

The Departure, The Transition, The Return

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In Genesis 37 we have the beginning of the story of Joseph and then we have in chapter 38 a departure from Joseph to the story of Judah and then chapter 39 continues the story of Joseph.

Why do we have this interruption in the story of Joseph? Let's take a look and you will see why.

As we all know from Biblical Jewish family history the first son was to receive the cherished birthright blessing.

Reuben was Jacob's first son born by his wife Leah.

But in Genesis 35 we find Reuben making a very tragic mistake that would have far reaching consequences.

Slide -Genesis 35:22 "And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it."

Now this may not truly mean much to us today but back then this was a direct insult to Jacob.

When we read 2 Samuel, we see the magnitude of this as a truly offensive issue.

David the King has fled Jerusalem because his son Absalom has gone behind his back and as it says;

Slide -2 Samuel 15:13 "Now a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom."

King David leaves 10 concubines behind to look after the house.

In 2 Samuel 16 Absalom is advised by Ahithophel to go into King David's concubines for a reason

Slide -2 Samuel 16:21 "And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong."

This act, a serious crime punishable by death, revealed the loss of Reuben's integrity.

But later on, Reuben saved Joseph's life when his brothers plotted to kill him.

He talked the brothers out of murdering Joseph and convinced them to leave him in a pit instead

Slide -Genesis 37:21-22 "But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father."

Reuben's plan failed when, in his absence, Joseph was sold into slavery.

But in that same chapter we read something about the character of Judah; Judah was the fourth child born of Leah.

Slide -Genesis 37:26-27 "So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened."

Unlike Reuben's motive, Judah's is not noble at all.

Judah's actions seem to be completely of self-absorbed and without moral merit.

Judah's motive seems to be less about incurring fratricide than does his desire for profit.

It is possible that Judah felt remorse or guilt for his actions, for in

Slide -Genesis 38:1-2 "It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her."

Slide -**So, we have the departure.**

Here Judah reaches a low point

Judah did not seek God or his father to help him find a wife like Jacob and Isaac did.

We see Judah's departing the family and intermarrying with the nations, a Canaanite woman.

The terminology in regard to this marriage and Judah's later dealings with Tamar suggest this marriage was for lust only.

There, the Canaanite woman gave Judah three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah.

When Er grew up, Judah gave him a wife named Tamar, a Canaanite woman.

But Er was an evil man, so as we read in;

Slide -Genesis 38:7 "But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord killed him."

Following the custom of levirate marriage, Tamar was then given to Onan, Er's brother

And as we read;

Slide -Genesis 38:9-10 "But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord; therefore He killed him also."

Shelah was too young to take a wife, so Judah ordered Tamar to live as a widow in her father's house (verse 11).

Slide -Genesis 38:11 "Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house."

From this verse and from Judah's later actions we see that Judah is scared that his last son will be killed also.

Judah seems to think that Tamar is bad luck.

Judah seems a bit superstitious which is note worthy of a heathen Canaanite than a member of the God's chosen family.

At this point in his spiritual life, Judah for some reason does not see the connection between the evil conduct of his sons with their early demise.

Judah is determined not to fulfill the levirate custom through his third son.

Slide -Genesis 38:12 "Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite."

After several years Judah's own wife died, and he grieved.

When he recovered, he traveled to Timnah to oversee to the shearing of his sheep with his friends.

This suggests he may not have been in terrible grief because shearing time was usually accompanied by a festival and Judah planned to take in the festivities along with his friends.

Sheep shearing work was hard and dirty work that was also known to for their rowdy parties.

Which included heavy wine drinking.

Tamar, still a widow in spite of the fact that Shelah had grown up, heard that her father-in-law was coming, and she devised a plan.

The problem for Tamar was that Judah had originally contracted for her to be in his family in order to continue the line.

Tamar was determined to secure offspring if she can and if her father-in-law has thwarted her, her purpose is to thwart him.

Her plan was to trick her father-in-law into fulfilling her plan to carry on the family line:

- It may have less to do with a desire to carry on the blessing than a fear of being discarded altogether.
- She was twice widowed with God killing her husbands and denied the third, so her prospects were grim.
- She may have also felt a right to carry the line despite the method.

Judah is about to enter into an even lower part of his life.

Slide -Genesis 38:13-16 “And it was told Tamar, saying, “Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.” So she took off her widow’s garments, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which was on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife.

Slide -When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face. Then he turned to her by the way, and said, “Please let me come in to you”; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. So she said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?”

As we see, Tamar put on a veil and pretended to be a prostitute on the road to Timnah

The veil hid Tamar identity from Judah, and Judah slept with her.

Tamar became pregnant, which had been her goal all along.

Prostitution was a respectable occupation in Canaanite society with many of the women in a village it was their way of making an offering to their own god or goddess.

This does not excuse the practice but rather gives insight into Tamar's thinking that what she was doing was not for lust or money and a normal part of her cultural practices.

Judah, of course, was a different story.

He knew better concerning prostitution and fornication.

Again, Judah did not seek God or his father to help him find a new wife.

He allowed the passions stirred by the festival activities and his loneliness to make him vulnerable to this type of situation.

The dialogue also suggests that he was not a first timer.

Slide -Genesis 38:16 “Then he turned to her by the way, and said, “Please let me come in to you”; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.”

He was brutally direct and new too well the process of the transaction.

He was familiar with the customary fee for such a transaction.

But Tamar takes it a step further and asks for a pledge, this is unusual which is why Judah says:

Slide -Genesis 38:18 “Then he said, “What pledge shall I give you?”

Judah obliges by giving her his signet ring and cord and staff.

These items are very unique to each individual that has them.

They may not mean much to us but essentially Judah surrenders his ID card, like his drivers license and credit cards.

Slide -So, we read Genesis 38:19 “So she arose and went away and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.”

Next, we read that Judah has sent the young goat to her by way of his friend the Adullamite.

Judah has the honor to keep his obligation to a prostitute but not to the marriage his daughter-in-law.

Plus, I believe he sends his friend because he wants to distance himself from the sinful act.

How shameful to pay himself for his whorish acts?

His friend cannot find her, and Judah calls off the search as he puts it in;

Slide -Genesis 38:23 “Then Judah said, “Let her take them for herself, lest we be shamed”

Judah would become the butt of many jokes because he gave such valuable objects for a fleeting pleasure.

The fact that Tamar returns home confirms that her actions were not motivated by greed or lust but rather by desperation.

Weak faith will drive people to do foolish and desperate things rather than trust God for help.

Now know this, that Judah is head of the family and therefore responsible for all that transpires in it.

Even his so-called future daughter-in-law falls under his jurisdiction.

Three months later, which is time enough for her pregnancy to show

then Judah found out that his supposedly chaste daughter-in-law was pregnant,

Slide -Genesis 38:24 “Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry.”

Judah was filled with rage: “Bring her out and have her burned to death!” he demanded (verse 24).

As she was being brought out for punishment of her harlotry,

Tamar produced evidence that her pregnancy was due to Judah’s own immorality through his signet ring and cord and staff.

Slide -**We have the start of the transition here.**

Judah saw his hypocrisy and repented, saying,

Slide -Genesis 38:26 “So Judah acknowledged them and said, “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never knew her again.”

First of all, Judah never knew her very well before this happened.

We do not know how much she had learned about Jehovah God, but she knew the importance of bearing children.

We see that God makes that clear with Abraham and Sarah, and also what God had done to Tamar's first two husbands.

Judah's words "She has been more righteous than I", we have to remember that this statement is coming from a man who has long been a deserter from his relationship with Jehovah God.

There are a couple of ways we can look at this statement.

First Tamar sin in single while Judah's sin is three-fold.

Tamar sin is of fornication.

Judah's sin is fornication, failed to give Tamar his third son Shelah as he stated and thus forced into such a position.

Tamar actions were not motivated by lust, where Judah's was.

But I believe that the word usage of righteous is more concerned with legality regarding the following the custom of levirate marriage.

