

“... his name was... Pharez”

Very often in life things do not quite fit our expectations. We make our plans and do our best to follow them, often with godly aims. Yet, God turns it all around, or even on its head, and we suddenly have to start out on a completely different path.

Despite the claims made by many 'victorious' Christians, these sudden changes are not always accompanied by feelings of well-being. There may be fear or anxiety, especially if there is no known answer at the time. The person might feel alone, or lost, or perplexed as to God's next move. So he flounders, not realising God has him in His hand.

There is no doubt whatever that God will only change someone's life for a good reason, but the person affected might not see it that way at the time! We see all this in the life of Jacob. Though he had first-hand knowledge of God, spoke with Him, and was given direct instructions and words, he still managed to be forlorn and anxious, and sometimes sinning.

As human beings we do not have access to all of God's plans. He lets us know when we ought to know. It is up to us to just follow, and not to become anxious. Easier said than done, I know! With the distance of time we can read what happened to the patriarchs, but even with this knowledge we are surprised by some of the actions taken by God, and the way lives were moved. In this chapter, too, we see changes not anticipated, but, with the advantage of history behind us, we can see, to a limited extent, what those changes meant.

Often, moves of God mean nothing to people at the time (in terms of explanation). Yet, those moves involve diverse people, their thoughts, and their actions. The Holy Spirit will order things in such a way, that many elements must come together to bring about a particular change. The people involved might not understand what is happening, or even why... but they must be patient and just do whatever God says and leads. It can be very hard at times, but this is no different to how the patriarchs felt.

Every so often I get letters or emails from Christians who demand to know why God did this or that. Unless God tells us, I cannot answer! Who am I to question God? One complaint is "Surely God would not do this or that because He loves people?" this is not the way to view it. Few Christians understand what is meant by God the Potter. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all

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life.

God does not need the things He has made! We don't really know why He made things, or us. We are creatures and He can do with us whatever He wishes. Whether we live or die, it is up to God, not us. We cannot place our human emotions upon Him and demand that He acts as we would act, because He is not human. He is not a creature. He is God Almighty. He has no emotions to speak of, for all his actions are pure and holy. (We often use emotional terms to speak of what God does, but emotions are an human attribute, not God's).

Humanly we all like to know what is going on, so that we can prepare. God knows exactly what is going on, even before we are born, but He does not inform us. Why should He? We are His creatures! As the saying goes, we must 'Go with the flow'. I don't think we are just being untrusting or lacking in faith. We are human and find it hard at times to sit back and let God do whatever He wishes. Just as Jacob did. But, when we do, we see remarkable things going on.

These studies in the lives of the patriarchs show that we cannot rely on our own plans in life. It seems that the majority of people get by without a hitch to their plans. I can only suggest that the life untouched by God's hand is either a sign that the person is already acting out God's plan to the letter – or he is not faithful, so God is passing him by. When God moves He does so in ways we cannot imagine, or would not wish to imagine.

This life is not for our benefit, odd though this might seem. We are all born for God's purposes, whatever those purposes are. We cannot settle into a routine because that is how we planned everything! God can uproot us, whether or not we like it or want it. When He does, we must accept quietly and wait for Him to show us His next move. Fight it, and we fail. And we feel miserable and anxious. Go with God – and see what happens. It is going to happen anyway.

Verses 1-5

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 Shuah; and he took

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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 conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him.”

About the time Joseph was sold into slavery, Judah went to visit “a certain Adullamite” (‘justice of the people’). His name was Hirah (‘a noble family’). Whilst he was with Hirah, he saw a Canaanite woman, whose father was Shua (‘wealth’). He married her and she eventually had a son named Er (‘awake’).

Her next son was Onan (‘strong’). After that she had a son named Shelah (‘a petition’). She was at Chezib when he was born. Chezib (‘false’) was a small town in what later became known as Judah.

Verses 6-10

1.

“And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar.

2.

And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.

3.

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And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.

4.

And Onan knew that the seed should 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 that he should give seed to his brother.

5.

And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.”

Many years later (of course Joseph was by now well advanced as an Egyptian slave) Judah chose a wife for his eldest son, Er. Her name was Tamar ('palm-tree'). Er was "wicked in the sight of the Lord". Therefore God killed him. We are not told how this happened, but it did. Even today God puts to death those who are wicked. This can come about divinely or by another human hand or circumstance.

As was the requirement in those days, the next son had to marry the widow in order to conceive a son and heir for the dead brother. This duty fell to Onan. However, he did not wish this for himself and when the time came to make Tamar pregnant he refused with the birth control, *coitus interruptus*

. Though this has long been interpreted as masturbation by Roman Catholics, it was not. And the sin was that he did not comply with the prevailing law and raise a child for his dead brother.

It seems that Onan had some dislike for Er. Possibly because Er was so wicked. Onan did not wish to perpetuate his family line, and so did not participate. For defying the law, he, too, was put to death by God. This shows us that the legal requirement was also a law of God.

