

PART FORTY-FIVE

THE INCIDENT OF JUDAH AND TAMAR

(Genesis 38:1-30)

The Biblical Account.

1 And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. 2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her, and went in unto her. 3 And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. 4 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. 5 And she yet again bare a son, and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. 6 And Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. 7 And Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah; and Jehovah slew him. 8 And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her, and raise up seed to thy brother. 9 And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest she should give seed to his brother. 10 And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of Jehovah: and he slew him also. 11 Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow in thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown up; for he said, Lest he also die, like his brethren. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

12 And in process of time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheep-shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold, thy father-in-law goeth up to Timnah to shear his sheep. 14 And she put off from her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped her-

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self, and sat in the gate of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she was not given unto him to wife. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; for she had covered her face. 16 And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Come I pray thee, let me come in unto thee: for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? 17 And he said, I will send thee a kid of the goats from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it? 18 And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet and thy cord, and thy staff that is in thy hand. And he gave them to her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him. 19 And she arose, and went away, and put off her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. 20 And Judah sent the kid of the goats by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not. 21 Then he asked the men of her place, saying, Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the wayside? And they said, There hath been no prostitute here. 22 And he returned to Judah, and said, I have not found her; and also the men of the place said, There hath been no prostitute here. 23 And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be put to shame: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.

24 And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter-in-law hath played the harlot; and moreover, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt. 25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff. 26 And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She is more righteous than I, forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son.

And he knew her again no more. 27 And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. 28 And it came to pass, when she travailed, that one put out a hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. 29 And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself? therefore his name was called Perez. 30 And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zerah.

1. *The Unity of the Narrative.*

The subject-matter of this chapter seems to be an interruption of the continuity of the narrative ("Saga") of Joseph. "Partly on this account, and partly because the name Jehovah occurs in it (vers. 7, 10), it has been pronounced a later Jehovistic interpolation. Its design has been explained as an attempt to glorify the line of David by representing it as sprung from Judah, or to disclose the origin of the Levirate law of marriage among the Jews; but the incidents here recorded of Judah and his family are fitted to reflect dishonor instead of glory on the ancestry of David; and the custom here mentioned of raising up seed to a dead brother by marrying his widow, though the idea may have originated with Judah, is more likely to have descended from earlier times. Rightly understood, the object of the present portion of the record appears to have been not simply to prepare the way for the subsequent genealogical register (46:8-27), or to contrast the wickedness of Judah and his sons with the piety and chastity of Joseph in Egypt, or to recite the private history of one of Christ's ancestors, or to show that the pre-eminence of Judah in the patriarchal family was due exclusively to grace, *but also and chiefly to justify the Divine procedure in the subsequent deportation of*

Jacob and his sons to Egypt. The special danger to which the theocratic family was exposed was that of intermarrying with the Canaanites (24:3, 28:6). Accordingly, having carried forward his narrative to the point where, in consequence of Joseph's sale, a way begins to open up for the transference of the patriarchal house to the land of the Pharaohs, the historian makes a pause to introduce a passage from the life of Judah, with the view of proving the necessity of such removal, by showing, as in the case of Judah, the almost certainty that, if left in Canaan, the descendants of Jacob would fall before the temptation of marrying with the daughters of the land, with the result, in the first instance, of a great and rapid moral deterioration in the holy seed, and with the ultimate effect of completely obliterating the line of demarcation between them and the surrounding heathen world. How the purity of the patriarchal family was guarded till it developed into a powerful nation, first by its providential withdrawal in infancy from the sphere of temptation (46:5), then by its separate establishment in Goshen beside a people who regarded them with aversion (46:34), and latterly by its cruel enslavement under Pharaoh (Exod. 1:10), is a subject which in due course engages the attention of the writer" (PCG, 440). Italics mine—C.C.) (See again Gen. 15:12-16).

The story related in ch. 38 of the involvement of Judah with Canaanite neighbors is, according to K-D (338-339), "intended to point out the origin of the three leading families of the future princely tribe in Israel, and at the same time to show in what danger the sons of Jacob would have been of forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, through marriages with the Canaanitish women, and of perishing in the sin of Canaan, if the mercy of God had not interposed, and by leading Joseph into Egypt prepared the way for the removal of the whole house of Jacob into that land, and thus protected the family, just

as it was expanding into a nation, from the corrupting influence of the manners and customs of Canaan. This being the intention of the narrative, it is no episode or interpolation, but an integral part of the early history of Israel, which is woven here into the history of Jacob, because the events occurred subsequently to the sale of Joseph."

We must never overlook the connection between the revelation to Abraham in Genesis 15:12-16 and that part of the patriarchal story which is now beginning to unfold in the last days of Israel's life. It should be noted that, following Genesis 37:1-2, we are still dealing with the "generations" of Jacob, even though the content of most of the latter part of Genesis has to do with the experiences of Joseph. It is with the forming of the Israelite nation that we are dealing here, the nation which by galling bondage and a subsequent glorious deliverance, prepared the way for the Messianic Reign, of which the early Theocracy was in so many respects a pattern. Thus God used person, prophecy, type, and institution to point forward to, and thus to identify, in minute detail, the Messiah Himself at His appearance in the world, and to validate the institutions of the Christian System which were established by Him *per se*, and by Him also through the Apostles whom He chose and trained to act as the executors of His Last Will and Testament.

