

Son of My Kin, From the Father

The Fall and Redemption of Lot

- ³⁰ Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.
- ³¹ And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth.
- ³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father."
- ³³ So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose.
- ³⁴ The next day, the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine tonight also. Then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father."
- ³⁵ So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.
- ³⁶ Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.
- ³⁷ The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day.
- ³⁸ The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

Genesis 19:30-38



Children of Unspeakable Origin

Several years ago, Bethel College brought in a chapel speaker. He was a black man who grew up in the 50s and 60s. He overcame his neighborhood, his culture, and many prejudices and discriminations to become Ph.D. in biblical languages. He taught at Princeton Seminary and Howard University. He was editor of a significant theological journal. He has spoken at dozens of colleges, written books, and influenced many people. But none of this would have been possible if his mother's friends had their way.

You see, this man was conceived as a product of a vicious rape. Knowing the circumstances, his mother's friends urged her to abort the tiny fetus. Nothing good could possibly come as a result of rape. "Kill that monstrosity in your womb. Take control of your life. Prove yourself more powerful than that evil man who so violently stole your innocence."

But this man's mother was a Christian. She would not murder her child, even if every day of her life, it would stare back at her, reminding her of that most horrific moment in her life. When the baby was born, she named him **Cain**. Cain—the child of corruption, the child of rebellion, the child of violence. She deliberately gave him a name that would be a reminder of the great evil done to her. But his

middle name would be **Hope**. Hope, because in the midst of great sin, may God take this precious life to bring some semblance of redemption to a world so full of violent, sexual sin. Cain Hope Felder is the man's name, and he always goes by both names, even to this day.

That is a story I've not forgotten in the 25 years since I heard it. In many ways, the story we are looking at today was probably similar for Jewish kids that were taught it in Synagogue Saturday School. It is the ending of the Lot Cycle in the book of Genesis. There are similarities of a kind between Cain Hope Felder and the children in our story. The story recounts how two babies were born to Lot from a most unholy union between Lot and his two daughters.

Remembering the Past

Genesis is such a theologically densely packed book that it seems like every story builds upon the next. We must always keep in mind the things we have read if we want to get the most out of what we are reading. Our story (**Gen 19:30-38**) comes on the heels of Lot fleeing his life from Sodom and Gomorrah. He has just made a bargain with the Angel of the LORD saying that he would flee to the city of Zoar.

Zoar marks the southernmost tip of the Dead Sea. The word means "**to be small.**" We find this little town in Genesis

14. Its king fights with the kings of the four towns destroyed by the LORD with fire and sulfur. Its king's name was Bela, meaning "swallow" or "destroy." The targums therefore said it was a town that "swallowed its inhabitants." This is where we pick up the story today.

“Not Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar” (Gen 19:30). Why is Lot afraid? Perhaps the city was full of the same sins as Sodom, and Lot failed in his faith, thinking that God might in fact destroy it. Or, perhaps he was afraid that the men of that city would blame him for the destruction of Sodom. We don't know.

But we should remember that it was Lot's idea to go here, rather than flee to the hills as the Angel told him. Calvin notes, “Those things which men contrive for themselves, by rash counsels, drawn from carnal reason, never prosper.”¹ Yet, it was God's grace that allowed Lot's decision to stand. Calvin continues, “He was neither expelled from Zoar by force nor by the hand of man; but a blind anxiety of mind drove him and hurried him into a cavern, because he had followed the lust of his flesh rather than the command of

¹ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 517.

God.”² Wenham says, “Lot is portrayed as faint-hearted and vacillating and reduced to living in a cave.”³ So the verse concludes, “So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.”

