

Joseph's Preservation of a Lineage

The Interlude of Gen. 38

Introduction:

1. In our previous study we observed that Joseph lived his life directed by his spiritual heritage.
2. This heritage involved the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - a. They were to inherit a land (Canaan).
 - b. They were to become a great nation.
 - c. Through them all the families of the earth would be blessed.
3. Joseph saw his life in Egypt as directed by God for the preservation of Israel, the people of God (50:20).
4. Joseph's anticipation of the fulfillment of the promise is seen in Gen. 50:22-26.
 - a. He saw his family heritage perpetuated to the third generation.
 - b. He reminded his brothers near his death of God's promise.
 - c. He made them swear to take his bones back to Canaan.
5. Within this great story of Joseph there is a chapter that seems not to fit—Gen. 38.
6. The story unfolds with Joseph being sold into Egypt by his brothers (37). Then there is the story of Judah and Tamar. The account then returns to Joseph in Egypt in chapter. 39.
7. How does this account about Judah and Tamar fit in the story of Joseph? Or does it?
8. First let's consider what the account says. Second we will try to define its significance to the story of Joseph. Third we will try to define its place in our spiritual heritage.

Discussion:

I. The events of Gen. 38.

- A. Judah took a wife from among the Canaanites and had three sons : Er, Onan and Shelah (38:1-5).
- B. Er married Tamar, upon his death Judah gave Onan to Tamar and he died. Tamar went to live in her father's house promised by Judah that when Shelah was old enough he would marry Tamar (6-11).
 1. Tamar waited for Shelah.
 2. Judah is afraid to give his last son in marriage to Tamar, lest he die too.
- C. Judah's wife died and when Judah went to Timnah to shear his sheep Tamar dressed as a harlot and Judah went in to her (12-19).
 1. Judah promised payment of a young goat.
 2. Tamar took as a pledge Judah's seal, cord and staff.
 3. She left, not waiting for the payment (20-23).
- D. Three months later Judah was informed that Tamar had played the harlot and was with child (24-26).
 1. Judah proclaimed that she should be burned.
 2. Tamar reveals who the father is.
 3. Judah confesses his unrighteousness and confesses her righteousness.
- E. She gave birth to twins (27-30).
 1. Perez.

2. Zerah.

- F. Like any single piece of a puzzle this account is ambiguous by itself, but when it is seen in light of the bigger picture its place and significance can be understood.

II. The significance of Gen. 38 in the book of Genesis, in the story of Joseph and in the larger picture of the story of the Bible.

- A. The book of Genesis is revealing the story of God's plan of salvation.
- B. There are certain key passages that need to be recognized as critical in understanding the plan. These passages have to do with a lineage stemming from Eve.
1. After man's initial sin God curses the serpent. Within that curse there is a statement made that is rather ambiguous at first consideration. It is found in Gen. 3:15.
 2. It is a "seed" promise.
 3. Someone is coming, from the seed of woman.
 4. This one will bruise Satan on the head; Satan will bruise him on the heel.
- C. A second, seemingly ambiguous, passage is given in Gen. 9:26-27.
1. It is a prophecy made about Shem, the son of Noah.
 2. He will be blessed above his brothers. Japheth will dwell in Shem's tents and Canaan will be Shem's servant.
- D. A third passage is more revealing: Gen. 12:1-3, but it too must be understood in light of the overall movement in Genesis.
1. We often describe Genesis as the book of beginnings. Often when we think of this we think of the creation and it is that. But I want you to see the book of Genesis as the book of beginnings of a spiritual lineage. God is building a house, a family, and these passages are revealing this family to us.
 2. It should be recognized that Abraham is a descendent of Shem (Gen. 11:10ff).
 3. Shem is a descendant of Noah who is a descendent of Eve. In our previous study we have traced the lineage of Joseph from his great grandfather Abraham, through his grandfather Isaac and his father Jacob. So Joseph's lineage traces all the way back to Shem, Noah, and Eve.
- E. A fourth passage in this developing lineage is found in Gen. 49:10.
1. Joseph's father is about to die. He prophesies regarding the future of his sons.
 2. To Judah he says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."
 3. This defines a regal element to the lineage. But who is this Shiloh and what does all this mean? Like any good story there are questions that intrigue us and keep us looking forward as we try to discover the mystery.
- F. A fifth passage is found in Num. 24:17.
1. The false prophet, Balaam, has been hired by Balak to curse the nation of Israel. Instead God causes him to speak words of truth in which he continues the regal element about Israel and how Israel will crush the head of Moab and the sons of Sheth (tumult).
 2. It is easy for these special elements of the story to get lost in the details. Cf. In my childhood my teachers would have us read a story and then go back over it to interpret it from the author's perspective. They would discuss the theme, moral elements to the story, the structure and what the author was trying to say.

Sometimes I had not seen very many of the elements in my cursory reading of the story. And so it is often with our reading of the story of the Bible.

- G. A sixth passage is found in Deut. 18:18.
 - 1. Here there is a prediction about the coming of a great prophet.
 - 2. Yes, the implication is that the passage refers to God speaking through many prophets.
 - 3. But the prophecy uses the singular pronoun as if to refer to a single prophet.
- H. Tracing these passages we learn that God is narrowing His promise.
 - 1. Of the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15).
 - 2. From the race of Shem (Gen. 9:27).
 - 3. From the family of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - 4. From the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). Someone is coming . . .
 - 5. He will be a ruler. He will be a special prophet.
- I. His lineage? Traces through Judah and Tamar and their son Perez. Joseph saved Judah and therefore Perez.
 - 1. The lineage of Perez is traced throughout Scripture.
 - 2. One might wonder what the significance is of the story of Ruth and Boaz in the Book of Ruth. Just an interesting story? Hardly! Boaz was a descendent of Judah. Boaz and Ruth had a son. Note the last verses of the Book of Ruth 4:16-22. "Why all this study about Judges, the coming of 1, 2 Samuel and the coming of the kingdom of David?"
- J. Now read with me Matt. 1:1-6.
 - 1. Now the story is coming together.
 - 2. Matthew is presenting Jesus as the promised seed.
 - 3. The significance of the genealogical record is becoming clearer.
 - 4. Note Matt. 2:6 and the regal element of the promise.
 - 5. Thus God is establishing a kingdom and a family as we observed in the lesson this morning.

III. What does it have to do with us?

- A. We are the people, the family, the household of God (Eph. 2:19-22).
- B. We are the kingdom of God. We are those people who submit to Jesus Christ as king (Acts 2:30, 38-39). It is what the apostles preached (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). It is a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28).
- C. This is our spiritual heritage.
 - 1. It is who we are.
 - 2. It is our mission.
 - 3. Joseph preserved us. His life is not just about good moral character. It is about God building a house for Himself.

Conclusion:

- 1. Understand it!
- 2. Submit to it!
- 3. Go and teach it!