

**BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: A Hope-Filled Christmas**

**Message Title: The Daughter-In-Law: Tamar Pt. 2**

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Verse Six:

Now Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn was evil in the sight of the Lord. So, the Lord took his life. \*NASB Gen.38:6-7

That's all we know. So, in this case, if the older brother dies, it was the duty of the next brother to have relations with his brother's wife, simply to produce a son. And that son would belong to his deceased brother, and the family line would travel through that son. So what Judah is asking, is actually a very honorable thing to do in that particular culture.

Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so, when he went into his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord; so, He took his life also. Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"; for he thought, "I am afraid that he too may die like his brothers. So, Tamar went and lived in her father's house. Vs. 9-11

You have to understand, in the ancient culture, that was as shameful and as humiliating as it possibly could have been for Tamar. She had had two husbands; both of them died, no offspring, sent back home to dad, used, abused and discarded. Devastating.

Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. (Vs. 12)

So, Judah's wife dies. Notice, even in the death scene, she remains nameless. There's a message in that. She dies; Judah goes through the required period of mourning, but as soon as he meets the requirements, his response is, "Let's party!" The record of the narrator there is meant to create that kind of picture. When it was time to shear the sheep - just like when it was time for the crop to come in - when it was time for the wool to come in, it was "party time". There's nothing wrong with that; it was the big harvest. But the way this is described is that, basically Judah goes through the required mourning period, but as soon as that is up, he is ready to party, and he heads off to Timnah.

Now one of the things that we have to notice is, in all of this, there isn't one mention of the slightest bit of grief. You can't miss the contrast between Jacob in Chapter 37 and Judah in Chapter 38. Jacob is emotionally devastated at the loss of his son, whom he deeply loved. Judah has lost two sons and a wife, and there isn't one word of grief or compassion. Again, the writer is wanting to paint a picture of this selfish, reckless, lust-filled person.

It was told to Tamar, “Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.” So, she removed her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. (Vs. 13-14)

Somebody comes and says, “By the way, your father-in-law is coming to the party,” and immediately she takes off her widow clothes and she puts on her prostitution clothes and she devises a plan. She now knows that Shelah will not be given to her. Her only hope is to pretend to be a prostitute and go sit by the road, which raises an interesting question: What did she know about her father-in-law, where she knew this was the right plan?

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. So, he turned aside to her by the road, and said, “Here now, let me come into you”; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. (Vs. 15-16a)

Now that phrase...let me come in to you...Sometimes, when we get these phrases from the ancient world, there’s just such a difference between an ancient culture and a modern culture - the difference between the Hebrew language and our modern language—things don’t always sound, or mean, the way they sound. In this case, this Hebrew phrase is meant to sound as crude and as vulgar as it sounds. The first reader would have understood this as unbelievably crude and vulgar. In other words, it’s trying to paint a picture of this man. He’s selfish; he’s reckless; he’s lust-filled; he sees this prostitute by the side of the road and he’s just abrupt and he’s vulgar when he speaks to her. That’s the intent there.

She said, “What will you give me, that you may come into me?” He said, therefore, “I will send you a young goat from the flock.” She said, moreover, “Will you give a pledge until you send it?” He said, “What pledge shall I give you?” And she said, “Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand.” So, he gave them to her, and went into her, and she conceived by him. Then she arose and departed and removed her veil and put on her widow’s garments. (Vs. 16b-19)

So, she begins to negotiate the deal, “Okay, what’s this worth to you?” “Well, I’ll give you a lamb. I just don’t have one on me so, when I get home, I will send it back.” She says, “Okay, that’s a deal, but I need some sort of security, just to make sure you don’t rip me off.” He says, “Okay, what do you want?” She says, “I want your driver’s license; I want your wallet; I want your credit cards.” That would be the equivalent. When she gets a hold of that signet ring, that is his credit card. She could go all over town charging up whatever she wanted with that ring. So, you have to understand, in that culture, what he gave was unbelievable. In other words, he runs into a roadside prostitute and he says, “Here’s my wallet; here’s my driver’s license; here’s my credit cards.” Again, it’s painting a picture of this guy who is so reckless, who is so lust-filled, who is so out-of-control, that he’s willing to do that for this moment of pleasure. It’s just kind of shocking. We’re told that Tamar becomes pregnant. She conceives; she goes home; she takes off her prostitution clothes; she puts back on her widow’s clothing.

