
Judges II (atrocities)

STANDING WITH VICTIMS IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

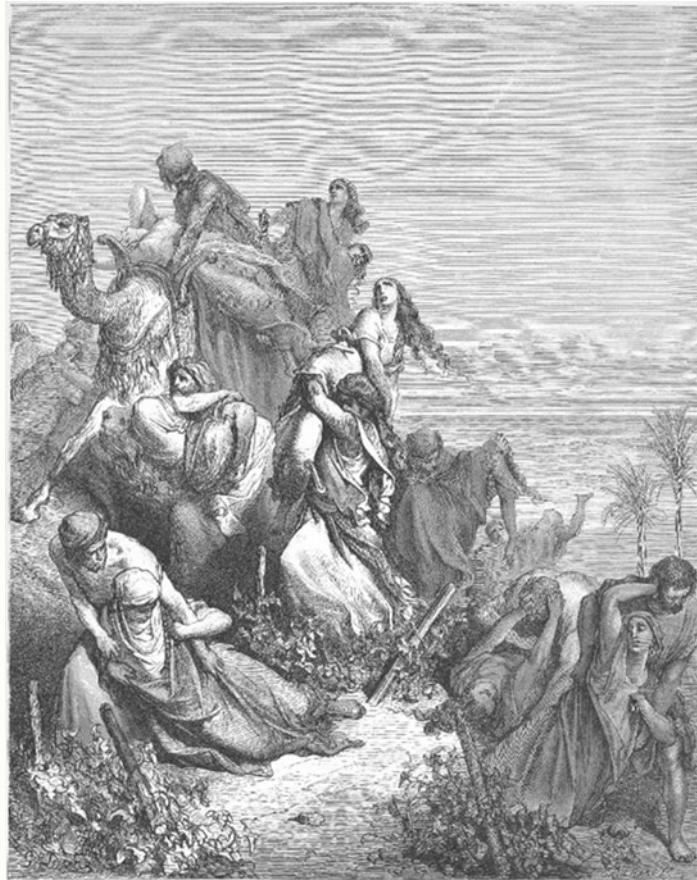
Aims of a BYU Education

- (1) spiritually strengthening,
- (2) intellectually enlarging,
- (3) character building,
- (4) leading to lifelong learning and service.

How will this class contribute to the Aims of a BYU Education?



Why study these stories of horrors?



THE CHILDREN OF BENJAMIN

CARRYING OFF THE VIRGINS OF JABESH-GILEAD

And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man . . . and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh . . .
(Judges 21: 12) (21: 23)



Why study these stories of horrors?

Some stories in the Old Testament are difficult to read because of the violence and terrors they portray. Existing in stark contrast to the many powerful Old Testament stories of God's devotion to and saving of humankind, it is easy to understand why they have traditionally been neglected. However, as Frances Taylor Gench, professor of biblical interpretation at Union Presbyterian Seminary, reminds us, "**Biblical texts . . . do not exist to make us comfortable. They exist to make us think, to be engaged by God, and to effect our transformation.**" Many of these troublesome texts—of which a significant number involve the lives of women—are well poised to do just that. **The issues they raise of power, violence, abuse, complicity, and subjugation are all too relevant in today's society, and the reflection they provoke may aid us as we work toward individual and societal change.**

A close study of the biblical narrative makes it clear that God does not condone these actions but rather that he desires us to recognize our responsibility to fight injustices and to stand with victims. . . . As we then discuss these stories openly, we will create biblically sanctioned spaces to discuss difficult topics that otherwise remain in the shadows

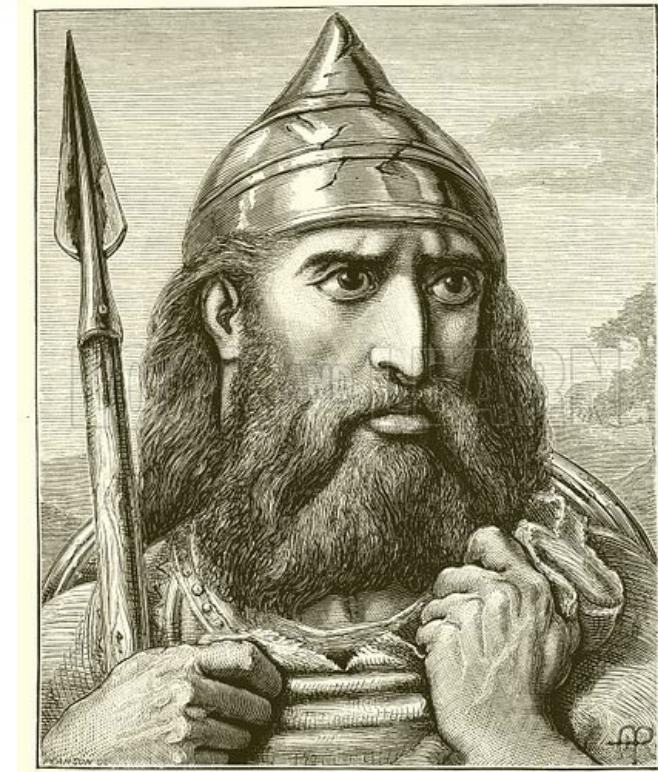


“These stories can help even contemporary readers to face the horrors of today’s ongoing sexual violations of women, children and some men”
(Susanne Scholz, Sacred Witness 155).

