

Perez—God's Breakthrough

Genesis 38:1-30

Halifax: 6 November 2016, 10:30 AM

Introduction

As we have been making our way through Genesis,

- We have seen again and again the remarkable way that God brings forth His promised salvation out of the rubbish heap of this sinful fallen world...
 - such a ruined world, such a corrupt world, a world entirely without hope.
 - entirely without hope if we must bring forth our own salvation.
- We are so used to living in the rubbish heap that we don't even realise what it would be like to live in a world where people really did love one another,
 - And where people really did worship God as God, and where they knew Him and walked with Him every day.
 - We have no idea what we are missing and how far we have fallen.

In Genesis, we have the record of the fall...

- But we also have the initial promises of salvation on which all the rest of redemptive history depends...
 - It is God who came and said that He would bring forth a people out of this ruined world that would repent and turn against sin and Satan.
 - It was He who promised to bring forth a righteous son—who would save them and who would destroy Satan.
 - Somehow, this righteous son would be born from this people that God transformed.
- We have seen how God promised this Saviour to a man called Abraham—that He would come forth through his descendants...
 - But we have seen how God showed them immediately that the bringing forth of this Son would not be by ordinary human strength.
 - Abraham and Sarah were barren, long past child-bearing years, yet God gave Sarah strength to have a son.
 - God also intervened to preserve Abraham from having his wife taken from him before she had conceived the son of promise (whose name was Isaac).
 - And then when Isaac was born, God showed that the son of promise must be offered as a sacrifice, but that the son to be offered was not Isaac, but one that God Himself would provide in future generations
 - And then Isaac also had a barren wife until God opened her womb...
 - and then there was the problem that Isaac tried to misdirect the blessing to the son that God had not chosen to carry on the line to Christ...
 - And the son of Isaac that God did choose was Jacob, and God showed that but for His intervention, Jacob would have been killed...and if not that, would have drifted away from his calling...

- In all this, the LORD was showing that the promised Son would come forth by His grace and power and not by human effort.
 - But now we come to a new threat to God overcomes...a fatal weakness in the promised line of Christ would have cut off the promised line.

Please listen as I read to you from our text—Genesis 38.

- This chapter seems to interrupt the story of Joseph, where Joseph has just been cruelly taken and sold to merchants who will sell him as a slave in Egypt.
 - They did this to get rid of him because they envied him.
 - Joseph, as we will see, will be instrumental in saving the whole family of Jacob, but interestingly, Joseph is not in the line of those that are to bring forth the Messiah.
- It is rather his brother Judah—and he is the one we read about in Genesis 38...
 - And we see that his line is nearly cut off, in which case he would not have been able to bring forth the Messiah.
 - We come to chapter 38 with the knowledge of those who know the whole story that Judah is the one through whom Messiah is to come.
- Listen as I read to you beginning in Genesis 38, verse 1. This is the Word of God.

Genesis 38:1-30: It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name *was* Hirah. ² And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name *was* Shua, and he married her and went in to her. ³ So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴ She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. ⁵ And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him. ⁶ Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. ⁸ And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." ⁹ But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. ¹⁰ And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also. ¹¹ Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his

brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house. ¹² Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³ And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." ¹⁴ So she took off her widow's garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. ¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face. ¹⁶ Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she *was* his daughter-in-law. So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" ¹⁷ And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock." So she said, "Will you give *me* a pledge till you send *it*?" ¹⁸ Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" So she said, "Your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand." Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹ So she arose and went away, and laid aside her

veil and put on the garments of her widowhood. ²⁰ And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. ²¹ Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who *was* openly by the roadside?" And they said, "There was no harlot in this *place*." ²² So he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*." ²³ Then Judah said, "Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her." ²⁴ And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she *is* with child by harlotry." So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" ²⁵ When she *was* brought out, she sent to her

father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I *am* with child." And she said, "Please determine whose these *are* — the signet and cord, and staff." ²⁶ So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he never knew her again. ²⁷ Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb. ²⁸ And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." ²⁹ Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? *This* breach *be* upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez. ³⁰ Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

In this chapter, we see how the promise of a Saviour is threatened in a way that it has not been threatened before!

- Yes, there was barrenness in Abraham and Sarah,
- And yes, there were enemies that came against them, against Isaac, and against Jacob that threatened to destroy them,
- And yes, there was the danger of assimilation into the corrupt people of Canaan...

But with Judah, we have something new...

- With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, there was faith—they had an eye to God's promise and even though they did not always understand it, they yearned for it.
- But Judah is the first in the line of sons that is to bring forth Christ who, at first, is a profane man—like Esau.
 - Do you remember what a profane man is?
 - A profane man is one who is no interest in the things of God—in the salvation of God—he does not care about God's kingdom or the promise of a Saviour.

We have already seen in the previous chapter how it was Judah that led the way in taking his brother to murder him, and then because of Reuben's restraint, agreed to leave him in a pit to die until he got the idea of selling him to the merchants and making some money.

- He is the one who cruelly led the way in these wicked deeds...
- And now, in chapter 38, we see how profane this man is...how little interest he has in the promises of God and how if it were left to him, he would have been cut off from the earth because of his wickedness.

I. So first of all, see how the promise is threatened by Judah's corruption.

A. The chapter opens with him departing from his brothers to hobnob with the Canaanites.

1. Remember that God has already revealed that the Canaanites were under His curse and that they were to be destroyed.

- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had all avoided marriage with these people.
- They had been called to inherit God's blessing, and to bring forth a son in future generations who would bring blessing to the world...
 - The blessing of forgiveness of sin and of eternal life and of deliverance from bondage to sin and Satan, deliverance from death and the curse.
 - They were called to walk before God and to be blameless.
 - They had been far from perfect, but they had all had an eye on God's promise and in faith, they had followed Him and He had kept them.
 - Esau, who was cut off from God, had hung out with the Canaanites and married them, but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had avoided it because of their trust in God's promises and their desire to see His promises fulfilled.

2. But of Jacob's sons, Judah is the one through whom the Messiah is to come and he has no regard for the promises...

- He leaves his brothers to keep company with the Canaanites, and then he marries this Canaanite woman...
 - He could not have consulted with his father about this, for his father would not have approved of it.
 - The way his relationship is described is as sheer lust...
 - Of course, yes, we can give him credit that he married her, but the way it is presented—it does not even name her...
 - He saw her and he married her—without any consideration apparently that she was a cursed woman of the Canaanites.
 - He married her and he went in to her.
 - He was not thinking of bringing forth sons for God's kingdom.
 - He was not thinking of the kind of woman that would help do that—not at all...
 - He married her because he saw her and she looked good to him—so he took her.
 - What a profane man!
 - He had these incredible promises from God, and he is only concerned to fulfill his lusts.
- If any of you young men or young women marry outside of the Lord, you will be put out of the church.
 - You show by this that you are a profane person who does not care about the kingdom of God.

- B. And what kind of fruit came forth from the marriage of this profane man Judah and this woman of Canaan?
1. Three sons, at least two of which we know were so wicked that the LORD actually killed them!
 - The LORD would not have these wicked sons to have a part in bringing forth the Saviour of the world.
 - He cut them down for their wickedness.
 - They could not continue the covenant line.
 2. The first born was named Er, which interestingly in Hebrew is the word wicked (ra'ah) spelled backwards...
 - So there is a play on his name in verse 7 when, after he marries, it says, **“But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked (ra’ah) in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him.”**
 - We are not told how the LORD killed him, but we are told that He did and we are told why He did—because he was so wicked.
 - He had married a woman named Tamar, and then God kills him because he is so wicked.
 3. So now Onan comes along to marry Tamar according to the custom of the day.
 - a. Verse 8 describes this when it says, **And Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.”**
 - This speaks of the custom of lev-ir-ate marriage.
 - In this custom, when a man dies after he marries before he has had any children, his brother marries his widow and the first son that is born to them is considered the son of one who died.
 - This was done to preserve the name of the one who died and to raise up an heir to inherit his property.
 - There is good reason to suppose that the LORD instituted this custom before Babel...
 - I say this because the practice is found in the various nations all over the world that were scattered at Babel...
 - We have records that it was practiced by the Chinese, the Assyrians, the Hittites, at Nuzi and Ugarit, by the Apaches, the Tibetans, the Huns, the Nigerians, and in places such as South Africa, it is still found.
 - It may have been a testimony to the hope of the resurrection—
 - The promise to the righteous that they would be raised and would inherit the earth—we have seen in the revelation that was given to Abraham that he was promised the land as an everlasting possession.
 - Though he never attained it in this life, he was promised that he would obtain it, and indeed he will, in the resurrection.
 - The promise to all the saved is that they, the meek, will inherit the earth—the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells.

