

Reading and recovering forgotten biblical texts in the context of gender violence

UJAMAA CENTRE

SCHOOL OF RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY, AND CLASSICS

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

SOUTH AFRICA



Rediscovering Tamar

- ▶ The Ujamaa Centre began working with 2 Samuel 13:1-22 at a workshop in 1996 on “Women and the Bible in Southern Africa”.
- ▶ We were challenged in 1999 to do something more than the Tamar Bible study; so,
- ▶ We launched “the Tamar Campaign” in 2000.
- ▶ Offered every year in South Africa.
- ▶ Launched in other parts of Africa in 2005, in Kenya, and taken up around the continent and world.
- ▶ At the 4th Pan African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Cameroun in 2007 we began to explore working with this same text in the context of ‘redemptive masculinity’.


Launching Tamar in Kenya



The Tamar Bible study

2 Samuel 13:1-22

- ▶ 1. Listen to 2 Samuel 13:1-22. Have you heard this scripture read publically before? What you think the text is about?
- ▶ 2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
- ▶ 3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
- ▶ 4. What does Tamar say and what does Tamar do?

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- ▶ 5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.
 - ▶ 6. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?
 - ▶ 7. What will you now do in response to this Bible study?

Re-reading Tamar's story in the search for redemptive masculinity, 2 Samuel 13:1-22

- ▶ 1. Listen to the text being read. Have you heard this text read publicly, in church, ... on a Sunday? Share your experiences of this text with each other.
- ▶ 2. Who are the characters and what do we know about each of them?
- ▶ 3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?

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- ▶ 4. How would you characterise Amnon's masculinity? What kind of man is Amnon?


Consider:

- ▶ What prevents Amnon initially from acting on his 'love' for Tamar (v2)?
- ▶ What is it that changes Amnon's 'love' (v1) to 'sickness' (v2), and what then enables him to act on his sickness/lust (v4-6)?
- ▶ How does he react to Tamar's attempts to reason/argue with him (v12-14)?
- ▶ How does he behave after he has raped Tamar (v15-17)?

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- ▶ 5. What kind of man does Tamar expect or hope Amnon to be? What kind of man could Amnon be according to Tamar?

Consider:

- ▶ What does she say (v12-13,16), and what do each of the things she says tell us about her understanding of what it means to be 'a man'? Pay attention to each thing she says.
- ▶ What does she do (v19), and what do each of things she does tell us about her understanding of what it means to be 'a man'?

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- ▶ Question 6: What are the dominant forms of masculinity in our contexts (in each age group), and what alternative forms of masculinity can we draw on from our cultural and religious traditions?
 - ▶ Question 7: How can we raise the issue of masculinity in our various gender and age-groups?
 - ▶ Action plan 1: an immediate plan of action for your context
 - ▶ Action plan 2: a more long-termed action plan
 - ▶ Action plan 3: a 'dream' action plan

Contextual Bible Study: a safe and sacred site

- ▶ The presence of Bible in Africa creates a sacred site.
- ▶ Bible study groups are often a safe site.
- ▶ A sacred and safe site is required for an articulation of local embodied theologies.
- ▶ A sacred and safe site is required for ownership of the Bible study process and product, and for community-based action.

Contextual Bible Study process

- ▶ Begins with reality 'from below'.
- ▶ Uses facilitation/animation type leadership.
- ▶ Creates a safe and sacred 'sequestered' site.
- ▶ Affirms dignity and agency of participants.
- ▶ Equalizes power relationships.
- ▶ Shares 'reading' resources.
- ▶ Enables articulation and owning of local embodied theologies.
- ▶ Requires local control of action plan.

Reading 'with': linking community and academy

- ▶ Begins in front of the text (thematic-semiotic);
- ▶ Moves to a close and careful reading of the text (literary);
- ▶ Offers resources to go behind the text (historical and sociological);
- ▶ Concludes in front of the text (thematic-semiotic).

The 3 CBS processes/movements

**CBS begins with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...
'community-consciousness'**

SEE

**In-between we re-read the Bible,
slowly, carefully and closely
using the critical resources of biblical scholarship ...
'critical consciousness'**

JUDGE


**=
Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)
Literary (on-text)
Socio-historical (behind-text)
Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)**


**... and ends with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...
'community-consciousness'**

ACT

Analysis of the CBS

- ▶ 1. Listen to the text being read. Have you heard this text read publicly, in church, ... on a Sunday? Share your experiences of this text with each other.
- ▶ Community consciousness question, drawing on interpretive resources and local knowledge of participants

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- ▶ 2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
 - ▶ 3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
 - ▶ 4. How would you characterise Amnon's masculinity? What kind of man is Amnon?
 - ▶ 5. What kind of man does Tamar expect or hope Amnon to be? What kind of man could Amnon be according to Tamar?
- ▶ Textual/critical consciousness questions, constantly returning to the biblical text to re-read it slowly, carefully, and closely
 - ▶ Invites socio-historical questions from participants

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- ▶ 6: What are the dominant forms of masculinity in our contexts (in each age group), and what alternative forms of masculinity can we draw on from our cultural and religious traditions?
 - ▶ 7: How can we raise the issue of masculinity in our various gender and age-groups?

- ▶ Community consciousness questions, returning to draw on the resources and experiences of the participants
- ▶ The Bible study begins and ends with community consciousness
- ▶ The Bible study belongs to the community and must lead to some form of action/s

Some analysis

- ▶ 1. Have you heard this text read publicly ... on a Sunday?
- ▶ 2. Who are the characters and what do we know about each of them?
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▶ Context

- ▶ **Begins in front of the text**

▶ Text

- ▶ **Moves to a close and careful re-reading, slowing the reading process**

- ▶ **Offers resources to go behind the text**

▶ Context

- ▶ **Concludes in front of the text**


▶ **Moves to a close and careful re-reading, slowing the reading process**

- ▶ 5. What kind of man does Tamar expect or hope Amnon to be? What kind of man could Amnon be according to Tamar?

Consider:

- ▶ What does she say (v12-13,16), and what do each of the things she says tell us about her understanding of what it means to be 'a man'? Pay attention to each thing she says.
- ▶ What does she do (v19), and what do each of things she does tell us about her understanding of what it means to be 'a man'?

- ▶ She says a clear "No" (13:12)
- ▶ She reminds him that he is her "brother" (13:12).
- ▶ She names what he is doing: "forcing" her (13:12).
- ▶ She reminds him of their communal values (13:12).
- ▶ She declares his intentions to be vile and evil (13:12).
- ▶ She appeals to her situation (13:13).
- ▶ She appeals to his situation (13:13).
- ▶ She offers him a way out (13:13).



- ▶ **Offers resources to go behind the text**

- ▶ 3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
- ▶ 4. How would you characterise Amnon's masculinity? What kind of man is Amnon?
- ▶ 5. What kind of man does Tamar expect or hope Amnon to be? What kind of man could Amnon be according to Tamar?

- ▶ Allows for both textual and socio-historical 'context'
- ▶ Eg. Structure of patriarchal household in biblical times

Context discerning scriptural detail; scriptural detail discerning context

- ▶ Scripture has a remarkable capacity 'to speak anew'.
- ▶ The guiding interpretive principle in our work is: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26).
- ▶ We may limp, as a consequence of wrestling with the detail of scripture, but we will persist, contending for readings that bring liberation and abundant life for all (John 10:10).

Resources from the Ujamaa Centre

- ▶ <http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za>
- ▶ Or Google: Ujamaa Centre
- ▶ Go to “Practical Resources” page.
Look for ‘Manual’. Enjoy!