMAR GIVES BIRTH TO TWINS. AS THE TWINS ARE BEING BORN, ONE SEEMS TO BE READY TO COME OUT BUT THEN IS OVERTAKEN BY HIS EAGER TO BE BORN BROTHER. THE MIDWIFE HAD TIED A SCARLET THREAD ON THE BABY TO INDICATE WHICH ONE WAS THE FIRST BORN (HARD TO TELL WITH NEWBORN TWIN BOYS PERHAPS?) BUT THEN THAT CHILD IS ACTUALLY BORN SECOND. THEY ARE NAMED PEREZ AND ZERAH. AND SO OUR STORY ENDS.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT FAMILIAL DYSFUNCTION. JUDAH'S EXPLOITS, SEXUAL SIN AND DECEPTION, (NOT TO MENTION THE EVIL THAT COST HIS SONS THEIR LIVES) IS IN LINE WITH THE GENERATIONAL SINS OF HIS FATHER AND GRANDFATHERS. THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM IS FAR FROM PERFECT AND IN NEED OF GOD'S GRACE.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT MAKING WISE RELATIONSHIP DECISIONS. JUDAH REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN IN CANAAN LOOKING AT WOMEN TO BEGIN WITH! HE IS THE GREAT GRANDSON OF ABRAHAM WHO WAS CALLED TO BE SEPERATE. HIS FATHER AND GRANDFATHER SPECIFICALLY DID NOT MARRY OR MINGLE WITH THE CANAANITES BUT LIVED AS A STRANGER AND PILGRIM. JUDAH DIDN'T DO THIS AND HIS DECISION TO MOVE TO CANAAN AND MARRY A CANAANITE WOMAN IS PART OF WHY THIS ALL HAPPENED TOO. WHERE YOU LIVE, WHO YOU MINGLE WITH AND WHO YOU MARRY ARE IMPORTANT DECISIONS AND CAN ALTER THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE. DO IT GOD'S WAY AND ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD RATHER THAN GOING WITH THE FLOW OR MAKING DECISIONS ON TEMPORAL THINGS. MARRIAGE IS HARD ENOUGH BETWEEN TWO BELIEVERS!

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN. WE EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE DAILY AND YET MUST LIVE IN FEAR OF THE LORD. JUDAH'S TWO SONS WERE EVIL AND DIED FROM GOD'S JUDGEMENT ON THEIR LIVES. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT ER'S SIN WAS BUT IT WAS EVIL AND COSTLY. ONAN THOUGHT HE WAS SMART AND COULD AVOID THE RESPONSIBILITY HE DIDN'T WANT TO ASSUME. HE THOUGHT HIS SINS WERE SECRET AND HIDDEN. BUT GOD SEES. GOD TENDS TOWARDS MERCY, BUT IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE AND POWER. THESE RECORDS REMIND US TO BE SOBER-MINDED AND NOT TAKE SIN, OF ANY KIND, LIGHTLY.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT KEEPING YOUR WORD. JUDAH WAS SUPPOSED TO KEEP HIS WORD TO TAMAR AND HE DIDN'T. EVEN IF HE HAD HIS REASONS TO CHANGE THINGS, HE WAS BOUND TO HIS ORIGINAL WORD. JUDAH THOUGHT HE COULD AVOID TAMAR, FORGET ABOUT TAMAR AND EXCLUDE TAMAR. HE THOUGHT THAT IF HE JUST IGNORED HER, SHE'D GO AWAY AND SO WOULD HIS RESPONSIBILITY. HE WAS WRONG. MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD HAVE TO BE PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY. TOO MANY PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD NEVER DEAL WITH WHAT THEY NEED TO DEAL WITH AND THINK THAT THEY ARE DEALING WITH THINGS. THAT'S NOT THE WAY LIFE WORKS. COVERING YOUR EYES AND EARS DOESN'T MAKE REALITY GO AWAY. *GROW UP.* KEEP YOUR WORD AND COMMITMENTS.

