

### 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL

#### Week 21, Chapters 13 and 14

Last week we finished the first half of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel chapter 13 that reports the horrific incident of David's firstborn son, Amnon, raping his half-sister Tamar in an act of out-of-control sexual lust.

I won't review the gory details but I do want to remind you of the surrounding circumstances and intrigue. The author of the book of Samuel makes a point that Tamar was (at least in Amnon's eyes) overwhelmingly beautiful. However as much as Amnon's lust was the catalyst for this crime, in the background was the playing out of political and family jealousies. Much of what went on was about the struggle for power and position within the royal family.

Preparing this lesson turned out to be a rather soul searching exercise so we won't make a lot of progress today; the principles that jump off the pages of this chapter have so much bearing in our time that to go by them without making the connection would be to make our study little more than a history lesson.

Amnon, as David's firstborn, was heir apparent to the throne of Israel; this hierarchy was understood by the people of Israel, by the extended royal family, and by David himself. However Absalom (another son of David), who was Amnon's half-brother (they had different mothers), also had designs for the throne and had spent years building up a following of loyal supporters (or in some cases, merely of insiders who were placing their bets on Absalom to somehow out maneuver Amnon and become king). When Amnon violently raped Absalom's sister Tamar (Absalom and Tamar had the same mother and father) and then instantly rejected her and threw her out of his chambers, there was a clear message behind it. And the message was that Amnon reaffirmed his position as unquestioned crown prince, that as David's favorite and firstborn son he was untouchable, and that Absalom's side of the family (although influential) would be subservient to him. In that era to have sex (especially if it was forced) with a rival's wife, concubine, or (in this case) sister was a customary and unmistakable sign of

domination and control.

But there was another side to the story as well. Absalom was a clever and coldly calculating man. Amnon's assault upon Tamar (while ruinous for her) provided an opportunity for Absalom to use to his benefit what was otherwise a family disaster and setback. As has been the motto of ruthless political leaders and political hopefuls since time immemorial, **'you don't ever let a good crisis go to waste'**. All it would take is some determination and patience on ***Avishalom's*** part and his fondest aspirations just might become attainable.

Let's pick up on this story at verse 19.

### **RE-READ 2<sup>ND</sup> Samuel 13:19 – end**

I want to stress that over and over again the words "brother and sister" are used in these passages to describe Absalom and Tamar's relationship. I do so because of the questionable teaching by some Rabbis and Sages (that at times has spilled over into modern Christian scholarship) that the two really weren't brother and sister at all. And this is because if they were not related it means there really wasn't incest in David's family, and there could even be a good argument that what occurred between Amnon and Tamar was not so much rape as simply the overly zealous seduction by a young virile man of a somewhat reluctant young female (mirroring the David and Bathsheba affair). The goal of this line of reasoning is to read a predisposed doctrine of Judaism back into the story, with that predisposed doctrine being that David was innocent if not utterly sinless all throughout his life. And therefore the reason that David took no action whatsoever against Amnon after he heard what had happened, was proper response since nothing terribly wrong had occurred anyway.

I'm sure that this idea of reading a predisposed doctrine back into a Biblical story is something that you recognize probably ought not to be done because it either distorts or misapplies God's commands and principles. It takes God's message and turns it into something else and so it is not right for religious authorities to concoct a doctrine or philosophy and then regardless of what the actual words of the Bible say, explain that those passages support their doctrine. This is the essence of allegorical teaching and sermonizing, which has been at the heart of Synagogue and Institutional Church liturgy for centuries. Allegory, and the reading of a predisposed doctrine back into the Bible, is how a religious leader can (for instance) read the

Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5, get to the paragraph about Messiah emphasizing that no one should think that what He is saying ought to be taken as meaning that the Torah, Law, and Prophets have been abolished or even changed to the slightest degree; and then the leader explains to his congregation that regardless of what the actual words say we are to understand that Christ DID abolish the very things He said He didn't. As I said, this is just one example of many and when taken as a package it has done considerable harm to Judeo-Christianity.

At verse 20 we see that apparently **Tamar** went to her brother **Avishalom's** house for refuge. That is, she didn't return to her living quarters at the Virgin's convent or compound because the reality is that she no longer belonged there. She had her purity stolen from her and one can only imagine the malicious gossip that would have erupted if she showed up distraught with her clothing torn, soiled with ashes, and smeared with blood. Tamar really had no other option than to remain as a ward of her brother, probably for the rest of her (or Absalom's) life.

