

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS

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THE OVERVIEW

In this week's portion the focus shifts from the kidnapped Joseph to his older brother Judah. Our story begins with the clear indication that Judah is separating himself from his brothers and going, at least temporarily, his own way. The direction of his journey takes him down to an area that will eventually be the inheritance of his descendants. But this journey is not all for good. Judah marries and produces three sons. Two of these three sons have the odious distinction of being slain by the Sovereign One for their wickedness. Our story concludes with Judah deceiving his daughter-in-law and then being deceived by his daughter-in-law in an effort to obtain justice. Two further sons are born to Judah by his daughter-in-law, one of which will play a significant role in the life and history of Israel.

THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 38:1 Judah heads south
- Genesis 38:2-5 Judah takes a wife and begins a family
- Genesis 38:6 Judah takes a wife, Tamar, for his firstborn son Er
- Genesis 38:7 YHWH judges the wickedness of Er
- Genesis 38:8-10 Onan goes in unto Tamar and is judged by YHWH
- Genesis 38:11 Judah deceives Tamar and sends her home to wait for Shelah
- Genesis 38:12-23 Tamar deceives Judah to fulfill his son's duty
- Genesis 38:24 Tamar's "treachery" is discovered
- Genesis 38:25-26 Judah's treachery is revealed and Tamar is justified
- Genesis 38:27-30 The birth of twins

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is this an independent story from the Joseph story?
2. Why does the focus shift to Judah?
3. What is revealed about Judah by the direction he takes?
4. What connections are there to Shechem?
5. What does Judah have in common with his three older brothers?
6. What is revealed by Judah's descent?
7. Whom does Judah marry?
8. What wickedness is done by Onan?
9. Does the Torah forbid a brother from having intimate relations with his brother's wife?
10. What is a levirate marriage?
11. How does Tamar win justice?
12. What does the name Tamar mean, and what does it say about her?
13. How is Judah redeemed?
14. What is significant about the children born to Tamar?

THE TEXT

Genesis 38:1-30 *And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. ²And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her. ³And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. ⁴And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. ⁵And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. ⁶And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. ⁷And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of YHWH; and YHWH slew him. ⁸And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. ⁹And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. ¹⁰And the thing which he did displeased YHWH: wherefore He slew him also. ¹¹Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house. ¹²And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep. ¹⁴And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife. ¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face. ¹⁶And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) and she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? ¹⁷And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it? ¹⁸And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from*

her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.

²⁰*And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not. ²¹Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place.*

²²*And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place. ²³And Judah*

said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her. ²⁴And it came to pass about three months

after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

²⁵*When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff. ²⁶And Judah acknowledged them, and*

said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more. ²⁷And it came

to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. ²⁸And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out

first. ²⁹And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? This breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. ³⁰And afterward came out his

brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.

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Over the past few months we have followed the subtle transitions in the patriarchal narratives from Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob, and from Jacob to Joseph and his brothers. In this week's portion, however, we are hit squarely in the face with what seems like a blatant interruption of the flow of the previous story's focus upon Joseph and his journey down into Egypt. Let us look at the ending of last week's portion and compare it to the opening verse of next week's portion.

Genesis 37:36 *And the Midianites sold him (Joseph) into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.*

Genesis 39:1 *And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.*

Clearly the focus of both of these verses is Joseph's journey down into Egypt, but sandwiched in between is the unexpected story of Judah. This abrupt change of direction and focus demands that we ask the question as to whether this story is an addition to the Torah from some other tradition or whether it is a case of the story simply being out of place, as I have suggested in the previous portion about the sale of Joseph. I would propose that this story may have been placed here just to extend the drama of Joseph's long journey down into Egypt. If this is true, then the shift of focus may be simply to create greater drama in the Joseph story. By suddenly shifting the focus from Joseph to Judah, we are given a small glimpse of what Jacob must have experienced after he was confronted with the shocking news of Joseph's demise. By employing this literary technique, we, the readers, are invited to feel the unforeseen, shocking change and interrupted flow of life after the sudden loss of Joseph. By employing such story-telling techniques, the Torah becomes alive in us as we are forced to ponder in suspense for at least an entire chapter the fate of our brother Joseph.

