

<b>Topic</b>	Judah and Tamar
<b>Reference</b>	Genesis 38
<b>Date</b>	25 October 2020
<b>Speaker</b>	Yee Dian Lee

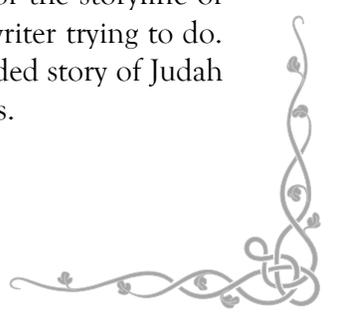
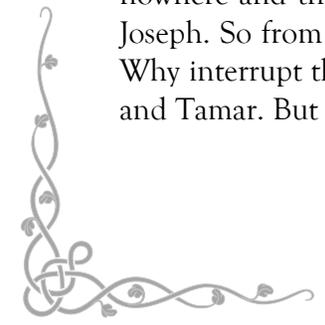
Once again, it's my joy and privilege to be standing here, sharing with you from the word of God. With a huge surge in new COVID-19 cases over the past weeks, I am back to facing the camera, which is not an easy thing to do. I would much rather see you all face to face in the auditorium. Let's pray that the situation will improve and we can resume physical services soon. We are now in the midst of our long running series on the Book of Genesis and this morning we have come to chapter 38 with the title, Judah and Tamar.

The text is taken from verses 1 to 26. Besides the difficulty I face in delivering this sermon in this studio without the congregation physically present, I'm confronted by an even greater challenge, in that Genesis 38 is one of the toughest most extraordinary passages in the Bible. There are explicit depictions of sex and prostitution. If ever there is a biblical text that is rated PG or parental guidance this is it. This is the narrative that no Sunday School would ever include in his teaching curriculum. If you have young children and the chance upon Genesis 38, you'll be at a loss to explain to them what is happening in a story of Judah and Tamar.

It contains ingredients that might be used for a juicy story, that will make your Korean dramas boring in comparison. After reading Genesis 38, the usual immediate reaction is why is this chapter even in the Bible? How can this be considered the word of God? What possible spiritual lessons can we derive from such a bizarre account? Nonetheless, we'll soon find out that our text today is really very instructive. That not only teaches us a lot about the nature of sin, but about God's amazing grace. When He deals with these people who sin against Him. There is much we can learn about how sin operates and how God works in relation to our propensity to sin...

Whenever I see my wife fixated on the gripping Korean drama, I've learned not to interrupt her. She'll get a little upset if she had to hit the pause button to attend to me. It is better for me to wait 30 minutes or so for her to finish the show and then she will give me her undivided attention. Similarly, I hate to be interrupted when I'm watching an exciting movie. Unless of course the kitchen is on fire. In a way Genesis chapter 38 is like an interruption. As I mentioned in my last sermon, the book of Genesis is about the four old Testament patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

The account of Joseph starts from chapter 37 and it stretches all the way to the end of Genesis chapter 50. Then out of nowhere, suddenly we have chapter 38, which says nothing about Joseph. It sticks out like a sore thumb in the account of the life of Joseph. Our text for today seems to have been plucked from nowhere and then inserted randomly into the storyline of Joseph. It breaks the flow of the storyline of Joseph. So from the onset, the big question hanging over Genesis 38 is what was that writer trying to do. Why interrupt the illustrious account of Joseph with this somewhat dark and rather sodded story of Judah and Tamar. But I submit to you that chapter 38 is very well placed in the book of Genesis.



It is a necessary interruption in the account of Joseph, but I'll keep you in suspense for a while, because I will only reveal the answer why towards the end of the sermon, so that you will stick with me until the end.

In the meantime, let's first dive into the text and go through the narratives. We have a long way to cover. We will dig deeper into the verses to uncover what is really going on with the character of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. We'll pick up some secondary lessons along the way before we look at key lessons in the later part of the sermon. Now to make it easier to digest the text. I have divided it into five segments.

1. Canaanite connection from the first five verses
2. The curse of Tamar, verses 6 to 11.
3. Carnal encounter between Judah and Tamar, verses 12 to 19
4. Cari Tamar. I wanted to say search for Tamar but I couldn't think of a word for search that starts with C, so I use the Malay word Cari, verses 22 to 23
5. Lastly confronting Judah, verses 24 to 26.

