

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Lesson 28. (Gen chapter 38:1 – 39:23). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>

Introduction/Review: Over the past several weeks, we have seen the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis chapters 12-36) promise to raise up a people (Israel), and empower the 3 Patriarchs to accomplish His Purpose. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all heed God’s Call; still, their responses were often by their own means and in their own way. God provided them land (Canaan); however, occupation of that land was not tension-free. Our story continues through the life and (mis)fortunes of Jacob’s/Israel’s favorite son, Joseph. The initial picture of him is not favorable. He appears as a teenage spoiled brat who tattles on his brothers and has dreams picturing him as superior to both his elder siblings and his parents – character traits which annoy his brothers so much that they plot to kill him (37:18). They ultimately sell him into slavery after which they deceive their father about Joseph’s supposed “demise” and their part in it (37:25-36).

Read 38:1-11: The opening verses give us more insight into character traits within Jacob’s family and begin some contrasts that carry forth into chapter 39. As you read these individual stories, try to remember the transformations that have occurred in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel. Contemplate also a larger framework: tension between one’s physical environment and the relationship with the Divine Presence.

- What picture does Scripture paint of Judah’s sons? Briefly discuss.
- Now re-read what God says about Abraham in Gen 18:19. What lesson, if any, do you draw from these verses that may apply to your own family situation. Discuss.
- Re-read 38:6-11. What initial picture do you draw of Tamar and how would you contrast her behavior with Judah’s sons? Briefly discuss.

Read 38:12-26:

- Within the context of “righteousness” and “responsibility,” how do you characterize both Tamar’s and Judah’s actions? Briefly discuss.
- Note: In these verses, Judah appears to be thinking almost exclusively of his own needs and desires. In the next chapter, watch for the contrast to Joseph’s temptation and his actions. At this point, what strikes you, if anything, regarding the tension between one’s circumstances (physical environment) and one’s relationship to God?

Read 38:27-30 and re-read 25:19-26: Tamar gives birth from the seed of Judah (fourth son of Jacob from his wife, Leah). What similarities or differences do you find in the birth stories?

- Now skim Matthew’s genealogy of Christ (Matt 1:1-16, particularly verses 3 & 6). According to Scripture, what is Perez’s importance in the story of God and His people?

Read 39:1-6: The Joseph we meet in slavery is very different from the spoiled brat in chapter 37. He now behaves responsibly and wisely, so much so that his master attributes something very important to him (v. 3). Interestingly, Joseph now lives a dual existence: blessed by God and even blessing others, but living as a slave.

- According to these verses, what is happening in and through Joseph and why is this occurring? What transformation do you sense is occurring in Joseph? Discuss.

Read 39:6-10: As you read, contrast the actions of Potiphar’s wife (open and powerful; the one “item” in the house for which Joseph is not responsible) with those of Tamar (disguised and powerless; also an “item” in ancient world thought); and Judah (succumbing to selfish desires) with Joseph (clinging to his selfless relationship with God and spurning “selfish” needs).

- What strikes you about Joseph’s response to the advances of Potiphar’s wife? Discuss

Read 39:11-23: Note the evolving circumstances of Joseph’s life. Having survived one pit, he now finds himself thrown into another! Interestingly, the same term is used for cistern and prison (39:30 compared to 37:24) and another coat is used to signal another change in Joseph’s status. What lesson(s) do you learn from these verses that can apply to your life? Discuss.