

The Juxtaposition of Judah and Joseph

Genesis 38-39

Introduction

1. After the death of Isaac, scripture records the genealogy of Esau, then shifts to the major part of Genesis which is the family through which God would make a nation, and through which He would give His Son for the redemption of the world.
 2. **Genesis 37:2** – “*history*” – *tôledâ* - “*genealogy*” (**36:1**) – the descent of Jacob concerns the 12 sons who would make up the nation by their descendants but focuses on Joseph who would be God’s instrument to bring the family to Egypt for protection, growth, and eventually coming into covenant relationship with God as a nation.
 3. **Genesis 38** seems to include an abrupt shift when Judah’s unseemly case is brought to our attention. However, the following chapter which resumes the history of Joseph shows some of the reason for the content of **chapter 38**.
 4. **Genesis 38-39** juxtaposes brothers, Judah and Joseph, giving insight into God’s wisdom in the following record of His providence for the family and redemptive plans for humanity, as well as extremely practical contrast of sinful and righteous behavior.
- I. Willing VS Unwilling Departure
- A. “*Judah departed from his brothers*” (**Genesis 38:1**).
 - a. This is after Joseph was forced out – **Genesis 37:26-28, 36** – Judah as spokesperson of the wicked scheme – Joseph to foreign people.
 - b. Joseph protested – **Genesis 42:21** – when Joseph expressed suspicion of them.
 - B. Significance of departure – **Genesis 18:19** – God’s description of Abraham’s character, and the pattern of patriarchal spiritual guidance.
 - a. God revealed – **Exodus 3:14-15** – eternal God, unchanging God, same God of fathers.
 - i. The cultivation and growth of the covenantal family into the covenantal nation is through the revelation of God and His will via the fathers.
 - b. **Hebrews 1:1** – stages of revelation – directly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who led their families – by the time the nation promise is fulfilled in Exodus, Moses, a prophet, is prepared for the nation as lawgiver.
 - C. The family/home is the foundational source of spiritual teaching, growing, discipline, and accountability – **Ephesians 6:1-4**
 - a. Judah’s departure had generational consequence – **Genesis 38:6-10**
 - i. Wickedness of Er and Onan.

- ii. Hatred of Onan for his brother Er – levirate marriage – Onan to perpetuate seed for his brother – selfish refusal.
 - D. The church is the family of God – **1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:4-6** – we need each other for godly influence.
 - E. Despite being forced out, Joseph remained faithful – his later conduct gives context to his character possessed when first introduced with his dreams – his relation to family was not resentment or pride but loving humble service.
- II. Worldly Influence VS Sanctification
- A. Judah's departure made him vulnerable to worldly influence – **Genesis 38:1-2** – worldly friend, worldly wife.
 - a. **(v. 7)** – Er wicked.
 - b. **(v. 10)** – Onan killed for wickedness.
 - c. Tamar, wife of Er and daughter-in-law of Judah, is deceptive and not above immorality to get what she feels is her right.
 - B. The Lord is noted to be with Joseph throughout his time in Egypt beginning at Potiphar's house – **Genesis 39:2-6**
 - a. His main reason for refusing to lie with Potiphar's wife reflects on God's presence with him, and his life of devotion to God – **(v. 9)**
 - b. The continued presence of God with Joseph after his refusal to sin sheds more light on the reason for God's presence with him – **(vv. 21-23)**
 - c. I.e. the Lord being with Joseph is contingent upon Joseph being with the Lord, or more specifically, Joseph sanctifying himself from what is contrary to the Lord and consecrating himself to the Lord's service.
 - d. This is contrasted with the absence of the Lord's continuing presence with Judah.
 - i. Though Joseph is in a place surrounded by worldliness just like Judah, because Joseph has committed to sanctification he has not been influenced like Judah.
 - C. Whether we choose to be surrounded by worldliness will not necessarily determine whether we will be surrounded by worldly people – such is inevitable – **1 Corinthians 5:9-10**
 - a. However, a sanctified person is equipped to bring glory to God in such environments rather than join the worldliness – **John 17:15-19; Ephesians 5:11-13**
 - b. However, the difference between an intentional worldly environment and an incidental worldly environment typically reflects on a person's character, and directly relates to following actions of faithfulness or

conformity (Judah's choice VS Joseph's being forced) – **1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 Corinthians 15:33**

