

Introduction

- The story of Judah and Tamar is often called “unpreachable” and one of the most offensive or controversial parts of the Bible.
- We need to be willing to press into the parts of the Bible we don’t like.

Judah’s Character (v. 1-5)

- Joseph went down to Egypt, now Judah goes down.
- Judah abandons his family to live with and marry foreigners.
- Judah visits a prostitute, then marries a Canaanite. He appears to take her by force.
- Everyone else is named in this story except for Judah’s wife.
- This shows us how Judah views women.
- Judah names first son, then doesn’t name the second, then is not even present when the third is born. He becomes a worse and worse father.
- Judah is not a righteous man.

Tamar’s Problem (v. 6-11)

- Tamar is taken by Judah as a wife for his first born. This seems sinister in nature.
- The flipped letters of Er’s name mean “wicked.”
- Er is killed for being wicked. Contextually, his sin is most likely sexual in nature.
- Judah commands Onan to make offspring for his dead brother.
- This is a common Near Eastern practice, which is later added to the Mosaic law in Deuteronomy 25.
- The goal is ensuring a family line does not disappear and the widow is cared for.
- The woman is supposed to be treated properly as a wife.
- Yet, Judah tells his son to procreate, but not treat Tamar properly.
- Onan uses Tamar as a sexual object, but refuses to do his duty.
- God sees Tamar’s abuse and kills Onan.
- Judah tells Tamar to wait until Shelah grows up, but has no intention of letting her marry him.

Tamar’s Solution (v. 12-23)

- Judah is not providing for Tamar and this proposal keeps her trapped.
- Tamar realizes (v. 14) that Judah will never do the righteous thing.
- Judah’s wife dies and he returns to visit more prostitutes.
- Tamar knows about Judah’s sexual promiscuity and dresses similarly to a prostitute.
- She is not trying to commit adultery, but receive what was promised.
- She is doing the only thing that was available to her at the time.
- Judah is fooled by a garment, and assumes she is a prostitute.
- He gives things that are unmistakably his, while she awaits goat payment.
- He is mocked and fooled with a goat after fooling his father with a goat.

Tamar Uncovered (v. 24-30)

- Tamar's pregnancy is discovered, specifically that it was from prostitution.
- Instead of recognizing true duty was done, he is angry.
- He is ready to kill her without any trial or questioning.
- The man known for frequenting prostitutes is ready to kill one.
- Tamar reveals the ring, cord, and staff as an invitation for Judah to come clean.
- Judah acknowledges they are his.
- Judah declares Tamar is not guilty, but righteous.
- Only two people in Genesis are declared righteous, Abraham and Tamar.
- She was a righteous foreign woman who sought fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant even when all of the men around her did not.
- Judah is the first person in the Bible to confess his sin and unrighteousness.
- This confrontation is the turning point for Judah.
- His behavior changes and he does not take advantage of women anymore.
- Later in Joseph's story he will be willing to trade places with Benjamin as a slave.
- Judah's confession and speech to Joseph in Genesis 44 causes Joseph to weep.
- Tamar gives birth to two sons, Perez and Zerah.
- Two sons to replace to the two wicked fathers who were killed.
- Twins is viewed as a great blessing at this point and time.
- The younger, Perez, will be the one the line of Christ comes from.

So What?

- This story shows the transformation of Judah.
- Tamar is included in the genealogy of Christ in the gospel of Matthew.
- Generations will name their daughter after Tamar, including King David.
- This story foreshadows John 8 with the woman caught in adultery. Instead, Jesus is the one without sin who sets her free.

Application

- God sees and cares when women are abused.
- Redemption can be found even in messy places to sinful people.
- Our pursuit of righteousness can transform others.