While I do believe that the placement of this narrative about Judah is, in part, for dramatic effect, I do not believe it is the sole reason for the story interrupting the Joseph narrative. As we stated last week and alluded to above, we have been following the subtle transitions in the patriarchal narrative from Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob, and from Jacob to Joseph *and his brothers*. In other words, Jacob was the last of the individual patriarchs. Now the focus has shifted to the sons of Jacob, the fathers of the twelve tribes. While Joseph certainly has played a significant starring role in the narrative thus far, we should not lose sight of the fact that the focus is much broader than just one brother. Therefore, with Joseph out of the picture momentarily, the focus now shifts to another of the brothers, Judah. Nahum M. Sarna, however, demonstrates that this story is no mere insertion; rather, it is a deliberate and intricate part of the story.

The concluding statement in chapter 37 about the sale of Joseph to Potiphar is repeated in the first verse of chapter 39, thus providing continuity after the intervening diversion. The recurring use of certain key words also forges verbal links between chapter 38 and its preceding and following chapters. Thus, the Hebrew root y-r-d appears in 37:35 ('ered, "I will go down"), 38:1 (va-yered, lit. "he went down"), and 39:1 (hurad, "was taken down"); the root n-kh-r is found in 37:32 (hakker, lit. "recognize"), verse 33 (va-yakkirah,

“he recognized it”), as well as in 38:25 (hakker) and verse 26 (va-yakker); the root n-h-m is used twice in 37:35 (le-nahamao, “to comfort him”; le-hitnahem, “to be comforted”) and in 38:12 (va-yinnahem, “was comforted”); while the root ‘-r-v is employed in 38:17, 18, and 20 (‘eravon, “ a pledge”) and in 43:9 (‘e’ervennu, lit. “I will pledge myself for him”) and 44:32 ‘arav (“has pledged himself”). A kid from the flock plays a role in the Joseph story (37:31) as well as in this one (vv. 17, 20). Deception occurs in both narratives; a point is proved through the production of tangible evidence (37:32-33; 38:25-26); the theme of female temptation is central to this and the following chapter; and the genealogy of Judah is repeated in 46:12 in a way that requires knowledge of 38:3-10, 29-30 in order for it to be understood.¹

Beyond mere verbal connections between the various chapters, which could be a mere accident of language, we should note that it is not Reuben, the firstborn, but Judah, the fourth son of Leah and Jacob, who will emerge as the leader of the sons of Jacob and the counterpart to the veiled Joseph in Egypt. Sarna goes on to write:

Reuben is the first-born of Jacob; yet, it is not he but Judah, the fourth son, who rises to prominence in the Joseph narrative. It was Judah who suggested the sale of Joseph to the caravaneers (37:26f), and it is he who will soon become the spokesman for his brothers to their father (43:3-5, 8-10). It is Judah who assumes a position of leadership when the delegation runs into trouble in Egypt (44:14-16) and who negotiates on behalf of the family for the release of the youngest brother (44:18-34). Finally, it is Judah whom Jacob selects to spearhead the migration to Egypt (46:28). So these narratives, while they recount the rise of Joseph, subtly register as well the ascendancy of Judah. The stage is being set for the future fulfillment of the divine promise to Abraham—“kings shall come forth from you” (17:6)—and to Jacob—“kings shall issue from your loins” (35:11). Two kingdoms resulted from these divine promises to the patriarchs: Judah became the name of the southern kingdom, while the northern kingdom of Israel was known as Joseph (Zech.10:6). The present chapter, then, provides a foil to the Joseph-centered episodes. It hints, ever so obliquely, at the future Joseph-Judah polarity in the history of the people of Israel.²

Clearly the subtle connection between the chapters, as well as the emergent dichotomy between the two divided houses of the nation of Israel in later history, indicates that this narrative about Judah is strategically located and is part of the foundation being laid for later development. With the location of our portion confirmed, let us move on to the narrative itself.

