

GENESIS 38:12-26

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS WON'T STAY IN VEGAS

“In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua’s daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And when Tamar was told, ‘Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep,’ she took off her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside and said, ‘Come, let me come in to you,’ for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, ‘What will you give me, that you may come in to me?’ He answered, ‘I will send you a young goat from the flock.’ And she said, ‘If you give me a pledge, until you send it—’ He said, ‘What pledge shall I give you?’ She replied, ‘Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand.’ So he gave them to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him. Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

”When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the woman’s hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, ‘Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?’ And they said, ‘No cult prostitute has been here.’ So he returned to Judah and said, ‘I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, “No cult prostitute has been here.”’ And Judah replied, ‘Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her.’

“About three months later Judah was told, ‘Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality.’ And Judah said, ‘Bring her out, and let her be burned.’ As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, ‘By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant.’ And she said, ‘Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.’ Then Judah identified them and said, ‘She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.’ And he did not know her again.”¹

Robert Gibbs, Press Secretary for the forty-fourth President of the United States, recently responded to a question asking why a speaking engagement for the President in Las Vegas was closed to the press, glibly replied “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.”² Taken from the title of a book by Michele Daniels, that phrase expresses a common sentiment for many people. The idea conveyed by the saying is that moral restraints no longer apply when one is away from home, or when one is not immediately accountable to family or church.

No Christian should imagine that he or she can sin with impunity. No Christian dare imagine that sin will not be exposed. For a Christian, there is no such thing as “private sin.” Jesus warned His disciples, “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known” [LUKE 12:2]. The Bible is replete with warnings that sin cannot be hidden. The biblical principle for all who worship the Living God is, “Be sure your sin will find you out” [NUMBERS 32:23]. We are aliens in a foreign land, awaiting our call to go to our eternal home. While here, we are responsible to glorify God through a holy life.

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² Joseph Gun, “Obama bets on Vegas after swiping at greed,” The Washington Times, Tuesday, May 26, 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/26/obama-bets-on-vegas-after-taking-jab-at-greed/?page=2>

How pitiful is the cry of sinning believers that is recorded by Isaiah, a mournful cry that could easily be offered up by far too many modern Christians.

“Our transgressions are multiplied before You;
and our sins testify against us;
for our transgressions are with us,
and we know our iniquities.”

[ISAIAH 59:12]

God does not exempt His own people from divine correction when they sin. Those individuals who claim to have a relationship to the Living Saviour while living in sin deceive themselves, for God will never leave His child in the condition in which He found Him. Moreover, when a Christian sins and refuses to turn from that sin, he must know that God will correct His child.

We will do well to read again the warning issued in the Letter to Hebrew Christians.
“Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.’

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” [HEBREWS 12:5-11].

God will not permit His people to hide their sin. He will expose them so that He can demonstrate His mercy and His grace. The Lord compares those who attempt to hide their sin to Sodom [see ISAIAH 3:9]. There can be no hiding sin from God whose eyes see all that is done in the earth. Indeed, we are cautioned in the Word:

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper.
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

[PROVERBS 28:13]

The life of Judah provides an example of a believer who sinned, only to have his sin exposed. It took place during the time between the sale of Joseph into slavery and his rise to power as the second most powerful man in the Kingdom of Egypt. The account is found in the **38th CHAPTER OF GENESIS**, to which I direct your attention at this time. Judah was the fourth son born of Leah to Jacob. In Hebrew, his name sounds like “Praise,” which is why his mother said, “This time I will praise the Lord” [GENESIS 29:35]. It was through him that the Messiah would come, though at this time he could not have known that he was the progenitor of the Messiah. At this time, his life was anything but praiseworthy; but God was working.

JUDAH'S SINS — Most people reading the account of Judah's interaction with Tamar would say that his sin was fornication. Some perceptive individuals would say that he sinned when he did not honour his word. However, Judah's sin as expressed in the text is the culmination of an even more egregious sin that is commonly committed by followers of the Lord Christ to this day. Judah's sin began many years prior to the incident recorded in our text.

