

Tamar - Genesis 38

Day One. Read Genesis 38:1-11

1. What had Judah and his brothers done? Gen 37:26-28, 33-35
 - Why might this event cause Judah to leave his brothers?
2. Where did Judah move to and whom did he marry? Gen. 38:1
3. What did Moses say about Israelites marrying the Canaanites? See Genesis 24:2-4, Deuteronomy 7:2-6.
4. What are the names of Judah's three sons? Who named them? Gen 38:3-5
5. Who chose Er's wife? Gen. 38:6
6. What kind of wicked things were the Canaanites doing? See Deuteronomy 12:29-31; 18:9-13
7. Who married Tamar after Er was killed? (Gen. 38:7,8) Why? (Deuteronomy 25:5-9).
8. Why do you think Onan refused to have a child with Tamar? What happened to him? Gen. 39:9-10

"The custom that informs this episode is the law for levirate marriage (Latin levir "husband's brother"). By this custom which was later incorporated into God's law for Israel, if a man died childless, his brother or nearest relative would marry his widow to produce a child who would carry on the family name of the deceased and inherit his property. Apparently, the near kinsman had the right to refuse, but he would be disgraced in the family for refusing to perpetuate his brother's name". (NLT Study Bible c 2008).

"Onan refused to perform this duty, knowing that the offspring would be considered his dead brother's and not his. Driver has pointed out that the construction should be understood as a frequentative use of the perfect and translated "whenever he went in" instead of "when he went in." Thus the action by Onan was done repeatedly and was not just a one-time event. Because this was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, He took Onan's life." (Bibliotheca Sacra 146 (1989) Steven D. Mathewson)

9. Why didn't Judah allow Tamar to marry his youngest son, Shelah? Where does he send her? Gen. 38:11

10. What do Judah's actions say about his character? What was his responsibility?

Excerpt from the Middle Assyrian Legal Code, found on baked clay tablets in Iraq, dating back to 1100 BC.

If the husband of a woman still living in the household of her father dies, and she has no son, then the father of her husband's household is to appoint one of his sons as her legal guardian... or serve as her legal guardian himself.

Excerpt from the Hittite Legal Code, found on baked clay tablets in Central Turkey, dating back to 1450 BC.

"If a citizen dies, then his legal guardian (brother) marries his widow. If a citizen and his legal guardian (brother) die, then the citizen's father marries his widow."

"Old Testament Parallels" Victor H. Matthews & Don C. Benjamin, Paulist Press NY, 1997

11. What are some emotions Tamar might have been going through at this time?

Application: When in your life have you felt like a victim of the circumstances? What kept you going through these times?

Day Two. Read Genesis 38:12-23.

1. When did Judah's wife die? Where did Judah go after this happened? Gen. 38:12

The moral atmosphere of the annual sheep-shearing might best be understood when compared to a contemporary television commercial. Visualize a group of hard-working shepherds finishing an exhausting, hot, and thirsty week among the sheep, leaving the fields after having completed this annual task. Suddenly one calls out to the others, "It's Miller time!" With a girl in one arm and a bottle of booze in the other, the celebration begins. Tamar knew well that this was the kind of thing that took place at sheep-shearing season. (Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs, Bob Deffinbaugh)

2. What is Tamar's reaction to the news about her father-in-law? How does she respond? Gen 38:13

3. What does she wear? Gen. 38:14

Excerpt from the Middle Assyrian Code, found on baked clay tablets in Iraq, dating back to 1100 BC.

"Prostitutes are not to wear veils. If a citizen sees a prostitute wearing a veil, then she is arrested, witnesses are subpoenaed, and she is charged before the assembly at the palace gate... She is flogged fifty times with staves, and tar is poured into her hair. If a citizen sees a prostitute who is wearing a veil, and does not charge her at the palace gate, then he is flogged fifty times with staves, his clothes are confiscated, his ears are pierced and tied with a cord behind his head and he to serve as a slave for the state for one full month."