- b. Whatever the case, God approves of levirate marriage because when Moses gives the law it says:
 - Deuteronomy 25:5-6: **If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be *married* to a stranger outside *the family*; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And it shall be *that* the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.**
 - c. But look at what Onan does!
 - Verse 9 says: **But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother.**
 - He indulges himself in sexual pleasure with the woman, but he defeats the whole purpose of the levirate union by spilling his seed...
 - and the language indicates that he did this over and over again—
 - What a wicked man!
 - That is not just my opinion!
 - Verse 10 tells us that this displeased the LORD so much that He killed Onan also.
 - The wickedness was heightened by the fact that it was from this family that the Messiah was to come forth...
 - And Onan, on his part, makes that impossible!
 - He shows that he is a profane man who doesn't even care that his family is called to bring forth the Messiah of the world!
- C. And now Judah himself does something that is almost equally wicked.
1. He makes a promise to Tamar that he will give her to his third son, Shelah, when Shelah gets a little older, even though he has absolutely no intention of doing this.
 - We are told about his false promise in verse 11: **Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers."**
 - He does not want to ever give Shelah to Tamar for fear that something will happen to Shelah such as happened to his brothers.
 2. This has wickedness written all over it...
 - a. First, there is the way he treats poor Tamar.
 - He tells her to wait when he has no intention of giving Shelah to her.
 - She might have gone on and married someone else in another family if he had been straight with her, but instead he leaves her dangling.
 - And instead of taking care of her, he sends her to her father.
 - b. Second is the way he does not repent of the wickedness in his family!
 - The LORD has just killed two of his sons because of their wickedness.

- That ought to get a father's attention, but instead he stupidly seems to transfer the blame to Tamar—
 - as if it is because of her that these boys died and the if he gives Shelah to her, the same thing might happen to Shelah.
- If Shelah was wicked, maybe so—and he probably was—but Judah should have led his family to repentance instead of acting like there was something wrong with Tamar...
- But that is the way with wicked men—God judges them and instead of repenting, they become superstitious...
 - They blame anything other than their own wickedness for their problems.
 - That is how superstitions often arise—something is blamed for God's judgments instead of our own sin.
- c. Third, Judah's wickedness is seen in that he shows once again that he has little concern about God's promise to bring forth a Saviour through him.
 - God had commanded His people to be fruitful and multiply, but Judah, on his part, prevents Tamar from bringing forth a son.
 - If it had been left up to Judah, the Messiah would never have been born—
 - but of course it was not left of Judah!

TRANS> And that brings us to our next point...

II. The LORD brings forth the child of promise out of all this wickedness! The son of promise breaks forth from this rubbish heap of a family!

A. To Judah's shame, God uses a Canaanite woman to accomplish this.

1. Tamar is eager to have a son through this family.
 - a. We see this in a couple of ways...
 - 1) First that when her husband died, she submitted to the custom of levirate marriage with Onan.
 - 2) Second, that she then waits patiently for what Judah has falsely promised to her—that he will give her to Shelah when he matures a bit more.
 - 3) It is not certain that she had a choice in the matter, but she probably did, especially since Judah sent her back to her father's house.
 - She and her father might have insisted that she would go and find a husband elsewhere—but she wants to be joined to this family.
 - b. The best explanation for this seems to be that Tamar understood that despite all their wickedness,
 - God had made special promises to this family.
 - It is hard to think that even with Judah's wickedness, this history would have been completely hidden from her.
 - People knew about Abraham and his family and they were afraid of them because it was obvious that God was with them.
- It becomes all the more obvious that Tamar wants to bring forth a child in Judah's family when we see what she does next!