Now that part of the text is saying she is not a prostitute—she’s a woman who has been shamed. She’s a woman who has been used and abused and discarded, and now she has been backed into

a corner. She has nowhere to turn, and she didn't know what else to do, so she devised this plan to somehow have a child that would continue the family line.

When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her. He asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here." So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no temple prostitute here.'" Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I sent this young goat, but you did not find her." (Vs. 20-23)

In other words, he is saying, "Hey, we tried to find her and pay the bill, but we couldn't find her, so let's move on." But the comment about ...we will be a laughingstock...is in reference to the fact that, if anyone finds out that I had an encounter with a roadside prostitute, and I gave her my driver's license, my wallet, and my credit cards, we will be a laughingstock, because that behavior was so ridiculous and so reckless. That is what he is saying—that this is so bad that we just need to keep it quiet and move on.

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It was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" (Vs. 24)

You have to understand how absolutely shocking that would have been, even to a first reader. Even someone in the ancient world would have understood this to be unimaginably shocking! It gives you a picture of the kind of authority these men had over these women. He was a law unto himself. If he wanted to bring her out and burn her, he had every right to do that. But even an ancient reader would have understood this as being unbelievably severe. As a matter of fact, Robert Alter, who is considered to be one of the experts in Hebrew narrative, says it is just breathtaking how quickly Judah responds, without the slightest degree of compassion. This woman is an embarrassment to him. He sees an opportunity to eliminate her, "Bring her out; we'll burn her to death." In the ancient world, it was not twenty years of appeals; it would have been carried out that day, and that's exactly what transpires.

It was while she was being brought out that she went to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." She said, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again. (Vs. 25-26)

When she's being brought out to be burned to death, she says, "Oh by the way, I have a driver's license here; I have some credit cards here. I wonder if you might look at them; this is the father of the child." Of course, Judah figures it out pretty quickly and states, "She is more righteous than I". Now I don't think the text is saying anybody in the text is righteous. I think her behavior was offensive to God, but you understand what had been done to her. She was desperate and she came up with this plan to do something. What he is saying is, the reason she

stooped to this behavior is, she is not a prostitute; she is not a bad person; but I had pressed her into a corner, and she had no hope in life, and that is why she did what she did. He is saying, "I'm the one to blame, because I pressed her into that circumstance." Interestingly enough, end of story for Judah. Judah virtually disappears—that's it! There is one more paragraph related to Tamar.

It came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb. Moreover, it took place that while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So, he was named Perez. Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand; and was named Zerah. (Vs. 27-30)

Now in an ancient culture, the fact that she was having twins would have been considered God's blessing, so we notice that as a reader. But then there is this strange detail about one of the sons sticking his hand out and he gets this red ribbon, and then it goes back in, and then the other one is born, and basically, she is saying, "This is all mixed up." But in the text, you get the sense that this story isn't over; that there's something else going on here.

Chapter 39 picks up the Joseph story, and you can't miss that Chapter 39 is about the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Joseph could not have been more different than his brother Judah. When tempted, when seduced, he chose to do the right thing with integrity and morality, and that is a dramatic contrast between him and his brother Judah. The rest of Genesis is the Joseph narrative: the favored son, the favored child, a man of character, a man of integrity, a high performer who becomes the number two man in the world—the Prince of Egypt.

So, by the time we get to Genesis, Chapter 49, this is a done deal. We know exactly how this is going to work—that the seed is going to go from Jacob to Joseph and on. That's why we are absolutely shocked when we get to Genesis 49, and we find out the seed does not go through Joseph, the high performer; it goes through Judah! Not only does it go through Judah, it goes through Judah and his relations with his daughter-in-law Tamar! That child would be the Seed of Promise. It is absolutely shocking! It goes against everything that we think is decent and right. We don't know what to do with this. It is just so unbelievably scandalous!

