

GENESIS 38: JUDAH AND TAMAR

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We have to recognize the work of the cross in our stories of restoration
 - i. Genesis 38 is a story of descent into sin, confession, repentance, restoration
 - ii. At the end there is a scarlet thread that reminds us who is responsible

II. OVERVIEW

- A. Judah met a Canaanite woman and had three sons with her
 - i. Er, Onan, Shelah
- B. Judah found a wife for his firstborn named Tamar
 - i. Er was wicked so God killed him
 - ii. Tamar was given to Onan who was also wicked and killed by God
 - iii. So Tamar had to wait until Shelah was grown to be given to him
- C. Judah's wife died so he went up to Timnah
 - i. On the way he saw a prostitute and slept with her
 - a. But it was actually Tamar
 - b. Judah had never given her to Shelah even though he was grown
 - c. Judah gave her his signet, cord and staff as a pledge to send her a goat
- D. Judah sent the goat but no one could find Tamar
- E. Judah found out she was pregnant three months later
 - i. He threatened to burn her for immorality
 - ii. But she produced the signet, cord and staff to prove the child belonged to Judah
- F. When Tamar went in to labor she had twins
 - i. Perez and Zerah

III. AT THAT TIME – V. 1

- A. Right after Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelite traders

IV. WENT DOWN FROM HIS BROTHERS – V. 1

- A. He may have been feeling guilty for selling Joseph
 - i. It was his idea¹
- B. The one who proposed sending Joseph into exile was now exiled

¹ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 6). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38A*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38a

- i. Indicates a moral descent

V. ADULLAMITE – V.1

- A. From the city of Adullam
 - i. Would eventually be part of the territory of Judah
 - ii. David would eventually hide from Saul in the caves of this region²

VI. DAUGHTER OF A CERTAIN CANAANITE – V. 2

- A. Like Esau took Canaanite women for wives
 - i. Foreshadows trouble
- B. First time one in the seed line marries a Canaanite woman
- C. The Canaanites were corrupting the sons of Abraham³
 - i. Each generation gets worse and worse
 - ii. To the point that Judah's oldest two sons were so wicked that God killed them

VII. HE TOOK HER – V. 2

- A. Like Eve did
 - i. Yet another fallen son of Adam

VIII. WICKED IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD – V. 7

- A. We don't know what Er did that was so wicked
- B. But it was wicked in God's sight
 - i. Though not in man's sight
 - ii. Or out of man's sight

IX. THE LORD PUT HIM TO DEATH – V. 7

- A. Some say God doesn't ever kill in the bible
 - i. He only uses agents like a flood or an army
- B. This verse gives us no other alternative
 - i. We must confront the fact that God Himself kills those who He decides are too wicked
 - a. Acts 5:1-5 ***But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep***

² American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. (1998). *Archaeology in Israel: Adullam*. Jewish Virtual Library. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/adullam>

³ Guzik, D. (2018). *Genesis 38 - Tamar and the Sin of Judah*. Enduring Word. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-38/>

back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

- b. Revelation 2:20-23 ***But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.***

X. GO IN TO YOUR BROTHER’S WIFE – V. 8

- A. Called levirate marriage
 - i. When a man marries his deceased brother’s wife
 - a. To provide her with financial provision and children
 - b. To preserve the deceased man’s clan
 - c. This was a matter of justice in those days
 - ii. Deuteronomy 25:5-6 ***“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.***

XI. OFFSPRING FOR YOUR BROTHER – V. 8

- A. The firstborn would be considered the son of the deceased brother
- B. The living brother acted as a stand-in⁴

XII. OFFSPRING WOULD NOT BE HIS – V. 9

- A. Including the inheritance that son would receive from the deceased brother

⁴ Guzik

- B. But if he has no son then he receives Er's inheritance⁵

XIII. WASTE THE SEMEN ON THE GROUND – V. 9

- A. Onan used Tamar for sex without giving her children
 - i. This is not proof that masturbation is a sin⁶
 - ii. It is a sin of denying justice to his sister-in-law

XIV. HE FEARED THAT HE WOULD DIE – V. 11

- A. Understandable why Judah would hesitate to give this woman to his youngest son
- B. Not clear if Judah knew God was responsible for Er and Onan's deaths
 - i. Maybe he thought Tamar was responsible

