

---

GENESIS 38:1 At that time, Judah went down from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

---

Judah marries the daughter of a Canaanite, Gen 38:1, Gen 38:2; and begets of her Er, Gen 38:3, Onan, Gen 38:4, and Shelah, Gen 38:5. Er marries Tamar, Gen 38:6; is slain for his wickedness, Gen 38:7. Onan, required to raise up seed to his brother, refuses, Gen 38:8, Gen 38:9. He also is slain, Gen 38:10. Judah promises his son Shelah to Tamar, when he should be of age; but performs not his promise, Gen 38:11. Judah's wife dies, Gen 38:12. Tamar in disguise receives her father-in-law, he leaves his signet, bracelets, and staff in her hand, and she conceives by him, Gen 38:13-23. Judah is informed that his daughter-in-law is with child; and, not knowing that himself was the father, condemns her to be burnt, Gen 38:24. She produces the signet, bracelets, and staff, and convicts Judah, Gen 38:25, Gen 38:26. She is delivered of twins, who are called Pharez and Zarah, Gen 38:27-30.

#### Verse 1

And it came to pass at that time - The facts mentioned here could not have happened at the times mentioned in the preceding chapter, as those times are all unquestionably too recent, for the very earliest of the transactions here recorded must have occurred long before the selling of Joseph. Mr. Ainsworth remarks "that Judah and his sons must have married when very young, else the chronology will not agree. For Joseph was born six years before Jacob left Laban and came into Canaan; Gen 30:25, and Gen 31:41. Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold into Egypt, Gen 37:2, Gen 37:25; he was thirty years old when he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, Gen 41:46. And nine years after, when there had been seven years of plenty and two years of famine, did Jacob with his family go down into Egypt, Gen 41:53, Gen 41:54, and Gen 45:6, Gen 45:11. And at their going down thither, Pharez, the son of Judah, whose birth is set down at the end of this chapter, had two sons, Hezron and Hamul, Gen 46:8, Gen 46:12. Seeing then from the selling of Joseph unto Israel's going down into Egypt there cannot be above twenty-three years, how is it possible that Judah should take a wife, and have by her three sons successively, and Shelah the youngest of the three be marriageable when Judah begat Pharez of Tamar, Gen 38:14, Gen 38:24, and Pharez be grown up, married, and have two sons, all within so short a space? The time therefore here spoken of seems to have been soon after Jacob's coming to Shechem, Gen 33:18, before the history of Dinah, Genesis 34, though Moses for special cause relates it in this place." I should rather suppose that this chapter originally stood after Genesis 33, and that it got by accident into this place. Dr. Hales, observing that some of Jacob's son must have married remarkably young, says that "Judah was about forty-seven years old when Jacob's family settled in Egypt. He could not therefore have been above fifteen at the birth of his eldest son Er; nor Er more than fifteen at his marriage with Tamar; nor could it have been more than two years after Er's death till the birth of Judah's twin sons by his daughter-in-law Tamar; nor could Pharez, one of them, be more than fifteen at the birth of his twin sons Herron and Hamul, supposing they were twins, just born before the departure from Canaan. For the aggregate of these numbers, 15, 15, 2, 15, or 47 years, gives the age of Judah; compare Genesis 38 with Gen 46:12." See the remarks of Dr. Kennicott, at Gen 31:55 (note). Adullamite - An inhabitant of Adullam, a city of Canaan, afterwards given for a possession to the sons of Judah, Jos 15:1, Jos 15:35. It appears as if this Adullamite had kept a kind of lodging house, for Shuah the Canaanite and his family lodged with him; and there Judah lodged also. As the woman was a Canaanitess, Judah had the example of his fathers to prove at least the impropriety of such a connection.

---

GENESIS 38:2 Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her, and went in to her.

GENESIS 38:3 She conceived, and bore a son; and he named him Er.

GENESIS 38:4 She conceived again, and bore a son; and she named him Onan.

GENESIS 38:5 She yet again bore a son, and named him Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bore him.

