**Genesis – 38:1-30**

**The Ugliest Sin!**

**(Lesson #47)**

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**Joseph’s Timeline**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Joseph’s Age** | **Genesis** |
| Joseph’s father Jacob moves family from Haran | **6** | 31:17-21 |
| Joseph is sold into slavery / Judah leaves his family | **17 /** Jac 108 | 37:12-36 |
| Joseph interprets the dreams of cupbearer and baker while in prison | **28** | Chap 40 |
| Joseph’s grandfather Isaac dies | **29 /** Jac 120 | 35:28-29 |
| Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dreams and is released from prison | **30** | 41:1-36 |
| Seven years of plenty, Manasseh and Ephraim born during this time | **30-37** | 41:47-52 |
| \* Estimate - Er is married to Tamar | **\*35** | 38:6 |
| Seven years of famine | **37-44** | 41:47-52 |
| Joseph and Jacob reunite (2 years into famine) and family moves to Egypt | **39 /** Jac 130 | 47:28 |
| Jacob dies | **56 /** Jac 147 | 47:28 |
| Joseph dies | **110** | 50:22-26 |

**Outline for this week:**

1. Judah leaves his family (38:1)
2. Judah marries a Canaanite woman (38:2)
3. She bore Judah three male children (38:3-5)
4. Judah secures a wife for his oldest son (38:6)
5. God kills the first and second born sons of Judah (38:7-10)
6. Judah promises the third born son to Tamar (38:11)
7. Judah’s wife dies (38:12)
8. Judah unknowingly has sex with Tamar (38:12-23)
9. Judah learns that Tamar is pregnant (38:24-26)
10. Tamar gives birth to twins (38:27-30)

***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. 2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, 3 and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. 4 She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. 5 Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.***

**Vs 1 -** Moses is telling us that around the time that Joseph was **sold into slavery** that Judah, **went down from his brothers** and he turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

Judah, leaves the area of Hebron and he **“went down”** from his brothers and he turns aside to a man whose name is Hirah. Judah left what is called the “hill country” of Hebron and “turns aside” to a certain Adullamite.

The name Hirah means **“a noble family.”** This is a man who Judah met along the way and they become friends and for whatever reason, Judah goes to stay with him, leaving the area where his family is dwelling.

Who are the Adullamite’s? They were people from the town of Adullam. The Hebrew word is used only three times in the Hebrew Bible, all three here in Genesis 38. **Adullam** was one of the **royal cities of the Canaanites**.

*“And these are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel smote on this side Jordan on the west, from Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon even unto the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir; which Joshua gave unto the tribes of Israel for a possession according to their divisions;*

 *In the mountains, and in the valleys, and in the plains, and in the springs, and in the wilderness, and in the south country; the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: The king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Bethel, one; The king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; The king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; The king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; The king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; The king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; The king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one…” (Jos 12:15 AV)*

**\*\* As we venture off on chapter 38 together**, it is important to note that the account likely spans **21-22 years**. So, what we are reading takes a long time to develop.

**Vs 2 -** There as Judah was visiting this Canaanite person, that we read he **“saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite.”** As we read this we understand he saw her in such a way that he was attracted to her, he saw her in such a way that he was drawn to her.

Here Judah is making the **conscience decision to** bring into his house a woman who **worships other gods**. As you consider this I would add, it seems, at least from Moses short explanation what draws Judah to this woman is **her looks.**

I gave a long explanation about the Canaanites two weeks ago. Later in the history of Israel God warned the nation of Israel about taking Canaanites as wives. The warning is very instructive!

*7:1 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, 2and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. 3You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. (Deut 7:1-4).*

**APPLICATION:** Be not unequally yoked.

***14****Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (II Cor 6:14, ESV)*

The Canaanites were a cursed people. Throughout the storyline the patriarchs had avoided intermarrying with them. But here **Judah marries a Canaanite woman**.

Her father’s named means **“wealth.”** So, this unnamed Canaanite woman is likely a daughter of a **wealthy** Canaanite man. Notice **Judah takes her** as his wife.

We **would imagine** that **Jacob (Israel) and possibly even Leah protested**, but we do not know.

It seems Judah took the daughter of Shua as his wife and he went in to her, he **consummated the marriage** with her, he had sex with her.

Now do not forget, Judah is the fourth born son of Jacob. He is a significant player in the nation of Israel. You and I know that Jesus will descend from Judah.

