

BEHIND THE SEEN

Exploring the Bible's Unsung Heroes

TAMAR

Rediscovering the God Who Redeems Me



Shadia Hrichi

Praise for **Tamar**

“If you enjoy squeezing every delicious drop of truth from the stories found in Scripture, Shadia Hrichi’s new study on Tamar will delight you. She handles God’s Word with exceeding care, pointing us to the many vital lessons worth learning and applying to our own lives. As a Bible teacher, I especially appreciate the options she offers small groups, from a light or moderate time commitment to in-depth or all-in. As an all-in woman, I love the depth and breadth of the questions to consider, the Bible verses to ponder, the word studies to review, and the compassionate unfolding of Tamar’s story. When you go *Behind the Seen* with Shadia, you are in very good hands!”

—**Liz Curtis-Higgs**, best-selling author of *Bad Girls of the Bible*

“After going through Shadia’s Bible study on Hagar, I couldn’t wait to see what she would do next. *Tamar* is another outstanding Bible study, rich in historical detail, cultural insights, and applicable life lessons for us today. I appreciate Shadia sharing personal stories from her own life (some heartbreaking, some amusing), which help shine light on Tamar’s story. Perfect for personal and/or group study.”

—**Francine Rivers**, international best-selling author

“If you embark on a Shadia Hrichi Bible study, know that you are in good hands. I love how she talks directly to you, cheering you on and giving you previews of the road ahead. It’s comforting! And when you study the story of Tamar from the book of Genesis, you will want comfort for this challenging story of a woman with a very unique role in biblical history. In *Tamar*, you will get to know a woman who faced a very difficult and painful path. The experts debate her choices and her motivations, but there seems to be a strong and lasting faith in God and his promises that underlies her actions. Ultimately, she gives birth to an ancestor of Jesus and is forever (and intentionally) memorialized in the genealogy of the Messiah. I don’t want to give away the story, or the stories of Shadia’s own difficult life woven together with Tamar’s. For that, you’ll need to dive into this study yourself, and even better, with a group of friends. Tamar’s life altered the trajectory of human history, and this very engaging study will put those pieces together for you in this powerful picture of God at work in the midst of a mess. Highly recommended.”

—**Susy Flory**, *New York Times* best-selling author and coauthor, and director of West Coast Christian Writers

"I have never felt so connected to an author while reading a Bible Study. Shadia Hrichi is a refreshingly real and relatable, grace-filled guide who roots this heartbreaking account within its historical context and God's plan of redemption. Witnessing Tamar's transformation from a mistreated, abandoned young widow into a powerful catalyst for change illuminates what God can accomplish through us and in us, even in the midst of our most painful circumstances. For anyone who has ever felt betrayed or deceived, this study is a blessing and a balm."

—**Rosie Makinney**, author, podcaster, and founder of Fight For Love Ministries

"Shadia is an engaging and knowledgeable guide who holds her reader's hand throughout the broader story of Tamar, while still creating room for individuals to listen for God's truth specifically for them. She integrates passages from both the Old and New Testaments, so those looking for an interactive but comprehensive approach to understanding the biblical narrative will be equipped to dive deep into this story of redemption."

—**Andrea Coli**, teaching pastor and Christian speaker

"From the first pages of this in-depth Bible study, Shadia Hrichi reveals her knowledge of Scripture and her desire for us to be transformed by truth. With consideration for the whole counsel of God's Word, Hrichi dives deep into the story of an abandoned woman to show us that God makes the powerless secure and invites the abandoned to belong."

—**Shawna Marie Bryant**, podcaster and author of *Longing to Belong: Discovering the Joy of Acceptance*

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Shadia Hrichi



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I dedicate this study to my dear friend and ministry partner, Sandi Miller.

Like many others, whose stories few will know this side of heaven,
your life and love for Jesus quietly and courageously display
the beauty and power of God's redemption—and those who know you are
enriched because of it.

But now thus says the LORD . . .

*“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.”*

Isaiah 43:1

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Scripture teaches that as God's people, we are "one body with many parts." The longer I serve in ministry, the more I realize how true this is. While my name may be on the cover of this study, I did not get here on my own.

