I'm not a robot

The reason for the choice of Judah is that she was trying to enforce the practice later laid down in Deuteronomy ch25 vv5-9, thus fulfilling the family's duty to her late husband."If brothers dwell together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger..." {in which case, I presume, his land would have been inherited by his widow and then by the children of her new husband, thus passing outside the family}Instead "her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead". In this way, the deceased man would have at least nominal descendants, and his "name" would not die out.Tamar was in precisely that situation, as the widow of Judah's son Er. The previous episode in the story was that Er's brother Onan was told to carry out the prescribed duty and refused to co-operate. He deliberately "spilled his seed" to prevent conception, and for this he was punished by God. Their father Judah put off sending in the next brother, for fear that he would also die, so Tamar was left without a husband and her late husband was left without a nominal heir.So Tamar's approach to Judah was a last-resort attempt to force Er's family to fulfil their duty to him. Someone in Judah's family was legally and morally obliged to do it. If nobody else would come forward, then Judah must be made to do it himself. The issue in Judah's case was lineage, a crucial theme in Genesis. Er's sin is not specified but Onan's is: he refused to conceive a child with Tamar and thus carry on Judah's lineage. (Incidentally an ancient tradition quoted by the medieval sage Rashi tells us that Er also refused to conceive a child with Tamar, because he felt her pregnancy would spoil her beauty. - Yebamot 34b.) For Jews the refusal to carry on Judah's lineage would mean that King David and his descendants would not have been born; indeed the tribe and entire nation of Judah would be cut off. For Christians it means that Jesus would never have been born. In addition, the refusal to have children constituted a rebellion against the first blessing/commandment given by God to human beings: "Be fruitful and multiply."This in no way excuses Simeon and Levi. But they and their descendants were indeed punished harshly, though not immediately. Jacob's final words to them were a curse:Genesis 49:5-7 NABRE5 Simeon and Levi, brothers indeed, weapons of violence are their knives. 6 Let not my person enter their council, or my honor be joined with their company; For in their fury they killed men, at their whim they maimed oxen. 7 Cursed be their fury so fierce, and their rage so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob, disperse them throughout Israel.Historically, Levi's tribe hand no land of its own, and Simeon's land was absorbed into Judah.Conclusion: Er and Onan's punishment shows the importance of the duty to carry on the lineage of the chosen people and tribe. Although as individuals they were punished more harshly than Levi and Simeon, their ancestral line was blessed and carried on through the bravery of Tamar. Simeon and Levi received their father's curse at the end of his life. From the Bible's viewpoint this was a fate worse than death. Want to improve this answer? Add details and include citations to explain why this answer is correct. Answers without enough detail may be edited or deleted. Sensus plenior is used by different people in different ways. The most common meaning used in debates among Catholics and later among Evanglicals is the one offered by Raymond Brown: The sensus plenior is that that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation. Raymond E. Brown, The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955), p 92The debates were done by men who admittedly did not know how to do sensus plenior. see [1][2][3] If you had debates held on the genre of riddle, by men who had never seen nor solved a riddle, the conclusions would be the same as for sensus plenior. Sensus plenior is not interpreting scriptures by modern methods. Those who claim to be able to unpack sensus plenior claim that the apostles use the method within the gospels to teach how to do it. Sensus Plenior, though not a threat to the doctrines of normative protestantism, is a threat to professional practitioners of the same. If sensus plenior exists in the form of a spiritual layer on top of the literal, the the practitioner is only familiar with half of the source material for his profession. If it exists in four layers, where the spiritual layer contains three voices, then the professional is only familiar with 1/4 of the source material for his profession. The field of hermeneutics is largely influenced by the same group of people who are placed most at risk by the introduction of sensus plenior to the discussion.Though sensus plenior interpretations will appear to be allegory it must be emphasized that a strict set of rules are followed which are so demanding that no human interpreter is permitted to do free-for all allegory. The most important rule which locks sensus plenior to the text is that when a word takes on an allegorical meaning, it must be the same everywhere the word is used. Every donkey is a prophet, every garment is works.It is self-correcting by such rules. For