In **GENESIS 38:1-5**, we read, "It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him."

The reference to going down from his brothers points to a time after Joseph was sold into slavery. Judah was the instigator of selling his brother into slavery. The brothers, jealous of Joseph's favoured status with their father, determined to kill him [**GENESIS 37:20**]. Presumably, Judah was party to this plot, which was averted only because Reuben prevailed in suggesting that they throw him into a pit where he would die of exposure [**GENESIS 37:22-24**]. As they were eating their noonday meal, Judah noticed a caravan of traders passing by, and suggested that they sell Joseph into slavery [**GENESIS 37:27, 28**].

The loss of his son devastated Jacob, and it would seem that Judah could not bear to see his aged father grieve. Though the Bible does not specifically say so, it seems apparent that he was unable to watch the unmitigated and undiminished sorrow of his father. So, he left behind the reminders of his perfidy and settled among the Canaanites.

You will recall that God cautioned Abram that "the iniquity of the Amorites" had not reached its fullness [**GENESIS 15:16**]. Apparently, the wickedness of the inhabitants of the land was recognised, because Abraham made his servant "swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth," that he would not get a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites [**GENESIS 24:3**]. Similarly, Isaac directed Jacob that he "must not take a wife from the Canaanite women" [**GENESIS 28:1, 6**] as had Esau, in a move that grieved his parents [see **GENESIS 26:34, 35**]. Nevertheless, and despite this history of caution in his family, Judah settled among the Canaanites. Surely this could only lead to compromise and sin against the Lord.

I observe that **Judah sinned by settling among the Canaanites** and developing a close relationship with them. I understand very well that in this present day the criterion for determining where one will live is determined in great measure by the desire for personal advancement. An individual seldom asks about the spiritual character of the community in which he or she will settle. However, to neglect the Christian character of a community, or to ignore the spiritual commitment of one's friends and colleagues, can lead to disaster.

Judah sinned by settling among the Canaanites; which in turn led him to sin through **marrying a Canaanite** woman—an unbeliever. The account of the death of her sons, Er and Onan, suggests that her own unbelief had been passed on to them since we are informed that they were killed as result of their own wickedness [**GENESIS 38:7, 10**]. Certainly, the Bible is quite clear that believers are not to marry unbelievers. God warns, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness. Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the Temple of the Living God with idols? For we are the Temple of the Living God" [**2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-16a**]!

It has long been my policy that I will not perform a wedding between a believer and an unbeliever. Unfortunately, it is the policy of many pastors that they will perform such ceremonies, rationalising that the believer may influence the unbeliever toward God. In over three decades of service before the Lord, I have never seen such pragmatic supposition bear fruit. I am convinced that a pastor sins grievously against the Lord when he fails to warn couples against such actions. It dishonours the office of the pastor and denies the Word of God.

Let me clarify this by stating my policy concerning marriage. Should a couple come to me, though they profess to be believers, if they are unknown to me I will request that they consult their own pastor. If he is prepared to give me assurance that he is aware of their plan for marriage outside of their own congregation, I will consider performing the ceremony in his stead. However, if they are uninvolved in a congregation, playing at church, so to speak, then I will counsel them to become involved in a congregation, investing their lives among the people of God. Then, when it is apparent that they are committed to following the way of the Master, I will be prepared to consider their request. Otherwise, I do not consider my position as a pastor to require me to serve as a convenient means by which to give legitimacy to every marital union.

If two unbelievers request marriage, I will explain as kindly and as clearly as possible that they propose to make a sacred vow before the True and Living God. How can they possibly expect to make such a vow to God whom they neither respect nor worship? I will present the message of life to them, urging them to believe in Christ the Living Saviour. If they are prepared to place faith in the Risen Lord of Glory, then I will consider performing a marriage ceremony. Otherwise, I will recommend that if they are merely seeking legitimacy in the eyes of the state, they should seek out a marriage commissioner or justice of the peace to perform the ceremony.