Absalom counseled her to keep what he views as a family matter to herself so that there wouldn't be a public scandal. Word of Amnon's incestuous act reached King David and we're told that he became angry; but that's apparently as far as his concern went. There is no hint that one word was spoken between David and Amnon. Certainly there is no record than any action whatsoever was taken by David; no rebuke, no punishment, no nothing. Here a serious flaw is exposed in David. David full well knew that by the Laws of Moses, Amnon had a price to pay and justice applied. However one must admit that it is not so cut and dried as what that price might be.

The law that comes closest to dealing with this is Deuteronomy 22:28-29. There it says:

***28 "If a man comes upon a girl who is a virgin but who is not engaged, and he grabs her and has sexual relations with her, and they are caught in the act,***

***29 then the man who had intercourse with her must give to the girl's father one-and-a-quarter pounds of silver shekels, and she will become his wife, because he humiliated her; he may not divorce her as long as he lives***

But the problem is that Tamar was Amnon's half-sister, so marriage was not possible according to the Law of Leviticus 18: 9.

**CJB Leviticus 18:9** *You are not to have sexual relations with your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether born at home or elsewhere. Do not have sexual relations with them.*

And the idea that Amnon would pay a bit of silver as reparation to his father, King David, is laughable. Besides as it says towards the end of Leviticus chapter 18:

**(Lev 18:29-30 CJB)** <sup>29</sup> *For those who engage in any of these disgusting practices, whoever they may be, will be cut off from their people.* <sup>30</sup> *So keep my charge not to follow any of these abominable customs that others before you have followed and thus defile yourselves by doing them. I am ADONAI your God."*

Thus according to Leviticus while Amnon didn't have the death penalty coming, he certainly was to be banished and cut-off from his people (in the same way a Leper might be). And equally he couldn't marry Tamar as a solution that mainly amounted to a protection for her.

So, David did nothing. And as we're about to see, his doing nothing led to even more violence. It is interesting that we see a similar thing happen with David's ancestor, Jacob, who also seemed to have no interest in disciplining his sons or taking action when wrong was done. Recall that the son of the King of Shechem raped Jacob's daughter Dinah and Jacob did essentially nothing about it except to become angry. In fact, it was the King of Shechem who came to Jacob, hat in hand, to ask Jacob if this could be made right by his son marrying Dinah (which, in fact, was the remedy of Deuteronomy 22, even though it would be centuries later before the Law was even given). Jacob agreed to this, but his sons were incensed that their father would respond by essentially giving in to a foreign king, and so they took a violent and wrong action by killing the entire male population of the city (who were innocent and had no part in this). Jacob's response to this was simply to move.

Here is another valuable lesson for us all: it is a God-principle that wrong doing even by our children must be dealt with, harshly if the situation is serious enough. We can call it discipline if we like, but God calls it justice. Unfortunately humanism has taken hold of society in this age, so even a mild slap on the bottom is considered abuse that is punishable by jail time or in some cases the State taking the child from the home. Equally so it has become customary in American society that the mother is the disciplinarian and the father just looks-on helplessly or is disinterested and prefers to be a buddy more than a parent. While maternal discipline is better than none, it often casts a woman into a role that she isn't supposed to have to bear.

Men, it is our job to discipline and exact justice upon our children when necessary (especially as they get a little older), both to benefit them in the long run and to satisfy God's commandments in the short run. I can remember the several times my mother said to me, "Wait until your father gets home and I tell him what you did". Those are words that no young boy wanted to hear. It was effective, and my father did what was needed. Apparently David's children had no such threat hanging over their heads, and the result (as this and the next few chapters show) wasn't less violent and more responsible children (today we're told that if we spank our children we'll turn them into bullies and abusers), but rather it was a stable of reprobate young princes who thought they were above the law and that there would not be consequences for their behavior. Ironically it was the lack of punitive action upon them that led to catastrophic and deadly results later in their lives.

After 2 years of a tense rift between Amnon and Tamar's brother, Avishalom had neither forgotten nor forgiven. For 2 years his desolate sister lived with Absalom, a constant reminder of Amnon's arrogant and infamous deed. No doubt Absalom was moved by his tormented sister's plight and it pained him. At the same time Absalom knew that he could use this to his advantage to achieve his goal of Israel's throne, and feeling that enough time had passed so that any suspicion could be laid to rest, he found exactly the right circumstance and moment to take action.