instance, popular typology defines leaven as sin, yet sin does not fit when we are told that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven. Leaven is better defined as 'teaching' where it can be used everywhere it exists. The common statement that "doctrine drives exegesis" is a patent admission to the subjective nature of modern exegesis. Sensus plenior eliminates that since it holds the practitioner accountable to formal rules. Compare this sensus plenior exegesis with that of any commentary on Gen 38. Though no attempt is made here to document all the scriptural evidence for each point, the parallels between the birth of Christ and the Tamar narrative are unmistakable. Each metaphoric meaning is subject to the formal rules.Birth of Christ in Gen 38 Tamar and Mary were in a similar predicament. Tamar has been discovered to be with child and was going to be killed. (Gen 38:24) Mary was discovered with child and was going to be put away. (Matt 1:18-19) When the true father of each child was discovered, they both were honored. (Gen 38:26, Luke 1:42)) Such a coincidence. Each had wanted an assurance of a promise. Tamar had received three things from Judah (Gen 38:18) and Mary had received three saying from the Angel that announced her pregnancy. (Luke 1:35) Tamar received a staff, Mary was told that the power of the Highest would overshadow her. Tamar received a signet ring, Mary was told he would be called the Son of God. These are easy parallels to understand, but they are easy to dismiss as accidents of history.The appointment Tamar met Judah before Timnath which means the appointment. (Gen 38:14). I will suggest that Mary met God before the appointed time of Christ. Since It is appointed unto man once to die (Heb 9:27) Christs appointment was with the cross, and Mary was available to God just before that time.The scapegoat Tamar was offered a goat by Judah. (Gen 38:17) And Mary was offered THE scapegoat, since the angel told her He will save his people from their sins. (Mt 1:21) In the ritual of the scapegoat, two goats are presented. They represent Jesus before and after the cross. One is killed for a burnt offering. In the burnt offering, the priest do not get to eat any part of it since it is completely consumed by fire. It represents the Sons total devotion to the Father which we cannot participate in, but only stand and watch in awe. The smell of the burnt offering is a sweet savor unto the Lord si nce there is not hint of sin involved in it. You can see the first instance of a burnt offering is when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac AND Isaac was willing to be obedient to his father. (Gen 22:2) The second goat is released into the wilderness to carry away the sins of the people. It represents Christs resurrection, which demonstrates that his sacrifice for us was accepted. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of the scapegoat images, Mary had also been promised a goat.The virgin birth Mary was told that she would conceive miraculously by the Holy Ghost. (Luke 1:35) And when Judah told Tamar he would send a goat, the word he used also means 'sow'. Since Judah represents God in the imagery, and Tamar represents Mary, we have a parallel passage that God would sow the goat. The need for assurance Tamar wanted an assurance that she would receive the goat, (Gen 38:17) and Mary also asked for an assuring word of explanation. (Luke 1:34)Three assurances Tamar was given the staff or rod which represents the power of God in discipline. (Pr 22:15, Pr 23:13, Pr 29:15) and Mary was told the power of the Highest would overshadow her. (Luke 1:35) She was not being disciplined, but Gods discipline upon mankind as borne by His Son and her son, overshadowed her life. Tamar was given the signet ring. (Gen 38:18) And Mary was told that he would be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:35) Tamar was given bracelets. (Gen 38:18) In a very literal sense, bracelets were given to signify a marriage, much like we now give rings. But the real clue to the hidden meaning comes from the law of cleanliness: Numbers 19:15 And every open vessel, which hath no covering [bracelets] bound upon it, is unclean. Paul was called a chosen vessel (Acts 9:15) and in other images we find that we are vessels as well. Since Tamar was a vessel that had bracelets, she was not unclean. Likewise Mary was told that she was not unclean because although she was with child, it was by the Holy Ghost. (Luke 1:35)Twins Tamar bore twins (Gen 38:27) and Mary bore the dual-natured God-Man. (John 8:58) The names of the twins mean breaking forth and rising sun while Jesus was called Dayspring.