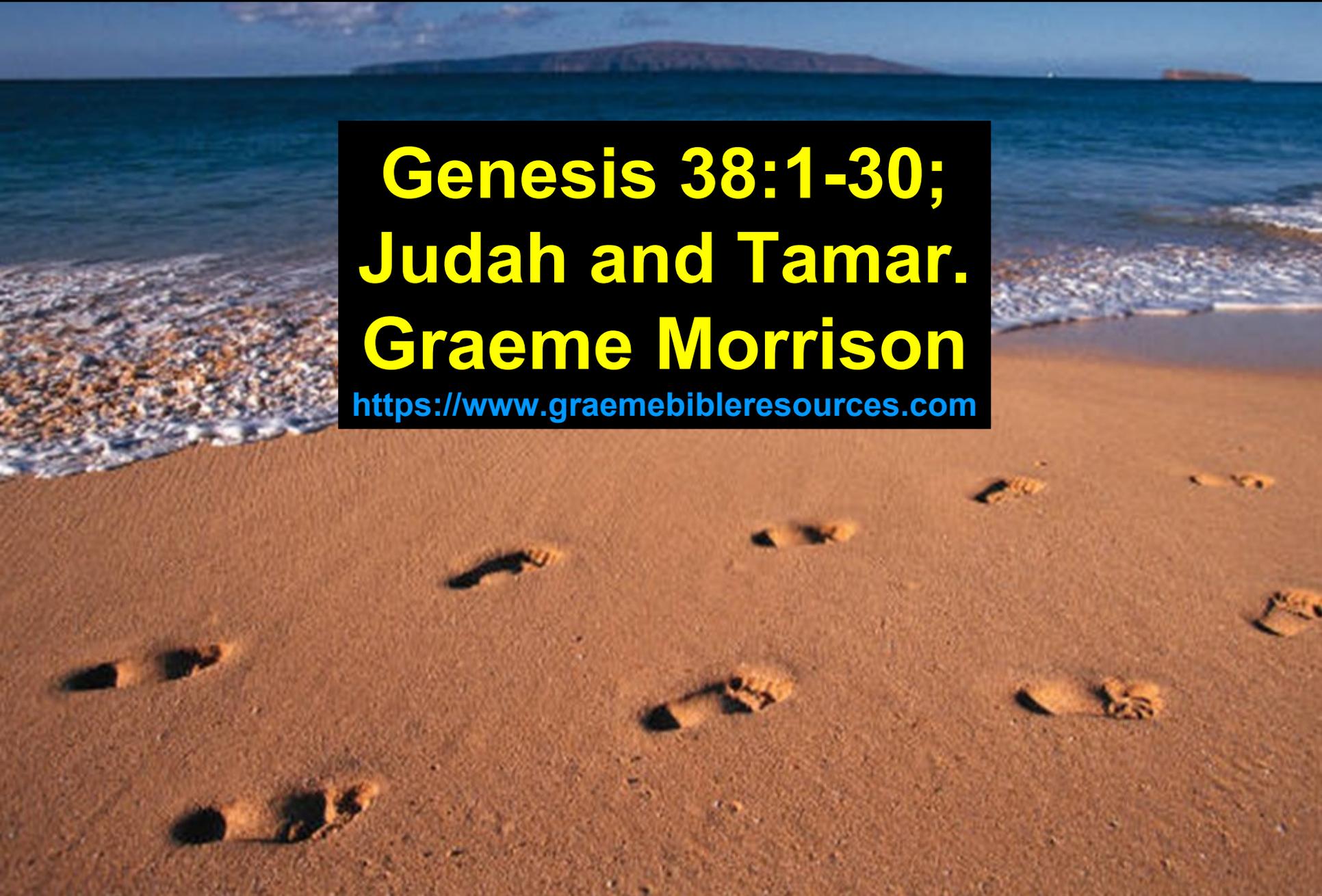


Patriarchal Age – The Patriarchs.

**Genesis 38:1-30;
Judah and Tamar.
Graeme Morrison**

<https://www.graemebibleresources.com>



The sins of Judah and his wicked Family. Gen 38:1-30;

Judah and Tamar.

Jacob's son, Judah, married and had 3 sons.

The oldest, Er, married Tamar. (38:6;)

Er was a wicked man and God slew him.

**Judah told his next son, Onan,
to fulfill his duty and marry Tamar.**

Onan was a wicked man and God slew him.