I am convinced that it is dangerous in the extreme for a believer to date an unbeliever. Inevitably, the act of dating will demand compromise of the believer. We are in error when we forget that friendship is the prelude to courtship, and courtship is the prelude to marriage. Even when clear boundaries are established, the believer must examine the profession of the one they think to marry to ensure that the intended spouse has truly exercised faith in the Son of God. If there is no fruit in the life of one's potential spouse, it is because the root is rotten. To disobey this teaching is to invite great sorrow and disaster for many years to come.

Not only did Judah sin by compromising his standards in friendship and in marriage, but **he sinned in breaking his promises**. According to the Word, God killed Judah's firstborn, Er, because he was "wicked in the sight of the LORD" [GENESIS 38:7]. According to the custom of the day, if the dead man left no sons, the brother of the dead man was responsible to impregnate the widow so that dead man would have an heir. This is known as levirate marriage, coming from the Latin term *levir*, which means "brother-in-law." This action was later codified under the Mosaic Law [DEUTERONOMY 25:5-10]. However, the second son, Onan, was unwilling to honour the name of his brother, and so he used Tamar for his own enjoyment, but refused to impregnate her, knowing that the child would not be his. God also killed him because this was wicked [GENESIS 38:10].

Judah promised Tamar that he would give her his third son once the boy was grown, presumably reaching the age of maturity at about fourteen. However, according to the text, Judah "feared that [Shelah] would die, like his brothers" [GENESIS 38:11]. This means that he deliberately lied to Tamar, creating false hope in her that she would have a son. He was acting selfishly, concerned only for his own comfort. As time passed and Judah took no action to fulfil his promise, it became apparent that he was ignoring his promise to Tamar. She was in her father's house and, as the saying goes, "out of sight, out of mind" so far as Judah was concerned.

The final great sin that Judah committed was that **he was immoral**. The longer he lived in Canaan, the more he was becoming like the people among whom he lived. In fact, he was growing more immoral than the Canaanites, to judge from the divine account. The text tells us that when it became apparent to Tamar that Judah was not going to honour his promise, she worked out a plan in which she would become pregnant by Judah.

Judah's wife died, and yet he remained in the land. Learning that her father-in-law would be going up to Timnah where his sheep were to be sheared, Tamar put her plan into action. First, she took off her clothing that marked her as a widow and dressed as a prostitute. Cultic prostitution was a common practise among the Canaanites at this early date; and the practise continued to plague Israel for years to come. Tamar then situated herself near the entrance to Enaim ("Twin Wells"), where there was possibly a pagan shrine. This was on the way to Timnah, and she obviously anticipated that Judah would pass by as he went to where his sheep were being sheared, and she apparently knew he exhibited a proclivity toward sexual immorality.

As he passed by, Judah saw Tamar seated at the side of the road. Thinking her to be a cult prostitute, he asked her to have sex with him. When she asked for compensation, he offered a young goat from his flock. Of course, she responded by questioning how she could be assured that he would send it. For surety, he gave her his signet, the cord with which it was tied around his neck and his staff. This would be the equivalent of giving one a credit card to hold until compensation could be arranged. Judah did have sex with her, and she became pregnant.

Later, Judah sent his friend Hirah, the Adullamite, with the young goat. However, Hirah could not find a cult prostitute, and no one recalled a prostitute located at that place. Though he was undoubtedly disturbed by the situation, Judah had no choice but to let the matter rest.

There are a couple of observations that should be made at this point. First, Judah had no qualms about cultic prostitution, which tells us that he was already rationalising participation in pagan rituals. Perhaps he was even considering the pagan gods as real. Cult prostitutes performed their duties as an act of devotion to the gods, and those availing themselves of their service were participants in the worship. For this reason, God saw immorality as intertwined with idolatry. One led to another, and thus each is soundly condemned in the Word of God.