Amazingly, this cave still exists. It is near the largest grouping of cemeteries in the ancient world, some dating back over 4,500 years.⁴ In 1986, on the steep hills overlooking the southeastern section of the Dead Sea in today’s Jordan, archeologists stumbled upon the remains of a Byzantine era church. This church covered a cave, and was filled with ancient objects and maps identifying this as Lot’s cave.⁵ In 2012, at 1,329 feet below sea level (the lowest elevation on earth), just a few hundred yards away, the aptly-named *Museum at the Lowest Place on Earth* opened, with among other finds, excavations from the church and cave.

² John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 517–518.

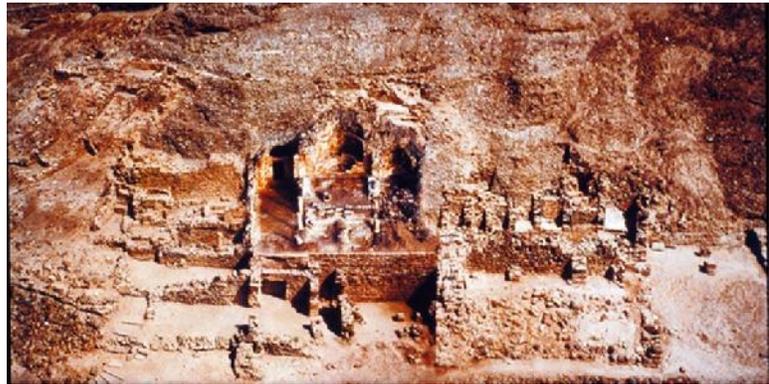
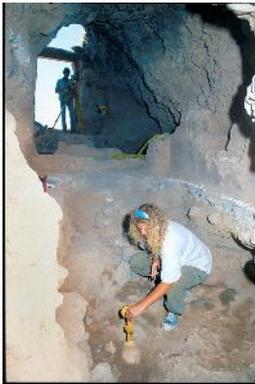
³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 60.

⁴ Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, “Ancient World’s Largest Cemetery Identified at Biblical Zoar (Ancient Zoora): Thousands of ancient burials uncovered southeast of the Dead Sea,” 02/28/2012,

<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/ancient-world%E2%80%99s-largest-cemetery-identified-at-biblical-zoar-ancient-zoora/>. And Konstantinos Politis, “Death at the Dead Sea,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 2012.

⁵ Konstantinos Politis, “Where Lot’s Daughters Seduced Their Father,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January/February 2004.

Lot's Cave and Byzantine Church Built on Top



“Dwelling in a cave is here an image of primitivism and perhaps even barbarism, of life reduced from the civilized state and the material prosperity that Lot had known. It also symbolizes fearful exile.”⁶ Lot becomes like the Horites—cave dwellers in the great battles of Genesis 14. All Lot has left is his two daughters. Nothing more. Caves are also where people bury their dead. Abraham was buried in a cave. But Lot will now live in a cave, on purpose. Caves are also where people go for protection. But Revelation says the caves won't

⁶ Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 135.

protect the unrighteous from the wrath of God (**Rev 6:15-17**). It is an utterly bleak outlook, both physically and spiritually for what Peter calls a “**righteous**” man.

But then things begin to get bad. Lot’s two daughters have a little powwow in the back of the cave. Do you remember them? Lot decided it would be better to offer these two girls to the evil men of Sodom to have them raped and murdered, than to have his angelic guests be defiled. How do you suppose they felt about that offer? Do you think their conspiring now may have anything to do with that?

The firstborn says to the younger, “**Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth**” (**Gen 19:31**). “Earth” (erets) is a word we saw back in Genesis 1:1. It may mean the whole earth, or it may mean a more narrow region of land. It is quite possible that the girls have literally everywhere in mind because of their perspective of what has happened in recent days. Do these poor girls think that the entire world has been destroyed? Later Jewish tradition, including Josephus, tells us that Zoar was destroyed.⁷ Maybe Zoar was later destroyed, or maybe

⁷ On the destruction of all five cities, cf. Wisd. of Sol. 10:6, Josephus, Wars 4.484 (Loeb, p. 143), Gen. Rabba 42:8,51:6; cf. 57:10, Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor. See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

the girls are exaggerating because they, too, are getting old and no one is around or willing to help them find husbands.