XV. TAMAR WAS TOLD – V. 13

- A. She found out Judah left to shear the sheep and left Shelah in charge of the home
 - i. Indicates he was no longer mourning his deceased wife
 - ii. She knew Judah would likely be partying with the guys
 - iii. Indicates Shelah was old enough to marry but Judah was not going to give her to him⁷

XVI. COVERED HERSELF WITH A VEIL – V. 14

- A. As in, a wedding veil
 - i. This is how prostitutes dressed to signal their intention⁸
- B. She used clothing to deceive Judah
 - i. Just like Jacob did with Isaac
 - a. Genesis 27:27 ***So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed!"***
 - ii. Just like Joseph's brothers did with Jacob
 - a. Genesis 37:32 ***And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not."***
- C. Continued cycle of deception in this family
 - i. Especially to get something that rightfully belonged to them already

⁵ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 6). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38A*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38a

⁶ Guzik

⁷ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

⁸ Armstrong, S. (2013b, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

XVII. WRAPPING HERSELF UP – V. 14

- A. Specifically refers to the uniform of a temple prostitute⁹

XVIII. THE ROAD TO TIMNAH – V. 14

- A. She dressed like a prostitute but Judah was her only intended customer
 - i. She placed herself where he would see her
 - ii. She must have known he would be tempted by her

XIX. SHE HAD NOT BEEN GIVEN TO HIM – V. 14

- A. She couldn't just find another man to marry in those days
 - i. A woman who wasn't a virgin was undesirable for marriage
 - ii. She was betrothed to Shelah and ineligible to be given to another man
 - a. Betrothal was more binding than an engagement in the 21st century
 - b. This was a sinful act against Tamar by Judah¹⁰
- B. Life without a husband or children was very difficult for a woman

XX. A YOUNG GOAT – V. 17

- A. Judah did not have the goat with him so he had to make a pledge

XXI. WHAT PLEDGE SHALL I GIVE YOU – V. 18

- A. He had to give her something of value so she could be assured she would receive the goat
- B. She wanted something that would obviously belong to Judah
 - i. So that later she could prove Judah was the one responsible for getting her pregnant
 - ii. Otherwise she would be put to death

XXII. JUDAH'S THREEFOLD PLEDGE TO TAMAR – V. 18

- A. Signet
 - i. Or seal
 - ii. Used for documents
 - iii. Highly personal identifier
- B. Cord
 - i. The necklace that held the signet
 - ii. Or, cloak or garment
- C. Staff

⁹ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

¹⁰ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

- i. Necessary tool for shepherding
- ii. They held no value to Tamar but great value to Judah¹¹

XXIII. WENT IN TO HER – V. 18

- A. Judah slept with what he thought was a random prostitute
 - i. This will provide a contrast to Joseph's morality in the next chapter

XXIV. SHE CONCEIVED BY HIM – V. 18

- A. This was not Judah's plan
 - i. But it was Tamar's plan
 - ii. It was also God's plan¹²

XXV. WENT AWAY – V. 19

- A. Keeping proof with her that it was Judah who had hired her

XXVI. LET HER KEEP THE THINGS – V. 23

- A. Judah decides to drop it and forget about it

XXVII. HAS BEEN IMMORAL – V. 24

- A. Prostitution was legal in those days
- B. But adultery was not
 - i. Since she was technically betrothed this was technically adultery

XXVIII. LET HER BE BURNED – V. 24

- A. Judah had committed the same sin as she had
 - i. But he was okay with putting her to death while giving himself a pass
- B. Judah had the authority to do this
 - i. National governments and court systems did not exist
 - ii. The patriarch was usually the highest authority around

XXIX. IDENTIFY WHOSE THESE ARE – V. 25

- A. Produced proof that Judah was just as guilty as she was
- B. Same words Judah used regarding Joseph's coat

XXX. JUDAH IDENTIFIED THEM – V. 26

- A. Imagine what was going through Judah's mind at that moment
 - i. He may have forgotten about a night of fun a few months earlier

¹¹ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

¹² Guzik

- ii. Until he realized who he had done it with
- B. He could have killed her and covered this up
 - i. His friend was the only one who knew
 - ii. He had done it with Joseph
 - iii. But he chooses to do the right thing this time