The sins of Judah and his wicked Family. Gen 38:1-30;

**“And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah”
(38:1;)**

Interruptions are often disturbing and annoying to some people, but they are sometimes vital.

The story is told about a wife who knew how upset it made her husband to be interrupted in the middle of a project.

Consequently, she walked up to him and stood quietly as he worked happily on a project in the garage.

The sins of Judah and his wicked Family. Gen 38:1-30;

In due time he finished what he was doing and **looked up, signalling** his wife that it was **now permissible to engage him in conversation.**
Her words took him totally by surprise.

Calmly she reported, **“The house is on fire.”**
and it really was!

Genesis 38 is an interruption also,
but a very significant one.

In **chapter 37** our attention was focused upon **Joseph, who was cruelly sold into slavery,** a somewhat more appealing alternative than murder.

The sins of Judah and his wicked Family. Gen 38:1-30;

In chapter 39 the principal character again is Joseph, this time in the house of Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer.

Chapter 38, therefore, seems to abruptly interrupt the flow of thought.

This chapter is absolutely essential to the development of the argument of the book.

It occurs by design, fitting beautifully into the context.

The sins of Judah and his wicked Family. Gen 38:1-30;

While chapter 37 has explained how Joseph (and so the entire nation of Israel) wound up in Egypt rather than Canaan, chapter 38 tells us WHY this Egyptian sojourn was necessary.

Chapter 38 provides a back drop against which the purity of Joseph in chapter 39 stands out the more plainly.

Chapters 39 and following describe the price which Joseph had to pay for the sins of his brothers.

Chapter 38 suggests some of the consequences of the sin of Joseph's sale which Judah suffered.

The sins of Judah and his wicked Family. Gen 38:1-30;

**The very forces which were active
in Judah's day are still at work today.**

**The dangers described in chapter 38 which threatened
the very ongoing of God's purposes for Israel
are those which threaten to hinder the program of God
through His church in our own day.**

**The same God who providentially overruled
the sins of men to bring about the fulfillment
of His purposes then is alive and well
and unchanging to this very hour.**

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

“And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.”

“Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her.”

**“she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er.
Then she conceived again
and bore a son and named him Onan.”**

**“she bore still another son and named him Shelah;
and it was at Chezib that she bore him.”**

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

“Now Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. **But Er, Judah's first born, was evil in the sight of the LORD, **so the LORD took his life.**”**

“Then Judah said to **Onan, “Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother in law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.”**

“Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so it came about that when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground, in order not to give offspring to his brother.”

“But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also.”

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

**“Then Judah said to his daughter-in law Tamar,
“Remain a widow in your father’s house
until my son Shelah grows up”; for he thought,
“I am afraid that he too may die like his brothers.”**

“So Tamar went and lived in her father’s house.”

**The sale of Joseph was only the
“beginning of woes” for his father Israel.**

**Directly on the heels of this sin flow the events
of chapter 38. Unity among the sons of Israel
was never a significant force.**

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

The selling of Joseph was only one indication of this, and even here, the brothers were not of one mind about it.

Now **Judah** has chosen to leave his brothers and his father for “**greener grass,**” namely **fellowship and union with the Canaanites.**

Judah's troubles began with an association with Hirah, an Adullamite.

The events of the chapter as a whole inform us that **Hirah was a close friend and a very poor influence on Judah.**

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

**Wherever Hirah is mentioned
there is trouble in store for Judah.**

**While with Hirah at Adullam,
Judah saw a certain **Canaanite woman** whose
name is never given. She is only referred to
as "**Shua's daughter**" (38:2,12;)**

**The stress is laid on Judah's seeing this woman
(**"and Judah saw there,"** v2)
that **her outward appearance** may have been
his only consideration in taking her as a wife.**

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

Since this seems to have been influential in **his father Jacob's selection of a wife**, we need not be surprised at this.

It was, then, a purely physical choice. Certainly no spiritual considerations were taken into account.

If we remember back in **chapter 34** we are told of Shechem taking Dinah. It is said of him that he **“saw her, he took her and lay with her” 34:2;**

There is very little difference between those words and the what is in chapter 38:2; **Judah “saw” this woman and “took her” and “went in to her.”**

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

Only the last expression differs, but both describe a physical union. **The act which angered Israel's sons to the point of murder is very much the same as Judah's taking of a wife.**

Three sons were born from this union of Judah and the Canaanite woman: **Er, Onan, and Shelah.**

For the first son, Tamar was acquired for a wife. Er, however, was so evil that God took his life. His sins are not detailed, for they are irrelevant to the point of the passage.