As we have seen with Sarah and Hagar, in those days, it was everything for a woman to bear children. If she died childless, she died worthless. How much more if she died an old maid? Even today, we have a card game memorializing old maids—she is the worst card in the deck. Maybe these girls were playing this game with their father, and didn't like it! Since Lot is either too old or too afraid to leave the cave to find husbands, per the custom of the ancient world, the girls hatch a plan.

“Come, let us...” (Gen 10:32). The English makes it sound like the men at Babel: Come, let us make bricks ... Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower (Gen 11:3-4). Is this an evil plan? “Come, let us make our father drink wine.” This has much better parallels with something that happened to Noah. “Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him ... So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father” (Gen 19:32-33).

Do you remember what happened to Noah as soon as he got off the ark? He planted a vineyard and, “He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent” (Gen

9:21). And Ham saw the “nakedness of his father” (22). Anyone just reading along through Genesis would instantly recognize the similarities. This was meant to be in light of Noah’s fall, which had so many parallels with the Eden story. And so this is also meant to be viewed as the lowest point in Lot’s life as well.

But though our minds cannot help but think about the Noah story, there are **serious differences** between this one and Noah. Notice that Noah got drunk himself. But Lot’s daughters made their father drink. In Noah’s story it is his youngest son who sins against him by sleeping with Noah’s wife. In this story, it is Lot’s oldest daughter who sleeps with him. Then we see that “Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him” (Gen 9:24). But Lot “did not know when she lay down or when she arose” (19:33). In fact, Lot was so oblivious, that he unwittingly let the second daughter do the same thing to him the next night, “and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose” (35) either. This is worth noting. Here we have a man that has become so obtuse to the world around him, and so easily wasted by the wine in front of him that he does not even have memories. This is not a praiseworthy trait, and we will soon see some ramifications of Lot’s obtuseness.

How To Interpret this?

There is one more very big difference. The girls did this in order to “**preserve offspring from their father**” (34) They wanted Lot’s family line to continue. This is nowhere near as diabolical as Ham who “**told his two brothers outside**” (9:22) because he was trying to usurp his father’s authority. In fact, the motives seem diametrically opposed to one another. All of this is meant to lead us as reader perplexed. Is Lot righteous, or unrighteous? Is Lot falling into sin, or is he purely a victim? Are his daughters evil or are they doing what was right because their father was neglectful and easily incapacitated?

The Proverb says, “**Give ... wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty**” (Prov 31:6–7). Yet the law will say, “**If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion**” (Lev 20:12). Curiously, the very next verse (13) in the law is the one that talks about homosexuality. Is this a coincidence?

Now, perhaps I differ from you in this, and that is fine, but I am personally of **very mixed feelings** when it comes to Lot here. It is very easy to chastise this man for sin after sin after sin, and almost everyone does it, if they even bother to

talk about this story, which many won't touch with a ten foot pole. He should have stayed with Abraham in the first place. He should not have lusted after Sodom. He should not have stayed in that wicked city. He should have listened to the Angel's words and flown to the mountains. He should not have been drinking wine in the first place. He *really* shouldn't have been doing that the second night! How easy it is to throw stones at sinners.

On the other hand, Abraham was at least partially to blame for Lot leaving. Yearning for the Garden of Eden is hardly a bad thing. Wanting to make a difference in the midst of a sinful world for Christ is commendable. Becoming a leader of a city in order to pass righteous laws, all while your heart is distressed by the wickedness around you is actually praised by the NT. Wine is not evil, though drunkenness is a sin.

