

The Literary Inner Logic of Genesis 38 by means of Sexual Incontinence and Deception Motif¹⁾

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1. Introduction

In Gen 37-50, the so-called Joseph cycle, an abrupt shift takes place in chapter 38. The focus shifts away from Jacob, Joseph, and Joseph's other brothers to Judah and Tamar. Two motifs - sexual incontinence and deception - are central to the narrative. Regarding the interpretive problem of Gen 38, scholars raise two major questions: what inner logic and theology of Gen 38 do those motifs construct and how does Gen 38 relate to its surrounding chapters? A number of scholars argue that Gen 38 is an individually contained narrative and that as a result, Gen 38 creates discontinuity within the sequence of the Joseph cycle.²⁾ Others, on the opposite extreme, assert that Gen

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1) This paper was read at the International SBL held in Berlin (2017). Its original title was "Tamar is in the right, not Judah."

2) The following is the list of major scholars who stress discontinuity: Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary*, tr. J. J. Scullion, S.J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 50; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 1 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), 299; George W. Goats, "Widow's Rights: A Crux in the Structure of Gen. 38," *CBQ* 34 (1972), 461-66; idem, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50," *JBL* 93 (1974), 15-21; Gerhard von Rod, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 356-57;

38 exhibits clear cohesion and unity in its literary and theological context.³⁾ Thus they argue that there is a considerable thematic, literary, and theological connection of Gen 38 to the chapters which surround it. In their view, the story of Judah and Tamar should not be excluded from Jacob's "family history." In this paper, agreeing in part with the argument that the story of Judah and Tamar is essential to interpret the larger narrative sequence of Gen 37-39 in the Joseph cycle, I will explore Gen 38's literary inner logic (plot and theme) and canonical relationship to its context, as well as interpretive problems of the current text.

2. Historical-Critical Problems

There are many lenses for examining the historical critical problems that Gen 38 poses. For our purposes, I will examine

Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, tr. M. E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 395-6; J. A. Soggin, "Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)," in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Heather A. McKay and David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup 162 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 281; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: Clark, 1930), 449-50; and Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 307.

- 3) These scholars stress continuity even though they do not ignore historical-critical issues of the passage: A. J. Lambe, "Judah's Development: The Pattern of Departure-Transition-Return," *JSOT* 89 (1999), 53-68; Aaron Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained Through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured through Judah and Tamar," *JSOT* 62 (1994), 37-48; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, WBC 2 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1994), 364-5; Richard J. Clifford, S. J., "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," *CBQ* 66 (2004), 519-32; and Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 429-56.

them in three respects: (1) textual problems of the inconsistent use of קָרָא in gender in vv. 3-5 and vv. 29-30; (2) literary problems related to the birth report placed in both the opening and the closing sections of Gen 38; and (3) source-critical problems of the chapter in relation to its neighboring materials.

2.1. Textual Problems of the Inconsistent Use of קָרָא in Gender

The Hebrew word קָרָא is used in the formulaic references to the naming of children both in the opening and the closing sections of Gen 38 (vv. 3-5 and 29-30). First, in the opening section, וַיִּקְרָא in v. 3 is the masculine form, whereas וַתִּקְרָא in vv. 4-5 is the feminine. As J. A. Emerton points out, the majority of Hebrew manuscripts show differences in the gender of this verb in vv. 3-5. The Targum of Onkelos and the Peshitta have the masculine form (וַיִּקְרָא) in v. 3. In contrast, the Samaritan text has the feminine.⁴⁾ Regarding this inconsistency in gender in vv. 3-5, some scholars have emendated not only וַיִּקְרָא into וַתִּקְרָא in v. 3⁵⁾ but also וַהֲיָה in v. 5 into וַהֲיִא in order to sharpen their argument.⁶⁾ Secondly, the gender inconsistency related to קָרָא occurs again in the closing section of Gen 38. Some Hebrew manuscripts have the feminine form וַתִּקְרָא in v. 29; the Samaritan text, the Peshitta, and Pseudo-Jonathan also have וַתִּקְרָא in both vv. 29 and 30.⁷⁾

Our current problem is what significance this observation about the inconsistency of קָרָא in gender has. It is difficult

4) J. A. Emerton, "Some problems in Genesis XXXVIII," *VT* 25 (1975), 338-61 (esp. 339).

5) Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 48.

6) For this, see Emerton, "Some problems," 339; and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 48.