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

Onan was then instructed by Judah to marry Tamar and raise up seed to his brother. Since the headship of the family (the birthright) normally went to the firstborn, this was a necessary act.

This is an early reference to what is later known as "levirate marriage."

Centuries later Moses commanded it as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy:-

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

“When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man.”

“Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.”

“It shall be that the first born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel.” Deuteronomy 25:5-10;

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

Onan knew that the offspring from his union with **Tamar** would only **further the cause of his deceased brother rather than his own.**

To prevent Tamar from conceiving, **Onan “spilled his seed on the ground.” (38:9;)** Such an act was regularly practiced, and **God took the life of this man for his wickedness also.**

Onan was condemned for two reasons.

First, Onan was **disobedient** in his actions. **His society** at least commended the raising of seed to a brother's name, and **his father had directly commanded it. (38:8;)**

We are led to infer from the story that **Judah never knew why children had not been conceived,** for **only Tamar** would have known the cause.

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

From Judah's biased perspective it was Tamar who must be the jinx, and this prompted him to withhold his last son.

Second, Onan sinned because his motivation was evil. Not only did Onan sin against his father and Tamar, but he sinned primarily against his dead brother.

Onan put his own personal interests above his brother's inability to continue the family line.

In essence, Onan's act was the product of self seeking at the expense of others.

Just as Joseph's brothers had no **"brotherly love,"** neither did this son of Judah.

Judah's Family. 38:1-11;

“The enormity of Onan’s sin is in its studied outrage against the family, against his brother’s widow and against his own body.”

“The standard English versions fail to make clear that this was his persistent practice.”

Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Chicago: Inter Varsity Press, 1967), p. 188.

Once Onan was dead, Judah became very reluctant to give his youngest (and last) son to Tamar.

It never seemed to occur to Judah that it was his sons who were the problem, not Tamar.

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

Judah and Tamar.

**Judah promised Tamar he would give her
his youngest son, Shelah,
as soon as he was old enough.**

**Tamar waited,
but Judah did not fulfill his promise.**

Tamar devised a plan.

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

Probably Shelah was too young at first to assume the role of husband and father, but more than enough time elapsed to solve this problem.

Finally Tamar was convinced that Judah had no intention of giving Shelah to her.

If she were to bear children to carry on the name of her first husband, **she must force the issue, she concluded.**

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

“Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheep shearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.”

“it was told to Tamar, “Behold, your father in law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.”

“So she removed her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah;

“for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife.”

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

“When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face.”

“So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, “Here now, let me come in to you”; for he did not know that she was his daughter in law.”

“she said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?” He said, therefore, “I will send you a kid from the flock.”

She said, moreover, “Will you give a pledge until you send it?” And he said, “What pledge shall I give you?”

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

“she said, “Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand.” So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.”

“Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments.”

Not only did **Tamar know men in general, but she **knew Judah very well.****

Moral purity does not seem to be one of his virtues.

There is little doubt that this wasn't Judah's first encounter with a prostitute.

He does not show any evidence any of the naivety of one who is new at this sort of thing.

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

“Sheep shearing was a festive time. (1 Samuel 25:4, 11, 36;) when **sexual temptation would be sharpened by the Canaanite cult, which encouraged ritual fornication as fertility magic.”**

Kidner, Genesis. P. 188.

Judah negotiated terms acceptable to both parties. It was probably common practice to ask for some kind of pledge since little could be done to force the **“client” to pay after the fact.**

Judah was therefore not taken back by Tamar's insistence that some **guarantee be given.**

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

Not that **Tamar** had any interest in payment.
She wanted only to become pregnant by Judah.

But the pledge that was given would serve
to **prove** at a later time that
Judah was the father of the child
that was conceived from this union.

Interesting that **Islam** accepts
the first 5 books of the Bible
and **tries to enforce the covering of the face**
of a woman as to protect her purity.

When here in 38:12-19; **A veil covering the face**
was seen as the sign of a prostitute.

Judah's Fornication. 38:12-19;

When this encounter ended Judah and Tamar went their separate ways.

Judah never knew the identity of this "prostitute," and Tamar went back to her normal routine, living as a widow in her father's house.