Judah attempts to frame the situation favourably in the eyes of Hirah, and anyone else who may learn of his action. He thought the woman was a whore [*zonah*, verse 15]; though after the fact he no longer called her by that name. Rather, after the fact he spoke of her as a *qedeshah* [verse 21], a "holy one," a "cult prostitute." In other words, Judah, who clearly sought gratification of his sexual appetite, wanted others to think that he had sex for sacred purposes.

Judah was putting the best possible spin on an otherwise sordid episode in his life. If we suppose that he was disingenuous in speaking of her as a cult prostitute after having sex with her, he is obviously deceitful, attempting to use a false religion solely for his own gratification. Supposing this to be the case, though he did not believe in the god she purportedly served, he was willing to use the religion for his own gratification. If Judah did in fact believe her to be a cult prostitute and he engaged in sacred prostitution, his action was yet more wicked as he participated intimately in a pagan worship ritual, giving legitimacy to a pagan god.

In the second place, Judah sought to gratify his own desires rather than seeking to honour God. There was nothing prohibiting him from remarrying. Certainly, he could have returned to his family and found a wife that worshipped the Living God. He had already demonstrated that he had no scruples about marrying a pagan; he could have even married another pagan woman, and while that would not be ideal, he would have had his own wife. However, he sought transient gratification, undoubtedly ignoring whatever misgivings he may have had.

God has warned His people to “Flee from sexual immorality” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:18]. According to His Word, “The body is *not* meant for sexual immorality” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:13]. Rather, the body is meant to serve the Lord. Consequently, we are taught, and we are confident, that “The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God”; and among those identified as unrighteous are the “sexually immoral” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:9].

God cautions His people that the law “is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine” [1 TIMOTHY 1:9, 10]. This is a dark list that exposes the lie that people cannot control their desires, and that they must surrender to their own passions. God expects His people to be holy and righteous; and if they are not, He will hold them accountable. In fact, we are specifically warned that “God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” [HEBREWS 13:4].

JUDAH’S HYPOCRISY — After a few days passed, it is doubtful that Judah thought much about what had happened. The prostitute could not do much with his signet, or so Judah thought. Three months passed, and Tamar’s pregnancy became apparent. Word came to Judah that his daughter-in-law was pregnant. The report that was borne to him accused her of prostitution. Burning with indignation at her immorality, Judah commanded that she be burned. Though she was living in her father’s house, she was under the authority of her father-in-law.

It was obvious that Tamar had slept with someone, and it wasn’t Judah’s surviving son! In his mind, she was promiscuous and adulterous, and there was only one thing to be done—execute her! Sentenced by her father-in-law and seized by men intent on carrying out his orders, Tamar had the presence of mind to send a message to Judah. She produced the signet and the cord to which it was attached, together with the staff, dispatching a messenger to say to Judah, “By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant” [GENESIS 38:25].

Perhaps the messenger was somewhat confused. Why would she send this information now, in the face of certain death? Perhaps a realisation began to form in his mind as he conveyed the information to Judah. Whatever the case for the messenger, Judah instantly recognised the items as those that he had left as a pledge with the woman he supposed to be a cult prostitute. Immediately, he realised what had happened. He had promised to fulfil the requirement of levirate marriage so that Tamar would have a son, and he had reneged on his promise. He had failed to honour His word, forcing her to act. Whether her actions were correct was not any longer in question; what was at issue was his own hypocrisy. Therefore, he was compelled to confess, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her my son Shelah” [GENESIS 38:26].

As is true of many of us, Judah had operated with a double standard. He had held others to a higher standard than he applied to his own life. Others lied; but he stretched the truth. Others were adulterous; he merely satisfied his needs. Others were idolatrous; he was pragmatic. And so it would have continued, had Tamar not exposed his duplicity.

Judah could not say that Tamar was righteous—she was not. She was a pagan who lived by a lower standard than did Judah who professed to worship the Living God. However, he was compelled to confess that she was more righteous because less was expected of her than of one who professed to worship the Living God. She was more righteous because she had waited, as he requested, anticipating that he was a man of honour who would keep his word. She was more righteous because she had sought to maintain the family name, thus honouring Judah himself.

