

God's Will Prevails Again Genesis 38:1-30

A visit to the beach is supposed to be an enjoyable time. There is the expectation of sand, sun, and surf. You want warm gentle breezes that titillate the senses from the fresh smell of saltwater lingering in the air. You want to see the open expanse of the ocean that extends beyond the horizon. You want to see the deep blue hue of water lapping up onto the beach. Sure, there will be people, sometimes lots of them, but then, you would expect that.

Unfortunately, your expectations can run foul with the site of trash that's been left behind. It's been estimated that after the 2019 spring break 30 tons of trash was left by beach revelers – 60,000 pounds of junk. That doesn't take into account what might be left after the tide has washed ashore pieces of driftwood, gobs of seaweed and trash of all kinds. You don't know what's hidden beneath the surface until it's washed ashore by a storm or the flow of the tide. It doesn't take long for the ocean to spew out what lies beneath.

It's the same with human nature as well.

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all else, who can know it?”

The NIV says the heart is deceitful and beyond cure.

The ESV says the heart is desperately sick, who can know it?

The Message says the heart is hopelessly dark, a puzzle that no one can figure out.

That tells me that what is inside in the heart, will eventually come out in actions and attitudes. It doesn't surprise me in the least that after some horrendous event like a mass shooting when people are interviewed about the person, that they always say the person seemed so nice or that they couldn't believe that person was capable of doing such a despicable thing. The Bible is quite clear that mankind has a dark heart to begin with and given the right circumstances, what is in the heart will come out. It's in man's nature.

So what we find occurring in **Genesis 38** shouldn't

surprise us. It's one of those chapters you won't ever hear used as a call to worship. It is evidence to the truth of verses like **Jeremiah 17:9** that the heart is wicked.

Isaiah 53:6 says we are like straying sheep going our own way.

Romans 3:23 says we are all sinners.

So it is no wonder that when we come to a chapter like **Genesis 38**, where I invite you to turn, that we see the depravity of man's nature in its rawest form. If it weren't for the fact of the author being inspired by the Holy Spirit to include this, we have to wonder why it's here. It doesn't seem to fit the narrative that has shifted from Jacob to Joseph and now to Judah. But it's here and for a couple of reasons.

Even though the remaining chapters are primarily about Joseph, this is still about Jacob's large family that will in time become a large nation.

Another reason is that it shows a very stark contrast on the one hand between the life and integrity of Joseph, while on the other hand you have Judah and his lack of moral discretion.

I think it also helps us to see how easy it is to shift away from any moral compass by allowing our sin nature to control our actions when we are no longer under any kind of godly influence.

As we look at this chapter, there are several things I want you to keep in mind. The first is that God's sovereign plan always wins out regardless of sin that is involved.

Closely linked is this: God never condones sin, but He can use it for His ultimate purpose. Sin doesn't derail God's plans.

The third thing I want you to keep in mind is that no matter what you think of Judah after this chapter, there will come a day when you see a change of heart. He will receive the blessing of Jacob that through his lineage would come the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And the last thing I want for us to see is the

overriding principle of God's abundant and amazing grace. That God would pick a man like Judah through whom would come the Messiah shows us the miracle of grace and forgiveness where repentance is concerned. That should give us hope that God can use us no matter what's in our past.

So let's take a look at this chapter in the life of Judah where we note first Judah's downfall.

I. JUDAH'S DOWNFALL – vs. 1-5

Let's remember that it was Judah who suggested they sell Joseph to the traveling merchants. He had pocketed his two silver coins and was ready to move on. As we think about his downfall, we see in **verse 1** his move.

A. His Move – v. 1

Verse 1 says that “**at that time, Judah left his brothers.**” Judah's move came shortly after the incident with Joseph. We don't know exactly when it occurred just that it happened around the time of selling him as a slave. There is a suggestion by some that there was a falling out with his brothers because of the incident in Dothan. Maybe the guilt of what they did coupled with an inconsolable grieving father weighed heavily on Judah's mind, so the best thing for him to do was move out.

Harold Stigers in his commentary on Genesis writes that it appears Judah had become spiritually unreceptive, which will play later on to his weakness and carnality. Simply put, he wasn't walking with God as he should.

When you aren't walking with God, it becomes increasingly difficult to be around anyone who is, so the best thing for him to do was move out and go live on his own. That way he wouldn't have to live like the hypocrite he was around his father. Every day he saw the grief and remembered the cries of Joseph. The burden of guilt must have weighed heavily on his shoulders. So instead of dealing with his sin he chose to run from it, but it only led him into other sins. The truth of the matter for Judah and really for any of us is that when we have a seared conscience by the guilt of sin and unrepentance it

will lead to a greater degradation of character.