Our portion begins with a very informative statement about Judah.

Genesis 38:1 *And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.*

This declaration is more than merely a geographical indication of Judah’s journey. Judah and his brothers have just committed the very heinous act of betraying and harming one of sons of Jacob and then deceiving their father to protect themselves. The fact that Judah “went down” indicates that he has sunken even lower than his brothers into a life lived in the lower nature. In other words, what the Torah is describing here is the very fall of Judah. We may recall that much of the tension between the brothers was a sort of class war between the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah.

Genesis 37:2 *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*

¹ The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pp. 263-264

² Ibid., Pg. 264

Here we see Joseph lumped in with the sons of the concubines. We must recall that Jacob's first four sons – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah – were borne by Leah. We may also remember that there was unrest in the family after the rape of Dinah. It was at this time that Simeon and Levi fell to their animal instincts and slaughtered all of the men of Shechem, earning a strong rebuke from their father.

Genesis 34:25-26 *And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. ²⁶And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.*

Genesis 34:30 *And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.*

It was Reuben who was next to fall to his lower nature. It appears that after Rachel's death, Reuben, likewise lacking respect for his father, made an attempt to take over his father's position as head of the family by laying claim to Bilhah, Jacob's concubine.

Genesis 35:22 *And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.*

In our portion this week it is Judah who sinks into his lower nature; thus, the fall of Leah's first four sons is complete. Clearly position is no protection against our ability to fall. The Master, Yeshua, warned even his chosen ones of their need for care in this matter of human vulnerability.

Mark 14:38 *Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

From the very beginning of our Torah study we have talked extensively about the calling upon Adam and his descendants. The Torah is very clear that man was chosen and equipped to be the image of Elohim in the world. This calling was to be accomplished in two very distinct fashions.

Genesis 1:26-28 *And Elohim said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. ²⁷So Elohim created man in His own image, in the image of Elohim created He him; male and female created He them. ²⁸And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

The first manner in which man is to manifest the presence of Elohim is by exercising dominion over the animal realm, including his own animal nature. The second manner is by being fruitful and multiplying. To this end the Creator created man with two distinct natures. The first nature is that of the earth from which he was created. This is a tangible, sensual nature. It is this nature that we have in common with the animals. Because this nature is tangible, it is driven by its senses and appetites. This nature needs food, shelter, and rest to keep the flesh alive. The second nature of man is a spiritual nature that he has in common with the Spirit Elohim. Through this nature man communes with the Creator Himself, receiving revelation knowledge on how to live and manifest His image in the tangible world.

In the proper created order the Spirit of the Holy One would instruct the spirit of Adam; the spirit of Adam would inform his soul how to think, how to feel, and how to understand various events and experiences;

and Adam's soul would then inform his flesh how to interact with the world around him. To be the manifest image of YHWH, Adam would have to live in this created order. But in the garden, Adam and Chava listened to their animal nature and their eyes were opened.

Genesis 3:4-7 *And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: ⁵for Elohim doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as elohim, knowing good and evil. ⁶And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. ⁷And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*

From this point on man has wrestled within himself between the revelation knowledge of YHWH and his own sensual knowledge. In this regard, man has become his own *elohim* (authority).

We may likewise recall, however, that when YHWH covenanted Himself with Abraham, He promised Abraham not only a land but multiple seed. This seed was described to the patriarchs in two very distinct ways.

The first description of the seed of the patriarchs is as the “dust of the earth” or the “sand of the sea.”