Understanding Jephthah

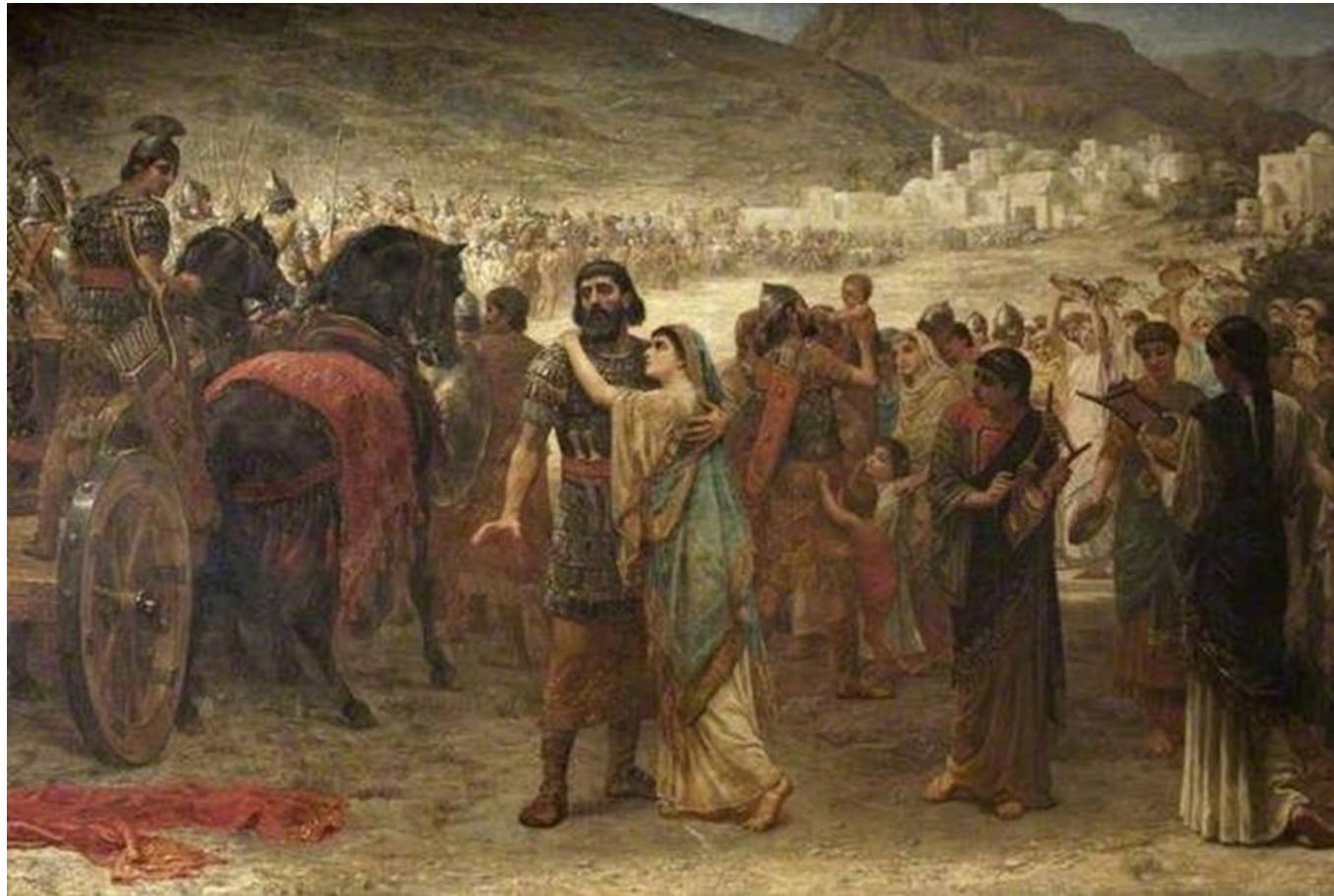
"We must conclude, therefore, that the judges were not intended to be spiritual role models, nor was their spirituality necessarily a criterion for God's raising them up. Indeed, the text never implies that it was. This is not to suggest that the judges did not act in faith; rather, it warns us not to place them on too high a pedestal. There were unquestionably some unethical things done by certain judges (e.g., 3:20; 15:4-5). The Bible does not express approval even though it acknowledges that deliverance was still possible nevertheless. . . . The fact that deliverance was accomplished does not imply approval of the means used." (Hill & Walton 243).

11:1-2 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.



Jephthah is another outsider, the illegitimate son of a Gileadite with a prostitute. Expelled from his family, he becomes a successful bandit, so successful, in fact, that when the Ammonites threaten Gilead, as they will repeatedly, the gileadites turn to Jephthah for help, and make him their head. . . . Jephthah's defeat of the Ammonites is described briefly. The narrator is much more interested in Jephthah's rash vow and consequences" (Coogan 222).

Understanding Jephthah



Does it change how you feel about Jephthah and his actions when you know that he is the son of a prostitute and an unidentified father? When you know that the pure offspring of his generation expelled him from their father's house (the land of Gilead)?

Jephthah's Vow

"The making of the vow is an act of unfaithfulness. Jephthah desires to bind God rather than embrace the gift of the spirit. What comes to him freely, he seeks to earn and manipulate. The meaning of his words is doubt, not faith; it is control, not courage. To such a vow the deity makes no reply" (Trible 97).

This is likely not your standard understanding of Jephthah because In the Epistles to the Hebrews, we read: 11:32-34 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

How can we work with these different readings of Jephthah?

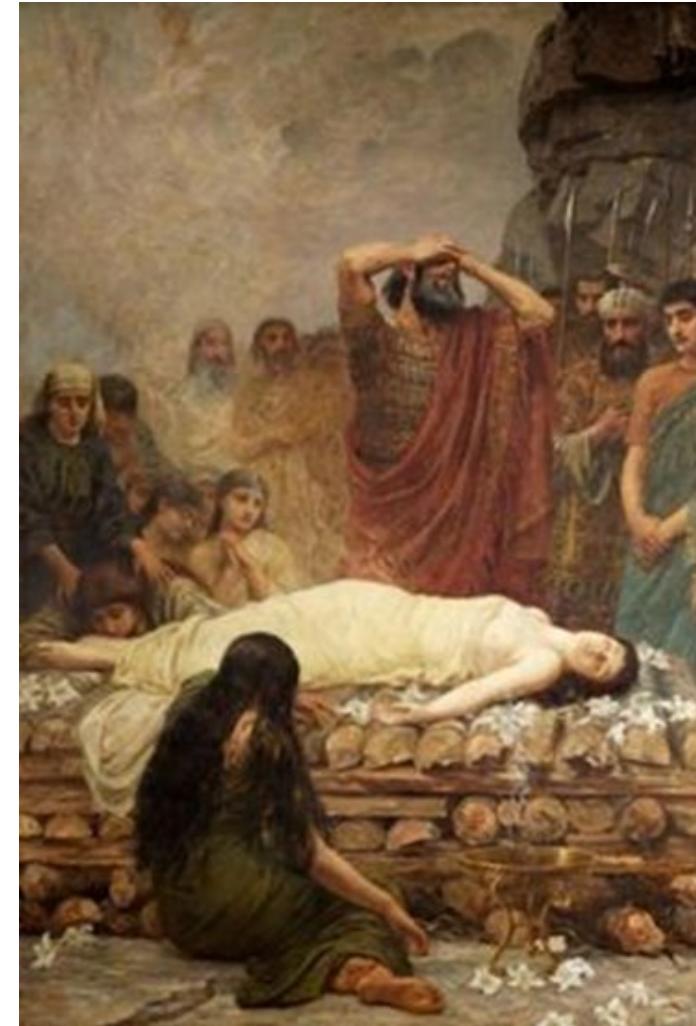
11:29-31 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."