Verses 11-19

1.

“Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And

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Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

2.

And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

3.

And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep.

4.

And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife.

5.

When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face.

6.

And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, 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?

7.

And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it?

8.

And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him.

9.

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And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.”

The next son in line, Shelah, was still too young to marry. So, Judah told Tamar to return to her father’s home until he was grown. Then, he would become her husband... if, Judah said, he did not die like his two brothers. She was to remain a widow until that time. She obeyed and stayed with her father.

Quite some time later, Judah’s wife died. After mourning and coming to terms with the death, Judah decided to visit the men who were shearing his sheep at Timnath (‘portion’). His friend, Hirah, went with him for company. As they travelled to the site where the sheep were kept, Tamar heard that Judah was going there. She had waited patiently, a young widow, for him to send Shelah to her as a husband, but had heard nothing, though Shelah was now adult. Thus, Judah had not done the honourable thing, and she felt an outcast.

Since the death of Onan, Tamar had been wearing “widow’s garments”. These were distinctive clothes, which she took off. She put on ordinary women’s clothing, and a veil. She went to the place of sheep-shearing and sat by the roadside, covered with her veil. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute... because harlots usually wore veils.

Sadly, Judah asked if he could be her customer, and she asked him what he would give her in return. If Judah would not send his son, then Tamar would get an heir by other means! He, promised to give her a young goat, but she demanded a pledge as security. What will you accept as security? he asked. Very cleverly, Tamar asked for something personal. She wanted his signet-ring (which was personalised), his bracelets (which may have been silver or gold wire, or corded threads), and his walking staff. The deal was struck and Judah went in to her, making her pregnant.

Judah went off to find his sheep-shearers, but Tamar did not wait... she had plans! She returned home and replaced her everyday clothes with her widow’s clothes. Today it is difficult to understand why Tamar did what she did, but she lived in very different times, when a widow had no support except from her husband, and the law of brotherly succession was part of this. So, what she did was wrong but understandable.

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Verses 20-23

1.

“And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not.

2.

Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place.

3.

And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place.

4.

And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.”

When Judah found the flock he sent his friend, Hirah, with the young goat. He was to collect the pledge – ring, bracelets and staff, and return to the flocks. But, when he reached the place, the woman was not there. He asked men nearby where the harlot was. They replied that there was no harlot in the area. Hirah returned to Judah and related the facts. Judah did not wish his visit to a harlot to be widely known, so he said the woman could keep the pledge, and the matter was dropped.

Sometimes our wrong-doing appears to be hidden. But, as Judah discovered, it can later become known to everyone. This is one good reason why we should not sin – it can come back to accuse us! But the main reason is that it is against God.

Verses 24-26

1.

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“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 also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

2.

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 bracelets, and staff.

3.

And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.”

Three months later, word came to Judah – Tamar was pregnant. Because she was supposed to be a widow, everyone assumed she had become a whore, and thus became pregnant. Furious, Judah demanded that she be brought to his camp and burned alive as a punishment. Tamar’s trick could have had disastrous consequences!

When she arrived, Tamar sent a message to Judah – the man who made me pregnant gave me these things – do you recognise them? Of course, Judah had to admit they were his. With feelings of guilt he admitted he had wronged her by not sending Shelah to be her husband, saying that she was “more righteous” than he was. The word, *tsadaq*, can have a number of meanings. One is to be in the right. Another is to be justified before God. I do not think it means Tamar was justified before God by her actions, but she was justified by the law of the day.

Verses 27-30

1.

And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb.

2.

And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first,

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3.

And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez.

4.

And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.”

Six months later, Tamar gave birth to twins and a twist came into the situation. Many years before Jacob supplanted Esau as head of the family. Now, a similar occurrence was near. One child started to emerge from the womb and his hand appeared first. Because it was important in the case of twins to know which one was born first, for purposes of having the title of eldest, the midwife tied a scarlet or crimson thread to his wrist. She declared that this child came out first.

Then came the twist – the hand was retracted and the second son was born first! Surprised, the midwife asked the baby ‘How did you do that? How could you be born first? You have broken through first!’ Because he had broken the usual order, the baby who came first was named Pharez (‘breach’). Next was born his brother, still with the scarlet thread around his wrist. He was named Zarah (‘rising’).

The descendants of Zarah would be the tribes of Zarhites, Ezrahites and Izrahites. The tribes descending from Pharez were far more significant: the Hezronites and Hamulites. The royal line of David and Christ came from the Hezronites, through Pharez and, of course Judah.

In the short time it took for twins to be born, the one who was thought to be eldest was replaced by the one thought to be second. It seems, then, that God ordered the birth sequence for this purpose.

It is a prime example of things not going according to human expectations and desires! Even at

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the last moment God reversed what 'should' have happened! This kind of sudden reversal and change can affect any one of us, throwing aside any ideas we might have of what God 'should' do in any given circumstance. Sometimes His changes to our lives can be initially astounding or fearful... but they are always part of His plan.

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