

The Woman Caught in Adultery

- 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.
- 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."
- ⁹ But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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."
- 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.
- 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.

Genesis 38:1-30

Women Caught in Adultery

There is a story in the Gospel of John that is probably not original to the book, but nevertheless was held by the early church with such respect and certainty that it was a real event that it was incorporated into later copies of the book as oral history to help us [understand something of Jesus](#) and the context of John. The story tells of a group of scribes and Pharisees who brought a woman to Jesus. This woman had somehow been caught in the act of [adultery](#). The man with whom she had committed the act is nowhere to be found. The scribes took her to Jesus in order to trap him in an impossible question. "[Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So what do you say?](#)" ([John 8:4-5](#)). What was the trap?

The idea is that if Jesus says they should let her go, they could bring a charge against him for inciting rebellion against Judaism. Moses said she should be stoned, so Jesus can't contradict Moses without getting into big trouble. They seem to have done this because Jesus was teaching that on one hand not a jot or tittle would fall from the law, but on the other that we need to forgive people. So how would he get out of this one? They didn't think he could.

He began to write something on the ground. What he wrote is not important and is only speculative since the story does not tell us. But as he wrote he said, "[Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her](#)" (7). One by

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one, the raging bulls turned into stammering chickens and fled the scene, leaving only Jesus and the woman left. At that moment Jesus said, “‘**Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?**’ She said, ‘**No one, Lord.**’ And Jesus said, ‘**Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more**’” (John 8:10-11).

Our story in Genesis today has something similar going on. A woman is caught in adultery. A man wants her burned alive for her misconduct. Then suddenly, he has a change of heart. The story in John teaches us about the brilliance of **Jesus to call hypocrisy what it is**, while upholding the laws of man and God, and simultaneously extending forgiveness to one who needs it. The story in Genesis provides the way **whereby the later story would even be possible**. For without this story in Genesis, there is no man named Jesus at all, and all the forgiveness he offers to the woman never comes to pass.

Relationship of this story to the Joseph Cycle

Before getting into the tale, let’s take an overview of its place in Genesis. At first glance, it seems to be out of place. We have entered into **the Joseph Cycle** of the book. We have just seen a whole chapter about Joseph. Now, suddenly, we get an entire chapter about **Judah**, fourth-born of Jacob. If the last 14 chapters of Genesis are about Joseph, how would this story help our understanding of him? Asking this question is helpful for making sense of the broader context of this story. It will be easy for us to see plenty of sins in Judah’s life here, sins that we can relate to today. But the story is not an end to itself. It fits into **the larger context** of Genesis and the Bible, and we want to do justice to that, so that we do not turn this into merely a moral lesson.

In terms of context then, a couple of not so important points are still worth mentioning. First, this story **creates suspense**.¹ Joseph has just been sold into Egypt. What will happen to him? We want to know very badly, but we have to wait. That’s what good story telling does. Second, it shows us that Joseph is going to **separated from his family** for a long time. Judah has enough time to marry, have sons, have them grow up, marry, and begin thinking about having children of their own. All of this happens after Joseph is sold, but before Judah and Joseph are reunited.

Finally, it **contrasts the previous story** in some interesting ways, while also providing background that will help us make sense of things that Jacob will **say about Judah later**, and about the Judah we will meet later on who is a very different man at the end of his life. If we did not have this story, we could not make sense of those later things. The changes are especially important when considering how they

¹ These are taken from Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 363.

come about, for it shows that God has worked in Judah’s life to sanctify him.