He packed up and moved to Adullam. It was one of the major Canaanite towns about 8 miles or so from where they were living. The Old Testament mentions Adullam several times. The name means cave because the region was made of limestone. Most notably Adullam was the location where David and his men hid from Saul.

It was in Adullam that he met a guy named Hirah. We aren't sure who initiated the friendship. Maybe Hirah had a “room for rent” sign hanging on the post of his tent. So he stayed there. In time Hirah showed him all the sights, took him to all the hangouts, told him about life in Adullam. Whatever sense of moral character Judah had, we see that it began to slowly erode away. **Psalm 1:1** warns us that if we desire to be blessed or happy, we should avoid associating with those who give ungodly counsel, those who are sinners or those who are mockers. **1 Corinthians 15:33** reminds us that bad company corrupts good character.

Judah's downfall began with his move hanging out with someone who didn't share the values he had learned growing up in Jacob's tent and it continued with his marriage.

B. His Marriage – vs. 2-5

We only know her as the daughter of Shua. That would be like me telling you that my wife is the daughter of Ted. Even though we don't know her name, we can learn a lot about Judah's wife from the passage. We learn that she was a Canaanite. It doesn't sound like there was a long courting process, similar to Samson finding a woman and telling his parents he wanted to marry her. Judah didn't go back home and ask Jacob's blessing. He saw her, he liked what he saw, so he married her.

Now the Canaanites were descendants of Canaan who was the grandson of Noah. Canaan was the one cursed by Noah after Ham saw his father naked and drunk (**Genesis 9**).

Henry Morris suggests that Ham's actions expressed a deep but hidden resentment toward his

father's authority and morality. Ham may have had a carnal and rebellious nature that was not restrained by the authority of his father. Seeing his father in a drunken stupor, Ham may have had a measure of glee that his father wasn't as righteous as he claimed to be and that his once suppressed desires could now be released. Thinking his brothers would also get a measure of satisfaction he told them what he saw. Ham may have expressed an element of immoral lust or pleasure in what he saw, but more likely he displayed rebellion and resentment against his father's authority and bucked the moral standard that had restricted him for 100 years. Essentially it was an attitude of resentment toward God. It would be a character trait that would be seen in his children and that is the same rebellious spirit that Noah saw in Canaan, and so he was cursed.

The people of Canaan exhibited the same rebellious character as their ancestor defying any semblance of a moral code to guide their lives.

Sin is deeply rooted in the heart of man that it comes out in actions. We aren't sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. The character of these descendants hadn't changed. Their lives were so shaped by sin that Abraham commanded his servant Eliezer that Isaac was not to marry any woman from Canaan (24:3).

Rebekah told Isaac that she didn't want Jacob to marry any of the women of Canaan (28:1).

But here is Judah, most likely aware that he too should not marry a Canaanite woman taking one to be his wife.

John Phillips writes "she was a raw pagan and a pagan of the very worst kink, a Canaanite pagan, a member of a sin-cursed race that practiced a religion of utter vileness."

Wenham says it was a "union based on chemistry rather than principle."

He was looking to get married but wasn't selective in who he chose. From what we read about two of the sons born to them, it's apparent that their mother had more ungodly influence on them than did Judah.

By moving to Adullam there was the temptation to live like his neighbors. It's like the old saying "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." Both his move and his marriage were part of his moral downfall. That brings us to Judah's deceit.

II. JUDAH'S DECEIT – vs. 6-11

It's been said, and maybe you find this to be true, that the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree.

On two separate occasions Abraham deceived others into thinking that Sarah was just his sister. Isaac deceived King Abimelech by saying that Rebekah was his sister.

Jacob deceived Isaac into believing that he was in fact Esau.

Now here, Judah is being deceptive as well.

There were four generations of deception.

First, there was his arrangement.

A. His Arrangement – v. 6-10

This unholy union had three sons. The firstborn was Er and he was now old enough to be married. Judah found a wife for her, a woman also from the people of Canaan. Her name was Tamar and it means palm tree suggesting a person of beauty, someone who was slender and exhibited grace. That God would use her in the Messianic line in spite of her pagan background suggests that she must have been a woman of high character, having some moral sense. It's possible that Judah may have known that through his line would come the Messiah and that may have intrigued her on hearing about it.

But whatever moral character Tamar may have exhibited, Er wanted nothing to do with any Messianic line. Our text tells us that he was wicked in the Lord's sight. You can let your imagination run with that, but given the context of what happens in the ensuing verses, it suggests that he wouldn't consummate the marriage and so produce an that would eventually lead to the birth of the Messiah. What he did was wicked in God's sight, so God put him to death.

In that day they practiced what is called the Levirate marriage. The Sadducees would try to trap Jesus in

a question about that custom (**Matthew 22:24**). A levirate marriage is part of the law given in **Deuteronomy 25:5-6** and would be illustrated in **Ruth 4:5**. Levir is a Latin word that means brother-in-law. If a brother died without producing a son as heir, the next brother in line would marry his brother's widow to produce an heir for him to keep the name alive.

Onan was the next brother who was to marry Tamar and give an heir to continue Er's family line. He was at willing to marry her and willing to consummate the marriage but changed his mind at the last minute. Our text says he did so to keep from producing offspring for his brother, knowing that if she should conceive, the child would be his brother's. But like Er, what Onan did was wicked in God's sight, so God took his life as well.

Influenced by their ungodly mother, neither of these sons had any intention of honoring God in marriage and were rebellious. Having failed in his arrangement, we see in **verse 11** his advice.

B. His Advice – v. 11

Shelah was Judah's third and last son and next in line to marry Tamar, but he wasn't quite old enough so he advised Tamar to head back home and wait until the day Shelah would be ready to take up his marital duties. Technically, she was still under his authority as the patriarch of the family but he sent her home. Judah made a pledge to Tamar that meant a prolonged engagement to Shelah.

Judah had two underlying motives for this move, which turns out to be deceptive on his part. First, he was hoping that after time, she would forget the whole thing and move on with her life.

The second reason is given in our text. Judah didn't want to lose a third son to death as he had the other two. What it tells us is that he had no intention of honoring the agreement he had made with Tamar to give Shelah as a husband. It also tells me that Judah knew the character of his son as well as the character of God to know it didn't look good for Shelah that he

would remain alive. The whole plan was deceptive.

His downfall was to move where he did and marry who he did. There was deception in the arrangement made and in the advice given. Now we see more of his depravity.

III. JUDAH'S DEPRAVITY – vs. 12-23

One sin leads to another that leads to another.

His action in selling Joseph was despicable

His action to trick Tamar was deceptive.

His action here shows his depravity.

First, we note his disposition.

A. His Disposition – v. 12

Another tragedy struck home. His wife died. We get the impression that it was not a happy marriage. He married the girl of his dreams only to find out she was a nightmare. But still, this was his wife. He spent time mourning for her. It's natural. It hurts whenever we lose someone. So he grieved for her.

Enter Hirah. He was the guy that Judah lived with for a while, who showed him around town, who likely introduced him to his wife. He's been grieving and along comes his old friend to cheer him up. "What you need is a night on the town."

It was sheep shearing time. That meant a lot of work and with a lot of work comes the need to blow off some steam. Judah had gone to Timnah where they were shearing his sheep and Hirah went with him. Sheep shearing time also meant it was a festive time. There was a lot of merriment that went along with the work. He had been grieving and now it was time to unwind and put on a happy face.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."

He had been weeping and mourning, now it was time to laugh and dance. His disposition has changed. His spirits are soaring and so are his desires. We see that in **verses 13-23**.

B. His Desires – vs. 13-23

Judah went out in search of the world's amusements. Tamar heard he was in the area, took

off her widow's clothes and went out dressed as a temple prostitute. In Canaanite culture that was a respectable position. After all, you were giving yourself to the gods you were serving. Her motives were right even if her means were wrong. It's like Jacob who knew the blessing would be his, but took matters into his own hands instead of waiting on God. Tamar took matters into her own hands as well. She knew that sheep shearing time would bring her father-in-law and so it did as she hoped. He took her and committed adultery with her.

Perhaps what is the saddest truth of all, is that she knew the character of Judah well enough to know that his lustful passions would overtake him.

After the deed was done, he promised to send a goat as payment for her services. She asked for something that would serve as security or pledge until the payment was made.

He gave her his signet with its cord and his staff. The signet represented his person. It hung around the neck. With it he signed and sealed documents and transactions.

The staff represented his position.

They would be like our driver's license and social security card. With them you can do all kinds of business because they are your identity, who you are. No one else had these same articles of personal identification. He gave them to her as a pledge of payment.

Once again, enter Hirah. Judah sent his friend to pay the debt. It's as if his conscience had finally been pricked and he realized what he did was wrong and he couldn't face the woman with whom he had committed an illicit and immoral act. So he sent someone else. The burden of guilt will often do that to the person who realizes his wrongdoing. Guilt causes us to not face our sin. So Hirah went to pay the woman but he couldn't find her. He even asked around town. 'Hey, have you seen the temple prostitute that was around here the other day.' 'What do you mean? There isn't anyone like that here.'

