

Week 24: David's Son's Great Sin: Amnon & Tamar

Hook



Main Point: Even if we repent, our sins have consequences, sometimes for generations.

Teacher, this week will focus on a story that includes topics that can be hard for anyone to discuss, especially so for people who have experienced such events. One question that might come to mind when reading about such evil acts is “Why would this be in the Bible?”

Scripture includes sinful people’s actions, words and thoughts, demonstrating that we live in a fallen world and everyone needs the life and restoration that only the Savior can provide. The Bible portrays even David as he was: heroic in one chapter and salacious in the next.

Approach this week with gentleness and compassion. Take time at the beginning of the lesson to pray with your class, putting your minds on God, who can redeem all things.

RECAP: Now we’ve entered the final period of David’s life (lessons 23–31), studying his great sin and all of the fallout and consequences from that. Last week, we looked at David’s sin, Nathan’s confrontation, and David’s confession and repentance. This week, we’ll see how David’s sin impacted his children’s behavior and how it was multiplied into their generation.

Week 24: David's Son's Great Sin: Amnon & Tamar

Book (Note: *Chronicles* does not include the story of David's family's sins.)

Main Point: Even if we repent, our sins have consequences, sometimes for generations.

2 Samuel 13:1–19 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Godly people don't just take what they want without regard for others.

How did Amnon show a disregard for other people in his behavior?

How did Tamar try to reason with him?

Samuel tells us that David had eight wives and many concubines (2 Samuel 5:13; 1 Chronicles 3:1–9). Six sons were born to him in Hebron, where he reigned for seven and a half years, and 13 sons were born in Jerusalem during his 33-year reign there, not including sons by his concubines, who would not have had a legitimate claim to the throne (1 Chronicles 3:1–9). The only daughter mentioned is Tamar, which is the account's way of hinting at this story since *Chronicles* doesn't tell the negative stories of David and his family, not in an attempt to whitewash the history of Israel or David's flaws, but because *Chronicles* focuses on pointing to the future hope of Israel, a "new David," the Messiah.¹

Chronicles gives us the birth order of David's sons. Because of David's multiple wives, some of these were full brothers and some were half. The firstborn was Amnon, son of David's second wife, Ahinoam, who was from Jezreel, so Amnon was full Israelite. His thirdborn is the other son in this story, Absalom, the son of David's wife Maacah, daughter of the king of Geshur, so Absalom was only half Israelite. Samuel tells us that Tamar was Absalom's full sister, but only half-sister to Amnon. But *Chronicles* tells us that "Tamar was *their* sister," referring to all the sons of David, hinting at how awful Amnon's behavior was, even though *Chronicles* doesn't tell the story. The writer of *Chronicles* assumed that anyone reading would already be familiar with the story.^{2, 3}

So Amnon, the oldest, who would have inherited the throne by the typical laws of the ancient Near East, was so tormented with infatuation with his half-sister that he was physically ill. The language of verse 2, which is translated quite literally, says, "it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything *to her*" (13:2). Doesn't sound like actual *love*, does it? We'll find out soon enough that it was not love; it was lust. Amnon's friend Jonadab was a "very crafty" man. This isn't the same word used about Satan in the fall (Genesis 3:1). It is typically translated "wise" or "skilled" (Exodus 28:3; 31:6; Deuteronomy 1:13). But Jonadab used his wisdom for evil – to give Amnon a plan to rape his half-sister. While that may make us uncomfortable, the story does not gloss over it.

Amnon first tried asking her for consent, but she protested, saying this wasn't done in Israel like in other nations, referring to both the incestual aspect (Leviticus 18:9) and the premarital aspect (Deuteronomy 22:20–21) of what he wanted. Her protest not only pointed to the law but also alluded to the humiliation of Dinah by a non-Israelite son of a king, making a comparison between this son of David and that pagan king's son (Genesis 34). Her question, "Where could I carry my shame?", means that no one would marry her after that. She also said he would be considered an "outrageous fool" (13:13). The word for fool is *nabal*, which would have reminded him of the story of the first husband of David's wife Abigail (1 Samuel 25).³ Even still, Tamar offered a solution. If he asked David for her hand in marriage, that would legitimize their coupling, though it was still incestual (13:13). But Amnon didn't listen and instead raped her (13:14).⁴

As soon as Amnon took her, his "love" for her turned to hatred (13:15). If we look at the language, it's clear Amnon saw her as an object to possess from the beginning. He was frustrated he couldn't have her. He didn't listen to her; he assaulted her. Then once he violated her, making her unmarriageable, he discarded her. His every action treated her like an object, not a person.