I have the same kind of **mixed feelings for these girls**. “The angels have rescued Lot and his virgin daughters from the Sodom mob; now they sacrifice their virginity and their father's honor when there is no actual danger.”⁸ Incest is so unspeakable to us that many actually say we should not teach this story in the pulpit or to our children. James Boice's

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 61.

sermon on this passage spends almost half of its time reflecting on this point. Never mind that this is God's word, that God's word is not shy about exposing sin the way we are, and that we ought better to want our children to learn right and wrong from the Bible than from the world, which they will eventually—in fact sooner rather than later—learn it from. Plotting against your father can't be viewed as good. Tricking him through wine and temptation is wrong. But then again, they want to preserve their father's line. They want to have children of their own so that their lives might have meaning. And Judah, the son of Jacob, in a very similar situation (as we will see), actually praises the woman for acting in this very way saying, “**She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah**” (**Gen 38:26**).

Perhaps this perplexing, difficult to sort through story is actually the epitome of what it is really like being sinful people saved by grace? All of our *best* motives and actions are still tainted by sin of some kind. We are still easily prone to falling into evil behavior. Our best acts are as filthy rags, Isaiah says. Yet, we desire in the inner man to do what is right. We are still tormented by sin that comes from without and within. We often make bad choices. God shows us grace, let's us suffering the consequences of our own stupidity, and

does so in ways that discipline us like children rather than punish us like enemies.

Good and Bad Consequences

In Lot's case, because of his own **choices**, his own lack of **choices**, and the **choices** of others that he had no control over, the last time we see him he is in a pitiful and pitiable condition. This ought to give us pause to consider our own choices, lack of choices, and the choices of others that we must live with day after day. It ought to cause us to be like Abraham, who longed for an eternal city. My guess is that at this point in time, Lot was probably very similar in his outlook, but it took many bad things to happen for him to arrive at the end of himself.

The picture of Lot getting drunk every night, living in a cave, alone, probably cold, without many belongings, destitute of happiness reminds me of how **Robin Williams** may have been feeling in his last moments on earth this week, though he had everything on the outside a person could possibly want—fame, money, cheers, and love, he did not find it on the inside. So he took his own life. Perhaps Lot felt like doing the same thing. Perhaps Cain Hope Felder's mother did too. This story ought to make you go to a very

low place. It is depressing. It is sad. It is horrifying. But it is not the end.

The low place is never the end this side of Judgment Day. For there is hope, hope in the midst of ongoing worry and woe and wickedness. **Genesis 19:36** tells us that “both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.” Children conceived in incest. I told you there were similarities with the opening story. This verse serves several purposes. On a most basic level, it introduces us to a brief **genealogy**, and Genesis loves those.

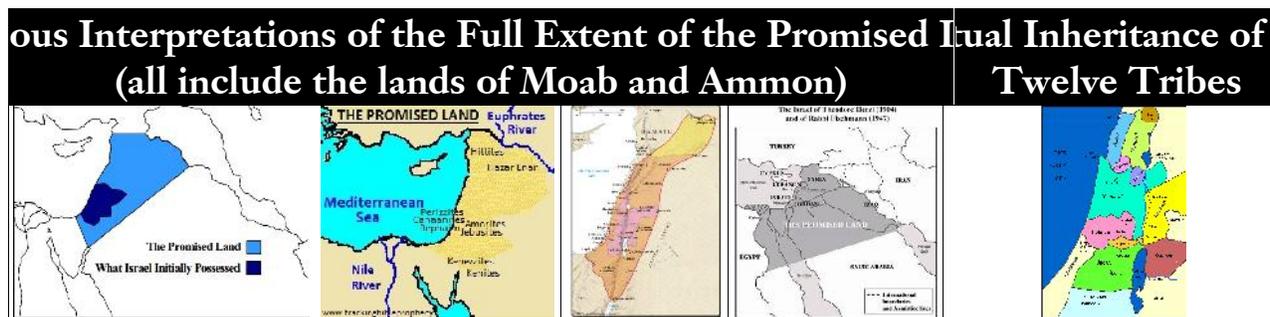
It also introduces us to the **incestuous cousins** of what will later become Israel. “The firstborn bore a son and called his name **Moab**. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name **Ben-ammi**. He is the father of the **Ammonites to this day**” (**Gen 19:37-38**). Now, let us be careful about how we think about these two people groups.

