



Lesson 29

THE JUDAH INTERLUDE

Story Elements

- **TEXT:** Gen. 38:1-30
- **Setting:** circa 1730 B.C. in Hebron.
- **Main Characters:** God, Judah, and Tamar
- **Plot:** Judah became involved with Canaanites and it ruins his family.
- **Key word(s):** “_____” (vv 17, 18, 20)
- **Climax:** *Genesis 38:25* When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, *By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff*

Foreword

- 1) Known as “the Judah Interlude,” Genesis 38 may seem like an awkward interruption in Joseph’s story, but it is included here on purpose. It is bookended by two verses that mention how Joseph is taken to Potiphar’s house as a slave (cf. 37:36 and 39:1). So, why is this story here? Notice:
 - a) This story recounts the wickedness and debauchery that had begun to creep into Israel through friendships and marriages with the _____.
 - b) This story reminded the Hebrews in Moses’ day that their Egyptian enslavement was used by God to protect Israel’s ethnic and _____ identity. John MacArthur notes, “Canaanite syncretistic religion...threatened to absorb the fourth and later generations of Abraham’s heirs, but Egyptian exile and racial exclusivism produced not loss of ethnic identity, but the preservation of it.”¹

Sinful Posterity – “*The LORD Slew Him*”

- 2) (vv 1-2) Judah “went down from his brethren” to spend time with an Adullamite named Hirah. (The town of Adullam is not far from Hebron). It was there that Judah met the daughter of _____, a Canaanite.
 - a) (vv 3-5) Together they had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah.
 - i) (v 7) Er was later married to a girl named _____, but Er was so wicked that the LORD slew him before he fathered any children.
 - ii) (vv 8-10) According to custom, Onan was to take Tamar in levirate marriage to raise up children in his brother’s name. Onan refused out of _____, and the LORD slew him also. Now Tamar had been widowed twice.
 - b) (v 11) Judah told Tamar to go live with her father until the youngest brother, _____, was old enough to marry. Judah’s words indicate he thought Tamar

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2005) p 65.

was the one inciting the LORD's wrath and by sending her away he was trying to save his third son. It seemed Judah had no intention of letting Shelah marry Tamar.

Sinful Ploys – “*Wilt Thou Give Me a Pledge*”

- 3) (vv 12-13) Years pass. Judah's wife dies. And Tamar remained a widow in her father's house waiting for Shelah, but the marriage never happened.
- 4) (vv 14-16) Tamar, taking matters into her own hands, disguises herself as a harlot. Whether she was hoping to intercept Shelah or Judah at the _____ festivities is unknown.
 - a) Though her actions were wicked, her motivation was to secure the inheritance rights of her deceased husband through a levirate marriage that had been unjustly _____ her.
 - b) (vv 17-19) Judah falls for her trap and leaves his signet, bracelets, and staff with her as a _____ for her hire.
- 5) (vv 20-23) Later, when Judah tried to send payment by the hand of his friend Hirah, the “harlot” was nowhere to be found. Judah was willing to drop the matter, “Lest we be _____.”

Sinful Proclamation – “*Let Her Be Burnt*”

- 6) (v 24) Three months later, Judah was told, “Tamar...hath played the harlot; and behold, she is with child by whoredom.” Judah proclaimed, “Bring her forth and let her be _____.”
- 7) (v 25-26) When Tamar was summoned, she produced Judah's signet, bracelets, and staff. She announced, “By the man, whose these are, I am with child.” Judah confessed, “She hath been more _____ than I.”
- 8) (vv 27-30) Later, twins were born to Tamar. The boys were named Pharez and Zerah. In a twist similar to Esau and Jacob's story, the presumed firstborn was last. _____ would be the child through whom the Messianic line would continue (cf. Matt. 1:3)

Application

- 9) Jesus said, “Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” (cf. Matt. 19:30; Mark 10:31) This means that human effort, tradition, and desire are nothing – God's _____ alone is the source of all blessings. Jacob, not Esau; Pharez, not Zerah.
- 10) “Be sure your _____ will find you out” (Num. 32:23) is a hard lesson Judah learned. Let us confess and forsake sin.

Answer Key

Key word(s): pledge | 1) a) Canaanites; b) religious | 2) Shuah; a) i) Tamar; ii) selfishness; b) Shelah; | 4) sheep-shearing; a) denied; b) pledged | 5) shamed | 6) burnt | 7) righteous | 8) Pharez | 9) grace | 10) sin