There is no greater foundation on which to build a ministry than prayer. Thank you to John and Carolyn Jacobson, Liz Nunez, Sandi Miller, Linda Dunning, Dave and Chris Ryan, Carole Swan, Jeannie Pittam, Anne Brown, Kendra Burrows, Kiki Myabathula, and so many other dear saints I haven't the space to list here who are part of my Ministry Prayer Team. Your faithful prayers over the years are the foundational strength of this ministry.

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Most of all, I give praise to the One without whom I would have nothing of value to share. Thank You, King Jesus, for redeeming my broken life from the pit. For as long as I have breath, I will praise You for all you have done. I am continually humbled that You would entrust me to teach Your holy Word. May the precious truths in this book stir many hearts to love You even more because of the glorious redemption You purchased for us by Your own blood. To Your Name alone be all glory and praise forever!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SHADIA HRICHI IS A PASSIONATE BIBLE teacher, author, and speaker who has a heart for seeing lives transformed by the power of God's Word. Having experienced much heartache, including a broken home, abortion, and divorce, Shadia captures the hearts of

her audience as she illustrates God's love, faithfulness, and power of redemption through her personal experiences.

She received a master's degree in biblical and theological studies from Western Seminary, as well as a master's degree in criminal justice from the State University of New York. Shadia is the author of several Bible studies, including *Legion* and *Hagar*, both in her Behind the Seen series, and *Worthy of Love*, a story-driven Bible study for post-abortion healing. In addition to teaching Bible studies, Shadia is often invited to speak at churches, conferences, and other events. Her insightful and witty yet vulnerable teaching style reveals compassion for the hurting, love for Jesus, and uncompromising commitment to the truth of God's Word.

Shadia, who resides in Northern California, is an active member of Venture Christian Church and loves visiting the ocean each week for "a date with Jesus." Be sure to visit www.shadiahrichi.com and sign up for updates. *Tamar* is the third study in her series, Behind the Seen: Exploring the Bible's Unsung Heroes. Be among the first to be notified of the next study!



ABOUT THE STUDY

WELCOME, FRIEND! YOU ARE IN FOR AN ADVENTURE. THE story of Tamar, with all its sordid twists and turns, could not be a more fitting place to embark on a journey of *Rediscovering the God Who Redeems Me*.

This book is divided into six weeks, each comprising five days of personal study. For added flexibility, choose a commitment level that works best for you: “light” (15 minutes/day), “moderate” (30 minutes/day), “in-depth” (45 minutes/day), or “all-in” (60 minutes/day). See Group Study Tips (on the next page) for more details.

Each day of study includes one or more questions suitable for group discussion. These questions are followed by a ☞. Be sure not to overlook these questions, even if you are working through the material on your own. There are also Pause to Ponder sections throughout the study; these are designed to provide you with a time of personal reflection. Use the space in the margin (or, if you prefer, a journal or notebook) to respond to these questions. For readers desiring to dig even deeper, I’ve prepared Extra questions, which are preceded by a ☞.

At the end of each day, there is a Your Turn section for personal application. These questions are important. While studying the Bible can stir our hearts and open our eyes to wonderful truths, only when we apply what we have learned will it have a lasting impact for God’s kingdom. In addition to this workbook, optional video teaching sessions are available at www.shadiahrichi.com/tamar.

During my study of Tamar, I often found myself fascinated by secondary topics related to the material. The Supplemental Readings I included throughout the study are not essential, but you may find them enjoyable and informative. I have included a section called Group Study Tips, which you may find useful if you are doing the study as a group.



One quick note: some paraphrase versions of the Bible may be inadequate for the purposes of this study. Whenever possible, it is recommended that you complete the exercises using a Bible translation that adheres to a more literal translation, such as the English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, New King James Version, or King James Version.

Before you begin, take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you over the next six weeks and to bless your commitment to this study. Then, as you open your Bible and your heart, begin each day with an eager expectation of *Rediscovering the God Who Redeems Me*.



GROUP STUDY TIPS

BECAUSE ANY DEEP WORK OF GOD REQUIRES A SACRIFICE

of time spent in His Word and in His presence, the volume of material in an in-depth study can be challenging for some participants. For this reason, several suggestions are provided to help you facilitate the study when participants have varying levels of time constraints.

