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Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-22) – a Beacon of Wisdom amidst a Sea of Madness

Tamara (2 Sam 13,1-22) – svetilnik sredi morja norosti

Abstract. This article offers a narrative-theological reading of Tamar's story in 2 Sam 13:1-22, situating it within the Davidic narrative and the broader biblical canon. Far from being an isolated tragedy, Tamar's violation marks the first fracture in the royal household, fulfilling Nathan's oracle in 2 Sam 12:10-11 and exposing the systemic collapse of Davidic authority. A close literary analysis – attending to structure, repetition, and key Hebrew terms such as נִגְלָה (outrage), מַעֲלֵה נָשָׁה (a long robe), and שְׁמַנְיָה (desolation) – shows how Tamar's embodied lament becomes a prophetic protest. Her gestures of mourning – tearing her robe, scattering ashes, placing her hand upon her head, and crying aloud – name injustice and preserve dignity when her father and brothers fail to act. Read intertextually, Tamar's story resonates with Esther (Esth 4:17 LXX), Susanna (Dan 13), and the woman accused of adultery (John 8:1-11). Each of these narratives portrays women confronting systemic injustice; together they highlight lament as a form of agency that unmasks patriarchal power while anticipating divine justice. Unlike Susanna, whose cry is vindicated, Tamar's protest remains unanswered, embodying the silence of failed kingship. By contrast, in John 8 Jesus becomes the woman's advocate, restoring dignity through mercy rather than condemnation. Drawing on feminist, narrative-critical, and trauma hermeneutical approaches, the article argues that Tamar is more than a tragic victim. She emerges as a beacon of wisdom amid a collapsing household and a prophetic witness within Israel's story. Her memory testifies that God hears the silenced and that lament can become the seed of truth, dignity, and hope.

Keywords: Tamar, 2 Sam 13, Davidic monarchy, sexual violence, lament, prophetic witness, intertextuality

Povzetek: Članek ponuja narativno-teološko branje zgodbe o Tamari v 2 Sam 13,1-22, ki jo umešča v Davidovo pripoved in širši biblijski kanon. Tamarino posilstvo ni bila osamljena tragedija, ampak jezaznamovala prvi razkol v kraljevi družini, s čimer se je izpolnila Nathanova prerokba v 2 Sam 12,10-11 in razkril sistemski propad Davidove oblasti. Natančna literarna analiza – ki upošteva strukturo, ponovitve in ključne hebrejske izraze, kot so נִגְלָה (grozodejstvo), מַעֲלֵה נָשָׁה (a long robe), שְׁמַנְיָה (desolation), – kaže, da Tamarova ekspresivna lamentacija postane proaktivna protestna dejanja. Njeni gesti smrdljivosti – raztegnite robe, razstrelišči popol, ročni pokrov na glavo in veliki krični izgon – imenujejo nepravdo in ohranjajo čast, ko njen oče in brata ne reagirajo. Čeprav se Tamarova zgodba rezonira z Esterino (Esth 4:17 LXX), Susannino (Dan 13) in žensko, ki je bila optužena za nečastnost (John 8:1-11), kaže vsaka od teh zgodbi, da ženske konfrontirajo sistemski nepravde; skupaj pa kažejo, da lament postane obliko agencije, ki razkriva moči patriarhalne moči in predvižda božjo pravdom. Tako kot Susanna, kjer je njen krični izgon vendar pa je bila potrdljena, Tamarova protestna dejanja ostane neodgovorena, temveč predstavlja ticho neuspešnosti kraljeve moči. Na kontrast z tem, v Jezusovem (John 8) postane žensko pravljico, obnovljajoča čast skozi milost,而不是通过谴责. Uporabljajući feministične, narativno-kritične in traumatske hermeneutične pristope, članek argumentira, da Tamar je več kot žaljiva žrtev. Nekateri pa jo kažejo kot svetilnik sredi morja norosti in vodilno svetilko v Izraelovem zgodovinskom ustvarjanju. Njen spomine kaže, da Bog sluša tihene in da lament lahko postane semenje pravde, časti in nadanja.

(dolga obleka) in נִזְנָשׁ (opustošenje) – pokaže, kako Tamarina utelešena žalost postane preroški protest. Njeni gesti žalovanja – raztrganje obleke, raztresanje pepela, polaganje rok na glavo in glasno jokanje – pokažejo na nepravičnost in ohranjaje dostenjanstva, ko njen oče in bratje ne ukrepajo. V intertekstualni interpretaciji se Tamarina zgodba ujema z Esterom (Est 4:17 LXX), Suzano (Dan 13) in žensko, obtoženo prešuštva (Jn 8:1-11). Vsak od teh pripovedi prikazuje ženske, ki se soočajo s sistemsko nepravičnostjo; skupaj poudarjajo žalovanje kot obliko delovanja, ki razkriva patriarhalno moč in hkrati pričakuje Božjo pravičnost. Za razliko od Suzane, katere jok je upravičen, Tamarin protest ostane brez odgovora in uteleša tišino neuspešnega kraljestva. V nasprotju s tem Jezus v Jn 8 postane zagovornik ženske in ji vrne dostenjanstvo z usmiljenjem namesno obsodbo. Članek, ki črpa iz feminističnih, narativno-kritičnih in travmatsko-hermenevtičnih pristopov, trdi, da je Tamara več kot le tragična žrtev. Pojavi se kot svetilnik modrosti sredi propadajočega doma in kot preroška priča v zgodbi Izraela. Njen spomin priča, da Bog sliši utišane in da lahko žalovanje postane seme resnice, dostenjanstva in upanja.

Ključne besede: Tamar, 2 Sam 13, Davidova monarhija, spolno nasilje, žalovanje, preroška priča, intertekstualnost

1. Introduction

Biblical narratives mirror the human condition by showing how stories marked by tragedy, trauma, and sin can be woven into the broader tapestry of life and faith.¹ When acknowledged and mourned, painful experiences are no longer ignored or trivialized by shallow gestures of forgiveness. Instead, they become integrated into a larger story, opening a path toward new meaning and hope. Likewise, biblical accounts reveal their full significance not in isolation but within the larger scriptural narrative. This is especially true of those texts that grapple with violence, destruction, and sin. Such traumatic episodes are not omitted but deliberately included, exposing their corrosive effects while also creating space for deeper understanding and the possibility of redemption.