This is an important custom to them, and it even becomes part of the law of Moses.

Tamar is more righteous because she is trying to keep the law while Judah is trying to subvert it.

However strange as her deed was, I believe Tamar has carried out the will of God while Judah did not.

This event marks the moment of enlightenment for Judah and his repentance.

Notice how quick was his change from ignoring his evil to open confession of it.

Slide -So now we have the return.

Judah apparently returns to Jacob and the family and becomes the leader of the family in the events to follow.

If you notice, we read this section on Judah in the middle of the story of Joseph because they explain Judah's actions throughout the remainder of Genesis.

All that transpired to send him back on the right track.

So, in the overall understanding, Reuben never repents of the shame he brought to his father Jacob, where Judah does confess and repents.

That Judah becomes the family leader, instead of Reuben is perhaps in large part due to the variance with which they handled their sin.

We can see also the way Reuben and Judah handle the request by Joseph for the brothers to bring their youngest brother Benjamin when they go back for more grain in Egypt.

Slide -Genesis 42:37 "Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you."

This statement is bold but is rashly spoken and not well thought out.

What is Jacob's issue here? The possible loss of his youngest son.

What good would it do Jacob to have another dead son and two dead grandsons,

According to Reuben's plan.

And what is Jacob's reply;

Slide -Genesis 42:38 "But he said, "My son shall not go down with you" to Reuben

But in the very next chapter Judah, from his own experience in how dangerous it is to the survival of the family to overprotect the youngest, which Judah did to his youngest Shelah

Judah offers himself as a surety for Benjamin's return

Slide -Listen to Judah Genesis 43:8-9 "Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him."

Jacob listens to Judah Genesis 43:11 "And their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this"

Later Judah assumes the role of family spokesperson before Joseph.

Judah before Joseph intercedes for Benjamin's life in regards to the stolen gold cup found in Benjamin's grain sack.

Slide -Genesis 44:32-33 "For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers."

Judah's life has already been given as a guarantee for Benjamin's safety.

Here, Judah acts, offering himself as a salve in Benjamin's place.

Judah has come full circle.

Judah conceived the plan to sell Joseph into slavery but now offers himself as a slave.

Judah becomes a type of Christ, the first person in Scripture to offer his life for another.

Judah implores Joseph **not** to send his brothers back without Benjamin.

Slide -We read in Genesis 44:34 "For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"

We can see here that Judah is a sincere son who genuinely cares for his father and would cause him no grief.

This stands in stark contrast to Judah's willingness years before to watch his father writher in anguish over Joseph's supposed death. Judah is definitely a changed man.

Judah illustrates the degree of repentance and typifies the Messiah by offering his life for another.

Tamar gave birth to twins, two boys named Perez and Zerah.

Perez is the first born.

We learn in the later genealogy that Perez was the carrier of the Messianic seed, mixed now with Canaanite blood.

The lesson of this chapter teaches God will carry out His purpose despite His people's unfaithfulness and its tragic consequences on their lives.

God's purposes will not be frustrated, even if God had to use a Canaanite woman, acting as a cult prostitute to do it.

Was Judah any different in his failings than any of the other Patriarchs?

Are we any different in our failing than Judah? Sure, we all have different failings.

God's Word consistently acknowledges the failing of the faithful

A point which both gives us hope when we falter

And emphasizes the truth of the biblical record, it doesn't glorify God's people at the expense of the truth.

Yet it is in being willing to lose everything that Judah achieves greatness, for he will receive Jacob's greatest blessing.

In giving up his life, Judah actually finds it.

Still, there is One greater than Judah.

One who had no sin and did not need to be convicted of His transgression to put Him in His place.

Christ Jesus, Judah's greatest son, gave up His life for our sake, only to be raised to new life and glory .

Matthew 16:25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Even if we are not martyred for the faith, we are to give our lives over to Jesus.

r it may be that you must speak forthrightly regarding a friend's behavior even if you might lose the friendship.

Will you lay down your life for Christ this day?

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