7) As cited by Emerton, "Some problems," 339.

to assume that vv. 3-5 is textually in agreement with vv. 29-30, even though v. 3 could be with vv. 4-5, and v. 29 with v. 30. There is no reason to prefer one reading to the other. Nevertheless, as many scholars already note, it is not too much to say that vv. 3-5 and vv. 29-30 form an *inclusio* by the use of the children naming reference with נָקָדָה, which brackets the whole chapter. One may raise a question in argument as to whether or not the *inclusio* sets Gen 38 apart from its larger context. It is true that the *inclusio* is an intentional literary framework set by the editor and clearly shows that vv. 3-30 constitute an individually contained narrative. However, it should not be missed that vv. 1-2 are also an editorial sign, which links the rest of the verses of Gen 38 to Gen 37.

Although E. A. Speiser argues that the circumstantial clause וַיְהִי בִּעֵת הַהוּא in 38:1 is formulaic and would amount to “at the precise time that Joseph was being sold to Potiphar,”⁸⁾ the clause appears to speak something in theme has much to do with before and after Gen 38. Rather, Gen 37 and 39, integrated through the temporal clauses in 37:36 and 39:1, together indicate that Gen 38 should be interpreted in relation to its larger context.⁹⁾

2.2. Literary Problems of the Formulaic Birth Report

As Martin Noth, R. De Vaux, and W. Rudolph point out, the story of Judah and Tamar comes to an end with the etiological birth report of twins in vv. 29-30, namely, Perez and Zerah.¹⁰⁾ According to Claus Westermann, the problem of vv. 29-30 is

8) Speiser, *Genesis*, 297.

9) Judah Goldin, “The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong,” *JBL* 96: (1977), 27-44.

10) As cited by Emerton, “Some problems,” 344.

that the genealogical note of Judah's tribe seems to have no connection to the preceding vv. 12-26.¹¹⁾ Indeed, the etiological birth report in vv. 29-30 is a clue that the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 seems to be a "reflection...of tribal history," as can be observed in Gen 46; Num 26:20f; Ruth 4:18; and 1 Chr 2:4-15. Therefore Emerton, von Rad, Westermann, and Jean-Louis Ska argue that Gen 38, a chapter that historically never existed at all, was subsequently developed by the later addition of the birth report, and has no important function in Gen 37-50, but to tell later readers about one of David's forefathers.¹²⁾

The postulation proposed by Emerton, von Rad, and Westermann about the tribal history of Judah, which Gen 38 alludes to, is insightful. However, their view of the tribal history of Judah does not have enough textual support. The text keeps silent about exactly when Judah leaves his brothers and goes down to Adullam in the land of Canaan and the region that becomes occupied by his different clans with the passing of time. Also, the birth report in vv. 28-30 clearly has a notable literary function in relation to its larger narrative sequence in that it creates a parallel to the youngest brother's victory over the eldest in the Joseph cycle (Gen 48; cf. 25:21b-25). Consequently, it is not reasonable to say that Gen 38, as a newly created story by the belated addition of the birth report, solely provides information about the genealogy of the Davidic line.

11) Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 54.

12) Emerton, "Some problems," 344; von Rod, *Genesis*, 361-2; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 55-7; and Jean-Louis Ska, "The Study of the Book of Genesis: The Beginning of Critical Reading," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, VTSup 152, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David Peterson (Leiden: SBL Press, 2012), 3-26 (esp. 9).

2.3. Source-Critical Problems of Gen 38

The last historical-critical subject to be examined is the source related problems of Gen 38. A number of commentators (Emerton, H. Holzinger, Julius Wellhausen, Speiser, Victor Hamilton, von Rad, and Gordon J. Wenham, for example) attribute Gen 38 unanimously to the J source.¹³⁾ The presumption, if true, that the larger context of its surroundings consists of E, P, and J¹⁴⁾ could be evidence for the argument that the final redactor had inserted the individually contained story (Gen 38), exclusively composed of J, into its present place in order to preserve it like other individual narratives about Jacob's sons.¹⁵⁾ But it is necessary for this presumptive claim to be examined again.

First, there are tensions related to source in Gen 38. The genealogical frame constituted by the birth reports in vv. 3-5 and 28-30 points to P rather than J, according to the general definition of P.¹⁶⁾ Even though the divine name יהוה occurs

13) Even though scholars acknowledge that the kernel of the narrative (vv. 12-26) has expanded to its final form and shape and there are some tensions in source, they designate its source as J. As cited by Emerton, "Some problems," 346-52; von Rod, *Genesis*, 361-2; Speiser, *Genesis*, 295-300; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 14-6; and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 49.

14) While ruling out Gen 38 in his study of the Joseph story, Coats shows a thorough analysis of the Joseph cycle. For this, see George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story*, CBQMS 4 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 60-74.

15) See my notes 9-10 above.

