

Genesis 38-40

Bible Study

Review

Chapter 36 (Genealogy of Esau)

Esau who became the nation of Edom was important because his descendants continually had contact with Israel...even until modern times

Chapter 37

Jacob favored Joseph over his other sons—gives him a coat that an heir would normally receive causing jealousy with his brothers

Jacob has two dreams (from God) which he tells his brothers—the meaning: that they will bow down and serve him

Joseph's brothers plot to kill him...instead, on **Judah's** insistence they sell him to Midianite traders who take him to Egypt

Genesis 37:36

³⁶Now the [£]Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard.

We take a one chapter break from the Joseph story to focus on **Judah** in chapter 38

Genesis 38 (Judah's family)

(Word) "the events of chapter 38 must span at least **20 years**, assuming Judah's sons married in their mid to late teens"

Genesis 38:1

¹It came to pass **at that time** that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name *was* Hirah.

Approximately at the time of Joseph's captivity, Judah left and went to **Adullam**, about 15 miles northwest of Hebron

The story of Judah (and Tamar) is placed here in the middle of the story about Joseph....events that took place around the time Joseph was sold into slavery and before the sons of Jacob would go to Egypt.

Although we see Judah's shortcomings, the purpose of this account is to prove lineage.

Jesus descended from Judah and without this story, the Jewish heritage of the descendents of Judah/Perez may have been unknown or disputed

Matthew 1: 1, 3

v. 1 "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham:

v.2 Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.

v. 3 **Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar...**"



Genesis 38:1

¹It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain **Adullamite** whose name *was* Hirah.

Adullam

²And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain **Canaanite** whose name *was* Shua, and he married her and went in to her.

Judah's mistake—Abraham and Isaac had warned about mixing with the Canaanites...

➤ the daughter's name [Judah's wife] is not mentioned

“he married her and went in to her”

(OKJ) “he **took** her and went into her”—In Genesis ‘taking’ has overtones of illicit taking (lust)

Judah's marriage to the Canaanite woman just about ruins Judah's family:

³So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name **Er**.

⁴She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name **Onan**.

⁵And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name **Shelah**. He was at Chezib when she bore him.

Three sons are born to Judah and the Canaanite wife in rapid succession...

➤ These three sons are possible **successors of Judah's line**

v. 5 Chezib was three miles southwest of Adullam—both Adullam and Chezib would afterwards become possessions of the tribe of Judah

⁶Then Judah took a wife for **Er** his firstborn, and her name *was* **Tamar**.

Parents often arranged marriages in the ancient times

v. 6 Judah obtained a wife for his son named Tamar...the text **does not say** if she was Canaanite

Some commentators say she was a Canaanite, some say no, others are silent

Either way God accomplished his purposes through her

⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord killed him.

Er was **wicked**, probably steeped in Canaanite ways and God killed him

⁸And Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up **an heir** to your brother.”

(NSB) ‘**Levirate marriage**’--“In the ancient middle east, for a man to die without having a son was regarded as an incalculable loss...
in order to **maintain the family line** and **the name** of the deceased, a **brother** or another near relative would marry the man’s widow and father a child that would carry on the man’s family”
[Deuteronomy 25:5-6]

(New Bible Commentary)
“In the time of Judah and Tamar the brother had an **absolute duty** to marry his sister in law, **and the father in law was expected to see this duty fulfilled**....Judah and his sons were reluctant to do their duty”



⁹ But **Onan** knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother’s wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother.

¹⁰And the thing which he did displeased the Lord; therefore He killed him also.

(NSB) “Because of his own selfishness and **wicked attitude** toward his deceased brother Onan would not allow his brother’s widow to have a child.”

God had repeated promises that Israel’s descendents would be fruitful and multiply—Onan was deliberately and defiantly in opposition to God’s purposes

¹¹Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, “**Remain a widow** in your father’s house **till my son Shelah is grown.**”

For he said, “Lest he also die like his brothers.” And Tamar went and dwelt in her father’s house.

