

THE UNBROKEN SILENCE – SEXUAL ABUSE AND ITS EFFECTS IN THE BIBLE AND AFRICA.

By

Christine Nancy Adjei
Christian Service University College
Kumasi

The broad topic for this contribution is Ethnicity and Gender in the Bible and Africa. My scope of the above topic begins from 2 Samuel 13: 1-22.

In this paper, I would like to look at the background of this Tamar-Amnon case before coming out with my methodology. It seems that the opposing parties had already taken their respective positions and had made their intentions clear. Here, I see this story in the wider context as a struggle for succession and not simply as a matter of private concern: Amnon's strong feeling of love for his half sister. Amnon and Absalom were the two obvious persons for the throne of Israel. At this stage it was Amnon who was the front runner because he was the eldest of David's sons (2 Samuel 3: 2-5) while Absalom must have been the next in line since Chiliad (3:3) may have died earlier. Absalom was, obviously the most handsome of David's sons (14:25) as well as the son of a king's daughter (3:3) and a man of some charm. However, it may be possible that Amnon's love for Tamar was, largely, part of his plan to put Absalom and his family in their place.

In the light of Gen 20:12, I see no reason to doubt the words of Tamar (13:13b) that a marriage between Amnon and herself was legally possible. Therefore Leviticus 18:9, 11; 20:17, Deuteronomy 27:22 may be either later than the Davidic reign or these laws were not implemented, at least in Jerusalem or in the royal family. Perhaps, the main problem was not the fact that Tamar was Amnon's half-sister but that she was Absalom's sister. Therefore it seems that although Amnon was attracted by Tamar's beauty, he hoped, even

so, both to gratify his sexual desires and to humiliate Absalom through Tamar, at the same time.

Consequently it is understandable why it is noted in v 15 that Amnon's hatred was greater than his physical attraction for her. Here we take it that this was not the result of a sudden change in Amnon's feelings but that it reflects previously existing attitudes. Moreover, it may be of some importance that Absalom's very first words to the distressed Tamar were "a euphemistic question," "Has Amnon, your brother, been with you?" (v. 20). It was as if he had foreseen such a possibility. Also his comment, "he is your brother" (v. 20) is, to some extent, coloured by sarcasm: as a brother, Amnon ought to have known better while Tamar as a sister had no adequate legal right.

Thus the background of the Tamar-Amnon case was the tension between Amnon and Absalom, and the bone of controversy was extremely the throne of Israel but in addition I would finally want to go beyond this by looking at the unbroken silence and its various effects and especially of the only broken silence and apply it to the Ghanaian context. Finally, I would look at what sexual abuse is and the unbroken silence and its effect in Ghana.

Methodology

I am adopting Ridout's Rhetorical Criticism.¹ 'Rhetoric' refers to persuasion in communication research. 'Criticism' refers to making a substantiated judgment; therefore, Rhetorical criticism is description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of persuasive uses of human communication.

This is to help me shed light on the purposes of the persuasive message, or its intended effects on an audience and seek to understand the effects of the context on creating the message. Furthermore, to evaluate contemporary society, social criticism and evaluate the ways in which issues are formulated and policies

¹ Ridout, G. P., The Rape of Tamar in Rhetorical criticism, Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974, Pp 75 - 84.

justified. Also to contribute to theory-building by offering generalizations about persuasion and also help to learn what is effective and ineffective persuasion.

The outline of 2 Samuel 13:1-22 is as follows:

- A. Amnon's desire for Tamar (vv1-2)
- B. Amnon's predicament and Jonadab's advice (vv3-7)
- C. Tamar at Amnon's house (vv8-10)
- D. Amnon's advances and Tamar's pleading
- E. Tamar's humiliation (v.14)
- D1. Amnon's rejection for Tamar and her pleading (vv 15-16)
- C1. Tamar's expulsion from Amnon's house (vv17- 18)
- B1. Tamar's predicament and Absalom advise (vv 19-20)
- A1. Absalom's hatred of Amnon (vv 21-22)

It may be possible that verses 1 and 22 form an inclusion since both verses mention the chief characters: Absalom, Amnon and Tamar. Conroy defines the function of our scope "in terms of complication, retardation, and resolution" which have their correlatives in the reader's "expectancy, growth of tension or suspense, and relief."² However, v 22 introduces a new complication (Absalom's hatred for Amnon) and gives rise to a new prospect expectation, thus preparing the way for further developments in the next episode.