(Lu 1:78)Usurping second son Have you ever wondered why so many second sons in the Bible got the inheritance rather than the first sons as tradition demands? It is a prophecy that Christ will be the second man, the second Adam. (1Co 15:47, 1Co 15:22) The image of Tamars twin sons would be incomplete if the second son did not get the inheritance, and sure enough, the wrestle in the womb, and the second son emerges first and receives pre-eminence. (Gen 38:28-29) And so it is with Jesus. In the flesh he died desolate. As Gods only begotten son, he did not succeed in being fruitful and multiplying. Only in his resurrection, as the mystery second son, did he receive the full blessing and inheritance given to Abraham. (Gen 12:2)Three chances to get it rightGod wants living children, not children dead in trespass and sin. Judah had three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Er represents Adam. Adam was alive until he ate the forbidden fruit and he died. (Gen 2:17) (Be careful he died the day he ate the fruit or you call God a liar). Since he had children in his image and likeness, (Gen 5:3) all his children were also dead. (1Co 15:22, Ro 5:14) But in riddle Er means 'awake'. Awake is the oppsosite of asleep... and if you are asleep, you are dead and in the dust... so Er was called "Alive from the dust" as was Adam. Adam blew it. And God killed Er because of sin. (Gen 38:7) Onan was mistakenly called 'vigorous'. We say it was a mistake because he was named by his mother and all the females of the Bible represent those who do not see clearly (for Eve was deceived). It was a mistake to call him vigorous because he too was dead as was Israel, God's son who was supposed to fulfill the Leverate law on behalf of Adam. God chose Israel through Abraham to bear living children (Jer 7:22-23) But Israel pursued the flesh and refused to do their duty to God in bearing living children, instead wasting their seed in the earth (Deut 1:26, Deut 1:43, Deut 8:20, Jud 2:17, 2 Ki 17:14, 2 Chron 24:19, 2 Chron 33:10, Ne 9:29, Ps 81:11, Isa 28:12, Isa 30:15, Isa 42:24, Jer 13:11, Jer 29:1, Eze 20:8, Mt 23:37, Lu 13:34) just as Onan did. (Gen 38:9) Israel blew it.Not given a chance The genealogy in Matthew tells us that Joseph, the husband of Mary, is the rightful heir to the throne of David. But he is not given the chance to bear living children. When it is his turn, God himself steps in to bear the first fruits of living children. (1Co 15:20) Likewise, Shelah is not given the chance to bear a son when the time was right. (Gen 38:11, 14)Smite the earth with a curse John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of the returning Elijah. Elijah had made the rain stop until he spoke. (1Ki 17:1) Since water represents the word of God, there was no word of God for four hundred years until John spoke. His task in fulfilling the prophecy was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and of the children to the fathers. (Lu 1:17)The consequence of failure was that the earth would be smited with a curse. (Mal 4:6) In the narrative of Tamar, Judah was going to Timnath. But why? Gen 38:12 and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13 And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep. The word for shear is cut off . Hirah means noble family and Adulamite means justice of the people. God was going to the appointed time to cut off his sheep. God threw Adam out of the garden, killed all but eight in a flood, killed a whole generation of Israel in the desert and now was going up to the appointed time to cut off the sheep. You may be looking forward to some future judgment, but the time of the cross was the time of the final judgment where God would have cut off all the sheep had it not been for Christ, the Lamb of God. When he bore all our sin on the cross what more could be judged? One thing you never want is justice. Always plead for mercy. God was ready to give men justice, and He did in Christ who reconciled grace andlaw.Desolate women Have you ever wondered why there were so many desolate, barren women mentioned in the Bible? Its prophecy! The world was full of dead children, dead in trespass and sin. It was long waiting for the fulfillment of the prophecy given to Eve. (Gen 3:15) The time was right as Tamar removed her widows garments. (Gen 38:14) And the time was right as Mary was selected to be the mother of Jesus. (Luke 1:69-70)The clift of the rock When Moses was in the physical presence of God he was hidden in the clift of the rock. (Ex 33:22) Tamar hid herself with a veil. The word is pronounced tsaw-eef. Is it an accident that there is a word pronounced saw-eef that means clift? The rock is Christ. In sensus plenior, all the rocks are Christ and they are all one rock. In this reasoning, the rock that was split in the desert, (Ex 17:6) is the same rock that Moses was hidden in. It was split by being smitten by the rod (of discipline of God). The real horror of the cross was not the physical agony of death. God himself was split as the Father removed himself from His Son on the cross. When Moses was hidden in the clift of the rock, it represented trusting in the cross to preserve you in the face of God. As Tamar covered herself with the veil, it tells us that Mary was covered with the grace of the cross in the presence of God.The death of Christ Gen 38:19 And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. Mary would be a barren mother again before she would see the first fruits. Jesus had to die before he would be fruitful. (Joh 12:24)Did not possess the goat. Tamar did not take possession of the promised goat. (Gen 38:20) Just as Mary knew that Jesus had to be about his Fathers business. (Luke 2:49)Gods only begotten son Gen 38:26 And he knew her again no more.He bore our sin The two sons together represent