

What My Grandmothers Taught Me
Lesson Two: Tamar (Genesis 38)
Handout

Opening Prayer on page 21

As you read the scripture passage and before you read the lesson, what initial thoughts did you have about Tamar? Did you judge her? Cheer her on?

The woman's role in this culture was to provide offspring to continue the family lineage. A woman's value was in marriage. When Tamar's husband dies, her value has diminished. She was helpless in a man's world. What memories does her situation bring up for you?

What do you think of the levirate marriage law? You can read about it in Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

Judah's third son, Onan, refuses to perform his role by spilling his "seed." How and to what does this show contempt? See Genesis 26:4 (also see page 23 in your study book).

Judah sends Tamar back to her father to wait for the next son to grow up and follow the levirate marriage law. However, Judah neglects to follow through. So far, the men aren't looking too good in this story (which is amazing given this story was written in a patriarchal society).

Tamar decides to take matters into her own hands. It is signified by her change of clothing, a common literary technique used by biblical authors to signify an important change in the story. What does Tamar's change of clothing signify? (see page 24 for help)

Some people call Tamar a trickster. There is an old saying “Desperate times call for desperate measures.” Tamar used her sexuality to get what was promised to her, which makes for an uncomfortable story. How might we look for the deeper issues and socially imposed constraints that can leave a woman so few choices for survival?

There is a huge surprise at the end of this story. A foreigner (Tamar) is called righteous by the man who wronged her. What is the significance of this? What does this teach us about God’s ways?

Where do we fail to see someone’s potential because of prejudice?

Biblical scholars assume that a man recorded Tamar’s story. How might the narrative have differed if written by a woman?

If Tamar told her story, what new insights do you think she might share?

End your session by reading the last sentence in our study guide: “Reading Tamar’s story, we learn that worldly power is not absolute; that God’s promises can be fulfilled through the most unexpected people, in surprising ways; and that those the world considers worthy of contempt can show us God’s grace, if we only have eyes to see.”

End with the prayer on page 26