

Genesis Chapter 38Title: **God's providence in the family line of Judah**

It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name *was* Hirah. ²And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name *was* Shua, and he married her and went in to her. 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. ⁶Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. ⁷But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD 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." ⁹But 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. 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. 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. ¹³And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 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. 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*?" 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. ¹⁹So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood. 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*." ²²So he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*." 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." 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!" 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. 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." 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. ³⁰Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

Introduction

A few weeks ago we started a series on the life of Joseph.

We began in Genesis Chapter 37.

The writer, Moses had finished the chapter by telling us that Joseph was sold as a slave to an officer called Potiphar. He was one of the King's guards.

You would expect Moses to continue the story on the life of Joseph.

However, he doesn't do that.

Instead we have a whole chapter devoted to Judah and Tamar.

This chapter is all about sex and violence.

At first sight it appears to be a random interruption to the story of Joseph.

So the question we need to ask is this.

What is the author trying to tell us and why doesn't he just skip this incident and get on with the story of Joseph?

The answer to this question will be revealed as we go through chapter 38 and discover some important lessons, some of which are in direct contrast to the life of Joseph.

I must admit that it would have been much easier to skip this chapter and get on with the life of Joseph, but Moses was a better judge than me, so I need to trust his judgement, and not mine.

We can divide the chapter into 3 sections.

1. God's judgement for sin - v. 1-11

a) Judah's sin of intermarrying – v. 1-5.

Firstly, we need to read Genesis Chapter 24: v. 1-3.

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, ³ and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell;

Secondly, we need to read Genesis Chapter 28: v. 1.

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

So Jacob, Judah's Father, must have known that he was not allowed to marry a Canaanite woman.

Judah, Jacob's fourth son now occupied the place of birth-right because of his older three brother's sins. (Chapter 34 informs us of their sins)

So Judah in total disobedience to God's command left home and moved to Adullam.

It was there that he married a Canaanite woman, and had three sons by this lady.

These boy's names were **Er, Onan, and Shelah.**

b) The sin of Er- v. 6.

Judah arranged for his first born son Er to marry a girl called Tamar.

Er was a wicked man and so in judgement for his wickedness, God took his life from him.

We are not told about all the sins that Er had committed, but we are told that he was a wicked man.

c) The sin of Onan- v. 8-10.

Judah now had a problem.

There was nobody to continue the family line.

So Judah reminded his second son, called Onan, that there was a Jewish Law that required Onan to marry Tamar and produce a child who would be an heir of the killed son Er, and not connected to Onan.

(We can read about the Jewish Law concerning marriages of this type from Deuteronomy Chapter 25: v.23-34)

Onan decided that he didn't want Tamar to have his child and then have to give him up to be an heir of Er.

Somehow he managed to withdraw during sexual intercourse and let his semen spill to the ground.

God was not pleased with **Onan's disobedience to the Jewish Law of raising up an heir in this prescribed way.**

So God took Onan's life away from him.

Judah was now in a big mess.

There was now only one opportunity of continuing the family line, and that was through the third son, Shelah.

However, Shelah was too young at the time.

Judah told Tamar to return to her home area and remain a widow until Shelah, Judah's third son was old enough to marry Tamar and produce an heir.

Personal Application

Firstly, we need to notice Judah's sin of inter-marrying.

Judah decided to leave his bothers and marry a "Canaanite woman".

We have already learnt that God specifically told Judah's father Jacob that he must not marry a Canaanite woman.

(Gen. 28: v. 1-4) **in the N.L.T.**

So Isaac called for Jacob, blessed him, and said, "You must not marry any of these Canaanite women. ² Instead, go at once to Paddan-aram, to the house of your grandfather Bethuel, and marry one of your uncle Laban's daughters. ³ May God Almighty bless you and give you many children. And may your descendants multiply and become many nations! ⁴ May God pass on to you and your descendants the blessings he promised to Abraham. May you own this land where you are now living as a foreigner, for God gave this land to Abraham."

The reason for this command is given in the text. God was preparing a special group of people, from Abraham's descendants, in order to witness to the world and to produce a "Saviour" for the world.

By Judah moving away and marrying a "Canaanite" woman it resulted in two main things.

- a) He disobeyed God's instructions.
- b) He allowed his family to be influenced by evil religions.

This first sin is a warning to every Christian, especially for young people who are considering a marriage partner.

The warning for every Christian is to always obey God's instructions whenever you face important decisions in your life.

The Bible is full of clear teaching about every important aspect of our lives.

If we choose to obey God's word in these areas, then we can be assured of God's blessing.

However, if we are a Christian, and we disobey God's word with our choices, then our lives will not be blessed of God in that area, until we repent of that decision.

Let me give you a clear example.

I know a Christian lady who about 35 years ago decided to get married to a nice young man.

There was only one problem, the nice young man was not a Christian.

Therefore, her Pastor refused to marry them.

The Christian lady was very upset with her Pastor.

No doubt her Pastor quoted the following verses to this Christian lady.

2 Corinthians 6: v.14-18 in the N.L.T.

¹⁴ Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ⁷ Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. ¹⁸ And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

It is clear from these verses, and others in the Bible that in God's eyes it is wrong for a Christian man or a Christian woman to marry a non-believer.

Nevertheless, the Christian lady went ahead and got married to this non believer.
At the time the Christian lady hated her Pastor for not marrying her.
Many years later the Holy Spirit revealed to that Christian lady that her Pastor was right and she was wrong concerning her marriage decision.
The Christian lady repented of her sin and later had peace with God in her heart.
She is still married, and has two grown up children.
Her husband has not become a Christian, and so far her two daughters are not Christians and have married non-believers.
The lesson for all of us is that if we want God's blessing in our lives, we need to obey the clear instructions of His word, the Bible.

The second thing that happened to Judah was that he allowed his family to be **influenced by evil religions**. This undoubtedly led to the death of his first born son Er, who is described as wicked.

The main influence that a child has in their early years is through their Mother. Er's Mother was a Canaanite who followed evil religions.
Therefore, it is no wonder that Er has been described as "wicked".
Every Christian mother has a wonderful opportunity and a challenging responsibility to influence her children with the teaching of the Bible and with the witness of her own life.
If Christian parents do not take their responsibility seriously in influencing their child with God's word, then somebody else will influence them with either wrong teaching or the influence of worldly things.

Proverbs 22: v. 6. In N.K.J.

⁶Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.

If we do our best in teaching our children the truth of God's word, and living out that truth in our lives, then our children will always be accountable to God, on what we have taught them.
Even if they decide to reject Christian teaching, they will always know the truth that you have taught them.
So it is worth all the effort to spend time with your children.
Family prayer times and teaching your children the Bible is an essential part of parenting, in fact the most important part.

2. The Deception of Tamar - v. 12-19.

In these verses we discover that Judah's wife had now died.

Judah was going through a grieving process concerning the loss of his wife, and decided to go and meet up with his friend called Hirah.

It was probably going to be a party time of drinking and food.

Tamar got to hear of Judah's travel plans and decided to take an opportunity to try and deceive Judah by dressing up as a prostitute and waiting by the side of the road near a shrine.

Why did she do this?

The answer is in the text. We are told that Shelah, Judah's third son had now grown up.

Remember that we were told in v. 11 that Judah had promised Tamar that when his youngest son had grown up that he could marry Tamar and then produce children to continue their family line.

Judah had not kept his promise and this had motivated Tamar to try and deceive Judah into having sex with her as a prostitute.

Tamar hoped to get pregnant by Judah and continue the family line, hopefully having a son.

Tamar was very cunning and required Judah to give her something valuable so that it would obligate him to return and make the promised payment of a young goat.

This was quite normal behaviour for prostitutes.

Tamar requested Judah's signet and cord and also the staff that was in his hand.

These items were very personal to Judah.

His staff would have had his name on it with special carvings.

His signet would have been the equivalent of a Japanese “Inkan”.

Tamar also requested Judah’s cord.

This was a personal item, used as a kind of belt. It would have been hand made to a special design for Judah.

So with all the business matters sorted, Tamar had sex with Judah and conception took place immediately.

At the time, Judah had absolutely no idea that he had just had sex with his daughter-in-law.

Application

So what applications can we consider from these verses about Tamar and Judah?

First of all, let us look at Judah.

Judah failed in his family responsibility as head of the clan to care for Tamar who was a defenseless widow.

Judah was abusing his daughter-in-law by denying her rights.

However, Tamar had remained loyal to Judah and his family.

It was about 20 years since the death of her husband.

Tamar was free to marry another Canaanite man, but she didn’t.

We know from history that “Cult Prostitution” was an essential part of Canaanite religion.

People engaged in ritual sex with Temple or shrine prostitutes, because they believed that their flocks of animals and their land would be productive and fruitful.

The fact that Judah thought that he was engaging with a shrine prostitute gives us a glimpse into how absorbed Judah had become into the culture into which he had married.

He had actually become a Canaanite.

Now for the application.

These verses are a warning to all Christians not to become unequally yoked in any way with an unbeliever. **(2 Cor. 6: v. 14)**

This applies to business, marriage, and social relationships.

God knows that our sinful nature is not destroyed when we become a Christian.

There is a constant battle between the two natures that live inside our hearts.

There is the Holy Spirit and then there is our sinful nature.

