



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

BIBLE STUDY

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Joseph, Judah and Jesus – the Wonder of Allegories!

(Part 2 of 3)

We hinted in Part 1 that Judah represents someone totally wicked. This is indicated in Scripture because something strange happens – there is an abrupt break that occurs in the narrative. The story of Joseph stops and we have a whole chapter (Genesis 38) about a totally unrelated incident, one that apparently has nothing to do with the events of Joseph's life. At the end of this chapter we once more return to the account of Joseph in chapter 39. Many have asked why it should be that this chapter is inserted here? What relevance has it to the unfolding story of Joseph?

Chapter 38 is all about Judah and some terrible events. When we view this chapter through the allegory we are developing, it suddenly becomes very clear not only why the chapter is here, but where it fits in the greater allegorical picture.

It begins as follows: "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" (verse 1). So Judah "went down". This literally means to sink down or decline. When the Egyptians were destroyed in the Red Sea, we are told that "The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone" (Exodus 15:5). They "sank" to the bottom. The same word used for the direction of travel of Judah. Judah sank below his brothers. He was of course one of the twelve but his actions that followed showed how low he was prepared to go.

Judah goes to a man called Hirah. His name means "splendour". Judah was always interested in wealth. Even in the previous chapter it was Judah who said: "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him". We know this sale instigated by Judah netted twenty pieces of silver. But now Judah has sought a man called 'splendour', indicating perhaps that he was a wealthy man.

While he is there he finds a Canaanite woman, the daughter of a man called Shuah. The word 'Canaanite' means "zealous" and the name 'Shuah' means 'wealth'! Yes Judah was indeed zealous of wealth. Judah married the daughter of Shuah despite her not being of the same faith. No doubt the dowry he might come into was more attractive!

Judah had three sons with this woman, all of whom were extremely wicked. So much so, that God punished the firstborn whose name was Er with death: "And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him" (Genesis 38:7). Er left behind a wife called Tamar. Under the Law, it was the duty of the next eldest brother to raise a family with his brother's widow. But the next eldest son, Onan, refused to let her get pregnant. As a result he suffered the same fate as his brother: "And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also" (verse 10).

Judah kept his only other son Shelah away from Tamar as he was too young to marry. Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law returned to her father's house without financial support or a loving husband to care for her but with the prospect of marrying Shelah when he was older.

Time went by and Judah's wife, the daughter of Shuah, died. Tamar heard about this and was bitter that she was not given to Shelah as his wife now that he was adult. When she heard that Judah was travelling, Tamar put a veil over her face and sat by the roadside waiting for him to pass by. With her veil over her face Judah did not know who she was and mistook his daughter-in-law for a prostitute. He had no money on him so he offered Tamar three things in exchange for sleeping with her. He gave her his signet ring, a cord ("bracelet" in the King James Version) and his staff. Judah planned to exchange these three precious items for a goat at some point. But as we will see he ended up losing them all.

So before we go any further we must explain who Judah is in the allegory. Judah, as you might already have deduced, is none other than Judas! In fact 'Judah' is spelt in exactly the same way in Hebrew as 'Judas'. 'Judah' is translated directly from Hebrew to English, whereas 'Judas' is Hebrew to Greek to English. We can see this in Matthew 1 where the original 'Judah' is translated as 'Judas': "And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar;

and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram” (Matthew 1:3). Judas was himself motivated by money. In fact he was a thief. “Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:4-6). The original Judah was indeed motivated by money. Of course this Judah (Judas) sold Jesus’ life for thirty pieces of silver. The original Judas sold Joseph for twenty pieces. “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver” (Matthew 26:14-15). Judas’ actions brought forth great wickedness – just as Judah’s own sons were wicked.

Remember Judah’s three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah. Their names are interesting. Er means ‘awake’. Onan means ‘strong’. Shelah means ‘petition’. Awake-strong-petition. What is a petition? It is formal request made to an authority for a specific cause.

But what about the episode with Tamar – how does she fit in? Well as we have seen, Judah ends up sleeping with Tamar, his own daughter-in-law, thinking that she is a prostitute. He gave her his signet ring, his cord and his staff. Ancient kings used signet rings to designate authority, honour, or ownership. A signet contained an emblem unique to the king. The bracelet (KJV) is a cord or lace – the same word used in connection with the priestly garments (see Exodus 28:28). The staff is translated from a word normally translated ‘tribe’. By losing all three, Judah lost his authority to rule, his ability to be a priest, and his right to live in the land (future kingdom).

Judas has also lost all three things. He would no longer be considered one of the twelve. A new disciple was found to replace Judas. By his wicked petition he had given up everything he could have been – a future king with Jesus, a future priest with Jesus, and an occupier of land in the kingdom.

The reason we are told that Judah never got these three items back is that he was ashamed: “And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her” (Genesis 38:23). Judah was ashamed. Judas was ashamed: “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, “What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3-5). Judas did not truly repent. He was so ashamed he could not live with himself and took what was for him the only way out.

Tamar in the events of Judah’s life gave birth to two boys, Perez and Zerah. Perez had a scarlet cord put around his wrist. Perez means ‘scarlet’. Scarlet we know represents sin. Zerah means ‘breaking out’. From Judah’s wickedness we have finally sin breaking out.

These are the final words we read about Judas: “This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:16-18).

When Judas had hung himself the religious authorities didn’t know what to do with the body. So they bought a potter’s field with the money and cast his body into it. His body burst open. It burst asunder. It literally means to crack open and all his insides spilled out. Just as the two boys born to Tamar were called ‘sin bursting asunder’, so Judah at the end of his life burst asunder because of his sin.

Chapter 38 of Genesis you see is not out of place. It is an in-depth amazingly encoded look at a future Judah (Judas) who would be involved in the greatest wickedness of all – the betraying of his Lord, Master, Saviour and Brother – the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the final Part we look at with the next chapters of Joseph’s life which continue in the same vein culminating in the role of Christ in the future kingdom.