Video Teaching Sessions

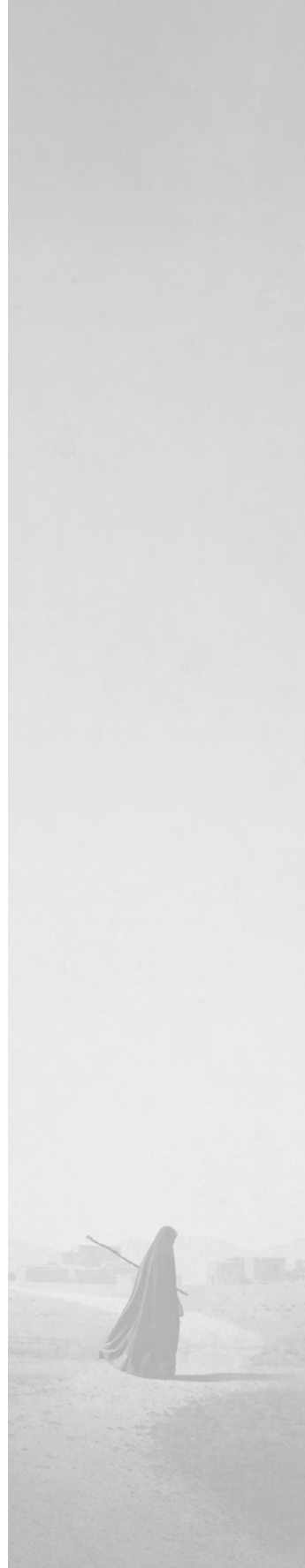
Seven optional video teaching sessions serve to complement and enhance the study. Watch Session One before you begin. Then, watch Session Two through Session Six before completing Week Two through Week Six in the study. Finally, as a wrap-up, watch Session Seven when you finish the study. Session One is approximately 15 minutes; Sessions Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, and Seven are between 20 and 25 minutes in length. Video sessions are available at www.shadiahrichi.com/tamar.

Plan an Extended Schedule

Instead of meeting for six weeks, allow two weeks for each chapter, for a total of twelve weeks. Every other week, invite participants to watch and discuss Shadia's video teaching sessions. These modifications will also provide periodic opportunities for participants to "catch up" on anything they may have missed or to spend extra time on areas of the study they may wish to explore further.

Customized Commitments for a Six-Week Schedule

Based on a six-week format, the following are suggested assignments based on an individual's time constraints.



For All Participants

- Read through each day's material, including the assigned Bible passages.
- Optional: read the Supplemental Reading section as provided in various weeks.

Light (15 Minutes a Day)

- Complete the Your Turn personal application section at the end of each day.
- If you have time, complete the Group Discussion questions, identified with a .

Moderate (30 Minutes a Day)

- Complete the various Pause to Ponder personal reflection sections as well as the Your Turn personal application section at the end of each day.
- Complete the Group Discussion questions identified with a .

In-Depth (45 Minutes a Day)

- Complete all questions except for the Extra questions identified with a .

All-In (60 Minutes a Day)

- Complete all the questions, including the Extra questions identified with a .
- Read all the Supplemental Reading sections.

May the Lord bless you as you journey through this study!



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

EVER SINCE I WAS A CHILD, I HAVE LOVED CHEERING FOR the underdogs. Whether I am watching a movie, reading a novel, or hearing of real-life events, my heart is drawn to those who face impossible odds and seem to have everything going against them. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I gravitate toward certain stories in the Bible. It is no accident that I named this series *Behind the Seen: Exploring the Bible's Unsung Heroes*. Like Hagar and the man with the Legion, Tamar is an example of someone often overlooked, not only during the time when she lived, but in today's preaching and teaching as well.

Though few may take notice of Tamar, God chose to weave her into His grand redemptive story for a reason. Like many unsung heroes, Tamar had a lot going against her, especially in the time and culture in which she lived. Not only was she a woman, she was also a Canaanite—an ethnic group that God's people were strictly forbidden to marry. If those strikes against her were not enough, at one point she even disguised herself as a prostitute and . . . well, we will get to that soon enough.