Perhaps you wonder why this story is included in the Genesis account. Some commentators had dismissed the account as unworthy of the Bible, believing that the story is an addendum that should not have been included. However, God has never attempted to hide the sin of His people. David thought that he could hide his adultery together with the lies that he told and even the murder for which he was responsible, but God said, “You did [this] secretly, but I will [expose you] before all Israel and before the sun” [2 SAMUEL 12:12]. God will not permit His child to sin secretly, hiding his wickedness from the sight of others. Indeed, “The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgement, but the sins of others appear later” [1 TIMOTHY 5:24]. And though God’s discipline “seems painful,” we may be confident that “later it [will yield] the peaceful fruit of righteousness” [HEBREWS 12:11].

Martin Luther was confident that the account of Judah and Tamar belonged in the Bible because it rebuked presumption and challenged despair.³ According to Luther, the story rebuked presumption because Judah, an ancestor of Christ Jesus the Lord, was undoubtedly instructed in the religion of his father Jacob and of his forefathers Isaac and Abraham. If Judah sinned as he did in having sex with Tamar, the great Reformer concluded that any of us are capable of grave sin, regardless of our background, privilege or training. Because this is true, we see that we must confess our sinful nature and walk closely to the Saviour. He alone is able to supply strength to resist temptation when it comes. We must seize the promise of God that has been delivered through John’s Letter, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 JOHN 1:9]. By the same token, the Apostle also cautions, “If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us” [1 JOHN 1:10].

Luther also stated that the story challenges despair because in the midst of this dreadful sin we witness the great mercy of God. Luther wrote, “The church of God has great need of these examples. For what would become of us? What hope would be left for us if Peter had not denied Christ and all the apostles had not taken offence at Him, and if Moses, Aaron and David had not fallen? Therefore, God wanted to console sinners with these examples and to say: ‘If you have fallen, return; for the door of mercy is open to you. You, who are conscious of no sin, do not be presumptuous; but both of you should trust in my grace and mercy.’”⁴

Perhaps, as you listened to this message, you imagine that you will never sin in such an outrageous manner. Perhaps you think that you are able to avoid sin. I caution you that you are susceptible. The Apostle cautioned, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. It is possible that you have shown yourself to be hypocritical in your assessment of others, though you recognise your own sinfulness. Perhaps you attempt to hold others to a biblical standard of morality even while excusing your own sinful behaviour. Tragically, each of us is capable of precisely such a double standard. However, the account of Judah and Tamar serves to humble each of us who are Christians, encouraging us to ask forgiveness for a censorious spirit and to seek restoration to the fullness of Christ’s love. He has not ceased loving us, but our attitude can drive us from the joy that we once knew.

LESSONS FROM JUDAH AND TAMAR — In the moments remaining, I want us to focus on lessons that will benefit each one who is a Christian. Judah sinned against the Lord, but God did not cast him away. He turned again to walk humbly before the Lord. On his deathbed, Israel prophesied about his son:

³ James Montgomery Boice, **Genesis: An Expository Commentary** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1982) 898

⁴ **Luther’s Works**, Vol. 7, 11, cited in Boice, op. cit.

“Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
 your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
 your father’s sons shall bow down before you.
 Judah is a lion’s cub;
 from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
 He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
 and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?
 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
 nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
 until tribute comes to him;
 and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
 Binding his foal to the vine
 and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,
 he has washed his garments in wine
 and his vesture in the blood of grapes.
 His eyes are darker than wine,
 and his teeth whiter than milk.”

[GENESIS 49:8-12]

Ultimately, from the line of Judah would come God’s Anointed One, the Messiah. The scoundrel would at last be a blessing to his brothers, though for the moment he suffered the humiliating exposure of what he thought was his secret sin.