What kinds of contrasts do we see with the previous story? First, there is a curious phrase, “Please identify” found in both stories. Joseph is asked to please identify his sons coat (Gen 37:32-33). Judah will be asked by Tamar to “please identify” some tokens he had given her (38:25). Only two verses in the ESV have “identify” (*nakar*). These are the two verses. The effect of this will be to see how the sins of the fathers are visited upon one generation to the next. So one commentator says, “Jacob had deceived his father Isaac [at the blessing]. He in turn was deceived by his son Judah [with the coat, for it was Judah’s idea to sell Joseph], and now Judah himself is deceived by his daughter-in-law [who acts like a prostitute]. In all three episodes.”²

Curiously, Wenham points out, “goats and items of dress are used in all three places of deception.” Jacob puts on furry goat garment to pretend he is Esau. Judah and his brothers dip Joseph’s coat in goat’s blood. Tamar will dress like a prostitute and Judah will try to send her a goat.³ It reminds me very much of the Garden of Eden and the clothes that they tried to put on themselves after a deception, only to have God himself clothe them with the skins of the slain animal in order to atone for their sins. How amazing it is to see history repeat itself over and over and over again. Just this one phrase is already highlighting the need to see beyond the story to the One who was promised to Eve, the one who would alone atone for our sins on the cross.

We will talk about more of these as we go along, but now let’s start to look at the chapter itself. The story focuses on Judah and his family. There are several characters here: Judah, his unnamed wife (we’ll see the Jews had a name for her), his three sons by her, one of their wives—a woman named Tamar, some other minor characters (Hirah the Adullamite, Shua the Canaanite), and more sons of Judah at the end. We can break it down into six smaller sections.

vv 1–5	Judah marries a Canaanite
vv 6–11	Tamar marries Judah’s sons
vv 12–19	Tamar traps Judah
vv 20–23	Judah looks for Tamar
vv 24–26	Tamar vindicated
vv 27–30	Birth of twins to Tamar and Judah ⁴

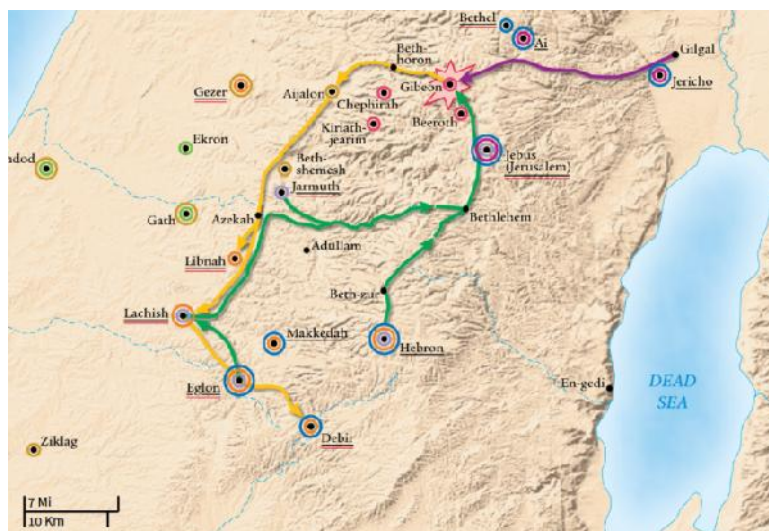
² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 364.

³ There is also the theme of red in all three: Red Esau and red soup, bloody dipped coat, and scarlet thread put on a baby’s wrist.

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 363.

Judah and His Wife

The first section tells us about Judah taking a wife. “It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah” (Gen 38:1). Shortly after Joseph is sold away, and probably after he so kindly stays to console his grieving father, Judah takes off for a small city 9 miles NW of Hebron.



All the Scripture says is that he goes here and finds a man named **Hirah**. Now, at this point, I want to introduce a book called the **Testament of Judah**. This is one of twelve books found in the larger collection called the “Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs.” It is another book that was popular during NT times. In the collection, each son of Jacob gets to tell his own story. It takes Scripture and tradition to create various stories to show how each son was prone to different sins, and how he then, on his death bed, passes down what he has learned to his own children, warning them not to follow after the evil things he has done. Quite an interesting read!

