

Cultivate Genesis Study
Chapter 38

Read and meditate on Genesis Chapter 38 this week
and prayerfully answer the following questions before Tuesday's class.

Right in between Genesis 37 and 39 we have an Interlude that involves Judah. Interlude- An intervening or interruptive period, space, or event: Interval.

Judah decides to leave his brothers and father and move not too far away to Adullam. A Canaanite settlement where he had a friend named Hirah.

The events of the chapter must span at least 20 years, years during which Joseph was lost to his family, (Genesis 37:2; 41:46-47; 45:6).

Read verses 1-3.

Just as his Uncle Esau had done, Judah made a decision to marry without asking the counsel of his father. It appears he was influenced by his friend, Hirah, instead of his own family.

Er- meaning "watcher", Onan meaning "strong,", and Shelah were born to Judah's wife, who we only know as "Shuah's daughter".

In choosing a Canaanite woman, he was going against the direction of both Abraham and Isaac. He was unequally yoked and two of his sons were rebellious to the point of receiving God's judgment.

Do you think this was a bad decision on Judah's part? Genesis 24:3, 28:1 and 28:8.

1. What consequences can you think of for someone choosing to marry outside of God's will?

"Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar." Genesis 38:6. Note that Judah chose a wife for his firstborn son, Er. Judah went out from his father's authority, but he made the marriage decision for his own son. We are not given much information on Tamar. She was likely a Canaanite woman.

2. Knowing that his son was wicked, what kind of characteristics may he have looked for in a wife for Er?

3. Do you think God Himself may have participated in Judah's choice? _____ Explain:

4. Verse 7, *"But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life."* What warning do we read in Psalm 34:16, Isaiah 29:20, Psalm 37:9, Psalm 94:23, Psalm 37:38, Proverbs 2:22?

In contrast, read Deuteronomy 6:1,2, 1Peter 3:10, Proverbs 3:1,2 Proverbs 3:15-17. What did you learn from these verses?

5. What about Er's upbringing? Could his upbringing have contributed to the fact that he was wicked? And if so, how?

Even if a child has a bad training as a child, when he matures, he must be responsible for his own actions. Do you know someone in a troubled home who is being taught ungodly, immoral things? _____ Find Scripture that can help you pray for them and share what you find. Please refrain from gossip, this is between you and the Lord.

Read Genesis 38:8-11

From Jamieson-Fausset- Brown Commentary:

"The first instance of a custom, which was afterwards incorporated among the laws of Moses, that when a husband died leaving a widow, his brother next of age was to marry her, and the issue, if any, was to be served heir to the deceased"

Notice that Judah referred to it as Onan's "duty" to marry Tamar.

As strange as this custom may seem to us, today, God's response to Onan for trying to prevent a child born in place of his brother, shows how sinful his action (or lack of action) was in the Lord's sight.

Judah told his second son Onan to Lie with Tamar to produce children for the older son Er, this is called the *Levirate marriage*. Latin *Levir*, meaning “brother-in-law”.

The purpose of the law was to provide an heir for the dead brother, thereby preserving his name and estate.

6. What other reason was the law designed for? Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and write your answer.

The story of Ruth and Boaz, recorded in the Book of Ruth, is a good example of the levirate form of marriage.

The Sadducees who tested Jesus about the resurrection also made a reference to the levirate marriage and they don’t even believe in the resurrection. Read Matthew 22:23-33

7. Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, so he kept from producing offspring for his brother Er and his sister-in-law Tamar. What he did was wicked in the Lord’s sight, why?

What do you think the real problem was? Verse 9 _____

Do you find it unusual that no mention is made of Judah mourning the deaths of his sons Er and Onan?

8. Why would Judah tell Tamar to return to her father’s house in verse 11? Do you think Tamar believed Judah? Do you think Judah forgot his promise to Tamar?

Are you one to keep your promises? Is there a promise you made that someone is waiting for you to keep?

Read verses 12-19

9. When Tamar heard that Judah was coming to town to shear the sheep she did three things, what were they?

First _____ Second _____ Third _____

Why would she do these things? _____

10. Is Tamar justified in her actions in these verses? Consider the time and the customs of that day in your response. Explain your answer.

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges notes this:

“Tamar apparelled herself in the guise of a religious prostitute (*kedêshah*, *Genesis 38:21*), one who dedicated herself to the goddess Astarte, the Babylonian Istar. The veil was one of the symbols of Istar.”

How far Judah has moved away from worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Read 1Corinthians 6:16

Tamar’s plan was successful, because Judah was not walking righteously with the Lord.

1Corinthians 10:13, 1Corinthian 6:18, Colossians 3:5

What was James’ instruction for Gentiles in Acts 15:28-29?

11. Tamar asked for three specific things from Judah, what were they?

And what might be the significance of these three things? What do you think her motive was?

Was it by chance or providence that Judah came by? _____

Read Genesis 38:20-23

Benson Commentary

Genesis 38:23. “*Lest we be ashamed* — Either, 1st, Lest his sin should come to be known publicly; or, 2nd, Lest he should be laughed at as a fool for trusting a whore with his signet and his bracelets. He expresses no concern about the sin, only about the shame. There are many who are more solicitous to preserve their reputation with men, than to secure the favour of God; *lest we be ashamed*, goes further with them than *lest we be damned*.”

Judah participated in the deception of Jacob in Genesis 37:31-32 with a goat and an article of clothing, now these items show up again but this time to deceive him.

Read Verses 24-26

How quick Judah was to judge Tamar when he was told she was pregnant. It is easy for us to cry “righteous anger” when someone else’s sin is revealed. Yet, we can minimize our own sin in our minds. Proverbs 18:17

Read John 8:1-11

Who was being condemned by the people in this account? Who was *not* being condemned by the people?

What is the significance of Jesus’ response? What does He show us about the heart of God?

In verse 26, *“And Judah recognized them, and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not have relations with her again.”*

Why does Judah make this statement, “she is more righteous than I?”

In this culture your word was your reputation.

Tamar, by no means, acted righteously, but Judah confesses that he was guilty of keeping his son Shelah from becoming her rightful husband, according to the law and custom of the day.

We mentioned Providence, in lesson 37.

God works in a multitude of ways to accomplish His providential plan.

In this case, Tamar gave birth to twins. The first son was named Perez-meaning “breech”. The second was named Zerah. The younger over the older again.

We know from the genealogies in Matthew 1:2 and Luke 3:33, that Perez is the one who will continue the line of the promised Messiah. Tamar is listed in Jesus’ Genealogy.