

## Genesis 38 — Judah

**September 18, 2016**

It is great to have you. We are about to dig into one of the strangest chapters in the book of Genesis. It may be one of the strangest chapters in the Bible. This chapter is about the fourth son of Jacob. He was a man named Judah. This chapter is a window into the 20 years of his life after he came up with the idea of selling Joseph into slavery.

If you go to Revelation 5:5, it says Jesus Christ is the lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus clearly identifies himself with Judah. You would think that means Judah must have been a great guy. He was not. He was terrible. He was evil. He was the kind of man you pray your daughter never meets. He was no better than his older brothers.

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, seduced and slept with one of Jacob's wives in an attempt to do a hostile take over of the family. Simeon and Levi, the second- and third-oldest sons, were mass murders of the men of Shechem. Judah, the fourth-oldest son, came up with the idea of selling Joseph into slavery. He was falling in line with the incredible wickedness of his brothers. In 1 Timothy 1:10, Paul listed great sins. He called slave trading a great sin. That was Judah. He didn't just trade slaves. He sold his own family into slavery. That is one evil guy.

Not only was Judah an evil guy, but this is a graphic chapter. That is why most people skip the chapter. That is a shame. This chapter is also one of the most amazing stories of God's undeserved grace in the Bible. The story of Judah's life has a rough beginning but you will be greatly encouraged when we get to the end.

## The Bible is an “R” rated book.

Before we jump into the text, I want to talk about the Bible in general. I don't know if you realize but this is an “R” rated book. It is not “G” rated. The Bible was written for adults. It was never intended to be children's curriculum. Of course, we want to teach our kids the Bible, especially when they are young. We just need to realize the Bible was written for adults. Most of it talks about adult-level issues, therefore the Bible says some things that are not appropriate for young children. That doesn't mean we avoid preaching those verses. We simply send the kids out of the room, like we did this morning. We preach all of the Bible because the Bible says all of Scripture is God's Word. God wants us to have all of it. Even the “R” rated stuff is there for a reason.

In addition, modern translators aren't helping us. They go out of their way to use non-offensive language that takes the edge off the way the Bible was originally written in order to sanitize the book. Let me show you just two quick examples.

In 1 Samuel 20:30 Saul was angry with his son Jonathan. Look what he called his son.

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman...” 1 Samuel 20:30 (ESV)

The Hebrew just says, “You son of a perverse woman.” The word rebellious isn't there. How would we say that someone is a son of perverse woman today? \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) That is exactly what Saul said in his time and would probably be a better translation. That is adult language. In an effort to sanitize the Bible, they don't say that.

Let me give you another example. Paul compared the worth of everything in the world to knowing Christ. Look what it says.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:8 (ESV)

The Greek is a specific kind of rubbish. It is the kind of rubbish we put in a port-a-potty. It is poop. Translators tame it down and call it rubbish. Paul was using much stronger language in the Greek when he said everything is like poop compared to knowing Jesus.

My point is simply that the Bible is an adult book. It speaks with adult language to adults about adult problems. That is why I preach to adults. I talk to you as mature adults. If things in the Bible don't feel appropriate for kids, we will just send the kids out of the room and keep teaching because we realize that is an adult portion of our adult Bible.

With that as our backdrop, let's jump into Judah's crazy story.

It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him. Genesis 38:1–5 (ESV)

Judah was part of the scheme to kill his brother. It was his idea to sell Joseph into slavery. Judah was part of the scheme to deceive Jacob with Joseph's blood jacket. I suspect it was because of his guilty conscience that Judah decided to leave home. He moved out of town to live with a guy named Hirah. With a name like Hirah, you know he was a party animal. He was a

Adullamite, which means he was a Canaanite. Judah left home to move in with his non-Christian friend because they loved to party together. I suspect that every time Judah and Hirah got together, they got into trouble. This is a classic picture of bad friends corrupting character. After living with Hirah, Judah became like his Adullamite friend. Judah turned his back on God and walked away from his faith while he partied with Hirah..

