

## TAMAR – Set Aside on a Shelf; Forgotten

Where do you turn with life's struggles – to yourself? to family and friends? to comfortable patterns? to God?

Women, like men, have a place in the Bible and in our world. God has not forgotten us. We are sinners and aliens just like men. The history we read in God's Word is one of grace working through the fall of mankind – making the last first.

Tamar was one of five women in the genealogy of Jesus, located in the book of Matthew. (Three were guilty of immorality – Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba – one was a godly Gentile woman – Ruth – and one was a godly young Jewish woman – Mary).

I Corinthians 1:27 – But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

Naming five women in the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel would have been considered extremely unusual at that time. Women in those days had no standing. This was a social statement by Matthew showing that Jesus would forever change the world's perception of women. There would be no gender distinction in the church in that God loves men and women equally. (not talking about our roles, but about our relationship with JESUS).

Galatians 3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

God uses women in His plan! Isn't that marvelous! We are useful and special to God.

Additionally, Tamar is honored not only in the genealogy of Jesus but also:

1. Ruth 4:12 – May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.

This is a statement intended to honor both Ruth and Boaz. This is a holy occasion. It was a blessing given to them on their wedding.

2. King David and his son Absalom both named their daughters Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1; 14:27). Why would that be? A name was more than a label. It represented a person's character and destiny.

Tamar's name means "Date Tree" or "Palm Tree" and it is believed that she was a beautiful, tall and stately woman.

Several verses to keep in mind as we study Tamar:

Deuteronomy 25:5-6 – If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. (The Levirate Law).

Leviticus 21:9 – And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire. (Penalty for Prostitution)

Yet note as we read the story, that Judah ultimately says: "She hath been more righteous than I"

Tamar was driven by one overwhelming need (to have a child to carry on her husband's name). She sacrificed her reputation and nearly her life to achieve her goal. The men in her life had failed to fulfill their responsibilities and left her a childless widow. However, her daring behavior resulted, not in ruin, but in the fulfillment of her hopes to bear children.

So, how do we evaluate her behavior and what lessons do we learn from her story told in Genesis 38?

In ancient times, a man's name lived on through his sons. To die without a male heir was to be erased from history. So, the ancient custom, which ultimately became the Levirate Law, was that if a man died without a child, his brother would marry and impregnate his widow. The son born from the widow would inherit the name and estate of the deceased brother. It was a disgrace for a brother to refuse to honor his brother by not fulfilling this duty. The widow was honor bound to preserve her husband's name. She couldn't just move on with her life. This took sacrifice by both the widow and the living brother.

Ancient Hittite and Assyrian laws also regulated this duty. In fact, the laws also supported marriage of the father-in-law to his son's widow if no brother fulfilled the duty. (This is later prohibited in God's Word). However, it may have been considered a legitimate way to save a family member from having his name cut off. And, if Judah was a widow at the time of Tamar's relationship with him, there was no sin against his wife.

Inheritance laws further complicated the situation: With 3 sons, the oldest received a double portion, so Er would receive 50% of the estate and Onan and Shelah would each receive 25%. When Er died without a child, the oldest Onan would receive two-thirds of the estate and Shelah one-third. So, the duty to produce a heir for his dead brother was a threat to Onan's financial position once Er died. So, this would be an extraordinary sacrifice. Onan would be sacrificing for the good of his brother's child and not for himself.

Onan was supposed to father children through Tamar for his brother, Er. This is the same act as that of the "kinsman-redeemer" found in the book of Ruth. The closest of kin was to father a child to carry on the line of the deceased husband. Although the act may seem offensive to us today, what do you think God's purpose was in decreeing such a plan?

Genesis 38 appears to be an interruption in the story of Joseph. This Judah-Tamar episode seems to interrupt the drama of Joseph after he is chained and carried off to Egypt. However, Judah's storyline is key. Judah has wandered from his family and becomes involved with the Canaanites. Certainly, he is not spiritually where he should be. Why did he leave his family? Could it have been tied to his actions involving Joseph? However, through his interaction with Tamar, he recognizes her righteousness and his lack and as we continue through Genesis, he ultimately returns to his family

and even offers himself in lieu of one of his brothers in Egypt. Judah is the line to the Messiah and God takes this experience and Tamar to bring him to where he should be.

Assertiveness of Christian Women, by John Scanzoni, Christianity Today, June 4, 1976 – Specifically, such assertiveness in women is healthful for men. We males would all be better off if God-gifted women were vigorously exercising their talents on our behalf and calling us to account where we have acted selfishly or unjustly towards them or others.

In the book, “Lost Women of the Bible” by Carolyn Curtis James, she refers to Tamar as an “ezer-warrior who rescues men”. Ms. James views Tamar’s actions as rescuing Judah’s two sons from extinction by the birth of her twins and rescuing Judah from spiritual decline.

Believer’s Bible Commentary – Prostitution was an expression of worship in the ancient Near East. Pagan peoples often believed that fertility gods granted blessings to those who practiced cultic prostitution. The sexual intercourse symbolized the hoped-for fertility and abundance of harvest. It may be that when Judah saw Tamar he took her for a shrine prostitute and had intercourse with her to ensure a good crop of wool. Judah had already fraternized with the world by marrying a Canaanite woman and then arranging for his sons to marry a Canaanite woman, while in the sheep business with a Canaanite. Judah paid a price for his actions. **God is a God of separation; when we fraternize with the world, we pay an awful price.**

God is the God of eternal surprises. He takes the unfit, desperate, and profane and uses them to his eternal and holy purposes.

God the Father allowed His own Son to be intimately linked with fallen human beings from whom He was descended.