They end up forming **two mighty nations** east of the Jordan River, in today’s modern state of Jordan. In one way, God looked upon these people with a kind of favor that seems second only to Israel itself. “**Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the people of Lot**

for a possession.” (Deut 2:9). “And when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession” (Deut 2:19).⁹

And yet, though they were sons of Abraham, they were not sons of the promise. Lot left the promise behind in hopes of finding Eden in Sodom. The line would not go through him or his sons. They were later very wicked and rebelled against God, and though Moses appealed to them and told

⁹ **GOING DEEPER:** Of all the peoples in the OT, the LORD only says he does this specifically for Israel, Edom, Moab, and Ammon. The NT says, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Act 17:26). All of this is related to the divine council. On one hand, God the Father oversees all things, and as such, determines allotted boundaries of everyone. On the other, the Son had been given a specific people (Deut 32:9) and a land (Lev 25:23), the land of Canaan which may or may not include more land than was actually promised to Israel (See chart below. In the Leviticus text cited above, it is the Son in mind, for he says, “You shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God” [Lev 25:17]. This is council language). When looking at the full extent of the Promised Land, we see that Ammon and Moab are always part of it, even though the tribes of Israel never actually inherited that land.



them Israel would not take a single thing from them on their way into Canaan, Balak the king of Moab opposed their march, and tried to get the prophet Balaam to curse God's people (**Num 22–24**). As someone says, “**Only Moab's and Ammon's lack of hospitality toward the Israelites on their way to Canaan prompted later animosity (Deut 23:4 [3]).**”¹⁰ “In later years, there were many wars between the Jews and these two neighboring kingdoms. In Amos there are prophecies of Ammon's (**Amos 1:13–15**) and Moab's (**Amos 2:1–3**) destruction.”¹¹ Thus, we see in these descendants of these two babies both grace and wrath, a kind of giving men over to themselves as Romans teaches.

Unexpected Grace

But it is grace that I want to leave us with this morning. It is a grace that finds itself in the most unexpected places. The first place we see it is in the names of the children themselves. Like Cain Hope, the names of these children are both a sad commentary on what happened, but also something that God will use in the future in glorious ways. Moab means either

¹⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 62.

¹¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 644.

“from the father” or “water of the Father.”¹² The former certainly fits the context and is a statement of how this boy was born. His father is also his mother’s father! Ben-ammi has a very similar meaning, “son of my male-kinsman.” But though both sons are born from what seems to be great sin, both sons and nations exist solely out of the grace and mercy of a God who did not destroy Lot with the wicked people in Sodom.

But there is more grace than meets the eye here. For God will take these names and do something later on in Genesis, and then later on in the OT, and finally in the NT that is most surprising. At this point, I turn to an article that was written some years ago looking at the literary structure of our story with two others.¹³ We have seen how this story has close affinities to the fall of Noah. And yet it also has stark differences. This story actually has closer ties to two stories that come later on in the Bible.

The first is the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. Both stories have the following similarities. In both, there is a

¹² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 53. On water see M. J. Dahood, “Eblaite and Biblical Hebrew,” *CBQ* 44 (1982) 13 n. 39, and “A Sea of Troubles: Notes on Psalms 55:3–4 and 140:10–11,” *CBQ* 41 (1979) 605–6.¹²

¹³ H. Fisch, “Ruth and the Structure of Covenant History,” *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982) 423–37.

descent. Lot descends down into valley where Sodom is located (Gen 13:11). Judah “descends [away] from his brothers” (Gen 38:1). Next, there is a disaster. Of course, God destroys Sodom. In the Judah story, God kills Judah’s two wicked sons: Er and Onan (Gen 38:7, 10). Third, there is an abandonment of women. Lot offers his two daughters to the men of Sodom, and then leaves them without prospect of finding husbands later on. In the Judah story, he finds a wife for his first son. Her name is Tamar. After this son is put to death, she is given to the second son in hopes that he could have a child. But he is killed to, and she is left without a husband after Judah forgets his promise to her that she can marry his third son when he grows up (38:11, 14).

