

## 2 Samuel 13:1-39

### Amnon Rapes Tamar

David was called a "man after God's own heart" because he was quick to repent and confess his sin. In fact, he is listed in the roll call of the "heroes of faith" in **Hebrews 11:32**.

But after David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, although he was personally forgiven by God, his reign was accompanied by an almost continuous succession of troubles, just as Nathan had prophesied.

At the same time, it seems like David himself was never the same. He showed indecision and, as one commentator observed, "his hand shook, and his voice trembled; both in what he did and what he said" resulting in hesitation to act, and an over-indulgence toward his children - probably a consequence of guilt from his own sin.

The next eight chapters describe a tragic soap opera. Like a Game of Thrones episode, it's full of lust, incestuous rape, lies, revenge, betrayal, political rebellion and warfare, including a suicide and multiple murders.

Again, the fact that this sad tale is included in the scriptures at all is proof of its truth and inspiration. (But the story is mostly omitted in the Book of Chronicles)

The chapter opens in what is probably the 20th year of David's reign, soon after the victory over the Ammonites and the taking of Rabbah. It seems as if the prophecy about Solomon being David's successor and builder of the Temple was kept secret, and known only by David, Bathsheba, Nathan and perhaps a few close advisors.

Amnon was David's firstborn and eldest son (**2 Samuel 3:2**), and he was considered to be the crown prince and destined to succeed David by the people and the court. That's key to understanding his actions and the responses of others.

The cast of characters and their relationship is complicated. It is unclear whether "brother and sister" means blood relative, step-siblings or something else.

The name Tamar means "Palm Tree," signifying fruitfulness. The name Absalom means "His Father's Peace." The name Amnon means "Faithful, Stable." None of them lived up to their names.

**2 Samuel 13:1-2** - "And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her."

This was lust, not love, as we find out later. The virgin princess was kept secluded within the palace, and there was no way Amnon could even get near her. His frustration

was driving him crazy, and he couldn't sleep.

### Jonadab's Scheme

**2 Samuel 13:3** - "But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man."

subtle = *hākām* - wise, cunning, either in a good sense or a bad sense.

**2 Samuel 13:5** - "And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand."

The idea was to propose that if Amnon could watch Tamar preparing the meal, this would supposedly stimulate his appetite and help him recover.

**2 Samuel 13:9** - "And she took a pan, and poured them out before him; but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me. And they went out every man from him."

Once alone, Amnon grabs her and tries to force her to have sex.

The rabbis suspect that Tamar resisted and might even have wounded Amnon during the struggle.

**2 Samuel 13:12-14** - "And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly. And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her."

force = *ʿānā* - to humble, afflict, cause to bow down, conquer, to humiliate a woman by either illegitimate or forced sex.

Used to describe Shechem's rape of Dina - he "defiled her" (**Genesis 34:2**); and the rape of the Levite's concubine (**Judges 19:24**); to force sex on a woman in her menstrual period (**Ezekiel 22:10**) "they humbled her that was set apart for pollution." Rape of women in Jerusalem by the Babylonians (**Lamentations 5:11**) "They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah."

Why did she think David might agree to their marriage? Wouldn't that be incest?

The rabbis say that Tamar's mother, Maacah, was a gentile taken in warfare (**Deuteronomy 21:10-14**). Before she converted to Judaism, David had slept with her and Tamar was conceived. Previous familial relationships are dissolved upon becoming

a convert. So Tamar was not related to her biological siblings according to the Law, although David raised her like a daughter. After David married Maacah, Absalom was born. So Tamar and Absalom were siblings. Amnon had David as his father, but was from another mother. Amnon and Tamar were really step-siblings, and might be able to legally marry.

**2 Samuel 13:15** - "Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone."

He hated her either because his lust was sated, or she reminded him of his sin, or because she had wounded him in the struggle.

**2 Samuel 13:16** - "And she said unto him, There is no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her."

Why? Because the private rape would now become her public shame. Her life was basically ruined by his actions.

**2 Samuel 13:17-18** - "Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her. And she had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her."

"a garment of divers colors" - actually a linen garment extending all the way down to the wrists and ankles, which would normally be covered by another robe. Amnon ejected her half-dressed, which added to the shame and made it look like perhaps he had rejected a shameful proposal from her.

**2 Samuel 13:19** - "And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colors that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying."

This was a sign of grief and mourning. She in fact was shrieking and wailing.

### **Absalom's Response**

**2 Samuel 13:20-22** - "And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house. But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth. And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar."

Tamar didn't go to her father David because she knew he tended to be indulgent to his sons. And with no witnesses, there was no way to bring Amnon to justice anyway. It was a "he said, she said" situation.

## Rape in Ancient Times

The penalty for rape of a woman who is married or betrothed was death (**Deuteronomy 22:25**).

But rape of an unmarried virgin *seemed* to be treated differently.

- **Deuteronomy 22:28-29** - "If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled (*‘ānâ*) her, he may not put her away all his days."

The common rabbinical interpretation of the crime of rape of an unmarried and unbetrothed virgin was seen only as damage to the virgin's marriageability and to her reputation. **Deuteronomy 22:28-29** told them that the rapist must pay reparation of 50 shekels of silver to the father and offer to marry the victim (although she could refuse) and never divorce her.

