



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Murder in the Family of David

**T**he story of great tragedy in the house of David continues. We left off last month having set the stage by explaining some of the relationships in the family of David. We concluded that two children of David, Amnon and Tamar, were half-sister and half-brother. Marriage between them was forbidden by God's law. Their cousin, Jonadab, however, was coaching Amnon on how Amnon could seduce his half-sister.

**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.

**6** So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat it at her hand.

Now when it says that Amnon "made himself sick" it does not mean he went bulimic and stuck his finger down his throat. It means he *pretended* to be sick. Obviously, it couldn't have been sickness of the stomach or he would have had no reason to request food.

**7** Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat.

Note the further cleverness of the plan in Amnon not sending for Tamar himself, but in persuading his father David to summon her. This, she could not refuse.

**8** So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. And she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes.

**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.

**10** And Amnon said unto Tamar, Bring the meat into the chamber, that I may eat of thine hand. And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought *them* into the chamber to Amnon her brother.

**11** And when she had brought *them* unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister.

**12** 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.

Here, the frightened Tamar is quoting almost verbatim from Genesis 34:7. It is a reference to the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, by a Canaanite prince.

**Genesis 34:1** And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

**2** And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.

**7** And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard *it*: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter;

**which thing ought not to be done.**

So here is Tamar appealing to Prince Amnon not to do such a despicable thing as the Canaanite prince had done to Dinah. But this did not stop the obsessed Amnon. He continues his advances upon Tamar, and she continues her pleading:

**13 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.**

What she appears to be saying here is: “Look, if you want me so badly, let’s get married, let’s go about this thing in the right way. Go ask our father for his permission; I’m sure he will approve.” This was no doubt her last-ditch attempt to stave off the rape. He knew as well as she did that David would not approve an incestuous marriage.

**14 Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.**

**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.**

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

**17 Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this *woman* out from me, and bolt the door after her.**

The reaction of Amnon after the rape reminds me of the question which is now practically immortalized in drama and film. You know the scene: where a man is attempting to seduce a woman for a “one-night-stand.” He looks at it as physical sex and nothing more. But from the woman’s point of view, she desires more, so in response to his request for sex, she says: “Will you still love me in the morning?” In other words, the woman is concerned that after the man fulfills his desire, he will discard her. He will simply have used her. So it was with Amnon.

Amnon’s violent hatred of his sister is further proof that his action was motivated only by selfish lust and not true love. True love always has the best interests of the other party in mind. The Bible says:

Love never faileth. In other words, love doesn’t disappear in the morning. Love is goodness in action towards another person indefinitely.

Amnon’s hatred for Tamar also illustrates the common human trait of hating the one whom you have injured. I say it is a common human trait, meaning it is common or frequent among those of low character. But we all hurt others occasionally, and for the spiritually-growing Christian, he or she learns to make restitution to, and to seek forgiveness from the one whom we have injured.

Amnon’s selfishness and passion led him into an act of incestuous rape. But after the deed was done, he despised her, not for any wickedness in her, but because her mere presence now exacerbated his guilt, his shame, his probable remorse for his atrocious deed, and undoubtedly, her presence amplified his fear of being discovered and punished.

**18a And *she had* a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king’s daughters *that were virgins* apparelled.**

Here we must understand the customs of the day. In modern America, clothing is exceedingly inexpensive. But in those days, it was all made by hand, and only the ladies of highest station could have the luxury to have fancy, embroidered robes or tunics. Ordinary women were too busy working on the necessities of everyday living. Thus, the multi-colored tunic was a mark of high distinction, and of class and wealth.

**18b Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her.**

He had his sister thrown out into the street. Again, the custom of the time would have required a servant to be standing at the door of a prince. In peace time, of course, it was almost never necessary for the bolt to be locked. But Amnon ordered it locked to make it appear that she was the guilty one—like Potiphar’s wife attempting to seduce Joseph—and that in order to protect himself from her, that he had to bolt his door.

**19 And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.**

Since the veil which the princess always wore is

not mentioned, it is probable that Amnon sent her away without it, and hence, she put her hands on her head as an attempt to cover her head. She goes to her full brother's house.

**20a And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee?**

Absalom didn't need to be a genius to figure out what had happened. The virgin daughters of the king wore that distinctive, multi-colored garment and here comes his sister weeping, with ashes of mourning on her head, and her garment having been deliberately torn. Tamar no doubt nodded a "yes" to his question. Listen to this seemingly odd reaction of Absalom.

**20b 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.**

This young woman needed sympathy for the grave injustice that had been perpetrated upon her, and all Absalom can say is: Hold your peace, my sister; he is your brother, regard not this thing?! That's like saying: "Now, don't go getting angry about it, sis. After all, he is your brother. Don't make a big deal about it." As we will soon see, there is a method to Absalom's weird reaction here.

