

• *Judah's story – an interlude*

The change in the story from Joseph to Judah might seem rather surprising. Yet there is a reason why we need to know a little of Judah, as will appear later.

• *Judah, his sons, Tamar and her twins*

The story is as follows. Judah marries a Canaanite and has three sons ¹. Later the oldest of his half-Canaanite sons married and Judah had a daughter-in-law, Tamar. When Tamar was unexpectedly widowed it was the custom that a brother in the family would see that a son was born to her, so that her part of the family would continue ². The second son wanted the pleasure of spending the night with Tamar but did not want to see a son born to her ³ (38:9–10). 'Levirate marriage' had its problems (and still does in parts of the world today) but it was a way of providing a son for a widow. God was displeased that a widow should be treated in the way Tamar was treated; the second son died.

¹ 38:1–5

² 38:6–8

³ 38:9–10

At this point Judah, the father-in-law, decides to shrug off this kind of responsibility for Tamar ¹. Although he pretends that his third son might one day provide for her, Judah plans to do nothing about her plight as a widow without a son to protect her.

¹ 38:11

Some time later Judah himself loses his partner. Judah was evidently known to be the kind of person who would make use of an easily available girl. Tamar decides to exploit his vulnerability ¹ and at the same time makes sure that she has proof of his identity ². Judah was not able to reclaim his pledge to the girl ³ and the matter was dropped. But three months later when Tamar was found to be pregnant the truth came out ⁴. Later still Tamar had twins ⁵. One of the twins, although not born first, put out a hand first and received a scarlet thread which marked his doing so ⁶. Once again, *'the elder served the younger,'* for it was the one who put out a hand first who was the ancestor of Jesus ⁷.

¹ 38:12–15

² 38:16–19

³ 38:20–23

⁴ 38:24–26

⁵ 38:27

⁶ 38:28–30

⁷ see Ruth

4:18;

Matthew 1:3;

Luke 3:33

"The elder served the younger"

What is the point and place of this story in the book of Genesis?

Judah's story underlines that God's plans for Israel are entirely from His graciousness

1. **It underlines that God's plans for Israel are entirely from His graciousness.** Again and again in the story of the family of Abraham we discover that the 'heroes' of the story are sinners like everyone else on planet earth. Abraham was a man who could lie out of fear. Isaac could be deceived by his appetite for a good meal. Jacob was notorious as a crook and deceiver. Now here are the twelve brothers who will become the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. But it has to be said that God's history of salvation is not making use of people who are specially godly. Here are the twelve ancestors of Israel. They are happy to see Joseph killed although he is one of the brothers. One of these brothers – Judah – is exceptionally callous. It all makes it perfectly plain that God's plans go forward by His taking sinners and using them without being put off by their wickedness and brutality.

• *Judah – an exceptionally callous man*

Judah's story explains the great change that came into Judah's life

2. **The story explains the great change that came into Judah's life.** It seems that this event brought about a great change in Judah. At the time of this incident, he was a man with a well-known tendency to immorality and with a harsh, uncompassionate spirit, a man who cared nothing for his brother Joseph or his daughter-in-law Tamar. When she was found to be unexpectedly pregnant he had only one

• *Judah – a cruel, callous womanising brute*

• *An amazing change – he became like Jesus – pleading for mercy for another and willing to suffer*

3. Judah's story leads to the choice of Judah as the tribe of the Son of David

• *What pleased God was that a savage man became a compassionate man.*

thing to say: 'Let her be burned' ^{□1}. It was Judah who made the suggestion about selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites. 'What profit is it to us if we kill our brother?' he had said. 'Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites...' ^{□2}. Judah was at that stage a cruel, callous, womanizing brute.



Yet a little while later we find Judah pleading for mercy for his father ^{□1}. He became like Jesus in being willing to offer himself as a substitute who would suffer in the place of his brother ^{□2} and was himself distressed at the thought of more pain and suffering coming upon the elderly Jacob ^{□3}. It was this plea that brought Joseph to the point of breaking down in distress ^{□4}. What caused this amazing change of character in Judah? It has to be the event that took place here in Genesis 38.

3. The story of Judah leads to the choice of Judah as the tribe of the Son of David. Later on in the book when we come to the predictive outline of what will happen to the sons of Judah, we shall find it is Judah who is chosen to be the royal line. Although all the tribes of Judah came into being by God's grace, yet there was a certain amount of appropriateness in how God used them in days to come. Reuben forfeited blessing because of his immorality ^{□1}, Simon and Levi were notorious for their violence ^{□2}. It was the fourth son, Judah, who was given the promise of sovereignty and kingship ^{□3}. Although God's grace is so amazing it is not necessary to explain why He should give privileges to anyone, yet it is also true that God likes to give rewards and that special privileges come to those who please God. What pleased God is that a savage man became a compassionate man. And what turned Judah into a man of sensitivity and compassion was the disgrace and shame that came upon him at this time of his life. It is an encouragement to all who have badly fallen. What could be the greatest disgrace of our lives might after all have a place in the story of the kingdom of God. When God chose to send Jesus through one of the tribes of Israel, He did not choose the tribe of the favourite, Joseph. He chose the tribe of Judah! God was pleased with a sinner who became a saint. Judah the profligate became Judah the compassionate.

□1 38:4
□2 37:26-27

□1 44:18-34
□2 44:33
□3 44:34
□4 45:1

□1 49:4
□2 49:5-7
□3 49:8-12

 <p>slices.org.uk</p>	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
<p><i>These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below</i></p>		
<p>Slices for the Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<p>Slices for Sponsors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation The same material as Slices for the Nations Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<p>Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email) The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations
<p>To subscribe please contact: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at www.slices.org.uk Details of the availability of <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> books and how they may be purchased can be found on www.ibtr.org.uk</p>		