

### Judah Thought Tamar Was a Prostitute

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that the Lord allows the difficult times that happen in our lives to help us become conformed to the image of Christ so that our lives will bring glory to Him. In this topic, we are going to see sin in the life of Judah. His actions did not bring glory to the Lord. However, we do see the mercy of the Lord because in the first chapter of Matthew, we see that Tamar was one of the four women mentioned as ancestors of Christ.

In Genesis 38:1-10, we read, “It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name *was* Hirah. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name *was* Shua, and he married her and went in to her. So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him. Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. And Judah said to Onan, ‘Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.’ But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother’s wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also.” Judah did not have the same faith in the Lord that Joseph had shown. As a result, we see that there were problems with sin in his life and in his family.

Judah wanted to develop friendships with more than just his brothers and sisters. As a result, he went to visit Hirah in the town of Adullam. That town was about fifteen miles northwest of the town of Hebron where Isaac had died. While Judah was visiting Hirah, he saw a woman whose name was Shua. She was the daughter of a Canaanite. Judah decided to marry Shua and took her as his wife and they had three sons. They named those three sons Er, Onan and Shelah. Er means “awake”, Onan means “strong” and Shelah means “petition”. By the time that Shelah was born, they were living at a place name Chezib. When Er became a man, Judah took a wife for him named Tamar. This was not the way he received his own wife, because he had made that choice instead of his father. However, this chapter tells us that Er was wicked in the sight of the Lord and so the Lord killed him. The word translated “wicked” is used six hundred and sixty-three times in the Old Testament and was most often translated “evil”. Many times, this word is used as the opposite of good and often speaks of the condition of the heart. An illustration of that is found in Proverbs 14:22, which says, “Do they not go astray who devise evil? But mercy and truth *belong* to those who devise good.”

Judah then told his next son, Onan, that it was his responsibility to conceive a son,

through Tamar, and raise up that son to carry on the name of his brother (this was called a levirate marriage). Onan knew that such a son would not be recognized as his son. He made the choice to rebel against the instructions of his father so that no child would be conceived, because he did not want to help conceive a child that would carry on the name of his brother. In this way, Onan showed that his heart was also filled with rebellion. That attitude in his heart also displeased the Lord, so the Lord killed Onan as well. This showed that both of the older sons of Judah had hearts filled with evil thoughts.

Genesis 38:11-14 says, “Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, ‘Remain a widow in your father’s house till my son Shelah is grown.’ For he said, ‘Lest he also die like his brothers.’ And Tamar went and dwelt in her father’s house. Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah’s wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And it was told Tamar, saying, ‘Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.’ So she took off her widow’s garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife.” In these verses, we see that Judah told Tamar to return to the house of her father and remain as a widow until Shelah was grown and then Judah said that she would become his wife. Tamar did return to the house of her father and had remained there.

Several years later, Shelah was an adult and Tamar had not been given to him as a wife. About that time, Shua, the wife of Judah, died. A period of time passed as he grieved for the loss of his wife. The day came when he had finished his grieving and felt comforted. Then, Judah decided to go up to Timnah to visit his sheepshearers. His friend Hirah, the Adullamite, also went along with him. At the same time, Tamar knew that Shelah had become an adult, and Judah had not kept his promise to Tamar that she would become the wife of Shelah when he was grown. Then, someone told Tamar, “Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.” Tamar decided that it was time for action because Judah had not kept his promise.

The inheritance rights of the Hittite people said that if a younger son was not given to a widow as a levirate wife, the father-in-law could enter into a levirate marriage with his daughter-in-law. Whether that custom of the Hittites influenced Tamar, we do not know. However, Tamar wanted a son who would carry on the inheritance rights that had belonged to Er. In that day, a widow wore a particular kind of clothing to show that she was a widow. Tamar took off her widow’s garments. She put on a veil to cover her face so that she was disguised and would not be recognized. Then, she wrapped herself in the clothing that would normally be worn by a prostitute.

The fact that she thought Judah would be interested in a prostitute showed that she had no respect for the moral condition of her father-in-law. We go on to read, in Genesis 38:15-19, “When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face. Then he turned to her by the way, and said, ‘Please let me come in to you’; for he did not

know that she *was* his daughter-in-law. So she said, ‘What will you give me, that you may come in to me?’ And he said, ‘I will send a young goat from the flock.’ So she said, ‘Will you give *me* a pledge till you send *it*?’ Then he said, ‘What pledge shall I give you?’ So she said, ‘Your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand.’ Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.” We see that once she was ready, she went and sat in an open place along the road that led to Timnah and waited for Judah to come along. The Canaanite religion had temple prostitutes. When he saw her, he probably thought she was a temple prostitute. These verses show that Tamar knew the moral condition of her father-in-law. She had been a part of the family while she was married to Er, before he died, and then for a little longer before Onan died.

As Judah came to the place where Tamar was sitting, he saw that her face was covered as was common for prostitutes. He turned off the road and went to where she was and said, “Please let me come in to you.” He did not realize that she was his daughter-in-law. The choices of Judah that day illustrate the meaning of James 1:13-15, where we read, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” The sinful desires of the heart of Judah were the cause of his choice to commit adultery with a woman he thought was a prostitute. In our next topic, we will see that he was very quick to condemn Tamar for the choice she had made. Many times, those who are guilty of sin are the quickest to condemn others.

When Judah made his request to Tamar, she answered him, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?” Here, we see that Tamar acted like a prostitute by asking Judah what he would pay to come in to her. Judah had already shown his character by his question. Now, we see that he did not hesitate to tell her that he would pay her by sending her a young goat from the flock. Tamar then asked what he would give her as a pledge until he sent the young goat since he did not have a young goat with him. Judah answered her question with a question. Tamar had an answer prepared when he asked the question. We see that Tamar wanted to have evidence of the choice Judah had made.

Tamar told Judah that the pledge she wanted, until she received the young goat, was “your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand.” Judah agreed and gave those things to her. A signet was a seal used to make a document official and was either a signet ring or a seal that was suspended around the neck on a string. This signet would prove that Judah had been with Tamar. The bracelet or cord was a piece of twisted material that was worn around the wrist. A staff was used as a support when traveling and was especially helpful on rough ground. It later became the symbol of the leader of a tribe. All three things were easy to identify and showed that Judah had been with Tamar.

Then, Judah went into her tent beside the road and committed adultery with Tamar. The Lord allowed Tamar to become pregnant by her father-in-law that day. Judah then left to go to the sheep shearers and Tamar also arose and went away. She took off the veil that she had worn so that Judah would not recognize her. Then, she put on the clothing that showed she was a widow whose husband had died. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that Judah committed this sin because of the sinful desires of his heart. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children explain that sin is caused by the sinful desires of the heart.