---

Verse 5

And he was at Chezib when she bare him - This town is supposed to be the same with Achzib, which fell to the tribe of Judah, Jos 15:44. "The name," says Ainsworth, "has in Hebrew the signification of lying; and to it the prophet alludes, saying the houses of Achzib shall be (Achzab) a lie to the kings of Israel, Mic 1:14."

---

GENESIS 38:6 Judah took a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.

GENESIS 38:7 Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD. The LORD killed him.

---

Verse 7

Er - was wicked in the sight of the Lord - What this wickedness consisted in we are not told; but the phrase sight of the Lord being added, proves that it was some very great evil. It is worthy of remark that the Hebrew word used to express Er's wickedness is his own name, the letters reversed. Er ער wicked, רע ra. As if the inspired writer had said, "Er was altogether wicked, a completely abandoned character."

---

GENESIS 38:8 Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up seed to your brother."

GENESIS 38:9 Onan knew that the seed wouldn't be his; and when he went in to his brother's wife, he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother.

---

Verse 9

Onan knew that the seed should not be his - That is, that the child begotten of his brother's widow should be reckoned as the child of his deceased brother, and his name, though the real father of it, should not appear in the genealogical tables.

---

GENESIS 38:10 The thing which he did was evil in the sight of the LORD, and he killed him also.

---

## Verse 10

Wherefore he slew him also - The sin of Onan has generally been supposed to be self-pollution; but this is certainly a mistake; his crime was his refusal to raise up seed to his brother, and rather than do it, by the act mentioned above, he rendered himself incapable of it. We find from this history that long before the Mosaic law it was an established custom, probably founded on a Divine precept, that if a man died childless his brother was to take his wife, and the children produced by this second marriage were considered as the children of the first husband, and in consequence inherited his possessions.

---

GENESIS 38:11 Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, until Shelah, my son, is grown up"; for he said, "Lest he also die, like his brothers." Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

GENESIS 38:12 After many days, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheep shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah, the Adullamite.

---

## Verse 12

In process of time - This phrase, which is in general use in the Bible, needs explanation; the original is וַיַּיְרֹב הַיָּמִים vaiyirbu haiyamim, and the days were multiplied. Though it implies an indefinite time, yet it generally embraces a pretty long period, and in this place may mean several years.

---

GENESIS 38:13 It was told Tamar, saying, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

GENESIS 38:14 She took off of her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gate of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she wasn't given to him as a wife.

GENESIS 38:15 When Judah saw her, he thought that she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

---

## Verse 15

Thought her to be a harlot - See the original of this term, Gen 34:31 (note). The Hebrew is זֹנָה zonah, and signifies generally a person who prostitutes herself to the public for hire, or one who lives by the public; and hence very likely applied to a publican, a tavern-keeper, or hostess, Jos 2:1; translated by the Septuagint, πορνη, from πρηναιω, to sell, which certainly may as well apply to her goods as to her person.

It appears that in very ancient times there were public persons of this description; and they generally veiled themselves, sat in public places by the highway side, and received certain hire. Though adultery was reputed a very flagrant crime, yet this public prostitution was not; for persons whose characters were on the whole morally good had connections with them. But what could be expected from an age in which there was no written Divine revelation, and consequently the bounds

of right and wrong were not sufficiently ascertained? This defect was supplied in a considerable measure by the law and the prophets, and now completely by the Gospel of Christ.

---

GENESIS 38:16 He turned to her by the way, and said, "Please come, let me come in to you," for he didn't know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

GENESIS 38:17 He said, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." She said, "Will you give me a pledge, until you send it?"

---

#### Verse 17

Wilt thou give me a pledge till thou send it? - The word ערבון erabon signifies an earnest of something promised, a part of the price agreed for between a buyer and seller, by giving and receiving of which the bargain was ratified; or a deposit, which was to be restored when the thing promised should be given. St. Paul uses the same word in Greek letters, ἀράβων, 2Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14. From the use of the term in this history we may at once see what the apostle means by the Holy Spirit being the Earnest, ἀράβων, of the promised inheritance; viz., a security given in hand for the fulfillment of all God's promises relative to grace and eternal life. We may learn from this that eternal life will be given in the great day to all who can produce this erabon or pledge. He who has the earnest of the Spirit then in his heart shall not only be saved from death, but have that eternal life of which it is the pledge and the evidence. What the pledge given by Judah was, see on Gen 38:25 (note).

