

# FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY DR. JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN  
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES  
P. O. Box 5695  
ASHEVILLE, NC 28813 U.S.A.  
See my blog at [www.stonekingdom.org](http://www.stonekingdom.org)

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## Joseph Tests Judah

*The Story of Joseph, Part 24*

We are continuing from last month where I stated that for the next several issues, we will comment only sparsely. We are now approaching the major climax of the story, and I want us to feel the impact—as though we were right there in ancient Egypt, as though we were seeing it and *feeling* it through Joseph's eyes, and through Benjamin's eyes, and through Judah's eyes, and through Jacob's eyes.

For the sake of new readers, I simply refer you to some prior issues for disclaimers regarding the book of Jasher. We won't repeat them here.

The brothers, the sons of Jacob-Israel, had left Joseph's presence a second time with grain in their sacks and were heading home when they were arrested and upon search, Joseph's silver divining cup was found in the sack of Benjamin. (Joseph had already revealed himself to Benjamin and he is in on the plan.) They are now back in the presence of Joseph.

Jasher 53:32 And Joseph rose up and caught hold of Benjamin and took him from his brethren with violence, and he came to the house and locked the door at them, and Joseph commanded him that was set over his house that he should say unto them, Thus saith the king, Go in peace to your father, behold I have taken the man in whose hand my cup was found.

So Joseph's first move is a quick one. He seizes Benjamin; locks him up, and then sends his subordinate back to tell the brothers to go home and Benjamin will remain as his slave. This did not sit well with Judah, however, and so in *The Book of Jasher*,

Chapter 54:1 And when Judah saw the dealings of Joseph with them, Judah approached him and broke open the door, and came with his brethren before Joseph.

2 And Judah said unto Joseph, Let it not seem grievous in the sight of my lord, may thy servant I pray thee speak a word before thee? and Joseph said unto him, Speak.

3 And Judah spoke before Joseph, and his brethren were there standing before them; and Judah said unto Joseph, Surely when we first came to our lord to buy food, thou didst consider us as spies of the land, and we brought Benjamin before thee, and thou still makest sport of us this day.

Here Judah boldly accuses the king of Egypt of playing games with them for his own amusement. But his boldness doesn't stop there. He takes a page from his daddy Jacob's letter and makes outright threats against the king.

4 Now therefore let the king hear my words, and send I pray thee our brother that he may go along with us to our father, lest thy soul perish this day with all the souls of the inhabitants of Egypt.

If someone said something like that to the president of the United States, the Secret Service would haul the person off to jail in a heartbeat for threatening assassination of the president. Judah continues:

5 Dost thou not know what two of my brethren, Simeon and Levi, did unto the city of Shechem, and unto seven cities of the Amorites, on account of our sister Dinah, and also what they would do for the sake of their brother Benjamin?

6 And I with my strength, who am greater and mightier than both of them, come this day upon thee and thy land if thou art unwilling to send our brother.

7 Hast thou not heard what our God who made choice of us did unto Pharaoh on account of Sarah our mother, whom he took away from our father, that he

smote him and his household with heavy plagues, that even unto this day the Egyptians relate this wonder to each other? so will our God do unto thee on account of Benjamin whom thou hast this day taken from his father, and on account of the evils which thou this day heapest over us in thy land; for our God will remember his covenant with our father Abraham and bring evil upon thee, because thou hast grieved the soul of our father this day.

8 Now therefore hear my words that I have this day spoken unto thee, and send our brother that he may go away lest thou and the people of thy land die by the sword, for you cannot all prevail over me.

We have to wonder: how will Joseph respond to this show of bravado? Is Joseph intimidated by the boasts of Judah?

9 And Joseph answered Judah, saying, Why hast thou opened wide thy mouth and why dost thou boast over us, saying, Strength is with thee? as Pharaoh liveth, if I command all my valiant men to fight with you, surely thou and these thy brethren would sink in the mire.

10 And Judah said unto Joseph, Surely it becometh thee and thy people to fear me; as the Lord liveth if I once draw my sword I shall not sheathe it again until I shall this day have slain all Egypt, and I will commence with thee and finish with Pharaoh thy master.

11 And Joseph answered and said unto him, Surely strength belongeth not alone to thee; I am stronger and mightier than thou, surely if thou drawest thy sword I will put it to thy neck and the necks of all thy brethren.