Christ. The first son represents Jesus in the flesh who bore our sin. The narrative identifies the first son as the one who wore the scarlet thread. Many may debate it, but with all the evidence presented thus far, the scarlet thread represents our sin. (Isa 1:18) The resurrected Christ, the Son who was fruitful and multiplied, does not have the scarlet thread because Christ died once for our sin. (Heb 9:27, Heb 6:6)The sensus plenior always speaks of Christ and is in agreement with the literal meaning of scripture as a whole. As the saying goes, the OT is Christ concealed, the New Christ revealed. Once he has been revealed, we can see him hidden in the Old. Re 19:10 ...for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.It is pretty difficult to support a claim that God did not intend for us to see Christ in these scriptures. Sensus plenior, as practiced above, gives an added dimension to the knowledge we have in the literal scriptures.[1]: "It is interesting to note that the proponents of the SPlen tend to confine their discussion of this sense to the theoretical plane, seldom appealing to it in their works of exegesis (The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1968, 618).[2]: "Thus we can summarize that on the question of surplus biblical meaning Raymon Brown [who popularized the term] consistently supported the intention and insight (even as he abandoned the mechanics) of the sensus plenior. (Life in abundance: studies of John's Gospel in tribute to Raymond E. Brown, S.S., John R. Donahue, p213)[3] "Another way of expressing the differences in qualifications is to point outthat NT writers were directly inspired by God. Current interpreters of Scripture arenot. That allow ed the NT authors certain prerogatives that readers of Scripture donot presently enjoy. Through direct revelation from God biblical writers couldassign applications based on additional meanings assigned to OT passages." (The New Testament Use of the Old Testament, Robert L. Thomas, TMSJ 13/1 (Spring 2002) 79-98, p.18 And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.Genesis 38:1 (KJV)Genesis 38:1 and the rest of the chapter tells us the story of Judah and his children. According to the account, after the sale of Joseph to the Midianites, Judah, possibly driven by remorse, moves away from his brothers and marries with a Canaanite. She later becomes pregnant, and bears him three children: Er, Onan and Shelah.Judah then marries his firstborn, Er, to another woman, Tamar. However, Er dies early due to his cruelty towards his wife. According to the law of levirate, Onan then marries Tamar, but he also ends up dead, due to the practice of coitus interruptus, in order not to give descendants to his deceased brother. Judah asks Tamar to wait until Shelah is old enough to marry, and then some time passes.Moving forward, Shelah marries another woman, Judah deceives Tamar. Tamar then deceives Judah, getting him pregnant with Perez and Zerah. When Israel leaves for Egypt, Perez is already a father, and Judah is therefore a grandfather, since his sons, Hezron and Hamul, is listed among those who left for Egypt:And these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. [...] And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zarah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul.Genesis 46:8,12 (KJV)The problem is that this all has to fit into just 22 years, which is the interval between Joseph's trip to Egypt and his revelation to his brothers (Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold, and thirty when he became governor. When he revealed himself to his brothers he was already in the second year of hunger, making him 39 years old. 39-17=22 years). Therefore, to reconcile all these facts, Er, Onan, Selah and Perez could not have been more than 10 years old when they got married and had children. And I don't need to explain much because this seems problematic."Well, perhaps Hezron and Hamul may not have been at the departure for Egypt, and were born later, the author just mentioned them without any chronological purpose." This was my initial thought, and it would be a good solution if not for Genesis 46:26, what says that the total number of Jacob's descendants who went down to Egypt was 66. Considering the list given in the previous verses, it is only possible to reach this number if we count the sons of Perez.In the few attempts to solve this problem that I found (which were really very few, this seems to be a subject that is rarely discussed), the justification is almost always the same: that the age standards for marriage at the time were different, that boys entered puberty earlier, and there could still be some cultural factor. The Jewish tradition assigns all of these characters ages to be 7 or 8 years old when they become parents, which sounds even more absurd to me, and the justifications seem to be very vague, and hardly credible. For comparison, Isaac was weaned at 5 years old according to the same Jewish tradition. Could he, just a mere 2 years later, already be getting married and having kids??Jacob married at 84 years, Esau at 40, Isaac also at 40, Joseph at 30, Judah himself at 20 or more, and probably your brothers too. If you check the entire