

## WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

### TAMAR: LESSON NINETEEN

by Sandy Harber

#### "And Judah begat Pharez and Zerah of Tamar...." Matthew 1:3

Did Tamar seduce Judah to ensure the birth of the Messiah? Scripture does not give us Tamar's motive for dressing up as a temple virgin and enticing her father-in-law to sleep with her. A few Bible commentaries have suggested that Tamar took this course of action to enable the birth of Christ, Whose lineage was prophesied to be of the tribe of Judah.

I did not include this theory as a motive for Tamar's actions when I wrote my lessons on Genesis 38 because I don't believe that it is a possibility. However, I have heard discussions from individuals who believe that Tamar may have been trying to "help God" like Sarah did when she gave Hagar to Abraham in order to raise up a son (Gen. 16:1-2). Therefore, I feel led to document my reasons for rejecting this theory.

My primary reason for dismissing the "ensure the birth of the Messiah" theory is that Tamar did not know that the Messiah was to come from the line of Judah at the time that she seduced her father-in-law. The prophecy that gives us the lineage through Judah was given by Jacob on his deathbed in Genesis 49. Jacob called his sons to him (including his two grandsons through Joseph, which he adopted as sons, giving Joseph a double inheritance, which is the portion of the eldest son) and prophesied the future of each son and their descendants.

In Gen. 49:10 we learn that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Jacob prophesied that the kings of Israel would come from the tribe of Judah. David was the first king from that tribe. God promised David that his descendants would occupy the throne of Israel forever (II Sam. 7:16). Saul from the tribe of Benjamin was the first king of Israel but God rejected him because of his sin.

In the reign of David's grandson, Rehoboam, the nation split in two, creating a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. While kings in the northern kingdom arose from various tribes, they didn't last long. David's descendants, however, continued to rule the southern kingdom in an unbroken line. The northern kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrian Army in 722 BC. The southern kingdom came to an end in 586 BC at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon due to the sin of the people in forsaking the Lord.

There are no kings in Israel today. Jacob prophesied that there would be a descendant of Judah on the throne in the future. And God promised David that the coming king would be from his (David's) lineage. Jacob called the future king "Shiloh," which means "Him to Whom it belongs." "It" being the kingdom or, more properly, the scepter, which is the symbol of authority. Shiloh is He Whose right it is to rule (Ezekiel 21:27). Ezekiel ministered to the Jewish people who were forcibly removed to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Through him God told His people that because of their sins there would be no more king in Israel until He "Whose right it is" shall appear (Ezek. 21:26-27). Shiloh is listed in the Jewish Talmud as one of the personal names of the Messiah. Jesus, of course, is Shiloh, the One Whose right it is to reign on David's throne forever.

Tamar did not have any of this information about the Messiah when she was married to Judah's sons. Even Judah himself did not know the Messiah was destined to come from his family until his dying father told him so. We have the completed Word of God at our disposal. But, we have to be careful when interpreting the Word that we do not read facts that we know back into the text documenting a situation where those facts had not yet been given.

Do not forget that Judah had a living son, Shelah. Even if Tamar knew about the prophecy what would make her assume that Judah needed another son to ensure fulfillment? Shelah did produce offspring (Numb. 26:20). Tamar could not have known that the Messiah's line was not destined to come through Shelah. I just don't think this theory is plausible given the facts of the situation.

*"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." II Timothy 2:15*