

# 1 Tamar

## *A Study in Triumph*

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As we enter into these studies of widows in the Old Testament, we need to open our hearts and minds to the truths we can learn from them. These widows were real women whose history offers much that can help us as we face our circumstances today.

Dear Father, You see us and know all that is happening in our lives. Quiet our hearts as we meet with You to teach us from Your Word. Give us hope and encouragement to trust You as You teach us more about Yourself. Give us understanding about Tamar and the special place You gave her in Your story. As we learn, help us realize that each one of us is also very special to You. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

- Why are you living in the place where you are?
- Why were you born into your father's family?
- What brought you into your deceased husband's family?

- Why do you have children or not have children?

When the apostle Paul was addressing a crowd on Mars Hill in Athens, Greece, he answered these questions.

*The God who made the world and everything in it is the LORD of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'.*

Acts 17:24–28

Jehovah God, who created Adam, and from him all beings, determined what family you would be born into and where you would live. He desires for you to seek Him, to reach out for Him and to find Him. He is Lord of heaven and earth and gives all men and women life and breath and everything else. The God who made all things is vitally interested in each of His creatures. He gave us the Bible, His story, so we could understand who He is and who we are in His sight.

To understand where Tamar fits into God's story, let me take a few minutes to talk about Genesis, the book of beginnings.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*  
Genesis 1:1.

God existed before anything else. He created the angels. One angel, Lucifer, used his free will to desire or covet God's position and power and was cast out of heaven, along with one third of the angels, who became his followers. See Ezekiel 28:11–17, Isaiah 14:12–15, Revelation 12:7–9.

God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Lucifer, who is called Satan, came to tempt Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God, and the curse of sin fell upon them and all their children until today. God said to Satan, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* Genesis 3:15.

In this verse God promised Satan that a woman would bear a Son who would crush him, but he (Satan) would strike Him first. God was speaking of His Son, Jesus Christ, who would later be born of a virgin.

God chose a family to become a nation through which Christ would be born.

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram left, as the LORD had told him.*

Genesis 12:1–4

God changed Abram's name to *Abraham*, which means "father of many." Abraham fathered Isaac, who fathered Jacob, who fathered twelve sons. From those twelve sons came the tribes of Israel.

Judah, in our story today, was one of Jacob's twelve sons. Issues took place in Judah's life that in some cultures are very difficult to talk about, because they involve sexual relations. It is important today to be able to discuss issues such as these because of AIDS and the HIV virus, which did not exist in Judah's day. Intimate relations between a man and woman who are married to each other are intended by God to be the most beautiful and fulfilling relationship there is on earth. God forbids sexually intimate relationships outside of marriage.

When teenagers and adults disregard God's law of marriage, they open themselves to sexually transmitted diseases. Often these are passed on to uninfected partners.

Just as God's grace and forgiveness are evident in today's study, God's grace and forgiveness are sufficient for those who have such diseases and face the health problems they present as well as for those who have experienced broken marriage vows or unfaithful spouses or lost such spouses through death. God cares about each person and has forgiveness and peace for each one who agrees with God and believes in Him.

After the events that took place in today's Bible lesson, Jacob's entire family, including Judah, Tamar and the children, went to Egypt during a time of famine. In Egypt, Jacob's family grew to be a great tribe of people, who became the Israelite or Jewish nation. From that nation and from Judah and Tamar's family

line came Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Tamar was born in the land of Canaan. She grew up in the Philistine hill country south of Hebron. Her name, *Tamar*, means “palm tree,” a very important tree in the Middle East. Her married life was one of great difficulty and grief, as was her widowhood. Her story is one that is often left out of Christian storybooks, but God certainly chose her for a very special purpose in life. Let’s look at the Bible account of Tamar, found in Genesis 38:1–30.

