

CHAPTER 7: RUPTURE

THE BIG PICTURE

2 Samuel 13 is one of the most heartbreaking chapters of scripture, and is the moral nadir of the story of David. The events of this episode are tightly woven together with the preceding sin of David with Bathsheba and the following account of Absalom's rebellion. David's failure to live up to God's covenant in the Bathsheba episode was the start of a downward slide into darkness for David's reign. His sin planted seeds destruction, and as those seeds take root and grow David will reap chaos from within his household. David has played the part of a selfish godless king, exploiting the people he was anointed to protect and taking what did not belong to him. The question throughout the books of Samuel is: "who reigns?" Ultimately, God reigns supreme and should sit enthroned on the heart of every human king. As the readers are introduced to David's adult children for the first time, the question of succession is raised. Which of his children will inherit the throne and the covenant promise of God? Will they follow in the footsteps of their father's success, or will they model their lives after his failures? David has been successful as a statesman and unmatched as a warrior, but as a father he has failed to prepare his children to inherit the throne. Instead of surrender to the will of God, they struggle and strive for power and prominence. In addition to this political uncertainty, David's children struggle to establish a moral compass as they embody the worst of their father's behaviors. David is crippled by the guilty memory of his own immorality, and so the immoral and exploitive behavior of his adult children goes unchallenged. Such unrestrained immorality will have tragic results in one of the most disturbing and saddening stories in the entire Bible.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. The story introduces some of David's adult children. Amnon and Absalom are David's oldest sons, each from different mothers. Amnon is the oldest, and therefore the heir apparent. Absalom is next in the line of succession. Pay close attention to the behavior and characterization of Absalom, because he will take a major role in the story of David's reign going forward. In this episode, there are two essential things to note. First, note the natural rivalry between these two half brothers. It is easy to imagine they are rivals for their father's attention, for power, and for prominence. Secondly, note that Absalom and his sister are known for their physical beauty. These are attractive people, and their appearance will prove to be a blessing and a curse.
 - Have you ever experienced rivalry with another person? How does such competition help or hinder your progress in life? Do you think rivalry is avoidable?
 - How could David as a father prevented the rivalry between his sons?

- Absalom and Tamar were known for their attractive appearance. How is beauty both a blessing and a curse? Why?

II. **2 Samuel 13:1-15** paint a narrative picture that is easy to imagine. Amnon's lust for Tamar is so intense it affects his physical health. After he takes what he wants from Tamar, his hatred for her is equally intense. His story is a study in the power of temptation and the cycle of sin and shame. The cycle starts when he allows himself to lust and fantasize inappropriately. These thoughts grow and work on his heart, corrupting his desires and eventually his motives and intentions. When his lust has taken root, he becomes willing to act on his thoughts despite the great risk. So many people make the mistake of thinking there is no harm in such fantasies as long as they stay in your mind. This just isn't true. Such thoughts are corrosive to your values and your will. They degrade your ability to recognize and affirm the worth of others. Broken desires lead to sin, which leads to death. These fantasies are built upon lies and falsehood, so they are never capable of delivering the satisfaction they promise. This is why Amnon (and many others) go so quickly from intense, irrational, insatiable desire to shame and even anger. He wants nothing but Tamar one second and nothing to do with her the next second. The same voice that tempts and entraps toward sin becomes the accuser slinging guilt, shame, and revulsion. This is why lust is such a dangerous thought to entertain. It gives empty promises it cannot fulfill, and leaves you more frustrated than before.

- Can you identify with Amnon craving and longing for something he should not have? What temptations do you struggle with right now?
- Lust desires to possess, use, and exploit. How is it different from love?
- Read **James 1:14-15**. How does Amnon's story illustrate the spiritual truth James is trying to convey?
- There is a dramatic shift in Amnon's emotions from v. 2 to v. 15. First, he is sick with desire and then he is sick with shame. The hatred Amnon displays for Tamar is rooted in his disgust for himself. Have you ever been ashamed of your actions? How did you deal with your guilt and shame?