---

GENESIS 38:18 He said, "What pledge will I give you?" She said, "Your signet and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." He gave them to her, and came in to her, and she conceived by him.

GENESIS 38:19 She arose, and went away, and put off her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.

GENESIS 38:20 Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend, the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, but he didn't find her.

GENESIS 38:21 Then he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the prostitute, that was at Enaim by the road?" They said, "There has been no prostitute here."

---

#### Verse 21

Where is the harlot that was openly by the wayside? - Our translators often render different Hebrew words by the same term in English, and thus many important shades of meaning, which involve traits of character, are lost. In Gen 38:15, Tamar is called a harlot, זונה zonah, which, as we have already seen, signifies a person who prostitutes herself for money. In this verse she is called a harlot in our version; but the original is not זונה but קדשה kedeshah, a holy or consecrated person, from קדש kadash, to make holy, or to consecrate to religious purposes. And the word here must necessarily signify a person consecrated by prostitution to the worship of some impure goddess.

The public prostitutes in the temple of Venus are called ἱεροδουλοι γυναικες, holy or consecrated female servants, by Strabo; and it appears from the words zonah and kedeshah above, that impure rites and public prostitution prevailed in the worship of the Canaanites in the time of Judah. And among these people we have much reason to believe that Astarte and Asteroth occupied the same place in their theology as Venus did among the Greeks and Romans, and were worshipped with the same impure rites.

---

GENESIS 38:22 He returned to Judah, and said, "I haven't found her; and also the men of the place said, 'There has been no prostitute here.'"

GENESIS 38:23 Judah said, "Let her keep it, lest we be shamed. Behold, I sent this young goat, and you haven't found her."

---

#### Verse 23

Lest we be shamed - Not of the act, for this he does not appear to have thought criminal; but lest he should fall under the raillery of his companions and neighbors, for having been tricked out of his signet, bracelets, and staff, by a prostitute.

---

GENESIS 38:24 About three months later, Judah was told, "Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has played the prostitute. Moreover, behold, she is with child by prostitution."

Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burnt."

---

#### Verse 24

Bring her forth, and let her be burnt - As he had ordered Tamar to live as a widow in her own father's house till his son Shelah should be marriageable, he considers her therefore as the wife of his son; and as Shelah was not yet given to her, and she is found with child, she is reputed by him as an adulteress, and burning, it seems, was anciently the punishment of this crime. Judah, being a patriarch or head of a family, had, according to the custom of those times, the supreme magisterial authority over all the branches of his own family; therefore he only acts here in his juridical capacity. How strange that in the very place where adultery was punished by the most violent death, prostitution for money and for religious purposes should be considered as no crime!

---

GENESIS 38:25 When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man, whose these are, I am with child." She also said, "Please discern whose are these—the signet, and the cords, and the staff."

---

#### Verse 25

The signet - חותמת chothemeth, properly a seal, or instrument with which impressions were made to ascertain property, etc. These exist in all countries.

Bracelets - פתילים pethilim, from פתל pathal, to twist, wreath, twine, may signify a girdle or a collar by which precedence, etc., might be indicated; not the muslin, silk, or linen wreath of his turban, as Mr. Harmer has conjectured.

Staff - מטה matteh, either what we would call a common walking stick, or the staff which was the ensign of his tribe.

---

GENESIS 38:26 Judah acknowledged them, and said, "She is more righteous than I, because I didn't give her to Shelah, my son." He knew her again no more.

---

#### Verse 26

She hath been more righteous than I - It is probable that Tamar was influenced by no other motive than that which was common to all the Israelitish women, the desire to have children who might be heirs of the promise made to Abraham, etc. And as Judah had obliged her to continue in her widowhood under the promise of giving her his son Shelah when he should be of age, consequently his refusing or delaying to accomplish this promise was a breach of truth, and an injury done to Tamar.

---

GENESIS 38:27 In the time of her travail, behold, twins were in her womb.

GENESIS 38:28 When she travailed, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, "This came out first."

