

Judah and Tamar

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[0 : 00] Please keep Genesis 38 open. And one of the things we'll have to figure out this morning, if we want to be really good Bible handlers, is why Genesis 38 is in the Bible at all.

And I'm not referring to the gory details, all the death and the incest. Actually, Judah and Tamar seem to divert us from our main character, Joseph.

At the very end of last week, if you were here, you'll remember that we left Joseph, chapter 37, verse 36. Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

And if you look over your Bibles to chapter 39, verse 1, it says almost the same thing. Now, Joseph had been taken down to Egypt to Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

And you can see it's on the slide in front of you. Oh, just a sec. There's a slide just to show you those verses. There you can see the two verses, end of 37, beginning of 39.

[1 : 05] And of course, our story, our passage in the middle. You see these two verses on your screen, they scream out that Joseph is in trouble. He's enslaved for a top official, a Pharaoh himself, and he's deep in the heart of Egypt.

Spiritually and physically, he seems to be miles away from God. And this trouble, it top entails chapter 38.

Because before we make sense of Joseph in Egypt, we need to learn the lesson of Judah in Canaan. And even though that does seem a little backwards, doesn't it?

Because last week, if Joseph was the golden boy, this week, Judah is the absolute worst. In our story, he has almost all of the sins covered off.

Lying, cheating, debauchery, immorality, hypocrisy. We will see it all in Judah. And so we asked this question as we went to a short break earlier.

[2 : 08] What do you think it would take to change a really terrible person? Maybe you know a Christian like Judah. Maybe you are a Christian like Judah that is trapped in sin.

What would it take to change you? Maybe a good life lesson. Perhaps a strong word from a loved one. Maybe the slow passage of time.

Maybe a sudden awakening. A near-death experience. What would it take to change a really rank sinner? As we go through Judah's story and we catalogue his sins, remember the lesson we learn from Judah is what Joseph needs to know as he's dragged off to Egypt.

And so please keep Genesis 38 open. And there is a handout which you'll find sort of there above my head. I think I'm touching the link. There's a link above my head. And you can find the link to the handout which will help you as well.

Let's look at verse 1. At that time Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adalim named Hira.

[3 : 19] There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and made love to her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son whose name was Ur. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan.

She gave birth to still another son and named him Shishilah. I'm going to say Shila. Shila. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him. Judah has three sons in three verses.

Ur, Onan and a boy called Shila. And it appears that he is aligning himself with God's promises. Remember God promised to bless the world through Jacob's offspring.

And Judah is playing his part. Having three offspring of his own. Well done Judah. But if we read closer. We'll find out that something much worse is going on.

Verse 1 says Judah left his brothers. That is he deserted his family. It says he went down to stay with a pagan. That is he turned away from God.

[4 : 22] You see Judah is a sinner on the run. He's distancing himself from God and God's people. In verse 2 says he marries a Canaanite woman.

But for this family Abraham gave clear instructions that Isaac was never to marry a Canaanite woman. Isaac gave clear instructions that Jacob was not to marry a Canaanite.

Esau he turns away and marries a Canaanite. It is always wrong for God's people to marry outside of God's family. And that's just what Judah does.

He marries the daughter of Shua. And he associates with Hira and the Dalamite. He turns away from God and associates and lives amongst the pagans.

The correct translation of verse 2 is this. Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite and he took her. He saw and he took.

[5 : 22] Does that remind you of anything? It's the same sequence of verbs in Genesis 3. When Eve saw and took the fruits. It's Genesis way of describing sin and rebellion.

To see and to take. Well in verse 6 to 10. Let's see if Judah's sons are any better. Verse 6. Judah got a wife for Ur his firstborn.

And her name was Tamar. But Ur was wicked in the Lord's sight. So the Lord put him to death.

Then Judah said to Onan. Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother in law to raise up offspring for your brother.

Back in those days it was the custom or the duty. If one brother dies that the next brother had to marry his widow and have children on the dead brother's behalf.

But in verse 9. Onan isn't happy with that arrangement. So he does this primitive form of contraception. Clearly Onan doesn't care whether God's promises flow through the family.

[6 : 26] Verse 10. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight. So the Lord put him to death also. And it's very clear that with Judah's two sons the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

Look at verse 11. Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar. Live as a widow in your father's household until my son Shelah grows up. You see instead of looking after her as a father.

Judah cooks up a lie to get her out of the house. Just live with your own father for a little while.

Shelah he's a bit too young. But when he's old enough to get married I'll give you a call. But you just go over there for a while.

But in verse 12. After a long time Judah's wife the daughter of Shua died. You see clearly someone other than Tamar is causing all the death in the family.

Because Judah blames her for the fact that his sons keep dying. As long as she lives in the house. Verse 11. Shelah may die too.

[7 : 31] Just like his brothers. And you'd think that all that death in the family would be enough to change Judah. But not even close. Because in verse 12.

It's shearing season in Canaan. Shearing season meant pagan festivals and drinking and debauchery. And so Judah takes his best mate Hira. The Adalimite.

