

This chapter's unusual placement, after the story of Joseph has begun, implies a purpose related to the theme which is being developed, i.e., that God was working to preserve a remnant of Israel on earth (Gen 45:7). This continues a major theme in Genesis, that God has preserving those whom he has chosen.

The first readers of Genesis could profit from this as well as learn a reason for their stay in Egypt. Another point of interest to them concerned the history of Judah, who was prominent among them. If God had not intervened through Tamar, then there may not have been a tribe of Judah. God's implicit sovereign preservation of and care for His people can be seen in this chapter.

### **I. *God was at work to preserve the continued existence of Judah.***

#### **1. *The continued existence of Judah put in danger***

There was an Ancient Near Eastern practice called levirate marriage in which a man was to marry the childless widow of a deceased brother in order to produce an heir for the deceased. In accord with this, Onan, Judah's second son, was to marry Tamar, the wife of his elder brother, Er, who had died by the hand of God for his wickedness. Onan, when he took advantage of the marriage but acted to prevent Tamar's pregnancy, was also killed by God. Tamar was sent off by Judah to his father's house to wait allegedly until the third son, Shelah, was old enough to take her as a wife. But when much time had passed, it became clear that Judah was not going to allow Shelah and Tamar to marry.

Continuation of the family line was left in Judah's hands and he did nothing about it. If it had been left up to him, his family line may have died out.

#### **2. *The continued existence of Judah made possible by Tamar***

Tamar appears to be driven to get an heir for her first husband and apparently resorted in her mind to the Hittite and Assyrian levirate laws, which provided for producing an heir by the father of the deceased husband. By disguising herself as a temple prostitute, she got herself pregnant by her father-in-law. When revealed to be pregnant and charged with immorality, she was able to prove that Judah was the father with the unclaimed security he had left for payment. Judah acknowledged his wrong and got twin sons by Tamar.

God had preserved the existence of Judah through the questionable actions of Tamar and in spite of Judah's own inaction.

### **II. *God was at work to preserve the unique identity of His people.***

God had called Abraham out of a pagan country and promised to make of him a people which God would call His own, a people separated unto Him. But there was an ever increasing pagan Canaanite influence on Jacob and his family.

#### **1. *Evidence of the Canaanite influence in Judah's life:***

- a. He had friendship with Hirah, from Adullam, a Canaanite city, who also aided Judah in his sinful practices.
- b. He married a Canaanite woman, a practice which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had avoided.
- c. He participated in the immoral, pagan prostitution practices enough that Tamar could anticipate his actions.

#### **2. *The need and plan for escape from the Canaanite influence:***

Israel was to be a special people dedicated to God, but the Canaanite influence was drawing them away from God. They were in danger of losing the unique character showing that they belonged wholly to the one and only God.

God's method of preservation would be to get them out of Canaan, and preserve them in Egypt, where they would be set apart from others because shepherds were detestable to the Egyptians.

God desires as well to protect our unique identity as His holy people. We should guard against ungodly influences around us. Remember that a mark of our relationship to God is His discipline of His children (*cf.* Hebrews 12).

### **III. *God was at work to preserve what would be the Messianic line.***

1. God's promise to bless all people through the seed of Abraham was being worked on via Judah and Perez, who became forefathers of King David and ultimately the Messiah (*cf.* Matthew 1:1-6).
2. God also made a special choice of Perez over Zerah. Though Zerah was marked as the first to breach the womb, Perez was acknowledged as the firstborn in all the genealogies. As is often the case, the one humanly expect to be first or chosen, is not.

We do not know why God worked the birth in this fashion or made the choice which He did. It does remind us that He works all things according to His divine plan and choice and not according to human reckoning.

What may seem logical to us, what may seem right by human standards, is not always God's way. To us there would seem to have been a "cleaner" way to accomplish God's work of preservation. But even as we demonstrate our sinfulness, God works to accomplish His purposes.

God was at work to preserve Judah and the unique place of Israel and His promise to bless through the seed of Abraham. God is just as faithful today to accomplish His purposes.