Judah appears to blame Tamar for the death of his sons, instead of their wickedness...so he promises her his younger son [Shelah] when he is of age....but even when he grows up Judah will still refuse
(v.14)

v. 11 (last part) “And Tamar went and dwelt in her father’s house”

(Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary)

“A woman with out children, was a woman without legal, economic or social status—a woman without a household.

Judah here relegates Tamar [through his continuing authority over her] to the protection of her father’s household”

¹²Now in the **process of time** the daughter of Shua, **Judah’s wife, died;** and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

“**Process of time**” —perhaps a year...

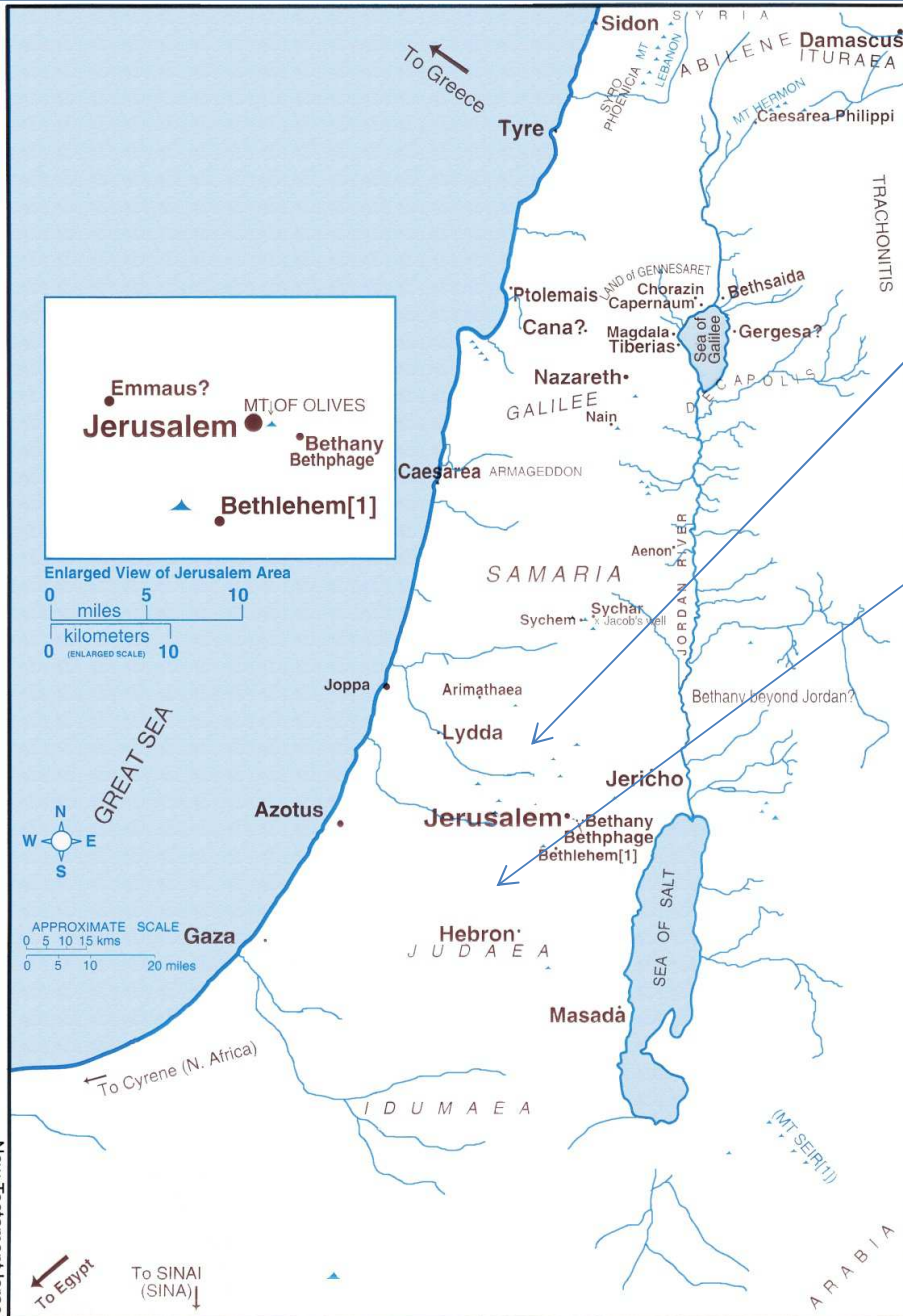
“long enough period to show Judah had **no intention** of allowing Shelah to marry Tamar....who was still wearing her widow’s garb” (Word)

