

## Rape – Why is this Story in the Bible?

2 Samuel 13:1-21

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me if you would to 2 Samuel chapter 13. One of the benefits of consecutive expository preaching - preaching through books of the Bible - is that you have to talk about things that you wouldn't want to talk about. And that was true in chapter 12 as we saw the death of David's son born to Bathsheba. The chapter ended with the continuation of the siege against Rabbah where Uriah the Hittite and Uriah the husband of Bathsheba had been killed. That siege went on for somewhere between nine months and possibly up to two years and eventually Rabbah was sacked and David conquered. Now we turn to David's home and his family.

And before we read this passage together let's look to God in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for the Bible that holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Grant Your blessing. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

2 Samuel chapter 13:

Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother. And Jonadab was a very crafty man. And he said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me bread to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'" So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. And when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand."

Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare food for him." So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's

house, where he was lying down. And she took dough and kneaded it and made cakes in his sight and baked the cakes. And she took the pan and emptied it out before him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So everyone went out from him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, that I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." She answered him, "No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the outrageous fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her.

Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up! Go!" But she said to him, "No, my brother, for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me." But he would not listen to her. He called the young man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence and bolt the door after her." Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves, for thus were the virgin daughters of the king dressed. So his servants put her out and bolted the door after her. And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she wore. And she laid her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went.

And her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother, do not take this to heart." So Tamar lived, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar.

After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. And Absalom came to the king and said, "Behold, your servant has sheepshearers. Please let the king and his servants go with your servant." But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go, lest we be burdensome to you." He pressed him, but he would not go but gave him his blessing. Then Absalom said, "If no, please let my brother Amnon go with us." And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" But Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Mark when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not fear; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant." So the servants of

Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and each mounted his mule and fled.

While they were on the way, news came to David, "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons, and not one of them is left." Then the king arose and tore his garments and lay on the earth. And all his servants who were standing by tore their garments. But Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men, the king's sons, for Amnon alone is dead. For by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day he violated his sister Tamar. Now therefore let not my lord the king so take it to heart as to suppose that all the king's sons are dead, for Amnon alone is dead."

But Absalom fled. And the young man who kept the watch lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, many people were coming from the road behind him by the side of the mountain. And Jonadab said to the king, "Behold, the king's sons have come; as your servant said, so it has come about." And as soon as he had finished speaking, behold, the king's sons came and lifted up their voice and wept. And the king also and all his servants wept very bitterly.

But Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son day after day. So Absalom fled and went to Geshur, and was there three years. And the spirit of the king longed to go out to Absalom, because he was comforted about Amnon, since he was dead.

Thus far, God's holy and inerrant Word.

This is a sorry tale. It's like a bad episode of a soap opera. It's David's family. You have Amnon, the firstborn son and heir to the throne, and his half-sister, Tamar, who is described in verse 1 as "beautiful," and Tamar's full-brother, Absalom, who was also beautiful according to the legend. And this other man, Jonadab, who is David's brother's son, a nephew of David's, a cousin to Amnon and Tamar and Absalom. And then you have David, the king, who has just committed adultery and killed Bathsheba's husband. Let's look at these five characters, shall we?

Amnon, first of all - the firstborn, David's firstborn, the heir to the throne. He's going to be dead before the chapter is through. He's portrayed here by the author like a Canaanite and he will die a Canaanite's death. And there are similarities. This is not a unique event in the Bible. There's a similar story in Genesis 34 — Shechem and Dinah. Dinah was also the daughter of a king, equally violated. Only in this case it is his sister, his half-sister but his sister nevertheless. And we're told in verse 1 that "he loved her." He has a love for his sister. It is an illicit kind of love. It seems that all David's children, at this point, have separate

houses, residences, in the City of David. We're told that Amnon found it impossible to do to Tamar what he desired to do, in verse 2. She calls him an "outrageous fool." Now that's not really strong enough. In the Hebrew, a fool is a godless man. He's behaving like a godless man, like an inordinately wicked man. Whatever love means in verse 1, in verse 15 after he has violated her, he hates her. It wasn't love, it was lust. He feigns sickness so that his father, who evidently did not visit on any regular basis, but because he was sick his father David now comes to visit him. And he persuades his father to send Tamar to cook for him and take care of him in his feigned sickness. Once she's in his house he acts with brutal swiftness.

And then you've got Tamar, this beautiful daughter of David, the sister of Absalom, half-sister to Amnon. We're told in verse 2 that she was a virgin. She wore clothes, garments that publically demonstrated that that's what she was. You learn about her in the very way the story is told, the very composition of the story — isn't it amazing? It takes my breath away, the sheer detail of this story. It's a very graphic narrative, but it's told in such a way that you immediately sympathize with Tamar. She is a woman of virtue. She is a woman of integrity. In verse 12, unless your heart is made of stone, your heart breaks as you hear her say, "No, my brother, do not violate me." You must forgive her for suggesting to Amnon — she is still in his house and still in his clutches — you must forgive her for suggesting that David will have them married. Probably not. It would have been contrary to the Levitical code and expressly forbidden in the book of Deuteronomy. It is extremely doubtful, but she is trying to save face and she's trying to save his face as much as her own. Your heart has to go out to her.