bible in fact, you will see that the generation age is almost always around 20/30 years old. The youngest father we know of in the Bible is King Josiah, who became a father at the age of 14. The youngest father in world history, that there is proof, was 11 years old. Some sources cite a supposed father of 9 years old in 1910, in China, but there is no proof that this actually occurred. Would Judah's sons and grandson be an exception in his entire family and in the all secular history, and even more a so extreme exception? And even if it were an exception, would it occur twice in a row? It doesn't seem very plausible to me.The only way out would then be to consider that the story actually predates the sale of Joseph, but the beginning of the chapter leaves no room for that. So how to solve this problem? In Genesis we learn that Judah's sons Er and Onan died, and both of them were married to Tamar. Because of their deaths (and involvement with the same woman, Tamar), Judah thinks that Tamar has something to do with them dying, and so refuses to give Shelah (his other son) to her as a husband.So, Tamar disguises as a prostitute and conceives by Judah. Does Tamar marry someone else after conceiving from Judah?Does she eventually marry Judah's son, Shelah? Because Numbers 26:20 mentions descendants of Shelah, Judah's son, so this makes me wonder if he did eventually marry Tamar, since usually a deceased man who was childless would have his brother marry his wife to carry on the family line, as Onan did after Er died. Even though the family line was carried on by Tamar conceiving from Judah, does this still suggest that Shelah married Tamar? All the proper names of the Bible play a very important role in conveying God's message. Genesis 38 is a chapter where this general fact becomes specially true. To understand the meaning of the scarlet hread on Zerach's hand I think it would be good to refer to all the names contained in the chapter. The strange story of Yehudah's marriage and his first generations in Genesis 38 contains in fact many significant and interesting proper names that are also closely related to each other. The very name of the father himself - Yehudah - to start with, which means "praised" or "thanked". The implied object of that praise is in fact the LORD (as clearly stated in Ge 29:35). The LORD is the One we thank as the source of every good gift we receive, and most importantly of our salvation. The story begins when Yehudah, far from his brothers, through a friend from Adullam (the place's name probably meaning "justice of the people") whose name was Chirah ("whiteness, splendour"), meets a girl, whose name has remained untold. However, strangely enough, we know her father's name, instead, together with the origins of his family: he was a man from Canaan and his name was Shua' . This name in Hebrew means "salvation", but it is not a name we find in Israel (elsewhere, it appears only as a Chaldean or Assyrian name, Ezek 23:23). But the LORD didn't want Yehudah to have any offspring from a man with such a name: salvation's source must not remain anonimous and even the less it can't be identified with a sinful creature. In fact, the name Shua', not referring to the only true source of salvation, that is HaShem (Ps 3:8), automatically becomes a lie, because it refers to somebody as something he can not possibly be. Anyway, from the anonimous daughter of the carrier of that misleading name, we read that Yehudah got three sons. All of them with a significant name.The first one he named 'Er . The two consonants of this name mean "awake", but this name turned out to signify the same as its anagram, i.e. the word that means "evil", ra' . In fact Er was such a person in the eyes of the LORD (Ge 38:7). On this account, God put him to death. Before that, anyway, Yehudah gave him a wife. It's quite interesting that her name (whose first meaning is "palm tree") refers, as a root, to the action of rising to the heights of the sky, like the palm trees do, and the pillars of smoke as well (Song of songs 3:6). Additionally the dates' palm trees refer to the sweetness of life and to the springs of living waters (cfr Exodus 15:27). Which corresponds very well to the role that Tamar is going to play in our story. The following two names, of the second and third child, were given by the unnamed wife of Yehudah. The second child, 'Onan , means "vigorous", but that man didn't use his vigour to obey God's commandment and raise an offspring to his dead brother. Therefore the LORD put him to death too. The name of the third one - Shelah , meaning "petition, request"- was also kind of prophetic, because he would be requested by his sister in law. The birth of the two twins Yehudah got from Tamar, which repeats the story of Yitzchaq's and Yoseph's sons, brings up another pair of meaningful names after all the other names of the chgapter. Again the one who looked like to be the firstborn became the second one, whereas the one to looked like to be the second one found his way out and became the firsborn. As for the first one, this action of breaking forth remains recorded in his name Peretz . But the name of the second, Zerach ("shining") refers to the scarlet thread that was put on his