

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“How To Goof Up Your Life”

Genesis 38:1-30

2003

Introduction

In 1995 Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who is the second most listened to talk radio show host in the nation, wrote a book called, *10 Stupid Things Women Do To Mess Up Their Lives*. It was a best seller! So she wrote three more:

10 Stupid Things Men Do To Mess Up Their Lives

10 Stupid Things Parents Do To Mess Up Their Lives

10 Stupid Things Couples Do To Mess Up Their Lives.

Her writing is filled with practical sage advice on how not to goof up your life.

But, the truth be told, Dr. Laura was scooped by God by 4000 years!! Because in Genesis 38, we have a record of the decisions and actions that Judah made to goof up his life. And by studying this sordid chapter, we can avoid the kinds of self-destructive actions that goofed up the life of one of the patriarchs of the faith.

#1 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life:

He failed to place a high priority on his relationship with God

This is evident in the life history we have of Judah so far in the book of Genesis

He was the fourth born son of his mother Leah and his father Jacob

He was the one who had suggested to his brothers that they sell Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37:26) for a profit.

He was a man of little or no spiritual depth.

I The Beginning Of The End

A. Judah **left** his brothers and stayed with Hirah [Verse 1]

Why did he leave? Here are several possible reasons:

1. Because of his guilt over selling Joseph
2. Because of the overall dysfunction of his family
3. Because of his father's unending grief – it was a depressing environment

Judah chose to exchange the fellowship of his brothers and father for fellowship and union with the ungodly people of Canaan.

#2 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life:

He separated himself from the covenant family of God

Heb 10:24-25 “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

#3 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life: *He chose the wrong friends*

Evidently, one of the first people he befriends is an Adullamite named Hirah. Hirah was the kind of man you warned your sons not to associate with and your daughters not to date! No doubt about it, he was a bad influence!

Application:

1 Cor 15:33 “Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

B. Judah **married** the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua [Verse 2]

The text stresses that Judah **saw** this woman, indicating that his primary attraction to her was physical. Nothing is said of her spiritual life, her devotion to God, or her passion for the things of the Lord.

#4 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life: He married an unbelieving wife

The Bible tells us plainly in 2 Cor 6:14-15 “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” In other words, don’t marry someone who is not a follower of Jesus Christ.

Why? Because a spiritually mixed marriage will erode our own faith and will create a constant collision of values and priorities.

Illustration:

Solomon was the wisest man in the Bible but he still drifted away from God. Why? Because his heart was drawn away by the foreign women he married who worshipped foreign gods.

C. Judah’s wife gave birth to Er, Onan and Shelah [Verse 3-5]

II The Spiraling Life Of The Family

A. Judah got Tamar for his son, Er [Verse 6-7]

1. But Er was **wicked** in the Lord’s sight

It is significant to note that the only other place where wickedness is mentioned prior to Gen 38 is found in Gen 13:13 “Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.”

We don't know what it was that Er did . . . but we do know that whatever it was, it was severe enough that . . .

2. The Lord put him to **death**

#5 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life:

He failed to raise his sons to know and obey the Lord

Deut 6:4-9, 21 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of

your houses and on your gates ... so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.”

Application:

Raising godly children is one of the greatest privileges and honors God has given mankind. Moms, don't ever believe Satan's lies about the value of what you do in raising your children. And husbands don't ever believe the lie that raising children is women's work!

Eph 6:4 “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

B. Judah told his second son, Onan to: [Verse 8]

1. Lie with Er's wife to produce offspring for your brother

This obviously sounds very strange to us! But, it was a common practice in the Near East during the times of patriarchs as we know from Deut 25:5-10. It was called a "levirate marriage" The word "levirate" came from a Latin words meaning "husband's brother"

In a levirate marriage, a brother would father a child through the widow and the child would take the name of the deceased husband, care for his mother in her old age, carry on the name of the deceased brother and receive all of his inheritance.