The main text

1. McCarty (101) and others rightly regard "Absalom" as a traditional mispronunciation of the defective spelling of the name. The correct pronunciation of the defective spelling of the name vocalization is further attested by the Greek (cf. Halat, 6b). However, in translation we have retained the familiar, traditional pronunciation (i.e., Absalom), especially since it is used in the MT (Masoretic Text). We regard Amnon, not Aminon, as the right pronunciation of the name

² Conroy, C. C., *Absalom! Absalom! Narrative and language in 2 Samuel 13 -20*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, P. 20.

since it seems to be derived from IDN “to be faithful.”³ The name “Tamar” probably means “date-palm.”⁴ She is also described as Absalom’s sister rather than as David’s daughter, thus preparing the reader for further developments. ... *a beautiful sister*. The catastrophic turn in David’s fortune began when he saw a beautiful woman and lusted after her. Now, the curse pronounced by Nathan on the house of David begins to unfold through the very same mechanism: a sexual transgression within the royal quarters resulting in an act of murder elsewhere. Several important terms and quarters and gestures here perhaps reinforce this link with the story of David and Bathsheba.

Amnon ... loved her. The love in question will be revealed by the ensuing events. Can it be an erotic obsession – what the early rabbis aptly characterized as “love dependent upon a (material) thing?”

2. Amnon’s plans were thwarted because Tamar, being an unmarried girl or virgin, may have been confined to the women’s quarters and carefully guarded. He was hardly suffering from genuine love-sickness but rather from frustration that he could not do what he wanted with Tamar. Sexual tampering with a virgin had particularly stringent consequences in biblical law (cf. Gen 22:12).

3-5 Jonadab is called Amnon’s friend which seems to denote an intimate acquaintance. It is less likely that the reference is to “the best man” usually active at weddings, or to a specific office such as “the friend of the king” who may have been an official counselor. The emphasis on Jonadab’s ‘wisdom’ – in biblical usage, often a morally neutral term suggesting mastery of know-how in a particular activity – makes the technical sense of counselor more likely.

³ Halat, Baumgartner, W., *Hebraischer and armaisches lexicon Zum Alten Testament*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967, 63a.

⁴ Stamm J. J. *VTSUP VT supplements*, 16, 1967, 328 – 29.

Jonadab was David's nephew but 4QSam a, c and GL⁵ call him Jonathan who according to 21:21 was also a son of Shimei (Shaman). It may be possible that Jonadab is described as "very clever" or "wise" but in view of his unethical advise, he appears as a crafty character. So Whybary has well described him as "a purely intellectual and morally neutral qualify."⁶ Von Rad emphasizes the aspect of being competent or skilled in some particular sphere or way, and that it may be "dissociated from a scale of values," as in Jonadab's case.⁷

Jonadab's advice to Amnon was to assume illness in order to persuade his father, David, to send Tamar that she might take care of him. This then would provide the opportunity which Amnon had been seeking.

Lie in your bed and play sick. David at the beginning of the Bathsheba story was first seen lying in bed, and then he arranged to have the desired woman brought to his chamber. Jonadab on his part observes that Amnon already looks ill (verse 2) and so suggests that he play up this condition by pretending to be dangerously ill and in need of special ministrations.

... nourish me. The Hebrew verb root *b-r-h* and the cognate noun *biryah* ("nourishment") denote not eating in general but the kind of eating that is sustaining or restoring to a person who is weak or failing. When you eat a *biryah* you become healthy or fat, the opposite of "poorly," *dal*. The distinction is crucial to this story.

... so that I may see and eat from her hand. Perhaps Amnon is encouraged to say this because, as a person supposed to be gravely ill, he would want to see with his own eyes that the vital nourishment is prepared exactly as it should be. The writer is clearly playing with the equivalence between eating and sex, but it remains ambiguous whether Jonadab has in mind the facilitating of a rape, or merely

⁵ 4QSam a,b,c – Samuel manuscripts from Qumran cave iv.

⁶ Whybary, *The Succession Narrative*, Naperville:Allenson, 1968, 58.

⁷ So Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, tr. J. D. Martin, London:SCM, 1972, 20.

creating the possibility of an intimate meeting between Amnon and Tamar.