Again quoting K-D: "The disappearance of the name Jehovah, therefore, is to be explained, partly from the fact that previous revelations and acts of grace had given rise to other phrases expressive of the idea of Jehovah, which not only served as substitutes for this name of the covenant God, but in certain circumstances were much more appropriate; and partly from the fact that the sons of Jacob, including Joseph, did not so distinctly recognize in their course the saving guidance of the covenant God, as to be able to describe it as the work of *Jehovah*. This imperfect

insight, however, is intimately connected with the fact that the direct revelations of God had ceased; and that Joseph, although chosen by God to be the preserver of the house of Israel and the instrument in accomplishing His plans of salvation, was separated at a very early period from the fellowship of his father's house, and formally naturalized in Egypt, and though endowed with the supernatural power to interpret dreams, was not favored, as Daniel afterwards was in the Chaldean court, with visions or revelations of God. Consequently we cannot place Joseph on a level with the three patriarchs, nor assent to the statement, that 'as the noblest blossom of the patriarchal life is seen in Joseph, as in him the whole meaning of the patriarchal life is summed up and fulfilled, so in Christ we see the perfect blossom and sole fulfilment of the whole of the Old Covenant dispensation' (Kurtz), as being either correct or scriptural, so far as the first portion is concerned. For Joseph was not a medium of salvation in the same way as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was indeed a benefactor, not only to his brethren and the whole house of Israel, but also to the Egyptians; but salvation, *i.e.*, spiritual help and culture, he neither brought to the Gentiles nor to the house of Israel. In Jacob's blessing he is endowed with the richest inheritance of the firstborn in earthly things; but salvation is to reach the nations through Judah. We may therefore without hesitation look upon the history of Joseph as a 'type of the pathway of the Church, not of Jehovah only, but also of Christ, from lowliness to exaltation, from slavery to liberty, from suffering to glory' (*Delitzsch*); we may also, so far as the history of Israel is a type of the history of Christ and His Church, regard the life of Joseph, as believing commentators of all centuries have done, as a type of the life of Christ, and use these typical traits as aids to progress in the knowledge of salvation; but that we may not be seduced into typological trifling, we must not overlook the fact, that

neither Joseph nor his career is represented, either by the prophets or by Christ and His apostles, as typical of Christ—in anything like the same way, for example, as the guidance of Israel into and out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1, cf. Matt. 2:15), and other events and persons in the history of Israel” (BCOTP, 333-334). (Nevertheless, the analogies between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ are several, and very significant, as outlined *infra* in our section on material for “sermonizing”). (Cf. also Heb., chs. 8, 9, 10). Again: “The very fact that the author of Genesis, who wrote in the light of the further development and fuller revelation of the ways of the Lord with Joseph and the whole house of Jacob, represents the career of Joseph as a gracious interposition of *Jehovah* (ch. 39), and yet makes Joseph himself speak of *Elohim* as arranging the whole, is by no means an unimportant testimony to the historical fidelity and truth of the narrative; of which further proofs are to be found in the faithful and exact representation of the circumstances, manners, and customs of Egypt, as *Hengstenberg* has proved in his Egypt and the Books of Moses, from a comparison of these accounts of Joseph’s life with ancient documents and monuments connected with this land” (K-D, *ibid.*, 333).

“The history (*tholedoth*) of Isaac commenced with the founding of his house by the birth of his sons; but Jacob was abroad when his sons were born, and had not yet entered into undisputed possession of his inheritance. Hence his *tholedoth* only commence with his return to his father’s tent and his entrance upon the family possessions, and merely embrace the history of his life as patriarch of the house which he founded [cf. 37:2]. In this period of his life, indeed, his sons, especially Joseph and Judah, stand in the foreground, so that ‘Joseph might be described as the moving principle of the following history.’ But for all that, Jacob remains the head of the house, and the centre

around whom the whole revolves. This section is divided by the removal of Jacob to Egypt, into the period of his residence in Canaan (chs. 37-45), and the close of his life in Goshen (chs. 46-50). The first period is occupied with the events which prepared the way for, and eventually occasioned, his migration into Egypt. The way was prepared, directly by the sale of Joseph (ch. 37), indirectly by the alliance of Judah with the Canaanites (ch. 38), which endangered the divine call of Israel, inasmuch as this showed the necessity for a temporary removal of the sons of Israel from Canaan. The way was opened by the wonderful career of Joseph in Egypt, his elevation from slavery and imprisonment to be ruler over the whole of Egypt (chs. 39-41). And lastly the migration was occasioned by the famine in Canaan, which rendered it necessary for Jacob's sons to travel to Egypt to buy corn, and, whilst it led to Jacob's recovery of the son he had mourned for as dead, furnished an opportunity of Joseph to welcome his family into Egypt (chs. 42-45). The *second* period commences with the migration of Jacob into Egypt, and his settlement in the land of Goshen (chs. 46-47:27). It embraces the patriarch's closing years, his last instructions respecting his burial in Canaan (ch. 47:28-31), his adoption of Joseph's sons, and the blessing given to his twelve sons (ch. 49), and extends to his burial and Joseph's death (ch. 50)" (BCOTP, 329). It should be noted, in this connection, that in the various Scripture references *to the fathers of the Jewish nation—the patriarchs—three, and only three, are mentioned, and the same three in the same order, viz., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.* (Cf. Exo. 3:6, 15, 16; Exo. 4:5; Matt. 8:11-12, 22:32; Mark 12:26, Luke 20:37, Acts 3:13, 7:32). In Acts 7:8-9, the term "patriarch" is extended to include the *twelve* sons of Jacob, founders of the twelve tribes who were constituted a *nation* at Sinai.

It should be emphasized at the outset that *the story of Joseph is essentially a study in, and revelation of the ways of, Divine Providence*: hence, it lacks the kind of problems (geographical, sociological, scientific, ethical and spiritual) that have required our attention in the first thirty-six chapters of Genesis. The narrative that engages our attention in the last fourteen chapters of the book is a simple story in many respects simply told. It is from beginning to end, from every point of view, *a human interest story*.

2. *The Birth of Er and His Marriage to Tamar* (vv. 1-11).

