

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

TAMAR: LESSON SIXTEEN

by Sandy Harber

"When she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet and bracelets, and staff. And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more." Genesis 38:25-26

Tamar was "brought forth" publically to be burned for harlotry. The whole town probably turned out for this event. How often did they get to witness a public burning? The story was repeated multiple times, traveling from neighbor to neighbor. Everyone was talking about it. Perhaps people were taking sides. Some were blaming Judah for delaying the marriage of his son. Some blamed Tamar for her unfaithfulness. Many wondered who fathered Tamar's baby.

Business was generally conducted at the city gate. Perhaps Tamar was "brought forth" to the gate where the elders of the city sat. The accusation of harlotry and the sentence of death by burning may have been announced to those present. Was she to be burned there in the area of the city gate or taken somewhere else? Perhaps a solemn march to the site of the burning was anticipated. Judah appears to be the judge at Tamar's "trial" if the justice she had could be considered a trial. At least, it was he who pronounced the sentence. Perhaps because he or his son, Shelah, was deemed the aggrieved party. Tamar brought the signet ring on a cord and the staff with her. She presented her "evidence" to Judah naming the father of her baby through his possessions. As indicated previously, the signet and staff were distinctive. It would have been obvious to all to whom they belonged.

To his credit, Judah admitted that he gave Tamar the signet and the staff. Further, he acknowledged that it was his conduct in withholding Shelah that caused Tamar to behave in the desperate manner that she did. Tamar had sinned. But, Judah admitted that he had the greater sin. It seems as though the trial had come to an end and the prisoner was set free. The entire town witnessed Tamar's vindication.

The Bible tells us that Judah and Tamar never again engaged in sexual relations. Therefore, it seems unlikely that he made her his wife. Did he finally allow her to marry Shelah? We don't know. We do know that Shelah had two sons named Er and Laadah (I Chron 4:21) but the name of the mother is not given. We can be sure that Tamar and her sons were included in Judah's family group, traveled with them to Egypt during the great famine, and their descendants returned to the land of Canaan with General Joshua.

God in His sovereignty allowed Tamar's deceit to produce the desired result: an heir for her deceased husband Er. What's more, Tamar's son would be part of the royal line that produced King David and, later, Jesus Christ. We may never know why God took a Canaanite girl who was raised in idolatry and included her in the family of His Son. Why did God choose Judah instead of Joseph to be the progenitor of the royal family? All we know is that His ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8-9).

Judah appears to be growing spiritually. He took responsibility for his sin. He acknowledged it publically. He vindicated the woman he blamed for the death of his eldest sons, and to whom he refused his youngest son. He spared her life. Judah had come a long way from the man who sold his own brother as a slave (Gen. 37:26-27).

Tamar survived her ordeal. God in His grace and mercy brought her through. He will do that for all of us. Often we would prefer He kept us from the trial - not having to endure it at all - rather than through the trial. But one important thing to remember is that while we are going through the trial He is right there with us. It is an opportunity to lean on Him and get to know Him better. Trials are not pleasant. But when they are over we find that we have gained some strength or insight that we can use in the next trial or pass on to others.

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." Isaiah 54:17