(NSB) “The **death of Judah’s wife** means that Judah had only one surviving son. Unless Judah remarried, his posterity depended upon Shelah”

(OKJ) "Behold"=draws special attention

¹³And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

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Timnah

Adullam

(NSB) "The time of **sheep-shearing** was not only a time of work, it also was a time of celebration"

"Sheep-shearing was a lively festival, when wine was freely consumed" (Word)

(Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary)
"Sheep-shearing time was pay day, and the income windfall, the celebratory atmosphere and the isolation of the men from the family, were conducive to the activity of prostitutes"

New Testament Israel

¹⁴So she took off her widow's garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah;

for she saw that Shelah was grown, and **she was not given to him as a wife.**

Judah had said when Shelah was grown (v. 11)... he would give him to Tamar as a wife

➤but he does not fulfill that promise (v. 14) "she was not given to him as a wife"

(BKC) "Thus the family's future was placed in jeopardy. Tamar felt she would have to take matters into her own hands if she were to be granted the rights of the Levirate custom"

(Word) "While not actually saying that Tamar dressed as a prostitute, the text implies that the dress and posture she adopted made her easily taken for one"



¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face.

¹⁶Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she *was* his daughter-in-law. So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

¹⁷And he said, “I will send a young goat from the flock.” So she said, “Will you give *me* a pledge till you send *it*?”

“young goat”—roasted kid which was a delicacy in those times

¹⁸Then he said, “What pledge shall I give you?” So she said, “Your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand.” Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

“Signet” or seal—a rich man would have his personally engraved seal...it was carried on a cord

“staff”—was a symbol of authority

¹⁹So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and **put on the garments of her widowhood.**

(NSB) “Tamar resumed wearing the clothing of a widow—clothing that broadcast Judah’s broken promises to the community”

²⁰And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her.

²¹Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who *was* openly by the roadside?" And they said, "There was no harlot in this *place*."

Judah sent his friend to retrieve the pledge back from Tamar but she could not be found

'harlot' (Heb.)= shrine prostitute—refers to sacred, pagan prostitutes, attached to the pagan religions
Apparently they were more respectable than just a common one

²³Then Judah said, "Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

Judah decides to let her keep the pledges to hush the matter

'Shamed' or joke—a contempt for someone considered lower

²⁴And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she *is* with child by harlotry.”

So Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned!”

(JFB) “In patriarchal times fathers seem to have possessed the power of life and death over members of their families”

(Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary)

“The punishment of burning is rare and reserved for the most serious of sexual crimes [Lev. 20:14; 21:9]...in ancient Near Eastern legal texts is likewise a rare punishment but used in similar circumstances”

²⁵When she *was* brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, “By the man to whom these belong, I *am* with child.” And she said, “Please determine whose these *are*—the signet and cord, and staff.”

²⁶So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, “**She has been more righteous than I**, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never knew her again.

(NSB) “Judah, one of the heirs of the everlasting covenant with the living God, was put to shame by a Canaanite woman. To his credit, Judah confessed his sins

(New Bible Commentary) “Tamar, a widow, had no **legal redress** against her father in law’s injustice. So she contrived to trap him. She outwitted him and obtained her rights under the **Levirate law** and two sons for the household of Jacob”



²⁷Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb.

²⁸And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.”

