



Genesis 38-39

The brothers of Joseph have dealt treacherously with him. They had conspired to kill him, but, the oldest brother Reuben did not go along with the plan. Reuben was fearful to openly stand up for Joseph, because of the hatred of the other brothers; so, he suggested that they just throw him in a pit and let him starve to death rather than to bloody their hands by murdering him. He intended to come back and get Joseph out of the pit and home safely to Jacob.

Judah didn't want to go along with the plot to kill Joseph and so he suggested selling him to the Midianites, who were heading down towards Egypt. So, Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver, by his brothers, to the slave traders. A parallel to this was when Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver by a friend. There are many parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus as we will see as we read more about the life of Joseph.

Now, Judah, right after this incident, may have been upset with his brothers and tired of the whole ugly scene of what they had done to Joseph.

They had told Jacob that Joseph was probably killed by a wild beast and they had his coat of many colors with the blood of a goat on it to more or less substantiate their deception. Judah separated himself from his brothers and for whatever reason moved away for a time from the family.

It is interesting that chapter thirty-eight, is the only insight that we have about what is going on back home while Joseph is in Egypt. In twenty-two years of history this is all we know about what is happening back in the land. From the time Joseph was sold as a slave until Jacob came down into Egypt to live, it was a period of twenty-two years.

Reuben, the first born, had gone into his father's concubine, Bilhah, and by that action, was removed from the position of receiving the birthright. It seems that Judah, although chosen by God for the line of the Messiah, was not chosen for the birthright and it could be because of chapter thirty-eight.

"And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her." (Gen.38:1-2).

They're really dwelling in the land as strangers and the boys are getting to the marriageable age. They can't go to Laban and find a girl to marry as the family there had been corrupted in idolatry; so, their choice for a bride is rather limited. Judah picked Shuah, a Canaanite, who he might have hoped he could convert to a belief in the one true God. It doesn't indicate by the scripture whether he was ever successful in doing this.

"And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah; and he was at Chezib, when she bare him." (Gen.38:3-5). Judah named the first son and Shuah named the second and third sons. It seems it didn't take her long to take control in the family.

"And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar." (Gen.38:6). You have the birth of Er and the next verse you have Er getting married; so, you obviously have a period of time that elapses here.

"And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him." (Gen.38:7). We don't know what Er's wickedness was or why the LORD killed him as the Bible doesn't say. Anything we might offer would only be worthless conjecture.

"And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother." (Gen.38:8).

In that culture, it was a common practice that if a man married and he died before he had any children, his next oldest brother had to take his wife and marry her and raise up children in the name of the dead brother. The firstborn would be named after the dead brother and considered to be his family. Later on this became a part of the Law.

In Deuteronomy, chapter twenty-five, there are some interesting angles to this particular law. If a man did not want to marry the dead brother's wife, he would go before the judges in the city gate, tell them he didn't want to marry the woman and loose his shoe and give it to her. She would then spit in his face, which is a cultural insult, and he would be free from the law and wouldn't have to marry her. He would always be known as "the man from whom the shoe was loosed in Israel." This was a dishonorable name, because the man didn't want to honor his dead brother by producing an heir to carry on his name. Onan didn't have this "out" that God gave with the Law, later on. He didn't have a choice in the matter.

In the Book of Ruth, after Naomi's husband and sons had died, she came back to Israel with her daughter-in-law Ruth. Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz and at the end of the Harvest season, she was instructed, by Naomi, to go at night and see the place where Boaz lay and lay down and cover her feet with his blanket. Boaz was a near kinsmen. Elimelech and his two sons are dead and his family name will perish unless someone follows the law and raises up a child to keep the family name going. Ruth is actually asking Boaz to fulfill the law concerning the dead brother to raise up a child after his name.

Boaz was an older man, old enough to be Ruth's father; but, he was attracted to her. However, there was another brother who was next in line, as far as order of kin, and he would have the first opportunity. He could not fulfill the law as he was already married, so, he passed on the shoe to Boaz and Boaz married Ruth.

