

## Genesis 38

### Limits of the Text

Genesis 38 is a logical unit of text, the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. The previous chapter ended with Joseph being sold into Egypt and the next begins with Joseph's activities in Egypt.

### Interpretation

At first glance, this story does not seem to belong here; it appears to interrupt the story of Joseph (compare 37:36 to 39:1). But Ge 37-50 is the *toledoth* of Jacob, the story of Jacob's family; Judah may not have been Jacob's favorite son, but he was his son nonetheless. Ge 36 ended with some uncertainty about who would assume leadership of the family—Judah or Joseph. This story helps to answer that question two ways. First, Judah is contrasted to Joseph; the wickedness of Judah highlights the righteousness of Joseph. As one example, Judah hired a prostitute, while Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife. Thus it will not be surprising when Joseph gets the birthright. Second, Judah turns a corner in this story that will lead to his godly leadership in 44:32-34. Thus it will not be surprising that the royal line comes from Judah. From a literary point of view, the interruption of the narrative of Joseph comes at a critical point, his arrival in Egypt, increases the reader's anticipation and leaves him asking, "What will happen to Joseph?"

Here begins the first movement of the text, wherein Judah had three sons; this movement sets the crisis of the narrative.

[38:1 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.](#)

"At that time" refers to the events of the previous chapter. Shortly after the sale of Joseph to the Midianites, Judah left his family and began to hang out with his Canaanite buddy, Hirah.

Who are the Adullamites? Adullamites were Canaanites living in Adullam, which was about fifteen miles northwest of Hebron<sup>1</sup> and about three miles southwest of Bethlehem.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, 1:88.

<sup>2</sup> Waltke, 509.

This chapter repeatedly exposes the wickedness of Judah, and here is the first sin of Judah: He established social relationships with a Canaanite. Apparently he had learned nothing from the consequences that happened to Dinah when she had done the same (34:1). The strong downward spiral of the narrative began with this event.

38:2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, 38:3 and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er.

Here is the second sin of Judah: He married a Canaanite woman. Like his uncle Esau (26:34), he did exactly what his great-grandfather Abraham and grandfather Isaac did not want their descendants to do (24:3; 28:1). Jacob's family was not only socializing with Canaanites, they were beginning to assimilate themselves into Canaanite families.

The abruptness of the verbs in these verses suggests to Hughes that Judah was doing more lusting than loving.<sup>3</sup> Apparently he was more concerned about his desires and his family line than in having a family and exercising spiritual leadership. Unlike Shechem (34:2), he at least he married this nameless girl before sleeping with her; the Hebrew verb translated as "take" is an idiom that means to marry.<sup>4</sup>

38:4 She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan.  
38:5 Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.

Despite his sins, things were looking up for Judah at this point. He had a growing family and three sons to carry on the family line.

38:6 And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.

Note the rapid passage of time. Er was born in 38:3 and ready for marriage in 38:6. Since he was now old enough, his father arranged a marriage for him, a common custom at that time (Ge 24).

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, 452.

<sup>4</sup> Mathews, 707.

Who was Tamar? Was she a Canaanite? Moses clearly identified the daughter of Shua as a Canaanite (38:2), but he didn't do so for Tamar. Commentators vary in their understanding. Sailhammer concludes that she was not.<sup>5</sup> Waltke suggests Tamar was a Canaanite name that means palm tree.<sup>6</sup> Hughes says she was a Canaanite.<sup>7</sup> The text does not indicate her nationality one way or another, so ultimately it must be concluded that this tidbit of information is not really necessary to correctly interpret the text.

To understand the remainder of the narrative, it's important to keep in mind that Tamar was the wife of Judah's oldest son. The fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob, particularly the promise that kings would come from his line (35:11), was at stake.

38:7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death.

Here is the third sin of Judah: He failed as a father. He failed to bring up a righteous son, and when his son was not righteous, he failed to discipline him. So God did it for him. The nature of Er's wickedness is unknown. Given that his mother was a Canaanite, perhaps his sin was idolatry; but whether it was or not, the main point is that Judah's firstborn died without an heir.