Normally such an affair would have been quickly forgotten, but several events occurred which made this immoral interlude a nightmare that Judah would never be able to put out of his mind.

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

Several events occurred which made this **immoral interlude a nightmare** that **Judah** would never be able to put out of his mind.

“When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman’s hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of her place, saying, “Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?”

“But they said, “There has been no temple prostitute here.” So he returned to Judah, and said, “I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, ‘There has been no temple prostitute here.’”

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

“Then Judah said, “Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this kid, but you did not find her.”

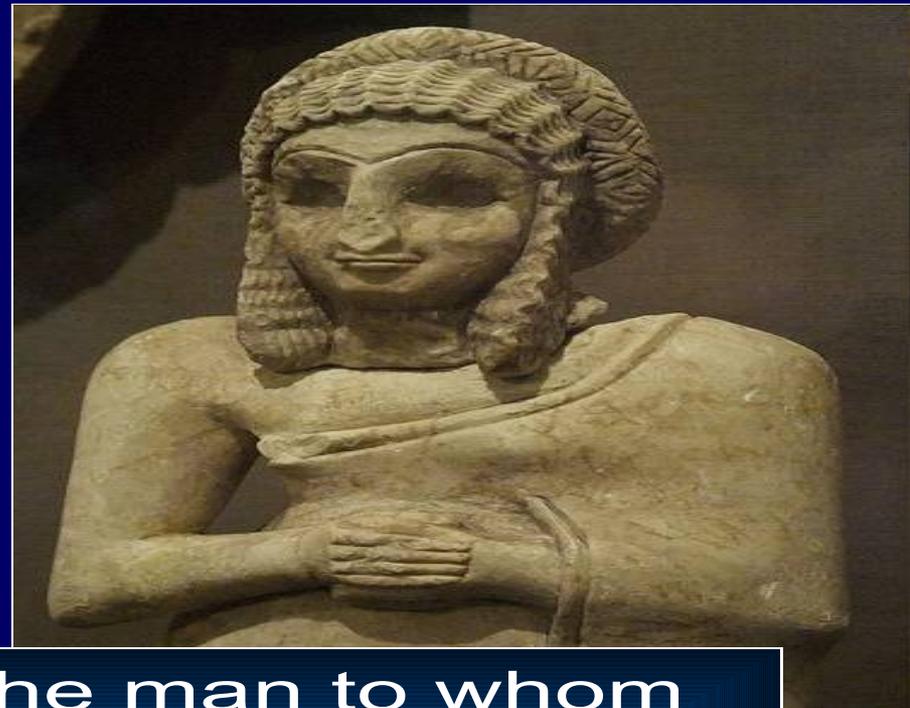
“Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, “Your daughter in law **Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry.”**

**Then Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned!”
It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father in law, saying, “**I am with child by the man to whom these things belong.**”**

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

“She said, “Please examine and **see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?”**”

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



“I am with child by the man to whom these things belong” (Genesis 38:25)

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

Hirah was sent to **pay the prostitute** and **retrieve the pledge** which Judah had given her

A subtle but **significant change of words** occurs here, which is indicative of **a serious flaw in Judah's character.**

Judah thought that **the woman** in the gateway of Enaim **was a mere prostitute.** (38:15; **a harlot.**)

But when **Hirah searched for her** he asked for the whereabouts of the **“temple prostitute.”** (38:21-22;)

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

The religion of the Canaanites was so corrupt that prostitution was a part of their **worship of the god of fertility.**

Judah, in his spiritual and moral dullness, was ignorant of such distinctions.

To him it was merely an affair, but to the Canaanites it was an act of worship.

Immorality would almost invariably lead to idolatry. Yet Judah was virtually unaware of these dangers.

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

Not finding the “temple prostitute”

and, worse yet, being told that there was no such person to be found, placed Judah in a very awkward and potentially embarrassing position.

It would seem that someone had gotten the best of him, but he was powerless to do anything about it

Who would ever report a theft to the authorities under such delicate circumstances.

The more he sought to find this woman, the more his folly would become public knowledge.

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

These were the kind of stories that were swapped in jest. Judah had no desire to become the laughingstock of the town.

He had tried to find the woman and pay her, better to take his losses and hope this was the end of the matter.

As one month, then two, and nearly three passed by without incident, **Judah may have begun to breathe a little easier.**

It seemed as though he had gotten off easy. **The woman had not appeared again, nor was there any sign of his personal pledge.**

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

It never entered his mind
that the matter would end up as it did.

