

Genesis 38-39

March 27, 2011

38:1-2: What do we learn about Judah in chapter 38 verses 1 and 2?

- Judah left his father and brothers and moved away. He marries a Canaanite woman.

Why do you think that Judah left his family?

- Judah saw his father Jacob grieve day after day. He surely felt guilty for being the one to recommend that they sell Joseph as a slave.

What might we learn from what Judah did?

- People who bear guilt tend to do two things: (1) they distance themselves from godly people and (2) they tend to get themselves deeper into sin.

38:3-11: What takes place in verses 3 to 11?

- Judah's first son marries a girl named Tamar. That son was wicked and God took his life. Judah then gave her to his second son who refused to have a child with her. The Lord took the life of the second son. Judah was afraid of losing his third son so he told Tamar to remain a widow in their home.

Is it possible to sin against God and for God to judge that sin by physical death?

- Yes!

Why was a man supposed to marry his brother's widow and have children with her (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)? ⁵ *"If two brothers are living together on the same property and one of them dies without a son, his widow may not be married to anyone from outside the family. Instead, her husband's brother should marry her and have intercourse with her to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law. ⁶ The first son she bears to him will be considered the son of the dead brother, so that his name will not be forgotten in Israel. ⁷ "But if the man refuses to marry his brother's widow, she must go to the town gate and say to the elders assembled there, 'My husband's brother refuses to preserve his brother's name in Israel—he refuses to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law by marrying me.' ⁸ The elders of the town will then summon him and talk with him. If he still refuses and says, 'I don't want to marry her,' ⁹ the widow must walk over to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal from his foot, and spit in his face. Then she must declare, 'This is what happens to a man who refuses to provide his brother with children.' ¹⁰ Ever afterward in Israel his family will be referred to as 'the family of the man whose sandal was pulled off'!"* *NLT*

- The inheritance was given to the males, not the females. This custom only applied if the widow had no children. Without a son, the inheritance to the deceased's widow was lost. Also, a widow without a son had no one to care for her in the present or in the future.

38:12-30: What takes place in verses 12 to 30?

- Judah's wife died and he went to visit his friend and father-in-law. **Tamar** has realized that Judah was never going to give her to his third son. She disguises herself as a prostitute and waits along the road for Judah. Knowing how worldly Judah was, Tamar knew that he would hire her for sex. She asks for a payment that he does not have with him and Judah leaves some personal items with her that he will get back when he sends her a goat. He sends the goat by his father-in-law who cannot locate the prostitute. None of the townspeople know who she is. Three months later Tamar is pregnant. Judah says that she is to be "burned". Tamar then shows Judah's things that expose him as the father of the child. Judah rescinds the judgment since he is as guilty as she. The chapter concludes with Tamar giving birth to twins.

Numbers 32:23 reminds us: *Be sure your sin will find you out.* Turn to **Matthew 1:3**. What do we learn there? **3** Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar). Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram. **NLT**

- Tamar is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus; Christ was born through her line.

Three other women are mentioned in the Matthew genealogy; who are they?

- Rahab, the harlot who helped the spies.
- Ruth, the Moabite woman who was faithful to her mother-in-law.
- And Bathsheba, the wife of adultery to David.

What do we learn from the fact that these four women are mentioned in this list?

- God obviously can and does use people who have sinful histories. We cannot undo our pasts, but we can rewrite our futures. The only perfect person God ever used was Himself in His Son.

What all do we know about Judah from this story?

- He wanted to escape godly influence. He married an unbelieving woman who had more influence on his children than he did. God killed his first two sons for their wickedness. Judah dishonored Tamar by not giving her to his third son. Judah then goes to a harlot. He is a supreme hypocrite for wanting to have Tamar “burned” for her sexual promiscuity when he was guilty of the same sin.

39:1-6: What takes place in chapter 39 verses 1 to 6?

- Joseph excelled and was blessed in everything that he did in Potiphar’s (*PAH-ti-fur*) house. The Egyptian placed Joseph over his household and put everything in Joseph’s hands to manage. We also learn here that Joseph was handsome and very physically fit.

Joseph was supposed to be a ruler. He has now been betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave. Has God abandoned Joseph?

- **No.** We are told in **verse 2** that *the Lord was with Joseph*. God’s blessing was upon Joseph to the extent that Potiphar knew that God was blessing Joseph (**39:3**).

Joseph is a slave. Can you be blessed if you are a slave?

- **Yes.** **Verse 3** says that the Lord caused all that Joseph did to prosper. **Verse 5** tells us that God even blesses the house of Potiphar because of Joseph.
- **The truths here are hard for some to grasp. God is with Joseph even when it looks like everything is going wrong in his life. God can bless us no matter what our “lot” in life. The fact that our lives are difficult at times does not mean that God is not with us. God is with Joseph and He is blessing Joseph, even though Joseph’s socio-economic status is “slave”.**

39:7-18: What takes place in verses 7 to 18?

- Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce Joseph day after day but Joseph refuses to be with her. She eventually grabs him and demands that he have sex with her. He flees but she grabs and keeps some of Joseph’s outer clothing. When Potiphar returns home, she tells him that Joseph tried to rape her.

What do we learn from what Joseph said in verse 9?

- Immorality is a *great evil* and a *sin against God*.

What did Joseph do and what do we learn from how Joseph handled the situation?

- Joseph ran! We are told in scripture to “stand firm” against the devil ([Ephesians 6:11](#)). But the Bible tells us to run from immorality. See [1 Corinthians 10:14](#) and [2 Timothy 2:22](#). The devil tempts men and women with immorality, but men and women who “play around” with temptation tempt the devil.

39:19-23: What takes place in verses 19 to 23?

- Potiphar sends Joseph to the king’s prison. Joseph found favor with the Chief Jailer who put him in charge of everything that was done in the jail.

Do you think that Potiphar believed his wife’s story? Why or why not?

- He most likely *did not* believe her. If he had, he would have executed Joseph. It would have been unthinkable in that day to take a slave’s “word” over a wife’s word.

How could God have been “with” Joseph when He was in jail?

- In America we tend to think that if God is “with” us, then we have no problems: physical, financial, or relational. Scripture is clear that God can be “with” us even when we are lied about, or suffer injustice, and are in jail.

How do you explain the fact that God “prospered” Joseph while he was in jail? What do you think that means?

- Clearly, prosperity here has nothing to do with material things or finances. Three things likely were true of Joseph:
- Joseph still had his character, which gave him an “internal”, emotional, spiritual blessing. We can’t control where we are or what we have, but we can always control who we are.
- Joseph made the best of whatever circumstance he was in. He was using his leadership gifts and skills to serve the jailer and the other inmates. This gave him purpose.
- Being a servant, he likely made some real friends in jail: he had some community.