
Day 17 - January 17

Period of the Patriarchs (2100 -1525 BCE)

Joseph's Early Years

Judah and Tamar

Readings: *Genesis 37:1-36; 38:1-30*

Reflections:

- The story of Joseph is told with a dramatic flair. The reader would not naturally like Joseph at first. He is at best naïve, and at worst arrogant. Here is a teenager, walking around with a flashy coat, daddy's boy, and boasting about how everyone in his family will one day bow before him as servants. It is easy to see why his step-brothers hated him.
- We see the role of dreams as an important way that God speaks. As we will see Joseph will have an ability to interact with dreams and understand how God speaks through dreams. This approach to hearing God will continue to take shape and significance throughout the entire narrative (see Joel 2:28; Acts 16:9; Acts 18:9)
- How the brothers respond to Joseph, some wanting to kill him and others wanting to save him, will later dictate how their descendents are blessed as tribes. We should note that our obedience or lack of obedience can have an impact into future generations. Our children and our descendents are blessed by our hearts being fully aligned with the purposes of God.
- The story of Joseph's rescue and being sold into slavery reveals God's sovereignty as we will see that something terrible is used by God to complete his purposes in ways no one could guess at this point in the story.
- Tearing one's clothes was a sign of deep grief. We see both Rueben and his father grieve deeply for Joseph. The loss of a child is devastating and so again in the narrative we see the impact of a father who grieves the death of his son. For Jacob he will receive his beloved son Joseph back from the dead.
- Into the story of Joseph is inserted another story that is completely shocking. The practice at the time was that if a man died, his brother would marry his wife and help her have children to carry on her brother's line. This would help ensure that the woman was protected and cared for into her old age by her children. This was how they provided care and protection for those who were completely vulnerable. Tamar, Judah's daughter in law is left as a widow

and Judah's other son, Onan, has sex with her but won't let her get pregnant and fulfill his responsibility to give her a child. He wanted the sex but he didn't want to actually care for her. In a sense, he was being selfish and abusive. Now Onan actually dies under judgment for this and so we see again the Lord's righteous anger against those who abuse the vulnerable. Judah does not have much compassion though and doesn't ensure she is cared for. Rather he sends her back to her own father's house and doesn't continue to care for her. He has what seems to be a good reason in that his other son was apparently too young at this point. Now apparently Judah doesn't follow through with this promise because after a long time Tamar is still with her family. Judah's wife dies and so this sets the stage for what is one of the most shocking stories in the story of Israel. Tamar poses as a Gentile shrine prostitute, seduces Judah, gets pregnant by him and then confronts him in the most dramatic fashion. Now this story is wrong in every conceivable way from the point of view of the Law. Tamar was breaking every major law. She was aligning with Gentile paganism. She was posing as a prostitute. She seduced her father in law. She was confronting a father-figure rather than doing everything possible to honor him. Yet, in the end, she was the righteous one. How can someone do something that looks wrong in every conceivable way and still be righteous? God does not look at outward appearances but at the heart. This we will see over and over again. Tamar was being victimized by Judah and so God blesses Tamar with twins and calls her the righteous one.

- We see at the birth the use of a scarlet thread to identify the one son. This use of scarlet will later return in the story when another prostitute Rahab is saved through a scarlet rope (see Joshua 2:18-21). This red rope or thread is a symbol of grace, a mental image of being marked with a blood colored band that brings deliverance.
- We also should note that it is through Perez that the Messiah will come. The Messiah actually does not come through this line because of Judah's righteousness but because of Tamar's righteousness. Matthew will point this out in his genealogy of Christ (see Matthew 1). Another shock? In a patriarchal society, the line of the Messiah will be directed through the righteous act of a woman, not a man. And this righteous act will include breaking the law in every major way in an effort to fulfill true righteousness and justice. We see here right at the beginning of the story of Israel the radically irreligious nature of God's view of righteousness and salvation. Again, God does not look at the outward appearance but at the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7).