It was sheep-shearing season in Israel and throughout the Middle East. Sheep-shearing was a festive and joyful time when work was mixed with pleasure; it was like a Birthday party. Family and friends would gather together to work as a team shaving the wool from the lambs and then exacting their profit. But it always involved copious amounts of wine and food as well; a regular party atmosphere that the folks looked forward to. Thus Absalom used this innocent occasion to press his father to come to the family sheep-shearing and to allow all the male siblings to come as well (a family reunion of sorts). Naturally David declined to come himself (such was not the place for a King), and this is what Avishalom had counted on. However he was surprised that his father also declined to allow his many sons to go. Perhaps it was that David grew a bit suspicious when Absalom specifically asked for Amnon to come. But Avishalom was nothing if not persuasive and so David set his skepticism aside and agreed that all of siblings should go, including Amnon.

Even if David wasn't suspicious of Avishalom's motives, it was always dangerous to have all of a king's sons dispatched to one place because of the possibility of some unknown calamity whereby they were all killed or captured. Such a thing could bring about the end of a king's dynasty.

The place of the gathering was Ba'al Hatzor, about 2 miles NW of Ophrah (this is NOT the Hatzor that is located up in the Galilee). Absalom instructed his servants (men who were the most loyal to him) that once they observed Amnon was sufficiently drunk with wine they were to attack and kill him. Naturally the servants were reluctant; the intended victim, after all, was the king's firstborn son, the precious crown prince. But Absalom told them not to be concerned, that he'd take the blame. They did the dirty did as ordered.

Were the servants right to follow the orders of their master to kill Amnon? No. They were responsible before God for their murder. They incurred blood-guilt. Once again we see David's past coming back to haunt him. A few years earlier David had instructed Joab to kill **Uriyah**, Bathsheba's husband, to clear the path so that David could add her to his harem. Other than wanting to be sure that the plan would work, and that the Israelite soldiers who would be nearby wouldn't suspect that this was really a murder plot; Joab seemed to be entirely unconcerned about the immorality and wickedness of David's order. Thus in proportional justice, David's firstborn son is about to be murdered by disinterested 3<sup>rd</sup> parties who are merely following orders from someone who wants him out of the way. With Amnon gone, Avishalom would be next in line as king, and David had proved time and again that he was incapable of confronting his children's sins. David would never exact justice upon Avishalom for murder and everyone knew it.

But this was the Middle East and cultural justice was a complex matter. Absalom didn't hide the fact that indeed he was the head of the conspiracy to kill his half-brother Amnon, and this was because he could claim the right as the **go'el**, the family blood avenger, and so felt that the general population would merely see him as doing his duty.

When David's other sons saw Absalom's men killing Amnon they jumped on their mules and fled fearing for their own lives. Mule (and not donkey) is the correct word; in the Hebrew it is **peh'red**. Mules were the mounts that royalty rode because they were expensive. Mules have to be cross bred to produce. It is known that Israel purchased these animals from their neighbors because cross-breeding was forbidden by the Torah.

In all the confusion and chaos a rumor quickly spread that all of David's sons were killed and the rumor reached David. He thought the worst possible disaster had happened; his sons were dead and his dynasty was in jeopardy. As he lay on the ground in mourning (accompanied by his royal court) **Yonadav**, David's nephew, spoke up and told him that the rumor wasn't true; all of David's sons hadn't been killed, only Amnon.

Recall that we see this same villain in Amnon's residence, devising the plot to get Tamar to come to Amnon so that he could have her. And of course we see him now as being near to David and having the king's ear. This was a person who was maneuvering to get himself in proper position to become a man of greater influence in the next administration (regardless of who might wear the crown). He was Amnon's ally until Amnon was killed, and so now it was time to play it safe to see how things worked out.

In fact **Yonadav** was so bold as to let David know that as an insider he knew things that the king didn't know about his own children; he knew the reason for Amnon's assassination and so he didn't want David to think a full-scale coup was underway; rather it was just an honor killing. Avishalom did this out of revenge for his sister, Tamar. Just as David had facilitated Tamar's rape by ordering her to go to Amnon to fix him some food, now David has facilitated his firstborn's death by ordering Amnon and all of his sons to attend the sheep-shearing. Notice the pattern: first unlawful sex and then murder as a result. But the irony is even thicker; Jonadab says, "My lord the king shouldn't take it seriously as if all the king's sons are dead; only Amnon is dead". This has the same sociopathic and indifferent tone of, "Don't let this matter get you down; the sword devours in one way or another" that David said to Joab when told that several innocent Hebrew soldiers had died in order that Uriyah was killed without suspicion being placed upon the king. David would have instantly recognized that once again the divine curse for his adultery and murder had fallen like a guillotine. Those words of dark promise from God, "The sword shall never leave your household" lay upon David as if it were a boulder upon his chest. He was trapped and could hardly breathe.