There are some lessons that we do well to note beyond the reminder of God’s grace. The first is that *association with pagan society disposes the godly to approve of unrighteousness*. Judah did sin against Joseph, and the grief arising from that sin appears to have driven him from his family. Living among the Canaanites in the land, he began to make friends with them. Like Samson, he saw a woman he liked and took her to be his wife, but the marriage did not bring him the joy he imagined he would have [see JUDGES 14:1ff.]. Abraham and Isaac had been careful to avoid marrying their children to the women of the land because they did not want to see their offspring polluted by idolatry and immorality [see GENESIS 24:3, 4; 28:1-4]. Similarly, the child of God makes close friends with the world only at the grave risk of compromise of his godliness.

While not excusing evil acts, *God is at work even in our sin to bring glory to His Name*. Judah sinned egregiously against the Lord God, and Tamar was hardly a paragon of virtue. Nevertheless, she is one of four women in the lineage of the Master. I note that each of the four women named in the lineage of Jesus is a Gentile, and three of the four were notorious sinners.⁵ To be certain, “Salvation is from the Jews” [JOHN 4:22], but from earliest days God was incorporating people from among the Gentiles to demonstrate His mercy and His grace.

I also observe that *God can use anyone for His glory*. The Jewish people trace their ancestry to Abraham, who together with Sarah were from “Ur of the Chaldeans” [GENESIS 11:28]. When Abraham sought a bride for Isaac, he sent again to his own people for a wife and brought back Rebekah, who though from Haran, was not a descendant of Abram. Jacob took two sisters, Leah and Rachel, as his wives. Neither were these descendants of Abraham. Judah married a Canaanite. Joseph married an Egyptian. Salmon married Rahab. Boaz married Ruth. David had Solomon by Bathsheba.

⁵ The four women are Tamar (a pagan Canaanite), Rahab (a Canaanite prostitute), Ruth (a Moabitess) and Bathsheba, whom is presumed to be a Hittite since she was married to Uriah, identified as a Hittite.

With the exception of Mary, it is impossible to name even one Jewish woman in the lineage of Jesus. These mentioned were all Gentiles. The famed Presbyterian preacher and author, Donald Grey Barnhouse, noted this when he wrote, “In all the ancestry of Jesus Christ, which is faithfully recorded as the son of David, the son of Abraham, there is not one daughter of Israel mentioned in the list of His grandmothers, but three Gentile harlots and the adulterous Gentile wife of David. Why did God’s providence guide matters in this way? The answer is surely in the fact that the church of Jesus Christ is called His bride, and that we, for the most part, are Gentiles. All of these incidents of anointed kings disobeying the commandment of God and taking Gentiles to wife are indicating that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself would turn to all the families of the world, and that the Church of Jesus Christ would include not merely the physical sons of Abraham, but the Gentiles.”⁶

There is a final observation that must be stated. It serves to encourage the people of God. I note that ***God’s grace is always at work in the life of His people***, even when they sin egregiously. According to the Word, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” [ROMANS 5:20]. This is not an excuse to sin; rather, it is a promise to be seized. God is not ignoring sin in His child—He will hold His child accountable, exercising severe mercy, if necessary, as discipline. However, it is encouragement to know that God is at work to bring glory to His Name through us, even when we disgrace Him. Until He calls us home, it is never too late to turn from our own evil and to embrace the mercies of God. The men and women whom we meet in the pages of the Bible were not perfect; some sinned deliberately. Nevertheless, the Lord used them to accomplish His purposes.

You should not imagine that God approved of their sin; after all, we know of their sin because He exposed their sin in each instance and He also judged that sin. What happened in Vegas won’t stay in Vegas, and for that we should be thankful. What it does mean is that God does use the weak things of this fallen world to accomplish His purposes. In the same way, He is working in my life, and in your life, to bring glory to His Name.

The great question for each listener is whether you have received God’s great salvation. The Word of God points to Jesus, the Son of God, as Saviour of the world. He gave His life as a sacrifice for sin so that no one need die because of their own sinful condition. He took all our sin on Himself and offered up His life as a perfect sacrifice. Therefore, God has promised that, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” The promise of God has never been rescinded. Therefore, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

⁶ Donald Grey Barnhouse, **God’s Glory: Romans 14:13-16:27** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1964) 181