

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

TAMAR: LESSON EIGHTEEN

by Sandy Harber

SUMMARY

Tamar was a Canaanite girl born into a nation of idolaters. Yet God chose her to be an ancestress of Jesus Christ. She was hand-picked by Judah to be the wife of his eldest son. The Bible doesn't explain why she was chosen. Perhaps her family was prominent, wealthy, or both. Maybe her father and Judah were friends. Whatever the reason, Tamar was chosen to be the bride of Er, Judah's eldest son. She was probably 13 to 17 years old. She could not have been married to Er for very long since the 22 year timeline of Genesis 38 doesn't allow for it. Thus, she was still a teenager when she was widowed for the first time.

It's likely Tamar married Judah's second son soon after the death of the first. This marriage didn't work out any better. Again, the marriage had to be very short since God took the groom after the couple had sex for the first time (vv. 8-9).

Tamar was a twice widowed teenager who was sent back to live with her father. She must have been humiliated. Everyone would have been talking about her. God killed both of her husbands, one on their wedding night. She had been sent home in disgrace. She had not fulfilled her role in producing an heir for Judah's family. Women were expected to marry and bare children. That was their purpose in life. Tamar was a failure. She must have taken that to heart. Perhaps she became obsessed with the idea of producing an heir for Judah's family. She wanted a chance to try again, but Judah would not send for her to marry his youngest son.

When she realized Judah was never going to marry her to his last remaining son she hatched a plot to give Judah his heir and take away her motherless disgrace. Only a very young, foolish, woman would come up with the plan Tamar executed. She risked her life disguising herself as a temple prostitute and seducing her own father-in-law. What if she had been recognized in her disguise? Only a very young and desperate woman would expect one sexual encounter to end with a pregnancy.

Tamar was smart enough to consider the consequences of her actions and made preparations to mitigate them. She obtained evidence from Judah to use as proof that he was the father of her baby. She must have believed in the integrity of her father-in-law to admit the signet and staff were his and that he gave them to her as payment for sexual favors.

Young Tamar was brave and either optimistic, desperate, or both. It is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture that she consulted the God of her husband's family, or a false god, either. But she executed her plan with courage and it yielded the result she wanted: she was with child.

Tamar survived the discovery of her secret. She was spared punishment by stoning or burning. Judah's influence probably saved her. She safely delivered twin boys: Pharez and Zarah. We can only speculate on what became of Tamar after the birth of her sons. The Bible does tell us that Judah never had sexual relations with her again (v. 26). Did he marry her anyway? Or, give her to his youngest son as he should have done before she resorted to deceit and trickery? Somehow, after having relations with her himself, that doesn't seem likely.

We do know that both Pharez and Zarah are included in the genealogies of Judah's family (I Chron. 2:5-6). Therefore, Pharez and Zarah were with Judah and the whole family of Jacob when they migrated to Egypt during the famine (Gen. 46:5-7). Since the twins would have been young children Tamar must have been included in Judah's family group.

Tamar's story teaches us that God is a forgiving, all-inclusive God. He blessed a Gentile young woman, born into idolatry, and made her part of the family of His Son Jesus. We are all born in sin, enemies of God. But He has lovingly provided a way for our sins to be erased as if they never were (Is. 43:25). All we need is faith in Jesus.

"I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no savior." Isaiah 43:11