One day Judah was informed that
Tamar was pregnant.

This was not mere fornication,
**but it was adultery, for Tamar was pledged
to marry Judah's third son, Shelah.**

Judah's righteous indignation must have been
awe-some. **She must be burned!**

**This was an unusually severe punishment,
even more than the Law later required.**

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

The usual **punishment** prescribed by the **Law of Moses was stoning.** (Deut 22:20-24;)

It may have been a sub conscious **overcompensation for his own immorality.**

Often we attempt to **cover up our own sinfulness** by a **severity in our response to the sins of others.**

On the other hand, it may have been even more **devious.** It is possible, in his low spiritual state, that **Judah saw this as the solution to a problem over which he had long agonized.**

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

Sooner or later he would have to face the fact that **Shelah, his only living son, was pledged to Tamar**, getting rid of Tamar could solve this.

Tamar's response to the situation was incredibly subdued and submissive.

We might have shouted that Judah was the father of this child from the housetops.

We might have sought to maximize his embarrassment. **What an opportunity to capitalize on the situation and find satisfaction for the years of delay and deceit in keeping Shelah from her.**

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

But she, it would seem, **privately presented the evidence to Judah** and politely urged him to carefully consider it.

She made no condemning accusations but only submitted the seal, the cord, and the staff to Judah.

What a shock this must have been to Judah.

It never occurred to him that he was the guilty party **who should suffer the penalty he had pronounced with his own lips.**

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

Judah, the forefather of the Messiah
and the great grandson of Abraham,
had to say of this woman,
“She is more righteous than I.” (38:26;)

Judah may have had some kind of turnabout here,
for he did not again have any
physical relations with Tamar.

Also, the **next time we read of him**
he is again back with his brothers and father

Judah's Folly. 38:20-26;

What are we to think of Tamar? 38:26;

Tamar is the account of a Canaanite who came into the covenant community and **who learned to value the heritage of the seed of Abraham.**

Women in the genealogy of Jesus:-

Tamar who dresses and acts like a prostitute.

Rahab who is a prostitute.

Ruth a Moabite woman.

Bathsheba an adulterous woman.

Mary who had to bear the assumption that she had a child out of wedlock.

The Twins. 38:27-30;

“It came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb.”

“Moreover, it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.”

“But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold his brother came out.”

“Then she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” So he was named **Perez. Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand; and he was named **Zerah**.”**

The Twins. 38:27-30;

As later genealogies will prove, **this firstborn son, Perez,** was to be **the son of Judah** who would **carry on the messianic line** until the time of David, and **ultimately, of Jesus.** (Ruth 4:12; Matthew 1:3;)

The Younger Brother Similarities:-

Seth instead of **Cain.**

Isaac instead of **Ishmael.**

Jacob instead of **Esau.**

Perez instead of **Zerah.**

Ephraim instead of **Manasseh.**

**(we have an elder brother
who has given us his inheritance.)**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

Historically, this chapter had much to teach the ancient Israelites.

To begin with, this event underscores the necessity of a sojourn in Egypt.

Spiritual purity was essential for the purposes of God to be realized.

Judah, the son through whom the Messiah would be born, (Gen 49:8-12;) was so carnal that he was willing to marry a Canaanite woman, to have a heathen for his closest companion, and to enter into an illicit relationship with a cult prostitute.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**Something drastic had to be done,
and the exile in Egypt was God's remedy.**

There, living among a people who detested Hebrew shepherds, (43:32; 46:34;) even if the Hebrews were willing to intermingle and intermarry with these people, **the Egyptians would not even consider such a thing.**

**Racial bigotry, if not religious piety,
would keep the people of God a separate people.**

**While the stay in Egypt was
in many respects a bitter experience,
it was a gracious act on the part of God.**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

Those **Israelites** who had gone through the **exodus experience** could begin to sense this **as they read this account.**

No Israelite could take this record seriously without a deep sense of humility.

Israel's "**roots,**" were rotten. They could not look back upon their ancestry with any feelings of smugness and pride.

There were **too many skeletons** in the closet for that. Instead, they must acknowledge that **whatever good had come to Israel was the result of Gods grace alone.**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you **because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,”**

“but **because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a might hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
(Deuteronomy 7:7-8;)**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

This was a lesson too quickly forgotten, for the Israelites of Jesus' day took great pride in their ancestry and **relied upon their "roots" for righteousness:**

"do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father;" for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. (Matthew 3:9;)

"They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?" (John 8:33;)

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

Our Righteousness comes only from God.