Twins were known to be a special blessing from God...this account of twins born is parallel to the birth of Jacob and Esau

Both twins in each account compete to be first... and the older one has to take second place

(NSB) “There could be no mistakes in indentifying the firstborn. (inheritance rights)
The midwife used a scarlet thread to make sure everyone knew which baby had been born first”

²⁹Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, “How did you break through? *This* breach *be* upon you!” Therefore his name was called Perez.[£]

“Perez” = breach or break through

³⁰Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

“Zerah” = a rising of light. Or shining, brightness
(Companion) “Both Perez and Zerah, together are in the genealogy of Christ [Mat. 1:3]”

Chapter 39

(Barnes) “Perez and Judah were born when Judah was in his 28th year, and therefore Joseph in his 24th. Here, we go back seven years to resume the story of Joseph”

The children of Israel who came out of Egypt, upon reading this story would help them understand events leading up to how their parents became slaves in Egypt

Genesis 39:1

¹Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.

Instead of being sold to construction crew slavery (pyramids, palaces, etc)-- God was with Joseph, and he was sold to a high Egyptian official

The overall theme—is repeated in v. 21, 23

²**The Lord was with Joseph**, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

³And **his master saw that the Lord was with him** and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand.

⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then **he made him overseer** of his house, and **all that he had** he put under **his authority**.

(JFB) “Potiphar signifies one ‘devoted to the sun’ the local deity of On or **Heliopolis**—a circumstance which fixes the residence in the Delta...”

Heliopolis



Potiphar and his estate prospered because God was with Joseph

⁵So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that **the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake**; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

In this story we see how all Abraham's descendents begin to fulfill (Gen. 12:2) "I will bless you...and you shall be a blessing"

➤ And Potiphar saw that the blessing was from God

⁶Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now **Joseph was handsome in form and appearance**.

(Word) "Joseph's mother, Rachel is also described as beautiful of form and appearance [29:17]. They are the only two people in the OT to be awarded this double accolade"

⁷And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

(JFB) "the ancient women of Egypt were very loose in their morals"

⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

⁹*There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and **sin against God?**"

(NSB) "Joseph exemplified the highest standard of personal behavior. ..the empowering presence of God in his life helped Joseph to resist temptation.

v. 9 '**sin against God**' (NSB) "Here Joseph not only stood up for his ethical beliefs, but he also told a woman who probably believed in many gods about the righteousness of the only true God!"

Joseph calls adultery sin

➤ 10 Commandments in force before the time of Moses

To serve as witnesses

¹¹But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside,

¹²that she **caught** him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

"Caught"—implies violence

(Word) "The main items of attire in patriarchal times were mid-calf shorts and a tunic, a long shirt. To pull either of these garments off against the wearer's will must have involved surprise and violence"

¹⁶So she kept his garment with her until his master came home.

¹⁷Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, “The **Hebrew** servant whom you brought to us came in to me **to mock** me;

¹⁸so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside

v. 17

(NSB) “The term Hebrew is used only four times in the book of Genesis. Here it is a racial slur.

‘to mock’ (NSB) “The verb suggests racial hatred. The Hamitic Egyptians scorned the Semitic people of Canaan”

¹⁹So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, “Your servant did to me after this manner,” that his anger was aroused.

²⁰Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners *were* confined. And he was there in the prison.

Even though Potiphar’s wife story aroused his anger, he did not have Joseph killed but rather put him into prison of which he was in command (v. 1 ‘captain of the guard’)

(JFB) “to account for the lightness of the punishment, considering the severity of the Egyptian law as to adultery...it is possible that Potiphar was not fully convinced of this wife’s chastity, and therefore did not place unlimited credence in what she said”

(New Bible Commentary)

“To be incarcerated in a royal prison on a false charge was a tragic fate for such a loyal servant as Joseph, though he was not the last to suffer for righteousness sake. [1 Pet. 2: 21-25]

Joseph is often regarded as a ‘type’ of Christ, the perfect servant who was unfairly condemned...”