The text opens in verse one with Judah leaving his family to live in a place called Adullam. Now Adullam was the city of the Canaanites, and so Judah left home and settled down in Canaan. That was how in verse 2, he met the Canaanite men named Shua, whose unnamed daughter he married. No reason is given in the text to explain why Judah left the comforts of home to live among the Canaanites. All this happened sometime after the brothers sold Joseph into slavery from the end of the previous chapter, chapter 37.

I can imagine the father, Jacob being in a state of prolonged grief over the loss of his favorite son, Joseph. I can also imagine the atmosphere in the house being never the same as before with the father in perpetual mourning. Jacob lamented in chapter 37, verse 35.

I'll continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.

Besides Judah himself was the architect of the hideous plan to sell Joseph into slavery. He soaked that idea to his brothers. Jacob never knew what actually happened to Joseph. He was told a big lie. Judah was hence living a life of deception and he must have found it hard to face his father day after day. And this may explain why he left home, rather than being repentant and coming clean with his father he chose to escape from his guilt by moving away from home. It is a social distancing of sorts.

But relocating to Canaan was a terrible decision. By doing so he effectively cut himself off from all spiritual resources and denied himself any opportunity for remorse or repentance. In other words, by moving to Canaan, he found himself in a worst place where he would sink deeper and deeper into sin, which is exactly what happened to him as the narrative unfolds. But that was what Judah chose to do.

And here relies the first lesson for us from the texts.

**Spiritual wisdom is not isolating yourself from the body of Christ.**

That is to say, all Christians should belong to a community of believers where we can check on each other and bless each other on. We ought to walk the path of faith together, strengthening one another, encouraging one another. There shouldn't be any lone ranger Christians. You shouldn't say, "Oh, it's okay. I don't want to belong to any church. I don't need to attend Sunday service. I worship God at home on my own, after all God is omnipresent". This is very ill advice. No believers should be outside the perimeters of Christian fellowship and care and mutual support. For this reason, if you have not already done so please get connected by joining a live group, especially now during the CMCO, most, if not all live groups are meeting virtually weekly or biweekly. Do not isolate yourself from your spiritual family like how Judah cut himself off from his family.

Getting on with segment one, not surprisingly or living in Canaan Judah soon a Canaanite woman. She's not named in the text. It only says that she was the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. I'm not sure how Judah met her, but the NIV is very explicit about what happened next. He married her and made love to her from verse 2. The way the verse is worded. It sounds as though it was all very physical and lustful. She must have been a very attractive woman. Judah desired her only as a sexual object for his own gratification. It should have been, he married her and loved her. Instead what we read is he married her and made love to her. In any case Judah's Canaanite wife bore for him three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah from verses three to five.

Here the pertinent thing to note is that earlier in Genesis 24 Abraham was very specific about the choice of a wife for his son Isaac. He told his chief servant,

**I want you to swear by the Lord that you will not get a wife for my son, from the daughters of the Canaanites.**

Similarly, when Isaac was also worried about whom his son Jacob would marry. In Genesis 28 when Jacob was leaving to flee from Esau, so Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and then he commanded him, do not marry a Canaanite woman. And so we see that from the days of the patriarchs, intermarriage with the Canaanites was strongly discouraged as a rule. This ruling was later ratified as law by Moses in Deuteronomy 7,

**Do not intermarry with them.**

The word them here refers to the seven tribes of Canaan.

**Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.**

We now understand that the origin of this law can be traced back to Abraham's time. From this vantage point, Judah's marriage in verse two is clearly un-Godly and unwise. He did what Isaac told his father Jacob not to do. He did what Abraham didn't want Isaac to do. Here an interesting question arises. Why did God forbid his people for marrying Canaanites? Is it a blanket ban on us marrying someone from a different ethnic group? Is God a racist? The answer is of course, no. God is not a racist. Of course you're free to marry across racial lines. The prohibition here was against marrying Canaanites. The reason why he

forbade the Israelites for marrying Canaanites is because there was something evil about the Canaanites in their culture with their worship of pagan gods, which included child sacrifice which God detested greatly.