12 And Judah said unto him, Surely if I this day open my mouth against thee I would swallow thee up that thou be destroyed from off the earth and perish this day from thy kingdom. And Joseph said, Surely if thou openest thy mouth I have power and might to close thy mouth with a stone until thou shalt not be able to utter a word; see how many stones are before us, truly I can take a stone, and force it into thy mouth and break thy jaws.

Can you feel the tension? Can you see how this is beginning to escalate and beginning to approach spiraling out of control? Judah now tries to ratchet it down a notch as he repeats what the conflict is all about: it's about Judah's refusal to leave Egypt without Benjamin.

13 And Judah said, God is witness between us, that we have not hitherto desired to battle with thee, only give us our brother and we will go from thee; and Joseph answered and said, As Pharaoh liveth, if all the kings of Canaan came together with you, you should

not take him from my hand.

14 Now therefore go your way to your father, and your brother shall be unto me for a slave, for he has robbed the king's house. And Judah said, What is it to thee or to the character of the king, surely the king sendeth forth from his house, throughout the land, silver and gold either in gifts or expenses, and thou still talkest about thy cup which thou didst place in our brother's bag and sayest that he has stolen it from thee?

15 God forbid that our brother Benjamin or any of the seed of Abraham should do this thing to steal from thee, or from any one else, whether king, prince, or any man.

16 Now therefore cease this accusation lest the whole earth hear thy words, saying, For a little silver the king of Egypt wrangled with the men, and he accused them and took their brother for a slave.

17 And Joseph answered and said, Take unto you this cup and go from me and leave your brother for a slave, for it is the judgment of a thief to be a slave.

18 And Judah said, Why art thou not ashamed of thy words, to leave our brother and to take thy cup? Surely if thou givest us thy cup, or a thousand times as much, we will not leave our brother for the silver which is found in the hand of any man, that we will not die over him.

19 And Joseph answered, And why did you forsake your brother and sell him for twenty pieces of silver unto this day, and why then will you not do the same to this your brother?

Once again, Joseph cleverly brings the debate back around to what they did to him. They sold Joseph for 20 pieces of silver; why won't they take the silver cup for Benjamin? Again, it's all part of the test of their character.

Will they treat Benjamin like they did him those 22 years ago? Or will they continue to stand up and fight for him? Joseph continues pushing them to the limit. Will they give in and essentially sell Benjamin or will they fight? Judah has already answered that they would not trade Benjamin for a thousand times as much silver. This is a good sign of their resolve.

20 And Judah said, the Lord is witness between me and thee that we desire not thy battles; now therefore give us our brother and we will go from thee without quarreling.

Judah is now showing considerable restraint.

21 And Joseph answered and said, If all the kings of the land should assemble they will not be able to take your brother from my hand; and Judah said, What

shall we say unto our father, when he seeth that our brother cometh not with us, and will grieve over him?

22 And Joseph answered and said, This is the thing which you shall tell unto your father, saying, The rope has gone after the bucket.

“The rope has gone after the bucket.” An alien expression to most modern readers. We all have running water at the turn of a faucet in our homes, and thus we need to remember how in days of old people had wells and there was a bucket with a rope attached to the handle. If the rope broke or the water boy let it slip, then the bucket would disappear into the water below and the rope would follow after it.

Joseph is referring to himself as the bucket. He is telling them that their brother Joseph disappeared 22 years ago and so now Benjamin, the rope, is going to disappear as well. Tell that to your father, says Joseph. Joseph is really pouring on the act of being heartless and without compassion here, isn't he?

23 And Judah said, Surely thou art a king, and why speakest thou these things, giving a false judgment? woe unto the king who is like unto thee.

24 And Joseph answered and said, There is no false judgment in the word that I spoke on account of your brother Joseph, for all of you sold him to the Midianites for twenty pieces of silver, and you all denied it to your father and said unto him, An evil beast has devoured him, Joseph has been torn to pieces.

Joseph is unrelenting. He is driving their sin home to them like a hot poker in the heart. Judah must have felt it very strongly.

25 And Judah said, Behold the fire of Shem burneth in my heart, now I will burn all your land with fire; and Joseph answered and said, Surely thy sister-in-law Tamar, who killed your sons, extinguished the fire of Shechem.

This verse may contain the first example of either a mistranslation or of an error in the book of Jasher. In fact, there are two instances in this one verse. However, the first one is an obvious one that corrects itself in the same verse. Let me re-read it.