6. ... *the king came to see him*. In Jonadab's original scenario, it was Absalom who was to play this role. As events work out, David, who sinned through lust, inadvertently acts as Amnon's pimp for his own daughter.

The significance of Tamar's services is not clear but it may have been believed that food prepared by a virgin in the presence of the sick man might have special curatives; Ackroyd suggests a possible "transference of vitality."⁸ The Hebrew word here has been usually translated as "Cakes" of some sort or other, but McCarter has well argued that they were "some kind of dumplings or puddings"⁹ since they were, apparently, boiled. "Hearts-shaped cakes (Hertzberg, 323) may sound more romantic but "dumplings" seem to fit the culinary process described; hence provisionally, I will follow both suggestions. Wright points out that the food (in his view "cakes") "were intended to be of magical import, whether therapeutic or aphrodisiac"¹⁰.

The verb and its object are both cognates with *lev* (or *levav*), "heart." The term could refer to the shape of the dumplings, or to their function of "strengthening the heart" (idiomatic in biblical Hebrew for sustaining or encouraging). In the *Song of Songs*, this same verb is associated with the idea of sexual arousal.

A belief in the former quality is true or valid while the latter alternative make Amnon's scheme too transparent. It probably had two meanings: "to make 'dumplings'" as well as "to arouse" which may have been hinted at in verse 8, thus preparing the way for the ensuing events.

9-10. Amnon's compelling command to his attendants may reflect "a courtly formula of dismissal"¹¹. It is found also in Gen.45:1 where

⁸ Ackroyd, P. R., *The second book of Samuel*. Cambridge Bible commentary. London: Cambridge, 1977, 121

⁹ MacCarter, Doubleday & company, Inc. USA, 1984, 322.

¹⁰ Wright, *Numen* 28, 1981, 61.

¹¹ Conroy, *Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Samuel*, Leiden, 1967, 30 n. 45.

the identical words are pronounced by another prince-like figure, just before he reveals his true identity to his brothers. In Genesis, these words preface the great moment of reconciliation between long-estranged brothers. Here they are a prelude to a tale of fraternal rape that leads to fratricide.

The story of the rape of Tamar continues to allude to the Joseph story, in reverse chronological order and with pointed thematic reversal. The moment before the rape echoes the encounter between Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39) in the middle of the Joseph story, and the attention drawn to the ornamented tunic that the violated Tamar tears takes us back to Joseph's ornamented tunic at the beginning of his story (Genesis 37). From such purposeful deployment of allusion, the inference is inevitable that the author of the David story was familiar at least with the J strand of the Joseph story in a textured version very like the one that has come down to us. However, still looking at the text, RSV has "send out every one from me!" but the verb is in the hiphil form. We have taken it as inwardly transitive since the command is addressed to the servants themselves.¹² Amnon's bedchamber was, apparently, a partitioned area of a longer room since he could see what went on in the "kitchen!"¹³

12-14. The word "outrage" denotes a serious breach of customary law, which may have certain implications for Israel as a whole.

Amnon's rape of Tamar was not incest, since marriage between Amnon and Tamar was possible (v. 13) and there is no indication in our sources that Amnon's offence was regarded as a crime or capital offence. However, McCarter has argued that Amnon was "guilty of both rape and incest."¹⁴ Clearly, this is not impossible because one does not know for certain what marriage prohibitions were in existence in David's time and to what extent they were recognized in Jerusalem and in the royal family.

¹² GKC Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.

¹³ Gordon, P. R., 1 and 11 Samuel, A. Wheaton & co. Ltd., Exeter, Devon. 1986. 263.

¹⁴ McCarter. Doubleday & company, Inc. USA, 1984, 324.

The frequent use of sibling's terms in our scope does not necessarily point to incest but rather to the lack of fraternal feelings, on the part of Amnon. Therefore one would feel that the suggestion provides a valid alternative. Hence one would argue that in view of Exodus 22:16-17, Amnon's misdeed was a rape of an unbetrothed virgin, and theoretically he would be expected to pay the so called marriage payment and to marry the girl (Deut. 22:28-29). Legally, the rapist had no choice although the father could refuse to give the girl to him (Exodus 22:17). Therefore by throwing Tamar out into the street Amnon added insult to injury, and revealed his unmistakable intention to humiliate both Tamar and Absalom, more or less implying that she was not fit to be married even by a rapist. Consequently, we can understand Tamar's complaint that her undeserved dismissal is a greater wrong than her previous humiliation. The latter deed could be partly compensated by marriage while her rejection was a final dishonor.

