

Genesis, pt3: Judah and Joseph

Genesis 38-39

MPS Jesus blesses the one who walks in integrity with steadfast love and favor, but the crooked will fall.

OBJ Every person can understand that integrity brings freedom by three blessings.

INTRO Ravi Zaccharias Ministry Fall Of all that has happened in this season, one of the most disheartening for me has been the public implosion of one of the most brilliant and greatest Christian apologists of this generation, reducing a lifetime of ministry and work to nothing more than sin's inevitable end; grievous indiscretions and abuse, lies, deception, harm, hurt and inconceivable wrongs. This reminds me; you can have all the right answers for everything, and still be undone by that one iniquity you neglected to kill or put away. *What you love most will define you last, whether in this life or after death.*

Jesus blesses the one who walks in integrity with steadfast love and favor, but the crooked will fall.

READ Genesis 38:1-6

It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, ³and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. ⁵Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.

*⁶And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. **Genesis 38:1-6***

Genesis 38 introduces Judah, the fourth and youngest son of Leah. What we learn of him will be no better than what we learned of his older brothers. Judah “*went down from his brothers and turned aside*” to take a wife, Hirah. She bore him three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. In time, Jacob took a wife for his firstborn whose name was Tamar. But the text says that Er “*was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death.*”⁷ So in accordance to custom, Judah sent Onan to Tamar to raise up offspring. But what Onan did “*was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also.*”¹⁰ Judah tells Tamar to wait until his youngest son reaches the age of marriage, and Tamar is left in the house to remain a widow.

Over time, Judah’s wife dies. After his time of grieving ends, he goes to Timnah for sheep shearing season. Tamar learns that he is gone. Having grown hopeless to ever have a child by Shelah because “*she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.*”¹⁴, she takes matters into her own hands, changes from her widow clothes to a veil and goes to the road to Timnah. *Tamar’s actions are morally questionable, but the text provides no commentary.*

Judah sees her, though not knowing who she is, and “*turned to her at the roadside*”¹⁶ to proposition her. He offers a goat but has no way to pay at that time, so he offers to leave a pledge. She takes his signet, cord and staff. For perspective, this is the modern equivalent of a man leaving his wallet, keys, and smartphone. He agrees, goes in to her, and she conceives, unbeknown to him. When he sends the goat as payment and to retrieve his personal items, his servant cannot find her. Judah replies, “*Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her.*”²³ Judah confirms that his servant knows he tried to make payment, but he is happy to let the matter go to avoid public shame. *How convenient it would be if only our sinful indiscretions actually disappeared this easily.*

Three months later he is told Tamar is pregnant. Outraged over her immorality, Judah acts as judge, instead of the town elders as the Law required, and orders her to be brought out and burned. While the punishment of death fit the immorality done in that day, the means is exceptionally cruel and harsh, even for their time.¹ She sends the personal items back to him to identify the father of her child. Judah is shocked to find his mis-placed personal items. Humiliated in his brokenness, he admits his guilt and acknowledges that her motivation was at least consistent with desiring children, while his only for

¹ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 11:27–50:26](#), vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 723. Mathews writes, “Most striking is the call for Tamar’s burning, which is rare in Mosaic law as a form of capital punishment; it is reserved for the heinous sex crimes of a man’s marriage to his mother-in-law and the promiscuous daughter of a priest (Lev 20:14; 21:9; contrast stoning in Deut 21:21, 24). Burning the body was an act of severe degradation (2 Kgs 23:16; Amos 2:1).”



pleasure. He also confesses responsibility in withholding his youngest son, Shelah. Judah's brokenness remains on him as "he did not know her again."²⁶ [Judah's attempt to hide his shame was now exposed as public humiliation.](#)

The chapter ends with Tamar giving birth to twins, Perez and Zerah. This is one of only two sets of twins in the whole Bible², the other being Jacob and Esau, employing the same words and echoing the continuation of generational strife and succession. [Judah was undone by his sin and shame, and his legacy was one of hurt and harm on his whole family.](#)

TRANS Genesis 39 brings us back to the Joseph narrative.

*Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ²The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. **Genesis 39:1-6***

Now "brought down" to Egypt, Joseph was made a slave of his Egyptian master. The Lord's blessing on Joseph meant he made a noticeable impression on his master, who put him in charge of his whole house. But Joseph's master was not the only one who noticed him, his wife did as well. When she could resist no longer, she demanded Joseph lie with her.⁷ But instead of entertaining the demand, Joseph recognizes the wrongness of it as an offense against his master and sin against God.⁹ But these were not compelling reasons for her. She continued day after day to seduce Joseph. Finally, one day she grabs his garment and states her demand, "Lie with me." Joseph immediately left his garment and fled. She calls the guards and accuses Joseph of attacking her. Then, she recounts her accusation to her husband. What else could she do? If his garment was in her hands and Joseph was not responsible, she would be exposed and humiliated. Her husband was greatly angered and had Joseph thrown back in jail. Again, back in jail, we are reminded of God's blessing on Joseph as verses 21-23 repeat what we've already read in verses 2-4.