²¹But **the Lord was with Joseph** and showed him **mercy**, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

²²And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.

²³The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under [£]*Joseph’s* authority, because **the Lord was with him**; and whatever he did, **the Lord made it prosper**.

God continued to be with Joseph and he prospered even in prison!

‘**mercy**’= loyal love

v. 22 ‘gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison’

(JFB) “the keeper might have been previously associated with Joseph and have had access to know his innocence of the crime laid to his charge, and will all the high integrity of his character”

Chapter 40

Chief butler and baker—high officials in Pharaoh’s court
Both were **responsible for meals** served to the king

- Assassination attempts were often made through the meals

Pharaoh got sick?

Genesis 40:1-4

¹It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.

²And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the **chief butler** and the **chief baker**.

³So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined.

⁴And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

⁵Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a **dream**, both of them, each man’s dream in one night *and* **each man’s dream with its own interpretation**.

‘each man’s dream with its own interpretation’

(NSB) “these were not ordinary dreams. They contained symbols that demanded interpretation”

⁶And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad.

⁷So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord’s house, saying, “Why do you look so sad today?”

⁸And they said to him, “We each have had a dream, and *there is no interpreter* of it.” So Joseph said to them, “**Do not interpretations belong to God?** Tell *them* to me, please.”

(Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary)

“Dreams were considered important vehicles of divine communication in the ancient world. Trained **specialists** interpreted the dreams of important people and paying customers using ‘dream books’...these books were consulted for the meaning of symbols in dreams”

“Do not interpretations belong to God”

Joseph realized that their dreams **were from God** and was working his will out through more dreams like his own

⁹Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me,

¹⁰and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes.

¹¹Then Pharaoh’s cup *was* in my hand; and I took the grapes and **pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup**, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.”

v. 11 ‘pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup’

(Companion) “A religious ceremony connected with the worship of Horus...”

The chief butler (cupbearer) had a dream that would have a favorable interpretation

¹²And Joseph said to him, “This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days.

¹³Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler.

The chief butler receives a good interpretation—his life will be spared

¹⁴But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house.

¹⁵For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.”

“land of the Hebrews”

(JFB) “The neighborhood of Hebron might be so called from the long residence, the immense substance, and the powerful influence of the patriarchs amongst the Canaanite tribes”

¹⁶When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, “I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head.

¹⁷In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head.”

¹⁸So Joseph answered and said, “This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days.

¹⁹Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you.”

The chief baker does not receive a good interpretation—his life will not be spared:

²⁰Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

(JFB) “This was a holiday season, celebrated at court with great magnificence and honored by a free pardon to prisoners”

²¹Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

²²But he hanged the chief baker, **as Joseph had interpreted to them.**

²³Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

The chief butler forgets Joseph... but God would not

(BKC) "In this hope Joseph has a persistent faith. His faith was not destroyed by his circumstances"

v. 22 "as Joseph had interpreted to them"

(Expositors) "The picture of Joseph that emerges from this narrative is precisely that which the Pharaoh himself later expresses—Joseph is 'one in whom is the spirit of God' [41: 38].

Joseph, then, represents the kind of leadership that the readers of the Pentateuch would be called on to follow. ...Joseph, like Solomon, is a picture of a truly wise leader who understands and sees the will of God in the affairs of those around him"

Lessons

Chapter 38

(Word) “this story [Judah and Tamar] which seems to be at first sight to be so marginal to biblical history, records a vital link in saving history. Tamar, through her determination to have children, secured for Judah the honor of fathering both David and the Savior of the world”

Chapter 39

Joseph’s unfair treatment (Potiphar’s wife) and imprisonment is a type of the sufferings that the righteous often must endure



I Peter 2: 19-21

¹⁹For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, **suffering wrongfully**.

²⁰For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when **you do good and suffer**, if you take it patiently, this *is* **commendable before God**.

²¹For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for [£]us, leaving [£]us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Chapter 40

Joseph's **faith did not waiver** despite his circumstances in prison...and God did not forget him