

# The Story of Joseph

## *The Lion Trap*

Part 12 – April 22, 2012

In the beautiful ugliness of chapter 38, we see the wretched depths to which God’s holy grace will sink in order to rescue and redeem sinners, like us, when we’re at our worst!



In chapter 38, Judah turns his back on his family and his faith, moves to a Canaanite city, and marries a Canaanite girl. Twenty years later, his two, wicked, oldest sons are dead, his young, pagan wife has just died, and he’s favoring his youngest and only surviving son, Shelah. And his daughter-in-law, Tamar, deprived of her levirate right and necessity for a son (through Shelah), has disguised herself as a prostitute and deceived Judah into fulfilling his obligation, by getting her pregnant.



When Jesus is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”, (Rev 5:5) *this* is the tribe! He’s not just the “friend of sinners” (Mat 11:19) ... they’re *family!*

And Judah might be the worst of the bunch of Jacob’s sons. #1 (Reuben) repented and tried to rescue Joseph. And when #2 and #3 (Simeon and Levi) slaughtered the Shechemites, it was *zealousness*, not rebelliousness.



If God wanted to show us how to *earn* his love or *deserve* his grace, #4 was a bad choice. But, if He wanted to show us that we can’t earn it, and don’t deserve it, that He’s the God of moral failures and disgraceful hypocrites, well then, He couldn’t have made a *better* choice! By seeing how *rotten* Judah was, we can see how sovereign, loving, and gracious God *is*. By choosing the worst one, He chose the best way to show us that He’s out to redeem, not condemn.



Let’s open our story ... Judah has just surrendered his business seal and family staff in pledge to Tamar (who he thinks is a prostitute), planning to later redeem them with a goat.

Both the seal and staff would be inscribed with his name.

After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow’s clothes again. – *Genesis 38:19 NIV*

The grieving period had long past (as we discussed last time), but Tamar continues to wear the clothing of a widow to shame Judah and broadcast his breach of contract to the community. She's slandering his good name, so he's most likely making some kind of public excuse. "She's cursed by God. Her barrenness is the proof. Any man who sleeps with her will take on her curse. My two dead sons are the proof!"

And he doesn't want to incite *more* gossip, by chasing after a prostitute with a goat to retrieve the symbols of his good name. So, he sends his ol' pal, Hirah to do his dirty work.

Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. – *Genesis 38:20 NIV*

Hmm, how interesting: The cost of his sin can't be redeemed with a young goat that's offered by another on his behalf.



It isn't just *Judah's* name inscribed on that seal and staff.

Remember when his mother Leah was so upset that Jacob (his father) wouldn't love her, that she named her first three sons after her misery? But something changed with #4; she stopped fixating on her plight and fixed her eyes on the Lord.

Flashback about 40 years to Judah's birth ...

... and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. – *Genesis 29:35b NIV*

Ever notice how sometimes "**LORD**" or "**GOD**" are in all-caps? It's a traditional way of treating the four letters of God's Sacred Name (YHWH in English, and called the Tetragrammaton). We pronounce it Yahweh, but it was closer to Yahuah. The Hebrew for "**praise**" here is ya'dah. And "**Judah**" was pronounced Yahudah. There's a language conversion quirk with Ys and Js. That's why hallelujah (i.e. praise you Yah) is spelled hallelujah, with a J.

... and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will ya'dah Yahuah." So she named him Yahudah. – *Genesis 29:35b NIV*

"**Ya'dah**" and "**Yahuah**" begin and end the same. So, Leah takes the "dah" from ya'dah and sticks it in Yahuah, and gets "**Yahudah**". This is inspired ... literally! She creates a new word. Judah or, Yahudah is God's Sacred Name enveloping praise!

The staff that Judah so hastily and carelessly surrendered to sin will become the scepter of the King who'll conquer it, the One whose sacred name, enveloped in praise, is inscribed upon it. Flash-forward about 60 years from Judah's birth to his blessing ...

[Jacob, on his deathbed said] "The scepter [i.e. royal staff] will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations [plural] is his." [He who redeems Israelite and Canaanite alike] – *Genesis 49:10 NIV*

This found its perfect fulfillment in Jesus. Flash-forward about 1990 years to John's revelation ...

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed." ... And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." – *Revelation 5:5a, 9 NIV*

Judah is ensnared by his own sin and rebelliousness. But the True Lion allows himself to be trapped by the rebelliousness and sin of man, in order to die for it and free us from it. The Lion of Judah is the Lamb who was slain.

Joseph was Yahuceph (later shortened to Yuceph). And Joseph and Judah are Jacob's only sons whose names contain the *Sacred Name*. Now watch what happens when Hirah goes looking for Tamar ...

He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?" **[Shrine prostitute? This is the first mention of a "shrine" prostitute!]** "There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said. – *Genesis 38:21 NIV*



So, Tamar sat where shrine prostitutes didn't do business.

But, if Hirah is describing the girl he saw (38:12 says he was *with* Judah), then Tamar must have looked like a *shrine* prostitute.

Shrine prostitutes were meant to excite the god into granting fertility in their fields and herds. And they often wore veils, like Tamar did, as symbolic brides of the god.

But, Judah had regarded Tamar as a *regular* prostitute. Flashback to the encounter ...

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute **[The word here is "zanah" [zä-nä], an unclean one; but, Hirah asked for the qēdeshah [ked-uh-shä], the sacred one]** ... – *Genesis 38:15 NIV*

Judah's lived in the land 20-some years; he knows what a shrine prostitute looks like. But, she wasn't *at* the shrine; so maybe he thought she was "off the clock". Not that he even cared. But the *inspired author* wants us to notice the distinction. When Judah thought he was buying a cheap thrill with an unclean one, he was actually doing nothing less than sacrificing God's sacred name in the worship of a pseudo-sacred whore.

Judah overvalued a fleeting moment of self-indulgent debauchery, and greatly undervalued the eternal Sacred Name of God. And sadly, it's something we're all guilty of in one way or another. Like Judah, we're in the habit of trading limitless lasting joy in the full radiance and goodness of God, for short-lived, self-destructive pleasures that only subtract from our happiness.

When the True Lion walked the earth, He said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Mat 16:26a)

If you're ever going to stop trading God's eternal treasures for temporary trash, you must know in your soul that intimacy with the Father is what you've been seeking all along. You've just been turning to pseudo-sacred substitutes for Him!

So he went back to Judah [i.e. Yahudah] and said, "I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, 'There hasn't been any [qēdeshah] shrine prostitute here.'" Then Judah [i.e. Yahudah] said, "Let her [The sacred whore] keep what she has, [God's Sacred Name on the symbols of his authority and identity] or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, ["I kept my word"] but you didn't find her." ["We did our best"] – Genesis 38:22-23 NIV

He's recklessly dismissing a critical choice: do whatever it takes to retrieve and restore God's sacred name as your identity and authority in spite of the world's ridicule ... or don't.

He just wants to sweep this whole sleazy affair under the rug. I don't blame him. You ever do that? Ignore the responsibilities you incur by your sin, hoping they'll just magically go away without you having to face 'em and deal with 'em? Trouble is, when we sweep sin under the rug, it eventually bulges out, trips us up, knocks us down, and forces us to face it.

About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." [He has no idea that's his sin bulging out of her!] – Genesis 38:24a NIV

You'd think he'd have some empathy. He hasn't provided for her in his deceased sons' absence, and ... *he sleeps with prostitutes!* But, human pride and hypocrisy knows no bounds.

Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!" [An unusually severe reaction and a cruel way to die] – Genesis 38:24b NIV

Maybe he's subconsciously overcompensating for the consuming guilt and shame of his own immorality. We often flare up at the sin of others when it ignites any guilt and shame in ourselves. But I think it's more sinister than that. A baby removes his proof-of-barrenness for his excuse that Tamar is cursed.



Now's his chance to be rid of the scapegoat whose causing him grief, *and* his legal obligations to her, *and* any subsequent backlash from the community, *and* the stress of facing his own failings. *And* the best part of all, he can disguise it as *righteous indignation!* Win-win-win!

If you can't sweep it under the rug, blame and burn, baby! It's the same philosophy he used to get rid of Joseph.

He has no idea of the trap that's about to spring! We can't get back what we've traded away, but we can begin anew, when there's true brokenness and surrender and repentance.

And this is where we have to end God's story for today.