



# Tamar

“Women in the Genealogy of Christ”

*“And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance.”*

II Samuel 14:27

We all know about Joseph and his many colored coat, but seldom do we hear much about the brothers of Joseph. One brother is included in the genealogy of Christ, Judah. Shortly after the incident when the brothers sold Joseph to the traders because they were jealous of Jacob love for him over them, Judah married the daughter of a Canaanite. She bore him three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah played matchmaker for his oldest son, Er, and picked Tamar.

However, Er, for some reason, many authorities have reasons! did not want to have a child by Tamar. According to the Scripture “Er, grievously offended God and God took his life.” Genesis 38:7. So Judah interfered again and told his next son, Onan, to go have a child by Tamar. But he did not want to have a child by Tamar. Perhaps Onan did not want Tamar to have a child because it would not actually be his and the property would go to the child by law. Again in Genesis 38; 10 we read “God was much offended by what he did and also took his life.” This was a disgrace for a Jewish woman because people thought that being childless was a punishment from God.

These are very difficult verses to comprehend. Scholars have found it fascinating, but that is not the end of Tamar. Judah told her to go back to her home until his third son, Shelah, grew up. Tamar did as she was told. As time passed, Tamar realized that Judah was not going to allow her to marry Shelah so she set out to do what she thought she should do. At this point, the story really gets “sticky.” We begin to wonder why.

Tamar set out to trick Judah so she could have his child. By ancient Hebrew standards, her actions were legal and morally right. After Judah’s wife died, he went with a friend for sheep shearing. Tamar was waiting at the gate to the city. She had taken off her widow’s clothes and put on a veil to disguise herself as a prostitute and set out to trick Judah. When Judah saw her he went over to her and asked to sleep with her. He did not know it was Tamar, because prostitutes at that time were required to cover their faces. Tamar knew what she was doing. She told Judah that she would sleep with him, but she wanted a pledge. So, he paid her a kid goat from the flock, and also gave her his personal seal-and-cord and his staff! After their affair, she arose, took off the veil, and put on her widow garments again

After several months, Tamar appears in public and people see that she is pregnant. They go and tell Judah that his daughter-in-law is pregnant and he asks to have her burned because she has been unfaithful. Even though the husbands had died she was a rightful heir to Judah.

But we need to remember that Tamar had taken care of this. When the authorities were about to burn her, she sent for her father-in-law and said that she was pregnant by the man who had given her his personal seal-and-cord and his staff. Judah acknowledge that they were his and said “She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son.” Genesis 38:26. When Tamar gave birth, she had twins, Perez and Zerah. Pharez is also mentioned in the genealogy of Christ found in Matthew, chapter 1.

It is a complicated story full of many things that we say today are wrong, and one can wonder why someone like Judah and Tamar would be included in the genealogy of Christ. Some authorities say that she risked everything to get what was rightfully hers. She fulfilled her part of the arrangement with Er and Onan. She had a right to have children and the property was to be kept in the family. There are so many things happening in this story. Perhaps the more we study it, the more we see why these people are included in the genealogy of Christ. They are just like us – human and sinful!

Tamar’s actions were wrong, but so were Judah’s. Actually Tamar was being very loyal to the tribe of Judah. Many people who have written about this story in the Bible say that she was a woman of integrity. As in so many other places in the Bible, a woman’s actions help to have the plan of God unfold.

We believe that God has a plan, and He had a plan to have Christ come into this world and be born of a virgin to save us. But why Tamar and Judah? Why not?

Prayer: God, Almighty, we don't understand Your ways, and we often think we are better than other people. Help us to realize that we all sin and fall short of Your Glory and only by Your grace are we able to believe that one day, we will be with You in Paradise. Help us not to judge others, but look to You for guidance in our own frail and sinful lives. Amen.

1. By today's standards, was Tamar right in what she did?
2. Was Judah right in his actions?
3. What does this story show of God's grace and justice?
4. Why are people like Judah and Tamar in the genealogy of Christ?
5. How should we as Christians treat people who act like this today?

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