



Silverdale Baptist Church

The Broken Tree • Judah and Tamar - A Rebel Restored • Matthew 1:3, Genesis 38 •
11 /30 -12/01/2019

MAIN POINT

God can use sinful, fallen people to accomplish His purpose

Introduction

It has been said we should all be careful shaking our family tree, a few nuts may fall out! Ancestry research companies have created a new world with easily accessible DNA testing. In that new world, people find half-siblings they didn't know about, and sometimes they find out THEY are the half-sibling. Family trees are often messy.

How broken is your family tree?

Who is the worst character in your family tree? Who is the most embarrassing to you?

What could God do with someone who was born out of immorality, or whose lineage includes a high percentage of drunks and drug users? Maybe God could use that person to write small group studies for Silverdale Baptist Church.

Understanding

Matthew begins his gospel with the family tree of Jesus Christ. He organizes his list in three groups of fourteen. The record is not comprehensive, but selective. Why are some names included while others are not? We don't know for sure, the Holy Spirit doesn't tell us. However, that does mean every name on the list is essential! The Holy Spirit must have included every name on purpose.

Who are these people in Jesus' family tree? As ancient genealogies go, this one is unusual,

even by biblical standards. While most lineages of that day would have only included the men, this record mentions women. And not just any women, but women whose names remind the reader of drama and trouble in the ancient stories of Israel. We will study all four of the women in the next weeks, but for today we will only look at the first one mentioned.

| Have volunteer read Matthew 1:1-6, and verse 17.

Who are the four women named in Jesus' family tree?

What do you learn about the genealogy of Christ in verses 1-3?

Context

The story of Judah and Tamar is tucked in the middle of the story of Joseph. In Genesis 37, Joseph, Jacob's favorite son, is sold into slavery by his older brothers. In the story, only two of Joseph's older brothers are mentioned by name, Reuben and Judah. Reuben wants to rescue Joseph, and Judah wants to sell Joseph. "What profit is it for us to kill our brother...let us sell him..."(Gen. 37:26-27). Genesis 39 opens with Joseph in Egypt, a slave of Potiphar. In Genesis 37, we see Judah as callous, uncaring about his own brother- let's sell him. In chapter 39, we see Joseph as tender and caring about his owner and his God – how could I do this great evil and sin against God? The Holy Spirit places the story of Judah and Tamar right in the middle.

| Have someone read Genesis 38:1-11.

What do you learn about Judah in these verses?

What do you learn from the text about Er and Onan?

After Er's death, what does Judah do?

Onan, what was his response to his father's command? Why?

Why did Er and Onan die, and who was responsible?

What was Judah's response to the death of his first two sons?

Levirate marriage

The idea of a widow (Tamar) being forced to marry her dead husband's brother does not fit our culture at all. It is hard for someone with a western mindset to see any legitimacy in this type of forced marriage. However, in the ancient middle east, the custom was well known and accepted. It is called a levirate marriage, from the Latin levir for brother-in-law. The brother-in-

law marriage was the custom of the day for most of the people of the middle east. This custom is implied in the story of Ruth and later outlined in Deuteronomy 25.

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 38:12-23.

Have a different volunteer re-tell the story of Judah and Tamar.

What do you learn about Judah in this passage? Tamar?

What is wrong with Judah's actions? Tamar's?

Is God mentioned in verses 12-23?

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 38: 24-30.

How does Judah respond when he found out Tamar was pregnant?

How did Judah respond when he found out he was the father?

Have a volunteer re-tell the entire story in one minute or less.

APPLICATION

What positive take away do you see in this story?

Why do you believe the Holy Spirit included this story in Scripture?

God is not mentioned after verse 10 in this passage, but what ways do you see Him at work behind the scenes?

In what ways is God at work behind the scenes in your world?

What similarities do you see between Jesus' family tree and yours?

If God can bring the Messiah into the world through this kind of family tree, can He bring beauty from your past? How have you seen God do that in your life?

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

God used Judah's arrogance and Tamar's pain and brought the Messiah through their family

tree. God can also give beauty for your ashes.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for reminding us that even Jesus family tree contained embarrassing people and stories. Lord, keep us from acting out in pride or pain like Judah and Tamar did. Thank You for the reminder that You are greater than our mistakes and You give beauty for ashes. Give us the opportunity to share this truth with someone who needs Your love.

| Comentary

38:1–30 Tamar humbles Judah

By this unexpected interruption of the story of Joseph, Genesis keeps us in suspense. We must wait a little longer to discover what became of him in Egypt. But the story of Tamar and Judah is not irrelevant to the main course of the narrative. In many ways it relates to the rest of chs. 37–50 in themes and phraseology. It is concerned with how the promise of descendants for the patriarchs should be fulfilled. It shows how the hard-hearted Judah was stopped in his tracks, and prepares us for the new compassionate Judah of ch. 44. It tells of yet another twin birth in which the younger overtook the older (38:27–30).

The modern reader is, however, most perplexed by the sexual antics of those involved. Does the narrator really approve of Tamar's behaviour? Why did Judah and his sons behave as they did? Was there enough time for the events in ch. 38 to occur between 37:36 and 39:2? Given that people usually married soon after puberty in Bible times, it would be possible to suppose that everything in ch. 38 occurred within the space of about twenty years. According to 37:2, 41:46–47 and 45:6 twenty-two years elapsed between Joseph's sale into Egypt and his brothers' discovery of him there.

In many societies, ancient and modern, the custom of Levirate marriage is known. According to the OT variety, the brother-in-law of a childless widow was expected to marry her to produce children for his dead brother. Dt. 25:5–10 regards such a marriage as desirable but not compulsory. However, in the earlier time of Judah and Tamar the brother had an absolute duty to marry his widowed sister-in-law, and the father-in-law was expected to see this duty fulfilled.

Judah and his sons were reluctant to do their duty, and Onan practised a kind of contraception. This contravened the spirit of 1:28, the letter of the Levirate custom and the promise to the patriarchs, who had been assured they would have numberless descendants.

So Onan died (10) because he had resisted God's declared will. Judah, who should have been concerned to see his next son Shelah fulfil his legal duty and ensure the promise's fulfilment, did nothing.

Tamar, a widow, had no legal redress against her father-in-law's injustice. So she contrived to trap him. She outwitted him and obtained her rights under the Levirate law and two sons for the household of Jacob. Indeed, one of her sons was the ancestor of David and Jesus. In the process she made a fool of Judah and showed up his hypocrisy, so that ultimately he was forced to confess, 'She is more righteous than I' (26). This is not to say that sleeping with one's father-in-law is approved of; 'And he did not sleep with her again' (26; cf. Lv. 18:15) shows it was not. Tamar's irregular behaviour was, however, in this instance, warranted because of her father-in-law's much greater negligence of morality and theology. It was her offbeat act that brought Judah to his senses.

Notes. 1–5 Adullam and Kezib were both near Hebron. 12 Timnah was about 4 miles (6 km) west of Beth Shemesh. 13 Sheep-shearing was a busy, lively festival (cf. 31:19; 1 Sa. 25:2–37). 18 Seals were carried on a cord threaded through the middle. 24 Prostitution is too precise a translation: 'illicit sexual intercourse' would be more apt. Probably, Judah regarded Tamar as guilty of adultery in that she was supposedly betrothed to Shelah. The death penalty could be demanded in this case, but not death by burning, which was reserved for even worse offences (Dt. 22:21; Lv. 21:9). 29 Perez's genealogy is in Ru. 4:18–22.

Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 85.