Simply mentioning Tamar's name to those who have heard of her story can invite all kinds of reactions: a lip curl in disgust, a groan of disdain, perhaps a sigh of pity. Plenty are quick to judge, but few have explored the depths of her story. Like many events in the Bible, if we take the time to dig deep into God's Word, to examine how the story fits into the bigger picture, we will often discover that there is far more going on *behind the seen*. As you explore Tamar's story in the coming weeks, you will have an opportunity to decide for yourself. Some call her courageous; others pronounce condemnation. Nonetheless, within the bounds of God's sovereignty, Tamar's choices altered the trajectory of human history, and they still echo in the heavens today.



When we look back through the generations, even among God's own people, we discover that Tamar was not alone. All of human history is basically an unending cycle of dysfunction and failure, but in His mercy, God does not abandon us there! His plan of redemption was written from eternity past, in spite of the dysfunction, failure, and sin that He knew would unfold along the way. For reasons known only to Him, God chose to invite Tamar into His glorious plan.

So, my friend, are you ready for an adventure? Are you ready for a story of a woman facing impossible odds, whose life intersects with the One who overcomes the impossible? Then come with me! Let's rediscover the *God Who Redeems Me!*

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shadia".

*In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace.*

Ephesians 1:7



PART I

ABANDONED



ANTICIPATING GOD'S FULFILLMENT

FROM THE BEGINNING, GOD HAS BEEN SETTING APART A people to call His own—a people to reflect His image in the world. This week, we will trace how God has been at work *behind the seen* throughout the generations of man, setting apart a people for Himself, from Adam to Seth to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As we journey through their stories, we will encounter triumph and tragedy, life and death, joy and sorrow.

When we come to the story of Jacob's wife, Leah, the trajectory of God's people takes a sudden turn, paving the way for Tamar's entrance into His grand redemptive story.

DAY ONE Being Set Apart by God

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David,
the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac,
and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and
his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.*

Matthew 1:1–3



Fun fact: Tamar's name is pronounced *Tah-mahr* in Hebrew, with the emphasis on the second syllable.

Three verses. Tamar's name appears just three verses into the New Testament, but her story doesn't begin there. Like all of our stories, hers begins at the beginning, the first chapters in the book of Genesis. Just as we wouldn't want to begin reading a novel midway through the book, before we can dive into Tamar's story, we will first spend a few days taking in the big picture in which her story appears.

Hero Stories

Genesis is a fascinating book to study because it is by and large a historical narrative. But it is more than that. I love how the *ESV Study Bible* describes it: "the book of Genesis is primarily a collection of what may be called hero stories. . . ."¹

Hero stories. I like that!

The other night, I watched the animated movie *The Incredibles*. When I was growing up, I loved watching the television programs *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman*—action-packed stories of ordinary people given super-human strength to carry out high-risk missions for the good of humanity. Who doesn't love a good hero story?

PAUSE TO PONDER

Name someone whom you consider or have considered to be a hero, now or when you were a child. The person can be real or fictional, in or outside the Bible. What makes this person heroic? *off*

Record your thoughts in the margin; do this for all Pause to Ponder sections.

To this day, there is no shortage of hero stories, both real and imagined. We find them in books and on television, in the movies and on the news. Our hearts are naturally drawn to hero stories. Why? The simple answer is that we need heroes. We need them because we live in a broken world. Everywhere we look, we find injustice and tragedy—things that, in the depths of our soul, remind us that this is not how the world should be. So we gravitate toward hero stories—stories of hope, of triumph, of good conquering evil. If we lived in a world where no one needed saving, there would be no need for heroes.

When we think about heroes in the Bible—such as Moses standing up to Pharaoh or David conquering Goliath—we can't help but celebrate their victories. The Bible is filled with stories of heroes: Noah, Abraham, Esther, Samson, and so many others. But all too often we forget that the same Moses who stood up to Pharaoh also murdered a man and buried him in the sand. The same David

who killed Goliath also killed his faithful servant, Uriah. Even the great King Solomon, blessed by God with surpassing wisdom, eventually succumbed to—of all things—idolatry.