Genesis 13:16 *And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.*

Genesis 28:14 *And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*

Genesis 32:12 *And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.*

Just as the name "Jacob" refers to the fleshly man and the term “sons of Jacob” refers to the biological descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so too do the references to the descendants of the patriarchs as the “dust of the earth” and “the sand of the sea.” Both of these references are to the fleshly line emanating from the flesh of Jacob. We may recall that man's flesh was made from the “dust of the earth.”

Genesis 2:7 *And YHWH Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

The second description of the seed of the patriarchs is as the “stars of heaven.”

Genesis 15:5 *And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

Genesis 26:4 *And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*

Genesis 37:9 *And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.*

This speaks of the seed of the patriarchs as being more than just biological progeny. In the first reference Abraham is told to look toward the heavens. So it is that Abraham will be the father of those who are spiritually motivated and look toward YHWH for their knowledge and motivation.

While some may balk at this description, fearing that it smacks of a spiritual Israel replacing the biological Israel, let us take note that in Joseph's dream the eleven "stars" represent his biological brothers. We should also note that at least once in the Torah a reference is made to the children of Israel as both the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea.

Genesis 22:17 *That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.*

We should remember, however, that the Torah is clear that merely being a biological descendant of the patriarchs is not sufficient to be an heir to the covenant. We only need to recall the lives of Ishmael, Esau, and the sons of Keturah to substantiate this truth. Yeshua and the apostle Shaul likewise affirm this reality in their teachings. After the tax collector Zacchaeus repents, Yeshua declares that he is a "son of Abraham." Likewise, when the Pharisees and scribes claim to be "sons of Abraham," he refutes them, showing their works to be of their father the devil.

Luke 19:7-9 *And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. ⁸And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. ⁹And Yeshua said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*

John 8:39-40 *They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Yeshua saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of Elohim: this did not Abraham.*

Furthermore, Shaul defines being an heir of Abraham and a child of Israel as a matter of sharing the patriarchs' faith and truth, not merely their DNA.

Romans 4:1-3 *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ²For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before Elohim. ³For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed Elohim, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

Romans 4:13-14 *For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.*

Romans 4:16 *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.*

Romans 9:6-7 *Not as though the word of Elohim hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: ⁷neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

Galatians 3:7-9 *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. ⁸And the scripture, foreseeing that Elohim would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. ⁹So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*

The fall of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and now Judah clearly indicates that being an heir to the patriarchs is neither merited by DNA nor protected by it. To be an heir of the patriarchs requires of us much more than simply an accident of nature.

To this end, then, we witness Judah descending into his lower animal nature in our portion. The testimony of this statement is made evident in Judah's shameful behavior. We should note here the manner in which Judah acquires a wife. Here we should note the very similar word usage to that used in the earlier story of the rape of Dinah.

***Genesis 34:1-2** And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. ²And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, **saw** her, he **took** her, and **lay** with her, and **defiled** her.*

Four verbs are used to describe how Shechem treated Dinah: he **saw** her, **took** her, **lay** with her, and **defiled** her. Let us now compare the language used of Judah's efforts to gain a wife.

***Genesis 38:1-2** And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. ²And Judah **saw** there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he **took** her, and **went in unto her**.*

The actions of Shechem and Judah are described in almost identical terms. We may also note the lack of the more intimate phrase "he knew his wife." The Hebrew word *yada* (*yud, dalet, ayin*), "to know," implies a sense of intimacy, not just an act of mere animal impulse.

***Genesis 4:1** And Adam **knew** Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from YHWH.*

***Genesis 4:17** And Cain **knew** his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.*

***Genesis 4:25** And Adam **knew** his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For Elohim, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.*

It is this very animal impulse that later leads Judah to seek the services of a prostitute. We should note that the mere fact that Judah brings nothing to pay the woman for her services indicates the impulsivity of Judah's behavior. Judah has not planned to visit a prostitute, but upon seeing her, he acts impulsively, conceding to his fleshly, animal nature.

Also confirming the fall is the fact that the woman he takes to be his wife is a Canaanite woman.