While he was a rebel living away from home living with his party-animal, non-Christian friend, he met a Canaanite girl and married her. This was not good. The last three generations of his family, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, went to great lengths to not marry Canaanite women because everyone knew marrying a girl of the land would eventually turn a man's heart away from God. If Solomon, the wisest man on the earth, had his heart turned away from God because of his foreign wives, and Samson, the strongest man on the earth, was destroyed by Delilah, a foreign woman that didn't love God, don't think Judah was any different, and neither would you be. Judah became a total pagan after he married this girl. Even the way he married her talks speaks about the shallowness of their relationship. She must have been a cutie. In Hebrew, it says he saw her and took her. That means he liked the way she looked and had to have her for himself. There was little romance involved. This is the same Hebrew language used to describe David's adultery with Bathsheba. He saw her and took her because he wanted her. Neither David nor Judah stopped long enough to think about the consequences.

We already saw how Jacob's brother, Esau, had his life and legacy ruined by marrying women outside the family of God and moving away from the covenant family. Judah was on track to follow in Esau's steps. He married a Canaanite woman outside of the covenant family and he moved away from the covenant people. His entire life was a disaster waiting to happen.

After he married this girl, they had three kids together in rapid succession. Then it got scary.

And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. Genesis 38:6–10 (ESV)

Judah took a wife for himself based on lust. He tried to avoid the same mistake for his boys. He arranged the marriage for his oldest son, named Er, to a woman named Tamar. The problem is Er's name was quite prophetic because Er did err. In fact, the name Er in the Hebrew is the word *evil* spelled backward. When your name is evil spelled backward, that is not good. Er was so evil God struck him dead. What did Er do to be struck dead by God? We don't know. The last time God struck people dead was in the days of Noah when people were so sinful God killed everyone on the planet. Er was quite a sinner. My guess is his sin was sexual in nature. His mother was a Canaanite. They were infamous for their sexual looseness and sexual sinfulness. I don't know what he did but God didn't tolerate his sin so he zapped him.

Once Er died, his wife, Tamar, was to marry his younger brother, Onan. Some of you will find this completely weird. I understand it sounds weird to marry your older brother's widow. In that culture, it wasn't strange. It was a practice called Levirate marriage. The first son bore through your brother's widow was given your brother's name. That son would inherit your brother's inheritance. This insured your brother's name was passed on. It insured your brother's wife had a son to care for her in her old age. It maintained your brother's lineage in society. This was an ancient type of social security safety net. All cultures at that time in history followed this practice. It sounds weird but it was normal. Now it gets even weirder.

Onan knew that if Tamar conceived a son, his inheritance would be greatly reduced. The oldest son received a double inheritance. Since Onan was now the oldest brother, he would receive two-thirds of his father's estate, and Shelah, his younger brother, would only receive one-third. If Tamar conceived a son, that son would get half of the estate and Onan's inheritance would be reduced to a quarter.

To prevent Tamar from conceiving, every time Onan was intimate with her, he would withdraw and spill his semen on the ground. I told you the Bible is for adults, not children. Onan used Tamar to gratify his sexual desires but he didn't love her. He refused to provide her with a child. He refused to provide his brother with an heir. He just wanted sex. He didn't want children. Sex and children are supposed to go together.

If you grew up in the church, you undoubtedly saw these verses misused. Many people see the verses on Onan as a warning against sexual self-gratification. Onan committed the sin of sexual self-gratification by spilling his semen on the ground. God killed him for it. Be careful about sexual self-gratification because God may kill you. I remember hearing that growing up.

That is a misuse of these verses. Onan's sin was not sexual self-gratification. It was greed and selfishness. He wanted more inheritance so he sexually used his brother's wife. He didn't honor her or his brother.

When it comes to the topic of sexual self-gratification the Bible is relatively silent on the issue. The church should be careful about speaking too loudly on it. While the Bible is silent on the issue of self-gratification, it speaks very loudly on the issue behind the issue. It speaks loudly about what motivates sexual self-gratification. It is motivated by lust. Today, lust is huge. In our culture, porn, which is all about lust, is a big issue. Each year Americans spend \$12 billion on watching porn. That is \$12 billion on lust. To put that number in perspective, that means more money is spent by Americans on pornography each year than is spent on pro-baseball, basketball and football combined. The Bible is clear. Looking at another person lustfully that is not your spouse is not innocent fun. According to the Bible our fantasies count.

**But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

God very much cares about our mental infidelities, not just physical infidelities. Here are a few things to avoid misunderstandings.