The Testament of Judah give us a flavor for what might have been going on here. Allow your imagination to run for a moment. It tells us, “I had many cattle; I had Hiram [Hirah] the Adullamite as chief herdsman. When I approached him, I saw Barsaba, the king of Adullam. He conversed with us and held a drinking party for us. When I urged him, he gave me his daughter, named Saba, as a wife” (TJud 8:1-2). This is entirely plausible. The Scripture and the Testament are both going to point to the same thing, and it is terribly important to this story.

Both say Judah takes a wife among the Canaanites. Shua is the name the Scripture gives for the father of his wife (the LXX has Suva/Suba). The picture we

get from the Scripture is one of, quite possibly, inappropriate “taking” of a wife (see [Gen 6:2](#); [12:15](#); [16:3](#); etc). Perhaps Judah threatened someone. Judah and his brothers had already killed a whole city of Canaanites. Perhaps it was as the Testament tells us, the lust of a man taken over with drunkenness. Whatever it is, the point is, she is a Canaanite. Why is this important?

There are two reasons. **One is known** to Judah at this moment. **The other is unknown**. What he knows is that God has promised to be with this family, and that through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob he would bring a chosen Seed. Because of this, his father ([Gen 28:6](#)) and grandfather ([24:3](#)) were not permitted to marry Canaanites. So Judah is showing a complete disregard for the promise of Christ here. What Judah does not know is that **he is the one** God will choose to continue the lineage of Jesus Christ! This singular fact should color everything else that you read about in this story, it is that important. For Genesis 38 is, if nothing else, God overcoming the rebellion of Judah in such a remarkable way that Christ will come from his loins.

Why would taking a Canaanite wife be such a problem? It was a threefold problem. **First**, God was giving the land of the Canaanites to Abraham and his Seed. It was to be a takeover, not a merger. But why a takeover? **Second**, God had told Abraham that the sins of the Canaanites and others living in the land was very great, and at least in part, he was punishing these people for their sins. The Canaanites were committing all kinds of horrible sins that were detestable to God, everything from bestiality to sorcery to unjust laws against the poor and orphans. This leads to the **greatest problem** of the Canaanites, which is that they were making alliances (military/marital/economic) with the greater enemies: **the giants** of the land. While the Canaanites were not themselves a race of giants, they attached themselves to them in such ways that they had to be destroyed from the Promised Land. This is why you often find Canaanites mentioned with known giant tribes such as Amorites ([Gen 15:21](#)), Nephilim ([13:32-33](#)), and Rephaim ([Josh 17:15-16](#)). So Judah’s action here is really about as bad of a thing as an Israelite could possibly do. It is the action of Esau, not Jacob.

It is into this that we now learn that Judah’s wife bears a child. The Jews had two names for his wife. **Betasu’el** ([Jub 34:20](#)) and **Saba** ([TJud 8:2](#)). [1 Chron 2:4](#) calls her **Bath-shua** (Perhaps not a name but simply “daughter of Shua”). Bath-shua the Canaanite gives birth to a boy that **his father names Er** ([Gen 38:3](#)). “Er” may mean “guard” or “**watchful**.” Then she has another boy. This time **she names him**. (Why does Judah not name him)? She calls him **Onan**. “Onan” means “**vigorous**.” Finally, she has a third son and again **she names him Shelah**, perhaps meaning “**drawn out**.” What we do not know is that Shelah is born many years later, and we will soon find

out why this is important.

Tamar and Judah's Wicked Sons

We come to the second section of the story beginning in vs. 6. “And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.” Consider Tamar for a moment. Her name means “Palm Tree.” From the Scripture we know nothing about Tamar’s ancestry. We are tempted to think that she, too, is a Canaanite. In fact, this is so tempting, that one very well respected dictionary says that she is, “The Canaanite woman who was married to Er, Judah’s first son by the Canaanite daughter of Shua.”⁵ But we don’t actually know that she is a Canaanite. In fact, both the Testament of Judah and Jubilees call her “a daughter of Aram.” In Genesis, there is a son of Shem named Aram (10:22) and a son of Nahor, brother of Abraham, named Aram (22:21). In other words, she was a Semite, not a Hamite. Now, those texts do say that her mother was a Canaanite, but the lineage is traced through the father, not the mother.

