

# WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

## TAMAR: LESSON ELEVEN

by Sandy Harber

**"And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife. When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; because she had covered her face.  
Genesis 38:14-15**

Tamar dressed for deceit. She removed her widow's clothing and replaced it with garments fit for a Canaanite temple prostitute. Veil included. No one who saw her would recognize her. Her face was hidden by the veil. Her body was disguised by prostitute's garb. Why did Tamar take this desperate step? She must have been convinced that Judah would never give her to his youngest son. She could not remain in her father's house forever. It was humiliating. She could not marry outside of Er's family due to the customs of the day, which tied her to his inheritance and placed on her a duty to produce an heir that would ensure his legacy and name would continue.

Her plan was far from foolproof. First of all, how could she be sure Judah would notice her, engage her services as a prostitute, and then not recognize her throughout the process? Besides that, what were the chances that she would be impregnated after only one encounter with Judah? The scheme was risky. And there's the ick factor: she was having sex with her father-in-law.

The Canaanite religion was built around immoral gods and goddesses made in the image of sinful man. Thus, these deities engaged in sexual perversions, which gave the "worshippers" license to mimic the behavior of their "gods." The temple priestesses became "sacred" prostitutes. Use of these temple prostitutes were part of the "worship" of these false gods.

Tamar's deception, then, was leading Judah into an act of idolatry as well as immorality. I doubt if this was her intention. She was focused on fulfilling her duty to bare an heir for her deceased husband, the father of whom must be Er's close kinsman.

So she sat by the route she knew he would be traveling. The Bible warns us that Satan lies in wait for us, like a lion ready to pounce. Temptation is wrapped in pleasant garments, waiting for us to walk by and take notice. But temptation is not sin. It's the giving into temptation, the action that we take, that becomes sin.

Judah could have walked by Tamar and continued on to Timnath. He could have ignored her. She set the trap, but he walked into it willingly.

We are all confronted with temptations on a daily basis. Sometimes it is blatant so we know giving in to it will lead to sin. But temptation can be subtle, it can be deceptive. We can get caught before we recognize what we have gotten ourselves into. Remember, Satan is a liar and a deceiver. He can make sin seem innocent. "Everyone is doing it."

Tamar herself gave in to temptation. The temptation to take matters into her own hands and trick Judah into sleeping with her. "The end justifies the means" is another lie we use to excuse our sin. When life seems to treat us unfairly and we are hurting or sad or depressed, then we are vulnerable to temptation. We are so focused on our feelings and emotions that we miss the full import of what we are doing until it is too late and we have sinned. It may just be with our lips. Sometimes we say that which we should not have. And then we dismiss it. "I'm only human." Or, we ignore it.

Satan and his minions are always watching and waiting. And, it isn't always temptation from Satan that trips us up. Our own sinful nature may take control and we just do whatever we want to. According to the Bible, the cure for this is to draw near to God (James 4:8) and read His Word (Psalm 119:9).

*"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." Psalm 119:1*