16) According to Hamilton (*The Book of Genesis 1-17*, 14), "the Priestly writer (P) (550-450 B.C.) heavily concerned with chronological, liturgical, and genealogical matters...Unlike J and E, P is not concerned with presenting history as such, but with establishing the basis of Israel's sacral institutions through their connection with history."

in v. 7 and v. 10, it does not mean that the whole chapter should be attributed to J. As Emerton argues, “the use of such common Hebrew expressions as **בַּעַת הַהוּא** in v. 1, **לְבַלְתִּי** in v. 9, **וַיִּרַע בְּעֵינָי** in v. 10, in **רָע** v. 12 and v. 20, **נָא** in v. 16 and v. 25, and **יָדַע** in v. 16 and v. 26” are not in accordance with normal Hebrew practice.¹⁷⁾

Furthermore, proposing that there was an orally handed-down tradition of Judah and Tamar before the redactor put it into its current place and completed the composition of the Joseph cycle with its final shape, Cassuto makes a convincing suggestion worth considering that Gen 37:32-33 forms a very close parallel to Gen 38:25-6 in the use of verbs:¹⁸⁾

The verbs in Gen 37:32-3:

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ...וַיֹּאמְרוּ...הִכָּרֶנָּא...וַיִּבְרָה וַיֹּאמֶר

The verbs in Gen 38:25-6:

שָׁלְחָה...וְתֹאמֶר הִכָּרֶנָּא...וַיִּבֶר...וַיֹּאמֶר

In spite of this striking parallel, many commentators designate Gen 37:32-33 as E and Gen 38:25-6 as J. They are reluctant to acknowledge that there is a thematic connection between the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) and that of the selling of Joseph (Gen 37) on the basis of a literary relation.¹⁹⁾ In addition, they overlook the fact that Gen 39 is also unanimously attributed to J.²⁰⁾ It is unreasonable in any way to rule out this evidence supporting the current chapter’s relation to its

17) Emerton, “Some problems,” 346.

18) Umberto Cassuto, “The Story of Tamar and Judah,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies vol. 1*, tr. Israel Abraham (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1973), 29-31.

19) For example, Emerton, “Some problems,” 347.

20) Speiser, *Genesis*, 301-4.

surrounding larger sequence. Accordingly, Gen 38's source related problems in relation to its surrounding materials, as examined above, do not necessarily imply that Gen 38 should be detached from its narrative sequence. Second, the temporal discrepancy between the story of the sale of Joseph (Gen 37, 39-41) and the story of the migration of Jacob's clan into Egypt (46:1-7, 12) in respect to J should also be studied.

It has been long argued that there is a twenty-two years' time space between the story of the sale of Joseph (Gen 37:25-36) and the migration of Jacob's whole family into Egypt (Gen 46:1-7, 12), and this period of time is insufficient for the events of Gen 38.²¹⁾ Even more, 46:12 mentions two grandsons of Judah, sons of Perez. Regarding this question of the chronological relation of the two stories, Emerton provides an interesting presupposition that the story of Judah and Tamar reflects "the period of Judges" and the J redactor had a different understanding of what happened to the tribe of Judah before Judah went down to Egypt.²²⁾ In doing so, Emerton continues, the J redactor did not have difficulty in reconciling the chronological discordance between the two. According to his logic, the J redactor might presume that the events in Gen 38 happened between the sale of Joseph and the migration of Jacob's clan (including Judah's) into Egypt."²³⁾ Even though there seems to be a clear temporal gap between Gen 38 and the story of Joseph, in my view, Emerton's postulation of a relation between Gen 38 and the story of Joseph in terms of J brings Gen 37-50's literary and theological continuity, rather than discontinuity, into relief. Similar to this understanding of the chronological problem, scholars making a literary approach, such as Steven D. Mathewson

21) George Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, 1979), 2:238.

22) Emerton, "Some problems," 347.

23) Emerton, "Some problems," 348.

and W. Lee Humphreys, bridge the twenty-two year temporal gap which may be made among the chapters in the Joseph cycle.²⁴⁾

Lastly, some commentators have brought forth a possibility that the canonical order of Gen 38 in its larger context with respect to J could be different from that of the final canon. Wellhausen considers that Gen 39 is very likely to be a direct continuation of Gen 37.²⁵⁾ In his view, Gen 38 as late J was inserted into its present place. Somewhat differently, George Bush, Otto Eissfeldt, and R. H. Pfeiffer assume that the story of Judah and Tamar originally belonged to an earlier tradition (early J or primitive L or S) about Leah's sons following chs. 34-5.²⁶⁾ This implies that the Joseph cycle once had no story about Judah and Tamar. Concerning this assumption, two significant questions should be asked.

The first question is whether or not placing Gen 38 right after the story of other sons of Leah in Gen 35:21-2 fits the larger Joseph cycle well. It does not seem plausible to me in that the editorial signals in Gen 37:36 and 39:1 shed light on the story of Judah and Tamar as taking place after the selling of Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt and before Judah's migration to Egypt with his other brothers. Furthermore, Gen 38:1 makes the whole narrative of Judah and Tamar fit the narrative sequence in its present place. The whole series of temporal and editorial settings indicate that Judah and his family have now settled in Canaan and not gone down to Egypt yet.