This actually becomes important to the story in those tellings of it. For they say that Er would not lay with her, because he wanted a wife from his mother’s people, “because she was not of the land of Canaan” (TJud 10:2). This is actually very strange, for Judah did not seem concerned that his own wife be a Canaanite, but he did not seem to want his son to marry one. Er probably finds this hypocritical to the extreme, and so plots against his father. How curious.

At any rate, the Scripture only tells us that Er “was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death” (Gen 38:7). There is a word play here on “er” and the word for evil “Ra.” One translator picks up on this saying, “Er erred. Again, we do not know if this is actual tradition or just someone making up a story, but the Testament says that he was wicked because he would not lay with his wife and have children.⁶ This is a very reasonable conclusion. Curiously, it says, “An angel of the Lord took him away on the third night” (TJud 10:2). This is also consistent with how we have seen that the LORD in Genesis is usually the Angel of the LORD.

So now Judah gives Tamar to his second born: Onan. “Go in to your brother’s wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up of [seed] for your brother” (Gen 38:8). This is the ancient rite called the levirate, where the next of kin (usually a brother) would take the widow and become his wife. It was expected and even discussed in the laws of the OT. This is what the book of Ruth is all about. But Onan was also wicked. And people use what he did in

⁵ Gary H. Oller, “Tamar (Person),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 315.

⁶ It actually blames Judah’s mother for this scheme.

Gen 38:9 to come up with fanciful interpretations that the verse is not talking about.

“But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother’s wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother.” Trying to be delicate here, Onan’s sin was not that he was practicing birth control or that he was doing something to himself, both of which I’ve heard as interpretations for this verse. Those kinds of interpretations are void of context. What is Onan doing? He is refusing to give children to his brother via Tamar. It is a sin against both his brother and his wife, and even his father. To put it into the larger context of redemptive history, both boys refuse the good promise of God to make the nation of Israel fruitful and multiply. But they have no idea the eternal significance of what they are refusing to do. It is this eternal significance that is in the mind of the LORD who saw what he was doing and, because it “was wicked in the sight of the LORD” he put him to death also (Gen 38:10). God does not just do this kind of thing willy-nilly. Believe me when I tell you that he has very good reasons for doing this. Before today ends, you will see what those reasons are.

At this point, poor Tamar is now twice over a widow, and she is still a young woman. Judah wants grandchildren, at least he is faithful enough to want that. So he commands Tamar, “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” (Gen 38:11). This ends the second section of the story. We are left wondering both about the goodness of God and what happens to Tamar.

Judah and Tamar

The third-fifth sections begins in vs. 12. It deals with Tamar and Judah. It unfolds a most incredible story of lies, deceit, temptation, and anger. “In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua’s daughter [we have called her Saba], died” (Gen 10:12). So Judah is now a widower himself. He loved his wife and it says he needed to be comforted. But just here, notice what it did not say about his sons. Not a word is mentioned about Judah mourning for his sons. But this is in sharp contrast to Jacob who was inconsolable about losing Joseph in the last chapter. This is one of those rather veiled parallels between this story and the former one. And it reveals quite a bit about Judah’s character.

At any rate, after a long time had passed, he goes up to another town called Timnah to his sheepshearers, along with Hirah the Adullamite. Here Tamar was told “your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep” (13), so 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” (14). Why? Because Shelah was now a grown man and had not been given to her in marriage as we promised. This poor girl had been forced to wear the clothes of a widow for perhaps a dozen or more years. This is a great injustice to her by Judah. She’s had enough. She hatches a plan.

