

Numbers 26:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sons of Judah were Er and Onan: and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan.

Analysis

Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan—This parenthetical statement explains why Judah's genealogy begins with Shelah (v. 20) rather than the firstborn. Er was slain by the LORD for wickedness (Genesis 38:7), and Onan died for refusing levirate duty (Genesis 38:9-10). Both deaths preceded the Exodus by centuries, yet Moses records them to explain Judah's tribal structure.

The Hebrew verb *wayāmūt* (they died) appears without elaboration, but Genesis reveals these were divine judgments. Their deaths in **the land of Canaan** (before Israel's Egyptian sojourn) meant their lines didn't continue—a sobering reminder that covenant privilege doesn't guarantee individual salvation. Yet through their brother Shelah and Pharez, Judah's messianic line continued to David and ultimately Christ (Matthew 1:3).

Historical Context

Er and Onan died c. 1900 BC during the patriarchal period, long before the Exodus (c. 1446 BC). Moses includes this historical note to explain why Pharez's line dominated Judah's genealogy—from Pharez came Hezron, Ram, Nahshon (Exodus 6:23), and eventually David. God's sovereignty overruled human sin to accomplish His redemptive purposes.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's judgment on Er and Onan demonstrate that participation in the covenant community doesn't guarantee individual salvation apart from personal righteousness?
2. What does the survival of Judah's messianic line despite the deaths of his firstborn sons teach about God's sovereignty over human failure?
3. Why does Moses include this ancient historical note in a census of the conquest generation, and what does it teach about the continuity of redemptive history?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵי י	יְהוּדָה	וְ	וְאוֹנָן	וַיָּמָת	וְ	וְאוֹנָן	בְּאֶרֶץ
The sons	of Judah	and Er	and Onan	died	and Er	and Onan	in the land
H1121	H3063	H6147	H209	H4191	H6147	H209	H776
כְּנָעַן:							
of Canaan							
H3667							

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 46:12 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zerah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul.