

# WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

## TAMAR: LESSON SEVEN

by Sandy Harber

**"And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also." Genesis 38:8-10**

Judah instructed his second son Onan to marry Tamar. The first son born from their union would be considered the son of Onan's brother Er and would receive Er's inheritance. This was a common practice at that time. Later, God directed Moses to codify it into His law (Dt. 25:5-6). It was known as the Levirate Law. "Levirate" means "brother-in-law" or "husband's brother." Whatever Er did to cause God to take his life was not sufficient for Judah to allow his son's name and legacy to be forgotten. By marrying Er's childless widow Tamar to Onan Judah was giving Er a second chance at a legacy. As the first-born son, Er was entitled to a double portion of his father's estate. If Tamar and Onan had a son that son would be legally entitled to Er's birthright, that is, a double portion of Judah's estate.

This marriage would also benefit Tamar. The plight of a childless widow was not a good one in those days. Young widows with or without children, were expected to remarry. She would then have the security of a husband to protect her and provide for her. And in her old age she would have her children to care for her. Imagine being Tamar. She had just lost her husband and now she was being thrust into a new relationship, an intimate relationship, with his younger brother. It doesn't seem likely that Tamar was in love with Onan. It was just as unlikely that Onan was in love with Tamar. In their culture, the father was king and everyone obeyed him. If Judah told Onan to marry Tamar, then marry her he must.

But, Onan was selfish. He knew that if he got Tamar pregnant and she had a son that son would get Er's inheritance, that is, a double portion of their father's estate. But, if there was no heir, then he, Onan, as the oldest surviving son, would receive the double portion of his father's estate. Therefore, when Onan had sex with Tamar he pulled out at the critical moment so that none of his sperm was inside her.

Poor Tamar. What a pair of husbands she had! Based on the culture she lived in, she cannot be blamed for the type of men she was married to. Today's woman, however, is free to choose her own spouse. The Bible warns us not to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. This is why pastors warn their congregation not to even date an unbeliever. This removes temptation and can save the woman (or man) from making a huge mistake.

Onan may have thought he was clever, that no one would know what he had done. But God knew. And God was not happy with Onan. He did not even give Onan a second chance. God killed him just as He had his brother, Er. God dispensed justice immediately in the cases of Er and Onan. Yet, we see so many situations that appear unjust to our human understanding. Corrupt politicians get away with flouting the law and the constitution, criminals are not prosecuted or are released early, the evil prosper while the victims are ignored, innocent men are jailed, and good people die too soon. Why?

The simple answer is that God is sovereign. He does what He does for His Own purposes. And because He is a holy and righteous God everything He does is good. That's the part that can be hard for us to accept when we are on the receiving end of a tragic situation. How can God be good when He allowed my husband, who faithfully served in His church, to die, but criminals are allowed to roam freely hurting innocent people?

The Bible says that God is good, holy, and righteous. There are no qualifiers or exceptions. So, we either believe the Bible or we don't. We may not understand. We certainly don't like the situation we are in. But if we have faith that the Bible is true, then we have to trust that God is working out His will in our lives. It's up to us to accept our circumstances are from Him. And we need to figure out how He wants us to move forward. When we trust God He gives us the strength and grace to face each day.

*"Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.  
Selah." Psalm 62:8*