**What Judah is doing is putting in jeopardy what God plans to do.**

* First, he separates from Israel.
* Second, he marries a Canaanite.
* Third, he has three male children by this Canaanite woman.

**Vs 3 -** As we might imagine, this Canaanite woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to the first son of Judah. The first son of Judah is named **Er by Judah.** His name means **awake** or **watcher**.

**Vs 4 -** Next we read that Judah’s bride gets pregnant again, she gives birth to a second son, she names this second son **“Onan.”** Notice that Judah’s unnamed **wife** is the **one who names** the second son. **Onan** means **“strong,” “strength”** or **“sorrow.”**

**Vs 5 -** Next we read that this Canaanite woman once again becomes pregnant, and she gives birth to a third son of Judah, this son’s name is Shelah. The name **Shelah** means **“a petition”** or **“weak.”**

**Notice, once again** Judah’s wife names the child in this case Shelah. We pick up a new piece of information. Judah has moved from Adullam, where it appears the first two sons were born, and she has moved to Chezib.

It is in **Chezib** that this Canaanite woman gives birth to Judah’s third son.

***6 And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. 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." 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.***

**Vs 6 - I**f we are **guessing on time**, this event is around **18 years** (give or take) since Joseph was sold into slavery.

So, a number of years of Judah’s life with this Canaanite woman pass and we have no idea how things went. We have no idea what the home life was like. Here all of a sudden, we read that Judah is securing a wife for his oldest son, Er.

The name of the woman was Tamar. Her name means **“palm tree.”** Tamar is also a **Canaanite woman.**

Judah has taken a Canaanite wife for himself, and now he has taken a Canaanite wife for his son.

Here is what is happening and it explains why God is raising up Joseph. **The warning**, Judah and indeed all of Israel has the potential to **lose their distinctiveness** and to be **assimilated by the Canaanite nations**.

**Vs 7 -** Then we are told that Judah’s firstborn son Er, was **wicked in the sight of Yahweh.** He was so wicked that Yahweh **“put him to death.”**

We are not told what he did that was **so wicked**, nor are we told how **Yahweh killed him**. We are told only the bare facts that Judah’s oldest son, born to a Canaanite woman, was so **wicked that God killed him!**

Now as I think about this **oldest son of Judah**, being **so wicked** that God **stepped in and killed him**, I do wonder what Judah’s pagan wife was like and what life was like in their home.

**APPLICATION:** As we read this, we are reminded of an important New Testament teaching:

*For the****wages******of******sin****is death, but the free gift****of****God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6:23, ESV).*

**Vs 8 -** Then **Judah instructs Onan**, the second son to ***"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."***

This concept is in the ancient legal system and became know as the **Levirate marriage.**

We find it in the **Code of Hammurabi**: If a man died childless, his brother had the obligation to produce a son to carry on the seed of his brother. This was the law of the day in this region of the world and it was known as the **levirate marriage**.

Later the Levirate law would become part of the Mosaic law. We see it spelled out for Israel is Deut 25:

***5****“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.****6****And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (Deut 25:5-6, ESV).*

**Vs 9 -** Onan had no problem **going in and having sex** with his deceased brother’s wife, but he had no intention of being part of giving offspring to his deceased brother. He did not **desire to honor his decease brother** in this way.

He went in unto her, and it sounds like **multiple times**, he would have **sex with her**, but he would **“waste his semen on the ground.”** The first child of their union would have been for his deceased brother. But he purposed in his heart not to do that.

That is **Onan’s sin**, and it sounds like he did it **multiple times**, and ultimately **God judged him for this sin**!

He was using Tamar for **sexual gratification**, but had no intention of **fulfilling the reason Tamar was having sex with him**. He had a **responsibility** that he **did not intend to keep**.

It seems he thought very little of his deceased brother.

***10 And what he did was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also. 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.”***

**Vs 10 -** Yahweh saw what **Onan was doing**, over and over again, it was **wicked in Yahweh’s sight**, and once again **Yahweh steps in** and kills **Judah’s second son “Onan.”**

Now all of this wicked behavior is putting in jeopardy one of the tribes of Israel. Judah has three sons, two are down and only one to go. But more than that, Judah is putting in jeopardy the promised seed who will be sent to bless the nations of this world.

**This whole issue, is why God is raising up Joseph!**

**Vs 11 -** Judah goes to Tamar and tells her to **continue as a widow**, in her **father’s house**, till **Shelah**, his third son grows up. It seems Shelah was younger and here Tamar is instructed to go and live in her father’s house **as a widow** until **Judah’s third son grows up**.

