

**Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2012 – 11:00am**

**'Joseph: Prince of Egypt'**

**3. Messiah Potential: Joseph or Judah?**

**Genesis ch.38:1-30**

**Introduction**

This morning we come to a break in the story of Joseph. Here in Genesis ch.38 the focus turns to Judah - and Joseph is not mentioned at all.

Why would that be? Well, first of all, although the bulk of the rest of the Book of Genesis will focus our attention on Joseph, we need to remember that the title for this section was back in Genesis 37:2 *'This is the account of Jacob'*, which basically translates *'This is what Jacob produced.'*

So these chapters are not just looking at Joseph, but their focus is on all the sons of Jacob as a family. As the family who will really be the foundation of the Nation of Israel, the Jews, God's Old Testament people.

Over the last couple of weeks we have been asking the question about who the Messiah might be? We asked at the start of ch.37: *Could it be Joseph?* But by the end of ch.37, with Joseph sold as a slave into Egypt, we could be tempted to ask: *Could it be Judah?*

The writer of Genesis is keeping us in suspense. We are kept guessing. Could it be Joseph? Or could it be from Judah, that the Messiah will come - because it was Judah who just stepped in at the right time in ch.37. In effect he saved his brother, Joseph's life. So could that be a clue that Judah is going to be the Saviour, not just of Joseph, but of the World?

In the next 2 chapters (38 & 39) Judah and Joseph are going to be compared. Who will come out on top? Who will be the Messiah? Who will be the Saviour of the World? Could it be Judah, or could it still be Joseph?

Another reason for the story of Judah appearing here at ch.38 is that it gives us the impression that time is passing by for Joseph down in Egypt. We know he was just 17 when he was sold as a slave into Egypt (ch.37:2). Another 13 years would pass by before he is exalted to be Second in Command of Egypt. So by then he will be 30 years old (ch. 41:46). Then there will be 7 good years in Egypt, before the 7 years of famine come along. And it will be during those years of famine before Joseph will ever see the rest of his family again. So if you add all that up, you come to a figure of something like 20-25 years that will pass before Joseph sees his brothers again. Genesis ch.38 gives us an idea of what life was like for at least one of his brothers during that period.

So here in ch.38 we have a potted history of Judah, another son of Jacob.

So with Joseph in Egypt, it's a bit like a clip from a Western silent movie – the words ***'Meanwhile back at the ranch...'*** come onto the screen and the focus of the story goes back to Hebron.

## 1. Judah and his Sons (vs.1-6)

We're told straightaway in ch.38:1 that it was *'at that time'* that Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam called Hirah.

Reading between the lines, it's as if Judah can't live with himself, since Joseph has been sold as a slave to Egypt. At least he can't bare being around his brothers, because they're a constant reminder of the terrible thing that they were all part of out in the field that day: at first talking about killing Joseph, and then at Judah's suggestion, agreeing to sell him to the Ishmaelites instead.

Maybe it seemed like a good idea in Judah's head at the time, but now Joseph was gone, and there's no telling where he had ended up, or what had become of him since. Judah seems uneasy, and has to get away for a while.

So he heads along the road (the same road that took Joseph to Egypt) to a place called Adullam - a Canaanite town, about 15 miles SW of Jerusalem.

While he was staying with his friend Hirah in Adullam, Judah met and married the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. It would seem that he did this with absolutely no involvement from his parents Jacob & Leah. He just goes out and does his own thing. He also has no concern about marrying the right woman, or of marrying someone from the Hebrew people, the O.T. people of God. This is obviously a Canaanite woman that he has married.

When Esau, his uncle, married Canaanite women they were *'a source of grief to his parents'* (Genesis 26:35) and Rebekah had also been very concerned that Jacob wouldn't marry a woman from among the Canaanites or Hittites (Genesis 27:46). But Judah just blatantly went on ahead and did it!