To modern ears, that seems to trivialize the crime.

But this would be step up from, for instance, the ancient Assyrian law, which said "the father of the virgin shall take the wife of the virgin's rapist and give her to be raped; he shall not return her to her husband (but) take her; the father may give his daughter who was raped to her rapist in marriage. If he has no wife, the rapist shall give the (extra) third in silver to her father as the value of a virgin (and) her rapist shall marry her (and) not cast her off."

How Do the Rabbis in the Talmud Address Rape?

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/2016/06/27/how-do-the-rabbis-in-the-talmud-address-rape/>

Talmudic Rabbis Debated the Cost of Rape—In Terms of the Woman's Market Value  
<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/belief/articles/cost-of-rape-daf-yomi-120-kirsch>

For a long time, rape was considered a property crime against the victim's husband or father. The word itself derives from the Latin word *rapere*, or "seize." It wasn't until the 11th and 12th centuries that rape began to be considered more as a violent, sexual crime against the victim.

But other scholars point to the law against kidnapping as a more appropriate punishment for rape:

- **Exodus 21:16** - "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."

They note that the **Deuteronomy 22:28-29** passage uses a different verb for "lay hold

of" (*tāpās*) which can mean simply "take" sexually, instead of the previous example in verse 25 - "force her" (*hāzaq*) or "prevail by strength or force." And the wording, that he lay "with" her and then "they" are found, shows this is describing consensual sex.

So with that understanding, when a couple is discovered having sex, the man would give a payment and have to marry the virgin if she wants to. There is no rape involved in that passage. But he has "humbled - *ānā*" her because the sex was illegitimate, without a marriage contract or her father's permission. Unless they marry, she is unlikely to be chosen as a bride because she is no longer a virgin.

So, if this is the correct interpretation, why is there no passage condemning the rape of an unbetrothed virgin?

### **Rape = Kidnapping**

Rape always implies a kind of "kidnapping" - a seizing and taking against the victim's will, and that would always demand the death penalty according to **Exodus 21:16**.

- See "Sacred Vaginas: How the Torah Condemns Rape"  
[https://www.academia.edu/40024338/Sacred\\_Vaginas\\_How\\_the\\_Torah\\_Condemns\\_Rape](https://www.academia.edu/40024338/Sacred_Vaginas_How_the_Torah_Condemns_Rape)

Wait, what about when the Benjamites "took" (*nasa*) or carried off wives of the daughters of Shiloh (**Judges 21:23**)? The rabbis point out could not be rape because it was forbidden to force anyone into marriage unwillingly. They would still have to woo their potential brides and receive consent to the arrangement. And this was not really kidnapping because of the previous arrangement with their fathers.

Although the rabbis did not seem to ever put these two passages together i.e. that rape = kidnapping, it could be one of those instances Jesus refers to when He says, "You have heard it said...but I say..."

### **Absalom's Revenge**

Judging from previous instances like the rape of Dinah by Shechem (**Genesis 34**), it was her brothers who exacted revenge. Now Absalom - Tamar's brother - was in that position of avenger.

First, Absalom told Tamar to try to carry on and leave this incident in the past. Meanwhile he was planning his revenge.

King David was "very wrath." But the Septuagint adds, "but he vexed not the spirit of Amnon his son, because he loved him, because he was his firstborn." This no doubt also offended Absalom.

The Talmud says (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, fol. 21.1) a law was made because of this incident, that virgins should not be allowed alone with a man, because if this could

happen to a princess of Israel, what might happen to a poor woman?

Two years later, Absalom arranged a feast at sheep shearing time, which was sort of like a harvest festival. He invited David, knowing he would turn it down. But then he asked all the king's other sons to attend, to disguise his hope to ambush Amnon.

**2 Samuel 13:28-29** - "Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled."

Just as David had committed adultery, made Uriah drunk, and then later murdered him: so Amnon did the same.

In the tumult, David's other sons flee, thinking they might be slain next. They make their way back by a circuitous route, hoping to avoid Absalom's men. Before they arrive, a rumor precedes them saying all the sons had been killed.

**2 Samuel 13:37** - "But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day."

Was David grieving for Amnon, or for Absalom, who was now estranged and on the run? It doesn't say. Probably for Amnon at this point. But later he would mourn for his other son, Absalom.

Absalom had to flee, because the cities of refuge would not give him sanctuary for premeditated murder. Talmai was his mother's father, his grandfather.

**2 Samuel 13:39** - "And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead."

David's active hostility towards Absalom was mitigated over time.

But the seed of rebellion had been planted in Absalom, and would soon come to fruition.

Notice that Absalom's murder of Amnon, and his later rebellion against David himself, might have been prevented if David had overcome his own guilt, and exerted any kind of moral discipline over his sons.

This chapter, and the succeeding ones, are meant to show us first that God's judgment, once pronounced, will surely take place.

- **Isaiah 55:11** - "...so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: It shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

The story also shows how close to the surface all the permutations of evil are lurking within us, waiting to pour out, unless we recognize our own sin, turn to the Father, and walk constantly in repentance.

Let that be our prayer!