In the New Testament, the Sadducees, who didn't believe in resurrection, spirits, or angels, came to Jesus seeking to show how ridiculous the idea of resurrection was. "...Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren; and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother; Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh, And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine." (Matt.22:24-33).

"And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; wherefore he slew him also." (Gen.38:9-10).

The displeasure of God was not the emitting of the seed on the ground, but his failure to fulfill the obligation of raising up an heir for the dead brother.

So both brothers have been slain by the LORD. It is possible that they had been raised in the practices of the Canaanites by their mother. Thus God wasn't going to allow them to be of the line of Judah from which the Christ would come and He eliminated them early in life.

"Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown; for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house." (Gen.38:11).

"And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite." (Gen.38:12). Judah's wife died an early death as she was probably in her forties. He has spent his time of mourning and now is going off to shear sheep, which is always "party time."

Shelah, the third son, did eventually marry and become the father of the Shulamites; but he did not marry Tamar, his dead brother's wife.

"And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnah to shear his sheep. And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife." (Gen.38:13-14).

Usually pagan worship was associated around the procreated capacities of man. They revered the marvelous power of the creating of life through a sexual union. It was a major part of the Canaanites religious belief and worship.

Every Canaanite woman had to devote herself, for a period of time, as a prostitute to raise funds for the Temple. It was an accepted practice among these people. So, Tamar put on the attire of a temple prostitute and veiled herself so Judah couldn't recognize her.

"When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face. and he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?" (Gen.15-16).

"And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it? And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him." (Gen.38:17-18).

The signet was the ring stamp that you could put into the wax and sign with to prove that the merchandise was yours. Incidentally, this is where the custom has come from in giving a ring to the bride. Tamar is asking for a guarantee that he will keep his vow to give her a goat. The engagement ring is a pledge of love or a guarantee that a man makes to the woman he has asked to be his wife and this is where it started.

"And she arose, and went away, and laid by her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood." (Gen.38:19). Tamar went back home to her father and resumed her life as a widow.

"And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand; but he found her not." (Gen.38:20). Judah asked his friend to take the goat and get back his ring and other things that he had given to the prostitute. He was probably ashamed to go himself.

"Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place. And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place. And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed; behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her." (Gen.38:21-23). The Adullamite, Judah's friend, could not find the harlot and the men of that area said there was no harlot there and so, he came back and told Judah. Judah said let her keep them, we have tried to do the right thing in sending the goat.

"And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt." (Gen.38:24).

It is interesting that though he had sent Tamar back home to her father, Judah still had control over her life in that he could order her put to death.

Women did not have any rights in those days. It was not until Christianity that women were brought into a position of equality. Paul says in Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal.3:28).

"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." (Gen.38:25). Tamar told Judah that the man whose things she had was the father of her child. Did he recognize them?

"And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more." (Gen.38:26). Judah admitted that he was wrong in not giving Tamar to his son Shelah.

"And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand; and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out; and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee; therefore his name was called Perez. And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was called Zerah." (Gen.38:27-30).

In Matthew, chapter one, we get the genealogy of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The line from which Joseph came happened to come through Perez, the son of Judah and Tamar. The next woman we have in the line, in Matthew's gospel, is Rahab, the harlot in Jericho. The next woman in the line of Christ is Ruth, the Moabitess and the last and the fourth in the line of Christ is Bath-sheba, the wife of David and formerly the wife of Uriah.

Four women named, only, in Matthew's Gospel. All of them outside of the Jewish race, for, even Bath-sheba was a Hittite. All of them had shady experiences in their past. It speaks of the "grace" of God. We may not have the most honorable past and we may be ashamed of it as we look back; yet, God does not disqualify us or kick us out. He would rather wash us, cleanse us, forgive us and then use us as trophies to His grace.

Now, we shift from home back to Egypt and what is happening to Joseph. Things aren't much better here except that in considering the two brothers Judah and Joseph, there is a great contrast.

