

January 22

Scriptures: Read Genesis 38 & 39

Key Verse: “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man;... How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:2a, 9c)

Overview

In the middle of the account of Joseph’s life there is an interruption recording the sins of Judah and his sons. Why would these strange stories be written at this point and what are their significance? Later biblical prophecy and history revealed that Judah was the most prominent tribe among the Israelites. His was the royal tribe and the one from which the Messiah would come; therefore, it was important to relate the life of Judah and his sons.

Judah left his brothers and godly father, took a Canaanite wife and lived among them. She bore him three sons before her death. The first, Er, married Tamar, but we are told the Lord killed him because of his great wickedness. Judah was in the wrong place, and so many difficulties followed him. He did not instruct his sons in the way of the Lord, nor did he have a godly wife, so he lost his sons because of sin. If parents do not raise their children to love and serve God, they could lose their children as well.

Tamar was left a widow without children. This was an awful position for her to be in. At that time, and as it still should be today, the children were responsible to take care of their elderly parents. If the widow was left without children, it was the responsibility of her late husband’s name and be his heir. Surprisingly, almost 500 years later, this same law was given to the children of Israel by Moses. (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Judah’s second son, Onan, must have had something against his brother, Er, or else was very selfish, for he was not willing to give her a son who would inherit the double portion that should have gone to Er, the eldest son of Judah. Selfishness displeases the Lord, therefore he also was killed.

Judah promised his third son to Tamar, but maybe out of fear that he also would die, she never got to marry him. Judah lied and did not carry the responsibility he had toward her, so she deceived him into thinking he was a prostitute. Judah had fallen into the ways of the sinful society in which he lived and went to the prostitute. When God’s ways are not followed the sinful world’s ways can be a trap. Thus Tamar conceived and in such a way Judah had two more sons, twins named Perez (who was the ancestor of King David, Ruth 4:18-22) and Zerah. They are all listed in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 1:1-3). In spite of such sin, the grace of God was manifested, for these were the ancestors of Jesus.

When we return to the story of Joseph, we find a great contrast between him and Judah. God had given him success in all that he did. Surely he kept in mind that God was in control, so he accepted his position as a servant and slave, and did his job well and faithfully. Potiphar recognized this and made Joseph the head of the affairs of his household. While Joseph was with him, he also was blessed with great success and prosperity. Joseph was a very handsome, strong young man, with unusual leadership and courage. He sets a worth example by his purity and strength of convictions. When Potiphar’s wife made continuous sexual advances toward Joseph,

he always resisted temptation and recognized it as a sin against God (39:9). In fact, one time he actually ran from the temptress (see 2 Timothy 2:22), but she held onto his coat and falsely accused him.

Although he was thrown in prison, Joseph nonetheless had the victory, for he remained pure in the sight of God (see 1 Peter 2:19). Most probably Potiphar knew he was innocent, but since it was an embarrassing public situation for him and his wife, he kept Joseph in prison. Joseph suffered there (Psalm 105:18), but he must have kept trusting in the Lord to bring him through, for he continued to show himself faithful and dependable and was even put in charge of all the prisoners. Keeping in communication with the Lord and having daily fellowship with Him keeps us pure with our eyes on Him so we may walk in the right way. Joseph would have done this and so we are told that the Lord was with him (39:23) and this was the secret of his success (see Matthew 6:22, 23).

Prayer

Holy Father, we recognize that all sin is against You. Forgive us and grant us the strength to take the way of escape from temptation which You always provide.