Over the course of time Judah and his wife had 3 sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. And again, over the course of time, Judah got a wife for his firstborn son, Er. Her name was Tamar. So Judah arranged the marriage for his son, even though he allowed his parents no say in who he had married. So it's probably safe to say that about 20 years have passed by in Judah's life, since Joseph had been sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites: time for Judah to get married, to raise his firstborn son, and to arrange a marriage for him: about 20 years...

But now things begin to go wrong in Judah's family...

## 2. Judah and his Sorrows (vs.7-12)

We're told, first of all, in v.7 that Judah's firstborn son, **Er**, was *'wicked in the Lord's sight'*. He was an evil man. We're not told what he had done wrong, but he had obviously grieved the Lord in some way: *'so the Lord put him to death.'*

Then, Judah told his second son, **Onan**, to marry Tamar. This is an early occurrence of what would later be called a Levirite marriage. If a man died, leaving no offspring, it became the responsibility of the dead man's brother to

marry his widow, and to produce offspring for him, so that his name would not die out completely.

But Onan, knew that the offspring would not be regarded as his, so he stopped short of having intercourse with Tamar: *'he spilled his seed on the ground'* so that no child could be conceived. (Remember *'seed'* is significant in Genesis). We are told in v.10, that what Onan did was wicked in the Lord's sight, so he was put to death as well. So Judah has now lost his first two sons.

But Judah had a third son called **Shelah**. We're not told what age he was at this stage in the story, but he must have been a good bit younger than the other two. He was now in line to marry Tamar as well, when the time was right, to fulfil the idea of a Levirate marriage, to produce offspring for the family.

So Judah tells Tamar, his daughter-in-law, to go back to her father's house, and to live there as a widow, until his third son, Shelah, was old enough to marry her. But did he really mean what he said? Because in v.11 we're told what he was thinking: Judah was beginning to think to himself that there was something wrong with Tamar, and that maybe his third son might die too, just like the others. So maybe Judah had no plans at all to give Shelah in marriage to Tamar; maybe he had just sent her back to her father's house to get rid of her? Anyway, that's what happened: Tamar went to live in her father's house as a widow, with no children. (v.11)

And then we're told in v.12, that *'after a long time'* Judah's wife also died. So now he has lost three of his family members to death. Married life so far, for Judah, has been full of sorrows. But when he had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah (8 miles West of Bethlehem), accompanied again by his friend Hirah the Adullamite. It seems that Hirah had been his best man, and now his best friend, for all these years! Judah had gone to Timnah to see his workmen, who were shearing his sheep (v.12).

### **3. Judah and his Sin (vs.13-23)**

Judah had made a promise to his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, that when his third son Shelah was old enough, he would give him to Tamar in marriage.

But now that a long time has passed by, it's obvious that Shelah would be old enough for marriage, but so far, Judah has not kept his promise to Tamar. That was his first sin – to make a promise and not keep it. He had told a lie.

Now though telling lies, or not keeping promises, is serious in itself, Judah's second sin, was even worse.

When Tamar was told that her father-in-law, Judah, had gone to Timnah to shear sheep, she hatched a plan. It was something she shouldn't have done. She took off her widow's clothes. (These would have been clothes that would clearly mark her out as a widow in that culture).

And we're told that she disguised herself with a veil over her face. Then she went and sat down at the entrance to a village called Enaim, which is on the route that Judah would have been taking to go to Timnah. We're told why she did this in v.14:

*'For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.'*

She felt hard done by. In that culture there was no Welfare State, there was no widow's pension, there was no social security. Judah should have continued to look after Tamar as his daughter in law, even though two of his sons had died after marrying her. Without his help she was destitute. So you can begin to understand that 'desperate times called for desperate measures'. She was *right* to challenge Judah on what he had failed to do for her, but she was *wrong* in how she went about it. She tricked him. But what Judah did next was worse...

When he saw this woman sitting by the side of the road near Enaim, we're told in v.15, that he thought she was a prostitute, because she had covered her face. He had no idea that she was really his daughter-in-law (v.16).