After his evil act, Amnon demanded of his servant to "put this woman out of my presence and bolt the door after her" (2 Samuel 13:17). He didn't even use her name; she was an object to him, simply "this woman." The language used by the heir-apparent mirrors his father's when King David inquired of "the woman" bathing on a rooftop two chapters earlier. Those who served David informed him, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (11:3). She wasn't an object; she had a name, a father, and a husband. But that didn't curb David's lustful pursuits. David's son was multiplying David's sin; taking his father's wrongdoing even further. As Thomas and Greer put it, "The sin sown by the father is harvested by the son."⁵

Tamar used some form of "no" in all four clauses of verse 12 and directly ordered Amnon not to violate her (13:12). And Tamar said that sending her away was an even greater wrong than violating her in the first place (13:16). This is a hard thing to understand for us today. But in their culture, though it would still have been incestuous, and her emotional suffering would have been horrific, marrying her afterward would have at least repaired the public shame of losing her virginity. Every part of Amnon's actions were wrong, but discarding her afterward heaped wrong on top of wrong.⁶

Amnon's sins mirror several aspects of the earlier story of David's sins, though Amnon carried it much further:

... both committed immoral acts outside of marriage with beautiful women (v. 1; 11:2) in the privacy of their own residences (v. 7; 11:4). Both women experienced great grief (v. 19; 11:26) because of the men's actions. Ultimately, both transgressions brought about death for sons of David (v. 29; 12:18). This carefully constructed narrative seems intended to demonstrate at least two truths: first, that God's prophetic word is true; second, that the sins of one

generation imprint the next generation. Each sin not only fosters more sin, it also fashions it by providing precedents for others to follow.⁷

The story of David shows us that though he was Israel's godliest king, he was not the savior the people needed, which only points us ahead to the need for Christ. No purely human king could ever be the Messiah we need; it took God's becoming man to save us. By showing us that even the "man after God's own heart" was a great sinner, Scripture points to the Gospel need for justification by grace through faith alone.

In addition to Amnon's taking his sexual sin further than David had, the most glaring difference between David and Amnon is the way that they reacted when they were confronted with their sin. David let his sin snowball out of control, but when directly confronted, he repented. When Amnon was directly confronted about how his choices would violate God's law, he didn't care. Though much in the stories of David and Amnon are parallel, Amnon's lack of remorse and repentance shows a glaring difference between his and David's character. David was a man after God's own heart who sinned greatly but repented. Amnon was not a man after God's own heart. David's oldest son was not the type of man who could be a godly king for Israel. He showed disregard for both God's people and God's law, the two sides of the greatest commandment: loving God and loving others.

Q: How does entitlement lead to mistreating others? How does it align with Scripture?

Q: How can we talk to our children about treating sex the way God intended, as a gift to be enjoyed within marriage, not a way to gratify ourselves and use others?

2 Samuel 13:20–33 and Romans 12:17–21 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Godly people do not take their own revenge.

Q: Why do you think David didn't do anything to punish Amnon?

Q: How do you think that would have made Tamar and Absalom feel?

Samuel tells us that David was very angry about what Amnon did to Tamar, but he didn't *do* anything about it. By Israelite law, David, as Tamar's father, should have made Amnon marry her, thereby clearing her of her cultural public shame, though not her inner pain. Or, even if he "utterly refused" to give Tamar to Amnon, David still could have required him to pay the bride-price without receiving her as his wife (Exodus 22:16–17; Deuteronomy 22:28–29). This was the case whether the premarital sex was consensual or not. However, David had the added complication that Tamar was Amnon's half-sister, so marrying them would have also been against Israelite law.

This law may be confusing to us, but it was God's way of providing for the woman who had been violated. Reading this with modern eyes may make it sound like forcing a woman to marry her assaulter, but note that the father could refuse, and the man

would still owe the bride-price to provide for the woman who would now be unmarriageable to anyone else. Most fathers would only allow the marriage if the daughter wanted it, when the premarital sex was consensual, as Exodus describes, “he seduces her,” not “seizes her.” This was a way for a woman who had been violated to be provided for and have her honor restored. This solution was gracious and kind compared to the laws of other nations in the ancient Near East.⁸

The story tells us that David was very angry but didn’t do anything about it. Perhaps he felt conflicted between his son and his daughter. Perhaps he was frozen by indecision. Or just so shocked it had happened at all that he didn’t know what to do. Another explanation is added in the margins of the story in the Dead Sea Scrolls – “But he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, since he was his firstborn.”⁹ As a result, Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house as “a desolate woman.” Not even in the palace with David and his other daughters. David did nothing to restore her honor or provide for her. Imagine how this must have made Tamar feel.

As with his episode with Bathsheba, when he could have stopped the sin from snowballing at many different points, because David didn’t stop and make things right as best he could, things just got worse and worse. Absalom waited two years before taking his revenge. The story mentions sheepshearers as a nod to David’s history as a shepherd and the story Nathan told David to convict him of his sin. Absalom used the same language with his servants that God used to encourage Joshua in the conquest, “Do not fear! Have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant” (13:28; Joshua 1:9). This contrast only highlights that Absalom’s commands were *not* godly. Earlier in Samuel, David had many times refused to take his own revenge, which we’ve discussed at length in previous lessons. But his son was now doing that very thing, taking generational sin to a whole new level. Instead of just imitating David’s sin, Absalom was now adding another sin that David was vehemently and publicly against. Because he hadn’t made the intentional choice to break the curse, David’s generational sin was growing.