"...biblical scholars, past and present, have associated the [veil] with the profession; that is, it was the veil of Tamar that signaled to Judah her status as a prostitute. Others, however, have disputed this reading of the verse, citing biblical and ancient Near Eastern evidence to indicate that the veil itself was not diagnostic, but simply allowed Tamar to conceal her identity. Following this view, while it is reasonable to assume, at least from the biblical text, that prostitutes did in fact adorn themselves in a distinctive manner (e.g., Jer 4:30; Ezek 23:40), their identity as such appears not to be linked to a veil.

In addition to the biblical passages, the most frequently cited evidence are those Middle Assyrian laws governing the use of veils among various classes of women. Here prostitutes, female slaves, unmarried hierodules...and concubines unaccompanied by mistress...are prohibited from appearing veiled in public. Others, however, have cautioned that customs may vary regionally and we should not assume that those of Assyria applied equally to ancient Israelite society." - John R. Huddlestun http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_19.htm

4. What is Judah's action upon seeing her? What does this say about how well Tamar knew her father-in-law? Gen. 38:15-16

"Not only did she know men in general, but she knew Judah very well. Moral purity does not seem to be one of his virtues. There is little doubt that this wasn't Judah's first encounter with a prostitute. He does not evidence any of the naivety of one who is new at this sort of thing. He handled the arrangements like an experienced man of the world. Tamar was convinced that if she could only look like a prostitute, Judah would take things from there and that her purposes would be realized." (Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs, Bob Deffinbaugh)

"The fact that Judah's use of a prostitute is recorded in the Bible does not mean that it is approved of. The Bible records both the good and the evil that men and women do. And not all evil was punished, for if it were, none would have survived. God graciously overlooks some evil. Judah failed in this matter, but God's grace overlooked it."
- Africa Bible Commentary (68)

5. What does she ask for as a pledge of payment? Gen. 38:18

"A cylinder seal, worn on a cord around the neck, was the insignia of a prominent man. He signed contracts by rolling the seal over the clay on which the contract was etched." (Reformation Study Bible)

6. Who does Judah send to pay the prostitute? What is his reaction to being unable to find her? Gen 38:20

7. What do you think of Tamar's actions? List the good and bad aspects of what she did.

Digging Deeper:

Read Hosea 4:13-14. What does the prophet say about prostitution and adultery?

Application: Tamar made a difficult decision to reject victimizing herself and instead demanded justice of her father-in-law. Have you ever found yourself in an impossible situation? What tough choices did you have to make?

Day Three. Read Genesis 38:24-30.

1. What is Judah's immediate reaction to news of Tamar's pregnancy? Gen 38:24 (Read Leviticus 20:10)

2. What does this reaction show about the risk Tamar was willing to take? How important must this have been to her?

3. How does Judah react to seeing the seal and the staff? How else could he have reacted? Gen 38:26

4. What word does Judah use to describe Tamar? What do you think he meant by that?

"Though she played on Judah's vice, Tamar was commended for her daring ruse to redress Judah's wrong and build up her family. Thus she became a heroine in Israel (Ruth 4:12)."

- (Reformation Study Bible)

5. What was unique about Tamar's childbirth? Gen 38:27-30

Digging Deeper: Use the boxes below to note Judah's character before and after Tamar becomes pregnant. List words to describe Judah's character in each of the passages.

Before		After	
Gen. 37:26-27		Gen. 43:8-10	
Gen. 38:11		Gen. 44:14-16	
Gen. 38:15-16, 23		Gen. 44:30-34	

6. What explanation do you think there is for this change in character?

7. Read Matthew 1:1-3, 16. Who eventually descended from Tamar's child with Judah?

- What does this tell you about God's purposes and plans?

Digging Deeper:
 Read Jacob's blessing to his son Judah in Genesis 49:8-12.

Application: In a broken story filled with sin and deceit, God carried out his purposes in a way neither Judah nor Tamar could've seen. What situations in your life are making it hard to see the bigger picture? What might God be trying to teach you?