How to view Jephthah . . .

“The horror with which biblical authors react to child sacrifice is the very reason this story is included in the book of Judges”
(Bellis HHH 115).

“Jephthah can no longer be thought of as a hero. . . . Perhaps there is a lesson we can learn from this said tale. **We must be careful to discern the difference between genuine piety and self-serving, ersatz versions that destroy rather than build up.** If we can learn this lesson, then perhaps Jephthah’s daughter did not die in vain”
(Bellis, HH116).



What may learning this lesson look like in your life?

Jephthah's Vow and Its Consequences

“Whatsoever comes forth . . . shall belong to Yahweh”

“His daughter is his sacrifice; she must die for his unfaithfulness. If Jephthah suffered for the sins of his parents, how much more shall this child bear because of the machinations of her father” (Trible 100).

What may
Jephthah's words
& actions teach us
in this moment?



“You have brought me low, you have been my calamity”

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“You have brought me low, you have been my calamity”
Jephthah seems to be mourning for himself, not his daughter. He also blames the victim. He does not take responsibility for his actions but instead blames others.

How to understand Jephthah's Daughter

With courage and determination the daughter answers her father. She shows no anger or depression. She shows compassion and understanding.

11:36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth;

“Nevertheless, hers is not quite acquiescence. Within the limits of the inevitable she takes charge to bargain for herself” (Trible 103).

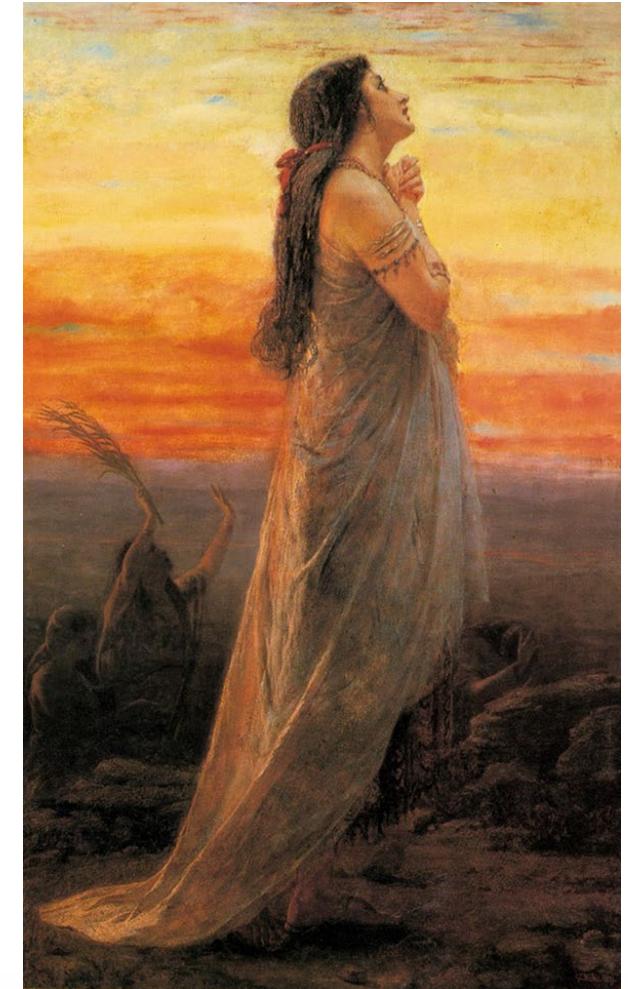
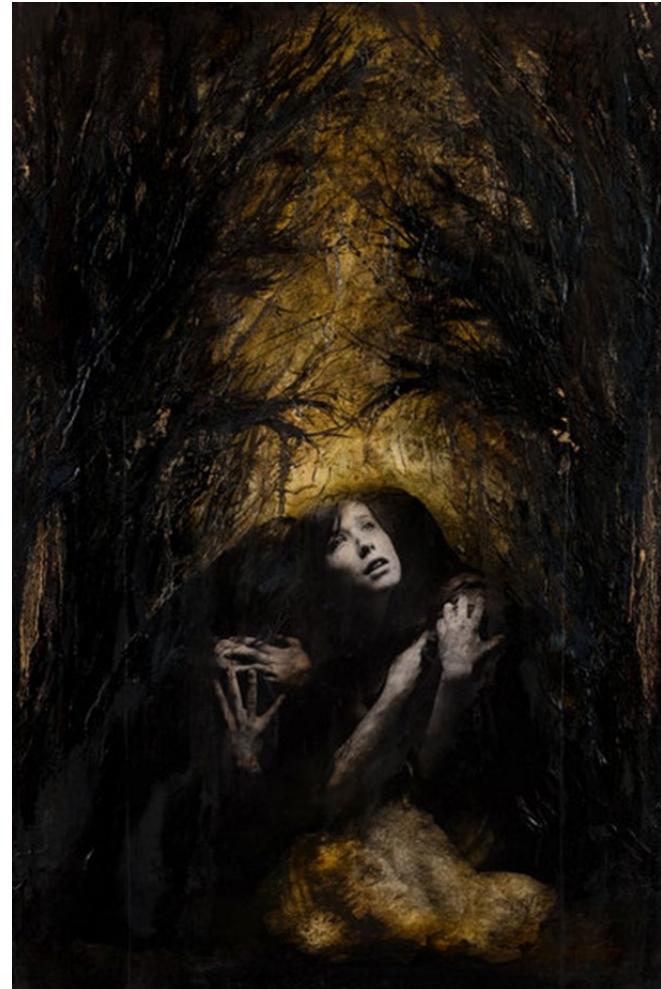
Let me alone for two months that I may go and wander upon the hills and lament my virginity—I and my female friends (11:37)

She goes to lament unfulfilled life



Some read her as previously hearing about her father’s vow, so she goes out to protect others.

