

Royal Line Preserved

H/N 4/07/04 pm

Reading: Ruth 4, Matthew 1

Study: Genesis 38:27-30

Psalms: 40:1-4, 77:12-15, 146:5-8, 145:9-11

Salvation is of the Jews, said Jesus to the Samaritan woman. And Paul reminded his Gentile readers that the Jews, his own people, were not only given the law, the covenants, and the promises, but that from the fathers, *according to the flesh Christ Jesus came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God*. (Romans 9:5). Jesus was not born an Englishman, an Asian, and Indian or an African – despite the efforts of some ignorant people who try to portray Jesus in some such way. He was born a Jew, and it vital that we recognize this.

Jesus is an historical person. Even if you jettison the Old Testament you will find the very opening of the New Testament reminds us of this. *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham*. Abraham was given the promise by God. What was that promise? *In your seed/offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed* (Genesis 22:18). God chose Abraham and promised him that one of his descendants would bring blessing to the fallen human race – the blessing of salvation as Jesus said. And so the whole of Scripture moves toward the fulfilment of that promise in Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham and the Son of God.

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar. So, far from being an intrusion into the story of Joseph this chapter (Genesis 38) provides us with vital information for the genealogy of Jesus Christ. In this somewhat obscure chapter we learn that Perez was born of sexual immorality and also born a twin in unusual circumstances. Yet Perez, the son of Judah by his daughter-in-law Tamar, was the one to continue the royal line. It is in another somewhat obscure book and tiny book called Ruth that we follow the line of Perez down to King David.

Royal line in jeopardy

Judah moved away from his brothers to live among the Canaanites, the people reserved by God for judgment. His alliance with them, particularly in marriage was disastrous, as might have been expected. His sons were so wicked that the Lord killed two of them before they had any offspring.

A stalemate was reached in that he would not give his other son Shelah to marry his widowed daughter in law Tamar. Shelah was supposed to have children with Tamar. He was supposed to produce an heir for Judah.

The life of a widow in her father's house was not a pleasant one for Tamar. In that society, as in many today, widows are very vulnerable. They have very few rights or privileges. They are often seen as a bad omen in the family and in society. In Hinduism the practice of Sati or burning of widows removed this stigma of widows from a male-dominated culture.

Tamar of course was almost burnt to death because she acted as a prostitute. She was desperate to be given status as a wife and also to have children. She acted to force the hand of Judah in fulfilling

his promise. But we can see that, in the sovereignty of God, it was that greater promise of the Lord to Abraham that she was fulfilling. In the larger picture of Biblical history and the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise we can see how the Lord overruled in all this wickedness to preserve the royal line.

It is amazing that Tamar's name is recorded in the genealogy in Matthew. A woman, almost certainly a Canaanite woman. A woman guilty of prostitution. And she gets a mention in this list which does not include such matriarchs as Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. Note other women who get a mention in this list. Rahab another Canaanite and a prostitute, and Ruth a Moabite.

Ruth was in a similar position to that of Tamar – a childless widow. Again the royal line was in jeopardy but the Lord wonderfully brought Boaz to marry her and have offspring to preserve this line. *May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman* (Ruth 4:12).

Tamar, Rahab and Ruth all speak to us of the grace of God. All Gentiles, and strangers to the covenant and the promises of God, yet brought in by grace; indeed woven in the royal line itself. Even with immoral backgrounds the Lord could use them for his eternal purposes.

We should remember that not only are we Gentiles, but we also have been brought into the covenant of grace from the depths of sin.

Twins

The children struggled together within her...she went to inquire of the Lord and the Lord said to her 'two nations are in your womb...and the older will serve the younger' (Genesis 25:22-23). That was Rebecca giving birth to Jacob and Esau. There is quite a similarity with this account of Tamar giving birth to twins.

There we saw that the Lord made the sovereign choice, even before their birth, that the younger was the one chosen to inherit the promise. Here we see in a similar way that the one who emerged first was actually the one to be born second.

It is an intriguing story is it not. At the time of birth a hand came out first. This was not normal of course – it indicated a breach delivery. The midwife quickly took a scarlet thread and tied it on this tiny hand saying *this one came out first*. Why did she do this? It must have been the custom at the time. Even today the midwife is quick to get a tag on the newborn lest the babies get mixed up in the hospital.

In this case the hand disappeared back inside the womb and next thing the other baby is born, presumably in the normal way. The midwife expressed surprise at this saying *'how did you break through'*. This firstborn of the twins was called Perez meaning breach or breakthrough. The brother with the scarlet thread on his hand came out second. His name was called Zerah.

The Lord is powerful to overrule in all situations for his glory. He raises up one, and puts down another. He said to Rebecca the older will serve the younger. And he overruled in the affairs of men to bring about his purposes. Men are so intent on making their plans for the future and making them without acknowledging their Creator and the ruler of this universe.

What did James counsel? Do not say in your arrogance today or tomorrow I will go to this city and do business and make a profit. Rather say, *If the Lord wills we shall live and do this or that*. The Lord is all-powerful. He can change your circumstances in an instant. If you are looking to Him and walking in his ways then you will be able to stand firm in all circumstances.

So we see how God wonderfully brought forth good from the great wickedness displayed in this chapter. Jacob was brought to repentance when his sin was exposed. Through Tamar, God raised up an heir for Judah. It was by his sovereign power, overruling even in the affairs of these sinful people.

'Through such a channel of iniquity – *Judah...Perez...by Tamar* – the Saviour according to his human nature was willing to pass on his way from the glories of heaven to the incarnation and to crucifixion in his people's stead. If this be recognised even the study of genealogy can be a blessing to mind and heart' (Hendriksen on Matthew).

Jesus would have known the background of these women specifically mentioned in his family tree. He knew the background of the birth of his ancestor Perez. He is fully aware of the sinful estate into which we are all born. Indeed he came to seek and to save the lost. Consider how he demonstrated that truth in his own ministry. He let a sinful woman anoint his feet (Luke 7), he went to eat with the despised Zacchaeus and did not condemn the woman caught in adultery – all of whom he saved. Yet He was denounced by the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and prostitutes (Luke 15:2).

Although doggedly holding to their heritage as children of Abraham the Pharisees were blind to the whole truth of their ancestry. It is there in the Scripture, it is highlighted in the genealogy given by Matthew. Far from showing compassion for the lost, for sinners, as Jesus did, they were intent on condemning them, little realizing that they were condemning their own ancestors – and themselves also.

What great love the Father has for miserable, hopeless and helpless sinners like us that he would send his son into this world; that he would let him be born in the likeness of sinful flesh. Jesus, being in the form of God came from glory into this fallen world. He lived among us in this cesspool of iniquity – tempted in every way as we are yet without sin – in order to redeem us, in order to lift us out of the pit that is the world in which we live. By his death on the Cross he did that - for those who believe.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon