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BIB102 NO- Old Testament Literature

13 September 2020

Judah's Story of Redemption

In Genesis 37-44, we witness crucial events in the adult life of Judah and how they determine his actions and shape his character. These life experiences and his response to them, show the different stages of his development, and the progressive evolution from an immature, uncompromising, in essence, a good-natured individual, but not willing to fully stand up for what is righteous, to a responsible, righteous, God-fearing grown-up, willing to accept the consequences of his shortcomings and make amends; eventually Judah will put his freedom and life on the line to protect and safeguard his family.

Judah is Jacob's son, a shepherd who works with his brothers tending to their father's flocks. When Joseph, who is tenderly loved by his father, reveals his divinely inspired dreams to his family, his brothers get jealous, feel threatened, and plot to kill him. Judah dissuades his brothers from killing Joseph, proposing that they sell him to the Ishmaelites instead. Judah also participates in the cover-up about what happened to Joseph. Nonetheless, Judah's intervention saves Joseph's life, and unwittingly, serves as God's instrument for the fall and rise of his brother Joseph. At this point, Judah shows a small seed of goodness, but he does not strongly stand against the plotters. Judah's sin is perhaps one of envy, fear, and resentment towards his brother, and one of following the crowd; condemning his brother to live as a slave, lying to cover their tracks, and, fundamentally, failing to do the right thing. Judah continues from there on to

experience life as an adult. He marries and has children of his own. His firstborn son dies and he asks his second son, Onan, to marry his brother's widow, Tamar, as per the law of the land in those times, but Onan refuses to follow through and he dies too. Then he proposes for Tamar to live at his family house and wait until his third son grows into adulthood so that he can become her husband. At this point, Judah also experiences the loss of his wife. Tamar is getting impatient, and will not wait on Judah's indecision to make his son marry her. So she disguises her as a prostitute and tricks Judah into sleeping with her. When Judah hears Tamar has been accused of prostitution, he reacts by judging her very harshly and even condemns her to death. However, when he finds out she is the woman who he had unknowingly slept with, and that she is pregnant by him, he reflects on the facts that took her to such desperate deceiving action, and accepts his part of responsibility in the act; he judges no more. These life events seem to have made Judah more compassionate and less judgmental.

Finally, we get to the turning point of this biblical story that leads to Judah's final redemption. Here I see the greatest change of heart and character, which surpasses all the shortcomings of his past. Judah displays integrity, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Judah rises to the occasion fully, when he travels to Egypt to buy grain to spare his family from starvation. It is Judah who pleads with his father to let him return to Egypt for the second time taking his younger brother Benjamin with him, as requested by the man in charge of the land of Egypt, who was no other than Joseph, who had prospered and gained the Pharaoh's favor, as God had disposed. It is Judah who reassures his father and takes full responsibility for bringing Benjamin, his father's youngest most loved son, back from Egypt safely.

Joseph tests his brothers before revealing himself to them, and sets them up by planting his silver cup in Benjamin's sack, to make it look as if he had stolen it. When the cup is found,

he threatens to take Benjamin to be his slave as punishment. It is Judah who speaks up again, this time he unselfishly offers to take his brother's place as a slave and pleads with Joseph to let the younger brother go free, safely back to his father. Judah knows the heartbreak of losing a son and wants to spare Jacob from the pain of never seeing his beloved younger son again. Judah's character shows strength, integrity, tremendous love, and compassion towards his father.

Finally, Joseph reveals himself and brothers embrace and weep. There has been a transformation through time and life events in all the characters of the story. The brothers have seen the inequity they inflicted on his brother Joseph, and have repented, and Joseph has forgiven them. Redemption has taken place. A broken family by the sins of the past has come together, and they stand more united than ever. All is well.

The most remarkable biblical characters, as human beings, have gone through the process of falling in and out of grace with God. David lied, committed adultery, stole another man's wife, and had his husband killed in battle. Jonah disobeyed God's direction for him. Isaac and Aaron let pride and idolatry drive them away from God. Yet our God is the God of second chances. The lesson to be learned from all these great stories of the Bible is that sin separates us from God, but reconciliation is possible if one is willing to repent and make amends. When we sin we stray from God's purpose for us, but if we repent, ask for forgiveness, surrender and accept God in our hearts, God restores us to our divine path, and will prosper us; there is redemption. Through the life experiences we all grow, mature, and are shaped by the "Potters Hand" of the Almighty God.

God has planted a great seed of potential in our hearts, we must grow it and nourish it so that when the appointed time comes, we can confidently raise to the occasion, and fulfill our purpose with integrity and excellence, just as our biblical ancestors did.