

# Genesis 38:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.

## Analysis

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**And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy bro...** This passage is part of the Joseph narrative, a masterfully crafted account demonstrating God's sovereign providence working through human choices and circumstances to accomplish His redemptive purposes. The Joseph cycle shows how God transforms evil intentions into instruments of salvation.

Central themes include divine providence orchestrating events toward redemptive ends, the testing and refinement of character through suffering and success, forgiveness overcoming betrayal and injustice, and the preservation of God's covenant people through famine. Joseph's rise from slavery to second-in-command of Egypt illustrates how God exalts the humble and uses seeming disasters for ultimate good.

Theologically, these chapters reveal:

1. God's meticulous sovereignty over all events, even evil human actions
2. suffering as preparation for future service rather than punishment
3. forgiveness as reflecting divine character and enabling reconciliation
4. God's covenant faithfulness across generations ensuring the survival and blessing of His people
5. how present suffering gains meaning when viewed from the perspective of God's larger purposes.

Joseph's words "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20) epitomize biblical theodicy and providence.

## Historical Context

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The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

## Study Questions

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1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

## Interlinear Text

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לֹא־יְבַקֵּשׁ אֶל־בָּת־אָחִיךְ בְּעֵבֶד מֵאָחִיךְ  
said And Judah unto Onan Go in wife to thy brother and marry  
H559 H3063 H209 H413 H802 H251 H2992

וְרָאֵת תִּרְאֶת מִפְּנֵי כָּל־בָּנָה וְרָאֵת תִּרְאֶת מִפְּנֵי כָּל־בָּנָה  
her and raise up seed to thy brother  
H853 H6965 H2233 H251

## Additional Cross-References

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**Leviticus 18:16** (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness.

**Ruth 1:11** (Parallel theme): And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?