2. She comes up with a plan to force Judah to act in her behalf.
 - a. It is not right what she does, but it seems to be an act of faith—sort of like Jacob deceiving his father to get the blessing that God had promised.
 - He and his mother did it because they believed the promise and because the promise was very precious to them...
 - Their method was wrong, but their faith was virtuous...
 - And Tamar's faith—if this is an act of faith—is extraordinary—for her, a Canaanite woman, to value the promise of God so much that she takes such extreme measures as she does.
 - b. Now you see what she does!
 - 1) Judah's wife has died, he has finished his mourning for her, and now he is in the festive time of sheep shearing (see that in verses 12).
 - Shelah has grown up now and she realises that Judah has deceived her—that he has no intention of giving her to Shelah as a wife.
 - 2) She is told that Judah is going to Timnah to shear sheep, and sadly, knowing his perverse character,
 - she dresses up like a prostitute supposing that he will be easily enticed by her...
 - And sure enough, Judah immediately solicits her services, not knowing that it is Tamar because she is wearing a veil—and he had pretty much ignored her for the past several years besides.
 - 3) In a very business-like fashion, she asks Judah what he will give her before she allows him to have her...
 - He promises to send her a young goat...
 - and she requires a pledge—a pledge which would be valuable to Judah but not to her—but which most men would not give up...
 - his signet and cord and his staff.
 - It would be something like giving up his passport and his debit card without the code—not that she could use it—but that he couldn't while it was in her possession.
 - For him to give these up shows that his lust had a death grip on him.
 - Men in the grip of their lusts will give up all kinds of things—to the enrichment of those in the sex trade.
 - This sin reduces men to a crust of bread as it says in Proverbs.
 - When Judah sends the young goat he promised her by the hand of a friend—to avoid embarrassment and exposure—his friend discovers that there is no harlot in that place.
 - Judah, realising that he would look like an idiot for giving up such a pledge and that it would expose him as a fornicator to wander around town looking for her, decides to let the matter go.
 - He would have to spend a lot of money to replace his signet and cord, but he will avoid the shame.

- B. And now Tamar’s plan, because God is in it, works out better than she could ever have imagined.
1. In the first place, she actually conceives a child (twins in fact) from this single encounter with Judah!
 - Obviously, the LORD wanted this to happen!
 - It is hard to guess what Tamar would have done if she had not conceived.
 - Was she trusting that the LORD would give her a child in this way, or was she planning, if she had not conceived, to inform Judah what he had done and insist that he have her again?
 - We cannot know, but the LORD did give her conception.
 - Conception is always the hand of God, but here His hand is very conspicuous!
 2. And now it is reported to Judah that Tamar has been a fornicator—played the harlot as it says—which does not necessarily mean prostitution...
 - Judah immediately reacts as if in righteous indignation—
 - Guilty men are often very harsh with the sins of others—and it was also the custom of the day for adulteresses (and adulterers if they were known) to be burned.
 - We may think this is barbarous, but we are the ones who are barbarous for taking the sin of adultery so lightly.
 - I say this because God Himself later instituted stoning for adultery—for both the man and the woman—reminding us that this is a sin that we take far too lightly in our day of sexual perversion.
 - It is a sin that destroys families, and that destroys children’s lives, and that is highly offensive to God, showing contempt for his institution of marriage.
 - We are so familiar with it that we think it worse to execute for it than to commit it!
 - But who is Judah to take such moral high ground with his daughter-in-law when he knew that he had put her in a place of temptation by not giving Shelah to her (and not intending to do so).
 - And when he himself had so easily been enticed by a prostitute?
 3. But now Judah is forced to face his sin...
 - a. It is a very dramatic scene—having just condemned Tamar to be burned as an adulteress, Tamar steps forth and says:
 - **v. 25: “By the man to whom these belong, I am with child.” And she said, “Please determine whose these are —the signet and cord, and staff.”**
 - This reminds us of what Judah did when he sent Joseph’s bloody coat to his father and said, “can you identify this coat—is this your son’s coat?”
 - b. Immediately Judah is struck by his own wickedness!
 - His response is given in verse 26: **So Judah acknowledged them and said, “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never knew her again.**