"And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither. And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. and his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand." (Gen.39:1-3).

"And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field." (Gen.39:4-5). It's interesting that God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph. His hand was upon Joseph and later on, Joseph recognized this.

There is no record of Joseph ever complaining about the treacherous things that had been done to him or even that he had questioned God. He suffered in silence and even further on when he was accused by Potiphar's wife, he didn't answer in his own defense. This is another parallel to Jesus, who didn't answer in his defense either. Joseph came to realize, in time to come, that this awful deed was actually a part of the purpose and plan of God for the preservation of the family.

One of our problems is our nearsightedness. We never see what is far off, but only that which is near. This is a problem in our Christian walk, for, God is often working out processes in our life which will not come to fruition until further down the road. As we are going through these present situations, we can not see what may happen further on. We don't realize that God has this problem all worked out and planned and years from now we may see what He has been doing. In the meantime we question God and give Him a bad time.

God must get tired of our unfaithfulness. We are so nearsighted that we can't see how this is all going

to work out and so we complain and question God as to what He may be doing. With hindsight we can look back, and what we thought were boils were really blessings. There came the day when Joseph looked back and said, "Wow! All the way God's hand was on me."

I'm sure that Joseph must have wondered where God was when his brothers sold him and he cried and begged for their mercy. Even in the difficulties that Joseph will experience in this chapter, "Where is God?" He's right there plotting and planning to work out His purpose.

Let's read on and discover what God's purpose is in all that has happened to Joseph.

Joseph is blessed of God and Potiphar recognizes this. God has prospered Potiphar's house because of Joseph. "And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured." (Gen.39:6)

The scripture says that Joseph is handsome in form and appearance. We're told concerning Saul that he was more handsome than any man in Israel during that time. Later on, we're told that David was handsome. Moses was a very beautiful child and there are a lot of apocryphal type of stories, concerning Moses beauty. Paul was ugly and I only say that to let you know that God doesn't just use beautiful people.

"And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me." (Gen.39:7).

"But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand. There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen.39:8-9).

Joseph was in his twenties and his sex drive was peaking. He was far away from home and all its influence. This woman was trying to arouse him day after day with provocative actions and open suggestions. This is a powerful temptation for a young man who is far from home, but Joseph did not yield.

The Bible tells us that temptation is something common to all of us. We have, in our flesh, those areas of weakness and in this we are not all the same. While sex may be a temptation to some, with others it may not be sex; but, cheating, drinking, gambling or some other sin.

Temptation is all around us. You could be facing temptation everytime you go to the store to buy a lottery ticket. Your chance of winning, in this, is about the same chance as being struck by lightning. Yet if you win a lot of people are going to lose in order to pay off your winnings. You are gaining at the expense of another's loss. Unfortunately that person who is losing is the one who can least afford to lose, as a rule. It is the poor people who are attracted to this type of gambling in order to get out of poverty.

Potiphar's wife has many descendents. Women, who are out seeking to seduce men and men who would like to get women in bed with them. It's a part of the whole world system today. The challenge and the game where love is not involved. It's a pass-time where you're facing temptation. How can you resist the pressure and come out clean? First, as with Joseph, it helps if someone is trusting in you and you don't want to violate that trust. Potiphar trusted Joseph with all that he had.

Secondly, Joseph recognized that he was different and that he was special. Joseph said, "How can I..." and the "I" implication is I am of a chosen race and a chosen people. Chosen of God to be of the race who will bring His savior into the world.

And with you, "How can I..." as a child of God, born again by the Spirit of God; "How can I..." joined together as one with Jesus Christ in the new life of the Spirit; "How can I..." get involved? I'm different, I'm special, I'm God's child. I've been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. I've been cleansed of my past and my sins.

