

Steve Greenberg's Notes

Week 33 Wed Oct 14, 2026 Gen 38 Judah Sins Against Tamar

Genesis 38:1-30 Judah and Tamar (Joseph's Family Sins with the Canaanites)

Gen 38:1 It came to pass at that time that Judah (**one of Jacobs 12 sons**) departed from (**left**) his brothers, and visited (**and then stayed with**) a certain Adullamite (**from Adullam a city about 1 mi. NW of Hebron.**) whose name was Hirah.

Joseph's Family Sins with the Canaanites

First, Simeon and Levi had taken revenge on Shechem (Gen 34).

Second, Reuben, the firstborn, had abused Bilhah (Gen 35:22).

Third, the brothers had sold Joseph into slavery (Gen 37).

Fourth son of Leah, Judah, left the family circle and sought Canaanite friendships.

Judah married a Canaanite woman, Tamar

Gen 38:2 And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her (**as his wife he had marital relations and lived with her**).

Be careful of your company friends it is easy to be lead astray. Choose your close companions wisely. The people who have regular access to your heart and mind can either strengthen your walk with God or weaken it. Know the difference between loving people and being influenced by their ungodly behavior.

1Cor 15:33 Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.

Psa 1:1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

Pro 13:20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed (**will suffer and experience harm**).

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived (**or misled by doing bad things**), God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows (**decisions he gets involved in**), that he will also reap (**good or bad**).

Gal 6:8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Gen 38:3 So she conceived (**became pregnant**) and bore a son, and he(**Judah, dad**) called his name Er.

Gen 38:4 She conceived again (**pregnant again**) and bore a son, and she(**Shua, mom**) called his name Onan.

Gen 38:5 And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and (Shua, mom) called his name Shelah (Judah's third son). He was at Chezib when she bore him (Chezib, also spelled Kezib, was a place in the region of Judah, commonly identified with Achzib, near Adullam)

Gen 38:6 Then (in the course of time) Judah took (made arrangements for) a wife for Er his firstborn (to get married to), and her name was Tamar.

Gen 38:7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked (evil) in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him (LORD-Yahweh judgment him and put him to death).

1Chron 2:3 The sons of Judah were Er, Onan, and Shelah. These three were born to him by the daughter of Shua, the Canaanitess. Er, the firstborn of Judah, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; so He(LORD) killed him.

Gen 38:8 And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother (perform your duty as a brother-in-law, be her husband and raise up a child, a descendant for your brother's name to continue)."

An ancient Israelite family custom (levirate marriage custom) described here, when a married man died without a son, his brother was expected to marry the widow and raise offspring in the deceased brother's name. For a man to die without leaving a son was regarded as a horrible tragedy, no family line.

Marriage Duty of the Surviving Brother, not established at Judah's time Gen 38 which predates the law

Deu 25:5 "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

Deu 25:6 "And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

Gen 38:9 But Onan knew that the heir would not be his (but his dead brother's); and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted (his semen) on the ground, lest he should give an heir (a child) to his brother.

Onan's conduct reveals his selfish behavior and contradiction: when he went in to his brother's wife expresses repeated sexual relations with Tamar but unwilling to fulfill the family responsibility for which the relationship had been established.

Gen 38:10 And the thing which he(Onan) did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also (LORD considered it evil for Onan to deny a child to his dead brother and play games with his brother's wife who desired a child for remembrance of her husband and the family line. So the LORD took Onan's life, in judgement also).

Onan refuses his responsibility to fulfill his family obligation, knew the offspring would not be counted as his own and deliberately prevents Tamar from conceiving, thereby God judges him and his conduct.

Gen 38:11 Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my (youngest) son Shelah is grown (old enough to marry you)." For he(Judah) said (in his mind, or thought), "Lest he(Shelah) also die like his (two older) brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house (waiting for Judah and his promise). (It appears that Judah was deliberately deceiving her).

Judah said to Tamar remain a widow in your father's house till my son (Shelah) is grown
Taking her father-in-law at his word (his promise) and residing at her father's household as a widow. Tamar waited for Judah's third son to protect the inheritance rights of her deceased husband. How sad Judah had deceived Tamar, be careful on waiting on peoples promises. Only God promises will stand.

Judah instead of recognizing his first two sons' deaths on their own wickedness, Judah blamed the innocent one, Tamar. Her husbands' deaths were not her fault. Judah lived for a season based on unfounded fair.

2Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Correlation passage: reminds us that Tamar could have got remarried?

Rth 1:3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

Rth 1:4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years.

Rth 1:5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

Rth 1:9 The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her (new) husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Rth 1:11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

Rth 1:12 Turn back, my daughters, go--for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons,

Rth 1:13 "would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!"

Gen 38:12 Now in the process of time (years later) the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted (his mourning ended), and (he) went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

Gen 38:13 And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look (**Behold-listen up**), your father-in-law (**Judah**) is going up to Timnah, to shear his sheep."

Gen 38:14 So she(**Tamar**) took off her widow's garments (**cloths**), covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself (**to disguise herself**), and sat in an open place (**some version have Enaim's entrance or gate**) which was on the way (**road**) to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah (**Judah's son**) was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife (**as Judah had previously promised**).

Gen 38:15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot (**temple prostitute fulfilling her duties**), because she had covered her face (**standard practice**).

