

On the Beginning

36. The Birth of Pharez

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 38

As we have seen, the Book of Genesis follows the family line that produced the Savior, Jesus Christ. Genesis 3:15 says that the Seed of a woman will bruise the serpent's head. Genesis 4:25 indicate that Adam and Eve were looking for the birth of that Seed, and that He would come through their son Seth. Genesis 5 traces the line of Seth down through Noah, whose family alone survived the Flood. In Genesis 9:26, Noah singles out one of his three sons and cries, "*Blessed be the LORD God of Shem*"! Then Chapter 11 traces the line of Shem down through Abram, who is told in Chapter 12 that "*in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed*"(v. 3). The following chapters give promises about Abram's Seed (12:7, 17:7, 22:18), who is identified in the New Testament as Christ (Galatians 3:16). Abram (Abraham) had two sons, but the promise of the Savior was given to Isaac (Genesis 26:4). Isaac had two sons, but the promise of the Savior was given to Jacob (Genesis 28:14). Jacob had twelve sons, but many chapters go by before any indication of which one would spawn the line of Christ. Chapter 38 gives us the first hint. Judah did not show much good character or spirituality in Chapter 37, in which Joseph was sold. His morality and scruples are not presented in any better light in Chapter 38, although the birth of his son in this chapter is the next step in the ancestry of Christ. Look at that ancestry in Matthew 1 before studying Genesis 38 with our class.

1. Judah's Family.

At the time of Joseph's removal to Egypt, Judah left the home of his father and went to Adullam and the nearby town of Chezib (vs. 1-5). At first he stayed with a friend named Hirah. In time he fell in love with the daughter of a Canaanite named Shuah. We must assume that she was a pagan girl. Their marriage produced three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. When the boys grew up, Judah arranged for the firstborn to marry a girl named Tamar. Apparently Judah's ungodly wife had a great influence on their sons, for we see at least two of them were wicked men. When God killed Er for his wickedness, Judah got Onan to marry his widow. This followed a custom, which was later given to the Israelite nation, that a man must marry his brother's widow in order to provide him with an heir to keep his property in his family line (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). The firstborn son of the marriage was legally counted as the first husband's heir. Some Bible students have guessed that the wicked sons of Judah did not want to marry Tamar because she was a believer in the LORD. Clearly, the second son didn't want to marry her, and he also died under the hand of the Lord (vs. 6-10). Shelah was now the only one left to "*raise up seed*" to his brother, but he was too young to marry. So Judah asked Tamar to wait and remain single until Shelah grew up (v. 11).

2. Judah's Sins.

Eventually Judah's pagan wife died, apparently at a young age. Enough time had passed for Shelah to reach marriageable age, but Judah ignored his promise to Tamar, who was living in widowhood at her father's house. In this part of the story (vs. 12-19), we see two sins committed by Judah:

- a. Breach of promise. He may have hoped that Tamar would take the promise as lightly as he did.
- b. Fornication with a harlot. He excused himself by the loneliness of losing his wife, but hiring a prostitute was still a sin. He didn't know that it was Tamar. Eventually he saw how sinful he had become (See v. 26), and found the peace of divine forgiveness. But he never found a good excuse for his sins. The morals of society, the pressure of circumstances, and the difficulty of doing right never provide good enough excuses for doing wrong!

3. Judah's **Line**.

The chapter ends (vs. 20-30) with its main point. Even though the people involved did wrong. God's purpose was fulfilled. One of the twins Tamar bore to her father-in-law was to be a forefather of the Saviour in Judah's line. See what Ruth 4:11-22 says about Pharez.