The third thing was that Joseph looked upon it as a great wickedness. Our trouble is our light opinion of sin. We might say, Oh he made a mistake or stumbled a little, taking sin very lightly, but, Joseph saw it as

a great wickedness. God sees it as great wickedness. We are looking at sin through our degraded culture and through the eyes of our Social Scientists and Psychologists. They may say something like, "Variety is the spice of life." It's a great wickedness, a sin, a work of the flesh which is dishonoring to God and degrading to Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1Cor.6:15-20).

How can you join Christ together with a whore? How can you bring Christ into that kind of relationship? "How can I, a child of God, do this great wickedness?" It was Joseph's keen consciousness of sin that held him back. We only see gray and not black and white. We need to remove the gray. It's right or wrong, not because of the Mores of our culture; but, because God's word says its sin. We need to have our consciousness awakened. We have had it seared through the media and we are not conscious of the horrible evil of sin and its terrible results.

We ignore the law of God and have freedom in our sexual lives. The Media would have us think we are prudes if we're not engaged in some kind of a sexual relationship somewhere along the line outside of our marriage. Freedom! we've been liberated and you read all about the liberated sex; however, up comes Aids. They estimate in Berlin at the present time, more than half of the prostitutes have Aids and are infecting the U.S. Soldiers. These soldiers are coming home and infecting their wives, who in turn are infecting their children. Aids is spreading through the service because of this problem in Berlin. It is now estimated that over one-half of the homosexuals in San Francisco have the Aids virus in their system. Yes, we may turn our back on the Law of God or go out and sin with impunity; but, God will put the brakes on and, at least, cause you to think twice before you get involved again. Solomon warned his son in the Book of Proverbs about the strange woman and that the way to her house is the way to death.

Joseph realized that all sin is against God. You may rationalize, in your mind, what you have done to another; but, your sin was against God. You may think you got by with it, but God saw it and He will judge you for it. Talking to God, David said, "Against you and you only have I sinned." All evil is done in the sight of God. With this awareness: I am something special, I am God's child, the man is trusting in me, sin is a great wickedness and sin is against God; Joseph was able to thwart the advances of Potiphar's wife.

"And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her. And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within, And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me; and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out." (Gen.39:10-12). As a last resort when you think you're going to slip, run. Paul told Timothy to flee youthful lusts. Run from them.

"And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice; And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out." (Gen.39:13-15).

Potiphar's wife is now telling a vicious lie because Joseph had spurned her. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

"And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me. And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out." (Gen.39:16-18).

"And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled." (Gen.39:19). It's interesting that it doesn't say his wrath was kindled against Joseph. He could have been angry with his wife. He might have known that she was flirting with Joseph.

"And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound; and he was there in the prison." (Gen.39:20). The plot thickens and it grows darker. First he is sold by his brothers as a slave, then he has to go through the pressure of this woman trying to seduce him and now she files these false charges against him and he is in prison.

Joseph is in Egypt, far from his family and home and accused of being an attempted rapist. God, where are you? God, how can you allow this to happen to me? God, I'm innocent, this isn't fair, but Joseph doesn't speak up in his own defense. He doesn't answer the charge, but submits to the whole thing. Amazing person this man, Joseph. The only thing that you can deduce is that Joseph was so committed to God that he realized that all things work together for good.

"But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." (Gen.39:21).

Joseph was such a likeable person that everywhere he went, he was liked.

"And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper." (Gen.39:22-23).

The LORD can be with us, even in the most adverse circumstances and cause us to prosper. As we will find out next week, God's hand is in all this imprisonment. It's a part of God's long range plan. What if Joseph had given up and escaped out of prison? He could have fouled up God's whole plan. I wonder how many times we foul up God's plan by bailing out when the pressure is on? When we get too impatient to wait on God and go on in our own fleshly way, we can mess up the whole plan of God.

Do you realize that Joseph was confined for years? Yet, God is working and even in the experience, God's hand is on him. In the overall sense, God is working out such a fantastic program. God is working in your life. Maybe you're going through some heavy waters right now and you can't understand your circumstances, but if you're a child of God, all things are working together for good. If you will just commit your ways unto God, you will find that God is going to bring you such victory and glory that it will be hard to believe.