God didn't want these people to be corrupted or compromised by this evil culture. The purpose was to protect them and to shield them. And this is clear from the next verse in Deuteronomy 7

**For they (Canaanites) will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods.**

I believe that we believe us also face similar dangers as we live in an increasing godless world where money, positions, material things have become gods. If we let our guards down, our faith may be compromised like Judah. We may end up straying from the right path. Granted, we cannot avoid interacting with non-believers in the workplace, in the neighborhood, et cetera. This is the reality of living in a modern society. We are in this world, although we are not of this world, but we must be careful not to be influenced by the values of this world that run counter to biblical teachings.

Here lies another lesson for us.

**Spiritual wisdom is not compromising your faith in a godless world.**

We must remain vigilant against being swayed spiritually or morally by the people we mix with. Actually this is the added reason for us to hit the first lesson of not isolating yourself from the body of Christ.

Moving on to the second segment, The Curse of Tamar,

Many years passed and the first two sons of Judah had already grown up. He found a wife for her elder son, Ur, not unexpectedly Judah found a Canaanite woman for him and her name was Tamar. They are the main character in the narrative. But before anything could happen, her husband died. In verse 7 he was so evil that God took his life. We're not told the kind of wicked things he did that caused God to judge him so severely. In any case, this set in motion all the things that would happen in the rest of the chapter.

In verse 8, Judah instructed his second son Onan to marry Tamar

**To fulfill your duty to her as a brother in law to raise up offspring for your brother.**

This is based on the law in Deuteronomy 25. If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. This is known as the Levirate Law from the Latin word levir, which means husband's brother. According to this law, if a woman's husband dies living no son to carry on his name, it's the duty of his brother to produce a son by his widow who will carry on the name of the deceased.

Now if the deceased is the first born, who is entitled to a double portion of the inheritance then the son from the union between his widow and his brother would receive this double inheritance.

Now some of you may point out that this law of Moses was only enacted centuries after the events of Genesis 38. Now you're right. But just like the earlier law in Deuteronomy 7, this law was also ratification of what was already in practice at the time of the Old Testament patriarchs. Onan did what his father told him and married Tamar, but he had no intention of producing a child or a son for his late brother. Verse 9 says,

**Onan knew that the child would not be his**

He was motivated by greed. What should he produce an heir for his late brother, which will mean a smaller share of the inheritance for himself. So, what he did was that he practiced birth control by spilling his seed on the ground and this is the part that is hard to explain to young children. Some translations render this less graphically by saying he did not complete the physical act. Onan not only disobeyed his father, he also dishonored his late brother. He also denied Tamar her rights and what is the worst is that while he refused to fulfill his responsibility, he was more than eager to use Tamar for his own sexual gratification.

Verse 9 further says,

**whenever he slept with his brother's wife.**

So it wasn't just a single episode, but over a period of time. Tamar was just means to satisfy his lust. Verse 10

**What Onan did was wicked in the Lord's site, so the Lord put him to death also.**

God judged him severely as he did his elder brother. Both of them met the same terrible fate. Now there are several instances in the Bible when God struck individuals dead because of their evil. The well-known New Testament example is in Acts chapter 5 in the case of Ananias and his wife Safira, who both angered the Lord greatly.

The patent lesson for us here is this.

**Spiritual wisdom is not taking God lightly for is a God of judgment.**

He hates sin and he despises evil. To use the local slang, don't play play. God can get very angry when his people behave badly. We often think of God as a God of love, but let's not forget that he's also a God of holiness. He says in Leviticus 11,

**I'm the Lord your God. You shall be Holy for, I am Holy**

To continue with segment two with the death of Onan, the Levirate Law would need to be applied again, as Judah had a third son and Tamar still without a son, but he was reluctant to give Shelah to Tamar as he thought that his daughter in law was cursed. In verse 11, he was afraid that his third son Shelah will suffer a similar premature demise, like his other two sons. In all likelihood, Judah might not have known the cause of death of his two sons. It appears that he was unaware of the divine judgment that was meted out

on each of them. He blamed it all on Tamar. He thought that she was jinxed and he feared for Shelah's life. And so Judah told Tamar to balik kampung, to live a life of a widow for the time being. His excuse is that Shelah was not yet of marriageable age.