At that time, i.e., about the time that Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, Judah "went down" from Hebron (37-14) or the mountains of Judah, toward the south, specifically to Adullam, in the lowland (Josh. 15:35), into the neighborhood of a certain Adullamite, a man named Hirah. Adullam was a town in the Hebron valley; in the period of the Conquest it was the seat of a Canaanite king (Josh. 12:15); afterward, it was celebrated for its connection with the history of David (1 Sam. 22:1, 2; 2 Sam. 23:13), and is subsequently mentioned in Scripture (2 Chron. 11:7, Neh. 11:300, Mic. 1:15). Judah, it would seem, deliberately separated himself from his brothers, and entered into an alliance, at least into friendly relations, with this Canaanite. "It would not be surprising if it turned out some day that Hirah was the name of an actual king of this Canaanite city, which lay in the Shephelah, or hill country, bordering the Philistaeian plain." "The name of Adullam survives to this day in an Arabicised form. . . . The Adullam of antiquity did not lie exactly at that village, but rather to the south of it on a site situated on a near-by hill, where sherds of the Middle Bronze Age confirm the existence of a city of patriarchal times. Travelers going from Hebron to Jaffa, or from Jerusalem to Gaza, would be attracted to it. King Rehoboam later found it

worth while to fortify this city (2 Chron. 11:7)" (Krae-ling, BA, 90). (Incidentally this writer explains: "We hear little in the narratives preceding the Joseph-cycle concerning the various sons of Jacob. And that little is not very much to the credit of the individuals thus singled out. In Genesis 34, Simeon and Levi came in for attention in connection with the role they are held to have played in the Shechem area. In Genesis 35:21-22 there was some notice of Reuben. Genesis 38 now gives us information about Judah. The strange position of this narrative after the first installment of the Joseph stories is due to the fact that in chapter 37 [v. 26] Judah is with his brethren; hence the compiler was not able to introduce it sooner. We shall take it up first before turning to Joseph" (*ibid.*, p. 90). We follow the same procedure in the present text.

The question that arises here is surely pertinent, viz., what prompted Judah to "go away" from his brothers? That is, to set up a separate and independent establishment apart from them? "Not only immediately after Joseph was sold, but also on account of it," "in a fit of impenitent anger" (Kurtz)? in a spirit of remorse (Lange)? How can we know?—no definite information is given us as regards his motivation. However, as noted already in considering Genesis 34, such alliances between nomads and city dwellers always resulted in intermarriage, and so it was in this case. Like Esau, this son of Jacob probably cast off the restraints of religion and married into a Canaanite family, "and it is not surprising that the family which sprung from such an unsuitable connection should be infamous for bold and unblushing wickedness" (Jamieson). At any rate, Judah married the daughter of Shuah, a Canaanite, and had three sons by her, respectively, Er, Onan, and Shelah. It strikes the present writer that Judah's motive for separating from his paternal household may well have been an infatuation for this daughter

of Shuah. Although it would appear that the tribe of Judah had an early history independent of the other tribes of Israel, the fact remains that Judah himself was back with his brothers in their various appearances in Egypt after Joseph became the *vizier* there under Pharaoh. As a matter of fact Scripture represents Judah as having taken subsequently a decided lead in all the affairs of Israel's family. When it became necessary to go into Egypt for food a second time, Judah remonstrated with Jacob against his detention of Benjamin and undertook to be responsible for the safety of the lad (43:3-10). When the telltale cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and punishment by Joseph seemed imminent, Judah's earnest petition for his father and brothers and his offer of himself as a slave so moved his princely brother that the latter could no longer retain the secret of his identity (44:14-34). Soon after, also, it was Judah who was sent by Jacob to act as guide ("show the way") for the migration of the latter and his house into the land of Goshen (46:28). We read no more of him until we find him receiving, along with his brothers, his father's final blessing (49:8-12). We now understand what the inspired writer means when he tells us that Judah, though not the firstborn of Israel's progeny, still and all "prevailed above his brethren" (1 Chron. 5:2).

As stated above, Judah married the daughter of Shuah, a Canaanite, (V. 2—Shua was *not* the name of Judah's wife, but that of her father, cf. v. 12). The woman bore a son, and Judah named him Er. When Er was grown up, according to ancient custom (cf. 21:21, 34:4), his father gave him a wife, named Tamar (v. 6), probably a Canaanite, of unknown parentage. But Er proved to be too wicked for Yahweh even to tolerate his continued existence, and so He "slew him" (*i.e.*, *caused him to die*). The son-in-law, no doubt, was addicted to all the abominable vices of Canaan (cf. Rom. 1:20-32). The wickedness involved elicited the heaviest divine disapproval; the wick-

edness—in all likelihood, some form of sex perversion—made Er guilty in a special sense, and so “Yahweh let him die.” We find here a positive evidence of the truth, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (cf. Gen. 2:17, Psa. 90:7ff., Prov. 10:27, Ezek. 18:20, Gal. 6:7-8, etc.)—an echo that rings throughout the entire Bible.

After the death of Er, Judah wished Onan, as the brother-in-law, to marry the childless widow of his deceased brother, and thus to raise up seed, *i.e.*, a family, for him. But Onan knew, of course, that the firstborn son would not be the founder of his own family, but would perpetuate the family of the deceased and receive his inheritance, and therefore prevented conception when consummating the marriage by spilling the semen, letting it fall on the ground. “This act not only betrayed a want of affection to his brother, combined with a despicable covetousness for his possession and inheritance, but was also a sin against the divine institution of marriage and its object, and was therefore punished by Jehovah with sudden death. The custom of *levirate marriage*, which is first mentioned here, and is found in different forms among Indians, Persians, and other nations of Asia and Africa, was not founded upon a divine command, but upon an ancient tradition, originating probably in Chaldea. It was not abolished, however, by the Mosaic law (Deut. 25:5ff.), but only so far restricted as not to allow it to interfere with the sanctity of marriage; and with this limitation it was enjoined as a duty of affection to build up the brother’s house, and to preserve his family and name” (K-D, 340). (Cf. also Matt. 22:23-33). “The custom of *levirate marriage* seems to have prevailed quite universally at the time, as it is known to have been customary among many nations ancient and modern. Judah does not appear as an innovator in this instance. *Levirate marriage* implied that if a man had died without leaving a son, the next brother of the deceased, if unmarried, would take

