

Genesis 38:1-30 **Tamar and the family of Judah**

¹ It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. ² And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and went in to her. ³ So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴ She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. ⁵ And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him. ⁶ Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. ⁸ And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." ⁹ But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. ¹⁰ And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also. ¹¹ Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die as his brothers did." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

¹² Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³ And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." ¹⁴ So she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which was on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. ¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face. ¹⁶ Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" ¹⁷ And he said, "I will send you a young goat from the flock." So she said, "Will you give me a pledge till you send it?" ¹⁸ Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" So she said, "Your signet and cord, and your staff that is in your hand." Then he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹ So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood. ²⁰ And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. ²¹ Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who was openly by the roadside?" And they said, "There was no harlot in this place." ²² And he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this place." ²³ Then Judah said, "Let her take them for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

²⁴ And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry." So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" ²⁵ When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Please determine whose these are-- the signet and cord, and staff." ²⁶ So Judah acknowledged them and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he never knew her again.

²⁷ Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins were in her womb. ²⁸ And so it was, when she was giving birth, that the one put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." ²⁹ Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez. ³⁰ Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah. NKJV

Facts revealed:

- ✧ The negative influence of the Canaanite people on the morals of the Children of Israel is evident in this story of Judah's experience with them which lends evidence that God was totally justified in calling for their extinction 500 years later when the Children of Israel were to destroy them and their wickedness and idolatry from the land as he had said to Abraham that at the time of the promise, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." [[Genesis 15:16-21](#)]
- ✧ Judah left his brothers and visited Hirah, an Adullamite, where he saw Shua a Canaanite.
- ✧ Judah took Shua, a Canaanite, as wife who bore him three sons, Er, Onan, And Shelah.
- ✧ The infectious wickedness of the place becomes evident as we find when Judah took Tamar as a wife for Er his firstborn and because Er was wicked in the sight of the Lord and God killed him.
- ✧ Judah instructed his second son Onan to take Tamar as wife and raise up an heir for his dead brother Er.

In doing this, a precedent was set which later became law for Israel, that a brother must take his widowed sister-in-law who has no children as wife to raise up an heir for the fallen brother so a name will not be lost in Israel. [[Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#)]

- ✧ Onan took Tamar but refused to raise up an heir for his brother Er, so God killed him also, this caused Judah to fear it had something to do with Tamar so he was afraid to give her to his last son but told her to remain a widow in her father's house until Shelah is grown.
- ✧ After Judah's wife Shua died and the mourning period was over, Judah went to his sheepshearers in Timnah and Tamar was told about it so she pretended to be a harlot, covered herself with a veil, and sat in an open place on the way to Timnah because she saw that Shelah was grown and she had not been given to him as a wife.
- ✧ It is interesting that the harlots covered their faces with a veil and today we find that the Muslims require their women to cover their faces with a veil. Is there a connection in the attitude of the men?
- ✧ After negotiating a price Judah gave her the pledge she requested and went in to Tamar and lay with her and she conceived.
- ✧ When it became evident Tamar was pregnant Judah sought to judge her and when she produced his pledge items he confessed "She is more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son."

Thus Judah confirmed that he still held the concept of bringing up heirs for the deceased to be valid, and that was well before it became law under the hand of Moses. God apparently honored the concept because He killed Onan for refusing to fulfill his duty in providing an Heir for his brother Er.

Tamar gave birth to twins, Perez and Zerah, and thus fulfilled the intent of the concept by providing an heir for each of her husbands whom God had killed. So God Himself gave approval of the concept and the conception.

Perez is named in the blessing given to Ruth when she married Boaz and became the grandmother of King David. [[Ruth 4:12](#)]