24) Steven D. Mathewson, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," *BS* (1989), 373-92 (esp. 381-4); W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 21-22.

25) As cited by Emerton, "Some problems," 348-52.

26) Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, 2:238; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament An Introduction including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and also the Works of Similar Type from Qumran The History of the Formation of the Old Testament*, tr. Peter R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 192-7; and R. H. Pfeiffer, "A Non-Israelite Source of the Book of Genesis," *ZAW* XLVIII (1932), 66-73.

The second question is how the story's thematic and literary connections to its nearer context (Gen 37 and 39) should also be explained if its present location was not the authorial intention. For one thing, the deception motif develops the literary plot of Gen 37 and 38. Additionally, the irony related to the sexual incontinence and the deception motifs together divulge the related plots of Gen 38 and 39. Hence, Gen 38 is the stage on which the two explicit motifs coexist and function as a key linking the chapter's preceding and following narratives. Consequently, in answer to those two questions about the possibility that the canonical order of J within the Joseph cycle may differ from that of the final canon, the conclusion can be reached that Gen 38 fits best in its present place and that source-critical problems in terms of J do not rule out its literary and thematic connection to its nearer context (Gen 37 and 39), even though the source analysis effectively designates the chapter as an individually contained literary narrative.

Until now in this section, I have re-examined arguments for the discontinuity that the story of Judah and Tamar may cause in its present place. The historical-critical problems (textual-, formal-, and source-critical) supporting the arguments for discontinuity have been re-evaluated diachronically in order to examine whether the academic results really show that Gen 38 creates discontinuity within the narrative sequence. My answer is no. In my view, the diachronic study of Gen 38 leaves room for its thematic and literary connection to its nearer and larger context. As a result, a synchronic study of Gen 38 should at this point be made in order to explore why Gen 38 is in its canonical place and what function it achieves there. In the following section, therefore, I will primarily look for the continuity of Gen 38 and its context.

3. An Alternative Reading of Gen 38

According to Thomas W. Mann, the whole book of Genesis in a synchronic way has a theological unity, in that it reflects the theme that “God seeks to use dysfunctional families as agents of divine grace to all the families of the earth.”²⁷⁾ Being located right after the *toledot* formula in 37:2,²⁸⁾ which singles out the story of Joseph, the inner logic of Gen 38 is constructed while defining what “tension between conflict and reconciliation” Judah and Tamar face. Identifying the tension found in virtue of the motifs of deception and man’s sexual incontinence makes readers struggle to understand the plot of Gen 38 in its canonical context.

Gen 38 dramatizes the story of Judah and Tamar through a plot that moves from tragedy to ironic ending in an unexpected way.²⁹⁾ Even though different views of its plot have been offered,³⁰⁾ our text is configured in two major divisions: (1) Judah’s

27) Thomas W. Mann, “All the Families of the Earth” - The Theological Unity of Genesis, *Interpretation* 45:4 (1991), 341-53 (esp. 341).

28) Even though the discussion of the *toledot* formula - whether it concludes the preceding literary unit or includes a new - has been yet completed, אֵלֶּה תְּלִדוֹת יַעֲקֹב in 37:2, which proceeds the story of development of generations like the one in 2:4, can be distinguished in use from the one in Gen 5:1 and 6:9 followed by the list of genealogy or generations. For this, see George W. Coats, *Genesis: With and Introduction to Narrative Literature*, FOTL 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 317-20; and Mann, “All the Families of the Earth,” 343-6.

29) Mathewson designates Gen 38 as a ‘U-shaped’ comedy plot. In my view, the story constitutes an unexpected irony rather than ‘a happy ending.’ Even though I agree with some poignant insights of the overall understating of the plot, his considering the whole story of Judah and Tamar a comedy comes to decrease the narrative dynamics of it. For this, see Mathewson, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38,” 375-81.

30) For the plot Humphreys sees a literary trajectory in this story on the base of his understanding that the genre of Gen 38 is a novella. According to Humphreys’

imperiling of the future line of his family in vv. 1-11; and (2) continuation of Judah's future line through the sexual relation between Judah and Tamar in vv. 12-30. Each of the two has its own subunits: vv. 1-5 and 6-11 and vv. 12-23, 24-26, and 27-30, built up by two formative motifs - mutual deception and sexual incontinence.

3.1. Judah's Imperiling of the Future Line of His Family (38:1-11)

There is a scholarly consensus that vv. 1-11 constructs the preamble of this story (introductory exposition in vv. 1-5 and Judah's practical imperiling in vv. 6-11), which represents Judah's imperiling of the future line of his family.³¹⁾

view, there are five divisions in Gen 38: exposition (vv. 1-6); complications (vv. 7-11); further complications (vv. 12-24); resolution (vv. 25-26); and denouement (vv. 27-30). Similarly, Clifford considers it an acting edition of a play. In this view, Clifford thinks that Gen 38 consists of three Acts: Act I (vv. 1-11) having two scenes (vv. 1-5 and 6-11); Act II (vv. 12-23) three scenes (vv. 12-14, 15-20, and 21-23); and Act III (vv. 24-30) two scenes (vv. 24-26 and 27-30). In addition, Steven D. Matheson finds literary devices - "disguise, mistaken identity, surprise, sudden reversal of misfortune, rescue from disaster, and reversal of conventional expectations" - which are familiar to modern comedy. Admittedly, the suggestions made by Humphreys, Clifford, and Matheson are quite helpful for our further discussion, I believe. Whether or not their modern literary theories really pertain to ancient Hebrew literary genre of Gen 38 should be taken into consideration according to the Hebrew text. For the details, see Clifford, "Genesis 38," 523-4; Humphrey, *Joseph and His Family*, 38 and 58; Mathewson, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," 375-6.

31) I am convinced of the structuring of Gen 38 proposed by H. J. Boecker, and Westermann. For the details I refer to H. J. Boecker, "Überlegungen zur 'Geschichte Tamars' (Gen 38)," in "Gott gedachte es gut zu machen": *Theologische Überlegungen zum Alten Testament*, Biblisch-theologische Studien 54 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 128; and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 49.

3.1.1. Introductory Exposition (vv. 1-5)

Linking Gen 38 to the preceding and following chapters (37:25-8, 36 and 39:1) וַיְהִי בְּעֵת הַהוּא in v. 1 sheds light on the circumstance in which Judah is currently situated: leaving his other brothers, Judah goes down to Adullam. With this introductory setting the first birth report (vv. 3-5) further implies Judah's association with the Canaanites. By marrying a Canaanite woman, Judah economically, sexually, morally, and even religiously associates himself with the people of Adullam. But the heightening focus is on his family; the plot introduces Judah's three sons "in a breathless pace" and is not reluctant to lead the readers' attention to what is yet to come.³²⁾

3.1.2. Judah's practical imperiling in vv. 6-11³³⁾

Unlike the larger two divisions and other subunits, vv. 6-11 begin without temporal clauses. Yet the developing plot on the base of vv. 1-5 triggers the beginning of tragedy for Judah's family: because of Er's wickedness, the Lord puts him to death (v. 7); by not fulfilling the levirate duty to impregnate Tamar as his widowed sister-in-law, Judah's second son Onan is seen as wicked in the Lord's sight and is put to death as well (v. 10). Even if it seems that our passage keeps silent concerning the reasons Judah's two sons were wicked in the Lord's sight and as a result were put to death,³⁴⁾ the plot puts its major

32) Mathewson, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," 376; and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 40.

33) Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Jacob Story?" in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, VTSup 152, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David Peterson (Leiden: SBL Press, 2012), 213-29 (esp. 220).

34) Mathewson expounds why Judah's two elder sons were wicked in the Lord's

focus on what Judah is about to do to his daughter-in-law Tamar after the death of his two sons. This unit ends with Judah's attempt to send Tamar back to her father's home to live as a widow (vv. 10-11). Susan Niditch points out the desperate situation in which Tamar is placed, "Tamar is no longer a virgin and does not belong in her father's home. Yet she can no longer bear children in the patriarchal line."³⁵⁾ Still it not only leads Tamar to take the initiative in taking a new turn of her situation, but also changes the fate of Judah's family line.

3.2. Continuation of Judah's Future Line (38:12-30)

A considerably long time passes since Judah placed Tamar in a very weak situation both economically and sociologically by sending her back to her father's home. At a very slow pace the plot forms its irony, spelling out how Judah's future line will be continued. This literary section can be divided into three subunits:³⁶⁾ (1) the sexual relation of Judah and Tamar (vv. 12-23); (2) the ironical reversal of Judah's and Tamar's positions (vv. 24-26); and (3) resolution of the tension (vv. 27-30).

sight and the Lord put them to death while reminding suggestions proposed by H. Freedmann and S. R. Driver. In my view, however, their reasoning is not convincing enough. Driver asserts that **כִּשְׁכֹּשְׁ** in v. 9 should be understood as a frequentative use of the perfect and translated "whenever he went in." And Freedmann deduces Er's death from Onan's death. But the relevant interpretation of the current issue of v. 7-10 cannot be made in this single respect. See Mathewson, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," 376-7.

35) Susan Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38," *HTR* 72 (1979), 143-9 (esp. 146).

36) According to Clifford ("Genesis 38," 523), there are literary signals (notices of time) introducing a new unit: **וַיְרֻבוּ הַיָּמִים** (v. 12); **וַיְהִי כְּמִשְׁלֹשׁ הַדָּרָשִׁים** (v. 24). However, he misses **וַיְהִי בַעַת לְדִתָּהּ** (v. 27). So I designate vv. 27-30 as a subunit ("resolution of tension") of the second large division.

3.2.1. Sexual relation of Judah and Tamar (vv. 12-23)

Tamar is commanded to return to her father's home to live as a widow with Judah's promise of Shelah to her. But as time goes on she realizes that Shelah is fully grown and has not been given to impregnate her as promised. At this time (וַיִּרְבוּ הַיָּמִים, v. 12), Judah goes up to Timnah to visit his sheepshearers after he is comforted for his Canaanite wife's death (v. 12). Our narrator does not forget to provide a significant comment here: "it has been told to Tamar" (וַיִּגַּד לְתָמָר, v. 13). Finally, her bad situation makes her "hit upon a desperate expedient."³⁷ She takes off her widow's garment (וַתֹּסֶר בְּגָדֵי אֶלְמְנוּתָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ), covers up (וַתִּכְסֶם בַּצָּעִירָהּ) and wraps herself (וַתִּתְעַלֶּה), and sits down at the entrance of Enaim (v. 14). Overshadowing what has not yet come, the clothes used here and in 37:31 "conceal the intentions underneath,"³⁸ Judah impregnates Tamar without knowing who she is (לֹא יָדָע in v. 16). Ironically, Judah has no idea of what is happening between Tamar and himself.

In this unit, the plot brings forth a theological question: who is truly sinful - Judah or Tamar? I argue that it is Judah who lies and sins in three respects. First, the plot of this unit intentionally avoids indicating whether or not Tamar really makes it her purpose to deceive her father-in-law by covering up and wrapping herself with a veil. There is no doubt that she hides who she is and that Judah is deceived by her. Yet her main purpose in hiding her identity is letting her last kinsman-redeemer fulfill his levirate duty. The thing that is worth noting at this point is that the narrator keeps his positive tone while describing the extremely unusual means taken by Tamar. In fact, the narrative truth, as Niditch asserts, is reflected in the evidence

37) Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained Through Sin," 40.

38) Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained Through Sin," 40.

that “the social fabric as a whole is weakened by her [Tamar’s] problem and extremely unusual means are allowed to rectify the situation.”³⁹⁾

Second, regarding what occurs in vv. 12-23, a number of commentators explain that Tamar is the liar and that the deception motif dominates the following narrative flow (vv. 12-23).⁴⁰⁾ But there is the other formative motif which should not be missed in this unit. That is, the man’s sexual incontinence causes a traditionally and morally unexpected and unacceptable result. In a subtle way, vv. 12-23 keep focusing on Judah’s behavior; these verses are obsessed with his uncontrolled sexual desire. This incident takes place as soon as he recovers from his grief for his wife’s death (v. 12). When he comes up to Timnah to visit his sheepshearers, he takes Tamar for a prostitute, זֹנֶה, even without having suitable payment. If the connotation of זֹנֶה is taken into consideration here,⁴¹⁾ it is Judah to whom the narrative points as the person taking a prohibited sexual relationship. Judah’s brief and simple utterance “let me sleep with you” (הִבְהֵנָּא אִבּוֹא אֵלֶיךָ) in v. 16 dramatically shows how uncontrolled is his sexual desire. In order to gratify it, Judah promises a young goat (גְּרִי־עִזִּים) from his flock to Tamar as payment in v. 17. It should be observed that שְׂעִיר עִזִּים is also employed by Judah himself and his other brothers to deceive their father Jacob in 37:31. The goat is the symbol of deception in both ch. 37 and ch. 38.

Third, one may find another of Judah’s false behaviors in

39) Niditch, “The Wronged Woman Righted,” 146.

40) Clifford, “Genesis 38,” 524; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 38; and Mathewson, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38,” 378.