The story of Tamar's rape (2 Sam 13:1-22) stands as one of the most harrowing of these narratives. It is a trauma that scars not only the Davidic household but also reverberates through the biblical canon. Feminist scholarship has rightly highlighted the marginalization of women within patriarchal structures (Muneja Musa 2006; Van der Walt 2012; Kalmanofsky 2017), while literary approaches (Higgins 2020) have drawn attention to the rhetorical and narrative artistry of the text. Psychological readings, such as those of Claassens (2016), discern within

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Tamar's trauma the fragile beginnings of recovery. Yet the broader theological and literary context of this episode – and its far-reaching consequences within the story of Israel – remains underexplored. Too often Tamar's tragedy has been treated as an isolated incident rather than as a pivotal turning point that exposes how unchecked violence and enforced silence unravel the health of the community.

This article proposes a narrative reading of Tamar's story within its wider canonical frame. First, it situates the episode within the unfolding arc of the Davidic narrative. It then analyzes Tamar's characterization and the progression of the plot, arguing that Tamar, against all odds, emerges as a beacon of wisdom within a disintegrating royal household. Her voice, resistance, and lament stand in stark contrast to the silence, complicity, and destructive rivalries of the men around her. While the royal line spirals into fragmentation, Tamar's apparent desolation paradoxically becomes a sign of hope – symbolically echoed in the naming of a new Tamar in the next generation (2 Sam 14:27). Ultimately, her story resonates with other biblical women, such as Queen Esther (Esth 4:17, Gk.), whose redemptive trajectory finds fulfillment in Jesus, who upholds rather than condemns human dignity (John 8:1-10). In this way, Tamar's narrative reveals the creative force within Scripture that empowers women to assert their dignity as envisioned by the God of life.

2. Narrative Analysis

2.1 Narrative Frame

The Tamar narrative opens with a familiar biblical formula introducing a new phase in the story: "After this" (2 Sam 13:1: *וְאַחֲרֵיכֶן*). Elsewhere this phrase marks decisive transitions in Israel's history (Gen 40:1; 48:1; Josh 1:1; Judg 1:1; 2 Sam 1:1). Here it functions both chronologically and theologically, linking what follows to the preceding episodes – David's grievous sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 11–12) and the conclusion of the Ammonite war at Rabbah (2 Sam 12:26-31). Just as the earlier chapters resolve one dramatic tension, this new section initiates another: the slow but irreversible disintegration of David's royal household.

The events of 2 Samuel 13 inaugurate a tragic chain that culminates in Absalom's death (2 Sam 18:32) and David's sorrowful return to a fractured Jerusalem (2 Sam 19:16). In literary and theological perspective, this segment enacts the fulfillment of Nathan's prophetic judgment after David's sin (2 Sam 12:10-11). The story of Tamar is thus not a digression but the first visible fracture in David's house, a rupture born not of external enemies but of internal corruption and moral failure. It sets the stage for the collapse of family cohesion, kingship, and covenantal integrity within the Davidic line.

Already the opening phrase hints at David's decline in both moral and political stature. Once the heroic warrior-king, he is now portrayed as passive and wit-

drawn. He stays in Jerusalem rather than leading his troops (2 Sam 13:1) and must be urged by Joab to take the field at Rabbah (2 Sam 12:26-28). Spiritually, he is marked by repentance and discipline: he fasts for his dying child (2 Sam 12:16) and names his next son Jedidiah, “beloved of the Lord” (2 Sam 12:25), in obedience to Nathan’s command. Yet this flicker of renewal is soon eclipsed by dysfunction. His weakness as both father and king becomes painfully evident in Absalom’s rebellion. In a tragically ironic gesture, David leaves behind ten concubines to “guard” the palace (2 Sam 15:16) – a decision that leads to their public violation by Absalom on the rooftop (2 Sam 16:21-23), carrying out Ahithophel’s counsel. David’s private moral failure thus erupts into public scandal, with devastating political consequences. Absalom’s coup nearly succeeds, but is thwarted only by the loyalty of ordinary citizens, such as the couple at Bahurim who conceal David’s messengers in a well (2 Sam 17:21ff.), a fleeting glimmer of providence amid the unraveling. Yet David’s emotional turmoil persists: his lament for Absalom blinds him to the devotion of his troops, and Joab must rebuke him sharply (2 Sam 19:6), accusing the king of loving his enemies while despising his friends. His grief, though deeply human, underscores his impaired judgment and faltering leadership.

This disorientation recalls the earlier scene of David’s anointing, when the Lord rejected Saul’s outward appearance in favor of the heart (1 Sam 16:7). True kingship required discernment – but David himself now falters in that very gift. His blindness toward his children, his advisors, and his moral responsibilities undermines the coherence of his rule. Within this framework, the Tamar narrative is no isolated scandal. It is the first public sign of dynastic collapse. Her violation exposes the fragility of David’s justice, his disordered household, and the erosion of divine blessing. As Anderson (1989, 177) observes, the story must be read within the larger trajectory of the disintegration of David’s house – a process unleashed by the king’s own transgressions.

2.2 Narrative Plot

2.2.1 Presentation

Within this narrative frame we first encounter Tamar, introduced as the beautiful sister of Absalom (2 Sam 13:1: תְּהִתָּ יִפְחָה). Her characterization is presented not independently but in relation to her two brothers, placing her at the center of a chiastic structure. Absalom, the key figure in the broader narrative sequence, is described as having a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar. This initial description of both Absalom and Tamar is expressed in *X-qatal*. Later in the narrative, Absalom will avenge Tamar by orchestrating Amnon’s death (2 Sam 13:32) and will pursue the throne in a bid for his own greatness – even at the cost of his life (2 Sam 18:15, 18). While here he is introduced in relation to Tamar’s beauty, his own depiction as handsome and without blemish is delayed until 2 Sam 14:25: “no one as handsome as Absalom /.../ there was no blemish in him (לֹא־הָיָה בָּו מָם /.../ אִישׁ יִפְחָה).” This description is further linked to his daughter in 2

Sam 14:27, who is also presented as a beautiful woman (אֲשֶׁר יִפְתַּח-מִרְאָה). Beauty, however, as the narrative will demonstrate, may prove empty when it is not accompanied by wisdom.

The opening presentation of Absalom and Tamar is framed in *X-qatal*, whereas the conflict – introduced through Amnon’s passion for Tamar – is narrated with *wayyiqtol*.

