
MYSTERIES & WONDERS *of the* BIBLE

UNVEILED

TAMAR'S STORY



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CHAPTER ONE

The girls chattered as they knelt before the huge loom in the weaving room. Tamar paced the floor along the length of the loom, watching every movement as fabric emerged from the intricately, perfectly woven cords. She barely heard their girlish talk, their voices blending with others that drifted through two wide windows. A nearly imperceptible breeze carried the aroma of onions and herbs from the market.

The scent almost distracted her. Last night the *Pesach* celebration had begun, and she'd eaten the first meal with her family. Her sisters and nieces would already be at work on the food for the second day of the weeklong feast, while she oversaw the last of the holy work they would do in the weaving room for the next week. No doubt her sisters-in-law were busy chopping vegetables and herbs and gathering eggs, while her cousin Levi, a priest in the temple, would be just as busy today as yesterday, slaughtering the lambs for the visitors to Jerusalem and for Gentiles who wished to celebrate with them. Levi, exhausted last night after the slaughtering for the resident Jews, had mused on how they might have to extend the *Pesach* sacrifices yet another day if the celebration grew any more.

Proof, they'd all agreed, that the Lord was at work in the world.

She jerked her attention back to the weaving room and the girls in her charge. Tamar smiled at their prattling voices, focusing on the fabric slowly growing on the cloth roll. She inspected the progress at each of the seventy-two rods with an expert eye to ensure every girl exerted the exact amount of tension needed. Their chatter quieted at her approach and began again as she moved along. She hid a smile. They weren't afraid of her, but they did respect her, especially the new girls—as they should for one who had served Adonai in such a sacred capacity for more than fifteen years.

Tamar halted, then dropped to her knees. A wayward thread protruded from the tightly woven cloth. She tugged lightly on the offending thread, and all conversation ceased.

“Did you not see this, Bithnia?” She looked at one of six girls who had joined the group two weeks before.

Bithnia's smooth brow puckered. She leaned across the taut rows of cords to examine the errant thread. “I...” She swallowed. “I did not notice. One of the strands must have frayed.”

Tamar drew in a deep, calming breath.

“You *must* be more attentive.” She controlled her tone but allowed a slight scold to creep in. She stood to look down on the girl. “One day this veil will guard the Most Holy Place. Adonai Himself ordained the design, and every strand *must* be perfect.”

Bithnia rocked back on her heels, her head drooping forward. “Yes, Tamar. I...I was distracted.”

“Distracted?” Tamar raised her voice to address the entire room. “This work is holy. We cannot become inattentive. This curtain is blessed. Sacred. It will safeguard the very presence of the Holy One. Who knows what would happen if the veil was imperfect?”

No one answered, the silence broken only by the sounds from the market.

Tamar bent, wrapped the strand around her fingers, and tore it from the woven fabric. She raised it, a scarlet thread to represent fire. When she knew she had everyone's attention, she released it. It fluttered downward and came to rest across the warp cords.

"Had we found it during the weave, we might have saved part of the veil. But now..." She drew in a deep breath and almost whispered, "Clear the loom and discard this imperfect fabric. We must begin again."

The girls raised a groan, and those around Bithnia glared at her. Tamar softened when the girl's features fell. She spoke again, loudly enough to be heard but this time with more compassion.

"Adonai knows we are not perfect." Again, the girls fell silent. Tamar gazed at the line of young weavers, each pair of eyes fixed on her. "That is the reason for the sin sacrifice, is it not?" The girls nodded, and Tamar smiled at Bithnia. "Did King Solomon not say, 'Two are better than one'? We help each—"

A commotion from outside interrupted her. A cacophony of angry cries filled the air. Not market shoppers. This sounded more like a mob. Tamar approached the closest of the windows and leaned out to look down the narrow lane.

To her left she saw only the shops and buildings lining the street until the road curved at the top of the hill. She turned her head to the right, toward the market, and her breath froze.

People packed the narrow lane, most walking backward to watch whatever followed. Their voices roared, some wailing, some shouting, some cursing. Beyond them, the metal helmets of Roman guards gleamed in the morning sunlight.

Tamar's stomach dropped. Another crucifixion.

She hurried to the door and threw it open then stepped onto the narrow stoop. Dimly aware that the girls crowded behind her or huddled around the windows, she stood as a barrier between them and the swiftly approaching crowd.