Judah's wife was dead. He was a widower himself. But that does not justify him going to look for sexual satisfaction from a prostitute. But that's what he does in this passage. He's away from home, he thinks nobody will know, and obviously his so-called 'best man' and friend, Hirah, doesn't stop him, so he goes over and asks this total stranger to sleep with him!

*'Come now, let me sleep with you' (v.16)*

[Prostitution is known as the oldest profession in the world, but it is still wrong. It's on an alarming increase in N. Ireland]. Tamar goes on to ask for payment:

*'What will you give me to sleep with you?' She asked (v.16)*

*'I'll send you a young goat from my flock' Judah said (v.17)*

*'Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?' She said (v.17)*

He said, *'What pledge should I give you?' (v.18)*

*'Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand.'* She answered (v.18).

So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. And after she left, she took off her veil and went back to being a widow again!

In v.20 Judah then did as he said, and sent a young goat by his friend Hirah the Adullamite (so he was in on it too) in order to get his pledge back from the woman: (his seal and its cord, and his staff).

But Hirah couldn't find the woman around Enaim (v.20)

He even asked around the men who lived there:

*'Where is the shrine-prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?'* (v.21)

But they said, *'There hasn't been any shrine-prostitute here!'*(v.21)

Judah was now beginning to get worried in v.23. He tries to back-track. He says to his friend Hirah:

*'Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughing stock.'*

*'After all I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her.'*

In other words, Judah thought that he had kept his side of the bargain. It wasn't his fault that she hadn't waited around, after he had left. So Judah hoped and prayed that would be the end of the matter.

But it's a case of: *'Be sure your sins will find you out!'*

#### **4. Judah and his Scandal (vs.24-26)**

Three months later, Judah was told that his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, was now pregnant! And if that wasn't enough, he was told that she had conceived the child through prostitution. What a scandal to hit his family! This would have been talked about for ages around his friends and neighbours. Judah would have been the talk of the town, as well as Tamar.

So he does what he would have been expected to do in such circumstances: He demands that Tamar be brought out, probably into the town square, and there she should be burned to death – for the sin of prostitution!

But as Tamar was being brought out, she managed to get a message to her father-in-law that would turn this whole scandal on its head.

The message read:

*'I am pregnant by the man who owns these...  
...See if you recognise whose seal and cord and staff these are.'*

Now you need to understand that in those days, a man's seal, and cord and staff were as good as his finger-prints. Each man's seal, cord and staff was unique to him. This would have been almost like a DNA or paternity test today!

There was absolutely nothing that Judah could say. He had been found out! He had been the man who had *also* indulged in prostitution – it takes two – and he had unwittingly got his own daughter-in-law pregnant. Judah was no better. He had to get down off his high horse, and admit what he had done. In fact, to his credit he said that Tamar was more righteous than he was (v.26)

*'She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.'*

And we're told that he didn't sleep with her again.

Two wrongs don't make a right. Tamar was wronged, in that she should have been allowed to marry Judah's third son, Shelah, when he came of age. But she was wrong in how she went about proving her point. But then in those days, widows, and women in general, had very little legal standing. She was desperate, and she had to do something. All she did was sit in his way.

But what Judah did was worse. He went back on a promise, to give his third son to Tamar as her husband, through whom she could have had children.

He was wrong to go looking for sexual satisfaction with a prostitute after the death of his wife. He was wrong to indulge in sex outside of marriage.

He was wrong to try to go on covering up his sin, especially when he demanded that Tamar be put to death because of her sin of prostitution, whenever he knew rightly that he had been involved in it too. It was a case of double standards: one law for him, and another law for his daughter-in-law.

But now at last there is the admission, that Tamar was more righteous than him. In that, he was admitting his own guilt. He had sinned, he had done wrong. He wasn't righteous at all. He was a sinner in need of a Saviour. Just like all his brothers, just like Tamar, just like everyone alive in the world at that time - they *all* needed a Saviour. They all longed for the coming Messiah that had been promised to Abraham. But where would that Messiah come from? And when would he appear? Those were the unanswered questions.