Chiasm in 2 Sam 13:1		
A: David’s son Absalom	וְלֹא בָּשָׁלֹם בְּקַרְבָּן	<i>X-qatal</i>
B: Sister Tamar	אַחֲתָה יְפָה וְשָׁמֶן מְפָרָה	
A': David’s son Amnon	וַיַּאֲהַבָּה אָמִנּוֹן בְּקַרְבָּן	<i>Wayyiqtol</i>

Moreover, the outer elements (A – A'), both marked by the formula “son of David” (בָּנָיו דָּוִיד), frame Tamar as the central figure: Absalom’s beautiful sister (אַחֲתָה יְפָה). The chiastic structure thereby highlights Tamar as the focus of the episode. This centrality is reinforced by the repeated use of her name throughout the passage (2 Sam 13:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 19, 20, 22). The name Tamar – evoking the flourishing beauty of the palm tree – becomes tragically endangered through the violence she endures. Yet her integrity is symbolically restored when Absalom later names his daughter Tamar (2 Sam 14:27). The recurrence of Tamar’s name both before and after her trauma underscores her symbolic importance. Although her voice is silenced within the narrative, her presence persists through literary repetition, through her brother’s vengeance, and through the enduring legacy of her name. Still, the text warns against equating beauty with agency or wisdom. For Tamar, beauty does not protect her from violation; for Absalom, beauty does not prevent his eventual downfall. The narrative thus destabilizes the idealization of appearance and turns the reader’s attention toward the deeper values of integrity and discernment.

2.2.2 Complication: Preparation and Execution of an Incest

The narrative *wayyiqtol* sets the action in motion, introducing the complication within the plot: David’s firstborn son, Amnon (2 Sam 13:1), falls in love with Tamar (2 Sam 13:1c: וַיַּאֲהַבָּהּ). His so-called love is described in depth: he becomes obsessed to the point of illness (2 Sam 13:2: וַיִּצְרַת / ... / לְתַחְלֹתָהּ), for she was a virgin (בָּתָה). Thus, “he could not do anything to her” (2 Sam 13:2: וְאַנְגַּתְהָ). Into this agitated context steps Amnon’s companion Jonadab, introduced with deliberate precision as both “a very shrewd man” and David’s nephew, the son of Shimeah, David’s brother – an identification that already signals intrigue and deception.

2 Sam 13:1	וְלֹא בָּשָׁלוּם קָרְעִינָה אֲחוֹת יְהָה וְשָׁמַר	Absalom the <i>son of David</i> had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar	<i>X-qatal</i>
2 Sam 13:3	וְלֹא בָּנָן רֹעֵה וְשָׁמַר יוֹנָב אִישׁ בָּרְשָׁמָה אֶת־לְבָב קָלֵם מָאֵז	But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab the son of Shimeah, <i>David's brother</i> ; and Jonadab was a very shrewd man.	<i>X-qatal</i>

Jonadab questions Amnon, who confesses that he is in love with Tamar. Yet already the narrator exposes a distortion: Amnon does not identify Tamar as his own sister but repeats the narrator's earlier phrasing, calling her "the sister of his brother Absalom" (2 Sam 13:4: אֲחוֹת אֶבְשָׁלוּם אֲחֵי תָּמָר). This subtle shift reframes Tamar's identity – not as his sister but as a possession linked to another male. Such a deflection signals both psychological and narrative distancing, as if Amnon has begun to objectify Tamar while casting her in the light of rivalry. This nuance is pivotal for understanding the dynamics of desire, possession, and the unravelling of familial bonds that drive the story forward.

Jonadab's advice consists of imperatives: "Lie down, pretend to be ill." (v. 5) He thus scripts not only Amnon's feigned sickness but also Amnon's request that Tamar, "my sister" (תָּמָר אֲחוֹתִי), come to prepare food. At first glance he seems a helpful confidant; yet the narrative unmasks him as a facilitator of evil. His cleverness becomes the tool of Amnon's scheme and, by extension, part of the broader disintegration of David's household. What seems like a private plot is in fact a decisive step in the royal family's collapse.

A telling symbol reinforces this undercurrent: the preparation of a special meal (2 Sam 13:5: תְּבִרְנִי לְתָמָם / ... / תְּבִרְנִיה / ...). The rare expression recalls David's earlier refusal to eat following Abner's death (2 Sam 3:35: לְהַבְּרוֹת אֶת־זָרוּחַ לְתָמָם). In both cases, "food" becomes charged with moral and political tension – either in grief over betrayal or in the manipulation leading to Tamar's violation. This intertextual echo ties Amnon's scheme to the wider narrative of decline and dysfunction in David's reign.

Amnon executes Jonadab's plan to the letter. The story moves into a seamless *wayyiqtol* chain (2 Sam 13:6: וַיַּשְׁכַּב / ... / וַיִּתְחַלֵּל / ... / וַיֹּאמֶר / ...), emphasizing the linear progression of his deception. Beneath this apparent fidelity to Jonadab's script lies manipulation: Amnon appeals to intimacy by calling Tamar "my sister" (תָּמָר אֲחוֹתִי, v. 6), while subtly shifting the request from the general special food (הַבְּרִיה) to the more emotionally charged heart-cakes (לְבָבּוֹת / ... / וְתַלְבֵבָב). The wordplay on *לְבָב* (heart) adds layers of affect, appealing simultaneously to emotion and to Tamar's role as caretaker.

David, unsuspecting, complies: "Go now to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare food for him." (2 Sam 13:7) Amnon is then described in a descriptive and static *X-qatal*: "he was lying down" (הָהָה שָׁכַב, v. 8) – a posture of feigned weakness. In contrast, Tamar is depicted in vivid, dynamic motion: "she went to her brother Amnon's house, took the dough, kneaded it, made the cakes before his eyes, and baked the cakes." (2 Sam 13:8: וַיָּתַבְבֵשׁ / ... / אֶת־הַבְּצָק וְתַלְבֵשׁ / ... / וְמַלְךָ / ... / שֶׁל אֶת־הַלְּבָבּוֹת וְתַלְבֵבָב) The energy of her actions highlights both her obedience and

her agency, even as it draws her deeper into Amnon's carefully prepared trap.