***Genesis 38:2** And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her.*

Again, we should understand that Judah, like the men of the righteous line in the days of Noah, is captured by his senses and fails to make distinction as to whom he marries, mixing the blessed line with the cursed.

***Genesis 6:1-2** And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, ²that the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.*

There are some who try to protect Judah's reputation by stating that the Hebrew word *khanaany* (*khaf, nun, ayin, nun, yud*) should be translated here as "merchant." This understanding of the word is clearly contraindicated by the Scripture itself.

1 Chronicles 2:3 *The sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah: which three were born unto him of the daughter of Shua the **Canaanitess**. And Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the sight of YHWH; and He slew him.*

Clearly Judah transgresses even the patriarchal prohibition of marrying a woman of the cursed line of Canaan. We witnessed this prohibition given to Abraham's servant Eliezer concerning a wife for Isaac. We also heard of the grief that Esau's Canaanite wives brought to the house of Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob too was sent back to Haran to find a wife and was forbidden from marrying a daughter of the Canaanites.

Genesis 24:3 *And I will make thee swear by YHWH, the Elohim of heaven, and the Elohim of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell.*

Genesis 26:34-35 *And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: ³⁵which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.*

Genesis 27:46-28:1 *And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me? ^{28:1}And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.*

Clearly Judah "goes down" from any moral supremacy that he might have once held. Now we witness the outcome of Judah's fallen state. The Torah teaches that we were each created to bring forth after our kind.

Genesis 1:11 *And Elohim said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.*

Genesis 1:21 *And Elohim created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and Elohim saw that it was good.*

Genesis 1:24 *And Elohim said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.*

So it is that the fallen Judah brings forth after his kind. The Torah reports that Judah has three children with his Canaanite wife – Er, Onan, and Shelah. Information about these sons is somewhat limited. Although we are told their names, we are not given the usual reasons for their names. Some believe that the name Er (*ayin, resh*) is related to the Hebrew word *ariri* (*ayin, resh, yud, resh, yud*), which means "childless."

Genesis 15:2 *And Abram said, Adonai YHWH, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go **childless [ariri]**, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

This would be a most appropriate name for one who is slain by the Sovereign One before he can bring forth after his kind. The name Onan (*aleph, vav, nun, nun*) generally means "strong," but it may also mean "virile," demonstrating that he has everything necessary to fulfill his duty to his brother but is unwilling. This wickedness too is met with a decisive and fatal judgment by the Sovereign One. The name of the third son, Shelah (*shin, lammed, hey*), means "petition." It may better be understood as "a thing asked for." This too would be an appropriate name, given the fact that the widow Tamar is waiting and asking for justice in this matter.

Without going into any detail at all, we are told by the Torah that Judah's firstborn is wicked and is slain by the Sovereign One. Judah, who descends from his brothers into moral decay by living in his lower nature, brings forth sons who likewise fail to exercise dominion over their animal nature. Such behavior cannot be tolerated by the Sovereign One, in whose image the children of Israel are to live. Judah brings forth after his kind. Now YHWH stops the creep of this cancer by eliminating Er before he has a chance to propagate seed after his kind.

***Psalm 37:28** For YHWH loveth judgment, and forsaketh not His saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.*

This sudden judgment upon Er's wickedness leaves his wife Tamar widowed without children. The Torah clearly forbids a man from sleeping with his brother's wife.

***Leviticus 20:21** And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.*

The one exception to this teaching, however, is the practice of levirate marriage. The name "levirate marriage" is derived from the Latin word *levir*, which means "husband." In Hebrew this practice is referred to as *yibbum*, which is assumed to come from the Torah, where the deceased husband is called *yavam* (progenitor) and the widow is referred to as *yevamah* (progenitrix).³ The teaching of this practice is fully described in the Torah.