the widow to wife with the understanding that the first son born would carry on the line of the deceased, but all other children would be accounted his own. . . . Onan knew of this provision and intentionally prevented its realization. Selfishness may have prompted him: he did not care to preserve his brother's family. Greed may have been a concurrent motive: he desired to prevent the division of the patrimony into smaller units. But in addition to these two faults there was palpably involved the sin of a complete perversion of the purpose of marriage, that divine institution. What he did is described as 'taking preventive measures.' The original says: '*he destroyed [i.e., the semen] to the ground.*' From him the extreme sexual perversion called *onanism* has its name. The case is revolting enough. But plain speech in this case serves as a healthy warning. Yahweh let him die even as his brother" (EG, 980-981). In the science of medicine, *masturbation* (commonly called "self-abuse") is erroneously designated *onanism*. Onan's act was an offense against the theocratic family, not an act indulged for erotic gratification, an act which, if allowed to become habitual, undoubtedly contributes to sexual impotence in later life. *It is interesting to note that Er and Onan disappear from the sacred narrative never to be heard of again, except as statistics* (Gen. 46:12, Num. 26:19, 1 Chron. 2:3-4).

The sudden death of his two sons, in each instance soon after marriage with Tamar, must have made Judah hesitate to give her the third son as a husband also, thinking, it would seem, according to a superstition which we find in the apocryphal book of Tobit (ch. 3), that either she herself, or marriage with her, had been the cause of her husbands' deaths. He therefore sent her back to her father's house, telling her to remain there as a widow, with the promise that he would give her his youngest son Shelah to wed her as soon as Shelah had grown up. It is generally conceded that Judah never meant this seriously, for *he*

thought lest (i.e., he was afraid that) he [Shelah] also might die like his brethren. "Judah sends Tamar home to her family, on the pretext that his third son Shelah is too young to marry her. His real motive is fear lest his only surviving son should share the fate of Ēr and Onan, which he plainly attributes to Tamar herself" (ICCG, 452). Her return to her father's house was in accordance with the law for a childless widow (Lev. 22:13, Ruth 1:8): so Tamar "*went and dwelt in her father's house*" (v. 11).

3. *Tamar's Stratagem* (vv. 12-19).

Skinner calls it "*Tamar's daring stratagem,*" and indeed it was just that. Tamar, after waiting a long time, saw that Shelah had grown up and was not yet given to her as a husband; she therefore determined to procure children from Judah himself who had become a widower in the meantime. Judah, having comforted himself (*i.e.*, ceased to mourn for his deceased wife) went to the sheep-shearing at Timnath. The sheep-shearing was kept with great feasting by shepherds. Judah therefore took his friend Hirah with him, a fact noted in v. 12 in relation to what follows. When Tamar heard that Judah was on his way to the feast, she took off the garments of widowhood, put on a veil, and sat down, disguised as a prostitute, by the gate of Enaim, by which Judah would be sure to pass on his return from Timnath. (Enaim no doubt was the same as Enam in the lowland of Judah, Josh. 15:34). (The veil was the sign of the harlot, here the term is *kedeshab*, that is, a cult prostitute, a woman dedicated to impure heathen worship, cf. Deut. 23:17, Hos. 4:14). Tamar's veil, her wrapping herself and sitting by the wayside (at the crossroads) set her apart as one who plied this iniquitous trade. (There are two evils that man, in his entire history on earth, has never been able to eliminate or even to control: one is drunkenness, and the other is prostitution). When Judah saw her, naturally he took her for what she expected him to: her design actually was

realized. "Judah does not appear to a very good advantage in this account. He seems to know altogether too well how to carry on a transaction of this sort. Since the veil seems to be the customary device to give herself the appearance of coyness, such as persons of this sort may use, it effectually served the purpose of disguising Tamar. When, besides, it is indicated that Judah did not know that she was his daughter-in-law ["for she had covered her face"], we see that Judah surely would not have consciously made himself guilty of incest" (EG, 984). Of course they entered into "negotiations." The price agreed upon was "a kid of the goats." This is indeed suggestive in view of the fact that the goat, because of its prolificness, played a rather prominent role in the ancient Fertility Cult, and hence was sacred to Astarte. "The present of a kid on these occasions may be due to the fact that (as in classical antiquity) the goat was sacred to the goddess of life" (ICCG, 453). (Cf. Pausanias, VI, 25, 2; Tacitus, *Hist.*, 2, 3; Lucian, *Dial. meretr.* 7, 1). Tamar's master-stroke, however, was the obtaining of a pledge which made the identification of the owner absolutely certain. The pledge was Judah's *seal, cord, and staff*. This was his signet-ring, with the band by which it was hung around his neck, and his staff: these served as a pledge of the young buck-goat which he offered her. These were objects of value and were regarded as ornaments in the East (cf. *Herodotus*, i, 195). The cord may have been regarded as having magical powers "like those occasionally worn by Arab men" (ICCG, 454). Judah then lay with Tamar, and she became pregnant by him. She then put off her veil and put on her garments of widowhood.

4. *Tamar's Vindication*, (vv. 20-26).

When Judah sent the young buck-goat to the supposed harlot, by his friend Hirah, for the purpose of redeeming his pledges, the latter could not find her, and was told, on inquiring of the people of Enaim, that there was no

prostitute there (literally no *consecrated* one). "The consecrated,' *i.e.*, the *hierodule*, a woman sacred to Astarte, a goddess of the Canaanites, the deification of the generative and productive principle of nature; one who served the goddess by prostitution: cf. Deut. 23:17-18). This was no doubt regarded as the most respectable designation for public prostitutes in Canaan" (K-D, 341). Ritual prostitution was an essential element of the Cult of Fertility which flourished throughout the entire ancient pagan world. *Kedesbah* here, v. 21, "strictly 'sacred prostitute'—one 'dedicated' for this purpose to Ishtar-Astarte, or some other deity, Deut. 23:18, Hos. 4:14," ICCG, 454).