41) S. Erlandsson, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, tr. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 99; and Leon J. Wood, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, eds. R Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 246.

vv. 20-23. In the foregoing narrative sequence Judah covers up the fact that he had a sexual relationship with a זֹנָה by not telling his friend the Adullamite, who is instead searching for a cult prostitute (קְדִישָׁה) to redeem his pledge (v. 21), that is, his seal, cord, and staff in his hand (בְּיָדָהּ, v. 18), which he left as surety in lieu of payment (vv. 16-8). As shown above, referring to illicit sexual intercourse, the word זֹנָה may reflect that Judah recognizes himself as having had a sexual relationship outside the marriage bond (v. 15),⁴²⁾ whereas קְדִישָׁה denotes a temple prostitute who had sexual relationships with men in a foreign fertility cult.⁴³⁾ The text does not clearly tell whether Judah actively takes part in the fertility cult. Hence, we are left with this question: why Judah did not ask his friend to find a normal prostitute, זֹנָה, after the Adullamite failed to find any shrine prostitute קְדִישָׁה (vv. 20-21). It is probable that Judah does not want his illicit sexual relationship with a prostitute even without suitable payment to become known. Contrary to his expectation, however, a striking irony unfolds in the following unit (vv. 24-26).

3.2.2. Ironic reversal of Judah's and Tamar's positions (vv. 24-26)

Finally, the plot reaches its climax. Exposing Judah's irresponsibility for Tamar and sexual hypocrisy, these three verses articulate the huge irony suddenly reversing the preceding story line and disclose what has happened to Judah and Tamar. Again the pace quickens, with וַיְהִי כְּמִשְׁלֵשׁ חֳדָשִׁים Tamar's pregnancy exposes Judah to himself (וַיִּגְדַּל, see v. 13) and she comes into

42) Erlandsson, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 99; and Wood, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 246.

43) F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: Coded with Stong's Concordance Numbers* (Boston: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 6948.

danger of being burned for adultery (v. 24). At this very moment Tamar returns the pledged items to their owner to let him recognize (נָכַר) who impregnated her (v. 25). Five Hebrew verbs are used in vv 25-6 to reverse Tamar’s misfortune and conventional expectations combine the two motifs - deceptions and sexual incontinence:

שָׁלַחָהּ ... וְתֹאמַר הַכֶּרֶן־נָא ... וַיִּכַּר ... וַיֹּאמֶר

The colossal irony of ch. 38 leads to Judah’s recognition (נָכַר) that “she is more righteous than I am, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah,” (v. 26, NIV) proclaiming that Judah’s levirate duty to Tamar comes to be fulfilled.

3.2.3 Resolution of Tension between Judah and Tamar in vv. 27-30

What follows, Tamar’s delivery of twin sons in vv. 27-30, finally resolves the tension between conflict and reconciliation that Judah and Tamar faced.⁴⁴⁾ It is now reported that Tamar’s twins have been born to Judah who lost two sons (Er and Onan). Yet this story comes to an end with another irony. Describing the even more interesting behavior of the twins, in which the second twin breaks through ahead of his older brother, these three verses connect the whole chapter to the previous and following narratives in Genesis (25:19-37:1; ch. 48) by fulfilling “one of the major themes of Genesis.”⁴⁵⁾

4. Conclusion

The above alternative study, discerning literary inner logic of Gen 38 built by sexual incontinence and deception motifs,

44) Clifford, “Genesis 37-50,” 220-21.

45) Goldin, “The Youngest Son,” 29.

pertains to its plot and theme. As already explored, the whole story of Judah and Tamar, which is bracketed by the *inclusio* of the two birth reports, mainly reflects the imperilment and continuation of Judah's family line and constitutes what Gen 38 is all about. The overriding theme of the chapter is Judah's propagation of his dysfunctional family with the ongoing tension between Judah and Tamar.⁴⁶⁾ By way of its inner logic, therefore, Gen 38 constitutes its close canonical relation to the context. Gen 38 creates a literary shift between chs. 37-9. Still, Gen 38's historical-critical issues do not necessarily mean that Gen 38 has no literary connection to those chapters which surround it. The story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 is cohesive and in unity with its context of the whole Joseph cycle. Additionally, the alternative study which I suggested above not only demonstrates the literary and thematic connections of Gen 38 to its canonical context, but also shows how the literary shift from Gen 37 to 38 and again from 38 to 39 constitutes the dramatic transformation that Judah and his brothers undergo

46) The question of whom Gen 38 is all about has been hotly debated by many commentators. Among them, von Rad (Genesis, 357) sees the theme in Tamar and her actions. Through their feministic readings H. J. Boecker ("Überlegungen zur 'Geschichte Tamars,'" 522-3) and Niditch ("The Wronged Woman Righted," 143-9) also designate Tamar as the protagonist of this story. However, as Clifford rightly points out, Tamar plays just "a subsidiary role" whereas Judah figures in every verse in the preamble part (vv. 1-11). In viewing the narrative function of the two birth reports (vv. 3-5 and 27-30), I have been convinced of Esther Marie Menn's insightful argument about what Gen 38 is really about: "One may conclude that the central issue driving the biblical narrative consists of the transition from one generation of males to the next. Since the motifs of birth and naming appear earlier in the narrative as well (Gen 38:3-5), Gen 38 may be viewed as a double tale of procreation, in which initial biological and social discontinuity is twice overcome, first in Gen 38:1-5 and next in Gen 38:6-30." For the further details of Menn's argument, see *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 15.

through the two motifs of deception and sexual incontinence. All in all, the overriding theme of the Joseph cycle is identified through the main canonical function of Gen 38. God was, is, and will be working out His purpose to bless all the families of the earth even through dysfunctional families, as He did through Jacob's sons.