The narrative flows into verse 9 with a sequence of *wayyiqtol* verbs, highlighting Tamar's precision and attentiveness: "She took the pan and dished them before him." Her actions embody obedience and care, as she carries out her father's instructions with deliberate concern. Yet despite her careful service, Amnon refuses to eat: "But he refused to eat." (2 Sam 13:9: *וְנִתְעַזֵּן לֹא־כָּלַל*) The verb *וְנִתְעַזֵּן*, constructed with *waw-consecutive in the piel*, conveys strong volitional force – an emphatic refusal, not born of appetite but of calculated intent. In biblical usage, this form often denotes firm resistance (Gen 39:8; Zech 7:11), and here it interrupts the ritualized flow of the domestic scene. What appeared as weakness and dependence is suddenly unmasked as strategic manipulation. With this refusal, Amnon seizes control, shifting the narrative from ordinary domestic intimacy into predatory isolation. He first dismisses the servants (2 Sam 13:9), then requests that Tamar bring the dish into his chamber so that he may eat from her hand (2 Sam 13:10). The verbal nuance is significant. In 2 Sam 13:10 the *hiphil imperative* ("bring") combined with the *volitive wayyiqtol* ("so that I may eat") does not strike the tone of a command. Instead, it simulates weakness and dependence. This is a rhetorical tactic: Amnon weaponizes the language of vulnerability to lure Tamar into deeper intimacy, seducing her into a false sense of safety and familial trust. Thus verse 10 functions as the turning point, shifting the scene from apparent domestic care to the threshold of betrayal.

As Tamar approaches to feed him (2 Sam 13:11: *וְתַגְשֵׁשׁ אֲלֵיכֶם לְאַכְלָל*), the pretense collapses. Amnon's true intent emerges in a rapid succession of *wayyiqtol* verbs: "He seized her" (*וַיִּתְצַקֵּךְ*), "and he said to her" (*וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ*), commanding: "Come, lie with me, my sister" (*בָּאִי שְׁכַבֵּי עַמִּי אֲחֹתִי*). The address "my sister" (*אֲחֹתִי*), invoked at the very moment of domination, intensifies the perversion. Amnon appropriates kinship language not to affirm familial bond but to mask coercion and amplify betrayal. In doing so, he desecrates trust, defiles the sanctity of family, and corrupts even its most intimate relational terms.

Tamar resists by turning to the only power still available to her: words. Unable to overpower Amnon physically, she launches a forceful and composed verbal protest, articulated in two escalating waves and culminating in a last-resort appeal for intervention. Although her resistance does not ultimately prevent the assault, it remains a crucial act of agency. Through her speech Tamar confronts the impending violence by appealing to (1) moral standards, (2) personal and social consequences, and (3) possible, if desperate, alternatives.

First, she appeals to moral and communal reason, framing her resistance through a crescendo of negations. Her protest begins in the sphere of intimate relationship: "No, my brother" (2 Sam 13:12: *אֲלֹא-אָחִי*), and quickly expands to a broader ethical and societal realm: "Such a thing is not done in Israel." (2 Sam 13:12: *לֹא-כְּשָׁהָ פָּנָן בִּשְׂרָאֵל*) She anchors her plea in *jussive imperatives*, invoking sacred language: "Do not humiliate me" (2 Sam 13:12: *אֲלֹא-תַעֲנִנִּי*), "Do not commit this foolishness" (2 Sam 13:12: *אֲלֹא-תַעֲשֵׂה אֲתִיהָגְבַּלְתָּה* *הַזֹּאת*). Higgins (2020, 28) insightfully ob-

serves that the emotional depth of Tamar's speech is conveyed not only by its grammar but also by its sound. The disrupted syntax – a negation without an explicit verb – and the repetition of alephs (א) (.../ אל-תִּתְעַנְּנִי / אל-אַחִי) resonate with Amnon's earlier, disingenuous declaration of desire (2 Sam 13:4: אַחֲתָה אֲבִשְׁלָׁם אַחִי). Tamar, however, unmasks this so-called “love” for what it truly is: a violent and corrupt urge cloaked in kinship.

Second, Tamar appeals to the consequences of the act – not only for herself, but also for Amnon. On the one hand, she points to her own impending shame, using the word *תְּרִפה*, which denotes disgrace, reproach, or public dishonor. This term extends beyond private humiliation to signify the loss of social dignity, especially for a woman subjected to sexual violation. Tamar fears exclusion from communal memory, honor, and restoration – precisely the disgrace that Isa 54:4 envisions God removing. On the other hand, she warns Amnon that such an act will render him “as one of the fools in Israel” (2 Sam 13:13: וְאַתָּה תְּהִי כַּאֲחֵד הַנְּבָלִים בִּשְׁעָרָה). The term *נְבָל* (fool) carries weighty biblical connotations, evoking moral collapse and covenantal breach, as in 1 Sam 25, where Nabal's folly leads to his ruin. Here, Tamar deploys it as both social and theological indictment: Amnon's contemplated act is not merely immoral but self-destructive and shameful within the covenant community.

Finally, Tamar proposes a last-ditch alternative aimed not at consent but at survival. With the transitional phrase “And now” (2 Sam 13:13: וְעַתָּה), she suggests appealing to their father, the king: “Speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.” (2 Sam 13:13: קְבָרָנָא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי לֹא יִקְנְעַנִּי מִמְּלֹאת כְּלֹתָךְ) This rhetorical move strategically invokes royal authority and lineage, positioning David as a potential arbiter. As Higgins (2020, 29–30) explains, the structure reframes the situation with the king as the gatekeeper of legitimacy. Tamar's words should not be read as acquiescence or compliance, but as a calculated attempt to delay the assault and to appeal to the last vestige of order within a collapsing moral framework. The narrator, however, leaves no ambiguity regarding Amnon's response. He is deaf to her voice, expressed with the *qatal* form (2 Sam 13:14: וְלֹא אָבַה). The ensuing *wayyiqtol* sequence portrays the assault with stark brevity: “But he was stronger than she, he overpowered her, humiliated her, and lay with her.” (2 Sam 13:14: וַיַּחַזֵּק מִפְנֵה וַיַּעֲבֹד וַיַּשְׁכַּב אֹתָהּ)

Tamar's resistance, though unable to prevent the act, remains profoundly significant. In her words we hear the voice of truth, dignity, and prophetic protest – a voice that names evil, confronts injustice, and refuses complicity in her own dehumanization. Her speech becomes the first step in reclaiming agency, even within a narrative that offers her no justice.