It seems the best way to get over your wife's death is a boys weekend. And so far. Just as we press the pause button there. How do you think running away from God is working out for Judah?

What sort of future do you think he will have? You see having a future is everything to the sons of Israel. They were the holders of God's promises.

Land. Offspring. And blessings. But here is Judah. Miles away from the promised land. With almost no offspring left. And on a boys weekend.

[8 : 30] He'll struggle to be a blessing to anyone. See Judah is a picture of a Christian. Who turns away from God. He thought that if he ran far enough away.

That God wouldn't be able to see him. Then he could see and take whatever he wanted. But his life has become a downward spiral. A hopeless dead end.

With no future. God has done this. You see Judah forgot the first rule about God. Genesis chapter 1 verse 1.

That he created the heavens and the earth. That there's nowhere to run away. Because he sees everything. And is sovereign in his world. Did you notice verse 7 and verse 10?

It says Judah's sons were wicked in the Lord's sight. So the Lord put them to death. God sees and acts. In our hands these verbs describe our sin.

[9 : 28] But in God's hands they describe his sovereignty. And this is the main event today. Because in his sovereignty. God is able to use even the most terrible people for good.

To achieve his purposes. You remember that Judah's father is Israel. But once upon a time Israel was called Jacob. Jacob was a shocking person.

A scoundrel. A cheat. And a liar. He cheated brother Esau out of birthright and blessings. But God used Laban. To give Jacob a taste of his own medicine.

In his sovereignty. He was able to flip and reboot and change Jacob. To become the patriarch of Israel. And so look at what God does to Judah.

Verse 13. When Tamar was told. Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah. To shear his sheep. She took off her widow's clothes. Covered herself with a veil. To disguise herself.

[10 : 29] You see Tamar won't settle. For the life Judah has relegated her to. She won't settle for being abandoned and motherless. Verse 14. For she saw that though Shelah had now grown up.

She had not been given to him as his wife. She realizes she's been conned and deceived by Judah. But she knows her man. He loves drink.

He loves women. And so she plans a trap. And in verse 15. Thanks to her veil. And probably all the wine Judah has drunk.

He doesn't recognize her. And that is a delicious irony. Because that's exactly the way Laban trapped Jacob. With a veil and too much wine.

But what's even more ironic. Is that Judah thinks that God can't see him in Canaan. Yet here he is. He can't even see his own daughter-in-law.

[11 : 26] When she's in front of his face. And in verse 16. He takes the bait. Judah went over to her by the roadside. And said. Come now. Let me sleep with you.

Verse 17 to 18. Tamar negotiates a guarantee for her services. Your seal and its cord. And the staff in your hand. She answered. And these three items.

Are the equivalent of a man's wallet. Or credit cards today. But what's really funny. Is that a staff refers to someone's tribe. Or offspring.

And the Hebrew. Or the words for seal and cord. They sound like the Hebrew. For father-in-law and simpleton. To put it another way. As a guarantee. Tamar says. Give me your offspring.

Father-in-law. You simpleton. And verse 18. So he gave them to her. And he slept with her. And she became pregnant by him. Verse 20 to 22.

[12 : 25] Judah needs his personal items back from the prostitute. So he sends Hira the Adolamite. To do his dirty work. But of course Hira can't find her. So verse 23. Judah says.

Let her keep what she has. You see. There's only one explanation. For why a prostitute has a man's wallet. And Judah says. He doesn't want to be a laughing stock.

But what he does next. Is shocking. Verse 24. About three months later. Judah was told. Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution. And as a result.

She's now pregnant. Judah said. Bring her out. And have her burned to death. It's quite sickening. Isn't it? How quickly. He calls for her execution.

And to people around. Judah appears. To be honoring. Or protecting the family's honor. But really. He's covering. His tracks. He's protecting his sin.

[13 : 23] You see. He refused to let her. Marry son number three. But with Tamar dead. No one. Will be any wiser. Bring her out. And have her burned to death. He says.

Verse 25. As she was being brought out. She sent a message. To her father-in-law. I am pregnant. By the man. Who owns these. She said. And she added. See.

If you recognize. Whose seal. And cord. And staff. These are. Boom. You see. In one fell swoop. Judah suddenly sees.

Everything. Clearly. Remember last week. He used. Joseph's. Personal robe. To deceive. His father. Well today. His personal stuff.

Is being used. To expose. His deceit. Last week. Judah said. To Jacob. See if you recognize. Whether it is. Your son's robe. This week. Tamar says.

[14 : 18] Verse 25. See if you recognize. Whose seal. And cord. And staff. These are. God has done this. Verse 26. Judah recognized them.

And said. She is more righteous than I. Since I wouldn't give her. To my son. Sheila. You see. Taking control. Manipulating others. And deceit.

Were always handy sins. In getting Judah. What he wanted. Until Tamar. Gave him a dose. Of his own medicine. God. Has done this.

And even though Tamar. Uses deception. Judah gives us. The verdict. She is more righteous. Than I. It is not. That it's suddenly. Okay. To deceive people.