Our first ancestor, Adam, failed to live by God's standards and thus sinned.

All of his offspring who disobeyed, like Adam, are sinners, (Romans 5:12;) and thus in need of a righteousness not their own.

Jesus Christ, God's Son, has come to this world to take our sin upon Himself, to bear the penalty for our sins, so that we can have His righteousness and spend eternity with God.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:21;

“if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Galatians 3:28-29;

The principal theme of this chapter is divine providence, which draws the entire section together;

God is at work bringing about His purposes through men who are actively pursuing sin.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

In chapters 37 and 39 and following, God is providentially at work to fulfill His promise to make the descendants of Jacob a great and mighty nation

**In chapter 38 God is at work, providentially assuring the fulfillment of His promise to provide a Messiah through the descendants of Judah.
(49:8-12;)**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**Ideally, God's sovereign power
and all wise and loving purposes
are accomplished through obedient servants.**

**But when His children go their own way,
God's infinite power is channelled
through unwilling, disobedient men and women,
who, in spite of themselves, achieve God's plans.**

This they do unknowingly and unpleasantly.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

Who would ever have thought that there was any chance of the messianic line continuing through Judah from the initial events of this chapter?

Here was Judah, the ancestor of Messiah, taking a Canaanite wife, failing to keep his promise to his daughter in law, and propositioning a prostitute, who could just have well been a part of a pagan religious cult?

In spite of all of Judah's sins and in spite of Tamar's impatience, Perez, the forefather of David and of the Saviour, was born.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**Who but God could have brought
such good out of so much bad?**

**The Sovereignty and the providence of God
are difficult concepts and are easily misunderstood.**

**Since much of what God does in this world
is through His providential guidance.**

**It is vital that we understand
its implications for Christians today.**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**The first is that godly living
is necessary for the glory of God.**

**Had we not been given the divinely inspired
account of the sale of Joseph into slavery,
we would not have imagined
that it was part of God's eternal plan.**

**At best, unbelievers would have
considered the outcome of the incident
good luck or mere coincidence.**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

You see, when God works providentially through disobedient men and women, not only are the instruments unaware of the hand of God, but so are the onlookers.

**In chapter 39 we are told,
“Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.” (38:3;)**

Why could this be said of Joseph’s master but not of his brothers nor of the Midianite traders nor of Hirah nor Tamar?

It was because God was working through men in spite of themselves.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**Joseph gave a clear testimony to his faith in God;
his good work and divine blessing
verified his faith in the God of Israel.**

**Judah did not witness to Tamar
as he was bargaining over the price of her services.**

**Hirah probably never learned
that Judah was to play a part
in the purposes of God.**

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**While God can accomplish His purposes
without man's cooperation
by His providential working in this world.**

**He can best be exalted and proclaimed
to unbelievers through those
who trust in Him and obey His will.**

**Lest we be tempted to be lax in our spiritual lives,
convinced that **God's will, will ultimately be done
anyway,** let us remember that **God desires
to be glorified in His saints.****

(cf. Genesis 49:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:10-12;)

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

The second implication stemming from the doctrine of God's providential rule is that we Christians must view every circumstance through the eyes of faith.

Judah did not realize at the time that God's promises were being fulfilled through his act of immorality.

Joseph did not fully know that his sale into slavery was going to bring about the deliverance of his brothers and father.

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**There will be many times
in the life of the Christian when it will appear
that **everything is falling apart at the seams.****

**Tragedy, disputes, divisions,
and heartache will afflict us
so long as we are in these mortal bodies.**

**We, too, must trust that
in these times of adversity **there is a God
Who does work providentially in our lives.****

Conclusion and Lessons from Genesis 38;

**This is the assurance
that we have from Romans 8:28;**

**“And we know that God causes all things
to work together for good to those who love God,
to those who are called according to His purpose.”**

**Only the eye of faith
will see the hand of God
in the hard times of life.**

**Genesis 38:1-30;
Judah and Tamar.
Graeme Morrison**

**Prepared by
Graeme Morrison**

graemestudy@gmail.com

<https://www.graemebibleresources.com>

Next in the series:-

Genesis 39:1; to 41:29; Joseph in Egypt.