XXXI. MORE RIGHTEOUS – V. 26

- A. Or, he is more guilty than she is¹³
- B. Tamar is more concerned than Judah is about preserving the family line¹⁴
 - i. This is the line that would result in the Messiah

XXXII. I DID NOT GIVE HER TO MY SON – V. 26

- A. Not only did he confess the sin of sleeping with Tamar
- B. But he confessed the sin of not giving her to his son

XXXIII. HE DID NOT KNOW HER AGAIN – V. 26

- A. There were still consequences for both Judah and Tamar's sin
 - i. Tamar remained unmarried
 - a. Marrying Judah would still be adultery
 - b. Marrying Shelah would be incest¹⁵

XXXIV. HIS BROTHER CAME OUT – V. 29

- A. The brothers struggled with each other like Jacob and Esau
 - i. Genesis 25:22 *The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.*
- B. The younger overcame the older to receive the birthright
 - i. This theme is seen in every family in Genesis

XXXV. WHAT A BREACH YOU HAVE MADE – V. 29

- A. Or, "What a strong effort you have made!" (Rashi)

XXXVI. POINTS TO JESUS

- A. Perez is the ancestor of Jesus

¹³ Armstrong, S. (2013, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

¹⁴ Sailhamer, J. H. (2008). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (T. Longman & D. E. Garland, Eds.; Revised Edition). Zondervan.

¹⁵ Armstrong, S. (2013b, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

- i. Matthew 1:3 **and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram...**
 - ii. Judah's three sons were the sons of a Canaanite woman
 - a. They shared in the wickedness and corruption of the Canaanites
 - b. None of them could produce the Messianic line
 - iii. Tamar means "palm tree" in Hebrew¹⁶
 - a. She was a Hebrew woman
 - b. Therefore she could give birth to the Messianic line
 - iv. God orchestrated events to result in a pure uncorrupted son
- B. The theme of the younger sibling receiving the birthright is present again
- i. We already have a firstborn son
 - a. Colossians 1:15 **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**
 - ii. The younger son is chosen to represent humanity
 - a. We are image bearers so we should act as the firstborn¹⁷
 - i. Philippians 2:5-8 **Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**
- C. Tamar puts on the clothing of a bride and a worshipper
- i. But she uses it as one who is a cult prostitute
 - a. Then she gives herself to Judah, the one who is chosen for the Messianic line
 - b. He is the father who refuses to find a bride for his son
 - ii. Jesus will completely redeem this story
 - a. He will purify His bride who will give herself to Jesus, the Messiah
 - b. The Father will present a pure spotless bride to His Son

¹⁶ Armstrong, S. (2013b, January 13). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 38B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_38b

¹⁷ Mackie, T. & Collins, J. (Hosts). (2023, January 2.) *God's Response To Human Power Structures (Firstborn #1)* [Audio Podcast Episode]. *BibleProject Podcast*. BibleProject. *God's Response To Human Power Structures*. (n.d.). *BibleProject Podcast*. episode. <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/gods-response-human-power-structures/>

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- A. How does the concept that “you reap what you sow” play out in this chapter?
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- B. Does the author believe that reaping consequences of sin will always look like the sin that was sown? Why or why not?
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- C. How does the biblical concept of sowing and reaping differ from the worldly concept of karma? Support your answer with biblical evidence.
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D. What would have been the consequences if Judah had not confessed his sin?

E. Is it necessary for a Christian to confess sin? Why or why not?

F. How have you seen confession lead to restoration in your life?

G. What is the difference between confession and repentance?

H. How have you seen the role of the cross at work in your restoration story?

XXXVIII. FURTHER STUDY

A. Why do you think it's significant that Judah had three sons with his Canaanite wife before Tamar became pregnant?

B. Why do you think it's significant that Judah had five sons total?

C. What are the similarities in Judges 14:1-4 to this story in Genesis 38? What does the author of Judges state explicitly that can help us understand the story in Genesis?

D. Notice the similarities and differences between this story and the one in John 8:1-11. Who is the accuser in each story? The accused? Who has to provide a defense for the accused? What is the result of the accused being pardoned in each case?

E. What was the original purpose of garments (Genesis 3:7-8)? How does the theme of using garments to deceive draw on this original purpose? Why is this a foolish thing to do before God?