Now this is an obvious lie. He just wanted to get it off her. Judah deceived Tamar, just like the way he deceived his father, Jacob years ago. Deception after deception, the same sin again and sin has a way of trapping you if you're not careful. Another point worthy of note is that when Judah deceived his father years ago, he couldn't care less about the grief his father would suffer over the loss of a son. Now he had to bear the same grief over the loss of his own son and then another so. As the idiom goes, 'what goes round comes around', only this time it came back to him twice over.

We come to the third segment, the most astounding segment. The Carnal Encounter between Judah and Tamar.

And this section of the text starts with after a long time. So many years have passed since the events of the last segment. We read that Judah's Canaanite wife had just died and he was mourning over her passing. The typical mourning period in ancient political times was seven days. So a week passed and Judah decided to go to this place, Timnah to join his men shearing his sheep in verse 12. Now, to give you a geographical sense of this. Timnah is to the Northwest of Adullam where Judah lived, only about 15 kilometers away. To give you more background information, sheep shearing in Old Testament days took place usually in the season of spring. And it was typically a time for settling old scores and for making right what was wrong, which is exactly what Tamar did.

By this time, Judah's third son Shelah had grown up and she realized that her father-in-law had lied to her by withholding Shelah from her. This we read in the second part of verse 14. So the poor widow concocted a cunning plan to settle the score. She decided to take matters into her own hands. Just like what Sarah and Rachel did in earlier chapters of Genesis. Taking matters into our own hands is mostly triggered by impulse or haste and not trusting in God's control and timing over the situation.

She got wind of Judah's plan to travel to Timnah. So she dressed up to look like a prostitute, covering her face with a veil to disguise herself. Then she set along the road to Timnah waiting for Judah. Her scheme was to trick him so that he would father a son for her. She was planning to deceive the deceiver, but why such desperate measures? Why didn't she just find a husband and remarry someone from the town where father live now that she was back home with her own family. Perhaps as a widow twice over, no one would want her, but the answer is not what we expect. The amazing thing about Tamar is that having been married into Judah's family, she took it upon us to follow Hebrew customs and laws, including the Levirate law.

Now back to Deuteronomy 25, the Levirate law didn't allow her to marry outside the family if you notice in the verse as long as her deceased husband had a brother. If Judah refused to let her have Shelah, she was destined to live the life of a destitute widow after his own father died. In those days, women were not financially independent as they are today. Without a husband or a son she faced a big future. So out of desperation and also determination, she sat there waiting for Judah and soon enough, Judah came along and this is what it might have looked like on that fateful road to Timnah. This was painted by a Dutch

artist in 1644. But Tamar here looked more like Judah's aunt. She couldn't have been as old as this. If we work backwards, Tamar would have been at most in the early 30s. Now this is another painting by the same artist, nine years later, after the earliest piece, someone must have told him Tamar shouldn't be that older. So the artist painted her younger here, but can you point out another problem here? She didn't paint Tamar wearing a veil over her face. The artists didn't read Genesis 30 in detail, especially verse 14.

Now what about this painting by a French artist from the late 19th century. Now this is much more accurate. We see Tamar dress colourfully with the half covered. She comes across more like a prostitute here. Not that I know how prostitutes look like in those days. Anyway, along came Judah looking her over as if she were a merchandise, and satisfied with what he saw in verse 16. Judah proceeded to make a direct proposition. Come now, let me sleep with you. Normally, I thought it was the girl who makes the first move. Hey, mister want to have some fun tonight? Hey, I saw it in some movies. Okay. But Tamar quickly moved the conversation to price negotiation. What will you give me to sleep with you she asked. Judah then offered her a young goat as payment in verse 17.

Notice that it wasn't the customer who was asking about the price. It was Tamar who asked how much. Now if there is one thing, this is about Judah, this doesn't appear to be the first time he was soliciting the services of a prostitute. You see, he knew the market price which was the value of a young goat. And also the first timer wouldn't be so direct as to say, let me sleep with you. Judah was no first timer. The other thing we can infer about Judah is even worse. Later in verses 21 to 22, Tamar is described as a shrine prostitute or a temple prostitute or more accurately she was dressed like a temple prostitute.

You should know that in those days, when the Canaanites worshiped their fertility gods prostitution was widely practiced in the temple grounds. As part of the ritual. Sex was part of the worship. It's hard to imagine a more perverted and immoral culture. The indictment against Judah is therefore this. Sleeping with a prostitute is bad enough, it is a sin of fornication, but in performing the physical act with the temple prostitute it gets much worse. He was also indirectly worshiping their pagan gods, but Judah had no qualms walking down the path of spiritual decline.

