

# The House of Perez

Genesis 38

The advantage of reading the Bible, rather assuming what it says, is that we find sinners a lot like us. When Joseph's brothers were going to kill him, Judah convinced them to make a buck by selling him into slavery instead (37:26-27). With Joseph out of the picture, he is the leader among his brothers, but not for good. In this story God breaks through his sin in the unlikeliest way, and establishes Tamar not just as a mother in Israel, but also as an ancestress of Jesus Christ.

## ***Judah's Rebellion***

Secret sin always messes people up, so after lying to Jacob about Joseph, Judah grabs a Canaanite wife (vv1-2; cf. 24:3; 28:1). She has three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah (vv3-5). Judah then takes a wife for Er whose name is Tamar, but Er is wicked in God's sight and so He kills him (v7). Judah encourages Onan to fulfill the levirate law that was designed to provide for vulnerable widows and carry on the family name (v8; Dt. 25:5-10). Onan is happy to sleep with Tamar but doesn't want a child to dilute his inheritance, so he emits on the ground (v9). This sin, and no other, displeases the Lord, and so He kills him (v10). Judah has been master of his own destiny, which is why everything is falling apart, and now he thinks he can protect Shelah by sending Tamar back to her father's house (v11). He is blinded by his pride, which has been so systemic in his life for so long that he can't even see it. Shouldn't he keep Shelah from Tamar for a time at least? Isn't he just trying to raise a family? Isn't it okay to be comforted and have a few drinks (v12)? Scripture teaches that our heart guards our head, not the other way around. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7).

## ***Tamar's Righteousness***

After Judah's wife dies and he is comforted, he goes up to the sheep-shearing party at Timnah with Hirah (v12). Shelah was never given to her like Judah promised, so she wastes no time putting off her widow's clothes and dressing up like a prostitute with a veil, expecting to attract Judah and succeeding (vv13-16). He wants to come in to her and so promises to send her a goat, but she asks for a pledge—his signet, cord and staff—as surety he'll pay (vv17-18). When he sends Hirah to pay her, she can't be found, so he forgets about his stuff in order to hide his shame (vv22-23). But three months later Tamar begins to show, and when Judah hears about it he condemns her for her harlotry to be burned (v24). How dare she since she is betrothed to Shelah! She comes out to be judged and brings the signet, cord, and staff that belong to the father of the child. As vile as Judah has been, he comes clean and says something that is hard for us to hear: "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." He also repents of his sexual immorality (v25). We don't typically think about dressing up as a prostitute to get pregnant as an act of superior righteousness, but it was. Judah was not only depriving Tamar of a husband, but of the possibility of being an ancestor in the line of the messiah. We tend to look at people in the Old Testament and think how little they know compared to us while we are ones missing what is happening in their story. Tamar knows who Judah is among his brothers, his strength and leadership, and that her first two husbands rebelled and died early. Apparently she has faith that God can bless her, and she is right: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Gen. 49:10). Judah experiences more than public shame; his repentance will continue as he offers his life as the "pledge" for the life of Benjamin (44:32-34).

## ***God's Bursting Kindness***

Tamar's swift and bold action to trick Judah reminds us of Rebekah tricking faithless Isaac (27:14-17). And like Rebekah, it works, and she is blessed. Judah's father Jacob is the twin of Esau, and Tamar will also have twins who swap places at birth (vv27-30). *Perez* means *breach* or *breakthrough*, and elsewhere this word is about God's judgment breaking out (2 Sam. 5:20; 6:8; Ps. 106:29). Here God judges in Tamar's favor. She is the first of five women named in Matthew's genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary (Matt. 1:1-16), all women with reputations. But when the elders bless Ruth, they say, "May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman" (4:12). God's kindness comes to this bereft and broken woman who looked forward to the birth of Jesus the Messiah.

## NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

### Today's Passage: Genesis 38:27-30

*27 Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins were in her womb. 28 And so it was, when she was giving birth, that the one put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." 29 Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez. 30 Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.*

1. This is the second set of twins born recently in Genesis. Can you think of the names of the other twins, and what was important about them? (hint: Judah's dad is one of them)
2. Tamar is mistreated by her father-in-law Judah, but she appears to trust the Lord and He gives her twins. What are their names (verses 29-30)?
3. Tamar was a Canaanite who had two lousy Christian husbands, Er and Onan. Her father-in-law Judah was bad to her. But she trusted the Lord and became an ancestress to the Lord Jesus. Even a few generations later her faith and God's blessing were famous in Israel: "May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman" (Ruth. 4:4). What should you remember when Christians sin against you?
4. Draw a picture of Tamar holding her baby boys.

### Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez —Genesis 38:29*