The tension of the narrative begins here. How would the family line continue?

38:8 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."

What was this duty? There was a custom known as levirate marriage. The word levirate does not come from the tribe of Levi but from the Latin word *levir*, which means "husband's brother." It would later become part of the Mosaic law (Dt 25:5-10). It is mentioned in the story of Ruth (1:11-13) and was used by the Sadducees in an attempt to trap Jesus (Mt 22:23-33).

The main point of this custom in Hebrew culture was to preserve the family line. When Er was killed, there was no one to carry on his line, and there was no one to inherit his portion of the family inheritance. The levirate marriage provided a means to accomplish this. A brother of the dead husband married the widow; if

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<sup>5</sup> Sailhammer, 232.

<sup>6</sup> Waltke, 510.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, 452.

things worked as planned, they had at least two sons. The first son would legally become the heir of the dead husband (inheriting his authority, possessions, and name); all other sons would become the heirs of the living husband.

The levirate marriage also provided for the widow. In Near Eastern culture, widows were vulnerable, needing both provision and protection. The father of the dead husband became the protector of the widow. She was obligated to marry within her dead husband's family, and the father was obligated to provide a male to for her to marry, typically a brother of the dead husband. Mathews notes that in ancient Near Eastern practice, even the father of the dead husband was eligible, though this practice is not mentioned in the Mosaic law. Until the marriage took place, the father was required to protect her sexuality, making sure she remained chaste and was not assaulted.<sup>8</sup>

Here is the fourth sin of Judah: He failed to give Onan to Tamar in marriage. He told Onan to have sex with Tamar (e.g., "your brother's wife") to produce an heir. He commanded his son and daughter-in-law to commit fornication! In so doing he failed to provide for and protect Tamar as he should have.

38:9 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.

While Onan had sex with Tamar, he made sure he didn't impregnate her. Why did he do this? Onan was Judah's second son. With Er dead and heirless, Onan was now the oldest son and would inherit the family leadership and a greater inheritance. He didn't want to share any of this with an heir of Er; in essence, he was stealing the birthright. He was unfaithful to his dead brother and unfaithful to Tamar.

38:10 And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also.

Why were Onan's actions so wicked? He enjoyed all the benefits of the levirate marriage (e.g., sex), but he refused the responsibilities that went along with it.<sup>9</sup> He wanted the leadership and inheritance of the family for himself. In summary,

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<sup>8</sup> Mathews, 705-8. Mathews has an excellent excursus on levirate marriage (705-710).

<sup>9</sup> Walvoord, 1:88.

he was greedy and selfish. But Onan's actions were worse than merely being greedy and selfish; he was deliberately thwarting God's plan for Abraham's family. By refusing to provide an heir for Er, he was deliberately trying to frustrate the fulfillment of God's promises. It was for this defiance that God killed him.<sup>10</sup>

At this point the tension of the narrative is rising rapidly. Judah was down to only one son. How would the family line continue?

38:11 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.

Here is the fifth sin of Judah: He relegated Tamar to a life of widowhood. He should have provided someone in his family, namely Shelah, for her to marry. If he would not do that, then he should have released her from her obligation so she could find someone outside of his family to marry, though this would have shamed him. Judah did neither. He had seen two of his sons killed, and he probably (wrongly) blamed her. He feared for his remaining son's safety and did not want to give him to her. So he sent her back to her father's house, claiming that Shelah needed to grow up; he promised that he would give Shelah to her later, but even this was a lie. (38:14 reveals his deception; he had no intention of ever giving Shelah to her.) Judah left her in limbo, betrothed but husbandless, unmarried but unable to re-marry, forced to wait.

Why did Judah send her to her father's house instead of taking her into his own? It did provide her with some means for her provision and protection, at least temporarily. It certainly ensured nothing occurred between her and Shelah. Perhaps Judah hoped the whole situation would go away with time. (But Judah was still responsible for her, as 38:24 indicates.)