wrist as a sign that he would be first. Actually, that scarlet thread, shaniy , is referred to by a word that has the very same consonants as the Hebrew word for "second" sheniy . In conclusion one of the main teaching we can draw from all these stories is that we must not rely on what we have and what we can see. The root of the name Zerach (zayn + resh + chet) cconveys the meaning of "irradiate, come out, appear" and also echoes the meaning of the close root of zara' (zayn + resh + ayn) which means to sow. But he was not the seed, he only appeared so. What happened to Zerach shows that situations can easily and quickly change (Proverbs 23:5). Those who were first can easily become the last ones if they take for granted what they have received and not make any effort to get it. The fact that salvation comes only from Ha-Shem, whom we cannot see, gives us the responsibility to keep searching for Him, together with the blessed hope that one day we will eventually encounter our King, whom we can't see now because everything we can see now is only for some time, whereas His kingdom will be for ever. As always in the living Word of God, this general message can be found also in the details, like that one of the Hebrew word for the scarlet thread on Zerach's hand, that was meant to signify that he was the first but that also contained the meaning of being second. (NOTE: Judah did not meet Joseph again until chapter 42, not chapter 39; but the 22 year time frame noted by the OP is reasonably calculated). Not much is given in the exact chronology of events of Judah, but consider from the time of the betrayal of Joseph one (hypothetically possible) time frame that would fit: 1 year to meet and marry Shua's daughter (Shua was the father, not the name of the daughter, 38:12; see also 1 Chr 2:3)1 year to conceive and bear Er1 year to conceive and bear Onan1 year to conceive and bear Shelah Stop there a moment; we are at 4 years. We do know that Er, Onan, and Shelah do not include any twins (based on the language of v.3-5), so they came in some sequence. Now according to Edwin M. Yamauchi, Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World, Bibliotheca Sacra 135 (1978): 241-242, generally for males the advisable age for marriage was between 14 to 20. So for purposes here, lets take the minimum for Er (assume he married Tamar when he was 14). That means we need to add 12 more years (since 2 of the above 4 years were after his birth). 12 years for Er to reach marriageable age. We are now at 16 years total. Let's assume 1 year passes before Er is killed by God for his wickedness (Gen 38:7), that puts Onan also at the earliest recommended marriageable age and able to perform Levirate marriage right away. But he immediately fails to perform his duties and is killed by God for it (Gen 38:8-10). So we added 1 more year here, and Shelah is at least 1 year out from being marriageable age. 1 year for marriage to Er and the very short marriage to Onan. So Tamar is possibly twice widowed by 17 years out from the Joseph incident. 1 year for Shelah to come of age.1 year for Judah's wife to die and Tamar to be stewing in her ire at Judah for not giving her to Shelah.1 year for Tamar to meet up with Judah, conceive, and bear the twins Perez and Zerah from him. So a total of 20 years is possible. One could even reduce that by at least 2, possible even 3 or 4 more years, if one accounted that Judah may have moved quicker than the year allotted in getting married.that it is only 9 months from conception to birth (so we gain a part of a year's time based off my rounding the 4 conceptions to 1 year each already, though we still need Er to reach marriageable age, which could probably only be pushed back to year 15 from Joseph's sale into slavery)that Er may have married even younger than "traditionally" allotted (and Onan as well, which may be why Judah decided he would wait a bit longer for Shelah to get older)that Er may have died soon after his marriagethat the passing of Judah's wife might have occurred during the year Shelah came of age. Conclusion It is quite possible that the period of time for the events of Judah could have transpired perhaps as little as about 16 years, and fairly easily between 18 to 22 years of time. Thus fully fitting the events within the period of Joseph being sold and the brothers visiting Egypt (either the first time or the second time; the second time is the 22 year mark). Onan's sin was entirely related to his refusal to perform his levirate duty. Quickly about the other three: Coitus interruptus is not masturbation. It is a (very unreliable) method of birth control. Onan was attempting not to get Tamar pregnant because he did not want to provide an heir for his deceased older brother.It was not "theft of Tamar's child." Rather, it was (once again) refusal to provide his deceased brother, Er, with an heir under the law of levirate marriage.Though marrying a brother's wife was normally prohibited (see Leviticus 18:16; 20:21), the law of levirate marriage was an exception to that rule. Marrying a deceased brother's wife under this law was not considered adultery or inchastity. And the rules of "inchastity" for men were rather lax in those days anyway. The law of levirate marriage is stated in Deuteronomy 25:5-10: 5 "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. 