

CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 25, 2023 • WEEK 3



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Romans 5:20-21

²⁰The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Man's Corruption and God's Grace



The theme of the Rotunda of Nebraska's state capitol is "Virtues of the State." The eight-winged figures in the dome form a celestial rose representing civic and sacred virtues: Temperance, Courage, Justice, Wisdom, Magnanimity, Faith, Hope, and Charity. These figures could very well also represent the adjectives for meditation enumerated in Philippians 4:8: True, Honest, Just, Pure, Lovely, Commendable, Excellent, and Praiseworthy.

THERE ARE SOME PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE that record events and deeds which some may find difficult reading. It should be remembered that while the entirety of Scripture is pure and holy, it also contains accounts of the depraved acts of sinful men and women. It is brutally honest about saints and sinners.

Bible commentator and seminary professor Herbert C. Leupold states this chapter was "Entirely unsuited to homiletical (or preaching) use."¹ But we must not forget that "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16) and it was "written...for our learning" (Romans 15:4).

Genesis 38 is important historically and spiritually. It gives insight into the unusual roots of the royal tribe of Judah, and provides background to the character of Judah, who plays a significant role later in the narrative of Joseph.

Pastor Arin Hess
Chaplain, Capitol Studies



Genesis 38 also warns us of the dangers of temptation and the awful consequences of yielding to it. It gives proof that even the most ungodly who will humbly repent may be transformed and bear righteous fruit. It is a revelation of the matchless grace of God toward the most unworthy sinners. Judah and Tamar are the main characters in this chapter and provide us a graphic lesson of man's abounding sin, as well as God's superabounding grace (Romans 5:20-21).²

INTRODUCTION

The concluding verse of Genesis 37 recounts the apparent end of the brothers' dealings with Joseph. Joseph is gone. He is far away. Their primary problem has been resolved, or so they think. While they have consciously hated Joseph and ridden themselves of him, they overlook the fact that their primary problem is not Joseph after all. Their primary problem is not outside of themselves but inside of them. Only one scene from the next 22 years is recorded in the land of Hebron where the brothers continue to live. It is a tragic scene of Judah's sin. It at once gives us a reminder of the kinds of things from which God chooses to rescue Jacob's family (idolatry and immorality) in their later move to Egypt.

I. JUDAH IS CORRUPTED BY PAGAN CULTURE

Genesis 38:1-5

And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. ²Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her. ³So she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er. ⁴Then she conceived again and bore a son and named him Onan. ⁵She bore still another son and named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.³

Here begins the downward spiral for Judah. He leaves the godly influence of the rest of the family and joins the pagan Canaanite dwellers and their immoral lifestyles. He not only chooses companions with ungodly beliefs and standards. He goes even farther and chooses to wed the daughter of a wealthy Canaanite citizen (Shua means "opulence"), perhaps seeking to enrich himself. The Israelites had repeatedly turned to idolatry through intermarriage with the heathen, so God had prohibited His people from marrying strangers for their own protection (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). The previous patriarchs knew this and chose not to marry into the Canaanite culture.

II. JUDAH'S SONS ARE CORRUPTED BY PAGAN CULTURE AND SUFFER CONSEQUENCES

Genesis 38:6-11

Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life. ⁸Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's



wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.” ⁹Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother’s wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also. ¹¹Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Remain a widow in your father’s house until my son Shelah grows up”; for he thought, “I am afraid that he too may die like his brothers.” So, Tamar went and lived in her father’s house.

Judah chooses for himself a wife from the Canaanite culture. He then chooses a Canaanite woman, Tamar, as a wife for his oldest son, Er. What parents indulge in moderation, their children will in excess. Judah’s selfishness and carnality are abundant in his sons. Er is so wicked that God kills him. Ornan is not much different as can be seen in his refusal to raise up a family to perpetuate his dead brother’s name (“levirate marriage” – Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 4:5). Living in the ungodly culture blinds Judah’s eyes to the reality of sin. He is ignorant as to the reasons why his sons died, blaming Tamar. Therefore, he unjustly restrains Tamar from remarrying, promising her his other son while most likely intending to defraud her.

III. JUDAH’S CORRUPTION LEADS TO LUST AND IMMORALITY

Genesis 38:12-19

Now after a considerable time Shua’s daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³It was told to Tamar, “Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.” ¹⁴So she removed her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. ¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, “Here now, let me come in to you”; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?” ¹⁷He said, therefore, “I will send you a young goat from the flock.” She said, moreover, “Will you give a pledge until you send it?” ¹⁸He said, “What pledge shall I give you?” And she said, “Your seal 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. ¹⁹Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow’s garments.

Judah pursues worldly pleasure, perhaps to comfort himself after the loss of his wife. Sheep shearing season was a time of celebrating and feasting. His attraction to an apparent harlot reveals his lust-driven spirit.

Tamar has a legitimate desire for children. It is interesting that she chose the attire of a temple prostitute, for in many ancient religious systems the





profession of a temple prostitute was considered respectable, different from a common harlot. We do know that promiscuity was very much a part of the Canaanite way of life. Tamar's motive was not lust or money, only to secure a place in a family of covenant reputation. Scripture does not condemn her, and she is included in the list of the ancestors of the Messiah. Yet her scheming was evil, even if her intentions were good.

