

Judah and Tamar: God's Amazing Grace

Genesis 38

James 4.17 says, "To one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." God's perspective on sin, and His ability to sovereignly bring good out of a corrupt situation, is on display in our passage today – the scandalous story of Judah and Tamar.

Family Ties: Judah embraces Canaanite ways (1-11)

- *Like father, like sons: Sin spreads* (1-10)
- *Deception and a desperate daughter-in-law* (11)

Judah Corrupt, Caught; Confessed, Changed (12-30)

- *Tricking the trickster: Tamar seduces Judah* (12-19)
- *Condemnation turns to confession* (20-26)
- *The blessing of life – and a peek at the future* (27-30)

Applications

- Bad company corrupts good morals (1 Cor. 15.33)!
- Confessing sin leads to transformation of heart.
- God's restoring grace is truly amazing!



1. The story of Judah and Tamar isn't found in children's Sunday School books – it's "R rated"! But while it is scandalous on its surface, it is instructive in its heart. Gen. 38.1-11 presents the setting: What do the details about Judah's life reveal about his spiritual condition? It's often observed that *like father, like son*: God's assessment that the oldest, Er, was evil, speaks for itself. What character flaws does the next son, Onan, display?
2. In Gen. 37 we saw how sinful action (selling Joseph to slavery) led to deception (making Jacob think his son had been killed by wild animals). How is this pattern replicated in v.11? Judah made Tamar utterly dependent by keeping her in his house, but he never intended to give her his third son, Shelah, in marriage. Instead of seeing his own sin (and that of his sons), he blames his misfortunes on her, and denies her the well-being and status she deserved. How does knowing this affect your view of Tamar luring Judah as a prostitute in verses 14ff?
3. Pious Christians loudly condemn sexual immorality; this story is a critique of our haste to judge worldly society. C. S. Lewis once wrote, *The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and back-biting: the pleasures of power, of hatred.* How does Jacob reflect this? How does the inspired narrator assess the relative guilt of Tamar and Judah? How would you?
4. Imagine for a minute that God asks you to oversee His 'Human Resources' department, and Judah and Tamar are applying for a position. What spiritual roles would you recommend them for? What chance for spiritual success would you give them? In your eyes, what actions would disqualify them? Compare your assessment with God's: See their names in Matt. 1.3 and Luke 3.33, and Judah's name in Rev. 21.12! If God's grace can do that with Judah and Tamar, imagine what He can do with you!