***Deuteronomy 25:5-10** If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. ⁶And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, **that his name be not put out of Israel.** ⁷And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. ⁸Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; ⁹then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. ¹⁰And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed.*

There are two primary reasons for such a practice among the children of Israel. First, we must recognize that there were no government "Social Security" or "Welfare" systems in the ancient world. Life was physical, demanding, and dangerous. Women in particular were dependant largely upon families, fathers, and husbands for support and protection. A single woman, whether young or old, was easily victimized, as we have already witnessed in the case of Dinah. The elderly, once past their physical capacity to provide for or defend themselves, relied upon their children to care for them in their old age. We may recall from the previous portion that Jacob bestowed upon Joseph the title "son of my old age." This position often fell to the youngest son. We have often mentioned in previous portions that having children was the primary purpose of marriage. Thus, the guarantee of children in the marriage was often a part of the wedding contract. We have already witnessed how Sarah and Rachel both provided their husbands with other women for the purpose of procreation when they themselves were unable to conceive. Thus, there was a duty between husband and wife to have children. If a husband were to leave his widow childless, then it would be the duty of his brother to take the widow to wife and conceive a child with her in his brother's name. This would give the widow a child to care for her in her old age.

There is, however, another clear reason given in the Torah for this practice. The Torah emphatically teaches that if a man should die childless, then his name (not necessarily his literal name but his

³ The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 266

memory) would die out in the land of Israel. Therefore, it is the duty of the brother of the deceased to provide an offspring for his brother who would not only care for the widow but also be the son of the deceased brother to receive his inheritance and keep his memory alive in the land of Israel. We witness a similar concern later in the Torah as the daughters of Zelophehad raise concern over the name and memory of their father, who died without sons to inherit his portion of the land.

Numbers 27:1-4 *Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. ²And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, ³Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against YHWH in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons. ⁴**Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.***

The practice of levirate marriage assured that every Israelite's name would be remembered in the land of Israel. For ancient Israel, being remembered was the same as being alive. In the ancient world it was believed that as long a person's name was remembered, he continued to play a part in the life of Israel and in the world. To have one's name and memory blotted out was a true sense of death. The threat to the wicked is that they would be remembered no more.

Psalm 69:28 *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.*

Psalm 109:13 *Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.*

Psalm 109:15 *Let them be before YHWH continually, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

A third reason for levirate marriage is connected to the idea of redemption. The Torah teaches that if our brothers or sisters fall into poverty or hard times and are forced to sell themselves as bondservants to another, we are to redeem them so that none of the children of Israel would ever become slaves to another foreign power. Prostitution was also a forbidden practice among the children of Israel.

Leviticus 19:29 *Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness.*

Leviticus 21:9 *And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire.*

Deuteronomy 22:21 *Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.*

Deuteronomy 23:17 *There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.*

In order to prevent one who is identified with or associated with the nation of Israel from ever falling into bondage to a foreign master or into the need for prostitution, it was incumbent upon the kinsmen of the unfortunate to redeem them.

Leviticus 25:47-49 *And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family:⁴⁸ after that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him:⁴⁹ either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.*

It is in this same spirit of redemption that the practice of levirate marriage was undertaken by the children of Israel. One of the greatest examples of this connection and practice is demonstrated in the book of Ruth. Ruth is widowed without children and is then redeemed and wed to Boaz, a kinsman redeemer, after the next of kin refused his duty.

Ruth 4:1-10 *Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! Turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. ²And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. ³And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: ⁴and I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. ⁵Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. ⁶And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it. ⁷Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. ⁸Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. ⁹And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. ¹⁰Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.*

In our portion, however, things do not work out so smoothly. Er, Judah's wicked firstborn, dies without providing Tamar with children. Onan is then called upon to perform the duty of the brother, but Onan is just as evil as his brother. Realizing that without an heir to his older brother, his inheritance is enlarged, Onan feigns obedience by having relations with Tamar, but withdraws from her at the critical moment, spilling his seed upon the ground. We may remember from our lesson on circumcision that all seed that passes through the cutting of circumcision is sacred unto YHWH. We should also understand that if Onan is not genuinely trying to raise up children to Er, then he is exploiting Tamar for his own benefit and merely defiling her. For this wickedness Onan too is slain by the judgment of the Sovereign One.