2.2.3 Consequence

Following the act of coercive sexual violence, Amnon is immediately overtaken by sudden and overwhelming hatred. The narrator records this emotional reversal with emphatic intensity in the *wayyiqtol* form: “Then Amnon hated her with

a very great hatred.” (2 Sam 13:15: וַיְשִׁנְאָה אָמִנוֹן שָׂנָאָה גָּדוֹלָה) The contrast is further accentuated through a striking comparison: “For the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.” (2 Sam 13:15: פִּירָדוֹלָה שָׂנָאָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂנָאָה מְאֵבֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶחָבָה) As Massimo Gargiulo (2016, 353) aptly observes, “the sick love, once satisfied, immediately turns into hatred and repudiation.” The juxtaposition of love and hatred not only highlights the volatility of Amnon’s passion but also exposes its perverse logic: what he once named as love is revealed to be nothing more than lust, violence, and shame. The narrator’s deliberate repetition of the roots שָׂנָאָה / אֶחָבָה (“hate”) and בְּדִין / אֶחָבָה (“love”) within the same verse functions as a rhetorical device, sharpening the contrast and underscoring the moral judgment on Amnon’s distorted desire. His cruelty escalates in the terse command that follows: “Get up and go” (2 Sam 13:15: קַעַל לְכָי), reducing Tamar from the object of his desire to a disposable burden.

Once again Tamar raises her voice in protest: “No – sending me away is a greater evil than the other that you did to me!” (2 Sam 13:16) With this cry, she exposes the layered nature of her trauma: not only has she been violated, but she is now cast out and discarded – stripped of dignity, safety, and voice. Yet the narrative repeats its tragic refrain, this time emphasizing Amnon’s indifference: “He was not willing to listen to her.” (2 Sam 13:16: לֹא אֶחָה לְשָׁמֹעַ לָהּ)

Amnon persists in asserting control. The narrator intensifies the humiliation through another *wayyiqtol* sequence: “And he said /.../ and he called.” (2 Sam 13:17: וַיֹּאמֶר /.../ וַיִּקְרָא) What follows is an imperative chain of expulsion: “Throw this woman out” and “Bolt the door after her” (2 Sam 13:17). These commands are notable in two ways. First, Amnon employs the plural imperative שְׁלַח-וּרְנָה (“throw out”), despite addressing a single servant – perhaps a rhetorical strategy of distancing, as if to evade direct responsibility. Second, he refers to Tamar only with the dehumanizing demonstrative אֵת (“this thing/ woman”), reducing her to an anonymous object, stripped even of her name and relation. This echoes Tamar’s own lament in the previous verse, where she names her rejection as “this greater evil” (2 Sam 13:16: הַרְעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת). The expulsion after the assault thus compounds the violence, intensifying her dishonor. By consigning Tamar to the hands of a servant, Amnon seeks to obscure his own culpability, hiding behind delegation and detachment. Yet in doing so, he fulfills the very judgment Tamar had spoken: he becomes the בָּל (“fool”), one who tramples both divine law and human dignity, and whose moral collapse leads inevitably to destruction. His final act of abuse is not merely physical but symbolic – a willful refusal to recognize Tamar as fully human.

Before the servant executes the order (2 Sam 13:18: וַיַּצֵּא אֶתְתָּה), the narrator briefly interrupts the violent scene with a poignant reminder of Tamar’s dignity: “She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, the garment of the king’s virgin daughters.” (2 Sam 13:18: כִּי כְּנָתְנָה בְּנָתָה הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְעַלְקָה פְּסִים) This descriptive *X-qatal* highlights the status she once carried and magnifies the disgrace of her expulsion. Stripped of protection and voice, Tamar nevertheless resists erasure by enacting a public ritual of mourning: she puts ashes on her head, tears her

robe, covers her head with her hands, and departs weeping aloud (2 Sam 13:19). These embodied gestures mark the rupture of her dignity and form a visible protest against injustice.

The narrative closes – as it began – with Absalom. His question is chillingly perceptive: he reads the signs and knows what has occurred without requiring Tamar’s reply. Yet instead of offering comfort or seeking justice, he imposes silence upon her: “Has Amnon, your brother, been with you? ... And now, be quiet, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this matter to heart.” (2 Sam 13:20) Tamar withdraws to Absalom’s house, where she remains – a desolate woman. This desolation is underscored linguistically by the explicative *X-qatal* “being desolate” (2 Sam 13:20: תִּשְׁבַּחַת) inserted into the *wayyiqtol sequence*: “and Tamar went /.../ in her brother Absalom’s house.” (2 Sam 13:20: וַיֵּשֶׁב תִּשְׁבַּחַת אֶת־בָּשָׁלוֹם אֶת־הַרְחָקָה /.../ The verb שְׁבַחַת (“to desolate”), elsewhere used of ruined land (Isa 49:8; Jer 12:11) or a forsaken woman (Isa 54:1), conveys both social marginalization and profound personal devastation. As David Toshio Tsumura (2019, 210) aptly notes: “Tamar lives as one who has been rejected by her husband.”

Yet Tamar’s desolation is not reducible to private grief or hopeless despair; it becomes a lasting testimony to the violence inflicted upon her and to the sin others choose to disregard. While her brothers-driven respectively by lust, pride, and revenge – pursue destructive paths, Tamar neither retaliates nor suppresses her pain. Instead, she embodies her trauma through ritualized lament: she rends her garment, scatters ashes upon her head, and cries aloud in public grief. In this way, she resists the temptation to interpret her suffering through denial or vengeance, and instead articulates it truthfully before God and community. Her mourning resonates with Israel’s wider tradition of lament, where grief becomes a vehicle of truth-telling and resistance – for example, Jeremiah’s weeping over the desolation of his people (Jer 9:1, 17-18) or the psalmist’s cries in Psalms of lament (Ps 6; Ps 22). Her retreat into Absalom’s house may outwardly suggest isolation, yet it also reveals her refusal to allow the violation to define her through bitterness or hatred. She remains desolate, but her desolation is marked by wisdom and integrity: a deliberate posture by which she entrusts her brokenness to the Lord. In this light, Tamar endures as one grievously wronged yet not silenced – her very desolation functioning as a prophetic witness to a deeper moral reality her brothers could not perceive.

2.3 Characterization

2.3.1 Amnon

Although Amnon is David’s firstborn (2 Sam 3:2), he is introduced in 2 Sam 13 only after Tamar and Absalom (v. 1), a subtle literary cue that foreshadows his marginalization. His characterization is defined by immaturity, entitlement, and moral failure. Lacking emotional depth and unable to establish healthy relational boundaries, Amnon succumbs to obsessive desire and self-pity, which gradually lead to physical and emotional deterioration (2 Sam 13:2). Instead of honoring Tamar’s

virginity with fraternal care, he is consumed by lust. From a socio-anthropological perspective, his immaturity is reinforced by his privileged status as firstborn and presumed heir in a patriarchal monarchy – conditions that foster a sense of entitlement to satisfy his desires without restraint. As Musa Muneja (2006, 84) observes, Amnon lacks the maturity to pursue Tamar's affection in any meaningful way, and his obsession overwhelms him. In the words of Eryl Davies (2021, 140), Tamar is to him “no more than a sex object that could be cast aside once his sexual appetite had been satisfied.”