Q: How have you seen sin grow from generation to generation?

Q: Why can it be hard to take the steps to break generational curses?

Q: Why is it so tempting to take our own revenge? Why isn’t it a good idea?

2 Samuel 13:34–14:33 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Godly people forgive and make amends.

Q: How is David’s encounter with the woman of Tekoa similar to the way Nathan confronted him?

Absalom fled to Geshur, where his mother’s father was king, because he feared the rest of the family would take vengeance against him for Amnon. The story tells us that David

longed to go to Absalom and that he didn't feel the law of the "avenger of blood" was warranted. This law required the family of an innocent murder victim to put the murderer to death (Numbers 35:19). But Amnon was not innocent. Though Absalom had done it in the wrong way, David was actually comforted that Absalom had punished Amnon when he didn't have the strength to do it (13:39). David longed to go to Absalom, but, yet again, he did nothing.

So David's general, Joab, sent a "wise woman" from Tekoa to tell him another story parallel to his life to wake him up as Nathan had done. And as with Nathan's story, David made a judgment call, and the wise woman showed him how the story was really about his own life and his own sons. The king sent for Absalom but asked him to live in his own house in Jerusalem and not to come into David's presence, which Absalom did for two years, the same amount of time he had waited before he took revenge on Amnon. David was making a statement. He was welcoming Absalom back to Israel but not into the palace as next in line for the throne. Finally, Absalom asked to go into the presence of the king. If there was any guilt in him, the king could put him to death as the "avenger of blood." But when he went to the king, David kissed him instead (14:33).

David didn't do anything to restore Tamar's honor, Absalom felt forced to avenge her himself. It wasn't the way it was supposed to happen by law, but putting Absalom to death would only add to the sin, not resolve it. This chapter ends so simply with a kiss of reconciliation and might make us think this is the happy ending we all tend to long for – except for the next-to-last paragraph describing how much everyone in Israel loved Absalom, reminiscent of how they loved David when Saul was king. We'll see that in the next chapter, but for now, David and Absalom forgave each other and made amends.

Q: Why can forgiveness and reconciliation be so hard sometimes?

Q: Give some examples of how you have experienced forgiveness and reconciliation. How did it take strength to make the first step? What happened as a result?

Q: How have you taken intentional steps to break generational curses? How have you taken intentional steps to stop the snowball of sin?

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Took

Main Point: Even if we repent, our sins have consequences, sometimes for generations.

David is sometimes remembered as the hero of his story, used as an example of following God in every situation. However, David was not perfect; he failed time and time again, and his failures had resounding consequences. The Scripture points to only one hope, and that is Jesus Christ.

God offers comfort and healing to those in need (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). If you are in need of healing from past pain and hurt, consider Prestonwood Life Recovery Ministry <https://prestonwood.org/connect/life-recovery>. The Life Recovery Ministry helps men, women and students recover from emotional, physical, relational and spiritual wounds through the power of Christ. Through classes, small groups and individual discipleship, the Life Recovery Ministry will help people pursue, overtake, and recover a life of peace and purpose.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on your family of origin, whether they be your parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles. Where do you see bad habits, sins or behaviors you want to change for yourself and your family? How can you break those generational curses? What kind of intentional choices and work will it take? Whom do you need to ask to help you – a counselor, pastor, friend, accountability partner, someone else? Remember, it doesn't have to be a "big" thing such as drug abuse. We can see generational curses in "smaller" ways, too, such as self-image, workaholism, finances, impatience, legalism, critical spirits and so on.

PRAY about any situations in which you need to make intentional choices to change either your own sins or generational sins inherited from your family. Ask God to change your heart and give you the strength to break generational curses.

ACT: Make amends. If you have had any kind of conflict with anyone, go to them and seek to make amends. Confess your role in the conflict and see how they respond. They may not be ready to hear it or reconcile, but you can do your part.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, just when we thought everything was resolved in David's family, we'll see Absalom take a turn for the worse. Not satisfied with being back in Jerusalem but not being next in line for the throne, he will lead a revolt against David and challenge him for the throne.

¹ "Chronicles: Not Just a Repeat: How did God View Israel's History?" *The Bible Project* - <https://bibleproject.com/blog/chronicles-not-just-repeat/>

² "Chronicles: Not Just a Repeat: How did God View Israel's History?" *The Bible Project* - <https://bibleproject.com/blog/chronicles-not-just-repeat/>

³ Note: Abigail's son Daniel was in the list of David's sons as second, between Amnon and Absalom, but because he's not mentioned at all in this story, scholars believe he died before this story happened.

⁴ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁵ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁶ Christ-Centered Exposition, Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Samuel. <https://www.amazon.com/Exalting-Samuel-Christ-Centered-Exposition-Commentary/dp/0805499318>

⁷ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁸ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁹ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).