When it comes to the human race, sooner or later, even the best heroes will fall short. No matter how strong, wise, wealthy, or successful, no one can escape the ravages of sin—the underlying first cause of all evil, sorrow, and suffering in our world.² The truth of the matter is that when it comes to saving the human race from sin, we need more than a hero; we need a Savior. And three chapters into the book of Genesis, God, in His mercy, promises one.

Write Genesis 3:15 below. (Optional: read all of Genesis 3:1-15.)

Set Apart by God

As soon as sin enters the world, God distinguishes the offspring (or seed) of the serpent and the offspring of the woman. Because the human race has fallen into sin, God pronounces the inevitable: a future of conflict and hostility, pain and sorrow . . . but in the end, triumph! Humanity needs rescue, and praise God that through the offspring of the woman, a Savior will one day come.

Read Genesis 4:1-8. Briefly describe the events.

Why did the Lord look favorably on one offering over the other? What distinguishing factor is emphasized in the text? (Hint: see Proverbs 3:9.)

PAUSE TO PONDER

Consider the effect of sin in just one generation. Do you find it surprising? Not so surprising? Disheartening? Share your thoughts.

When it comes to the human race, even the best heroes will fall short. In truth, we need more than a hero; we need a Savior.



.....

"The heart is deceitful
above all things, and
desperately sick; who can
understand it?"

—Jeremiah 17:9

.....

One generation. One! One generation into human history, and the first person born to the first human couple murders his own brother in cold blood. If Genesis is a collection of hero stories, we don't seem to be off to a good start. Let's look at the passage more closely, beginning with verses 1–2a, which reads: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again, she bore his brother Abel."

Because the passage mentions only one conception immediately followed by two births, commentary author John Calvin proposes that Cain and Abel may have been twins, an idea passed on from earlier Jewish rabbis and teachers.³ It is a reasonable possibility, not only based on the construction of the text ("And again, she bore" can also read, "Then she bore again" as translated in the New King James Version), but also in light of God's blessing on Adam and Eve to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). In the Bible, we are certain of at least two sets of twins (we will cover these in the weeks ahead), each of which holds a prominent place in the genealogy of God's people. Whether or not Cain and Abel were twins, their violent clash would set a tragic trajectory for generations to come.

The Evil and the Righteous

In the account of Cain and Abel, we read that each brother brought an offering to the Lord out of his labor. Though both engaged in noble pursuits (agriculture and shepherding), it was the quality of their gifts that exposed the degree of reverence in their hearts.

Look back at Genesis 4:3–7. In the table below, list the only two types of behavior the Lord describes and their respective outcomes, according to verses 6–7. I filled in one box for you.

Behavior	Outcome
Do well	

 Ponder the above table. What conclusions can you draw?

Read Genesis 4:8-9. What does the Lord ask Cain? How does Cain respond?

Since the Lord knows everything, why do you think He asked Cain this question? What does it reveal about the Lord's character?

How about Cain? What does his response reveal about his character?

Already we see the Lord's mercy at work. Cain just murdered his own brother, yet the Lord does not begin the conversation with an accusation, but a question. Just as He did for Adam (Gen. 3:9), the Lord, in His grace, provides Cain an opportunity to confess his sin. Sadly, Cain not only refuses to confess, but he boldly lies to the Lord's face! In fact, he questions the Lord in return! No pity. No remorse. Just defiance. This from the first person born to the human race. Oh, how this must have grieved God's heart!

What reason(s) may have been behind Cain's actions? *Off*

Read 1 John 3:12. Fill in the blanks based on the text.

We should not be like Cain, who was of the _____ one
and murdered his _____. And why did he murder him?
Because his own deeds were _____ and his
brother's _____.

Though the Lord warned Cain, urging him to "do well" (Gen. 4:7), Cain's behavior only became worse, revealing the cold heart within. Scripture describes Cain as being "of the evil one." That's quite a pronouncement.

In contrast, how does Scripture describe Abel, according to Hebrews 11:4?

.....
"Precious in the sight of
the LORD is the death of his
saints." —Psalm 116:15
.....



Right from the start, we see a clear distinction between Cain and Abel, and we see the “evil one” already at work in the interaction between these first children of man with “the seed of the serpent striking quickly at the seed of the woman in an attempt to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15.”⁴

Who Is My Brother?