First, while God cares about mental infidelity, physical and mental infidelity are different. Some people say that once they have thought about infidelity they should just commit infidelity. Don't do that. Mental infidelity involves you and God. Physical infidelity involves you, God, another person and every other person the two of you are connected with through your family and friends, because they all will be touched by your infidelity.

Second, there is a difference between a lustful thought and lusting. We call this the second look difference. You may recognize somebody as attractive and find your sexual desires aroused. That is not sin. It is what you do with those thoughts that constitutes sin. Do we keep dwelling on the lustful thoughts or do we change the mental channel and force your brain to think about something else? Having a lustful thought isn't sin. Entertaining lustful thoughts is sin.

Third, how do we beat lust? We change the mental channel. In Philippians 4, Paul said we need to be careful about what we choose to think about. We are to think about whatever is excellent or praiseworthy. We are to pour our mental energy into good thoughts, not into lustful thoughts. If we allow ourselves to lust, the sin of our thought life will destroy us from the inside out. What we role play in our minds will become what we real play in our lives. One of the ways lust expresses itself in actions is sexual self-gratification.

These verses on Onan are also not saying God is against birth control. Some people use these verses to make that case. That isn't what they are teaching. Onan was a greedy, selfish man that wanted money. He didn't want to have a son for his brother and reduce his inheritance.

What does God say about birth control? In a nut shell, the Bible is clearly against all forms of abortive birth control. These include abortion, RU486 — also known as the morning after pill, any kind of intrauterine devices which force abortion after fertilization and many modern forms of the birth control pill which are now formulated to force a woman's menstruation even if she is pregnant. Most people do not know this. A bunch of you just learned something in church that your Ob-Gyn did not teach you.

The Bible doesn't say birth control that prevents pregnancy is wrong. Some forms of birth control are not wrong. While we think about birth control, the Bible does say we should be fruitful and multiply. It says a large family is a blessing from God. Don't be afraid of having kids. I realize there are reasons why every family can't be a large family. That is understandable. We just need to remember the Bible highly values kids.

At this point, Judah only had one son left. According to Levirate marriage, Tamar was supposed to go to Shelah as his wife. What do you think Judah was thinking? He thought Tamar was a black widow. Whoever married her died. Judah loved his son. He told her to go home to her father's house and wait until Shelah was old enough to get married. Judah was buying time and sidelining Tamar.

Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up"—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father's house. Genesis 38:11 (ESV)

Tamar was stuck. She was at her father's home but couldn't move on with her life. She was technically engaged to Shelah. Now the story gets weirder.

In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside and said, "Come, 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 answered, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." And she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it—" He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet 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 went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood. When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. And he asked the men of the place, "Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?" And they said, "No cult prostitute has been here." So he returned to Judah and said, "I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, 'No cult prostitute has been here.'" And Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her." Genesis 38:12–23 (ESV)

We don't know how many years passed. We know it was a long time.

Shelah was now a grown man. Tamar was not given to Shelah for a wife. That doesn't mean Shelah was still a single guy. We know Shelah married at some time because he had descendants called the Shelamites in the Bible. Maybe Judah had already given Shelah a different wife. We don't know. What we do know is it was obvious to Tamar and everyone else that Judah sidelined Tamar. Tamar would not bear children to pass on the names of her husbands in Judah's family line.

In addition, Judah's wife passed away. After the customary week of mourning, it was sheep-shearing season. Judah grabbed his party-animal friend Hirah and went to the sheep-shearing festival. What you need to understand is

sheep-shearing season was party season. It was everybody's Vegas moment. Everyone got together and had a good time and hoped that what happened in Vegas stayed in Vegas. If you were going to live on the moral edge, this was the time to do it.

Tamar had an idea of how she could carry on the family name. She dressed up as a high-class prostitute and approached Judah. I think she knew Judah was the kind of guy she could seduce. He was lonely. He probably had terrible sexual ethics since he was married to a Canaanite wife.

After Tamar enticed him, Judah was interested but didn't have anything to pay her so he agreed to leave the equivalent of his car keys, drivers license and credit card in exchange for her services. As a result, Tamar became pregnant by Judah. She left and went home. In the mean time Judah sent Hirah, his party buddy, to pay her with a goat. They couldn't find her but decided to not ask questions because it was embarrassing to talk about your time with a prostitute.