The KJV uses the word harlot to describe her. Here it means one set apart, indicating that she passed

herself off as a temple prostitute and not just an ordinary harlot. Hirah returned with the goat and with the news that she couldn't be found. So Judah thought he was off the hook. She could keep his things for all he cared, even though they were his identity. He didn't want any further attention brought to his indiscretion so dropped the matter.

We can certainly condemn Judah, but it's not so easy to condemn Tamar. No, we can't condone her actions, but we do understand her motive. It reminds me of Rahab lying about the whereabouts of the two spies she had hidden. Her motive was right even if her actions weren't. But that doesn't justify committing sin for something we know to be right. The end does not justify the means.

Henry Morris suggests that "her motive was not for lust or money but to ensure her place in the covenant family, which she longed for but was denied."

One sin led to another, that led to another that led to another. Judah let fleshly desire rather than godly character guide his actions.

The old adage out of sight out of mind doesn't leave you with a sense of peace. Sooner or later wrong decisions will come back around. That's evident in [verses 24-26](#). Here we see Judah's decree.

IV. JUDAH'S DECREE – vs. 24-26

It doesn't take long for bad news to travel. Judah heard something awful about his daughter-in-law Tamar. [Verse 24](#) tells us about his conclusion.

A. His Conclusion – v. 24

He was told that Tamar was pregnant and pregnant through prostitution. When he heard the news it was like music to his ears. He could now legally be rid of her and not be bound to his promise to give Shelah to her as a husband. She had committed an act that deserved the death penalty. Generally, death was by stoning for prostitution, but later on in [Leviticus 21:9](#) burning was also deemed appropriate in certain circumstances. He quickly acted to bring justice by demanding she be burned

for her actions. In his opinion his decree was that she was guilty and swift judgment was called for. But that's when his decree is turned back on himself and he has to admit his culpability.

B. His Culpability – vs. 25-26

If Tamar was going to be judged, she wasn't going to be judged alone. She provided evidence of the person who was also guilty. The evidence was in the identity of the one who owned the signet, cord, and staff. She had kept them for her own security. But notice that he sidestepped his own immorality by saying that she was more righteous than he was. Once the truth was revealed, Tamar was confident that Judah would treat her fairly and he stopped the execution. He knew what she had done and why she had done it. And he knew her son would become his heir. What he had committed as an act of lustful desire he now had to admit publicly.

We see in this story that God used a backslidden condition to bring about His purpose. He is always working in His people to bring about His will. And in the remaining verses we see the evidence of God's unparalleled grace. It's in Judah's descendants.

V. JUDAH'S DESCENDANTS – vs. 27-30

Tamar gave birth to twins. Perez, the second born, would be the one through whom the Messiah would be born. He became the head of the clan of Judah and the ancestor of David and then of Christ.

What's even more remarkable when you consider the genealogy of Jesus is that God included Gentiles, Gentile women to be exact. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanite women. Ruth was a Moabite. Bathsheba was a Hittite.

They give hope to Gentiles that salvation in Christ is available to all.

Henry Morris concludes by writing “what a marvelous testimony to God's grace, and the truth that God forgives past sins and brings new life!”

We will see in time that Judah has a change of heart and character. He will become something different than he is in this chapter.

I John 3:2-3 “Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself even as He is pure.”

I like to put it this way: “I'm not what I was and neither am I yet what I'm going to be.”

That will be evident in Judah.

God who began working in me the moment I trusted Christ as my Savior is continuing to work in me to change my character and make me more like Him each day. Some days He has more work to do because I resist that change, but as I yield to His work He makes me more like Him and some day I will be like Him when I see Him face to face.

And folks that's such a great reminder for us as we take communion. Without Christ's shed blood on the cross for us, there is no hope of a changed character. He made it possible. He makes it happen.

This chapter is included for a reason. It shows us that God's grace prevails and God's purpose will be accomplished. That's the positive lesson from this chapter. The negative lesson from Judah is that when we choose to move away from God, we can begin to live like the world and make one wrong decision after another. The Bible tells us that we are to live in the world but not live like the world. People should notice a difference.

So as we take communion do a couple of things. First, thank God for His grace that He included you in His plan of salvation through a person like Tamar. Thank Him for His forgiveness.

Second, think of communion as an opportunity to commit to live as God in His Word directs you. If you have been living like Judah, admit your sin, confess it, and begin to live in obedience to Christ.