

## WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

### TAMAR: LESSON FOUR

by Sandy Harber

**"And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. And she yet again conceived and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him." Genesis 38:3-5**

Judah and his wife had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. There was apparently a number of years between Onan and Shelah. Shelah was still a young child when both Er and Onan were married to Tamar (one at a time, of course!). Scripture points out that the family was at Chezib when Shelah was born. Chezib was another Canaanite town like Adullam. Judah may have moved his family before the birth of his third son.

The history of Judah's family life is placed after the selling of Joseph to Egypt and the record of how Joseph fared in Egypt. Why was the story of Judah and Tamar inserted here?

It was obviously important for us to know the history of these ancestors of Jesus. God does not spare us the sordid details of the lives of His people. We can, therefore, understand that in spite of their sin God included them in the royal line that produced His Son, the Messiah. God is in the mercy and grace business. He forgives sins and blesses the sinner.

Genesis 38 is a parenthesis in the story of Joseph. At the same time that Joseph is being transported to Egypt and sold to Potiphar his tormenter, Judah, left his brothers and moved to the Canaanite city of Adullam (v. 1). Judah did those things that Joseph could not: he made friends, started a business, married, and had children. In other words, he lived the normal life of a free man in his time and culture. He did things that were denied to his brother, the slave.

In future lessons we will see that Judah matured a little in that he acknowledged he had been wrong in withholding his son from Tamar (v.14), in using the services of a prostitute (vv, 15-16), and in attempting to punish Tamar as harshly as possible (v. 26). He shows further maturity in offering to be surety for his brother Benjamin (Gen. 43:8-9). And, finally, he proves that he is a changed man when he offers himself as a slave in place of Benjamin so that his father is not grief-stricken a second time (Gen. 4:18-34).

How we react during the dark times in our lives exposes who we really are. Judah caused his own tragic times by allowing his jealousy and hatred to dictate his actions. When he saw how his actions affected his father, Judah could not remain with his family and witness his father's grief. Judah's guilt must have been a great burden.

But many crises are not the result of our actions. They are griefs and sorrows not of our own making. Nevertheless, God is watching to see how we respond. Dark times should drive us to our Lord, to His Word, and to His people for support and comfort. Tragedy is an opportunity to trust God. It's a chance to prove His promises and experience His love and comfort first hand.

*"Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."  
Psalm 37:3*