2. But Onan refused to raise up offspring for Tamar [Verse 9]

Onan was willing to have sex with Tamar, but not willing to father a child with her. And so to avoid impregnating Tamar, he spills his sperm on the ground. The Hebrew verb form indicates a “consistent practice.”

Why would Onan refuse this responsibility?

1. He didn't want to have the responsibility of raising a child that would not be considered his.
2. He didn't want to father a son who would receive the inheritance of the firstborn instead of him!

Whatever his reasoning, one thing is clear:

- a. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight [Verse 10a]
- b. The Lord put him to death also [Verse 10b]

BTW, this is not, as some might suggest, a proof text against birth control.

C. Judah told Tamar to live in her father's house [Verse 11]

1. Until his third son Shelah grew up
 - a. Judah was afraid Shelah might die, also

Judah told Tamar that she should wait for the third son, Shelah. But he was really thinking: “Two of my boys have been involved with Tamar and they are both dead!” He's not an idiot. He is beginning to see a

pattern! He concludes that maybe it is Tamar (not the wickedness of his sons) that is the problem. Judah sends Tamar back to her parent's home and says that he will call her when Shelah is old enough. But it soon became apparent that Judah had no intention of ever calling Tamar.

III The Spiraling Life Of Judah And Tamar

A. After Judah's wife **died** he went to Timnah [Verse 12]

Judah was approximately 50 years old at this time, which means his wife's death represented the third untimely death in his family.

Biblical reasons for early deaths:

1. Wickedness

Ps 55:23 "But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days."

2. Righteousness

Isa 57:1 "The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil."

1. To shear sheep with his friend, Hirah

"Sheep-shearing was a festive time, when sexual temptation would be at its peak due to the Canaanite fertility cult practice of ritual fornication."

Application: The danger of being away from home on business

Call your spouse twice a day. Be accountable. Never be alone!

B. Tamar took things into her **own hands** [Verse 13-14]

When Tamar discovered Judah's plans to go to Timnah, she quickly devised a deceptive plan to provide herself a son to carry on the name of her first husband.

We would say, "Hey, there is nothing wrong with being single and there is nothing wrong with not having any children. Why don't you just go back to school, get a good job, and enjoy your life!"

But things were different in the days in Genesis. A woman who did not have children was considered "defective." She also didn't have any security (this was before the days of Social Security and welfare).

Rather than trusting in the Lord, she proceeded with her risky and shocking plan!

1. She took off her widow clothes and disguised herself as a prostitute

Deut 23:17 "No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute."

2. She sat down at the entrance to Enaim near Timnah

Obviously, she knew Judah well enough to know that moral purity wasn't one of his virtues and that if she could just look the part of a prostitute, he would most likely take the bait. And as we'll see, he doesn't evidence any of the awkwardness of someone who was having his first experience.

C. The unraveling choices of Judah's life [Verse 15-23]

#6 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life: *He was a sexually immoral man*

1. He **saw** a woman he thought was a prostitute

Prostitute = Zona = "A common prostitute"

Prov 6:25-29, 32-33 "Do not lust in your heart after [her] beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished ... But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away."

Application:

Five suggestions for overcoming sexual temptation:

1. Let your mind be renewed by daily time in the Word of God
Rom 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
2. Develop your relationship with the Holy Spirit
Gal 5:16 "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."
3. Make a covenant with God and your wife (or a close friend)
Job 31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."
4. Refuse to allow your thoughts to lead you into sin
2 Cor 10:5 "... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."
James 4:7 "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."
5. Deal radically with sexual sin
Matt 5:28-30 "It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

2. He propositioned her

I don't think Judah would have ever considered sleeping with a prostitute if he was still at home where people knew him.

Job 24:15 "The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, 'No eye will see me,' and he keeps his face concealed."

3. He **negotiated** the price – a young goat
After negotiating the price, Tamar demands a pledge of the future payment of the agreed-upon price (a young goat).