Why does Jephthah's daughter not revolt?



Why does Jephthah's daughter not revolt?



Idea from Dr. Valerie Cooper, a womanist scholar: “For Jephthah’s daughter, the choice was between death and dishonor. For Bat-Jephthah, to accept her father’s words meant certain death, but to reject her father’s rash vow meant to declare a fool the man all of Israel had once before rejected and then to run, with no place to hide. Bat-Jephthah held in her hands not only her own honor but her father’s. For many black women today, the same choices define their conduct as they barter their silence for the prestige of the men they love” (HHH 117).

How might you relate to this? What are the implications for Cooper’s statement? How do we combat this? Should we combat this?

Friendship & Agency

“At the time of deepest sorrow, the last days of her life, the girl reaches out to other women. She chooses them to go with her to wander upon the hill and lament her virginity. . . . Within the limits of the inevitable she has shaped meaning for herself”
(Trible 104).



Let me alone for two months that I may go and wander upon the hills and lament my virginity—I and my female friends (11:37)

What does this part of the story teach you? What may you gain from knowing it & sharing it?

Female Solidarity: Remembering One Another

“and it became a custom in Israel. From year to year the daughters of Israel went to mourn for the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, four days in the year” (11:39-40).

“The unnamed virgin child becomes a tradition in Israel because the women with whom she chose to spend her last days have not let her pass into oblivion. . . . The narrative postscript, then, shifts the focus of the story from vow to victim, from death to life, from oblivion to remembrance. Remarkably, this saga of faithfulness and sacrifice mitigates, though it does not dispel, its own tragedy through the mourning of women” (Trible 107).



What does this part of the story teach you? What may you gain from knowing it and sharing it with others?

Real power in our baptismal covenant “to mourn with one another” . . .

“Like the daughters of Israel, we remember and mourn for the daughters of Jephthah the Gileadite. In her death we are all diminished; by our memory she is forever hallowed” (Trible 108).



“having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another”
(Mosiah 18:21)

Why did Bible authors include this story?

“The horror with which biblical authors react to child sacrifice is the very reason this story is included in the book of Judges” (Bellis HHH 115).

In Judges, “God is active on a national scale, bringing first conquerors and then redeemers. But God no longer saves private individuals and families. . . . In the absence of God’s interventions, human beings and their social system must prevent such horrors. But the social system of Judges has no way to prevent the tragedy. The sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter is a sign that something was not right in Israel. Something was rotten in the state of the judges, and things were unraveling. . . . Throughout the Bible, violence against women is a symptom of a basic social flaw and a harbinger of social disintegration” (116).



Why did Bible authors include this story?

“By telling horrible stories, the narrator solicits support for the royal institution” (Bellis 115)

“Every man did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25)

“It happened in those days, there was no king in Israel” (Judges 19:1)

“The story of the pious Jephthah and his heroic daughter is the turning point of the book of Judges. It is the first hint that lack of control over heads of families is a crucial flaw that will ultimately lead to the destruction of the social order. The rest of the book of Judges spirals down through problematic stories until it culminates in the catastrophic implosion of society that begins when the Levite’s concubine leaves her husband” (Bellis 117).



The Levite's Concubine or as we will refer to her the unnamed woman in the book of Judges

“ . . . the story of rape and murder of the unnamed woman becomes the story of the destruction of an entire tribe. The men, women, and children minus six hundred men, are all killed. The story is also about the destruction of the town of Jabesh-gilead, with the exception of four hundred young virgins. It is finally about the abduction of two hundred more young women from the festival of Shiloh” (Bellis HHH 118).



God is Not Sanctioning Nor Supporting these Actions

THE VIOLENCE WAS REMEMBERED. HOSEA WRITES IN ANNOUNCING PUNISHMENT: “THEY HAVE DEEPLY CORRUPTED THEMSELVES AS IN THE DAYS OF GIBEAH; HE [GOD] WILL REMEMBER THEIR INIQUITY, HE WILL PUNISH THEIR SINS” (HOS 9:9).

Judges 19:1-2 Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents' home in Bethlehem, Judah.

The Levite's foolish decision to start travelling back when it is late.

19:12 “No. We won’t go into any city whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah.”

Lack of hospitality from the men of Gibeah—the Benjaminites.

19:18 but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house.



Hospitality is among Men

Levite and his host offering women as a substitute—
should remind us of Lot & his daughters

Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him. 23 And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. 24 Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing. (Judges 19:22-24 KJV)



Context of Rape

“Let us know him”: rape as an assertion of dominance and the dishonoring of the man forced to submit

By “knowing” the concubine, they assert their superiority over the man too. Controlling women is a mark of manhood in patriarchal societies, failure to protect others from violating her emasculates the men.

“To the Levite, as to his hearers, the attack on the girl was an attack on him, and by extension, of any Israelite traveling among his fellow Israelites” (129).



and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning. Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light.
(Judges 19:25 KJV)

One death after another for the girl

J. Cheryl Exum “the anonymity of the woman who is gang-raped in Judges 19 encourages readers not to view her as a person in her own right” (Stratton 103).



How does this occur today?

“Get up and come!”

He does not disavow her; he sees his actions as a necessity: “To Israelite eyes, this is an emergency, and in emergencies, daughters are expendable.” (Frymer-Kensky 137)

How would biblical authors and readers have understood the Levite’s actions? “Did they consider such actions simply a part of patriarchy, regrettable but necessary? Or did they view Lot’s offer and the Levite’s sacrifice as an abuse, a rupture in the social order, a tragedy even when ‘necessary’?” (Frymer-Kensky 126)

“The striking absence of empathy the morning after the deadly rape should perhaps not be attributed to the Levite’s patriarchal attitudes or to feelings of male supremacy but rather to his victimization and powerlessness” (Stratton 104).

19:28 And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place.



The Extreme Violence Done to this Woman

He came to his house and took the knife and took hold of his concubine and cut her through her bones into twelve pieces. He sent her throughout the whole territory of Israel. And it happened that everyone who saw it said, “Such has never been, has never been seen, since the day the Israelites came up from Egypt until this very day. Take note of her, take counsel and deliberate (Judges 19:29-30)



Why does the tribe of Benjamin protect the men of Gibeah?



Escalation of Violence

“ . . . the story of rape and murder of the unnamed woman becomes the story of the destruction of an entire tribe. The men, women, and children, minus six hundred men, are all killed. The story is also about the destruction of the town of Jabesh-gilead, with the exception of four hundred young virgins. It is finally about the abduction of two hundred more young women from the festival of Shiloh” (Bellis 118).



“Violence against one woman by guilt men has led to violence against those who stood by the guilty men (the ‘Other’) to violence against those who stayed out of it (the neutral ‘innocent’ bystanders) to violence against the self. The violence turns inward, against the very heart of Israel, against girls who had not yet declared themselves apart of Israel either by attacking Israelites or refusing to join them in an attack on the ‘Other.’” (Frymer-Kensky 137).

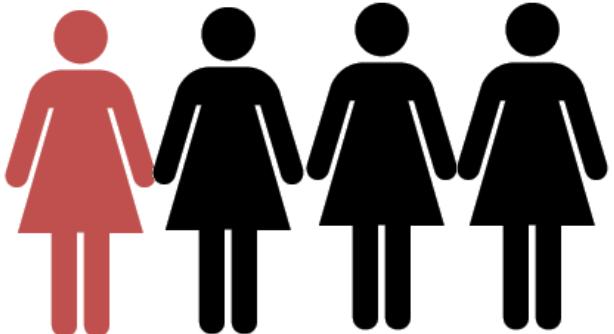
It is one of the many ironies of the book of Judges that the only time that all the tribes of Israel are reported to have united in warfare (the ideal in the book of Joshua) is not to attack an enemy that threatens them but to punish one of their own.

Tamar: Why tell her story?



Why tell her story?

“Date rape is so common that college students are receiving instruction about it as part of their orientation to college life. Tamar is not an ancient anomaly. She is all around us. If awareness can lead to change let us remember Tamar’s story and resolve that sexual abuse can and will stop” (Bellis HHH 134).

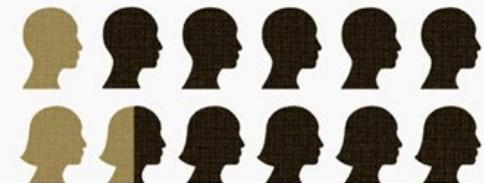
1 in 4 women in college will

suffer a date rape or attempted one
only 5% will be reported

STATS ON SEXUAL ASSAULT

SEXUAL ASSAULT OCCURS IN 10–14% OF ALL MARRIAGES

EVERY 2 MIN

SOMEONE IN THE U.S. IS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED



80%
OF VICTIMS
ARE UNDER 30

ONLY 5-20%
OF SEXUAL
ASSAULTS ARE
ACTUALLY
REPORTED

17% OF MEN &
25% OF WOMEN

ARE OR WILL BE VICTIMS OF
SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THEIR LIFETIME

SEXUAL ASSAULT IS NOT JUST
FORCIBLE RAPE. SEXUAL ASSAULT IS
ANY TYPE OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OR
CONTACT WHERE CONSENT IS NOT
FREELY GIVEN OR OBTAINED AND IS
ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH FORCE,
INTIMIDATION, VIOLENCE, COERCION,
MANIPULATION, THREAT, DECEPTION,
OR ABUSE OF AUTHORITY.

90%
OF YOUNG WOMEN INVOLVED IN
PROSTITUTION WERE SEXUALLY
ABUSED AS CHILDREN

80%
OF VICTIMS ARE ASSAULTED BY
A KNOWN ACQUAINTANCE

STATISTICS FROM *RID OF MY DISGRACE* BY JUSTIN AND LINDSEY HOLCOMB

Why tell her story?

“Secrets, violence, abuse, cover-up. Some readers wonder why this ugly story is in the Bible. The painful truth is that these events happened in Israel’s royal family, and similar events happen in our families. This text offers insight into a tragic aspect of the human condition. People hurt each other. Even people who are intimately connected by family bonds can misuse their power and sexuality to hurt others. **The story is a powerful reminder that abuse can happen in a church-going family, a wealthy family, and influential family**” (Bellis, HHH 132).



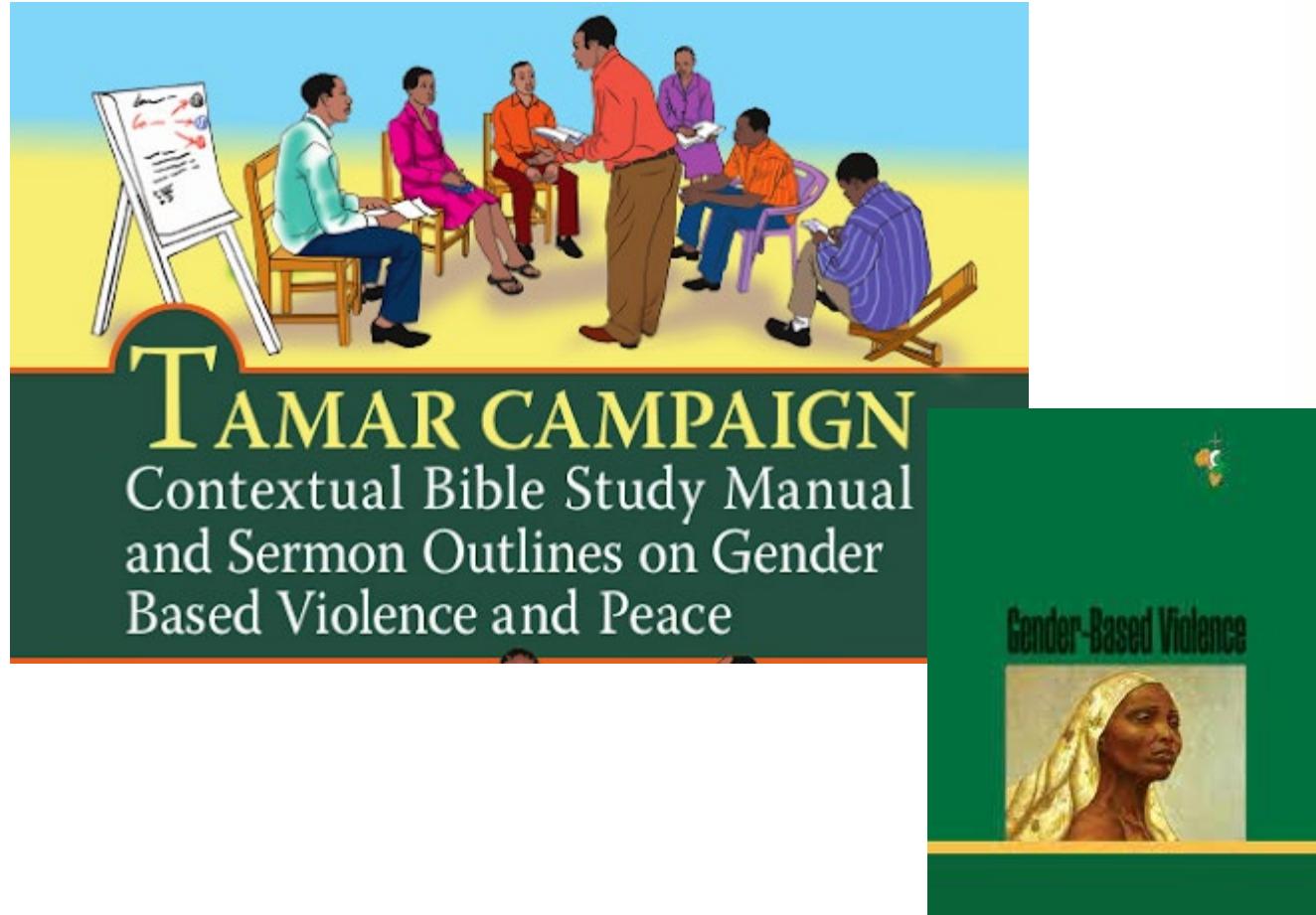
Why tell her story?

“The story of Tamar does not offer easy answers to the problems of sexual and family violence, but it is important to tell this story because many survivors have never heard abuse name in the church. **Hearing a sermon on this text may give people the freedom and space to tell stories of their own**” (Japinga 135).



Tamar

The Tamar Campaign is a Bible study began in South Africa that explores the roles of women and men in this text, in conversation with domestic and sexual violence in their own context. It “provides a framework for women to talk about sexual violence, using its inclusion in the Scriptures as authority to discuss it in their own communities” (Gafney 232).



Who are the male characters and what is the role of each of them in Tamar's rape?

- Amnon
- Jonadab
- David
- Servant
- Absalom



Absalom: gave his sister a home, but also told her to be silent about the rape; how do we see him as the avenger of his sister?

21And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? 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.

22And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.

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

28Now 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, . . . the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded.



Who are the male characters and what is the role of each of them in Tamar's rape?

“Most often perpetrators of sexual violence prey on the trust and bodies of their own family members and friends” (Gafney 232)

“Sexual offenders are not all lone wolves. As the biblical account of Jonadab’s collaboration illustrates, there are other family members, adults, who know that a child or woman or man is being abused. They say nothing, or worse, they even participate.” (Gafney 232)



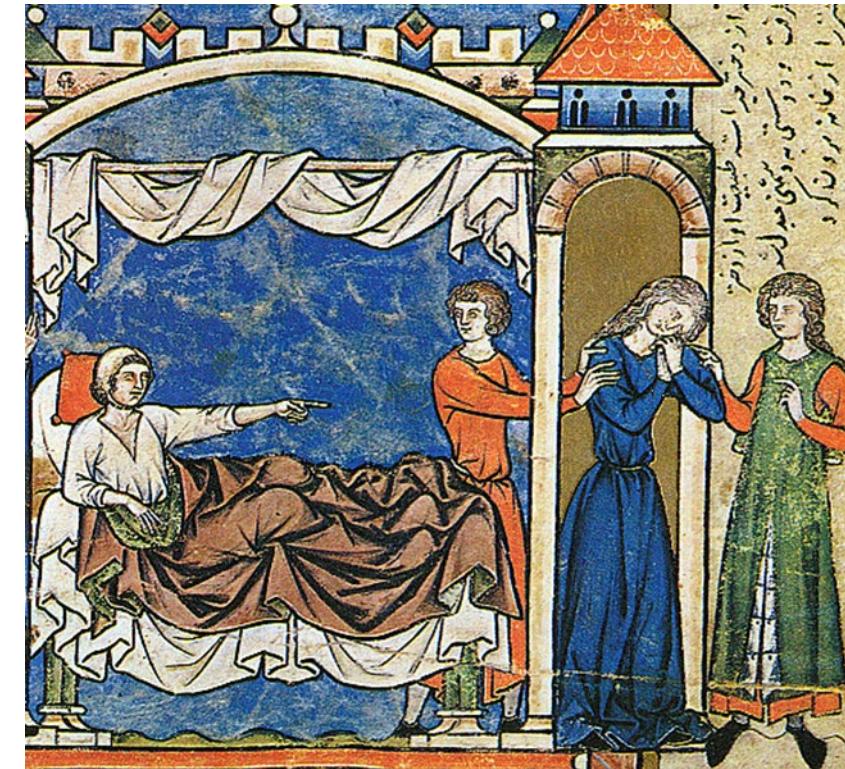
What is Tamar's response throughout the story? What does she say and do?

- 12And 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.
- 13And 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.
- 14Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.



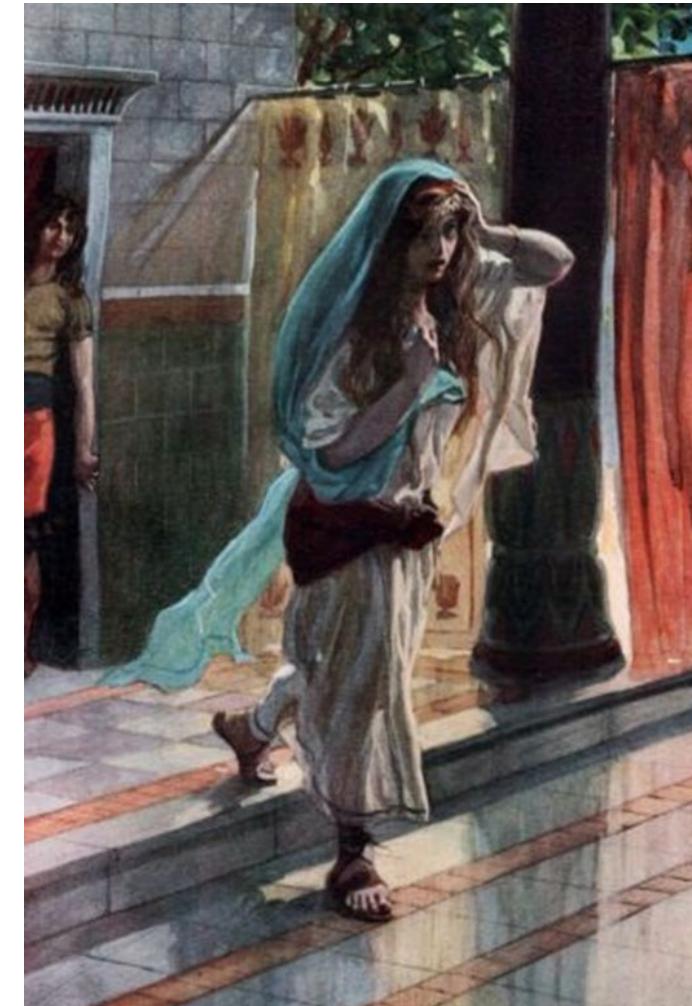
Tamar's words afterwards . . .

- 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: 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.



Tamar's actions afterwards . . .

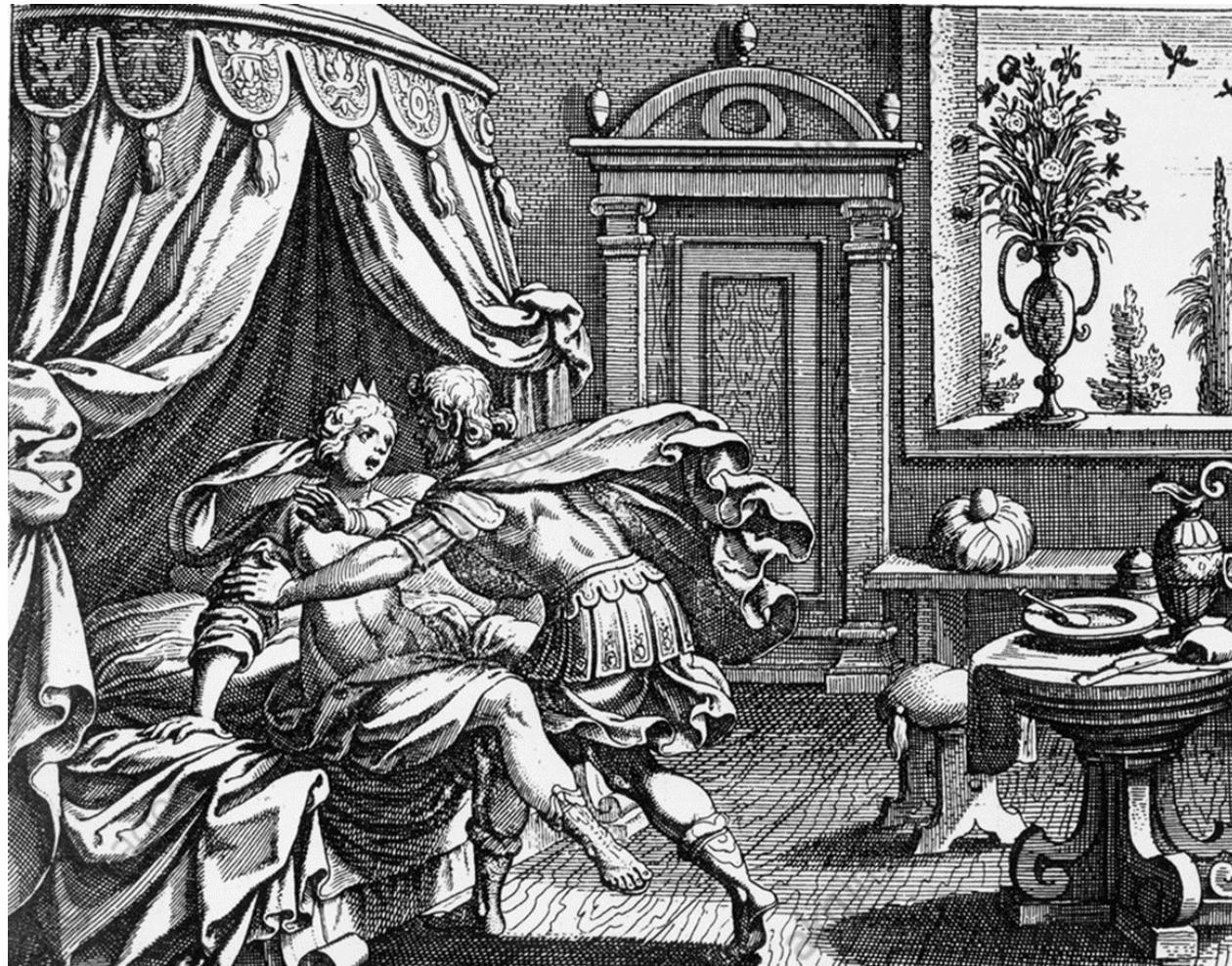
- 18And she had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her.
- 19And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.
- She creates a public spectacle. She needs to let the world know that she is a victim. Otherwise, she may be held responsible.
- “The blood on Tamar’s garment is her own blood, a sign of her stolen virginity, death for a woman in the ancient world” (132).



Assess the attitude of the narrator?



Assess the attitude of the narrator?



Tamar is presented as
articulate, wise, and remarkable

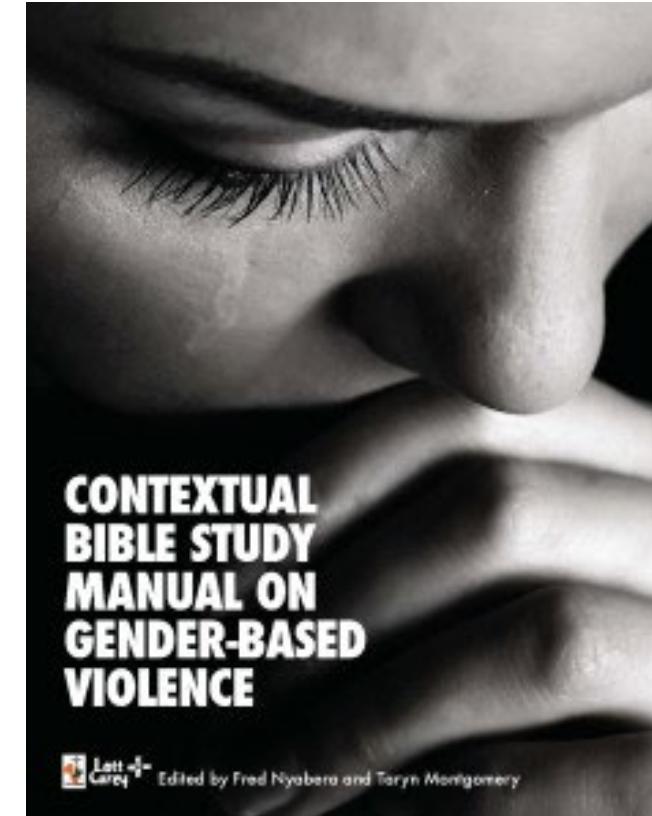
Where is God in this story?