<주요어>

창세기 38장, 정경적 독법, 주요 논리, 성관계와 거짓말 모티프, 문학적-신학적 함의

<Key Words>

Genesis 38, Canonical Reading, Inner logic, sexual intercourse and deceit motif, literary and theological implications

* Received August 29, 2018, Revised September 25, 2018, Accepted October 07, 2018

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<초록>

창세기 38장의 문학적 중심 논리

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창세기 37-50장은 흔히 ‘요셉 싸이클’이라고 불린다. 그런데 이 요셉 싸이클은 38장을 기점으로 그 내러티브의 주된 내용과 초점이 급격하게 전환된다. 즉 창세기 38장 이전과 이후에 주요 인물들로 등장하는 야곱과 그의 아들들은 내러티브의 무대에서 갑자기 온데간데없이 사라져 버리고, 유다와 그의 며느리 다말의 이야기로 진행된다는 것이다. 더욱이 통념상 부정하다고 생각할 수 있는 ‘성관계’(sexual incontinence)와 ‘거짓말’(deception)이라고 하는 두 가지 모티프가 창세기 38장의 내러티브 흐름을 주도한다는 사실은 독자들의 눈길을 사로잡기에 충분할 만큼 충격적이다. 그렇다면 이처럼 부정적인 뉘앙스가 강한 두 가지 모티프를 사용하면서까지 창세기 38장의 저자가 전달하고자 하는 중심 논리와 신학적 의미는 무엇일까? 또한 해당 내러티브 본문과 그 주변 내러티브는 어떠한 상관관계를 가지고 있는 것일까? 이러한 문제점들에 대해서 학자들은 오랫동안 씨름해 왔다. 일부 학자들은 통시적 접근방법을 사용하여 요셉 싸이클의 내러티브 흐름상 불연속성을 야기하는 창세기 38장의 편집 및 요셉 싸이클의 역사적 형성 과정을 주로 살핀 반면, 또 다른 일군의 학자들은 공시적 방법론을 통해 창세기 38장의 내적 통일성은 물론 주변 내러티브와도 문학적(주제적)으로나 신학적으로 유기적 연관성을 갖는다고 주장하기도 한다. 따라서 논지는 이 논문에서 선행 연구 결과들의 도움을 토대로 정경적 접근법을 사용하되, 먼저는 최근까지 진행된 유의미한 역사비평학적 연구 결과들을 살펴보고, 창세기

38장의 해석상의 난제들에 대한 답을 모색해 볼 것이다. 그리고 난 연후에 해당 본문이 주변 내러티브들과 갖는 정경적 기능과 신학적 의미를 탐구해 보고자 한다.

<Abstract>

The Literary Inner Logic of Genesis 38 by means of Sexual Incontinence and Deception Motifs

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In Gen 37-50, the so-called Joseph cycle, an abrupt narrative shift takes place in Gen 38. The chapter does not follow the story of Jacob, Joseph, and Jacob's other sons: Its narrative focus shifts away from Jacob and Joseph to Judah and Tamar, and two motifs -sexual incontinence and deception- are central to the narrative. And then, Gen 39 resumes the narrative flow of the Joseph cycle where Gen 37 leaves off. These narrative features raise interpretive questions: First, what is the purpose of the insertion of Gen 38 into that of Jacob and his sons? Second, why is the narrative of Judah and Tamar placed between Gen 38 and 39, not elsewhere in the Joseph cycle?

To answer these questions, a number of scholars argue that Gen 38 is an individually contained narrative and that as a result, Gen 38 creates discontinuity within the narrative sequence of the Joseph cycle. According to them, it is the work of the final redactor who combined the diverse sources or traditions appearing to be in conflict. Others, on the opposite extreme, assert that Gen 38 exhibits clear cohesion and unity in its literary and theological context, even though it would be chronologically out of place. Thus, they say that there is considerable thematic, literary, and theological connection of Gen 38 to the chapters which surround it. In their view, the story of Judah and Tamar should not be excluded from Jacob's "family history." Agreeing in part with the argument that the story of Judah and Tamar

is essential to interpret the larger narrative sequence of Gen 37-39 in the Joseph cycle, this study will suggest sexual incontinence and deception motifs construct the literary inner logic of Gen 38 and its theological implications. This study will also explore how Gen 38 canonically relates to its surrounding chapters.