III. The author of this narrative has framed the story in terms of the rivalry between Amnon and his half-brother Absalom, but modern readers will undoubtedly be concerned for Tamar. She is a true victim in the power struggle between her brothers, a woman with no power of her own. One brother uses her for forced sexual pleasure; the other brother uses her misery for political advancement. She is known for her beauty, and the speech she gives trying to prevent her brother's sin shows an impressive intellect. What happens to her is heartrending. Once Amnon objectifies and abuses her, he sends her

away forcefully. Verse 16 presents another difficulty for modern readers: it seems odd to us that after being so abused by Amnon she wouldn't want to escape. She argues that two wrongs don't make right. The issue here is that a raped woman in the ancient world was ruined. Her prospect for marriage has been eliminated and her life has been forever altered. The Mosaic Law included stipulations that required the rapist to provide for his victim. Don't think of this as marriage in the modern sense, it is more about providing for her needs. It was an imperfect system of social welfare aiming at helping victims avoid total destitution (you can easily imagine a better system where the perpetrator has to pay fines and provide for living expenses that doesn't involve victims marrying their rapist). This is what Tamar is appealing to. She is saying: "Where will you send me? You have treated me horribly; I will not allow you to abuse me further. You have made me desolate and I have no where to go!" Amnon commits another great crime when he throws her out, turns his back on her need, and locks the door behind her.

- The plight of women in the ancient world was often difficult. God's word moved people in a better direction, but the movement was at a pace that the ancient people could accept. It is almost like God was working to improve human society one step at a time. How do you feel about Tamar's plight in this story? What bothers you the most about the injustice she endured?
- Tamar was taken into the home of her brother Absalom to live as a desolate woman. This beautiful princess had her life and dreams destroyed by sin. Normally, princess stories work the other way around! How can you protect your future from the damaging effects of sin?

IV. There is no question that Amnon has behaved deplorably. He has treated a beautiful daughter of a king like an object. After he used her and abused her, he put her aside like a toy he was finished playing with. His actions are without excuse. It is easy to wonder: where is this girl's father to defend and protect her? Where is the king's justice? The text notes that David was furious, but his anger doesn't move him to action. This story causes the reader to look back on David's own sexual sin and recognize how far the consequences of his failure will reach. David no doubt recognizes the injustice, but who is he to hold Amnon accountable? Wouldn't David be a hypocrite if he judged Amnon for the same crime he himself committed? David's mistakes are returning to haunt him. He exploited someone else's daughter in selfish lust, now his own daughter will be exploited...by his own son! The entire kingdom will suffer as long as the king is without moral authority, allowing his own sinful record to disqualify him from confronting and correcting others. This story illustrates the way that the sins of one

generation can imprint on the next generation. ***Tragically, sin and shame are now writing the story of David's reign!***

- What are some mistakes of the previous generation that you need to avoid making yourself? How do you think the generational cycle of sin is broken?
- Do you think David's bad example gave Amnon a valid excuse for doing what he did? Why or why not?
- Do you agree that it would be hypocritical of David to hold Amnon accountable for the rape of Tamar after David was guilty of the same crime with Bathsheba? Why or why not? What should the king do instead of ignoring it?
- David has complex values competing for prominence. He loves his daughter, but he also loves his son. He wants to be a just ruler, but he also knows about God's great mercy. What would you do if one of your children did something horrible? What advice would you give David?

V. The story of Absalom's plot to murder Amnon starts with verse 25. For two years, Absalom has nursed anger and resentment. Yet he has also been busy! He is plotting and scheming, trying to devise a way to avenge his sister's abuse. The violent treatment of Tamar leads to more violence. David's rape of Bathsheba has been followed by Amnon's rape of Tamar. Now, David's murder of Uriah will be followed by Absalom's murder of Amnon. Like father, like son! Absalom's actions are not entirely about justice for Tamar. He is also moving to eliminate his rival for the throne. This section of Samuel has so many examples of violence being used to grasp for power or selfish gain. It is easy to imagine Absalom's self-justification of this murder: he is doing what needs to be done, what the king should have done himself! Absalom challenges the authority of David when he moves against Amnon, but again David does nothing. Like Nathan the prophet foretold, David is reaping the disaster sown in sin. **This narrative invites the reader to consider the full weight of sin.** We see its consequences are private and public, personal, and social.

- Some scholars argue that the text suggests a conspiracy between Absalom and Jonadab to set up Amnon and remove him from the line of succession. If this is true, Absalom sacrificed his sister to advance his political career. How would this change the way you read the story? How would this change your opinion of Absalom?
- What do you think about Absalom's actions? What message was he trying to send to his other siblings by killing Amnon in their presence? How much of this is about avenging Tamar, and how much of this is about securing his own advancement?
- Tragically, sin and shame are now writing the story of King David's royal court. How do you think the cycle of sin needs to be ended? How can we break the cycle of sin in our own lives?

- Although this is a true story, it has been told to teach us something about spirituality, morality, and humanity. What lessons does this tragic narrative teach?