Amnon confides only in Jonadab, his shrewd and morally bankrupt cousin, who shows no concern for Amnon's integrity or the wellbeing of the royal household. Jonadab devises the deceptive plan that enables Tamar's abuse. Though absent from the immediate aftermath, he reemerges later, coldly informing David that only Amnon has been killed – an outcome he presents as expected following Tamar's violation (2 Sam 13:32). This detachment underscores his callousness. The episode recalls Jezebel's manipulation in securing Naboth's vineyard for King Ahab (1 Kgs 21), highlighting a recurring theme of royal desire, manipulation, and moral corruption.

Amnon also manipulates his father with striking irony, referring to Tamar as “my sister” even as he plots her deception. His dishonesty extends to self-deception, blinding him to the moral gravity of his intentions. Once alone with Tamar, his unchecked desire overwhelms him. Fully aware of the wrongness of his plan (2 Sam 13:6-9a), he nevertheless dismisses the attendants and attempts to seduce her (vv. 9b-11). When Tamar resists, he refuses to heed her words, rapes her, and then – compounding the violence – expels her with contempt (vv. 14-17). In so doing, he not only objectifies her but also attempts to distance himself from his guilt. Yet this dissociation only confirms his role as the biblical *nabal* – the “fool” of Ps 14:1 – who denies God in his heart and commits vile deeds as though divine justice did not exist. Amnon thus embodies the archetypal fool who acts with impunity yet unwittingly invites his own destruction. The dramatic reversal from love to hatred (2 Sam 13:15) stands in deliberate tension with Gen 39. When confronted with Potiphar's wife, Joseph embodies covenantal integrity by refusing (גַּם) her advances (Gen 39:8), thereby aligning himself with God's will. Amnon, by contrast, perverts this tradition: rather than resist lust, he indulges it; rather than preserve dignity, he destroys it. The linguistic echo between Joseph's righteous (גַּם) and Amnon's manipulative (2 Sam 13:9) accentuates this divergence. Joseph's refusal safeguards holiness, whereas Amnon's refusal initiates predation. By turning love into hatred and desecrating kinship bonds, Amnon deserts the biblical model of fidelity and becomes a paradigmatic example of how unchecked desire corrupts both self and community.

From this perspective, Tamar becomes Amnon's scapegoat in his pursuit of status, as Muneja (2006, 84) suggests – yet at a devastating cost. Later, at Absalom's invitation, Amnon attends a feast, and once intoxicated becomes an easy target for his brother's vengeance (2 Sam 13:27-29). He speaks little, acts rashly, and is ultimately undone by the same impulsiveness and self-deception that defined his earlier crime.

2.3.2 Absalom and David

Absalom is portrayed as a figure of heavy silence and boiling rage. After the violation of Tamar, he addresses her as “my sister” (תְּתִיָּה) but simultaneously refers to Amnon as “your brother” (אָחִיךָ), thus distancing himself from both siblings (2 Sam 13:20). His resolution, signaled through recurring expressions such as “and now” (2 Sam 13:21: הַזָּהָר), “this” (2 Sam 13:12, 16, 17 [הַזָּהָר] 20 [אַתָּה]) and “heart” (2 Sam 13:6, 8, 10 [20] לְבָבְךָ אַתָּה), alludes to the abuse incident, though not necessarily so critically as Higgins (2020, 32–33) does. Absalom enforces Tamar’s silence not necessarily to shame her but under the guise of protection. Yet beneath this lies his deep hatred for Amnon (2 Sam 13:22), which culminates in murder (2 Sam 13:28–29), escalates into open rebellion against David (2 Sam 15:12), and ends with Absalom’s own violent death (2 Sam 18:9). His response to injustice is thus not reformative but retaliatory, perpetuating cycles of bloodshed that fracture David’s household and destabilize the kingdom.

David, by contrast, is depicted as passive and morally compromised. The episode belongs to the larger Davidic narrative cycle, where the consequences of David’s earlier sins – especially his abuse of power in the Bathsheba–Uriah affair (2 Sam 11–12) – unfold within his own house. Although angered by Amnon’s crime (2 Sam 13:21: וְיִרְאֶה לֹא מְאָדָם), David does nothing. As both king and father, he fails to uphold justice or protect his daughter. Notably, Tamar is never explicitly identified as David’s daughter in the narrative, perhaps foreshadowing his abdication of responsibility. His passivity constitutes a breach of Torah, for incest is explicitly condemned in Lev 20:17, and the king is bound to uphold covenantal law. David’s refusal to confront evil within his family creates a vacuum of leadership, soon filled by Absalom’s distorted justice of vengeance. The narrator further underscores this failure when Absalom publicly violates David’s concubines (2 Sam 16:22), a deed that mirrors David’s own earlier sin and fulfills Nathan’s judgment (2 Sam 12:11–12).

From a Deuteronomistic perspective, this episode constitutes a pointed critique of monarchy. As Peters (2021, 309–319) has argued, the narrative deliberately aligns David and Jonadab as figures who represent the erosion of royal authority and wisdom, in contrast to Amnon’s destructive agency. Their silence and complicity reveal that the king, who should have embodied covenantal justice, is no longer capable of exercising authority even within his own household. In this way, the events of 2 Sam 13 realize Nathan’s oracle (2 Sam 12:10–12), which predicted calamity arising from within David’s house, and confirm the Deuteronomistic conviction that kingship – far from safeguarding justice – inevitably leads to exploitation and disorder (1 Sam 8:10–18). As Westbrook (2016, 148–154) emphasizes, the rape of the king’s own daughter within the royal household underscores the collapse of the monarchy’s most basic responsibility: the protection of its people. Absalom’s subsequent rebellion is thus not only an act of filial vengeance but an ironic parody of kingship itself, exploiting the very vacuum of justice created by David’s failure.