Now his path of sin started in Genesis 37 when he hatched the plan to get rid of Joseph, then he deceived his father. Then he married a Canaanite woman. Then he lied to Tamar when he sent her away, then he withheld his third son Shelah from her and now the sin of sexual immorality and also indirectly the sin of idolatry, worshiping pagan gods. One sin led to another to another to another. Sin can trap us and lead us into a downwards spiral. And a useful lesson for us here is that

### **Spiritual wisdom is not underestimating the ensnaring power of sin**

In Genesis 4 when Cain got upset God said to him, if you don't do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, be mindful of how sin works. It develops or grows then it dominates and finally it destroys. To finish off segment three, Tamar accepted a young goat as payment. Judah of course didn't have the goods with him, so she asked him for a pledge, or as we say today a collateral. Now needless to say, she wasn't interested in animal. I mean, what was she going to do with a young goat? She wanted something more convenient that could be of use to her later. So she asked him for his seal and his coat and his staff.

A seal was something they carried in those days to stamp on documents. It could be in the form of a ring you wear on your finger called a signet ring, or it could be worn around the neck which is the case here. And hence your seal with this coat. She also wanted his staff and all these things were Judah's personal effects. So, the deal was sealed. The deal was concluded and the transaction carried out. He got what he wanted. She got what she wanted, but she got much more from him than he from her.

And as this part of the text ends, Tamar conceived bearing Judah's child unknowing to him. She then went back to resume her life as a widow but satisfied that she now had a child.

Next the fourth segment, which we shall look at quickly, The search for Tamar.

Judah wanted his things back, but he wanted to look respectable and didn't want to be seen carrying a goat looking for a prostitute. So, Judah sent a friend to locate Tamar in order to retrieve his collaterals. But she was nowhere to be found. Three times in a text it says that he didn't find her. Which underscores the predicament Judah was in. It is little like a respectable gentleman losing his credit card in the brothel. Hello, Citibank, is that Citi bank I just lost my credit card. How did you do the credit card? Uh, I was sleeping with a prostitute. So you don't risk losing his credibility and becoming the subject of the towns gossip.

At first, he didn't think that this brief affair with a prostitute will become so complicated, but this prostitute now has this credit card and she was missing, but he was powerless to do anything about it. He thought he could trust her to return these things, and the whole incident will be quickly forgotten and his sin would remain hidden. It only goes to show that sin cannot be concealed. Sooner or later, it will spill out.

In the end he decided to let her keep his seal and the coat and the staff. If he and his friend had kept on looking for her, his secrets would eventually be known and it will become the bud of everyone's joke. It will be hugely embarrassing for him.

And this brings us to the last segment confronting Judah

Three months into Tamar's pregnancy Judah received news that his daughter in law was with child, which to him was impossible since she was a widow without a husband. And what was more shocking to him, he was told that she prostituted herself, which was the reason she became pregnant. Judah's reaction was swift and severe. How dare she do this. In verse 24,

**have her burned to death.**

Now this is surely a very harsh punishment for Tamar. Is it because she prostituted herself? It is worthy of note that while the Mosaic Law prohibits prostitution based on Leviticus 19:29, the penalty for prostitution is not clearly specified and hence Judah's judgment on Tamar was not based on her, was more based on her sin of fornication, not on her prostitution. Fornication means illicit sexual relationship outside of marriage. Fornication is a broad term that is best understood as sexual immorality.

Now what is remarkable is that. Judah himself was equally guilty of this sin since he did sleep with a prostitute or possibly many prostitutes as we saw earlier. It is remarkable that he found it easy to pass judgment on someone who have sinned just as he had sin without passing the same judgment on himself.

What height of hypocrisy? What a sense of self-righteousness? A fixation on other people's sin and not on his own. Judah, just went one notch down in his downward spiral of sin. Jesus cautions us in Matthew 7, why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and not pay attention to the plank in your own eye?

In reflection I'm inclined to think that there is the little Judah in all of us as we are quick and prone to pointing our fingers at others and not directing the finger at ourselves first. We are as much a sinner as those who sin and this we do need to reflect. Here lies the last secondary lesson for us.