AND LASTLY, THIS IS A STORY ABOUT PRIDE. JUDAH LOOKED AT THE SINS OF OTHERS (TAMAR'S) AS SERIOUS AND HORRIBLE AND MINIMIZED THE SIN AND EVIL IN HIS OWN LIFE AND IN HIS FAMILY. HIS PRIDE ELEVATED THE SINS OF OTHERS AND MINIMIZED THE SINS IN HIS LIFE. THAT'S WRONG. WE DO THIS BECAUSE OUR PRIDE TRICKS US INTO THINKING WE ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS. THAT OUR DUNG DOESN'T STINK.

ROMANS 1 & 2 WARN US AGAINST THIS. WE ARE QUICK TO KNOW RIGHT AND WRONG WHEN LOOKING AT OTHER PEOPLE BUT DON'T HOLD THE SAME STANDARD TO OURSELVES. AFTER DESCRIBING IN DETAIL THE EVIL OF HUMANITY AND HOW WHEN PEOPLE DON'T ACKNOWLEDGE GOD THEY ARE DRIVEN TO DO THE WORST KINDS OF SINS IN ROMANS 1, WE CHRISTIANS FIND OURSELVES THANKFUL TO NOT BE LIKE "THOSE PEOPLE." WE READ ABOUT THE GREEDY, THE HOMOSEXUALS AND IDOLATERS AND MORE AND ARE OUTRAGED BY SUCH WICKEDNESS. AND THEN PAUL SAYS THIS:

ROMANS 2:1-4 NLT - "YOU MAY THINK YOU CAN CONDEMN SUCH PEOPLE, BUT YOU ARE JUST AS BAD, AND YOU HAVE NO EXCUSE! WHEN YOU SAY THEY ARE WICKED AND SHOULD BE PUNISHED, YOU ARE CONDEMNING YOURSELF, FOR YOU WHO JUDGE OTHERS DO THESE VERY SAME THINGS. AND WE KNOW THAT GOD, IN HIS JUSTICE, WILL PUNISH ANYONE WHO DOES SUCH THINGS. SINCE YOU JUDGE OTHERS FOR DOING THESE THINGS, WHY DO YOU THINK YOU CAN AVOID GOD'S JUDGMENT WHEN YOU DO THE SAME THINGS? DON'T YOU SEE HOW WONDERFULLY KIND, TOLERANT, AND PATIENT GOD IS WITH YOU? DOES THIS MEAN NOTHING TO YOU? CAN'T YOU SEE THAT HIS KINDNESS IS INTENDED TO TURN YOU FROM YOUR SIN?"

YIKES! THIS WAS JUDAH'S PROBLEM AND IT CAN BE OURS TOO IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL. IT'S EASY TO LOOK AT THE EGREGIOUS SINS OF SOME AND LOOK AT THE MORE SUBTLE SINS IN OUR LIVES AND NOT BE AS EAGER TO TURN TO THE LORD FOR FORGIVENESS AS WE MIGHT HOPE THAT THOSE EVIL "SINNERS" DO. YEAH, THAT'S NOT WISE.

INSTEAD WE SHOULD WORK TO KEEP OUR OWN "SIDE OF THE STREET" CLEAN, SPENDING MORE TIME PURSUING THE LORD AND LESS TIME JUDGING OTHERS. FOR SURE THERE IS A STANDARD OF RIGHT AND WRONG AND PART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS THAT GOD IS SENDING HIS SON TO "JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS" (ACTS 17:30-31). BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD SHARE THE SPIRIT THAT JUDAH HAD IN THIS CRAZY CHAPTER IN GENESIS.

THERE IS A WAY TO HELP THOSE IN SIN, THERE IS A WAY TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE IN GREAT NEED OF GOD'S GRACE. THE WAY IS TO DEMONSTRATE IN OUR OWN LIVES, HOW GLORIOUS THIS GRACE IS. THAT THIS GRACE IS SOMETHING WE OURSELVES HAVE NEEDED, AND DARE I SAY, STILL NEED. YES, THAT'S THE WAY. SHOW THEM, TELL THEM, HOW WONDERFUL IT IS TO FIND THIS SWEET AND HEALING AND AMAZING GRACE.