7 And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' 8 Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, 'I do not wish to take her,' 9 then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house. 10 And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.'" Although this law was recorded several centuries after the time of Onan, as with many statutes in the Mosaic Law it was a codification of a law that was already in effect long before the time of Moses, and that was common to many ancient cultures. For more on the law of levirate marriage, see: Jewish Encyclopedia -> Levirate Marriage (Hebr. "yibbum"). The law of levirate marriage was, however, complicated in its application, and has been the subject of much debate and varying interpretation since ancient times. Having said that, here is a summary of the key events in the passage, followed by the most likely scenario of precisely what Onan's sin consisted of. At the time of the incident of Onan in Genesis 38:6-11, Judah had fathered three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah (see Genesis 38:1-5). Er, the eldest, had received the punishment of death from the Lord for unknown offenses. Judah then instructed his second son, Onan, to fulfill the law of levirate marriage for Er, his deceased elder brother, and provide an heir for him. Onan went through the motions of doing this, but avoided actually getting Tamar pregnant by the practice of coitus interruptus, termed in the Biblical account "wasting his semen on the ground." The text states Onan's purpose for doing this as follows: But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. (Genesis 38:9) This was why the Lord carried out a sentence of death on Onan: And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. (Genesis 38:10) Why did Onan marry Tamar, but then avoid getting her pregnant, and why was this an offense punishable by death in the Lord's eyes? By going through the motions of taking Tamar as his wife, and thus appearing to fulfill the law of levirate marriage, Onan would become the heir to his deceased brother's current possessions. If he refused to fulfill his duty under the law of levirate marriage, he would not receive his brother's property. So he had a financial incentive to at least appear to fulfill the levirate law. However, if he got Tamar pregnant, and she bore a child, especially if it were a male child, that child would inherit: The primogeniture that would have gone to the first biological male child of his Levirate, or legal father Er, Judah's eldest sonwhich would cause the leadership of the clan to pass to the child, andA double inheritance from Judah, their father, which the firstborn son was entitled to by long custom (see, for example, Deuteronomy 21:15-17). As mentioned above, Onan would have already received his deceased brother's property by taking Tamar as his wife. However, if he impregnated her and gave her a child, especially if it were a male child, he would lose both the primogeniture and the double portion of the inheritance from their father Judah. A bit of simple math shows that assuming Judah fathered no more children, this would cut Onan's inheritance from two-thirds to one-fourth of his father's total wealth when his father died. And of course, it would deprive Onan of the primogeniture, or leadership of the clan, that would otherwise pass to him because his elder brother would have had no heir. Additional source for the above: Jewish Encyclopedia -> Inheritance ("yerusbah," "naalah") -> Levirate Connections The sin of Onan, then, for which the Lord punished him with death, was that of going through the motions of obeying the law of levirate marriage in order to obtain his deceased brother's property, but not actually performing his duty under that lawthat of providing an heir for his brotherin order keep for himself both the primogeniture and the inheritance of a double portion of the wealth of their father Judah. Short version: Onan made a pretense of following the levirate law, but in fact shirked his obligations to his family and clan under the law, all from motives of greed and desire for power. According to Jubilees, Er sinned by refusing to sleep with Tamar:(1) And in the forty-fifth jubilee, in the second week, (and) in the second year, Judah took for his first-born Er, a wife from the daughters of Aram, named Tamar. (2) But he hated, and did not lie with her, because his mother was of the daughters of Canaan, and he wished to take him a wife of the kinsfolk of his mother, but Judah, his father, would not permit him. (3) And this Er, the first-born of Judah, was wicked, and the Lord slew him. (Jubilees 41:1-3)According to Rabbinic sources, Er did sleep with Tamar, but avoided impregnating her, in order to maintain her beauty: ', . (Bereshit Rabbah 85:4) ' " (,) (,) " . (Bavli Yevamot 34b)Er and Onan indulged in unnatural intercourse. An objection was raised: During all the twenty-four months one may thresh within and winnow without; these are the words of R. Eliezer. The others said to him: Such actions are only like the practice of Er and Onan! -Like the practice