This phrase that Tamar remained "desolate" in her brother's house is not incorrect. It paints a picture of a woman *devastated*, *deserted* and *ravaged* by this event. Those words are all other possible translations for the Hebrew word here translated "desolate." But there is another possibility which seems to fit even better, given that she had been raped. The Hebrew word (Strong's #8074) would better have been rendered "deflowered." It speaks of the flower of her virginity.

Why did she live with her brother and not in Daddy's house? Well, this is another custom of the ancient East, where polygamy was common. The full brother often became the guardian and special protector of the interests and honor of a sister. When a father had numerous children from many wives, he delegated these duties to the various elder sons.

**21 But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth.**

**22 And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Am-**

**non, because he had forced his sister Tamar.**

Let us notice the contrast between the reactions of David and that of Absalom. David showed his hot anger openly. You can imagine him livid with wrath as he strode about his palace, shouting in anguish to his courtiers and other family members: "Oh, God, no! Oh, God! Why Tamar? Why Amnon? Why have you done this to me? Why, God? Why?"

But as soon as his cries of anguish left his lips, he instantly knew why these things had happened. It was a result of his own sins with Bathsheba and Uriah which were now coming back to haunt him. It was God's pronouncement of judgment through the prophet Nathan now coming to pass. "Oh, the pain!" he thought to himself. "Such prolonged tragedy for a few moments of pleasure with Bathsheba. What a fool I was!"

David wept; he moaned; he cried out; he groaned in intense emotional pain. He screamed in anger at Amnon. But that may have been the extent of his reaction. The Bible gives us no indication that David acted to punish Amnon in any way. Perhaps he did and it is simply not recorded. But David was obviously compromised by his own sins in the Bathsheba affair so that he felt he could not do much about what Amnon had done.

Absalom, on the other hand, was seething inside with hot anger and hatred. He did not let it show for even a moment. He must have been one cool customer, because even as he learned the truth when Tamar came back with her torn garment, he had *immediately* suppressed his anger and hatred toward Amnon. I believe he had set his plot in motion from that very moment and thus he counseled his sister Tamar the way he did. He certainly showed a poker face to Amnon. He did not speak a word about the incident to Amnon. He carried on a normal relationship with him, acting as though nothing had happened.

This was to deceive Amnon into thinking that perhaps he had gotten away with the dastardly deed. At this point, we ask readers to consult the chart we placed on page 2 of last month's FMS—the chart showing the various relationships in David's family. Who is the first-born son of David? It's Amnon. He is the heir-apparent to the throne! After mentioning the birth of Chileab of Abigail as David's second-born son, nothing is ever heard of him again and most

scholars infer that he must have died in his youth. If that were so, then it becomes clear that Absalom would have seen *the removal of Amnon from the family as a very convenient method to further his own ambition towards becoming king of Israel*. Consequently, Absalom was very sly in concealing his boiling hatred for Amnon. He displayed a poker face to Amnon and to everyone else for an exceptionally long time as we read in the next verse.

**23 And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons.**

**24 And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant.**

Setting aside the royal English manner of speech for a moment, Absalom is simply asking his father to come to his big sheepshearing party and to bring all his servants with him.

**25 And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him.**

Absalom is playing the proper game of political protocol here. He makes every effort to appear wholly sincere in desiring to have his father and his entire entourage at his sheepshearing feast, but I wonder if, with the revenge murder he had in mind, whether Absalom really wanted his father present. But protocol and royal etiquette demanded he invite him. David, however, not wishing to put an enormous financial burden on Absalom for the expenses of his entire entourage, declined with grace.

**26 Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee?**

**27 But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.**

**28 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.**

**29 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.**

You can picture the scene. A huge feast, plenty of food and lots of drinking going on, lots of mirth, merriment and entertainment of one sort or another. Suddenly, several servants of Absalom surround the drunken Amnon and plunge their daggers into him.

The other princes, half-soused though they may have been, quickly sobered to the point of realizing that Absalom may be intending to eliminate all competition for the throne in one horrendous massacre. So they mount their mules and hightail it down the highway towards Jerusalem. In the confusion and tumult which ensued, the news reached Jerusalem and the king's ears even before the princes arrived home.

**30 And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left.**

Rumors were flying everywhere. This seems to be typical of mankind in general. Anytime there is a major tragedy, all kinds of versions of the story start floating about. Remember the 9-11 tragedy? Well, David believed the worst. That all his sons had been murdered. This was not at all uncommon. In many a nation with hereditary rulership, one claimant to the throne will seek to slay all his competition. There is more than one example of that in the Bible. For instance, in Judges 9, one of the 70 sons of Gideon kills all the rest except Jotham who narrowly escaped.

I guess we could say that the lesson in being a son of the king is that it is a very dangerous job. Are you "the son of a king?" King Jesus? Then, be aware that your greatest enemies might just be your own brethren. Hmmm. Do you see an application to the Saul church here? We'll come back to that idea later.

*(to be continued)*

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