But righteousness. Here. Is acting. In line. With God's promises. She is totally. Determined. That this family. Has offspring.

[15:14] Whereas Judah himself. Verse 26. Wouldn't give her. To his son. Sheila. You see. Finally. Judah. Is on the receiving end. And realizes.

How terrible. His sin. Feels. And he confesses. How unrighteous. He is. For the first time ever. She is more righteous. Than I. And even though.

Judah is not. The finished work. From now on. We'll have our eyes. On him. Because it's clear. That God has begun. To bring about. A change.

In this terrible. Sinner's. Life. That's what verse 27. To 30. Are all about. God gives Judah. Two new sons. Two new sons. To replace.

Two wicked ones. Two new sons. For a totally new. Judah. And Judah's twins. They're born. Exactly the same way. The twins. Jacob. And Esau.

[16:09] Were born. Both times. The first boy out. Was a red baby. Esau. Red hair. Zerah. Had a scarlet thread. Tied around his wrist.

Both twins work in reverse order. Younger Jacob. Is stronger. Than older Esau. Younger Perez. It says. Breaks out. Against older. Zerah.

And crucially this. Just as younger Jacob. Will go on. To be a great nation. So too. Perez. Will further. That nation.

As well. On your screen. There's a slide. From Ruth chapter 4. Through your offspring. The Lord gives. Gives you by this young woman. May your family. Be like that of.

Perez. Whom. Tamar bore. To Judah. God has. Done this. You see. Judah thought. That if he ran. Far enough.

[17:04] Away from Israel. That God. Wouldn't see him. That if he. Immersed himself. In a pagan lifestyle. He'd finally be free. From God's promises. And plans. For his life.

But God still. Sees. And acts. He took. Judah's. Worst sins. And made them. An elegant trap. To flip him around. God changes him.

By giving him. A dose. Of his own medicine. Through Tamar. Of all people. See. Genesis 38. Is. A test case. For God's sovereignty. As they drag.

Joseph. Off. To slavery. In Egypt. He needs to learn. That God. Can still see. Judah. In Canaan. If God. Can use.

Terrible. Judah. For his good. Then he can take. All the terrible things. Happening to him. In Egypt. And use that. For good. Too. And for us.

[17:59] Genesis 38. Equips us. For our own times. Of trouble. As well. Last week. When we said trouble. We were talking. Specifically. About the virus. But. It's clear.

That there's so much. More going on. In people's lives. Money and career. Parenting. And health. Marriage and singleness. Anxiety and grief.

For despairing Christians. Who are facing all of these troubles. Perhaps you are wondering. Where God is. Whether he still cares. We need to know.

That God still sees. And acts. That he hears our prayers. That he's so sovereign. That he can use. Even our struggles. To achieve.

His purposes. For proud. Two-faced Christians. Who put on a veneer. Of righteousness. Like Judah. All the while. Running away from God.

[18:57] We need to know. That God sees. And acts. That he will. Humble us. Maybe. Via a dose. Of our own medicine. The way Tamar does to Judah.

Or maybe. On that final day. He will humble us. He does see. He does act. To fed up Christians. Like Judah.

Who are sick. Following Jesus. Those who want to. See. And take. And sin. Just like everyone else. Around us. It might look more exciting.

And feel more. Liberated. But. It is wicked. In the Lord's sight. It is a downward. Spiral. Our passage says.

To a. Hopeless. Dead end. And one with no future. But I want to finish. By looking at. Tamar. Tamar is a pagan. An out.

[19 : 49] An outcast. Miles away. From God. A foreigner. To his purposes. She is just like. Our loved ones. We need to know.

That he can not only. Bring them into his family. But use them. To play a key role. For his purposes. In the world. Just have a listen.

To how Tamar. Ends up. And to how God. Uses her. In salvation history. This is our New Testament. Passage. It's on our screen.

This is the genealogy. Of Jesus. The Messiah. The son of David. The son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac the father of Jacob. Jacob the father of Judah. And his brothers. Judah the father of Perez. And Zerah. Whose mother was Tamar. Notice how she gets a mention. Amongst all the men. And over the next screen. Tamar's family line.

[20 : 47] Goes down. To have Jesse. The father of King David. Who then goes on. To have Joseph. The husband of Mary. The mother of Jesus.

Who is called. The Christ. Christ. It's amazing how God. Uses. These people. For his promises. Let us pray. Father God.

We praise you. That you are able to use. The most terrible people. The most unlikely people. And the most harmful situations. For your good. To achieve your promises.

In the world. Father. As Joseph faced trouble. In Egypt. And as we face trouble. In our lives. Please teach us. The lesson of Judah. That you see everything.

We're so grateful. That it's you. And not us. Who is the sovereign one. Thank you. For how beautifully. You used Tamar. And how powerfully. You changed. A sinner like Judah.

[21 : 46] Father. Even though we don't know how. Please help us to trust. That you are able to use. All this harm. And hopelessness. For our good. In Jesus name. Amen.