Although Tamar had warned Amnon (v. 13) that his misdeed would make him like a social outcast, in the actual situation this was not strictly true. He must have remained the heir apparent, and although David was angry (v. 21), he did nothing about Amnon's deceitful offense and Tamar's humiliation. The fact that David was contented to be simply angry is probably to be accounted for partly from his own consciousness of guilt, since he himself had been guilty of adultery; but it arose chiefly from his consequent indulgent affection towards his sons, and his consequent want of discipline. He never broke the silence. This weakness in his character bore very bitter fruit.

15. It has been often suggested that this verse illustrates a psychological transformation of love into hatred (Hertzberg 324): "sexual hatred" because this so-called love was hardly more than lust while Amnon's hatred of Tamar and her family may well have been part of his mental attitude.

It can also possibly be that the psychological insight of this writer is remarkable throughout the story. Amnon has

fulfilled his desire for this beautiful young woman or, given the fact that she is a bitterly resistant virgin, perhaps it has hardly been the fulfillment he dreamed of. Or can it possibly be because of the tension between Amnon wanting to humiliate Absalom through Tamar as suggested earlier? In any case, he now has to face the possibly dire consequences to himself from her brother Absalom, or from their father David. The result is an excess of revulsion against Tamar, a blaming of the victim for luring him with her charms into all this trouble.

16. *Don't!-this wrong is greater...* There is a textual problem here in the Hebrew, which seems to say, "don't- about this wrong..." Some versions of the Septuagint read here "don't, my brother", as in verse 12, but this could reflect an attempt to straighten out a difficult text rather than a better Hebrew version used by the ancient Greek translators.

To send me away now. "Now" is added in the translation in order to remove an ambiguity as to when the sending away is added. "Sending away" is an idiom that also has the sense of "divorce"- precisely what the rapist of a virgin is not allowed to do in biblical law. If some modern readers may wonder why being banished seems to Tamar worse than being raped, one must say that for biblical women the social consequences of pariah status, when the law offered the remedy of marriage to the rapist, might well seem even more horrible than the physical violation. Rape was a dire fate, but one which could be compensated for by marriage, whereas the violated virgin rejected and abandoned by her violator was an unmarriageable outcast, condemned to a lifetime of "desolation" (vs. 20)

...and bolt the door behind her. Having devised such an elaborate strategy for drawing Tamar into the chamber where he can have his way with her, he now has her thrust out into the open square, with the door bolted against her as though she were some insatiable, clinging thing against which he had to set up a barricade.

18. It seems that *versel8a* is a later explanatory addition and it would be better if it were placed after 18b.¹⁵

The Hebrew for “the long tunic” is of uncertain meaning in Genesis 37 where it is used of Joseph’s coat (vv. 3, 23, 33), and it has been often rendered as “multi-colored coat” or “long robe with sleeves” (RSV) or “richly ornamented robe” (NIV). We follow the interpretation provided by GL and Josephus (*Ant.* 7.171), namely “long tunic” (i.e., one reaching down to the ankles). Equally problematic is the ‘garments;’ RSV says “of old” and NAB also says “in the olden day.” Tamar and Joseph are the only two figures in the Bible said to wear this particular garment. Joseph’s too, will be torn, by his brothers, after they strip him of it and toss him into the pit, and they will then soak it in Judah’s blood. Tamar’s ornamented tunic may well be blood stained, too, if one considers what has just been done to her.

19. Tamar behaves like a mourner as if she were a widow (c.f. 20:3). “Hands (or “hand”) on the head” is an expression of grief (c.f. Jer. 2:37; ANEP nos. 634, 640). De Vaux points out that this was “the pose of weeping women in certain Egyptian bas-reliefs and on the sarcophagus of Ahiiram, king of Biblios.”¹⁶ It was a conventional gesture of mourning, like the rending of the garment and the sprinkling of ashes on the head.

20. The rhetorical question involves a euphemism (cf. Genesis 39:10); Absalom, obviously, had it easy in guessing the nature and cause of Tamar’s distress. This may well take us to an existing hostility between the two half-brothers, all these bringing out my point of the effect of the unbroken silence – perhaps their parents never took notice and if they did, they might have ignored it. Notwithstanding, Absalom’s advice to Tamar seems not enough; though there may be a tone of softness but in view of Tamar’s experience the consolation sounds somewhat shallow. In effect,

¹⁵ Contra Conroy, *Absalom*, Leiden, 1967, 34.