III. Pursuit of Sin VS Flight from Sin

- A. Perhaps the most dramatic contrast between Judah and Joseph is their conscious moves in opposite directions in relation to sin.
 - a. Judah pursued sin – **Genesis 38:11-16** – he made the request!
 - b. Joseph fled from sin – **Genesis 39:6-12** – he vehemently refused the request and fled when the pressure escalated.
- B. **1 Peter 5:8** – the devil is seeking whom he may devour – RESIST!
 - a. It is difficult enough to remain pure and holy when the devil is constantly seeking us, but we must not give him opportunity – **Romans 13:14**
 - i. Sin doesn't typically just happen, but is the product of a line of reasonings, decisions, and actions – Judah's fornication resulted from many things leading up to it.
 - ii. Likewise, overcoming temptation is the result of a line of reasonings, decisions, and actions – **1 Corinthians 10:13** – Joseph's flight from sin began long before Potiphar's wife sought him.
 - b. Presentation of ourselves to sin results in sin, and a degradation of moral virtue – **Romans 6:16, 19**

IV. Sinful Pride VS Godly Meekness

- A. The parallels between Judah and Joseph are striking – departure from family, worldly environment, sexual temptation – they are unquestionably intentionally juxtaposed by the Spirit.
- B. There are even parallels within more nuanced themes of the narrative which speak volumes.
- C. Tamar receives a pledge of Judah's signet, cord, and staff for the payment of harlotry – **Genesis 38:16-18** – i.e. Judah left possessions in the hand of a seductress.
- D. Potiphar's wife took Joseph's garment from him as she sought to seduce him – **Genesis 39:11-12** – i.e. Joseph left possessions in the hand of a seductress.
 - a. The reasons for these possessions being left with these women are dramatically different – pursuit of sin, flight from sin.
- E. The progression of the narrative reveals deeper spiritual significance for both:
 - a. Judah sent the payment and to receive his pledge – **Genesis 38:20-23** – when she was not found they stopped looking to avoid shameful attention upon themselves.

- i. He knew what he did was shameful but took evasive action to hide his shame.
- b. Joseph left his garment and Potiphar's wife used it against him – **Genesis 39:16-20** – Joseph sacrificed his standing with Potiphar for His relationship with His God.
 - i. He knew what he did was right and was not bothered by the blasphemy of Potiphar's wife, nor the suffering inflicted by Potiphar.
 - ii. **1 Peter 2:19-20** – enduring grief because of conscience toward God.
- c. When Judah's sin was exposed, his response was anything but godly sorrow – **Genesis 38:24-26**
 - i. He acknowledged guilt – **(v. 11)** – he broke a promise.
 - ii. However, what he leaves out shows just how spiritually calloused he is – fornication, harlotry, deception, hiding sin, etc.?
- d. Joseph's stated reason to lie with Potiphar's wife manifests a character entirely opposite of Judah's – **Genesis 39:8-9** – manifesting love and loyalty to God and man!
 - i. What led to his strength to withstand was his meek surrender to his God!
 - ii. Even to the extent of leaving his garment behind that could be manipulated as evidence against him – his only concern was faithfulness to God!
 - iii. **1 Peter 3:13-17** – who can harm you? Sanctify Christ in your hearts.

Conclusion

1. Stark contrast between Judah and Joseph is recorded for our learning. If we wish to be pure, and useful for the Master's service we will emulate Joseph, and see the mistakes of Judah as powerful warning.
2. However, though Judah's account provides a cautionary tale, it also gives space for God's grace and mercy to be displayed.
 - a. Though Judah betrayed Joseph, Joseph would later show him mercy, and despite his horrible immorality, Judah was given an opportunity to show true change even after the image of Christ – **Genesis 44:33** – willingness to take Benjamin's place in death.
 - b. Despite his sinful decisions, God used Judah as the tribe through which the Messiah would come – **Genesis 49:10**