“When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face” (15). He was tempted by her and decided to have a tryst with her. “Come, let me come in to you,” he said, “For he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law” (16). It is amazing how matter of fact Genesis is about the sins of the Patriarchs. It really does not matter what the sin is, it just tells is like it was. Nothing is hidden from our sight. No sin is too gross for them to commit. These were not pure, lilly white men. They would all have repeatedly put under church discipline at your local church.

Judah gives in to her plan. “She said, ‘What will you give me, that you may come in to me?’” (16). She is playing the part of the prostitute: Money for sex. He answered, “I will send you a young goat from the flock.” She replied, “If you give me a pledge, until you send it” (17). Little did Judah know, *this was her plan*, this “pledge.” He looked at it as a down deposit for the goat, returnable upon payment. She looked at it as a way to expose his evil.

He returned, “What pledge shall I give you?” She looked around, “Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand” (18). The signet and cord showed that Judah was a rich man, able to have his own ring like a king. His staff was both his tool for working with sheep and a symbol of his authority. It is amazing that she would ask for these things. It is even more amazing that vs. 18 says he gave them to her, all for a night of fantasy and fun ... with his daughter-in-law ... whom he didn’t recognize.

It is curious that there is some reason to believe that there was a festival taking place in this town and that Judah was drunk out of his mind. In fact, drunkenness the root sin that Judah blames himself for committing throughout the Testament of Judah. But the possibility that he was drunk also comes from commentaries which point to the sheep-shearing festivals where wine was abundant (see Wenham, 368). That explains a little more easily how he could have been so deceived by someone he knew so well, including on into the night itself, where he is still obvious to who the woman is.

In the night she arose and went away, “and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood” (19). “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” (20). Uh oh. 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” (21). Double uh oh.

His long time friend Hirah returns to Judah with the news, “I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, ‘no cult prostitute has been here’” (22). It must have been a mistake. They were drunk too and didn’t notice. “Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at” (23). After committing prostitution, the only thing he can think about is how the other boys in town will talk about him now that he managed to lose his prized possessions.

At this point the story moves ahead by three months. Judah gets word that his widowed daughter-in-law “has been immoral” (24). She has played the harlot. Moreover, she is pregnant by this immorality! Well, Judah just can’t stand for that. He becomes indignant, irate, even irrational. No woman in my house will do such a thing. “Bring her out, and let her be burned” (24). Please note, the way that this story develops will later be used by the author of Samuel in another story of a King and his friends wife: David and Bathsheba.

Now, the punishment he calls for is just amazing. In the Law of Moses, only two sins get burning to death. One is when a man marries both a mother and her daughter (Lev 20:14; Hammurabi had a similar punishment; Ham §157). The other is when a priest’s daughter commits prostitution (Lev 21:9, which you also find in the law code of Hamurabbi §110). Both involve sexual sins, and the latter is very curious in terms of what it may imply about the kind of a man Judah was supposed to be.

It is at just this point that you need to understand that when a man is betrothed to a woman in the ancient world, the sexual sin she would be committing is adultery. Yes, she played the harlot, but she was actually committing adultery. Furthermore, the man with whom she commits the act is also committing adultery. In other words, Tamar is the first woman caught in the act of adultery. She is a forerunner of the woman in John 8. But Judah does not know this yet. As far as he is concerned, it was just prostitution (just prostitution!). But in reality, Judah is the forerunner of king David here (morally and biologically). You also need to know that, “This is the only place in the OT where one individual had the power to order the execution of another for adultery.”⁷ Judah has absolute power.

Now the moment of truth arrives. As she was being brought out like a medieval witch for her burning, “She sent word to her father-in-law” (that is to Judah), “By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant” (25). And now the

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 449.

parallel with Jacob asserts itself. “Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff” (25). Jacob had to identify the bloody coat of his dead son, dead at the hands of son Judah (so he was deceived). Judah has to identify his own possessions, given freely to a his daughter-in-law who had deceived him. Beloved, this is how sin works. It multiplies and sets into the generations. Like father, like son. This is why you must be so very careful not only to not commit sin, but to teach your children through personal humility, even to helping them see things you have done wrong, so that they might be warned of things you are prone to. This is the very lesson Judah gives in the Testament of Judah, and though certainly not Scripture, it is more than appropriate for an application of the story here.