Bottom line, according to Judah, Tamar living as a widow in her father’s house was only temporary. At least that is what he told Tamar. But then Moses shares with us some inside baseball: ***for he feared that he would die, like his brothers.***

Two things are implied:

* The boy is likely very close to being old enough already.
* Judah had no intention of giving him to Tamar, for he feared that Shelah, like his brothers would die also!

But Tamar did what Judah told her to do. Now we cannot read too much into that statement, but it may likely say a great deal about Tamar.

Judah has no intention of giving Shelah to Tamar, he likely sees her as a black widow, instead he lies to her. **Judah deceives Tamar.**

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***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. 13 And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," 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. 15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.***

**Vs 12 -** And time marches on… A year, or two, we do not know.

But Tamar is still living with her father, waiting for Shelah and we might imagine her resentment is growing and she is starting to recognize that Judah has lied to her. Time marches on and then **Judah’s wife**, who is **Shua’s daughter dies**.

Judah has a **period of mourning** and following that period, he goes up to **Timnah**, to be **present when his sheep are sheared**. Timnah is 12 miles northwest of Adullam.

**Vs 13-14 -** Tamar learned that Judah was going up to Timnah to shear his sheep, she removed her widow’s garments, **put on a veil** and **dressed herself up** to look like a **cult prostitute.**

Next, she went and sat at the gate at the entrance of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She knew that Judah would pass by this location.

She did this we are told: ***For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.***

She figured out the **Judah had no intention of ever giving his third son** to her, in spite of that fact that is what he **told her** and equally in spite of the fact that she had been living in her father’s home as a widow, **possibly for a couple of years.**

So she dolls herself up, veils herself up, and waits at the entrance of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah.

**APPLICATION:** We understand why she is likely harboring anger and bitterness. She has been lied to. But I would remind us:

***14****Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.****15****See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled (Heb 12:14-15, ESV).*

***32****Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph 4:32, ESV).*

**Vs 15 -** So, here she is, sitting in the gate, she is veiled and Judah assumes she is a prostitute.

But do not miss the larger issue, Judah sees this prostitute and is being drawn to her because of his own lusts.

***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?" 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 — " 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. 19 Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.***

**Vs 16 -** Seeing her there at the gate, Judah **assuming** she was a prostitute, **he turns into her** there at the entrance of the city and says: ***"Come, let me come in to you,"***

Notice Judah initiates, Judah turns from the roadside to her and Judah says: ***let me come into you.***

**\*\*\* Clearly**, Judah having sex with a person who he believes is a **prostitute** is against **God’s plan and design**.

Moses tells us that Judah had **no idea that this was Tamar**, that this was his **daughter-in-law**, who he had **promised his third son**.

Judah is following the **whims of his flesh**, and he decided to **purchase** and **have sex with this woman** who he believes is a **prostitute**.

He **makes the offer**, Tamar (in disguise) **replies:** ***"What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"***

What is the **payment** she asks, what will you give in exchange to have sex with me?

**Vs 17 -** He responds, I will send you a **young goat** from my flock. Tamar (in disguise) responds: **"*If you give me a pledge, until you send it — "***

**Vs 18 - Judah responds:** What **pledge** would you like me to give, what will suffice, what will work?

Tamar (in disguise) responds to Judah, if you give me your **signet ring**, your **cord** (this would be the bracelet or necklace that holds the signet ring), and your **staff**, I will do it, those three things can serve as pledge until you send the young goat from your flock. These are all items that will identify Judah, these are all very unique items.

Judah quickly gives her his signet ring, his cord, and his walking staff.

Isn’t it funny, no isn’t it sad, what we will **give up** in the heat of a **moment of temptation**?

Judah has sex with Tamar (daughter-in-law) and he goes on his way, likely not thinking another thing about it. **This is how much Judah has been infected with the sins of the Canaanites.**

**APPLICATION:**

***18****Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (ICor 6:18, ESV).*

**You and I should flee temptation.** Judah, rather than fleeing ran headlong.

**And sin has consequences.** Although we do not know what is going to happen, we can be sure something is going to happen.

**APPLICATION: Do we think we can sin and escape the consequences?**

Now Moses, as he has done a number of times, gets a **little in front of his skis** and he tells us that not only did Judah go into Tamar, but **Tamar conceived**, she **became pregnant!** Yes, **sin has consequences**.

**Vs 19 -** So Judah goes on his way to Timnah, Tamar goes on her way, she arises, heads back home, takes of the veil and puts back on the garments of widowhood.