When their advance brought them to the shop, she extended her arms to protect her girls from the fury of the screaming mob.

They filed past, their garb identifying them as Jews. Probably pilgrims to Jerusalem, come to celebrate Pesach. But why were they so angry?

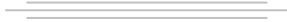
As the first wave passed, she heard the thudding of feet on the stone road. Through the crowd, she glimpsed a row of Roman soldiers, identifiable by their uniforms. And then...

Her stomach lurched. She'd seen crucifixions, but this man was barely recognizable as human, His face so disfigured from the beatings He had endured. Blood streamed from a crude circlet on His head, and even from this distance, she saw huge thorns digging into His skull. Just watching Him struggle to take His next step made her body ache.

"Who is that?" she whispered.

Tamar hardly knew that she had spoken until someone sniffled. She turned to find Bithnia standing beside her. Tears ran down the young woman's face.

"It is Jesus."



Work on the curtain progressed slowly. Tamar helped the girls remove the flawed fabric and drag it off to be discarded. They'd only

been working on this veil for a few weeks, so the weight was manageable. Then they began the process of threading the tightly woven warp through each rod, attaching the weight stones, checking each cord's tension while ensuring that the twenty-four strands were firmly wound.

She was bent over the eighth rod when the light failed.

The room was enveloped in darkness. One young woman squealed in fear, and soon half the others joined in. Though she understood their fear—even experienced some herself—Tamar straightened and spoke firmly.

“Girls, control yourselves. Davorah, Hinda, Illana, bring lamps from the storeroom.”

They hesitated only a moment before moving as one toward the back room.

Tamar addressed the rest of the weavers. “’Tis a terrible storm, no doubt. It will pass. We have lost too much time on this veil already. We cannot afford to waste any more.” She forced a calm breath. “I know we all have Pesach meals waiting for us at home. Let us work quickly so we can join our families soon.”

Though she heard several whimpers, Tamar ignored them and walked toward the door. She opened it and stepped outside.

The tall buildings that lined the street lay in deep darkness. It was around noon, but the sky was as dark as if it were midnight. She barely discerned the black clouds filling the sky. It seemed the sun had disappeared. From the marketplace came nervous voices, fear apparent in their cries.

She stepped back inside and turned to the seventy-two anxious women.

“As I said, a storm.” She forced confidence. “Like all storms, it will pass.”

The three returned from the storeroom. Tamar directed the placement and lighting of the lamps until the room glowed. The flickering lamplight soothed their nerves, and the sound of fearful sniffing disappeared. Work began again.

Hours passed. The girls worked diligently at preparing the loom for the new veil, Tamar inspecting every movement. At rod forty-two, Illana finished securing the warp and then moved to the next one.

Tamar stiffened. “Why are you overseeing two rods?” She surveyed the row of weavers and identified the missing girl. “Where is Bithnia?”

Illana bowed her head. “She left.”

“Left?” Tamar drew a deep breath. One of the chosen weavers abandoned her post? “When did she leave? And why?”

Illana kept her head down. “When the sun darkened. She went to Golgotha.”

The hill of crucifixions. The truth hit Tamar. “Bithnia follows Jesus.”

It was not a question, but Illana answered anyway. “She does. She said she could not stay here while...” The girl swallowed and risked a glance at Tamar. “While her *Messiah* is dying.”

Tamar gasped. Who hadn’t heard of this Jesus, the one claiming to be the Son of God? She herself had been swept up in emotions a week before, when the carpenter rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

But to desert your sacred post? To leave the others to carry on your task? It was unthinkable!

She started to say so, but the words never came.

A loud rumble interrupted her thoughts. Tamar covered her ears to drown out the sound, but it seemed to reverberate from the soles of her feet up through her body.

The vibration intensified. The earth shook until it tossed Tamar sideways. She grasped Illana for balance, but Illana had none, and together they tumbled to the ground. Fear gripped Tamar. She grabbed her knees and curled into a ball, praying for the tremors to cease.

Though the earthquake ceased after only a few seconds, it seemed to last a lifetime. The girls were still huddled around the room when Tamar stood, stretched, and drew in a breath of dusty-tasting air.

“Is anyone hurt?”