---

#### Verse 28

The midwife - bound upon his hand a scarlet thread - The binding of the scarlet thread about the wrist of the child whose arm appeared first in the birth, serves to show us how solicitously the privileges of the birthright were preserved. Had not this caution been taken by the midwife, Pharez would have had the right of primogeniture to the prejudice of his elder brother Zarah. And yet Pharez is usually reckoned in the genealogical tables before Zarah; and from him, not Zarah, does the line of our Lord proceed. See Mat 1:3. Probably the two brothers, as being twins, were conjoined in the privileges belonging to the birthright.

---

GENESIS 38:29 As he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out, and she said, "Why have you made a breach for yourself?" Therefore his name was called Perez.

---

#### Verse 29

How hast thou broken forth? - מה פרצת mah paratsta, this breach be upon thee, עליך פרץ aleycka parets; thou shalt bear the name of the breach thou hast made, i. e., in coming first into the world. Therefore his name was called פרץ Parets, i. e., the person who made the breach. The breach here mentioned refers to a certain circumstance in parturition which it is unnecessary to explain.

---

GENESIS 38:30 Afterward his brother came out, that had the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

---

Verse 30

His name was called Zarah - זָרַח Zarach, risen or sprung up, applied to the sun, rising and diffusing his light. "He had this name," says Ainsworth, "because he should have risen, i. e., have been born first, but for the breach which his brother made."

There are several subjects in this chapter on which it may not be unprofitable to spend a few additional moments.

1. The insertion of this chapter is a farther proof of the impartiality of the sacred writer. The facts detailed, considered in themselves, can reflect no credit on the patriarchal history; but Judah, Tamar, Zarah, and Pharez, were progenitors of the Messiah, and therefore their birth must be recorded; and as the birth, so also the circumstances of that birth, which, even had they not a higher end in view, would be valuable as casting light upon some very ancient customs, which it is interesting to understand. These are not forgotten in the preceding notes.

2. On what is generally reputed to be the sin of Onan, something very pointed should be spoken. But who dares and will do it, and in such language that it may neither pollute the ear by describing the evil as it is, nor fail of its effect by a language so refined and so laboriously delicate as to cover the sin which it professes to disclose? Elaborate treatises on the subject will never be read by those who need them most, and anonymous pamphlets are not likely to be regarded. The sin of self-pollution, which is generally considered to be that of Onan, is one of the most destructive evils ever practiced by fallen man. In many respects it is several degrees worse than common whoredom, and has in its train more awful consequences, though practiced by numbers who would shudder at the thought of criminal connections with a prostitute. It excites the powers of nature to undue action, and produces violent secretions, which necessarily and speedily exhaust the vital principle and energy; hence the muscles become flaccid and feeble, the tone and natural action of the nerves relaxed and impeded, the understanding confused, the memory oblivious, the judgment perverted, the will indeterminate and wholly without energy to resist; the eyes appear languishing and without expression, and the countenance vacant; the appetite ceases, for the stomach is incapable of performing its proper office; nutrition fails, tremors, fears, and terrors are generated; and thus the wretched victim drags out a most miserable existence, till, superannuated even before he had time to arrive at man's estate, with a mind often debilitated even to a state of idiotism, his worthless body tumbles into the grave, and his guilty soul (guilty of self-murder) is hurried into the awful presence of its Judge! Reader, this is no caricature, nor are the colourings overcharged in this shocking picture. Worse woes than my pen can relate I have witnessed in those addicted to this fascinating, unnatural, and most destructive of crimes. If thou hast entered into this snare, flee from the destruction both of body and soul that awaits thee! God alone can save thee. Advice, warnings, threatenings, increasing debility of body, mental decay, checks of conscience, expostulations of judgment and medical assistance, will all be lost on thee: God, and God alone, can save them from an evil which has in its issue the destruction of thy body, and the final perdition of thy soul! Whether this may have been the sin of Onan or not, is a matter at present of small moment; it may be thy sin; therefore take heed lest God slay thee for it. The intelligent reader will see that prudence forbids me to enter any farther into this business. See Clarke's note at Gen 39:21.