The narrative also recalls Gen 34. Just as Jacob remained silent after Dinah's violation and sought resolution by offering her to Shechem, so too David fails to act for Tamar. In both cases, paternal silence provokes violent retaliation by the sons – Simeon and Levi in Dinah's case, Absalom in Tamar's. These parallels expose the destructive logic of patriarchal passivity, where misplaced priorities leave the vulnerable unprotected. David's moral failure thus not only unravels his household but foreshadows the decline of his dynasty.

2.3.3 Tamar

Tamar – whose name means “palm tree” – evokes a biblical symbol of beauty, fruitfulness, and dignity. The palm, associated with blessing and wisdom (Ps 1:3), stands tall and resilient. Yet in Tamar's story this noble symbolism is bitterly ironic: her dignity is shattered by sexual violence, leaving her humiliated and isolated. Still, the narrative presents Tamar as a woman of remarkable strength and moral clarity. Unlike Dinah in Gen 34, whose voice is absent, Tamar speaks with composure and wisdom (Trible 1984, 45). Her protest and subsequent lament reveal integrity that unmasks evil and refuses collusion with silence.

Naively yet obediently, Tamar follows her father's command to tend to Amnon, unaware of his true intentions. When confronted with danger, her resistance emerges through what Claassens (2016a, 182–91; 2016b, 40–43), drawing on Judith Herman (2015), identifies as four crucial elements of trauma response that preserve dignity:

- a. Firm Refusal. Tamar categorically says “no,” appealing to covenantal law: “Do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing.” (2 Sam 13:12) As Higgins (2020, 28) notes, her refusal is grounded in both Torah (Lev 18:9; 20:17) and communal ethics.
- b. Appeal to Reason. She warns Amnon that he will become as a – נָבָל – a “fool,” recalling Nabal's downfall (1 Sam 25). The term consistently signifies moral disgrace and covenantal collapse (Gen 34:7; Judg 19:23).
- c. Desperate Attempt at Legal Protection. As a last resort she appeals to royal authority: “Speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.” (2 Sam 13:13) Far from compliance, this is a survival strategy invoking Mosaic precedent (Deut 22:28-29) and patriarchal examples such as Abraham and Sarah (Gen 20:12).
- d. Post-Assault Protest and Lament. Even after being overpowered, Tamar protests expulsion as a “greater evil” (2 Sam 13:16). Refusing silence, she embodies truth against Amnon's rejection, exposing him as the very נָבָל she had named.

Tamar's lament is not resignation but prophetic protest (2 Sam 13:19). She scatters ashes upon her head (אֶפְרַת עַל־רָאשָׁה), rends her special “ornate robe” *ketonet passim* (בְּלֵבֶת הַפְּפִים), lays her hand upon her head (עַל־רָאשָׁה יְדָה), and departs crying aloud in bitter grief (וְתַלְךָ הַלּוֹךְ וְזַעֲקָה). These ritual gestures recall Job's mourning

(Job 2:12-13) and Israel's communal lament in exile (Esth 4:3). As Gargiulo (2016, 353) notes, such mourning expresses both protest and acknowledgment of an irreversible rupture. Yet Tamar's lament differs from Israel's collective cries: it is solitary, seemingly unanswered, yet implicitly lifted toward the Lord (2 Sam 15:11). Claassens (2016b, 44) interprets this act as prophetic lament akin to the psalms – a refusal to internalize trauma and an insistence on naming pain truthfully before God.

The symbolism of her torn ketonet passim deepens the tragedy but also gestures toward hope, entrusting injustice to God. The “ornate robe” (*ketonet passim*, 2 Sam 13:18: כהנְתַת פְּסִים), further described as a *me'il* (מעיל), designated the distinctive dress of the king's virgin daughters. In Scripture, such robe (*ketonet*, כהנְתַת) can signify divine protection (Gen 3:21), priestly vocation (Exod 28:4), or royal dignity (Song 5:3), and, and – like Joseph's garment – the status of a beloved child vulnerable to betrayal (Gen 37:23). Likewise, the *me'il* is associated with priestly vestments (Exod 28:4) and prophetic office (1 Sam 2:19), yet it too can be torn as a sign of judgment (1 Sam 15:27). Bledstein (2000, 70–74) therefore suggests that Tamar may have held cultic or priestly responsibilities – whether literal or symbolic – violently cut short by her assault. Yet the torn garments of Joseph and Samuel both foreshadow how unjust suffering can paradoxically serve the preservation of Israel's life. Tamar's torn robe, in this light, becomes not only a symbol of devastation but also a prophetic sign pointing beyond injustice to God's redemptive purposes.

Her final state is described as פְּשָׁלֵל (“desolate,” 2 Sam 13:20), a term elsewhere applied to ruined cities under divine judgment (Lam 1:1; Isa 47:1-2). Tamar thus becomes a living embodiment of devastation, her dignity and future laid waste (Isa 54:1, 3). Yet, as Claassens (2016a) observes, desolation can also mark the beginning of recovery, resonating with Judith Herman's therapeutic stages of trauma healing: establishing safety, naming the harm, and opening a path toward reintegration. In contrast to David's silence and Absalom's revenge, Tamar embodies truth-telling grief that gestures – however faintly – toward renewed life.

The endurance of her memory reinforces this. Absalom later names his daughter Tamar (2 Sam 14:27). Trible (1984, 55) and Claassens (2016a, 190) interpret this as an act of remembrance and dignity, while Higgins (2020, 35) cautions that it may reflect unresolved trauma, her name echoing pain rather than healing. Either way, the persistence of her name ensures that Tamar's suffering is not erased but becomes a national wound, exposing the complicity of the royal household. At the same time, Tamar remains a sign of hope. For Bledstein (2000, 82), she represents the sanctity of suffering entrusted to God. Brouer (2014, 12) identifies her as a bearer of wisdom and enduring moral authority. Meir (2020, 12), comparing 2 Samuel 13 with The Words of Gad the Seer, concludes that “any man who tries to rape a woman does so upon peril of death, if not by biblical law, then by inevitable repercussions” – a judgment that underlines Tamar's prophetic role. Read through the lens of trauma recovery, Edith Eger (2017) emphasizes that Tamar, though victimized, refuses to remain only a victim; through mourning she

transforms desolation into dignity.

Tamar's story, though devoid of vindication, endures as testimony. Through her suffering and refusal to vanish, she joins the company of biblical women whose lives became embodied prayers for justice. Her legacy is not sealed in silence but points prophetically toward a reordered world of truth, healing, and divine judgment. As Van der Walt (2012, 203) notes, Tamar's story continues to open a space of hope for women who share her pain.