At this point the tension of the narrative has peaked. Er and Onan were both dead and without heirs. Tamar was not given to Shelah, but forced to be a barren widow forever. How would she bear children in Er's name? How would the family line continue? How would the promises of God to Jacob be fulfilled?

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<sup>10</sup> Greidanus, 371.

Waltke estimates that 38:1-11 covered a period of twenty years, while the remainder of the chapter covered only one year.<sup>11</sup> The first half of the narrative merely sets the tension; Moses focuses the readers' attention on the resolution in the second half of the chapter.

Here begins the second movement of the text, wherein Judah committed immorality.

38:12 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. 38:13 And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," 38:14 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.

Two events prompted Tamar's actions. First, Judah's wife died. Her death was important because it left Judah a widower, a man once again eligible for marriage. Second, Shelah had grown up but had not been given to Tamar in marriage. At this point, Tamar realized that Judah had deceived her; it appears to her that she will be an unmarriageable widow forever unless she takes matters into her own hands.

Why did Tamar act like a prostitute? Since Judah was not going to give her a husband so she could have a child, Tamar decided that she would take one.

Apparently Tamar knew Judah well enough to know what sort of man he was. He was either a man who was controlled by his lusts and in need of sex (now that his wife was dead) or a man who wanted blessing of the Canaanite gods on his crops and herds. Or maybe he wanted both. Either way pretending to be a cultic prostitute was exactly the right kind of trap to set for him. "Tamar knew that cultic prostitutes would be out selling their services as fertility magic to ensure the growth of the fields and herds."<sup>12</sup> So Tamar replaced her distinctive garments of mourning with those of a cultic prostitute and sat in a specific location, one where Judah was likely to travel and where cultic prostitutes had been known to frequent.

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<sup>11</sup> Waltke, 506.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, 453.

How do we label Tamar's actions? Were they good or bad? Some commentators describe her actions in very positive words. Ross says, "It is not appropriate to judge her by Christian ethics, for in her culture at that time her actions...were within the law."<sup>13</sup> Waltke says her actions were "a daring act of faith."<sup>14</sup> Morris says, "One would be justified in concluding that God placed His approval on Tamar's action in this case."<sup>15</sup> As long as actions are culturally acceptable, are they acceptable with God?<sup>16</sup> Did she in fact trust him? Does God place his approval on the sins of deception and fornication? How shall we judge her? We shall judge her by biblical standards.

To be fair let's consider her situation. Certainly Judah had deceived her and treated her very poorly. She had a proper motivation, to obtain a husband and an heir. She was bold and daring and creative in her plans. And it's entirely possible that Tamar was acting in accordance with the acceptable practices of her own culture.<sup>17</sup> Waltke notes that Hittite and Assyrian laws legislated (i.e., allowed) this behavior, though the Mosaic law did not.<sup>18</sup>

But despite her situation, her actions do not meet biblical standards. Her actions were not a bold act of faith; they were an utter lack of faith. Unlike Jacob (32:9-12), she did not cry out to God and allow him to work on her behalf. She was not content with knowing God and thus willing to be wronged. She took matters into her own hands and forced the issue. Because Tamar failed to trust God, she failed to act in a righteous manner.

Tamar sinned. She sinned at least four ways: She failed to trust God, she deceived Jacob, she dressed and acted like a prostitute, and she committed fornication. Does being treated poorly justify doubting God? No. Does having a proper motivation justify deception? No. Does having a bold plan justify prostitution? No. Does living within the Canaanite culture justify fornication? No. Let's call her actions what they were: sin.

Tamar can be compared to Sarah. Sarah was in a difficult situation, unable to have a child to be the promised heir. She failed to trust God, took matters into her own hands, and gave Hagar to her husband (16:1-3). Tamar can be

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<sup>13</sup> Ross, 617.

<sup>14</sup> Waltke, 508.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, 553.

