

Tamar

I am Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah. My parents were Canaanites. When I entered the eternal kingdom of the LORD, I learned that I had a distant descendant, also named Tamar. We shared several characteristics besides our name – both were victims of sexual misconduct by men who were, despite their imperfections, part of the chosen people of the LORD, God of Israel. Let me explain.

I was given in marriage to Er, son of Judah, son of Jacob -- also known as Israel. My husband offended the LORD and died. According to the customs of our culture, I was to be given to his brother Onan. Now that may seem strange to you, but it was our way. Onan, however, did not want to produce heirs for his dead brother and arranged to go through the motions but make sure that I did not get pregnant. That also offended the LORD and Onan died. Judah had another son, but he was young. Judah told me to live as a widow and wait for Shelah to grow up.

After my mother-in-law died, my father-in-law went out to supervise the shearing of his sheep. Now comes the part I am not proud of – I wanted desperately to be a mother. Shelah had not been given to me and there would be no more sons of Judah. I disguised myself as a prostitute, guessing that Jacob might be susceptible to seduction at that time in his life. He did not recognize me, and we had sex with his promise to give me a goat. As a pledge he gave me his seal, cord and staff.

He later sent a servant to give me the goat but could not find me. The servant asked people in the neighborhood about their shrine prostitute and the people said there was no prostitute.

When I knew I was pregnant, the word got back to Judah and he was ready to have me burned. As I was being brought out, I sent a message to my father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these. See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." Suddenly his view of punishment for sexual sin changed! I believe in your day it is called "a double standard." It is not a new thing but actually as old as the human race.

I gave birth to twins; Perez was technically first because his hand appeared – and was marked with a scarlet thread -- but then his brother Zerah came out. Both grew up and married. I was told after entering the eternal kingdom that Perez became the ancestor of the greatest king of the people of Israel. Also, in the line of that king, there was a mystery coming that was secret even to the angelic beings. This great event would result in the final victory of Jehovah over sin, evil and death.

And I, soiled by impure motives, together with my father-in-law, who might be called in your colorful language "a dirty old man," were by the grace and mercy of the LORD, God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob allowed to have a crucial part. And those three patriarchs were also deeply flawed.

Do you think that you are too soiled or damaged to be of value? When you see what happened to me, you must ask yourself, is anything too hard for the LORD? Is it any wonder that we are commanded, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength?" How can we help but love the LORD who shows such mercy?

Genesis 38, 2 Samuel 13, Matthew 1, Luke 3