**Spiritual wisdom is not neglecting to examine yourself honestly.**

Now, this doesn't mean that we keep silent about the wrongdoings of others, but it does mean that we shouldn't be too hasty in judging others, less we be similarly judged. The psalmist exhorts us to come to God in earnest reflection. He writes in Psalm 139,

*Search me O God, know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*

As for the rest of the text, we see that Tamar was rather calm and collected in a response. She didn't shout out in open, my accuser is the father of my son. She didn't want to embarrass him in public. Instead she quietly send the seal and the coat and the staff to Judah with the message in verse 25. You know, these items belong to the man who make me pregnant. Do they look familiar to you? Now, you can try to picture the look on Judah's face. His reaction is not recorded in the text, but you can imagine his jaw dropped. He could only say in verse 26,

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

Now this doesn't mean that she was righteous and that he was less righteous. It's not a comparison of the level of righteousness. Rather, it was Judah saying, yes, I'm in the wrong. It means that he searched his own heart and finally acknowledged that he was at fault for not giving his last son Shelah to Tamar, which triggered the tragic chain of events leading to him committing the grievous sin of incest.

You see, incest is such a detestable sin in God's eyes including incest with one's daughter-in-law based on Leviticus 20:12. Judah realized just how low he had sunk descending even to the depth of incest. And this is indicated by the last line of our text

*and he did not sleep with her again.*

And this realization, Kindle reversal in his long decline down the path of sin. It marks the beginning of his redemption. We have finished scrutinizing the texts and we picked up a couple of secondary lessons.

In the concluding part of the sermon, I shall now offer you three main lessons from an overview of the text. And for that, let me return to the big question I asked at the beginning.

**Why place chapter 38 here in the book of Genesis to interrupt the long narrative of the life of Joseph?  
How can chapter 38 fit into the account of Joseph?**

As I mentioned earlier, Genesis 38 is right here in the book for a good reason. In fact, three reasons. Firstly, to present to us the contrast between Joseph and Judah, specifically between the upright and moral standing of Joseph and the careless and flawed character of Judah. Joseph was faithful and strong spiritually, whereas Judah was sinful and weak. And this contrast comes up best when you compare Genesis 39:12 where we read how Joseph fled from temptation when Potiphar's wife approached him. Compare this with Genesis 38:16, where we see how Judah gave him to temptation when he approached Tamar. Both Joseph and Judah found themselves in foreign lands. Joseph was forcibly taken down to Egypt from Genesis 39:1 while Judah willingly went down to Canaan from Genesis 38:1. Notice the common word down, taken down, went down, but Joseph flourished while Judah floundered.

Within the pages of scripture, God often use contrast to teach us his truths. Contrast is often employed in Genesis as a structural motif, as a means to impart important lessons of faith. Abel is contrasted with Cain, Abraham contrasted with Lot. Jacob with Esau, and now Joseph with Judah. As we read Judah's dark descend into sin in chapter 38, we start to see Joseph as a shining example. Joseph's outstanding spiritual credentials become more enhance and magnified when compared to Judas spiritual shortcomings. We begin to look at the conduct of Joseph as a spiritual compass to guide us in our own journey of faith.

To press this point further, Joseph is considered a prototype of Jesus. We find in Joseph's life many similarities to Jesus. And hence the first main lesson for us here is this:

**God's son Jesus is the model of our faith.** We are to emulate Jesus to walk in his steps. We have to become way more Christ-like. 1-John 2:6 says,

**Those who say the life in God should live their lives as Jesus did.**

Secondly, Genesis 38:6 very well here and is connected in a strategic way to the account of Joseph, because it serves as a backdrop to explain why God had to move the Israelites to Egypt. Let me explain. In the overall architecture of the story of Joseph, he was first forced into slavery in Egypt but later rose to become its prime minister. This is so that the family could move to Egypt years later to escape the famine, which we read in the later chapters of Genesis. But that's just the surface reason. There is a deeper reason relating to God's longer term purpose.