Let's review what had happened in Tamar's life:

1. Her father and father-in-law arranged her marriage, most likely based on financial or political advantages.
2. Her marriage to Er must have been a nightmare. Her husband was "wicked in the Lord's sight" and she lived with his wickedness every day. His wickedness was so terrible that God took his life.
3. Then she was married to Onan, who pretended to be honorable but degraded her by using her for his pleasure and denying her the ability to conceive a child.
4. She was powerless to do anything about her situation with Onan.
5. God stepped in and killed Onan.
6. Judah believes his sons died because of Tamar.
7. Judah sends her to her father to wait to marry his 3<sup>rd</sup> son Shelah.
8. She waits and waits and waits and waits.
9. She could not marry someone else. She was stuck.
10. She had no children and was disgraced.
11. No one stood up and defended her.
12. She hears that Judah has been widowed.
13. She hears he is going to the sheep sheering.
14. She knows his character. (Think about it – would a godly man stop for a prostitute? )
15. She sheds her widows garments and veils herself as a prostitute.
16. Judah sees her, approaches her and they bargain.
17. She demands a pledge – his seal and staff. (the equivalent of Judah's ID – credit card and driver' (Does this remind you of any other stories in Genesis?))

None of the men in Tamar's life fulfilled their responsibilities to her, including her father-in-law Judah.

Judah called Tamar "righteous".

"Lost Women of the Bible" by Carolyn Custis James – "Righteous living – doing the right thing in God's eyes no matter how much it costs you – is a sign that you belong to him...Tamar's righteous actions stand in sharp relief against the wickedness of Judah's sons. Judah couldn't have paid Tamar a higher compliment than to call her righteous. He was saying, 'She has done the right thing. She has done what pleases God. And I have not.'"

A possible contrast (as set forth in “Lost Women of the Bible”):

1. Judah deliberately engaged in prostitution. Tamar fought for her family.
2. Judah’s actions devalued and squandered the promised seed. Tamar regarded his seed as sacred and risked her life to preserve it.
3. Judah was seeking pleasure for himself. Tamar is laying down her life for others.
4. Judah was not righteous. Tamar was righteous.

Ms. James goes on to say, “She wasn’t called righteous for her quiet and gentle spirit. She was righteous by being strong and assertive. She was a godly leader. She confronted Judah, the future leader of Jacob’s family, for turning his back on God’s covenant, and her courageous actions led him back to God. She was committed to build the house of Jacob and used her strength, her wit, and her courage to do what was right in God’s eyes. Judah rightly called her righteous...Dropping a strong woman like Tamar from the lineup of biblical female role models confuses women into thinking it’s okay to turn a blind eye instead of speaking up when sin is in the family or in the church...When we disregard the strength of women, we disable a powerful weapon against the Enemy and remove a vital safeguard for men. God calls the ezer to be strong...Although her tactics wouldn’t work today, the principles she represents do. Women are called to think about where men are leading, to stand against wrong, and to be leaders for God’s purposes...Tamar shatters the traditional definition of what it means to be a woman...For a time, she takes the symbols of authority away from the man who tells her whom to marry and where to live – a man who can sentence her to death without answering to anyone. Before returning the articles Judah had given her, she pointed Judah back to the God of the covenant, the only true authority over both of their lives...Judah gave Tamar the highest marks for her conduct and accepted her righteous rebuke...he became a better man because of his encounter with her...The strength of a woman is a powerful weapon for rescue, healing, and peace when women like Tamar are ‘strong in the Lord.’”

Perez – means “breaking out”

Zerah – means “scarlett”

Perez is in the line of David and lineage of Christ, along with Tamar.

Women of the Bible, a One-Year Devotional Study of Women in Scripture, Ann Spangler & Jean E. Syswerda – The story in Genesis 38 reveals nothing about Tamar’s knowledge of God’s hand in the events of her life. More than likely, she was totally unaware of the power of God at work. But He was at work nevertheless, bringing good out of tragedy and blessing out of less than honorable events. That’s the beauty of this story. God’s power to bring positive things from the negative, even sinful, events of our lives is just as much at work now as in Tamar’s day. We may not see it today or tomorrow – or perhaps ever – but we can trust the God we love to do what he loves: bring blessing to us in spite of ourselves.

God can use everyone and everything to bring about a good result.

Romans 8:28 – And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Jeremiah 29:11 – For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

God takes our desperation and replaces it with hope.

Like Tamar, we all have hopes and dreams for the future.

God wants us to keep our promises. Judah failed to do so.  
Judah did not exhibit faithfulness.

Tamar does even though she takes things into her own hands.

Tamar is a sinner who committed sexual sin requiring the death sentence.  
Tamar was included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ through the mercy of God.

Women of the Bible, God’s Word for the Biblically Inept – Tamar, like many others in the Bible, took action to try to fulfill God’s promise. Yet God is never powerless or late. Although we don’t know how God would have liked Tamar’s situation to be solved, we can be assured he knows the plans he has for each of us in our struggles. Sometimes, we find waiting difficult, but God will work to bring good out of a bad situation and get us through our time of trial.

“Genesis 38 – the story of Tamar and Judah, upon which Unveiled is based – can be seen as a celebration of the father and mother of a tribe. Tamar was held in great respect. Her actions were carried out with the sole intention of having a child to carry on the family. God saw her heart and gave her children. God also knew Judah’s heart and provided a way for him to be restored to his family, as well as his descendants, to carry on his name. Ultimately, God used the line of Judah to give the world the Messiah. The Messiah is often referred to as the Lion of Judah. Jesus is Messiah.”  
Unveiled by Francine Rivers.