*But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed. **Genesis 39:21-23***

[Beyond only descriptive, these verses define Joseph; no matter where he is, who he is with or what he is doing, Joseph lived with God's blessing on his life because he stayed focused on faithfulness to the Lord.](#)

SUMMARY TRANS At first reading, Genesis 38 feels misplaced, disrupting Joseph's narrative and God's clear leading in his life by the complete sinful meltdown of Judah's life. But that is the VALUE of these two chapters and their placement. [Between Judah and Joseph, we see a life of selfish rationale and sinful indiscretions set against a life of God's steadfast love and favor, and the sovereignty of God at work in the midst of it all.](#)

The contrast of two lives: Judah reveals a life absent of integrity. Like his father, was a man who wanted to make his own way. This is his first "turn away" as he "went down" from his brothers.¹ When Judah settled, he made his own life; he ordered people by his choosing, did what he wanted and went where he wanted to go. But one thing he could not control nor satisfy were his selfish desires. Two pivotal moments in the text record that Judah "turned aside". The same word is used in both accounts (.1; .16), and holds the sense of "to change orientation or direction". Judah lived like a drunk driver, swerving wrecklessly after his own pleasure, but never finding it. The only thing Judah went straight into was his next sinful desire. Because Judah walked by selfish pride and sinful indulgence, everything and every one became his master. He had to work to control every situation, manage every conversation to ensure it corroborated his story, blame and condemn others to release himself of guilt, and wait on his own downfall in blind ignorance of deception. Judah lived a pattern of "turning aside" from what he knew was right, in what may have seemed small and inconsequential matters in the moment,

² K. A. Mathews, 703. "for in all of Scripture only Rebekah and Tamar produce twins."



but ultimately led him to self-destruction. **The absence of integrity always inebriates to forsake Biblical teaching, gospel doctrine and Spirit-led conviction for sinful actions.**

Joseph, on the other hand, reveals a life of integrity. Verse two tells us, “*The Lord was with Joseph*”. His life is distinctively marked by the Lord’s steadfast love and favor. And even though Joseph was “brought down” multiple times by his circumstances, he never turned away from the Lord in his personal decisions and loyalties, recognizing the wrong it would cause against other people, his master, and God. Joseph was “brought down” in every direction of circumstance and by many different people; carried to a place of another’s choosing, enslaved to another’s demands, and accused after denying another’s selfish pleasures, but none of this caused him to swerve or turn away in his direction. When Joseph held that his life was God’s and he was His servant, he never lived mastered by anyone or anything else. **Integrity leads one to walk straight by this guiding conviction; that what is right before God is good for life and all people.**

Genesis 38 has one conspicuous absence in Judah’s account, there is no mention of God’s intervention. This is important because his lineage, under Perez, is one through which Jesus will be born into the world. Some might ask, “**IF God’s sovereign work occurred in Judah’s family, then why worry about how we live?**” The answer is found in the contrast of Judah and Joseph. Judah harmed and hurt everyone around him by his sin; the carnage of bad relationships, decisions and actions condemned anyone associated with him. Joseph blessed everyone around him by his integrity; his life blessed those directly associated with him and those only indirectly affected by him. Judah lived a life of cursed brokenness; Joseph a life of blessing for all. **God will accomplish His will, but He is not indebted to favor anyone who walks outside His Word. Christians are called to live as a blessing to others by the steadfast love and favor God bestows on our life.**

The actions of your life reinforce and train your beliefs and convictions by how you live, the pattern of your life.

When “little indiscretions”, as we too often label our sins that we see as of little importance, are tolerated in our behavior, it erodes the foundation of one’s doctrinal beliefs. The more and longer you tolerate to practice these indiscretions (sin), the more damage they do. **Never forget: the ethical conduct of your life matters because it reveals and determines the doctrines and convictions that define your faith.**

When you walk with the Lord, He leads you in His steadfast love and favor. When you turn away, you become prey to every temptation along the way. For the person who walks in integrity of heart – in accordance with the Lord – it is the steadfast love of God and His favor that guards their life from destruction, regardless of the circumstances. For the one who walks according to their own ways – it is only a matter of time before they suddenly fall.

When we trust in Jesus to repent, turning from sin and self to obey God’s commands, we cast off the yoke of sin and take on the yoke of Christ to walk in integrity of His freedom.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:29-30

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

OBJ Integrity in Christ brings freedom to life by three blessings.

1: Security

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out. Proverbs 10:9
 “Securely” carries the sense to be set free from fear, worry or anxiety. Maybe you’ve recognized those as three of the top most common issues and crises of our day. Integrity releases from fear’s lies that start, “But what if... / what might be... / what about...” and the unlimited myriad of mental games we play in life. We need not worry over our reputation because as we focus on Christ He builds (transform) our character. **Integrity is the security of our life as we walk with Jesus.**

2: Guidance

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them. Proverbs 11:3



“Guides” means ‘to be in charge of’. When a person walks in integrity, what they know about Jesus by revelation from His Word controls their living for Jesus by faith in obedience to His Word. The absence of integrity guides life too, by steering one into self-destruction. [Integrity guides all of life by faith, by leading one’s conduct in accordance with God’s command.](#)

3. Deliverance

Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall. Proverbs 28:18

“Delivered” means to be saved from ruin; to be victorious. What an incredible promise, especially when reflected against the contrast we’ve seen today in the life of Judah and Joseph. Joseph was saved from ruin to be victorious because he walked in integrity of heart, in accordance with what he knew to be true of God. [Integrity delivers one to a life of freedom by delivering from the grasp and harm of evil.](#)

TRANS If you want to know the steadfast love of God and His favor on your life, you must walk in integrity. David provides an helpful outline to walk straight in the integrity of heart with Jesus Christ.

READ Psalm 101:1-4

I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music.

²I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house;

³I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

⁴A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil. Psalm 101:1-4

A life of integrity resonates and ponders God’s ways and goodness in Jesus Christ to walk in integrity. Then, it commits to and flees from all that does not align!

[Jesus blesses the one who walks in integrity with steadfast love and favor, but the crooked will fall.](#)