I have known women and men who have been violated and the pain that they bear and the hurt that never goes away. The psychological ramifications of this episode, this incident, will be with her for the rest of her life. She bears a stigma here. She mentions in verse 13, shame — "Where could I carry my shame?" She attaches, her society would attach it, as our society would attach it, the culture would regard her now as a woman of shame, although she is innocent. She changes her clothes to demonstrate that she is no longer a virgin so that it is now publically demonstrated. Her prospects of marriage are greatly compromised.

Then you have Jonadab, who was also a family member — David's brother's son, a nephew of David, a cousin to Tamar and Absalom and Amnon. And he's described in verse 3 as crafty, "very crafty." He's a cool customer. He's shrewd but it's not a gift he uses in the interest of righteousness and integrity. Amnon is so caught up in his lust he can't even think, so it's Jonadab who suggests the plot.

Ralph Davis, our dear friend and commentator, says in his commentary about Jonadab - he is the most dangerous man of all. Davis, you see, says that Amnon will always be tending to his lust, but Jonadab is ambitious. Jonadab has political savvy. He has skill with no scruple. He has wisdom but not ethics. He has insight

but he has no integrity. Watch how cool he is at the end of this chapter coming to David, who thinks he's lost all of his sons, and saying, "No, only one is dead." He's the only cool one in the entire house. There's something extremely unlikeable about Jonadab. He is, I think, a slithering serpent in the story.

And then there's Absalom who loves his sister with a brotherly love. He'll call his first daughter, Tamar. And in verse 22, he hates Amnon. He hates him. Maybe he hated him anyway, but he hates him for what he had done to Tamar, his sister. It's two years later, this is a plot and a hatred that has been brewing for two years, and at sheep shearing time, he invites all of the king's sons — he invites the king but the king doesn't come — but he especially invites Amnon. David is suspicious. "Why do you want Amnon?" he says. And in an act of premeditated murder, Amnon is killed. In circumstances very similar to the circumstances in which he had violated his sister in his own dwelling place when he was drunk. It's in anger, it's a rage, that you can understand, but it is still an act of murder.

And then there's David. What did he do, what did he do when Amnon did this thing to his sister? What did David do? He did nothing. He did nothing. Oh yes, he was cross, he was — verse 21 — he was "very angry" — but he did nothing. There's no hint in the passage of comforting Tamar, for example, let alone for punishing Amnon. And how could he? How could he? There is no greater question for David than, "Who are you to talk, David? Who are you to talk?" You see, David is paralyzed, incapacitated by his own track record. His own failure has incapacitated him. David's kingdom is now on the very edge of civil war. It's all downhill now. And this is David's family and you think you've got problems. I mean you think you've got problems in your family. This is David's family. He's got a son who's committed murder; he's got another son who's violated his sister.

Why is this in the Bible? I've been asking that all week. Why is this story in the Bible? I'm amazed at how many of you came out tonight. Given the inclement weather, I thought it would be a perfect excuse not to have to listen to a sermon on this passage! (laughter) I am so glad that this story is here. I don't want to read this story every day but I'm so glad that it's here. There are dear Christian folk, godly women, yes and godly men, who have been violated, and this story is saying, "You are not alone. You are not alone." *What kind of Bible would it be if it didn't address the dregs and the hurts and the pains and the darkness that so often colors our life?* There isn't a circumstance, there isn't an event, that the Bible doesn't address in some way. This story is — why doesn't the author dress it up a little? Why doesn't he camouflage it a little? He lays it bare in all of its gory detail like some soap opera because our life sometimes can be like soap operas and our families can sometimes be like soap operas.

This is what Nathan had said to David back in chapter 12 and verse 10 — "The sword shall never depart from your house." *This story is saying God's prophetic word is true.* It's saying God's prophetic word is true but it's also saying

something else and I'm not sure how to put it. *But the sins of one generation can sometimes be imprinted on the next.* Amnon is behaving like his father. Absalom is behaving like his father. That terrifies me. That absolutely terrifies me. So what this story does is drive me to Jesus. My salvation is not in David. He was a man after God's own heart, but he was a man after God's own heart because God humbled him. Why do you think David can write those psalms in which he conveys such a nearness and such a tenderness of spirit? Because God humbled him to the dust. David could bring nothing and say, "Lord, look at what I can bring." His own life and his own family's life is a shambles.

You know in the history of redemption this story is saying, "David is not your man. Only Jesus, only Jesus can save, and He can save and He can help and He can nourish and protect and surround with His presence His dearest children who find themselves victims in this world, like Tamar." This story, it drives me to Jesus because there is no redemption in the story itself. Someone else has to come — great David's greater, perfect, righteous Son must come.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank You for Your Word. It sometimes isn't as we would have thought the Bible to be. We pray for sisters and brothers whose lives have been torn apart, and perhaps in the very privacy and secrecy tonight of their own hearts, cry out to You with a longing. Draw near to them. What they do not find in this world may they find in the arms of Jesus. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

**Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).