

Bible Stories

JUDAH

Genesis 49:8-10

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We are going to backtrack a little bit today. It wasn't until I started writing *"Moses at the Burning Bush"*, that I realized we really needed to talk about Judah. Here is his story:

Genesis 29:31 tells us that Leah was unloved. When she gave birth to her first son, Reuben, she said, *"Now my husband will love me."* What a sad statement.

Two sons later, she was hoping for the same outcome, *"Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."*

Judah was Leah's 4th son.

Even after the 6th son, Leah was still holding out hope that Jacob would finally love her and treat her with honor.

Without going down the rabbit hole – we can comfortably say that Leah's sons would have felt inferior – 2nd rate – because they were the children of someone who was unloved. To know that your father doesn't love your mother is a terrible weight to carry and no doubt this truth impacted their emotional wellbeing and worldview.

At any rate, years would go by. All the brothers were united in their jealousy and hatred of Joseph. Judah emerged as the leader of the group when he came up with the brilliant idea of making a profit – 20 pieces of silver – off of Joseph instead of killing him.

Inserted in the middle of Joseph's story we find the story of Judah – **Genesis 38**.

Judah married a Canaanite woman, named Shua. Together, they had 3 sons – Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er was old enough, Judah got him a wife from the local town. Her name was Tamar.

We are also told that Er sinned and was killed. As was the custom, the 2nd son, Onan, married Tamar in order to produce children in the dead brother's name. For whatever reason, Onan did not like this arrangement, so intentionally did not get Tamar pregnant. He, too, was killed.

Judah was worried that Tamar was a curse, so he said to her, *"listen, Shelah is too young to marry, so return to your father's house and live as a widow until he's old enough, then you can marry him."* – Judah had no intention of ever letting this happen, but he needed time to think.

Some years went by and Judah's wife died. Scripture tells us that when Judah had recovered from his grief, he went, with his friend, Hirah, to Timnah, where the sheep were being sheared.

It came to Tamar's attention that Judah was in town. By this time, she knew that Judah was not going to fulfill his promise, so, *"she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah."*

When Judah saw her sitting, by the side of the road, he thought she was a prostitute, because her face was covered. He strolled over and propositioned her, *"Let me sleep with you."*

"What will you give me?" she asked.

"I left my wallet at home, but I'll send you a young goat from my flock." He responded.

"I'll need some collateral – how about your seal, cord and staff."

He did – they did – she got pregnant – he went home.

Judah, true to his word sent his friend, Hirah, to make payment, but the **“prostitute”** was nowhere to be found. Hirah even asked the locals if anyone had seen the shrine prostitute, to which they responded, **“We don’t have a shrine prostitute.”** ---- Very mysterious!!

“Fine,” said Judah, **“she can just keep what she has.”**

3 months later..... Judah was told, **“Your daughter-in-law is guilty of prostitution AND she’s pregnant!”**

Judah was filled with righteous indignation. How dare she do such a thing! **“Bring her out and let her be burned alive!!”** he commanded.

As Tamar was being dragged out of town, she sent a message to Judah along with a couple of items she’d been hanging on to.

“I am pregnant by the man to whom this seal, cord and staff belong.” ---- **“Can you tell me his name?”**

BUSTED!!! Judah recognized them and said, **“She is more righteous than I because I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.”**

Tamar had twins: Perez and Zerah.

It would appear that Judah is changing.

Now we find ourselves back within the story of Joseph. The 7 years of plenty have come and gone and famine has hit – hit hard – even Canaan was impacted.

Jacob sent the 10 oldest sons to Egypt to buy grain.

They met the Governor of the land, who seemed pretty testy.

They were accused of spying and thrown in jail for 3 days.

Simeon was forced to stay behind, while the remaining 9 were given grain and told, in no uncertain terms, that they better produce brother #12 at their next visit, or there would be consequences.

We have arrived at **“next time”**. The grain was running out, but Jacob refused to let Benjamin out of his sight – there must be another way.

There was no other way.

Something had definitely happened in the heart of Judah. While, Reuben, the oldest son, offered his **sons** as surety for Benjamin’s life, Judah, the brother who had suggested the sale of Joseph into slavery, offered **himself**. He, personally, would guarantee the life of Benjamin:

- **Genesis 43:8-9** - Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. ⁹ I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life.

Little did he know that it wouldn’t be long before that promise would be tested.

When the brothers finally arrived in Egypt, the Governor received them and invited them all home for lunch.

They were seated in chronological order and Benjamin was given 5x more food than the rest.

Strange, but at least the Governor had gotten over his suspicions.

Relieved that the nightmare was over, the brothers headed for home, not knowing that the Governor’s favorite cup had been slipped into Benjamin’s grain sack.

Not long into their journey, the police caught up with them, accusing them of theft.

Taken aback, the brothers replied, **“Why would we do such a thing? We would never do anything like that! Listen, look in all our sacks, if you find the cup, the person whose sack you find it, will die and the rest of us will become your servants.”**

Beginning with the oldest, every sack was checked:

- Reuben – nope.
- Simeon – nope.

- Levi – nope.
- Judah – nope.
- Dan – nope.
- Naphtali – nope.
- Gad – nope.
- Asher – nope.
- Issachar – nope.
- Zebulun – nope.
- Benjamin – Holy Cow!!

As Benjamin was slapped in the cuffs, the official told the rest to go home.

“Sorry” Judah said, *“you take one, you get us all.”* - and back to Egypt they all went.

Upon their return, Joseph was *“incredulous.”* How could they have taken advantage of his generosity in such a way?

Regardless, he was a fair man, so, everyone – except for Benjamin – could go home.

In that moment Judah had a choice to make – what must he have been thinking.....

Notice only his words in his conversation with Joseph:

- **Genesis 44:16-34** – “What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves -- we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.” ----

Then Judah went up to him and said: “Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.” ----

“Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!’” ³³ “Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴ How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father.”

20 years before Judah had willingly sold an *“innocent”* brother for profit. Now he would sacrifice himself and his future for a *“guilty”* brother.

In that moment a family was reunited and restored and a legacy was born.

At the end of Jacob’s life, he blessed all his sons. Notice the blessing he gave Judah.

- **Genesis 49:8-10** - Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. ⁹ You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness-- who dares to rouse him? ¹⁰ The scepter 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 is his.

To Judah, the 4th son – the crowning blessings of the birthright were given.

What do we make of the story of Judah?

It is a story of transformation - from a jealous, cruel, lying, and scheming brother to an honorable son who was humble and self-sacrificing.

He became the young lion - the head of the entire family.

We love the story of Joseph because of his fidelity and integrity before God, but it is from Judah, not Joseph, that Israel’s greatest king would come:

- **Psalms 78:68-72** - but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved. ⁶⁹ He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. ⁷⁰ He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; ⁷¹ from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. ⁷² And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

It is from of Judah, not Joseph, that the promised Messiah – Jesus – would come:

- **Micah 5:2-4** – “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” ³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.
- **Zechariah 10:4** - From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.

- **Matthew 1:2-16** - Jacob the father of Judah Judah the father of Perez Perez the father of The father of The father of Boaz the father of Obed Obed the father of Jesse Jesse the father of King David Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Judah: Forgiven – Restored – Transformed.