When Judah identifies them, like David before Nathan, he cries out, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah’ and he did not know her again” (Gen 38:26). Judah knew exactly what she was doing. It wasn’t because she was being promiscuous at all. In fact, one might almost call what she did righteous, in that she was giving children to the very man who wanted them so badly, while exposing the sin of an evildoer. Of course, how she did it was not in fact righteous, but her thought is much better than what it is so easy to just say—like Judah did when he demanded she be burned.

In this, Judah repents of his sin, and cannot cast the stone (or light the match), though he was the one who ordered it done, just like the Pharisees and scribes who were trying to catch Jesus in a trap, except that Judah is both the Pharisee and the man who committed adultery, making him doubly culpable. But Judah throws down his match, and is humbled greatly by being caught in his own words by his own wickedness. This then serves as the background for much later in the Joseph Cycle when Judah will actually offer himself to be the slave instead of Benjamin, showing concern for both his brother and his father. The man has a turning point in his life, and this is it. May you have a turning point in your own sins, seeing them for what they are, before you they carry you away and your sin finds you out. This is the lesson of Judah.

The Seed Continues

But that lesson can actually come in the context of good news, rather than just me scolding you to stop sinning. That is where the conclusion of the story is so vital to read. Tamar’s time for labor had come and it was soon discovered that she was bearing twins (27). Suddenly, we are reminded of Judah’s father Jacob who was a twin with Esau.

It then tells us about this very interesting birth. “When she was in labor, one put out his hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, ‘This one came out first’” (28). Identical twins and all that, they need to know who

is the oldest! And if you have ever known twins, believe me when I tell you they will let you know who is oldest. “But as he drew back his hand and [I love the language of this, because it shows very clearly how the Scripture views the baby in the womb as a human being with a will of its own], behold, his brother came out first” (29). So she named him Perez, because he breached out or burst through first.⁸ Out of the darkness, into the light of the world. Perez.

“Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah” (30). Now, our story ends here, but *The Story* does not at all end here. For this story tells something most amazing, something that Judah did not understand at the time, not until his father would bless him saying, “Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (Gen 49:9-10).

What Jacob prophesied here to his son was that Judah would become the father of, first, David and last, Jesus Christ. He would do this not through the older. And who is the older? It is Zerah, for though he came out last, he had the scarlet thread, and was the first to pop his arm out. Rather, the Promise will come, yet again, through the younger, not by outward appearances, not by birthright, but by Promise. And so incredibly, God is giving the promise to Judah—not to Joseph, but to Judah, who is such a vile man in this story. Judah who humbled himself in the face of great personal sin.

Perhaps even more incredible is that The Word ensured that Judah's wife would not be the mother of the Lord Jesus in the flesh, but rather Tamar would. Judah's Canaanite wife would not be Christ's mother. Tamar would be. Tamar who was so badly mistreated by Judah. Tamar who was thinking about the Promise and so had children by Judah. Tamar who makes it into the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Tamar, the woman caught in the act of adultery, the mother of Jesus Christ. Is it any wonder that our Lord would then come to forgive a woman such as the unnamed woman in John 8? Is it any wonder that he offers the same forgiveness to any and all who will repent and trust in him, whether they are Tamar or Judah or this unnamed woman or a Pharisee hell bent on killing him. Someone like Nicodemus. Someone like Saul who became Paul. Someone who in their sin shows treason and disregard for God. Someone like you and someone like me?

⁸ Note, “What a breach you have made for yourself.” Do not read this as if he was a breach baby. Rather, he burst through before his brother. They were fighting to get into the world first.