¹⁶ De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 59.

Absalom's words would appear in a different light if Tamar had rightly sensed that her brother intended revenge in due course (v. 32). It seems that Absalom had studied the situation quite realistically; Amnon was Tamar's half-brother, and therefore the whole thing was the concern of the "family" (i.e., David, as its head. Unfortunately David kept silent. Probably, he may have been fully aware that little could be done to Amnon (Exodus 22:16-17) even if David were prepared to act. The existing law and custom did not take into consideration the required family pride and honour. So Absalom must have come to the decision of having no real option but to take the law into his own hands, following the example of Simeon and Levi (Genesis 34:30-31).

21. *King David had heard all these things, and he was greatly incensed.* The Qumran Samuel and the Septuagint add here: "but he did not vex the spirit of Amnon his son, for he loved him, since he was his firstborn." However, this looks suspiciously like an explanatory gloss, an effort to make sense of David's silence. That imponderable silence is the key to the mounting avalanche of disaster in the house of David. One might have expected some after-the-fact defense of his violated daughter, some rebuke or punishment of the rapist son. However, he hears it and is angry, but unfortunately, he says nothing and does nothing, leaving the field open for Absalom's murder of his brother. In all this, the rape of Tamar plays exactly the same pivotal role in the story of David as does the rape of Dinah in the story of Jacob. Jacob, too, "hears" of the violation and does nothing, setting the stage for the bloody act of vengeance carried out by his sons Simeon and Levi. By the end of the episode, Jacob is seen at the mercy of his intransigent sons, and that is how this once-powerful figure will appear throughout the rest of his story. An analogous fate, as we shall abundantly see, awaits David from this moment on.

22 This verse sums up the previous events and gives Absalom's reaction to them. It also hints at the tragedy to come.

Sexual Abuse and the Unbroken Silence: Their Effect in Ghana

There are many forms of sexual abuse. They include rape and forced intercourse, in and out of marriage. Sexual violence takes place usually without the consent of the victim. Violence is a threat to girls and women in Ghana. For too long it has been kept silent. Many believe that violence at home is a “family affair” and should be dealt with inside the home. Too often we turn our heads when we know that a girl or a woman is being abused. That silence is as dangerous as the abuse itself. By ignoring violence or not breaking the silence, we are putting every woman we know at risk. Violence against women affects every woman from the time they are infants until they are elderly. It affects our daughters, our mothers, our sisters and our friends. Violence is a threat not only to women, but affects the society as well. It also tarnishes the image of the family, affects the girl or the woman’s life psychologically, and sometimes creates a lonely life for her. The woman or girl can also be infected with some of these venereal diseases (diseases passed on by having sexual intercourse) like HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis etc., some of which are without cure.

Below is the result of a national study:¹⁷

Sexual violence is 27%, and for 2 in 10 girls or women, their first experience of sexual intercourse was by force.

1 in 3 girls or women had been fondled or touched against their will:

- 3% below 10 years
- 40% between 10-14 years
- 54% between 15-18 years
- 3% over 19 years

1 in 5 women experienced forced sex by a man:

- 17% between 10-14 years
- 64% between 15-18 years
- 19% over 19 years.

¹⁷ Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre and its partners, 2002, Ghana.

2 in 5 women are harassed or coerced when they refuse their partner sex

3 in 10 women are forced by their male partner to have sex sometimes

7% of girls and women had been forced to touch a man's private parts:

- 3% below 10 years
 - 40% between 10-14 years
 - 53% between 15-18 years
 - 3% above 19 years
- 6% had been threatened by a school teacher, principal, lecturer etc. that schooling would suffer if they did not have sex:
- 30% between 10-14 years
 - 66% between 15-18 years
 - 4% over 19 years
- 4% of women had been threatened with sex demands for sex before being offered a job or having a favor done:
- 12% below age 15
 - 50% between 15-18 years
 - 26% over 19.
- 15% of women surveyed had been circumcised:
- 51% below age 1
 - 17% between 1-9 years
 - 17% between 10-14 years
 - 15% 15 or older.