of Er and Onan, and yet not [exactly] like the practice of Er and Onan: 'Like the practice of Er and Onan', for it is written in Scripture, And it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilt it on the ground; and 'not [exactly] like the practice of Er and Onan', for whereas there it was an unnatural act, here it is done in the natural way. [The source for] Onan's [guilt] may well be traced, for it is written in Scripture, That he spilt it on the ground; whence however, [that of] Er? R. Nahman b. Isaac replied: It is written, And He slew him also, he also died of the same death. [The reason for] Onan's [action] may well be understood, because he knew That the seed would not be his; but why did Er act in such a manner? In order that she might not conceive and thus lose some of her beauty. (Bavli Yevamot 34b) . (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Bereshit 38:7)But Er the firstborn of Jehuda was evil before the Lord because he had not given his seed unto his wife, and the anger of the Lord prevailed against him, and the Lord slew him. (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Bereshit 38:7) ' . (Rashi Bereshit 38:7)Was evil in the eyes of the Lord [His evil was] like the evil of Onan, viz. that he wasted his semen, as it is written in connection with Onan: and He put him to death also, meaning that, as Ers death, so was Onans death. Now, why should Er waste his semen? So that she (Tamar) would not become pregnant and her beauty be impaired. (Rashi Bereshit 38:7)According to these sources, Er sinned just like Onan, in some form of sexual misconduct. "One would think that murder is more serious than onanism. Yet Onan was killed and not Cain."OK, there are several things to unpack here. Onanism is just masturbation. Despite the name, that is not Onan's crime. His crime is that he slept with his dead brother's wife supposedly in order to provide an offspring, but he didn't want to provide an offspring he just wanted to sleep with her, so he had sex but pulled out, went back the next day, had sex but pulled out again, etc. That way he could keep sleeping with her but not actually give her an offspring that would not be his. Of course he could have just refused to be married to her, but Tamar was beautiful.Technically, Onan was practicing birth control, but the whole point of why she (and the community at large) allowed him to marry (e.g. lawfully sleep with) her was to give her a child. In this way, he was committing an offense against his dead brother's wife but also against the community at large. Masturbation, in and of itself, was primarily an issue of cleanliness.Why does God punish crimes and how is the severity reckoned.In contrast with the God of the Bible, man has a warped view of crime and punishment, so things that don't seem serious to man are serious to God and vice versa. E.g. incorrectly saying a prayer in the holy of holies would result in instant death, but putting out someone's eye would not. Collecting sticks on the sabbath was a death penalty in Numbers yet slavery was not a crime at all. Thus human assessments of the magnitude of both offense and punishment are almost always way off the mark as they do not see into the future to fully understanding what is happening, nor can they peer into the world of spirit. The solution for those interested in exegesis is not to try to judge God by modern western standards of justice, but to try to understand what is happening from the point of view of the text itself and culture of the time:One way to think about this is that Onan, by having sex with Tamar, was (according to custom) her husband, so if he was kept alive, then she would not be able to find another man with which to have a child. Onan's death allowed her to (ultimately) find someone who would not practice birth control, and from Tamar we get Christ. Thus God wanted to protect the line of Messiah and that line needed to keep going. Onan was trying to snuff that line out not only by refusing to continue the line himself, but as a result not letting anyone else continue it either[1].Almost all of the God-commanded mass killings in the Bible, from Noah to the wiping out of the Caananite tribes, was to keep that line of Messiah pure and going until Christ was born. Thus Onan, by practicing birth control with Tamar, was a threat to the seed, that is the Promise, whereas Judah, by sleeping with a prostitute, was a friend of the Promise. Thus one was put to death and the other was honored, even though by human standards of justice Judah's crime was worse than Onan's. But God is interested in the seed, and his love is centered in his Son. Those who promote the promise prosper and those who oppose the promise are cut off. It does not matter what human justice is, because the mystery of the promise is foolishness to notions of human justice.[1] Moses had not yet come along with the concept of certificates of divorce (which we are later told was only because of the people's sinfulness, and not according to God's heart for marriage), so there was not an option for Onan to say "sorry, I tried, now someone else can have a try" and to send her away after he got tired of her.

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