25 And Judah said, Behold the fire of Shem burneth in my heart,... This has to be a reference to Shechem, not Shem, because in Joseph's reply, he says -- Surely thy sister-in-law Tamar, who killed your sons, extinguished the fire of Shechem.

In my view, it is once again a reference to the rape of Dinah by the man named Shechem. Judah is re-

calling the burning anger in his heart towards Shechem, and he threatens to destroy the land in Egypt just as they did to numerous cities of the Amorites because of the Dinah incident.

As I said, that could be simply a mistranslation. Listen carefully now as we re-read the second half of the verse. Is there a possible contradiction to the Bible here? Remember, he is speaking to Judah.

“...and Joseph answered and said, Surely thy sister-in-law Tamar, who killed your sons, extinguished the fire of Shechem.”

Perhaps this is a mistake in Jasher...because it refers to Tamar as Judah's sister-in-law as opposed to his daughter-in-law. We read in...

**Genesis 38:11 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.**

But let us not be too hasty in calling it an error! Could not Tamar be both? Could she not have been the much younger sister of Judah's wife? Therefore, it is not necessarily a mistake. Regardless of that, what is Joseph's point here?

We're not going to read the story in Genesis 38, but merely summarize it. Judah had three sons. When his oldest boy, Er, was grown up, Judah gave Er as a husband to Tamar. But, the Bible says, Er was wicked and so the Lord slew him. After Er was killed, it was then the duty by law of Judah's second son, named Onan, to give seed to Tamar and produce a son thereby, who would inherit in the place of Er.

But Onan saw there was nothing in it for him. I would suggest that Onan was thinking that if Er had no sons, then Onan and his sons would inherit in the place of the first born. Therefore, while Onan did have sex with Tamar, he declined to provide seed for Tamar. A bit of old-fashioned contraception there, and generally, a very unreliable method. Nevertheless, it worked for Onan. But he should not have done that! Because the Scripture declares that the Lord slew him as well.

But how did the Lord slay these two evil sons of Judah? Well, we cannot deny the possibility that Joseph's reply, as given in Jasher provides the truth—that Tamar herself killed them—perhaps in self-defense because there is no indication that she was punished for it. Jasher says: “and Joseph answered [Judah] and said, Surely thy sister-in-law Tamar, who

killed your sons, extinguished the fire of Shechem.”

And so when Judah tells Tamar to just wait some years until his third born son, Shelah, is old enough to marry, Tamar does wait, ...and wait, ..and wait. And when Shelah is old enough, Judah conveniently forgets about it.

The Bible records that therefore Tamar disguises herself like a prostitute, she covers her face and goes out and makes herself available to Judah. He doesn't recognize her and he has sex with her. So is Joseph hurling a biting barb at Judah by pointing out his hypocrisy?

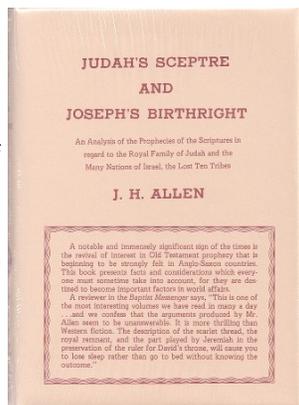
In other words, Judah's heart burned with anger over the rape of Dinah, and yet Judah goes out and has sex with a woman he thinks is a prostitute, but who turns out to be his long-widowed daughter-in-law, who is perhaps his wife's younger sister as well.

Joseph is confronting Judah with all his sins. Incidental to our present study, but *incredibly important* in the overall Plan of God, Tamar got pregnant from her encounter with Judah, and who was born of that union? The twins Pharez and Zerah! The line of Pharez became the line from which were born David, Solomon and our Lord Jesus Christ. And the line of Zerah ended up in Ireland, Scotland and England. Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, Prince William and Prince Harry are actually descended from both lines! Read about it in *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*. (To be continued.)

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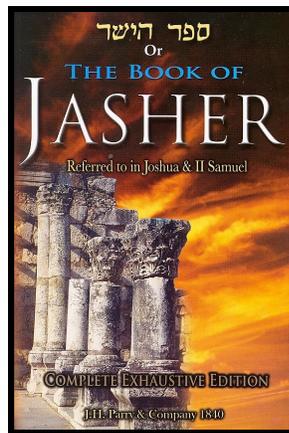


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