Application

In general, cases of sexual abuse have increased in many parts of Africa including Ghana in recent years. This includes cases of infant and child sexual abuse as can be seen from the data above. The high rate of sexual abuse can be linked to the myth that when an HIV positive person sleeps with a virgin, they are cured from the

virus. Unfortunately not enough is being done to expose this as an unfounded rumour; people concerned have taken a position of silence. According to a research I did in some of the second cycle schools in 2008, lesbianism is on the increase. Innocent girls are being pushed into this business but they are not able to break the silence. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of breaking the silence.

Going back to our text, one sees Tamar as a girl of integrity. Even though she broke the silence and protested against women abuse, her whole future was ruined on that day because we are told she spent the rest of her life as a lonely person in Absalom's home. Sometimes women and girl children are not safe from rape, even in a God fearing home and among people that are supposed to be trusted. Unlike Tamar, most girls and women in Ghana are silent about this, but Tamar was not silent, she broke the silence. Though her brother Absalom came in, he delayed and perhaps did it wrongly causing a lot of serious problems.

This is the effect of rape; it can happen to any woman and child at any time and anywhere, even in the safety of the woman's home.

The silence of David and his entire family reminds us of the saying that the men who rape women and children are few, but those who are silent about it are many. David and his family's silence led to the disastrous fate that befell them later. It is the silence that motivates the perpetrators to continue the abuse. Parents in Ghana are also silent about their daughter's rape cases.

Like David, they want to protect the family name. With all the education and the awareness programmes organized in Ghana, most of the people are silent about sexual abuses.

The character of Amnon teaches us that rapists are found in all classes and races. In Ghana, we have similar cases where sometimes real brothers like the one in the bible, the girl's father, step-father, uncle, ministers, pastors do the raping. Rape is not induced by what a woman or girl is wearing, the place where she is, or the class that child including boys belongs to. It can happen to any woman or child at any time and anywhere - including the safety of their homes.

Looking at Amnon's case, later when it comes out will be angry and the victim is advised to keep it secret for the sake of the family's reputation. This is going on everywhere including schools, homes etc.

Jonadab teaches us what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12: 33 that 'bad company corrupts.' Here too we see a lot of friends, both boys and girls, luring their friends to commit rape.

The initial silence of Absalom who did not confront Amnon, Jonadab and King David, tells us that justice delayed is justice denied. His revenge indicates that the whole family was wounded and needed healing.

Recommendations

1. Preach against violence against children and women. We need to break the silence.
2. Provide shelter for victims of rape. Let us begin by creating an atmosphere of trust so that the victims can have the courage to talk about it. We are the hands and feet of Jesus. Let the compassion of Jesus come out in us, to provide care for those who are victims.
3. We also need to declare a zero tolerance zone for any form of sexual abuse.
4. We need to be open enough to accommodate the perpetrators of abuse. Confronting them alone will not solve the problem; they also need to be led to deliverance. We know Jesus as the one who delivers us from all forms of evil.
5. We need to give back to people the sense of integrity and a purpose for life.
6. Dispel the myth that having sex with a virgin cures people from HIV.
7. Create a safe environment for daughters even in the homes.
8. Set up strong counseling services.
9. We should not keep silent even when the victim of the rape is the girl-child that we live with.

10. Delay in acting against rape case for fear of exposing another loved one, or to protect one's own financial vulnerability at the expense of our girl children brings about a lot of problems.
11. There should be counseling centres for numerous women who are having marital problems because of their childhood rape experience so that they can seek inner healing.

Conclusion

The Amnon-Tamar story is one of the most sordid accounts in the Old Testament but it contains no explicit editorial comment; however, the pleading of Tamar (vv12-13, 16) is a more effective judgment on Amnon's actions than any editorial remarks or moralizing could have been. In my opinion, Amnon's offense was a rape of an unbetrothed virgin rather than incest. The outrage was made more serious by Amnon's refusal to marry Tamar. It seems that, ultimately, the whole incident was part of Amnon's self-assertion over against Absalom and his family. In the given circumstances Absalom could only swallow his pride or follow the example of Simeon and Levi's self-help (Genesis 34:25-31). In the end, he chose the latter alternative since it increased, at the same time, his chances of succession, especially if the elimination of Amnon was a justifiable homicide rather than murder.

In Christ we show that we love God by the way we treat others. A person who abuses another has lost a sense of dignity and integrity, and we should always break the silence to prevent some of these hazards.

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