4. He offered his seal and staff as a pledge
Pledge = `arabown = “Security”

The seal, cord, and staff were very individualized items that were unique to the owner. When a contract was made, hot wax was put on the document and the seal was rolled over it, leaving the impression of the owner of the seal. It was the equivalent of our credit cards today. And so Judah’s seal, along with his staff, were one-of-a-kind items that could be easily identified.

Possession of these items gave Tamar proof of that Judah was the father of her child when he was born.

5. He **slept** with her and impregnated her

Application:

1 Cor 6:15-20 “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

6. He fulfilled his promise of to provide a goat
Judah sends his friend, Hirah, to fulfill his commitment to retrieve the pledge of his seal and staff.

- a. But the shrine prostitute could not be found

Shrine prostitute = Kedesa = “A Canaanite temple prostitute”

Judah thought that the woman in the gateway of Enaim was merely a prostitute. But when Hirah searched for her he asked for the location of the “temple prostitute,” which was part and parcel of the Canaanites’ fertility worship. So to Judah he had an affair, but to the Canaanites, he had participated in the worship of their false gods.

7. He let her keep his seal and staff

- a. He didn’t want to be a **laughing** stock

You can’t blame Judah for wanting to drop the matter. Who in their right mind is going to call the authorities to report a robbery under these circumstances.

IV The Spiraling Consequences Of Sin

Three months later ...

A. Judah discovered that Tamar was: [Verse 24a]

1. Guilty of **prostitution** and was pregnant

B. Judah's verdict was swift and brutal [Verse 24b]

1. "Bring her out and have her **burned** to death!"

#7 Way Judah Goofed Up His Life: *He was a hypocritical judge of others*

The usual punishment prescribed by the Law of Moses was stoning (Deut. 22:20-24). So why would Judah demand such a radical punishment?

1. He may have blamed the death of his sons on Tamar.
2. He may have been overcompensating for his own immorality. Sometimes people attempt to cover up their own sinfulness by their severe condemnation of others caught in the same sin.

Illustration: The Pharisees and the woman caught in adultery - Jn 8:3-9

Rom 2:1 "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."

C. Judah was given a message by Tamar: [Verse 25]

1. I am pregnant by the man who owns this **seal** and **staff**

Application:

Luke 12:2-3 "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs."

D. Judah recognized the seal and staff as his own [Verse 26]

We can only imagine what a shock this must have been to Judah!

Illustration: David's harsh judgment against the man in Nathan's story

2 Sam 12:5-7 "David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

1. He acknowledged her **righteousness**

Judah is not saying that Tamar is righteous. It would be impossible, by any stretch, to consider Tamar's actions as righteous.

But in comparison to Judah, Tamar was practically an angel!

1 Sam 24:16-18 “When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. 17 "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.”

2. He did not **sleep** with Tamar again

Judah may have genuinely repented here, since the next time we read of him in Genesis 43, he is again back with his brothers and father. The tragic events of this sordid chapter may have been the turning point for Judah.

Application:

2 Cor 7:10-11 “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

E. She had two sons: Perez and Zerah [Verse 27-30]

Neither Judah nor Tamar are examples of godliness, but both of them are in the family line of Jesus Christ the Messiah through Perez (Ruth 4:12; Mt 1:3)

This is nothing short of astonishing! Why in the world would God bless such sinful and unfaithful people the privilege of being in the line of Christ?

For the same reason he chose you and me. It is a glorious example of grace!

1 Cor 1:26-31 “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Conclusion

Maybe you can identify with Judah and Tamar because you feel you have made a mess of your life. You have made bad decisions. You knowingly went down a wrong path. You sinned in some horrible way and have concluded that God could never love you or do anything through you. I hope you will be encouraged by this sordid story! The God who forgave them will forgive you. The God who transformed them will transform you. The God who used them will use you. It doesn't matter where you have been. It doesn't matter what you have done. What matters is where you turn now. Anyone who comes to Christ with the pieces of their life will be received and remade. When Jesus died on Calvary He died for your sin. He died for mine. He paid the price so that we could have a new beginning and a new destiny!

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