When Judah's friend returned with the kid and reported that he had had no success in finding the woman, Judah decided to leave his pledges with the girl, lest he might expose himself to popular ridicule by any further inquiries, since he had done his part toward keeping his promise. "It is significant that Judah employs his *fidus Achates* Hirah in this discreditable affair, and will rather lose his seal, etc., than run the risk of publicity, v. 23."

In due time, however, it was made known to Judah that his daughter-in-law had played the harlot and was certainly with child. Hence it fell to Judah as the head of the family to bring her to justice. This meant that she should be brought out and burned. "Death by burning is the punishment imposed in Hammurabi, sect. 157, for incest with a mother, and was doubtless the common punishment for adultery on the part of a woman in ancient Israel. In later times the milder penalty of stoning was substituted (Lev. 20:10, Deut. 22:23ff., Ezek. 16:40, John 8:5), the more cruel death being reserved for the prostitution of a priest's daughter (Lev. 21:9, cf. Hammurabi, Sect. 110). Judah ordered the burning, whereupon Tamar, on being brought forth for the infliction of the penalty,

by thus waiting till the last moment, "made her justification as public and dramatically complete as possible." Producing the things which Judah had given her as a pledge, she addressed the crowd, saying, *By the man to whom these belong I am with child.* Judah recognized the seal, the cord, and the staff as his own, and frankly confessed that her conduct was justified by the graver wrong which he had done her in not giving her his son Shelah as a husband. "In passing sentence on Tamar, Judah had condemned himself. His sin, however, did not consist merely in having given way to his lusts so far as to lie with a supposed public prostitute of Canaan, but still more in the fact, that by breaking his promise to give her his son Shelah as her husband, he had caused his daughter-in-law to practise this deception upon him, just because in his heart he blamed her for the early and sudden deaths of his elder sons, whereas the real cause of the deaths which had so grieved his paternal heart was the wickedness of the sons themselves, the mainspring of which was to be found in his own marriage with a Canaanite in violation of the patriarchal call. And even if the sons of Jacob were not unconditionally prohibited from marrying the daughters of Canaanites, Judah's marriage at any rate had borne such fruit in his sons Er and Onan, as Jehovah the covenant God was compelled to reject. But if Judah, instead of recognizing the hand of the Lord in the sudden death of his sons, traced the cause to Tamar, and determined to keep her a childless widow all her life long, not only in opposition to the traditional custom, but also in opposition to the will of God as expressed in His promises of a numerous increase of the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Tamar had by no means acted rightly in the stratagem by which she frustrated his plan, and sought to procure from Judah himself the seed of which he was unjustly depriving her, though her act might be

less critical than Judah's. For it is evident from the whole account, that she was not driven to her sin by lust, but by the innate desire for children; and for that reason she was more in the right than Judah. Judah himself, however, not only saw his guilt, but he confessed it also; and showed both by his confession, and also by the fact that he had no further conjugal intercourse with Tamar, an earnest endeavor to conquer the lusts of the flesh, and to guard against the sin into which he had fallen. And because he thus humbled himself, God gave him grace, and not only exalted him to be the chief of the house of Israel, but blessed the children that were begotten in sin" (K-D, 342-343). "It follows that the episode is not meant to reflect discredit on the tribe of Judah. It presents Judah's behavior in as favorable light as possible, suggesting extenuating circumstances for what could not be altogether excused; and regards that of Tamar as a glory to the tribe; cf. Ruth 4:12" (ICCG, 455). "To suppose that incidents like that recorded in vv. 12-26 were of frequent occurrence in ancient Israel, or that it was the duty of the father-in-law under *any* circumstances to marry his son's widow, is to miss entirely the point of the narrative. On the contrary, it is just the exceptional nature of the circumstances that explains the writer's obvious admiration for Tamar's heroic conduct. 'Tamar shows her fortitude by her disregard of conventional prejudice, and her determination by any means in her power to secure her wifely rights within her husband's family. To obtain this right the intrepid woman dares the utmost that womanly honor could endure—stoops to the level of an unfortunate girl, and does that which in ordinary cases would lead to the most cruel and shameful death, bravely risking honor and life on the issue. At the same time, like a true mother in Judah, she manages her part so cleverly that the dangerous path conducts her to a happy goal" (*ibid.*, 455).

5. *Birth of Perez and Zerah*, (vv. 27-30).

Tamar brought forth twins, and a circumstance occurred at the birth, which does happen occasionally when the children lie in an abnormal position. Moreover, it always impedes delivery, and this fact was regarded in this instance as so significant that the names of the two children were founded on it. At the birth, a hand came out first, around which the midwife tied a scarlet thread to mark this as the firstborn (v. 20). We then read that when the child drew back its hand "*behold, his brother came out.*" Then the midwife said, "*wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself?*" (Marginal, "*How hast thou made a breach? a breach be upon thee!*"). That is, *Thou bearest the blame of the breach, i.e., by breaking through by pressing forward.* From this fact he received the name Perez ("breach," "breaker through"). Rashi renders it: "Why hast thou acted with such strength' to force thy way out before thy brother" (SC, 241). Then the other child, the one with the scarlet thread around his arm, came into the world, and was named Zerah ("exit," "rising," or according to Rashi, "shining," because of the bright color of the crimson thread, SC, 241). Zerah sought to appear first, whereas in fact Perez was the firstborn, and is therefore placed before Zerah in the genealogical tables (46:12, Num. 26:20. Perez was the ancestor of the tribe-prince Nahshon (Num. 2:3), and of King David also (Ruth 4:18-22, 1 Chron. 2:3-17). Through Perez, it should be especially noted, Tamar has her place as one of the female ancestors of Christ. Perez himself carried on the chosen line that culminated in Messiah (Matt. 1:3). "The grace of God is vividly demonstrated by His use of these abominable events to accomplish His own purposes. The Divine Potter, undoubtedly for reasons of His own, has often worked with very inferior clay (cf. Jer. 18:1-12). Again we must be impressed with the fact that the Bible is a very *realistic* book: it pictures life as men and

women have lived it, and continue to live it. It is pre-eminently the Book of Life.