***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. 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." 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.’" 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."”***

**Vs 20 -** So Judah, sends the **promised young goat**, by his friend the Canaanite to take to the woman who was at the gate and to get Judah’s ring, cord, and walking staff back. But Judah’s friend **Hirah** (the Canaanite) was not able to find her.

**Vs 21 -** So Hirah does not find her at the gate as he expected, so he begins **asking the men of the city**, ***"Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?"***

They reply from the men of the city is that no such cult prostitute has been here! Hirah is out of options, this woman is not where he expected to find her and no one knows anything about her, so he leaves.

**Vs 22 - So Hirah returns to Judah** and says I was not able to find her and the men of the city have told me that no cult prostitute has been here. A divine mystery, what happened to the cult prostitute?

**Vs 23 -** Judah replies to his friend: **Stop the search**, let her keep the ring, cord, and walking staff, if you keep **inquiring, I shall be laughed at!**

Judah concludes, I did what I said I would do, you yourself are witness.

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 ***“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." 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." 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.***

**Vs 24 -**  **Approximately three months goes by**, Judah has no doubt forgotten all about the episode, and word comes to him that: ***"Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality."***

Your daughter-in-law Tamar, the one **who is waiting for you to give Shelah has been immoral**. The Hebrew word means she has **committed fornication**, and she is **pregnant by the act of fornication**.

Judah, gives command to bring Tamar out and declares she will be burned to death for her immorality.

**APPLICATION: This is the ugliest sin. We see it often. People will commit some sin,** and then **condemn and even cry for judgment on the exact sin** when they find it in others.

Judah, just three months earlier had slept with a person he thought was a prostitute. He had solicited her. He was totally guilty. Look how self-righteous Judah is, yet he has recently committed this same sin.

Let her be put to death by burning. That is **Judah’s prescribed punishment** for the **whoredom of his daughter-in-law**.

Judah, by the way he has been **lying to for years.** But, he likely sees that this whole episode will **get him off the hook, an easy win, if you will.**

**Vs 25 -** As Tamar is bring brought out to be put to death by burning, she gives her defense.

**Here it is:** As she is being brought out, she sends word to her father-in-law (Judah) and says***: "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."***

The man who got me pregnant is the owner of this signet ring, this cord, and this walking staff. **UHHH OHHHH! Please identify who these belong to!**

Can you imagine what went through Judah’s mind when he saw those three items?

**Vs 26 -** Judah identified them, he immediately recognized they were his. Further he recognized the larger issue: ***"She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah."***

Now this is comparative of course, and her actions could be hardly seen as righteous, but **compared with Judah’s,** she is the winner hands down!

**I gave my word that I never intended to keep**, she **stayed faithful waiting** for me to keep my word. She is more righteous than me. He likely understands his lie has created a huge mess that was further complicated by his sinful desires.

**Next, it implies** he moved her into this house, and he **never knew her again!**

***27 When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb. 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." 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. 30 Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.***

**Vs 27 - Tamar is pregnant**, the six months fly by and she **goes into labor** and she is **pregnant with twins!**

**Vs 28 -** As she is in labor, the midwife is assisting, one of the babies’ hands slip out of the womb and the midwife ties a scarlet thread around the baby’s wrist to **identify it as the firstborn.**

The midwife even declares that **“this one came out first!”**

**Vs 29 -** As the process of birth moves forward, the child withdraws his hand, and ultimately his brother is born first, the one that does not have the scarlet thread around the wrist.

And she said, this is likely Tamar, **"What a breach you have made for yourself!"** This is the reason she named the child that came completely out of the womb first **Perez.**

The name **Perez** means **breech**, or **break through**. Here, with Perez, the birth order is reversed. Like Ishmael and Isaac and like Esau and Jacob.

**Vs 30 -** Next the brother with the scarlet thread on his wrist came out and she named him **Zerah** which means **rising or shining one.**

The **chapter abruptly ends here**.

**As we step back,** we must ask ourselves **why would God put this chapter in the Bible? What are the lessons** God would have us learn from this very odd account of **Judah and Tamar**? **Great question!**

We also wonder, since **Judah is in line to the Messiah**, which **son of Judah** traces to the Messiah (Shelah, Perez, or Zerah)? **That too is a great question!**

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**Next week** we pick back up with Joseph, who **was sold into Egyptian slavery**, **sold to a man employed by the government called Potiphar.**

From here on, **Joseph becomes the primary focal point!**