I know this entire event raises many questions in our mind. How did he not recognize Tamar? Apparently it had been a really long time. Maybe she had a very thick veil. Maybe it was really dark in the tent. I don't know. Maybe Judah needed reading glasses so everything closer than 4 feet he couldn't see. I don't know.

About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." Then Judah identified them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again. When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put

out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah. Genesis 38:24–30 (ESV)

Here is where it gets interesting. About three months into her pregnancy people realized she was with child. Judah had her brought out to be burned. What an incredible hypocrite. Then she sprang her trap. As she was brought out she said, "I am pregnant by the guy that owns these car keys, this wallet and these credit cards." Judah was caught red-handed. Everybody realized the one with the sin problem was not Tamar. It was Judah. Tamar was trying to ensure the family name continued for Er and for Onan. She wasn't sleeping around. Judah was. That is why God gave her twins. There was one son to pass on each of Er and Onan's family lines.

Here are a few lessons:

**Be sure your sin will find you out.** Judah was living a double life. He tried to look like the good guy when in reality he was out having sex with a prostitute. If you are one of those guys or gals that keeps up the facade of purity when in reality you have a serious sin just beneath the surface, I encourage you to repent today. Sin is like a beach ball. You can only hold it below the surface so long before it comes out for everybody to see. Like Judah, God often ensures our sin comes to the surface at the the worst possible time to break us of it. It is always better if you confess and repent of sin willingly than to keep living a lie waiting for God to expose your sin and the truth to come out.

**Nobody is beyond God's grace.** Judah was a terrible guy. He sold his brother into slavery. He married a pagan. He was such a bad father two of his

sons were struck dead by God. He sidelined his daughter-in-law. He slept with a woman he thought was a prostitute. Yet, in Revelation 5, Jesus called himself the lion of the tribe of Judah. Why would Jesus want to be associated with him?

An interesting thing happens in this chapter. When Judah admitted Tamar was more righteous than he was because she tricked him into preserving the family line, I think he hit rock bottom. I think that was Judah's come-to-Jesus moment. From this point forward, Judah started to change. In this chapter he confessed his sin against Tamar. In Genesis 42:21, he confessed his sin against Joseph. In Genesis 43:3-5, he became the spokesman for his brothers. In Genesis 44:18-33, he offered to become a slave rather than let his half-brother Benjamin become a slave like Joseph. He went from selling family members into slavery to offering to become a slave to save his half-brother. In Genesis 49, he was given the privilege of being the son through which God would carry on the promise of redemption. God carried on the promised line through the sons Judah bore with Tamar that replaced Er and Onan.

What an incredible picture of God's undeserved grace. How much further away from God can you walk than Judah did? Yet when he repented, God's amazing grace forgave him and took him back, then used him for Christ's kingdom in ways he would have never imagined.

If we go to the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:3, there are many people skipped. Look who gets special mention in the family line.

...and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez... Matthew 1:3 (ESV)

Tamar, and the sons she conceived through Judah, are part of the lineage of Jesus. I think this is important. Jesus chose rebellious, hard-hearted, but repentant, Judah to be part of his family tree. He chose Tamar, the unloved outcast Canaanite woman that was considered a black widow, to be part of Jesus' family line.

I don't know how far you have wandered from God this morning but some of you can identify with Judah. You have wandered far from God and you hit rock bottom. You wonder if God could ever take you back. Here is what you need to see from Judah's life. How far can you run from God? You can't run further than God's amazing grace. Repent, and even now, after all your sin, he will use your life for his glory. He loves to do that.

In fact, when we get to heaven, Revelation 21 tells us that in the new Jerusalem there are 12 gates and over the 12 gates are the names of the 12 sons of Israel. Someday, when we walk in and out through those gates, we will see the name of Judah over one of them. For all of eternity we will remember his life story. He was a man that ran far from God but no matter how far he went, he couldn't outrun God's amazing grace. No matter what we have done, when we repent, God will take us back and use us for his glory, just like he did for Judah.

If God can forgive and love a guy like Judah and even make him part of the family tree of Jesus, then there is hope for you and me. No matter what you have done. No matter how far you have run. You cannot outrun God's grace. God offers to forgive you through Jesus, to make you part of his family tree and use your life for God's glory in ways you never imagined.



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