Gen 38:16 Then he(**Judah**) turned (**aside**) to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you (**or lie with me**)"; for he(**Judah**) did not know that she was (**Tamar**) his daughter-in-law (**disguised**). So she said, "What will you give me (**pay me**), that you may come in to me (**or lie with me**)?"

Gen 38:17 And he(**Judah**) said(**replied**), "I (**promise**) I will send a young goat from the flock." So she said, "Will you give me a pledge (**as a deposit**) till you send it (**That is, the young goat**)?"

Remember he had broken his promise previously to her and now he cannot be trusted, she did not need the goat it was the principal.

Gen 38:18 Then he(**Judah**) said, "What pledge shall I give you?" So she said, "Your signet (**seal for identity**) and cord (**attached to signet**), and your staff that is in your hand (**proof of his identity**)." Then he(**Judah**) gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived (**became pregnant**) by him.

The signet seal was an ancient means of identification, like today's signature or credit card.

Pharaoh took his signet ring off and put it on Joseph's hand, now second in command

Gen 41:42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.

Gen 41:43 And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt.

Gen 41:44 Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

Gen 38:19 So she(**Tamar**) arose (**left**) and went away (**quickly**), and laid aside her veil (**her disguise**) and put on the garments of her widowhood.

Gen 38:20 And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend (**Hirah**) the Adullamite, to receive his pledge (**get the deposit back**) from the woman's hand, but he(**Hirah**) did not find her.

Gen 38:21 Then he(**Hirah**) asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot (**temple prostitute: a woman married or not who served a pagan deity by prostitution**) who was openly by the roadside (**at the entrance to Enaim**)?" And they said, "There was no harlot (**temple prostitute**) in this place."

The scripture tells us that Tamar disguised herself (**she was not an actual temple prostitute**), and Judah mistook her for a common temple prostitute.

Judah accepted part of Canaanite culture (the practice of **cultic prostitution which was to their pagan deities**). He solicited the desire to lay with her approving the evil practice?

Gen 38:22 So he(**Hirah**) returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her (**anywhere**). Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot (**temple prostitute**) in this place."

Gen 38:23 Then Judah said, "Let her take them for herself (**pledged articles: signet seal for identity, cord, and staff**), lest we be shamed (**least we become a laughingstock searching everywhere for a prostitute**); for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

Gen 38:24 And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot (**she is pregnant by immorality, she has participated in prostitution**); furthermore she is with child by harlotry." So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned (**she deserves to be burned to death as punishment**)!"

Judah judged the woman by what he thought he saw, but he did not recognize Tamar. Later, when her identity and his possessions were revealed, Judah had to confront his own responsibility. He initially called for Tamar to be punished when he learned that she was pregnant, yet he himself had participated in the encounter that led to her pregnancy. This exposed his double standard. **We should be cautious and careful about judging others based on appearances while ignoring our own responsibilities and wrongdoing.**

Gen 38:25 When she(**Tamar**) was (**being**) brought out, she sent (**a message**) to her father-in-law (**Judah**), saying, "By the man to whom these belong (**seal, cord and staff**), I am with child (**pregnant**)." And she(**Tamar**) said, "Please determine whose these are--the signet and cord, and staff (**examine them carefully**)."

Gen 38:26 So Judah acknowledged them (**recognized the articles**) and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her Shelah my son (**shame on me for I had promised her my son and she has been waiting faithfully**)." And he never knew her again (**Judah never had relations with her again**).

Judah finally recognized his sin

1. Recognition of sin: Judah acknowledged that Tamar was more righteous than he was. He stopped blaming her and focused on his own failure.

2. Taking responsibility: Judah admitted, "I did not give her to Shelah my son." He recognized that Tamar had been denied what he had promised her. His words demonstrated a willingness to acknowledge his own wrongdoing rather than conceal it.

3. The deeper spiritual lesson is that repentance begins when we stop defending ourselves, taking everything personally and honestly acknowledge our sin before God.

Gen 38:27 Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins were in her (**Tamar's**) womb.

Gen 38:28 And so it was, when she(**Tamar**) was giving birth, that the one (**baby**) put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and bound it on his hand (**wrist**), saying, "This one came out first."

It was very important that they identified the firstborn, because of special privileges and benefits.

Gen 38:29 Then it happened, as he drew (**or pulled**) back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly (**first**); and she(**midwife**) said, "How did you break through? This breach (**or break through**) be upon you (**coming out first**)!" Therefore his name was called Perez (**meaning breach or breaking out**).

This first of the twins, born out of prostitution to Tamar, nevertheless came into the messianic line, which went through Boaz and Ruth to King David (Ruth 4:12-13, 18-22; Mat 1:3). Tamar a Canaanite became a member of the family of promise. Matthew mentions Tamar—a woman—in the lineage of the Messiah. She had become a woman of the faith—despite her origins and some of her actions (Mat 1:3).

Gen 38:30 Afterward his brother came out, who had the scarlet thread on his hand (**wrist**). And his name was called Zerah (**meaning a dawning, brightness or scarlet**).

Gen 46:12 The sons of Judah were Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (twins) (Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.

1Chron 2:4 And Tamar, his daughter-in-law, bore him Perez and Zerah. All the sons of Judah were five.

End