

## **Genesis 38: Judah and Tamar**

### **11-04-18 PM**

Genesis 38 is one of the more graphic chapters in the story of the patriarchs. In this chapter we are told the story of the family of Judah. Judah (by a Canaanite wife) has three sons. The first is of such evil that he is struck dead by God. The second refuses to impregnate the widow of the first, and yet still engages in sexual relations with her, committing a form of technical rape. He too is struck dead by God. The last son is held dear by Judah. Judah denies this last son to Tamar, the widow of his oldest son, although the tradition is that she ought to be allowed to take him as her husband.

It is in this setting that Tamar comes up with a plan to secure her place in the family of Jacob. She disguises herself as a shrine prostitute and is encountered by Judah, who impregnates her. She takes from him his seal and other items. When months later it is discovered she is pregnant, Judah prepares to have her put to death. She delivers his pledges, and Judah realizes his hypocrisy, and declares Tamar righteous. She gives (auspicious) birth to twins, the oldest of whom will receive the Abrahamic blessing of the Christ promise.

### **TAMAR**

From Genesis 38 morally ambiguous at best. Prostitution, scandal and death may divert us from the important story here. So perhaps we might step away a moment to consider Tamar in light of other Scriptures. In Ruth 4:12 a blessing is pronounced on Ruth in the name of Tamar. In Matthew 1:3 Matthew distinctly names Tamar in the lineage of Jesus, one of only a handful of the most virtuous women mentioned. Clearly Tamar is someone whom Scriptures esteem.

Tamar's circumstances are quite poor. She is a Canaanite (assumedly), and as such is not well regarded in the promise story of Israel. She is married to an evil man, and then is forced to intimacy with another evil man. Finally, she is secluded and denied a husband by Judah. One might think that such ill treatment at the hands of the family of Israel would drive her away. Yet it is not the case; instead, she risks her life to remain part of this family. We must assume it is this characteristic, her compelling drive to be part of the story of Israel that is the model point we are meant to consider.

### **BIRTH CONTROL**

An aside to this story is the question of birth control. There are several denominations that refer to the circumstances of Onan "wasting his seed" in Genesis 38:9 as proof that God sees birth control as a sin. Such a conclusion is profoundly spurious. First, the sin here is clearly that Onan refuses to permit his deceased brother a son. Later the Law of Moses would spell out clearly that this was the expectation of a brother for his widowed sister in law (Deut. 25:5-6). Second, there is nothing in this account that would indicate that it establishes a law to which we are subject; indeed, identifying this as "birth control" is an enormous speculative leap, and then to apply this to us is unauthorized.

This might be the end of the debate, but there are some who look to passages that speak of God opening and closing the womb that cause some to wonder if the concept of conception is one in which man is not permitted to regulate. We do see this term used in Scriptures (consider Rachel and Leah in Genesis 29:31, 30:22), but usually with a supernatural inference. Yet the very idea that man is not permitted to regulate conception fails to see that the actions that lead to conception are entirely in the hands of people. That physical intimacy of marriage (which was not purposed for procreation exclusively, or even primarily, but we are told was purposed to the work of the consummation of marriage - 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Genesis 2:24, Hebrews 13:4).

If indeed God did not want men to manipulate or control procreation, why could that be? It would imply that if limiting procreation were contrary to the Divine will, then so would be those activities that increase fertility. Medical methods are used today to enhance the body's ability to conceive; it is not new, if we consider the story of Rueben's mandrakes in Genesis 30 as an example of the same. If we are expected to accept God's work of bringing children to the home as exclusively His work, then even adoption (a non-biological means of "procreation") would be contrary to that mind.

Clearly, as with many of the natural blessings God has given to man, we are expected and given authority to administer, control and order the blessing of children.

Yet still the myth persists that such control fails to place trust in God. To that end there are some who believe that a large family (a subjective definition to be certain) is somehow a manifestation of greater faith or spiritual wealth. Yet we only need to meet the family of Jacob, David or Gideon to see that such is clearly not true. Having lots of kids does not mean you are more Godly, and may in fact mean that you have failed to consider God's purpose in giving us authority to control the birth of our children.

God's expectation in planning a family must include consideration about leadership and administration. Consider for a moment Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 5:8: *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"*. Can it not be said that such a lack of provision may be due to a lack of foresight and planning; as Jesus said, we ought to be people who count the cost of our decisions, including the planning of our home. Consider the wisdom of the proverbs which tells us that A man must *"prepare your work outside and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterwards, then, build your house"* (Proverbs 24:27). Once more, the mindset is not just to expect that divine blessings will cover our needs, but that the Divine expectation is to be wise in determining what we will be able to wisely administer and lead.

Parenthood is one of the greatest blessings of God (Psalm 127:3, Mark 10:14). But when we want blessing without being prepared or planning how we will use them, we may find our blessings denied to us or even working against us.

James 4:3 *You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*