If you were to go onto Ancestry.com, this is not the story you want to find in your family tree. This is embarrassing; this is shame-filled. This is the kind of story we hide and hope no one will ever find out. You would think when Matthew was recording the genealogy of the King, the genealogy of God-become-flesh, the genealogy of the Messiah, he would slip past this one as quickly as possible and hope nobody notices. But as a matter of fact, he does the exact opposite. Again, in this genealogy, other than Mary, there are only four women named, and the first woman named in the genealogy is Tamar. If you had a story like this in your family tree, why would you focus attention on it? Why would you make it jump off the page? Why wouldn't you hide it and hope nobody knows.... unless that is the point? Unless that is the point, that God Himself was going to enter into the garbage heap, to seek and to save those who are lost, those who have been used, those who have been abused, those who have been discarded, those whom

the world says have no value. Isn't that the whole point? We all live in the garbage heap and desperately need a Savior. Isn't the whole point that He would enter into the mess, even to the degree that that mess would be scandalously represented in His family line? Isn't it God's way of saying that His ways are not like our ways?

One of the reasons why grace is just so hard to process and so hard to fully embrace is because it is so other than anything you will ever experience in this life. It is so other than. At times it surprises us; at times it shocks us, and I think at times it even offends us, and goes contrary to everything that we think is right and decent. I mean the grace of God is so unbelievably scandalous that who knows, God may actually choose you to change the world.

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Arnie: Bryan, this story is so incredible, but it's the truth. We can actually trace the line back through Tamar and Judah, is that right?

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. It's clearly outlined in Matthew One, and you get to the end of Genesis Chapter 49, and you have Jacob blessing Judah as the son through whom the seed will travel.

Cara: So yesterday, we left the story with Tamar in disgrace, but God had his eye on her, so her story was far from over. And that applies to us today, because no one is too far outside the boundaries of God's grace.

Bryan: Yeah, no one. I mean it gives hope for everyone.

Cara: I'm guessing that the first readers then would have picked up from this story that Gentiles might be part of this family.

Bryan: Yeah, I think that's a good point. I'm just not quite sure. For the Jewish mind, that was pretty scandalous stuff. And I think Biblically, the Jews always struggled with the thought that the Gentiles would be part of the family.

Arnie: Bryan, Tamar was shrewd. She had to be to survive in that culture.

Bryan: Absolutely. She was shrewd. That's not to say God approved of her methods, but she wasn't giving up, and God still showed up and blessed her.

Arnie: What was it about Tamar that showed faith?

Bryan: I guess I would say, I'm not sure it was her faith. I would say it was more an act of desperation. I don't know really what her view of God was. I would say that particular story is way more about God's faithfulness than about Tamar's faith.

Cara: The tribe of Judah became the Royal tribe, but that's actually because of Tamar, isn't it?

Bryan: Yeah, it's because of both. It's because in Genesis 49, Jacob blesses Judah as the son through whom the seed will travel, and that specifically through Judah and his relationship with Tamar.

Cara: So, you said it's very odd for women to be mentioned in the genealogy. So, is there anything else about Tamar other than this story?

Bryan: I don't think so. I think this is virtually all we know.

Arnie: Do you think Judah actually learned his lesson from all of this? I ask, because Genesis, we see Judah trying to protect Joseph's younger brother Benjamin.

Bryan: Yeah, so I'm going to guess, "Yes". It's hard to say for sure, but certainly in that text where he's protecting Benjamin, he is presented in a much more noble light than he is in Chapter 38.

Cara: So, Bryan, Christmas is coming. What do we need to remember about this story to give us hope for Christmas 2019?

Bryan: Yeah, so great question. The genealogy of Jesus is just full of reminders that Jesus came to redeem us - sinners, misfits, and losers - from sin: sins we've done; sins that have been done to us. So, for everyone, Christmas is the reminder, there is hope.