- Before witnesses, he confesses to what he has done, and we have reason to believe that he is sincere here!
 - Why? Because the LORD is in this and later on, Judah, who before called for Joseph's murder in cold blood,
 - will be found offering himself in the place of his brother Benjamin—to bear Benjamin's punishment so that Benjamin can be set free.
 - Judah will be willing to take his brother's place in love for his brother and for his father!
 - Such a transformation is completely inexplicable without this history that is before us here...
 - Judah's sins have closed in on him—that is God's gracious work by the Holy Spirit.
 - Have you had that happen to you?
 - Are you gripped by the fact that you are a sinner and that without a Saviour you deserve only to be condemned?
 - Do not fight against God's Spirit if He is showing you your sin.
 - It is the truth about you and you need to face it.
 - He shows it to you, not that you might be condemned, but that you might turn to Christ for mercy.
- c. Judah commends Tamar as more righteous than he has been.
- She did this so that she might have a child by his family—it was not meant to be by the father-in-law, but it was in the spirit of the levirate marriage.
- C. And now see the glorious outcome—the son of promise breaks forth out of this wicked family!
1. The account of his birth is given in verses 27-30:
 - **Genesis 38:27-30: Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb. 28 And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” 29 Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, “How did you break through? *This breach be upon you!*” Therefore his name was called Perez. [Perez means break through] 30 Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.**
 2. The marvellous thing is that when it looked as if there would be no son of the promise to carry on the line of Christ because of the great wickedness of Judah and his family,
 - Perez breaks forth into the world!
 - The salvation of the whole world, in a sense, depended upon it!
 - If Judah's line through whom Messiah was to come had been cut off because of wickedness, then there would be no Messiah and no salvation for the world.

III. This all goes to show once again that only the Lord could bring forth a Saviour for us!

A. Only He could bring forth a righteous life-giving loving holy Son out of the ruined race of mankind.

1. Salvation is wholly of the LORD and only of the LORD...
 - It is not a natural accomplishment or achievement of man, but a freely given gracious gift of God Almighty!
2. Jesus Christ is Himself the true Perez who breaks forth from the rubbish heap of sinful fallen mankind.
 - He emerges from us and of us with the power and merit to save us—such power and merit as we could never manufacture in a million years!
3. Perez stands as a concise picture of the whole work of God in bringing forth the promised Saviour to us.
 - He had to come forth from the most unlikely of all sources—
 - corruption had to bring forth incorruption;
 - what was spiritually dead by God's grace brought forth the only one who was spiritually alive;
 - what was righteous broke forth from what was unrighteous...
 - And we are left with the midwife's question concerning Christ, "How did you break forth?"
 - How did you ever come forth from us?
 - And of course the answer is that God did it...God did what was impossible and brought forth a Saviour from sinners.

TRANS> And that is not all that we see in this passage in the way of grace...

B. We also see that our mighty gracious God takes us as individual persons whom He has chosen to save and brings *us* from death into life!

1. Life breaks forth in us and overcomes death through His saving work in us.
 - His salvation takes us from the rubbish heap of sin and makes us holy so that we can live with God in glory.
2. God looks at us when He comes to save us as individuals, and He sees how corrupt and how defiled and how ruined we are...
 - But He has plans for us—to take us and to join us to His Son and to fill us with His Spirit and to lead us into the fullness of life...
 - into the life of grace and holiness and goodness that He has prepared for us to walk in.
 - In His kindness, He will break us and humble us the way He did Judah so that we clearly see our sin and our need of salvation...
 - And He will transform us by and by so that we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us...
 - Like Judah, we who once had murderous hatred for our brothers, bitter envying and strife,
 - will come forth with love and mercy, with a readiness to lay down our lives for our brothers the way Jesus laid down His life for us.

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters, there is hope—tremendous certain hope...

- not because of what is in us or because of what is in you,
 - but because God is our God and our Redeemer and He has made a covenant in which He has promised to save us through His only begotten Son...
- Already, contrary to all that we are, He has brought Him forth for us...
 - And now He is taking us each one and transforming us by His grace the way He transformed Judah...
 - And we are already accepted, not through our own merit or any goodness that we will attain by His grace,
 - but through the merit and the sufferings of Jesus Christ who lived for us and then suffered for our sins.
 - Our salvation is sure because it is all in God's hands and He has promised!
 - Come and put yourself in His hands and He will not turn you away.