What effect or
impact does
Tamar's story
have on you?
What is the
message for us?



What effect or impact does Tamar's story have on you?

Women in South Africa: “Women felt the story of Tamar was empowering because it was a story in the Bible and therefore could be used in the church and community to break the silence surrounding rape and abuse. We must accept abuse as a reality, they said, and learn to listen to those who have been abused, particularly our children. Women also felt that much more could be done by the legal system, police, hospitals, etc to support and protect women” (5).



Tamar's Story as a Story of Today

- Tamar was sexually assaulted, not by a stranger, but by someone she knew;
- The violation took place not in a desolate remote place at the hands of a stranger, but by a member of her own family in his home;
- Tamar was exploited through one of her most vulnerable traits—her kindness, her culturally instilled obedience and her upbringing to take care of the other;
- Tamar said ‘No’ and her ‘No’ was not respected;
- When Tamar sought help she was told to hush it up;
- The process for achieving justice and restitution was taken out of her hands entirely and carried forward by her brother. No other women are even recorded in this story as having a voice or a role in coming to Tamar’s aid. It became men’s business; and
- In the end, it was Tamar’s perpetrator for whom her father mourned not for her. In fact, the end of Tamar’s story happens without her.

8 of 10
sexual assault victims
know their
attackers¹

1 in 6 American women will
be a victim of sexual assault.²



Fewer than 5 % of completed
and attempted rapes of college
students are reported.³



73 % of sexual assaults
are perpetrated by a
non-stranger.²



SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTS AT UTA

Forcible Sex Offenses
2009: 3
2010: 4*
2011: 2
2012: 5
2013: 7**

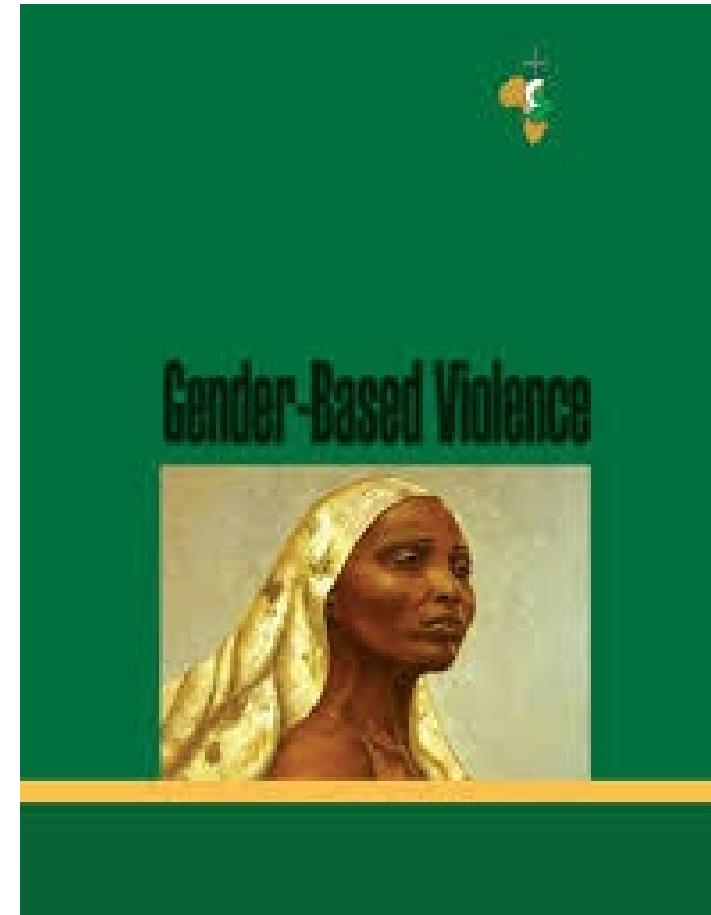
*One sexual assault was reported in 2010 but said to have happened in 2007.

**Four reports of sexual assault had been made as of Sept. 10, according to university spokeswoman Kristin Sullivan. Since then, 3 more reports were recorded in the UTA daily crime log.

Sources: 2009-2011 numbers from the annual campus fire and safety report, university spokeswoman Kristin Sullivan. 1 = Texas Department of Public Safety, 2 = Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, 3 = National Institute of Justice

What can we do to help?

“There is no good news here, but the text invites and encourages us to write a different ending to the story, where the parent takes action, the abuser is confronted, and the victim is heard and cared for. WE can write a better ending that chooses to listen rather than ignore, to offer grace and healing rather than shame” (Bellis HHH 135).



What did you find useful from the Church's website on helping victims of abuse? What more should we do?



How will we direct our hearts to her, what counsel will we take, how will we speak and what will we say?

Trible concludes: “First of all we can recognize the contemporaneity of the story. Misogyny belongs to every age, including our own. Violence and vengeance are not just characteristics of a distant, pre-Christian past; they infect, the community of the elect to this day. Woman as object is still captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered, and scattered. To take to heart this ancient story, then, is to confess its present reality. The story is alive and all is not well. Beyond confession we must take counsel to say, “Never again.” Yet this counsel is itself ineffectual unless we direct our hearts to that most uncompromising of all biblical commands, speaking the words not to others but to ourselves. Repent. Repent” (120).



Take note of her, take counsel, & and speak your minds.

19:30



and God wept (Moses 7:28)



Brothers and sisters, not throwing stones is the first step in treating others with compassion. The second step is to try to catch stones thrown by others. Elder Renlund, April 2021