

Readings

Scripture

¹It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, ³and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. ⁵Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.

⁶And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. ⁸Then 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." ⁹But 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. ¹⁰And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. ¹¹Then 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.

¹²In 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. ¹³And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," ¹⁴she 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. ¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶He 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?" ¹⁷He answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." And she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it—" ¹⁸He 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. ¹⁹Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

²⁰When 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. ²¹And 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." ²²So he returned to Judah and said, "I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, 'No cult prostitute has been here.'" ²³And 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."

²⁴About 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." ²⁵As 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." ²⁶Then 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.

²⁷When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. ²⁸And 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." ²⁹But 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. ³⁰Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

- Genesis 38 (English Standard Version)

Sermon Outline

Doing Justice; Loving Mercy; Walking Humbly *Intended for Good*
Genesis 38 Brad Anderson

God requires his people to practice the weightier matters of the law as a demonstration of love... (Micah 6:8)

There are failures to love found throughout the Bible; where do we see this in Genesis 38?

In the failure to do justice by caring for a widow... (Genesis 38:8-10)

In the failure to love grace by keeping a promise... (Genesis 38:12-14)

In the success of one man who walked humbly with God, following his plan... (Genesis 38:24-30)

Reflection Questions *(taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)*

- When have you been awakened by a neighbor or family member in need? What kind of needs get you out of bed?
- Why is this digression about Tamar inserted into Genesis in the narrative about Joseph? Support your answers from the text.
- Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10 on brother-in-law marriages. Why would this law be important for widows in ancient Israel? How would this provide social structures for the poor, widow, orphan, and outcast?
- What is the duty of Judah's sons, and even Judah himself, to Tamar?
- Do you think Tamar acts morally here? Why or why not? In what sense is Tamar "more righteous" than Judah?
- What situations, if any, would ever justify wrong acts to achieve something right? How does Genesis 38 support your answer?
- These events in Genesis 38 offer a window into God's redeeming work in Judah. Judah grows over the course of Genesis 37-50. He becomes more a man of mercy and justice and humility. Through real suffering he becomes much less selfish and much more self-sacrificing. Read Genesis 43:1-10, 44:18-34. How do these later interactions demonstrate that God is changing Judah?