Jacob's family stayed on in Egypt and the Israelites were there many generations where they were the multiplied in numbers. One question here, why didn't God just move Jacob's family back to the promise

land after the famine. Why did Jacob's descendants have to remain in Egypt? You see it's because they were not ready to possess the land promised by God to Abraham. The actions of the brothers in Genesis 37 showed that perhaps minus Joseph and Benjamin, Jacob's sons lack the moral integrity that God wanted to see these people. They will not be ready to be custodians of God's covenant with Abraham.

What our text does is that it zooms into one of the brothers as an example, namely Judah to expose his sinful nature. The text shows that Judah had no hesitation in fraternizing with the Canaanites. He married a Canaanite woman, slept with Canaanite prostitutes. So, God had the Israelites stuck in Egypt for the longest time, so that they wouldn't be corrupted by pagan culture. Well, you see the Egyptians despise the Hebrews and the practice social distancing from them. They wanted to have nothing to do with them. The outcome is that the Israelites were not contaminated by pagan culture. And you can now appreciate why Genesis 38 has been placed where it is to explain why the events later in Genesis had to take place, namely the relocation of the sons of Jacob to Egypt.

But what's the main lesson for us here. It's this,

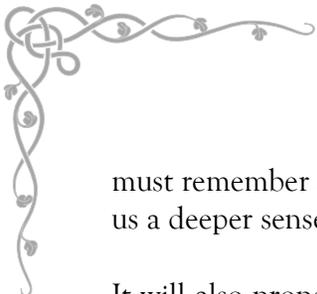
**God will do whatever it takes to make sure his people whom he loves would eventually live up to his purpose.**

Our spiritual lives, maybe marked by ups and downs but God will steer us, guide us even admonish us to fulfill his purpose. Blessed then are those whose lives are directed by his purpose. The lesson for us is that **God's purpose should be the steering wheel of our faith.**

Thirdly and lastly, why was the story of Judah and Tamar purposely placed within the story of Joseph? It is to illustrate that while God used a faithful servant like Joseph, he could also use a corruptible sinner like Judah. We discuss in detail from our texts, Judah's descend into a downward spiral of sin. His life starting from the chapter before was a catalogue of willful transgressions. And yet God used him to further his divine purpose.

God also use Tamar, a Canaanite woman who counter deceived Judah. Both of them committed the grievous sin of incest and yet out of this immoral relationship came a son who will become the forefather David and later the Messiah our Lord Jesus. Surprisingly, neither David nor Jesus came through the line of Joseph. Towards the end of Genesis 38, which is outside of our text, Tamar gave birth to twin boys name Perez and Zerah. Now Perez will become the ancestor of Jesus. In the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter one, this is just a partial list, we see the names of Judah and Perez clearly. Tamar is also listed, but we don't see the name Joseph. Genesis 38 is that single chapter on the lesser person of Judah against a dozen or so chapters on the better person in Joseph.

Who would have thought that the Messianic line will run through Judah and not Joseph who would have imagined that Judah will be given the prominence over Joseph. In Revelation five King. Jesus will be given the title, the lion of Judah. The only way to explain this is this thing called grace, God's grace. Genesis 38 is ultimately about God's grace. Grace is unmerited favor. You didn't earn it, bestowed on an undeserving person, you shouldn't be getting it. That's what happened to Judah and that's what happened to us when we were safe. God chose us not because of any inherent good in us but solely on the basis of his grace. We



must remember always that grace is the foundation of our faith. When we realize that it will precipitate in us a deeper sense of humility and gratitude.

It will also propel us to align ourselves with God's purpose and to be more Christ-like. The problem with us is that we think we are good enough when actually we are no different from Judah in God's eyes. Without his grace we are nothing.

The story of Judah and Tamar is far from a positive one. The chapter includes broken promises, deception, immorality and even incest. But through it all, we see the grace of God. The grace of God is even more amazing when we see the transformation of Judah. At the end of our text, we noted a turnaround Judah. He admitted he was wrong. The rest of Genesis gives no further detail on this transformation, but by the time we get to chapter 44 we see that Judah was a changed man. He was willing to give up his own freedom for the sake of his youngest brother Benjamin and his father Jacob. God's grace was at work in his life, lifting him up from the pit of sin to a place of honor as the Messiah's forefather.

In a similar fashion, God's grace is at work in our lives. He is transforming us. His spirit is continuing its work of renewal in us and he will finish the good work that has begun in us. **Grace is the starting point of our faith and grace will lead us home.**