Avishalom knew that he would need to stay far away from his father for awhile; murdering the crown prince was far more serious than rape. Not only that but Amnon's side of the family would now be after blood revenge on this blood avenger (that's the way of the Orientals). He went to his mother's hometown and stayed under the protection of his grandfather, the King of Geshur, biding his time. Many months passed and David, finally coming to terms with the death of Amnon, began to set his mind on Avishalom. To say David was conflicted puts it mildly; since his firstborn was killed, who would be next in line to replace him? Just as Amnon had been seen as the crown prince, Avishalom must have been seen as next after him by one and all. Can David bring him back and forgive him? Can David bring him back and trust him not to do to David what he did to Amnon? David well understood the ways of blood revenge; but he also well understood that Avishalom was ambitious, ruthless, and impatient.

Let's move on to chapter 14.

**READ 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL CHAPTER 14 all**

In verse 1 the palace intrigue is once again apparent. **Yo'av**, another of David's nephews and his chief military commander, re-enters the scene. He determines to try and affect reconciliation between David and Absalom but to what end? It is difficult from the context to figure out if Yo'av is just being a good loyal servant to David, and with empathy sees that the king longs for his son Avishalom but is morally paralyzed and can't figure out how to deal with the conundrum of wanting to see the prodigal son who had killed the other son; or was it that Joab is secretly loyal to Absalom and is trying to get him back to Yerushalayim and nearer to the throne to prepare for the day that David must turn over power to his successor?

Although we can't know for sure, the population of Israel was probably behind Absalom now with Amnon dead. They well knew what Amnon had done to Tamar, and likely admired **Avishalom** for doing his duty as the blood avenger. Of course, the Laws of Moses do not allow such a thing. Amnon had robbed Tamar of her virginity, but he had committed no capital crime. So while avenging Tamar's rape was culturally expected, it was evil in God's eyes. But the nature of populist sentiment always has to do with political correctness and the current national mood; only rarely does divine and eternal right and wrong play a role. Yet it is the tendency of both Jew and Christian to freely substitute one for the other.

I'd like to conclude today's lesson with this thought. In our time we see an assault upon God's holiness and His laws and commands and authority as perhaps never before. Manmade doctrines and philosophies and intellectualism rule the day. The issues of homosexual rights, gay marriage, disposition of the Holy Land of Israel, abortion, Islam and so much more are today viewed through the eyes of 21<sup>st</sup> century modernity that stresses tolerance, rather than through the eyes of the Creator who stresses obedience. And sadly vast segments of the Church and Synagogue are fully caught up in that spider's web of deceit and rebellion that makes our unstable hearts as the best judge of good and evil rather than God's written commandments. It is not difficult to see the striking parallel between what is happening in David's Israel of 980 B.C. and the worldwide march towards secularism of our time. At the core of the issue then as now is the relegating of the Torah to irrelevance in favor of the philosophies of religious intellectuals and institutions. The hope that we have is that a global grassroots revival is underway to restore the entire Word of God to its rightful place of authority. And central to that is the rediscovery of the validity and value of the Torah and the Old Testament.

A sizeable segment of Christianity has declared that God has been essentially reduced to one attribute alone: love. His other attributes (the more difficult and demanding ones) were severed

from Him when we turned the page of our Bible from Malachi to Matthew. And love demands that people of the same sex (who love each other) be allowed to marry. Love demands that gentile foreigners and those who hate God's people receive their fair share of Abraham's inheritance because that will bring peace. Love demands that Allah be given equal status with Yehoveh because it makes no difference who we view as God as long as we have faith in a higher being. Love says that we cannot tell a woman whether or not she may kill the baby that is in her womb because that removes her choice. Love prohibits taking the life of a murderer and it overrides every divine commandment that demands proportionate justice (especially if it is not in line with our thinking) because that is retribution and retribution is beneath us. Love demands that our concerns are God's chief concern because He is here to serve us and make us happy.

A sizeable segment of Judaism has declared that God's main attribute is humanitarianism. And humanitarianism demands that God's enemies be treated as God's friends. Humanitarianism demands that God's people must no longer see themselves as the distinct and set-apart that He made them to be. Humanitarianism says that if we're just nice enough to those who hate us, they'll see our inherent human goodness and accept us. Humanitarianism says that our behavior is what gives us righteousness before the Lord. Humanitarianism is the means that God ordained to bring about the conditions that would bring in the Messiah and His Kingdom.

And none of the philosophies and doctrines that I've just listed (which are but a few of many) has any Scriptural basis or reflects any divine reality. But it does reflect a steady falling away from God, even by those who insist that they love and serve Him, just as it was with David and all Israel during the time of the Kings.

We'll continue this next time.