*At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. He married her and lay with her; she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him.*

Genesis 38:1–5

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and Leah. His name means “praise.” When Judah and his brothers took their brother Joseph and put him in a well to die, Judah saved Joseph’s life by persuading them to sell him as a slave to a caravan going to Egypt. Then they deceived their father, Jacob, by telling him wild animals had killed Joseph (see Genesis 37). Following this incident, Judah left the family and traveled south, where he befriended Hirah. He settled there, married the daughter of Shua and started raising his family.

He had three sons—Er, Onan, and Shelah. As he

watched his boys playing and growing up, he must have thought of his own brothers and their wrongdoings to Joseph. He must have wondered about Joseph and what happened to him. Did he think about the grief of his father over the loss of his son Joseph?

*Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death.*

Genesis 38:6–7

Tamar was chosen as a bride for Er, Judah's firstborn son, and came to live in Er's home. I'm sure there must have been times when the family gathered around the fire and Judah told the stories of God and the beginnings of man, of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God and being driven from the beautiful garden, and of Noah.

*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain...Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.*

Genesis 6:5–6,9

God told Noah to build an ark and take a pair of every kind of animal and bird along with his family on board, and God shut the door. It rained for forty days and nights, and a great flood destroyed all living creatures on the earth. When the waters subsided, Noah and his family were told to be fruitful, increase in number and fill the earth (see Genesis 6–9). Man was to

be accountable to God for his actions.

Judah told them how Abraham was called to become the father of a great tribe, a special people of God of which they were a part. Er heard what Judah said about man's responsibility to God, but wickedness grew in his heart. This must have caused heartache to Tamar. Er's wickedness reached a point where God slew him, and Tamar became a widow, with no children.

*Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so he [God] put him to death also.*

Genesis 38:8–10

Hittite and Middle Assyrian law codes speak of *Levirate marriage*, which was widely practiced and was later regulated for Israel by Moses (Deuteronomy 25:5–10). The brother of a deceased husband was to marry the widow and conceive a child that would be raised up in the deceased brother's name. This child would have the firstborn's birthright and inheritance.

Onan, being of a selfish nature, did not want to give a child for his brother's name, so he married Tamar but refused to make her pregnant. This was wrong in God's sight, and Onan died. Tamar became a widow for the second time and remained childless.

*Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your father's house until my son*

*Shelah grows up.” For he thought, “He may die too, just like his brothers.” So Tamar went to live in her father’s house.*

Genesis 38:11

Judah became fearful that he would lose all his sons. Shelah was somewhat younger than the first two brothers, so Judah sent Tamar home to her father’s house to live as a widow. She would be out of Judah’s sight and no longer his responsibility. Tamar must have had a heavy heart, longing for a child to care for her in her old age.

*After a long time Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.*

Genesis 38:12

Judah’s wife died, and he went through a period of mourning. He had lost two sons and a wife. When he recovered from his grief he went with his friend Hirah to Timnah, where his sheep were to be sheared. The sheep-shearing was a festive time of revelry and merry-making. The wine would flow freely.

*When Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep,” she took off her widow’s clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.*

Genesis 38:13–14

Years had gone by, and Judah had not kept his word to Tamar. She knew that in some areas, the Levirate marriage law included the deceased husband's father, who could take his son's widow for a wife. The Mosaic Law, which was given by God to His people 400-plus years later, excluded the deceased's father from the Levirate marriage. When she heard that Judah was over his mourning and going to the sheep-shearing, she devised a plan. She removed her widow's clothes, disguised herself with a veil and sat by the road at Enaim, the place of a fountain, near Timnah.

*When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you." "And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked. "I'll send you a young goat from my flock," he said. "Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" she asked. He said, "What pledge should I give you?" "Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.*

Genesis 38:15–19

Judah did not realize he was with Tamar. The pledge for payment he left with her was personal to him. It was a signet, a cylinder seal worn on a cord about the neck and used for a signature. The staff sometimes figured as a symbol in completing a transaction. Judah, who participated in deceiving his father into believing Joseph was killed and who deceived Tamar into living as a widow at

her father's house until "Shelah was old enough to marry" had now been deceived himself.

*Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?" "There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here," they said. So he went back to Judah and said, "I didn't find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, 'There hasn't been any shrine prostitute here.'" Then Judah said, "Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn't find her."*

Genesis 38:20–23

Judah must have felt somewhat uncomfortable without his personal seal and staff. He must have wondered where they might show up and regretted his moments of indiscretion. *You may be sure that your sin will find you out.* Numbers 32:23.

*About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!" As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.*

Genesis 38:24–26

By previously sending Tamar back to her father's house, Judah hoped to be rid of her. He now asserted his patriarchal position, seeing a way to be free of her and appear righteous at the same time. According to the later Mosaic legislation, burning, the severest penalty, was prescribed for certain extreme cases, and stoning was the penalty for a case like Tamar's, as betrothed to Shelah.

When confronted with his belongings, Judah, for the first time, admitted he was wrong and that Tamar was more righteous than him. In some areas the father of the deceased could marry the widow. Judah shows a repentant heart and confessed his wrongdoing so that Tamar might live and give life to the babies growing within her.

*When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, "This one came out first." But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez. Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was given the name Zerah.*

Genesis 38:27–30

God gave Tamar twin boys. The name *Perez* means "breaking out" and *Zerah* means "scarlet" or "brightness." Though David is a descendant of Perez, both names appear in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew. Look in Matthew 1:1–3.

God's Word is truth as written by men inspired and guided by God's Holy Spirit.

*And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Peter 1:19–21

God, who is holy and righteous, without sin, does not hide the sinfulness of men or women. He tells their stories honestly and openly so that we can learn from them. The same God who holds man accountable for his wrongdoing forgives the repentant heart and brings peace to the soul that trusts in Him.

The appearance of Judah, Tamar, Perez and Zerah in the genealogy of Christ teaches us that Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, humbled Himself to become a man, born into a family with a colorful history.

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is*

*LORD, to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2:5–11

\_\_\_\_ **Personal Application** \_\_\_\_

As this study of Tamar comes to a close, let us consider how these truths affect us.

- Have you been able to identify with Tamar in her place of childhood, growing up in the hill country, being chosen as a bride to become a part of the groom's family?
- Did her struggles of living with a wicked husband—so wicked that God slew him—touch you?
- Could you identify with her widowhood? (For her, not once but twice.)
- Could you identify with her longing for a child?

Tamar was a woman, like you or me, that suffered life's pain and experienced life's joy. This story does not talk about her relationship with God, but there is no doubt that God chose her to be an ancestor of His Son.

God's hand is on each of our lives, and He wants us to believe and trust Him in all matters of our lives like Abraham and Noah did. Like Judah, He wants us to be aware of our wrongdoings and repent so that His forgiveness and peace can enter our lives.

God's grace and mercy is evident in Tamar's life, that she should be included in the line of faith that extends from Adam to the birth of Christ.

- Is His grace and mercy evident in your life?

- Are you waiting on Him to grant the desires of your heart?

Dear Lord, enable us to trust You with our whole hearts. Make us aware of Your hand on our lives even when it looks like our prayers are unanswered and things look hopeless. Help us not to give up, not to turn to unholy alliances for help, but to keep our faith and trust in You. Thank You that You have promised never to leave us nor forsake us. Just as You kept Your promise to send One to crush the head of Satan and sent Your Son Jesus, the Christ, born of Judah's family tree, we know You will be faithful to us in Your perfect timing. Tamar lived in the midst of a sinful culture and experienced Your mercy and grace. We also are living in a sinful culture and need Your mercy and grace as well. Walk with us as You walked with Noah and Abraham. Teach us more and more about Yourself, that we might believe You in every area of our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Exercise: Consider how God wants you to trust Him more. Ask God to show you something for which He wants you to trust Him. Watch to see how He helps you grow in trust in the weeks ahead.