<sup>16</sup> By this criteria, abortion and homosexuality are acceptable behaviors if one lives in America. Yikes!

<sup>17</sup> If so, this would tend to argue that she was a Canaanite; she 38:6.

<sup>18</sup> Waltke, 511.

contrasted with Ruth. Ruth was in a difficult situation, a foreigner in Israel without a husband to protect and provide for her and give her an heir. But Ruth trusted God and acted nobly; she made her wishes known to Boaz, but did not attempt to seduce him (Ru 3:7-14).

38:15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

The theme of deception continued to run in the story of Jacob's family. As Judah had deceived his father (37:32), so he was in turn deceived by his daughter-in-law.

The veil served both as part of the disguise—they were worn by cultic prostitutes—and as a means of hiding her identity.<sup>19</sup>

38:16 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?"

38:17 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—"

38:18 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.

Here is the sixth sin of Judah: He committed fornication. He pleased himself sexually while he had denied the same thing to Tamar (38:11). According to Le 18:15 & 20:12, incest was a sin worthy of death, though Judah committed this sin unknowingly.

The signet, worn on a cord around his neck, was the symbol of his personal identity; the staff his corporate identity. Both were carved distinctively and were easily identifiable as Judah's.<sup>20</sup> It is surprising that Judah gave them to an unknown prostitute; this would be the equivalent in our culture of giving someone our driver's license and credit card.<sup>21</sup>

38:19 Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

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<sup>19</sup> Waltke, 512.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, 454.

<sup>21</sup> Greidanus, 373.

38:20 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.

As prostitution was common in Canaanite culture, Mathews speculates that Judah sent Hirah to pay off the prostitute because Hirah would not have been embarrassed by such behavior.<sup>22</sup> Apparently Judah was not much of a witness about the character of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to his friend.

Note the irony: Judah acted honorably to a cult prostitute, paying her what he owed, but he had not acted honorably to his own daughter-in-law.<sup>23</sup>

38:21 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."

38:22 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.' "

38:23 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."

Why would he be laughed at? If it became known that he entrusted these valuable possessions to a prostitute and she outwitted him, it would have made Judah look like a fool.<sup>24</sup> Here's another time where Judah probably hoped an unpleasant situation would just go away on its own.

Here is more irony: Judah was concerned about his own reputation in the community, but he was not concerned about Tamar's reputation.<sup>25</sup>

So Judah had committed immorality, he had sexually pleased himself after the loss of his wife, and though he couldn't pay the prostitute, he thought the entire situation was behind him. He could not have been more wrong; God would not let him off the hook so easily.

Here begins the third movement of the text, wherein Judah was hypocritical.

38:24 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."

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<sup>22</sup> Mathews, 721.

<sup>23</sup> Waltke, 513.

<sup>24</sup> Waltke, 513.

<sup>25</sup> Greidanus, 374.

Since Judah had not yet given his son Shelah to Tamar as promised, he still maintained some level of responsibility for her, included protecting her sexuality (see the notes on 38:8). Pregnancy demonstrated that Tamar had not remained chaste, so it was Judah's responsibility to discipline her. It may be that Judah saw this as opportunity to resolve all his problems between Tamar and his son, Shelah. She's guilty, execute her, problem solved! So he commanded her to be burned.

Here is the seventh sin of Judah: He was a hypocrite. Although he had committed immorality, he was extremely harsh when his daughter-in-law had done the same. He violated the teachings of Jesus who said, "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Mt 7:4-5, ESV).

Why did Judah think it was ok for him to commit immorality but not Tamar? As Tamar was still betrothed to Shelah, her actions were considered to be adultery; Morris notes that in Near Eastern cultures, the penalty for adultery for a woman was death. It was common to have a double standard with penalties far worse for the woman in such situations than for the man.<sup>26</sup>

Why was he going to burn her? In the Mosaic law, burning was reserved for the most heinous sex crimes; it was an act of severe degradation. Mathews speculates that "the essential idea behind death by fire for sexual offenses was purging the offense from the community."<sup>27</sup>

38:25 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."

