

Genesis 38:1-18**JUDAH AND TAMAR**

Joseph had been rejected and expelled from the family and as far as his brothers were concerned, was as good as dead. His father was heartbroken, unaware of the cruel deception of his sons. However, their ignoble behaviour continued, this time through Judah. Judah, meaning 'praise' was the fourth son of Leah, but there is nothing praise worthy about this conduct. Nevertheless, God preserved the purity of Judah's family line through which thousands of years later, the Saviour of the world would be born.

Judah was wrestling with a guilty conscience. What do you do when your conscience is troubling you?

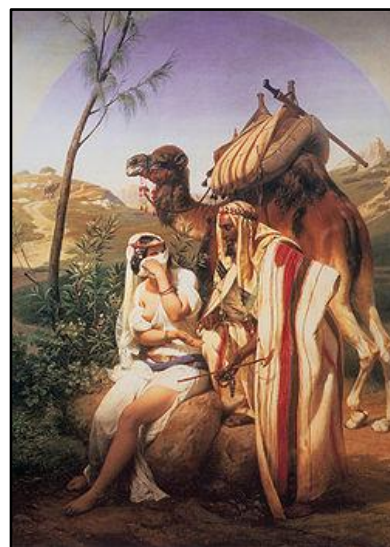
LEAVING JACOB'S TRIBE v 1-5 – on that awful day in Dothan, it was Judah who had urged his brothers not to kill Joseph, but sell him instead as a slave (ch 37:26-27). Back home, without Joseph, the brothers were confronted with the daily sight of his father's grief. This must have weighed heavily on their conscience, as well as the uncertainty as to whether Joseph was alive or dead. Judah decided to get away, choosing a path that took him down, not just physically, but spiritually too. He went to live near a man called Hirah who was an Adullamite. There he met Shuah, a Canaanite woman whom he married. This in itself was rebellious. He knew a circumcised son of Israel should not marry outside his tribe. Instead, he chose a wife who worshipped idols and had no faith in the living God. From their marriage were born three sons – Er, Onan and Shelah.

CHILDLESS CHILDREN v 6-10 – the family grew up and in time, Judah chose a Canaanite wife called Tamar for his eldest son to marry. However, Er was so wicked that God slew him before he could have children and perpetuate his sin. This was the first time in the record of God's people that anyone had their life removed because of their wickedness. Judah then followed the tradition of that day, to preserve the family name and inheritance by giving Onan, his second son to Tamar. But Onan knew that if they had a child, it would belong to Er's inheritance and not his own and thus he spilled his sperm upon the ground. His refusal to honour the name and inheritance of his brother greatly displeased God and so God slew Onan too.

Er was so wicked that God slew him. What does the bible say about God's attitude to the sin of each one of us? (Eph. 2:1-6, Lam.3:22)

TAMAR SENT AWAY v 11 – Judah, having lost his eldest two sons became concerned that this was because of Tamar's influence, rather than his own errant behaviour and that of his wicked sons too. So, he sent Tamar away, back to her father's house, on pretence of waiting until his youngest son Shelah was old enough to marry her. However, when Shelah grew up he was given to somebody else (v 14).

TAMAR'S PLAN v 12 -18 – Judah's third bereavement then occurred when his wife, Shuah died, and with her any hope of more sons to be given to Tamar. This news reached Tamar. She waited until Judah's days of mourning were over and he went to shear his sheep. She knew that Canaanite sheep shearing festivals involved cultic worship and ritual prostitution. Therefore, she used this as an opportunity to disguise her identity, expose Judah's character and produce an heir for his family name. Craftily she dressed as a cult prostitute, covered her face and sat openly where father-in-law would pass, knowing his immoral weakness for such a lure. The plan worked and he availed himself of her services but did not have any money for the payment. He offered instead to send a goat. Tamar though, presumably anticipating this, asked for a guarantee that he would honour his debt in the form of his signet, bracelets and staff. These would uniquely identify him as the father of any child subsequently born.



Judah and Tamar (1840 painting by Horace Vernet)

Consider Tamar's situation in life. How might she have been feeling?

*'For whom the Lord loves He corrects,
Just as a father the son in whom he delights'*
Proverbs 3:11