But little did any of them know, but that a baby in Tamar's womb held the key!

### **5. Judah and his Seed (vs.27-30)**

Remember the promise that had been given to Abraham, that *'through his seed (offspring) all nations on the earth would be blessed.'* (Genesis 22:18).

That promise was given just after Isaac had been rescued from off an altar on top of Mount Moriah. It was as if, with every turn, *'the seed'* was in danger of dying out! What then would become of God's promise to Abraham to bless the nations; or to save the world through *his seed*?

That Covenant had been renewed with Isaac in his day, and then with Jacob in his day - at Bethel, but now it was 'up for grabs' in a sense. Which of the 12 sons of Jacob was going to be the one through whom the Messiah would be born? We might think that it would be Joseph, because his story takes up most of the rest of Genesis – and in a very real sense he did 'save the world' by saving Egypt through the 7 years of famine that were about to happen. But Joseph was not the one through whom the Messiah would come. Just as it had not been through Esau, but Jacob, so it would not be through Joseph, but Judah, that *'the seed of Abraham'* would one day come into the world.

How do I know? Well just look at the closing verses of this sordid chapter. Just look at how God turned an immoral situation around by his grace, and brought good out of it. Tamar was carrying twins, conceived within her by Judah, the great grandson of Abraham. Just look at what happened at their birth in v.27...

*'When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.'* Remember Jacob and Esau – struggling with each other in Rebekah's womb? Well these boys are doing the same. They're struggling over who will be first! (v.28) As Tamar was giving birth, one of the babies put out his hand, so the midwife tied a scarlet thread on its wrist, and said, *'This one came out first!'*

But then in v.29 that baby drew his hand back into the womb, and his brother came out first! So the midwife said, *'So this is how you have broken out!'* And that's why he was named **Perez**, which means *'breaking out'*.

But then his brother (v.30) who already had the scarlet cord tied round his wrist came out, and he was given the name **Zerah**, which means *'scarlet'* or *'brightness'*. So Perez and Zerah were the twins born to Tamar, by Judah.

### **Conclusion: So what's the significance?**

Well, turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, ch.1, as we close this morning. Here we have the genealogy of the Messiah: a very important document. Genealogies in the Jewish religion, only ever contained the names of men. But in this genealogy there are a number of women mentioned, and the first of them is **Tamar** – the woman we have met in Genesis ch.38 this morning.

### **Read Matthew ch.1:1-6**

Do you see in v.2 that the line down to the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, came through Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and then to Judah?

But Judah's 3 sons who were born to his Canaanite wife, do not feature in this chapter. They would have polluted the line of descent down to the Messiah.

Instead it was Judah's own *'seed'* conceived in Tamar, that provided the next in line towards the Messiah – and that was **Perez** (v.3). Not the baby with the scarlet cord round his wrist, that the midwife thought should be the firstborn, but the baby that *'broke out'* in accordance with God's plan and purpose, who became the one through whom the Messianic line would be carried on.

The line then goes from Perez to Hezron, to Ram, to Amminadab, to Nahshon to Salmon to Boaz. And then we get another woman mentioned: Boaz's mother was Rahab. **Who was Rahab?** She was another prostitute: the one who rescued the spies when the Israelites were trying to occupy Jericho. Boaz married **Ruth, the Moabite** (a third woman mentioned in the genealogy). Their son was Obed, and his son was Jesse, who became the father of **King David**. And so the line goes on from David down to **Jesus**.

That is the remarkable way that God kept his promise to Abraham. It was through Judah's sinful relationship with Tamar that God brought good out of bad, as God brought his **grace** to bear in a very sad situation, and so the Messianic line was maintained, until the Saviour of the World appeared in Jesus of Nazareth – the one who lived a sinless life, and died a sinless death for our sins on the cross at Calvary, and then rose again to be our Saviour.

Judah and Tamar were sinners who needed a Saviour, and so do you and I. The question is have you accepted Jesus as your Saviour? Are you forgiven? *'The **blood** of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from **all sin**' (1 John 1:7).*