The parallels continue when Lot is tricked into becoming the father of his daughter’s children. In a similar way, Tamar tricks Judah into sleeping with him, so that he might become the father of her child. Because Judah sees this as a righteous act on her part, we might think of both men as being kinds of kinsman-redeemers, for they give children to the maids and widows. In both stories there are bed-tricks. In both, there is merriment. Lot is made drunk with wine, and Judah goes to a sheep-shearing festival (38:12). Perhaps the most curious thing of all is that in both stories, two children are born. We

have seen Ammon and Moab. In the Judah story, Tamar gives birth to twin sons: Perez and Zerah. The oldest, Perez, becomes the father of man many years later whose name is **Boaz**.

The second story that our text is related to literarily is the story of the book of **Ruth**. The curious thing is that the firstborn of Lot, Moab, becomes the ancestor of Ruth. And who does Ruth end up marrying? Boaz. But before getting to that point, notice how the author of Ruth deliberately crafts his story so that it parallels this one in ways that also parallel the Judah and Tamar story.

Again there is a **descent**. “**A man of Bethlehem in Judah**” (**Ruth 1:1**) descends down to Moab because of a famine in the land. Moab is still well watered. His name is Elimelech and his wife’s name is Naomi. They also have two sons: Mahlon and Chilion. But then **disaster** strikes again. Elimelech died (**Ruth 1:3**), leaving Naomi with her two sons. The sons get married to Orpah and Ruth (**4**). Then they die too (**5**), leaving more **abandoned** women. When Naomi wishes to return home, Orpah stays, but Ruth goes with Naomi, though she is a Moabite (**14**). They go to the land of Judah, to Bethlehem (**19**).

Through the course of the story, Ruth meets Boaz, a kinsman and nearest relative to Naomi. He becomes her kinsman-redeemer. Again, there is a **bed-scene** as Ruth comes secretly to the threshing-floor (**3:3**). In all three scenes, the women take the initiative. Then there is a merry-making barley feast (**3:7**). Then Boaz takes Ruth to be his wife.

And behold. “So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son” (**Ruth 4:13**). That son’s name would be Obed, and Obed would give birth to Jesse, and Jesse to King **David**. And it would be from this union of a woman born from the incestuous union of Lot and his firstborn daughter and a son born from the incestuous union of Judah with his daughter-in-law, unions that would later demand the death of both parties in Israel’s sexual code, that one would come forth who would be the redeemer of his people. One born from his heavenly Father.

“Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth ... the father of Jacob ... the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ” (**Matt 1:5, 15-16**). Cain Hope Felder’s mother was in good company believing that God could do something marvelous through such an unholy union. So should you. This is what faith in the Living God is

all about. So you, when you read this story and become unnerved by its sin, when you think to skip ahead, to not teach it to your children, to put the book down because the story is too offensive, remember God's grace to a man who was anything but perfect, to his daughters who were anything but holy, to whole nations that rebelled against the LORD in every conceivable way. Then remember his grace to you, for if he showed no grace here, then Jesus would not be born, and you would not have the opportunity for salvation, and opportunity that is made certain through the hope that we have by faith alone in Jesus Christ, son of Mary, wife of Joseph, son of Boaz, the son of Judah and Tamar, and of Ruth, the daughter Moab, the son of an unnamed daughter and of Lot, the Nephew of Abraham upon whom God began to first shine the light of Christ so many years ago.