"The twin-birth of Rebecca is once more reflected. We see how important the question of the firstborn remains to the Israelitish mother and midwife. In the case of the twins there appears more manifestly the marks of a striving for the birthright. Pharez, however, did not obtain the birthright, as Jacob sought it, by holding on the heel, but by a violent breach. In this he was to represent Judah's lion-like manner within the milder nature of Jacob. According to Knobel, the midwife is supposed to have said to Pharez: a breach upon thee, *i.e.*, a breach happen to thee; and this is said to have been fulfilled when the Israelitish tribes tore themselves away from the house of David, as a punishment, because the Davidian family of the Pharezites had violently got the supremacy over its brethren" (Lange, 593). (Cf. 1 Chron. 11:11, 27:2-3; Neh. 11:4-6). Later references to the progeny of Judah's third son, Shelah, are found in Gen. 46:12; Num. 26:20; 1 Chron. 2:3, 4:21-23). These references to the line of Shelah are, as will be noted, mostly statistical.

We probably should mention here the matter of the sequence of time between chapters 37 and 38. "At that time," v. 1, ch. 37, must surely mean, just after, or soon after, Joseph had been sold into Egypt, at the age of seventeen (37:2). He was elevated to the position of prime minister of the land at the age of thirty (41:46). It will thus be evident that some twenty-two years intervened between the sale of Joseph and the settlement in Egypt (13 years until Joseph's promotion plus 7 years of plenty *plus* 2 years of famine). On this basis Judah had time to marry, to have a son whom he gave in marriage in his seventeenth year; to have a second son whom in his eighteenth year he gave to the same wife; allowing an additional two years for the rest of the events narrated in ch. 38. "Judah departed from his brethren in vexation

over their treatment of their brother Joseph and over their hypocrisy in the sight of their father. At least some such reason for his going 'away from his brethren' is possible. . . . Judah does approach more closely to a Canaanite man, who appears to have been friendly and welcomed the approach. . . . A further contact with the Canaanites follows. A man by the name of Shua (a name meaning perhaps 'opulence') has a daughter whom Judah takes to wife. Whether resentment against his brethren had anything to do with this, or whether easygoing friendship with Canaanites lay at the bottom of it all, is hard to say" (EG, 977). (It is interesting to note that Leupold differs from authorities quoted above on the matter of Judah's motivation in "pitching his tent" toward Canaanites). Again, on the chronological problem we note the following: "The 23 years which intervened between the taking of Joseph into Egypt and the migration of Jacob thither, furnish space enough for all the events recorded in this chapter (38). If we suppose that Judah, who was 20 years old when Joseph was sold, went to Adullam soon afterwards and married there, his three sons might have been born four or five years after Joseph's captivity. And if his eldest son was born about a year and a half after the sale of Joseph, and he married him to Tamar when he was 15 years old, and gave her to the second son a year after that, Onan's death would occur at least five years before Jacob's removal to Egypt; time enough, therefore, both for the generation and birth of the twin-sons of Judah by Tamar, and for Judah's two journeys into Egypt with his brethren to buy corn" (K-D, 339).

The Tribe of Judah, together with that of Benjamin, retained its identity down to New Testament times, we might well say to the Fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent Dispersion, A.D. 70. The history of this tribe is of considerable importance, in view of the fact that Messiah was of the seed of Abraham, of the royal lineage of David,

and of the tribal lineage of Judah (although a high priest after the order of Melchizedek) (Gal. 3:16, 3:29-29; 2 Sam. 7:12; Matt. 21-9; John 7:42; Rom. 1:3; Rev. 5:5, etc.; Heb., ch. 7, also 6:20).

Judah early in life took a prominent role among his brothers, as is shown by the story of Joseph (Gen. 37:26-27, 43:3-10, 44:16-34, 46:28). Genesis, ch. 38, though throwing light on the beginnings of the tribe of Judah, probably stands where it does for the purpose of contrasting Judah's character with that of Joseph. Gen. 49:8-12, though not strictly a promise of kingship to Judah, but rather of leadership and tribal stability, the promise of Shiloh does involve kingship ultimately. (Note the blessings of Moses on Judah; Deut. 33:7). The genealogies of Judah's descendants are given us in 1 Chron., chs. 2-4. When Judah went into Egypt he had three sons, but so rapidly did his family increase that at the time of the first census it numbered 74,600 (Num. 1:26-27) and was first in population of all the tribes. At the second census, it numbered 76,500, still retaining its rank (Num. 26:22). Its representative among the spies, and also among those appointed to partition the land, was the great leader Caleb, the son of Jephunneh (Num. 13:6). "According to rabbinical authority, Judah's standard was green, with the symbol of a lion (Keil)" (UBG, s.v.). Throughout the Exodus and the Wanderings, the tribe of Judah was at the forefront of the procession (Num. 2:3, 9). Judah was the first tribe which received its allotted territory ("inheritance") west of the Jordan, which included fully one-third of the entire land. When a survey was made later, at the completion of the Conquest, an adjustment was made by which a part of Judah's territory was given to Simeon (Josh. 15:20-63, 18:1-10; Judg. 1:3). The boundaries and cities of the region allotted to Judah are given at great length (Josh. 15:20-63). Judah and Simeon led the military expedition which resulted in the defeat

of the Canaanites, including the capture of Jerusalem (Judg. 1:10); whereupon they extended their conquest by overrunning most of the coastal plain (Judg. 1:16-21). "During the rule of the judges, Judah maintained an independent spirit toward the other tribes; and while they acquiesced in the Benjamite (Saul's) appointment as king, it could hardly have been with a very good grace, as may be inferred from the very small contingent they supplied to that monarch's army against Amalek. (1 Sam. 15:4). When Judah established David as king, and removed the sanctuary to Jerusalem, the Ephraimites were dissatisfied, and seized the first opportunity of setting up an independent kingdom. Then the history of Judah as a tribe lapsed into that of *Judah as a kingdom*" (UBD, 614). "Then followed a long history of wars, vassalage and occasional prosperity. Against Judah were arrayed Israel, Egypt, Syria, and finally the country was ravaged by the king of Babylon, Jerusalem was burned with fire, the holy temple laid in ashes, the people taken away into captivity, and Judah was no more" (*ibid.*, p. 615). (Cf. 2 Kings, chs. 24, 25; Jer. chs. 39-41).

The territory of Judah extended east and west from the northern end of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, and north and south from this line to the region of Kadesh-Barnea. It included the cities which figure pre-eminently in the Biblical story, and with great significance especially in New Testament times. It is interesting to keep in mind that from the tribe of Judah came the Son of Mary by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and that from the tribe of Benjamin came Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:1, Phil. 3:5, 2 Cor. 11:22).

The following comment on ch. 38 by Dr. Speiser is important: "Because of the eventual pre-eminence of the tribe of Judah, the personalized history of that branch was of obvious interest to tradition. Through the period of

Judah and down to the time of David, Judah expanded by absorbing various Canaanite elements. This beginning of that composite history is here intimated by Judah's settlement among the Canaanites and his acquisition of a Canaanite wife. His line, however, is in danger of extinction; but a daughter-in-law by the name of Tamar, apparently another Canaanite, takes heroic measures and triumphs in the end. In resolutely following the intent of the law, by unorthodox and hazardous means, Tamar thus takes her place alongside Rachel (31:19). She had the stuff, it was felt, to be the mother of a virile clan, which is clearly the main theme of the story. What brings this theme into bold relief is the institution of the levirate marriage, that is, marriage with the wife of a deceased brother (or another relative in special circumstances). The objective was to maintain the family line in a society that set great store by blood ties, and consequently had little use for adoption. Biblical law upholds this obligation and frowns on any attempt to circumvent it (cf. Deut. 25:5ff., Ruth, ch. 3f.). Judah sought to live up to this practice, yet shrank from risking the life of his last surviving son. When Tamar became convinced that her father-in-law was temporizing, she tricked him into leaving her with child, by waylaying him in the disguise of a harlot. But she had the presence of mind to secure positive proof of her mate's identity. Here J adds a subtle human touch. Judah mistakes Tamar for a common harlot, Heb. *zanab*, v. 15, just as he was meant to do. But when his friend Hirah seeks to redeem the pledge, he asks for the local *kedeshab* (votary, hierodule, cult prostitute), in order to place the affair on a higher social level. At the critical moment, Judah finds out that Tamar was no wanton, and absolves her of any guilt in the matter. She rewards him for his candor and understanding by presenting him with twins. An aetiological notice about the boys' names brings the unique tale to a close" (ABG, 300).

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FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

The Book of Life

The Bible pictures life just as it is lived by men and women in all ages. There is no false modesty in the Book of Books. The Old Testament pictures life as it was lived in ancient times—in all its sensuality, debauchery, and vice. This, unfortunately, seems to be the way men are living in our day: apart from the influence of Biblical religion and morality, they—seem not to have changed very much, if at all. The charge of vulgarity has been hurled against the Bible. Some have said that it is bestial. No, it is not the Bible that is vulgar, bestial: it is men and women who choose to live life on the level of the brute, indulging their animal passions to the full. The Bible portrays life exactly as human beings live it. It pictures their vices as truly as their virtues. It is pre-eminently the Book of Life. The content of the Bible is essentially *realistic*, from every point of view.

This is not true of ordinary writers of fiction. Their villains are too villainous and their heroes too heroic. I recall some of the works of fiction which I read as a boy, especially a novel by the name of *St. Elmo*. The leading man of the story was the meanest villain I had ever read of, and the heroine was simply too good for this world. Characterizations were so overdrawn as to be absurd. And the cheaper the fiction, the greater the exaggeration in character portrayal. I recall other books, *Isbmael*, *Self Raised*, *Lena Rivers*, etc. "Nick Carter" was the most unrealistic character in the time of Victorian fiction, with the possible exception of "Rollo" or "Little Lord Fauntleroy." And of all the tear-jerkers that ever appeared in print, what shall we say of *East Lynne*?

But the characters of the Bible are true to life. The more one studies them, the more one realizes that they were the same kinds and classes of men and women as

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those with whom one rubs elbows day by day. Their modern parallels are living down the street from our home or across the hall from our apartment. First, there was gentle, peace-loving Abel, and there was wild, reckless, daring Cain—two boys of completely different temperaments and aspirations such as are often found in the same family. There was old patient Noah, a righteous man in the midst of an ungodly generation, but his righteousness did not prevent his falling a prey to the wine-cask. Some are inclined to exonerate Noah on the ground that he was the first to cultivate the vineyard and did not know that the product was intoxicating if taken in excess. They may be right.

There was patriarchal Abraham, with flowing beard and spiritual mien—grand, solitary, sublime, in his walk with God, a friend of God and the father of all the faithful. But he did not always tell the whole truth. On two occasions, when a half-lie seemed to serve his purpose better, he told the half-lie and was caught in it both times.

There was self-seeking Lot. Lot always looked out for "number one." There was Isaac, the hen-pecked man, who seemed unable to realize that his wife was taking advantage of him repeatedly. There was shrewd, property-loving Jacob, a man who could take a small investment and build it into a fortune. There was strong-willed Joseph: one instance in which the "dreamer" proved to be the most practical man of his time. We are compelled to admire Joseph. There was the meek Moses who endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27). Moses could not make a speech (so he said), and so God sent Aaron along to do the persuading. Aaron was a typical "politician": the words ran out of his mouth like oil, and he always kept his ear to the ground to gauge