At the last moment, Tamar returned Judah's items. "What a breathless moment as Judah was forced to own that each of the items was his!"<sup>28</sup> The extent of his own immorality and hypocrisy came crashing down upon him.

Why did she send them to him? Tamar sent these items to Judah to force him to admit his role in her pregnancy and thus to avoid the death penalty at his hands.

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<sup>26</sup> Morris, 555.

<sup>27</sup> Mathews, 723.

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, 454.

If he punished her, he would have to punish himself. He should have done both, of course, but he did neither. "Rather than include himself in any punishment, he simply exonerated her."<sup>29</sup> "Tamar had won the right to be the mother of Judah's children, though in a deceitful way. Her action was desperate and risky."<sup>30</sup>

38:26 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.

Judah's response is the interpretive difficulty in this narrative. What exactly did he mean by "she is more righteous than I"? First, it should be noted that Judah included an explanation, "Since I did not give her to my son." "There must be a logical connection between the declaration and the reason given for Judah's admission."<sup>31</sup> So Tamar's more righteousness and Judah's less righteousness is not absolute but is somehow connected to Shelah; this relates back the levirate marriage. Judah acknowledged that Tamar's actions were attempting to accomplish the levirate marriage, whereas his own actions, withholding his son Shelah, were attempting to circumvent the levirate marriage. She had right motivation; he did not. With regard to the levirate marriage, Tamar was more righteous than Judah.

Second, it should be noted that Judah didn't make any comment, positive or negative, about her sins of deception and immorality. He neither approved of them nor condoned them. And neither did the narrator, Moses. This situation is similar to the lies of the Hebrew midwives (Ex 1:17-19) and Rahab (Jos 2:4-5). They had right motivation mixed with some wrong actions (i.e., lying), but neither the narrative nor the narrator (nor the New Testament) comments on their lying. The Bible is not approving of Tamar's sins; Moses expected his readers to know by this point that deception and immorality were wrong.

Did Judah actually repent of his sins? Most commentators see this event as crucial to understanding the change in Judah. In 37:26 he wanted to sell Joseph to make some money; in 44:33 he offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin. That's a radical difference! When did Judah change? Perhaps change began when Tamar's actions clearly revealed to Judah his own wickedness. So what indications exist that Judah repented? Mathews believes it was because Judah

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<sup>29</sup> Ross, 618.

<sup>30</sup> Walvoord, 1:89.

<sup>31</sup> Mathews, 709.

did not have sex with her again.<sup>32</sup> Hughes believes it was because Judah publicly admitted his moral failure.<sup>33</sup> Personally, I'm not sure that he actually repented at this point. His words admitted only that he had not pursued the levirate marriage; he admitted none of other sins, nor did he explicitly repent. The usual actions associated with repentance, such as restitution and weeping, are not in evidence. I think it's safer to say at this point Judah recognized his own wickedness and at some later point he actually repented. Waltke attempts to estimate the timelines of Judah and Joseph.<sup>34</sup> If his estimations are correct, then the events of this chapter occur shortly before the brothers' confession to Joseph (42:21); thus these events may have led to repentance which led to his confession in 42:21 and his willingness to be a substitute in 44:33.

Here begins the fourth movement of the text, wherein Judah had two more sons; this is the resolution to the crisis in the narrative.

38:27 When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb.

Moses used the exact words here that he did of the birth of Jacob and Esau in 25:24.<sup>35</sup> Since the younger preceded the elder in that case, it is not surprising to the reader that something similar happens in this case.

38:28 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."

Birth order was very important in their culture. Issues like inheritance and family leadership were connected to it, thus the scarlet thread.

38:29 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.

Perez' name comes from a Hebrew verb (*paras*) that means to break down.<sup>36</sup> For example in 2 Chr 26:6, King Uzziah broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod as he warred with the Philistines. His name is the noun form (*peres*) of

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<sup>32</sup> Mathews, 723.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, 455.