Read Genesis 4:10–11. Write the Lord's response to Cain, according to verse 10.

What does the Lord's response reveal about His heart?

.....

“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” —1 John 3:10

.....

Examine Genesis 4:1–11 in your Bible. Mark (highlight, circle, or underline) each occurrence of the word *brother*. How many times is this word used to describe Abel? How many times is it used to describe Cain?

Abel _____ times

Cain _____ times



Do you think this is significant? Why or why not?

In the New Testament, believers are repeatedly and affectionately called “brothers” (often referring to both male and female siblings within God’s family). In Genesis, it is no coincidence that only Abel is described as a “brother”—not once, but seven times! In the Bible, the number seven is symbolic for completion or fullness. Scripture is revealing that Abel is a “brother” in the fullest sense of the word.

.....YOUR TURN.....

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:9

What difference does it make that God sets apart a people for Himself?
For example:

- What difference has it made in your life?
- How about in your family or church?
- What about the world? What difference does it make in the world today that there is a group of people whom God has set apart for Himself?

DAY TWO

Calling on the Name of the Lord

Yesterday, we saw how beautifully Scripture brought Abel's heart to light by describing him as a brother—not once, but seven times. In contrast, Cain is never once described that way; he exhibits no brotherly affection, concern, or love. On the surface, he may have seemed entirely amicable until jealousy and sin exposed the cold, empty heart within.

Good Fruit vs. Bad Fruit

My favorite evening snack is a bowl of popcorn and a plate of orange slices or a tall glass of orange juice (with lots of pulp). I love oranges. I still remember the first time I was living away from home and went grocery shopping for myself. When I came to the produce section, I happily filled a plastic bag with a half dozen large, bright oranges. I couldn't wait to get home and try one (with a bowl of popcorn, of course!). Later that evening, I took a knife and eagerly cut into one of the oranges. The orange was vibrant and firm on the outside, but when I sliced into the skin, it was nearly an inch thick! Not only that, but when I finally reached the fruit inside, it was a fraction of the size I expected and nearly half shriveled. What a disappointment!

Looks can be deceiving. What appeared sweet and delicious on the outside turned out to be dry and shriveled on the inside. Only later did I learn the trick of weighing the fruit in my hand to assess how much plump fruit and heavy juice lay hidden within. In the same way, God knows every corner of our hearts. Nothing is hidden from His sight.

.....

"Every way of a man is
right in his own eyes, but
the Lord weighs the heart."

—Proverbs 21:2

.....



NOTHING CAN THWART GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE—NOT EVEN YOU.

If God can choose the Canaanite Tamar to continue the line through which Christ would come, can anything keep Him from weaving your story into His redemptive plan?

Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah, is the first woman listed in the lineage of Christ. Mistreated, widowed twice, betrayed, and used as a prostitute . . . it seems impossible that God could redeem her story, but His plan of redemption was prewritten for all eternity—and nothing can get in His way.

Through this six-week, in-depth Bible study, you will discover that no matter life's twists and turns or your sins and failures, there is a God working *behind the seen*, redeeming it all for His glory.

“If you enjoy squeezing every delicious drop of truth from the stories found in Scripture, Shadia Hrichi's new study on Tamar will delight you. She handles God's Word with exceeding care, pointing us to the many vital lessons worth learning and applying to our own lives.”

—**LIZ CURTIS-HIGGS**, best-selling author of *Bad Girls of the Bible*

“If you embark on a Shadia Hrichi Bible study, know that you are in good hands. Tamar's life altered the trajectory of human history, and this very engaging study will put those pieces together for you in this powerful picture of God at work in the midst of a mess. Highly recommended.”

—**SUSY FLORY**, *New York Times* best-selling author, and director of West Coast Christian Writers



Shadia Hrichi is a passionate Bible teacher who has a heart for seeing lives transformed by the power of God's Word. She holds a master's in biblical and theological studies as well as a master's in criminal justice. Shadia is the author of several Bible studies, including *Hagar*, *Legion*, and *Worthy of Love*, and is often invited to speak at churches, conferences, and other events. Residing in northern California, Shadia is an active member of Venture Christian Church and loves to visit the ocean each week for “a date with Jesus.” To learn more, visit www.shadiahrichi.com.


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