She allowed the girls a moment to take stock of themselves and their surroundings and to relax enough to answer her. She studied the frightened faces. This day had held enough turmoil. She was tempted to send them home.

But divine duty came first.

“Now,” she said, “let us continue our work.”

The girls released a sigh, but in it Tamar caught the tone of relief. These girls needed assurance that all was well and that she—Tamar—was in control.

They worked for perhaps half an hour.

Then the door burst open with a loud *bang*. The man standing in the doorway wore the garb of a priest.

Tamar looked closer and gasped. This man was none other than High Priest Caiaphas.

She halted her inspection of the loom and knelt. In the fifteen years she had been overseeing the weaving of the holy veil, the high priest had never visited the weaving room. Why would he now? Did

his presence have something to do with the darkness and terrifying earthquake?

“Where is Tamar?” His voice held suppressed rage.

“I...” The word was weak with fear. She cleared her throat. “I am Tamar.”

The high priest paced forward.

“You will come with me, woman.” He gripped her arm and dragged her toward the door.

“I—” Tamar gasped with pain. “Of course. Where are we—”

Caiaphas trampled the carefully strung cords and the holy threads and pulled her behind him. Tamar cast a helpless last glance at her girls’ terrified expressions before he dragged her through the door and down the lane.

Tamar struggled to match his pace, but she was no match for the high priest’s long legs. Merchants stared, their compassionate gazes turning to judgment when they recognized her captor.

The temple was not far, by design. Three hundred priests were needed to transport each perfectly completed veil. The high priest dragged Tamar the short distance in a few minutes.

“My lord, where are you taking me?” Tamar’s teeth were clenched in fear.

“Hush, woman,” Caiaphas spat, and Tamar fell silent.

They entered the holy temple through the Beautiful Gate. They passed through the gate into the Court of the Women, and still, Caiaphas dragged her forward.

When they reached the Gate of Nicanor, which separated the Court of the Women from the Court of Israel and the Court of Priests, she dug her heels in.

"I cannot enter the Court of Priests," she gasped.

Caiaphas turned a gaze on her that froze the breath in her chest. "Do not speak to me, you sinful woman."

Such anger, such accusation, in his eyes. Tamar shrank from his fury and shut her eyes as he dragged her forward.

Then he released her. She wavered on her feet. Terrified of divine retribution for entering a forbidden area, Tamar stood statue-like, afraid to look, to move. She heard the sound of a door sliding open and smelled the incense.

"Look, woman!" Caiaphas's voice ground out, fury clear in his words. "Look what you have done!"

Though she could barely breathe, Tamar raised her head and opened her eyes.

What she saw stunned her.

The curtain—the one she had overseen and finished not a month past—lay before her, ripped in two from top to bottom.

She closed her eyes and shook her head. No. Impossible. The veil was a handsbreadth thick and untearable.

Yet there it was. Torn in two. And beyond it...

Tamar collapsed prostrate to the floor. *No!* No one could look upon the Holy of Holies and live.

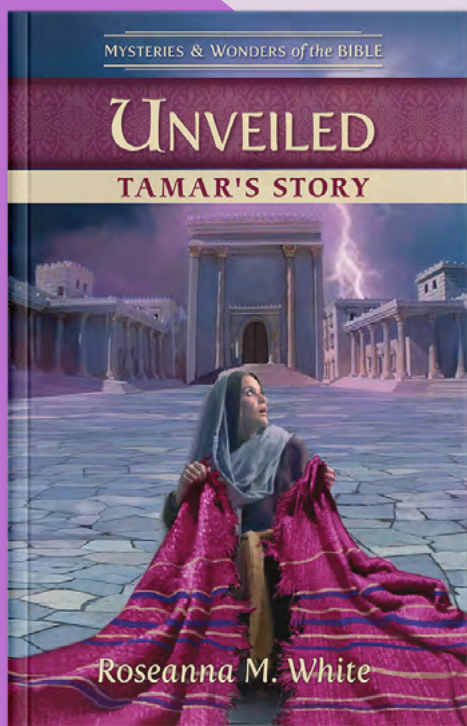
Caiaphas's voice cut through her horror. "You have done this. You have exposed the Lord to the world!"

No! The veil was perfect. I saw every strand woven into place!

But the words would not come. Once again, she peeked at the torn veil and beyond. The Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God Himself, uncovered to the world.

What had she done?

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