<sup>34</sup> Waltke, 507-8.

<sup>35</sup> Mathews, 724.

<sup>36</sup> Swanson, DBLH 7287.

the verb and means a breech or a bursting forth.<sup>37</sup> He burst forth from the womb ahead of his scarlet-threaded brother.

38:30 Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

Why did Moses include the story of the birth of the twins? “This final part of the story provides the significance of the whole account. God gave Tamar twins, and the line of Judah continued because of her.”<sup>38</sup> Despite Judah’s many sins, God was faithful to the promises he made to Jacob.

What is the significance of the younger coming out second? God’s choosing of the younger over the older is a repeated theme in Genesis. Jacob was chosen over Esau (27:27-29). Perez over Zerah. Ephraim over Manasseh (48:14). Joseph over Rueben (49:22-26). This theme demonstrates that God elects whom he wills; he is not bound by cultural constraints to only choose the eldest. The other significance, at least in this text, is that both David (Ru 4:18-22) and the Messiah (Mt 1:3) came through Perez.

In the end, how do we evaluate Tamar? She is the heroine of the story, though a flawed heroine. On the one hand she displayed little trust in God and thus sinned greatly, but on the other hand she worked to carry on Judah’s family line and thus helped to achieve God’s promises to Jacob. Like many Bible characters, there were both good and bad aspects to her. “Through her determination to have children of the promise, she scratched and clawed her way into Israel and secured for Judah the honor of fathering both David and the Savior of the world.”<sup>39</sup> She was one of only four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1:3). Although God did not compel Tamar to commit her sins nor did he approve of them, he graciously chose to accept the results of the situation, her twin sons, to carry on the family. God always keeps his promises.

How do we evaluate Judah? Judah is not the hero of the story; he did wrong at every turn. But his wickedness serves to highlight God’s faithfulness and graciousness. God did not abandon Judah, but exposed his own wickedness to him, thus beginning the process of change.

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<sup>37</sup> Brown, 829.

<sup>38</sup> Walvoord, 1:89.

<sup>39</sup> Hughes, 455.

### **Three Levels of Narrative**

1. Personal History – This is a story about one woman’s desperate actions to have kids and carry on her family’s name.
2. National History – This is a story about God’s preservation of Judah’s family line.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about God’s carrying out of his plan for redeeming mankind through Judah’s family despite Judah’s many sins.

### **The Gospel**

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? When we fail to trust God completely, we will do anything to get what we want. We will even sin in our attempts to achieve something good.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God’s grace to meet our need? God will accomplish his plans despite sin and disobedience. At times God harshly judges those who intentionally thwart his plans. At times he exposes the wickedness of our hearts when we disobey. At times he graciously uses the outcome of our sinful actions.
3. How does this text stand in relation to the gospel? This text reflects a key aspect of our need for redemption through the gospel. We need a Savior who will accomplish he plans for saving us despite our sin and disobedience.

### **Textual Outline**

1. Judah had three sons (1-11).
2. Judah was immoral with Tamar (12-23).
3. Judah was hypocritical with Tamar (24-26).
4. Judah had two more sons (27-30).

### **Central Truth of the Text**

Moses wrote Ge 38 in order to teach the children of Israel that God can accomplish his plan of salvation despite the disobedience of Judah and Tamar.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> This CTT drew heavily Greidanus’ thoughts, 377.

## Teaching Outline

God can accomplish his plan of salvation<sup>41</sup> despite the disobedience of his people, and God wants this church to see that his plans never fail. From this text in Gen 38, we see three ways that God can accomplish his plan of salvation despite our disobedience.

1. God may harshly judge our rebellious sin (1-11).
2. God may painfully expose our wicked hearts (12-26).
3. God may graciously use the outcome of our sinful actions (27-30).

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<sup>41</sup> In this sense, plan of salvation refers more to sanctification than to justification.

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