IV. JUDAH'S CORRUPTION LEADS TO A DESIRE TO SAVE FACE

Genesis 38:20-23

When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. ²¹He asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here." ²²So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no temple prostitute here.'" ²³Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her."

Judah, having deceived his father with Joseph's garment, is now himself deceived with a prostitute's garment. He gives his personal signet, bracelets, and staff as a deposit for the harlot until full payment can be made. When he seeks to claim his deposit, he fears being shamed among men more than he had feared sinning against God. So, it is with those who try to maintain appearances. Reputation is what men think you are; character is what you truly are. The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching. All sin is against God, whether men know of it or not (Psalm 51:4).

V. JUDAH'S CORRUPTION LEADS TO HIS APPREHENSION

Genesis 38:24-26

Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" ²⁵It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" ²⁶Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again.

Three months later, word comes that Tamar is pregnant through harlotry. She is officially engaged to Shelah, Judah's son. Even though Judah never intended to go through with the marriage, he acts highly offended and calls for the death penalty. Tamar will be out of the picture,



and Shelah can take another woman as his wife. Judah's harsh reaction reflects the common double standard in Canaan. Men could go to prostitutes all they wanted, but women had to remain faithful to their husbands. Judah hypocritically condemns Tamar for the same sin of which he was guilty. Of course, in condemning her, he really condemns himself.

Tamar is prepared for this. As she is being taken out for execution, she calmly sends Judah's seal and staff to him with the message, "I'm pregnant by the man to whom these things belong. Do you recognize them?" Judah is caught in his own scheme. He is forced to admit that he has been wrong in not giving Tamar to Shelah as he promised.

Genesis 38:27-30

It came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁸Moreover, it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." ²⁹But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez. ³⁰Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.

Matthew 1:1-3

The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. ³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron...

The striking thing about this story is how thoroughly conformed to the corruption of the Canaanite culture Judah is. He's on his way to party with his pagan friend, Hirah, when he sees a prostitute. Without a thought of God, he turns aside to her. His readiness to do this and the calm way he handles the negotiations show that this wasn't the first time he has done this. Tamar knows this also, or she most likely would not have tried it. When Judah finally gets caught, he doesn't say anything about his sexual sin. He just admits that he is wrong in not keeping his promise to give Tamar to his son in marriage. He does abstain from any further sexual relations with her, though at this point it hard to tell if he is penitent.

We all are prone to corruption. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on [Christ]" (Is. 53:6). We don't have to be pulled into a lifestyle of sin. If we avail ourselves of God's grace through the Descendant of Judah and Tamar (Matt. 1:3), the Lord Jesus Christ, He will keep us from the corruption of this evil world.





CONCLUSION

The well-known writer Ernest Hemingway was raised in a solidly evangelical home in Oak Park, Illinois. His godly grandparents graduated from Wheaton Bible College. His grandfather, Anson Hemingway, shared a close friendship with the evangelist D. L. Moody. Ernest's physician father wanted to be a missionary doctor, but his mother was too much of a city girl and refused to go. But Ernest was raised in the church where he tithed his allowance, sang in the choir, read completely through his King James Bible, and passed a comprehensive exam on it.

After high school, he moved to Kansas City to become a reporter. He stopped going to church and began drifting from his upbringing. He enlisted in World War I, was wounded, and took to drinking to ease the pain. He once offered his sister a drink. When she refused, "he told her not to be afraid to taste all of what the world has to offer just because Oak Park had labeled it sinful and off-limits." He married a worldly woman and moved to Paris to further his writing career. Totally alienated from his parents and their godly lifestyle, he would eventually go through four wives.

In his late years, "he grew distant from everyone. He was notorious for his drunkenness. He would not stand up straight and, he stopped communicating verbally." A friend said that his "every hour was filled with the pain of being truly lost and alone." Hemingway's own description was, "I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug into." Finally, on a sunny Sunday morning in Idaho, at age 61, Ernest Hemingway took his own life.⁴

Hemingway's tragic life did not have to end the way it did. He started with bad choices: to distance himself from God's people, to marry outside of the faith, to participate in the pleasures of the world, and he faced the consequences of those choices.

Pastor Arin Hess

Questions to Consider:

In light of 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals,'" when should we pursue a friendship with an ungodly person and when should we drop it?

How can we live in this evil world and yet avoid being corrupted by it?

How can we maintain God's grace without licentiousness and His holiness without legalism?

No one ever falls into sexual sin without first entertaining it in his or her mind. Where do we cross the line between temptation and sin?

FOOTNOTES

1. *Exposition of Genesis*, Baker Book House, 1950, Vol. 2, p. 990.
2. Some of this material is adapted from Pastor Steven Cole's work found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-64-if-god-sovereign-why-am-i-pits-genesis-37:1-36>.
3. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
4. This is culled from "Ernest Hemingway: Tragedy of an Evangelical Family," by Daniel Pawley, *Christianity Today*, November 23, 1984, pp. 20-27.

Much of this material was gathered by Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina; it is used with permission.

Personal Study Notes

Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything is worthy of praise, dwell on these things.



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