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the direction of the winds of public sentiment, and when the people wanted to set up the golden bull and worship it, he allowed it to be done. We suppose he thought he could get away with it, but Moses returned at the wrong time and caught him red-handed in the act of sanctioning idolatry. There is persistent, plodding Joshua, the U.S. Grant of the Bible who proposed to fight it out on his line if it took all summer or longer. And there was Saul, powerful and handsome in physique, but small in spirit, jealous, revengeful, and mean. Saul hit the bottom rung of the ladder when he drifted into the witch of Endor's den. And there was David! The man who could fight and sing, and sing and fight. Never could man sin more heinously and repent more genuinely than could David. There was Daniel the courageous, who could say "No" to despots, who, like Luther and Knox, defied the powers that be in order to be true to their God. There was hopeful, optimistic Isaiah, melancholy, pessimistic Jeremiah. There was Hosea, the man with a broken heart, who, out of this domestic experience, could give us a deeper picture of God's love than did any other man of Old Testament times. There was John the Immerser, the iconoclast, the smasher of images, who overturned precedents, who could call his audience a "generation of vipers," who cared not one whit what people thought of him but sought only to call them to repentance. There was impulsive, boastful, yet withal lovable Simon Peter. Peter was always out-and-out just what he was: he was adept at opening his mouth and putting his foot in it. One may not have agreed with Peter all the time but one always knew just where he stood! There was Paul, the lawyer, the intellectual giant, a product of Gamaliel's rabbinical school in Jerusalem. Paul was so shrewd in dealing with audiences or in pleading the cause of Christ

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before kings and emperors. When the Jews were about to kill him in Jerusalem, he hurled a question at them about the Resurrection. It so happened that the mob was made up of both Pharisees (who believed in the resurrection of the dead) and the Sadducees (who did not, Acts 23:6-8). The shrewd Apostle cried out that he was being opposed because he believed in the resurrection of the body, whereupon the Pharisees and Sadducees went to arguing among themselves, and while they argued, Paul slipped away unharmed. There was James, the practical man, who paid his respects to backbiters and gossips, and who had much to say about the danger of riches, the brevity of life, the nastiness of the tongue, the real meaning of faith, and pure and undefiled religion. And there was the beloved John, who reclined on the Master's bosom at the Last Supper, whose vision penetrated eternity and heaven itself to let us know that in the beginning there was the Word, and that the Word was with God, and that the Word is God, that is, deity as truly as Father and Son are deity.

Two women, one named Mary, the other Martha, are mentioned by two New Testament writers. Luke writes five verses about them, and John writes fourteen. Yet these two women live in our own day and their names are household words among people who read the Bible, despite the fact that all we know about them is to be found in nineteen New Testament passages. The characters of the Bible are genuine. They are true to life. They are portrayed just as they lived, thought and acted. No book in all the world is as true to life in its portrayal of all shades of human character as is the Bible. It is a realistic book. It deals with mankind honestly. It tells him that he is in sin, and it shows him the way out. To fail to read and meditate upon the Word that is in the Bible is to miss the pearl of great price. C.C.C.

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REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART FORTY-FIVE

1. What reasons are suggested by various writers for the insertion of this story about Judah and Tamar at this point in the patriarchal narratives?
2. Are we still following the account of the *toledoth* of Jacob? How does the story of Joseph fit into this background?
3. What are the two periods of Jacob's life following his entrance into full possession of the patriarchal inheritance? When did that event occur?
4. What is the *motif* that pervades the entire narrative of Joseph's career?
5. What reasons are suggested for Judah's "separating himself" from his brothers?
6. What problem did his consorting with Canaanites raise? Why is this story of Judah and Tamar inserted into the story of Joseph at this point?
7. Whom did Judah marry? What were the names of his three sons? Which of the three did God allow to die?
8. In what passages does Judah appear again in the story of Joseph in Egypt?
9. What particular sin did Onan commit? What was his purpose in doing what he did? What is known as *onanism* today? Is this designation strictly relevant? Explain.
10. What was the custom of levirate marriage? To what extent did it prevail in the ancient world? What was the purpose of it?
11. What was Judah's reaction to the deaths of his first two sons by Tamar?
12. What did he do with Tamar? What did he promise her, and why did he fail to fulfil his promise to her?

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13. What deception did Tamar perpetrate on Judah? What was her purpose?
14. Distinguish between the *zanab* and the *kedeshab* in the Canaanite culture.
15. What was the price agreed upon between Tamar and Judah? What was the significance of this price?
16. What threefold pledge did Judah give Tamar to bind the bargain?
17. Explain what ritual prostitution was in the ancient pagan world? With what cult was it associated?
18. Why did Judah decide to leave his threefold pledge with Tamar?
19. How did Tamar dramatically—and publicly—prove Judah's guilt in this transaction?
20. How did Judah react? On what ground did he justify Tamar's act? What did he admit to be his own motive in failing to keep his original promise concerning Shelah?
21. On what basis may we justify—at least partially—Tamar's role in this incident?
22. What aspect of nobility does Judah finally manifest in this incident?
23. How would you evaluate this incident morally and spiritually in the light of the motives of the two persons involved? How are we justified in speaking of this as a "human interest" story?
24. What two sons did Tamar bear to Judah? What was significant about the manner of their birth? In what respects was this a sort of repetition of the story of the birth of Rebekah's sons?
25. How explain the sequence of the time element between chs. 37 and 38? (That is, between the story of young Joseph and the story of the sons of Judah).
26. What two tribes retained their identity down to the Fall of Jerusalem? Who was the great Personage who

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hailed from the tribe of Judah? What important person came from the tribe of Benjamin?

27. Trace briefly the history of the tribe of Judah as it is pieced together out of the Old Testament record. What gave it its special significance?
28. Summarize Dr. Speiser's presentation of the significance of this story of Judah and Tamar, also his evaluation of Tamar's character, and of Judah's role in the affair.
29. How does Dr. Leupold differ from other commentators in his theory of Judah's motivation in this case?
30. Why do we say that the Bible is the Book of Life? Show how this story of Judah and Tamar proves this to be true. What do we mean when we say that it is a realistic book?
31. What son and what grandson of Jacob became members of the Line that brought forth Messiah?
32. Explain the metaphor, "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah." What does this metaphor suggest?