

## WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

### TAMAR: LESSON SIX

by Sandy Harber

**"And Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him." Genesis 38:7**

In the space of one verse Tamar was married and widowed. Scripture doesn't give us a timeline. Were they married for a year? Two years? Six months? It probably wasn't a long marriage since Onan was still single and Shelah was still too young to marry when Er died.

Was Tamar happy in her marriage? She was tied to a man who was so wicked that God killed him. The Bible doesn't tell us what sin(s) Er committed. Could he have treated Tamar with love and respect while committing sins worthy of death in the eyes of God? It doesn't seem likely. The most likely scenario is that he was a poor husband, possibly abusive. Tamar may have been more relieved than grief-stricken at his death. On the other hand, she may have loved him in spite of his faults and was truly sad when he died. We can only speculate.

The loss of a husband has many impacts. In Tamar's day especially it meant the loss of security. Women did not have the opportunities we do today. Without a husband or children the Biblical widow could face homelessness and starvation. She would be an object of pity. If she was lucky she might have her parents or another relative willing to help her.

Loss of a husband causes emotional distress. Tamar may or may not have been attached to Er so we cannot assess the level of her grief. But, for those of us who truly lost the love of our lives, a husband's death is devastating. A part of us dies as well. Such a loss leaves an emptiness that can never be filled in this lifetime. There's an ache just under the surface that never completely disappears.

Without her life partner the widow is left to do things alone. Little things, like grocery shopping, attending the church service or a birthday celebration, or decorating for Christmas are not accomplished alone. Bigger things, like maintaining the house and the car can be frightening without the strength and knowledge of her husband. The widow's "new normal" is a series of challenges.

The Bible tells us that Er was wicked in the sight of God. What about Er's family, friends, and neighbors? Did they recognize Er's sin? Or, was it something he was able to hide? Perhaps Tamar was the object of pity because people saw what kind of man she was married to. Perhaps she was ignored or avoided because people did not want to deal with her husband. It just doesn't seem as though she could have enjoyed a happy married life.

There are not many instances in Scripture where God intervenes and cuts a life short. He generally allows time for the sinner to repent and change his ways. God would not have taken Er if there was any chance he would have repented. Er had loved the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19-20). By taking Tamar's wicked husband God gave her a second chance at happiness. She was young enough to marry again and have children. It was customary for a childless widow to marry her deceased husband's brother. Tamar would have a second chance with Onan as her groom.

*"For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness." Psalm 18:28*