Our non-Christian friends only have one nature.

That is the sinful nature.

Their influence towards us can never be “Spiritually Edifying”.

Therefore, we are not going to grow as a Christian by spending time with them.

We are more likely to decline in our spiritual life and get absorbed into a non-Christian culture.

God’s command to be separated from non-believers was for their spiritual protection.

In the same way that a Mother or Father desires to protect their children from physical harm, God wants to protect His children from “Spiritual Harm”.

We can stay protected by being obedient to God’s word.

3. Be sure that your sins will find you out - v. 20-30.

We now come to the final section in chapter 38.

Judah sent the young goat that he had promised the cult prostitute via his friend Hirah.

Judah was expecting to receive his cord, staff, and signet in return.

However, he didn’t receive the item back. Instead he was told that there was no prostitute working in the place where Judah had informed him.

In v. 21 we are told that even an extensive enquiry with the locals revealed that there had never been a prostitute in that place.

After a period of three months, Judah was informed that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, and it was reported that it had happened through prostitution.

Judah was angry and requested that Tamar be executed for her sin.

Judah now had an opportunity to remove Tamar, who was obviously causing him a problem.

In v. 25 we are told that Tamar brought out Judah’s signet, cord and staff and told everybody that she was pregnant through the man who owned these things.

In v. 26 we are told that Judah owned up for his sin and declared that Tamar was more righteous than himself.

Judah admitted his mistake in not giving his son Shelah to Tamar to continue the family line. Judah was definitely convicted of his sin and his confession was a sign that God was working in his heart.

The rest of the text informs us that Tamar gave birth to twins, who were called Perez and Zerah. It is interesting to note that the first born son Perez was the founder of the family line from which David the King would be born, and ultimately the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Now let us look at some applications and challenges of these last few verses.

First of all, we will notice the actions of Judah.

Judah came from a good family, his parents no doubt taught him about God.

However, he left the family and turned his back upon his upbringing.

Judah was immersed in a pagan, ungodly culture in the land of Canaan.

Temple Prostitutes and child sacrifices were part of their religion.

Through this mess that Judah had created for himself, God was able to break through into his heart, and from that day when he confessed his sin, God started to work in his heart.

The lesson for us today is that no matter how far people may fall into sin, God is able to rescue them if they repent.

The next time we see Judah in the story of Joseph, we will see a change in his behaviour.

Even the worst of sinners can enter heaven, by God's redeeming grace.

The New Testament equivalent of Judah is the prodigal son or the lost son in Luke's Gospel chapter 15: v. 11-32.

The son in this story knew the Father's love and protection but chose to go his own way and wasted his money.

However, one day, the lost son realised his mistake and repented of his sin.

His Father welcomed him back into the family.

His words were, **"for this son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."**

(Luke 15: v.24 – N.K.J.)

Maybe today you are wondering if the God of the Bible will accept you into His family. Maybe your sins are great and you can't see how God can forgive you for your sins.

Well God will forgive you, because of Jesus.

God sent His Son from Heaven to come to this world to take the punishment for your sin.

It was the only way that God could forgive us without compromising His Holiness.

It was an amazing act of sacrifice, that God should do this, and that Jesus was willing to come and follow God's plan.

The hard thing for us is to admit our sin. Perhaps today God's Holy Spirit will reveal your sin to you.

If He does, then by confessing your sin to God and asking for His forgiveness because of Jesus, you can be welcomed into God's family.

Now let us look at an application from Tamar's behaviour.

Remember Tamar was a poor widow who had waited about 20 years for Judah to fulfil his promise of giving her his third son. It didn't happen.

Remember that Tamar was a Canaanite, why should she bother about continuing the family line of Judah?

The simple answer was that God was working His purposes out in the messy situation.

Of course it was wrong to have sex with your "Father-in-Law".

Yes, Tamar did deceive Judah into having sex with her.

However, in the middle of this awful mess, God was able to work His purposes out to bring a satisfactory conclusion.

In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew Chapter 1, only 5 women are mentioned. They are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary.

Tamar dressed up as a prostitute, Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth was a Pagan Moabite, Bathsheba was an adulteress, and Mary was wrongly regarded as immoral because no-one would believe her story.

This points to the humility and grace of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tamar's insistence in fulfilling this Jewish cultural demand to continue the family line would eventually lead to the only person who could deal with the sins of the world.

In Revelation Chapter 5, when the whole population of heaven gather to hear who is worthy to take the scroll, John weeps because no one is found.

Then one of the heavenly Elders says to him;

"Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of JUDAH, the root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

On a human level it all goes back to this awful one night stand with a person who posed as a prostitute.

Amazing Grace, how can it be, that thou, my God should die for me!!!