Having lost two sons, Judah now seeks to protect his only heir. So blind is Judah in his fallen state that he fails to see that it is his own sons' wickedness that has cost them their lives; instead, Judah sees Tamar as the threat. Judah sends Tamar away to her father's house to wait for Shelah to come of age, but Judah has no intention of risking his son's life with the deadly Tamar. Tamar waits patiently for Judah to fulfill his promise. When she realizes that Judah has no intention of fulfilling his promise to her, she takes the initiative into her own hands. At the appropriate moment Tamar puts off her widow's garments, veils her face, and waits enticingly as a prostitute at the city gate. When Judah goes down to shear the sheep, his animal nature impulsively draws him to Tamar. The Torah is clear that Judah does not realize that it is Tamar. Judah then negotiates a price for the harlot's services and gives her a pledge for security until the payment is made. Tamar wisely selects for the pledge objects that will clearly identify Judah as the owner. Once the deed is done, everyone returns to life as normal. Tamar returns to her widowhood,

and Judah returns home to his son. While the Torah does not tell us how long a time passes, it is clear that Tamar is pregnant. News of her pregnancy is brought to Judah in a most ironic fashion.

Genesis 38:24 *And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.*

The great irony is in the fact that the news report is actually the truth. Tamar does play the harlot, she is Judah's daughter-in-law, and she is with child by whoredom. Again, Judah's blindness is blatant. He has of yet made no connection with the fact that the woman he whored with is his own daughter-in-law. Now, when she is brought forth to face Judah's judgment upon her, she boldly acknowledges that the report is true, and she is willing to name the father. We should note that Tamar does not publically shame Judah but sends his signet, his staff, and his bracelet to him privately with a note that the owner of these items is the father of her child.

Genesis 38:25 *When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.*

Here we may see a sense of measure for measure coming against Judah, who with his brothers deceived their father, asking him to identify the owner of the unique garment given to Joseph.

Genesis 37:32 *And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.*

With this reminder, Judah is convicted of his own wickedness. He has already lost his wife and two of his three sons. He has also lost his dignity and integrity. Now Judah repents and acknowledges that it is he and not Tamar who is wrong. Where once he was ready to cheat, shame, and burn his daughter-in-law, now he declares her to be righteous.

Genesis 38:26 *And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.*

We may note at this point that the name Tamar in Hebrew means "date palm tree." The appropriateness of this name is seen in the fact that the righteous are often described as trees.

Psalms 1:1-3 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ²But his delight is in the law of YHWH; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. ³And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

Psalms 52:8 *But I am like a green olive tree in the house of Elohim: I trust in the mercy of Elohim for ever and ever.*

Proverbs 11:30 *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*

It is interesting to note that in many ways Judah finds his redemption through Tamar. At the beginning of our portion Judah falls into wickedness by marrying a Canaanite woman and raising at least two wicked sons by her. But the Canaanite wife dies, as do her two wicked sons. Now Judah brings forth seed by the righteous Tamar, and it is through this seed that Judah will be remembered, for Tamar shows herself to be much like the matriarchs of Israel. Like Rebekah, Tamar brings forth twins; and like Sarah and Rebekah, the second son becomes the firstborn.

Genesis 38:27-30 *And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. ²⁸And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. ²⁹And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? This breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. ³⁰And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.*

It is through Pharez and his descendants that Judah will find redemption, for it is through the line of Pharez that David and Yeshua come forth to rule over Israel.

How wonderful is our Elohim! Even in our weakness and fallen nature He continues to use us and draw us to Himself. This story should give great hope to all of us who, regardless of how far we have fallen, can rejoice that YHWH has made provision for our lives, our redemption, and our return to communion with Him and with our brethren.

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