3. Women Figures

3.1 Echoes of Tamar

The biblical tradition frequently portrays women as vulnerable figures—victims of violence, silenced within patriarchal systems, and used as pawns in broader social, political, or military struggles. Their bodies often become symbolic markers of conquest and control. Even King David is implicated in this dynamic: he claims women as war spoils (1 Sam 30:1-2, 18-20), and later abandons his concubines in Jerusalem, leaving them exposed to Absalom as a visible token of his political defeat (2 Sam 15:16).

Tamar, David's daughter, belongs to this long line of women whose suffering reveals the brutal workings of patriarchal power. Her story resonates with figures such as Dinah (Gen 34), Tamar the daughter-in-law of Judah (Gen 38), and Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 3). Each must navigate gendered structures of vulnerability and find ways to preserve dignity and identity. Their narratives capture the recurring biblical tension between victimhood and agency, between suffering and resistance. Strikingly, several of these women reappear in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17), suggesting that the story of salvation is profoundly marked by female resilience amid afflictions.

3.1.1 Tamar and Esther

While the theological and intertextual richness of Esther's story has been widely studied (Efthimiadis-Keith 2022), its literary and thematic parallels with Tamar remain largely unexplored. The contexts differ: Tamar suffers personal violation at the hands of her half-brother (2 Sam 13), while Esther faces the genocidal threat against her people (Esth 3:6). Yet both women inhabit the intersection of personal suffering and public injustice, and in both cases lament becomes a means of protest.

Esther, an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai, is thrust into the royal court and compelled to intercede for her people (Esth 4:13-17). Her personal identity becomes inseparable from the destiny of the Jewish nation. Like Tamar, she enacts her anguish through ritual gestures of mourning that carry profound theological significance. These gestures – (1) ashes, (2) torn garments, (3) gestures of

shame, and (4) the cry – function not as cultural conventions alone but as enacted protests, transforming lament into a form of agency.

1. **Ashes.** Tamar scatters ashes upon her head following her assault (2 Sam 13:19: **אָפָר עַל-פְּתַח-מִמְרָה** [LXX: ἔλαβεν Θημαρ σποδὸν καὶ ἐπέθηκεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς]), a sign of desolation and social death. Esther likewise rejects royal perfumes and covers herself with ashes and dung (σποδὸς καὶ κοπρία, Gk Esth 4:17:11), renouncing privilege to identify with her endangered people. In both cases, ashes serve as visible denunciations of injustice and theological indictments of systemic failure.
2. **Torn Garments.** Tamar tears her richly ornamented *ketonet passim* (כְּתַנְתִּית פְּסִים), a symbol of her virginity and royal identity (2 Sam 13:19: **וּכְתַנְתִּית הַפְּסִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-לִבָּה** [LXX: τὸν χιτῶνα τὸν καρπωτὸν τὸν ἐπ’ αὐτῆς διέρρηξεν]). Esther removes her splendid attire and puts on garments of distress and mourning (ἱμάτια στενοχωρίας καὶ πένθους, Gk Esth 4:17:11). By rejecting external tokens of beauty and status, both women dramatize the rupture of their worlds and protest the broken order.
3. **Gestures of Shame.** Tamar places her hand upon her head (2 Sam 13:19: **מִשְׁׁתַּחַת אָשָׁשָׁה** [LXX: ἐπέθηκεν τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῆς ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς]), a traditional gesture of grief and humiliation, signifying her devastation and helplessness. Esther casts herself down, humbling her body and scattering the torn locks of her hair throughout the palace (καὶ πάντα τόπον κόσμου ἀγαλλιάματος αὐτῆς ἐπλησε στρεπτῶν τριχῶν αὐτῆς, Gk Esth 4:17:11), undoing the very appearance that once secured her favor. These embodied acts reveal the inner fracture wrought by injustice and mark a transition from silence to protest.
4. **The Cry.** Tamar departs crying aloud (2 Sam 13:19: **וְקַלְלָה קָלָה** [LXX: ἐπορεύθη πορευομένη καὶ κράζουσα]), a public lament that becomes her only voice of protest in a world that refuses to hear her. Her cry echoes unanswered by those meant to protect her. Esther, by contrast, transforms her mourning into intercessory prayer (ἐδεῖτο κυρίου θεοῦ ισημερινή, Gk Esth 4:17:11-13), directing her cry to the only true King who hears the abandoned.

Together, Tamar and Esther articulate a theology of lament. Their grief is not passive but prophetic: embodied responses to violence and injustice that unmask power, expose systemic failure, and preserve dignity. Yet their narratives also diverge in a crucial theological register. Tamar's cry (2 Sam 13:19-20) is swallowed by David's paralysis and Absalom's suppression, embodying the collapse of justice under compromised monarchy. Esther's lament, by contrast, culminates in prayer directed to God, who both hears and acts. The juxtaposition highlights a fundamental biblical conviction: while human rulers may ignore or suppress the cries of the vulnerable, the covenant God does not. Tamar's unanswered protest thus becomes the negative foil to Esther's heard petition, together revealing both the depth of patriarchal failure and the persistence of divine faithfulness.

3.1.2 Tamar and Susanna

The stories of Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-22) and Susanna (Dan 13, in the Greek additions to the Book of Daniel) present striking parallels: both women confront sexual aggression from men in positions of power. Though separated by historical and cultural context, the two narratives expose the abuse of authority, foreground female moral agency, and interrogate the structures of communal responsibility – yet with sharply divergent outcomes.

Susanna's account, set in the Babylonian Exile and thematically aligned with figures such as Esther and Judith, portrays oppression not at the hands of foreign rulers but, significantly, from within her own people. As Claassens (2016b, 51) observes, "the threat does not come from outside, but from inside." Likewise, Tamar is not assaulted by an enemy but by her half-brother Amnon, the heir of the Davidic throne, within the very household meant to safeguard her honor. Both narratives thus turn the gaze inward, exposing how the gravest threats to women's dignity often arise from the very institutions – family, religion, and leadership – that claim to protect them. Yet their outcomes differ starkly. Susanna's voice is ultimately heard and vindicated through divine intervention, while Tamar's voice is silenced, and her desolation ignored. Still, both women embody clarity, courage, and integrity in the face of systemic injustice, exposing not only the sin of individual perpetrators but also the complicity of their surrounding communities.

Tamar, introduced as a young virgin of royal lineage, appeals to Israel's covenantal law, communal conscience, and moral reason: "No, my brother, do not violate me! For such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing." (2 Sam 13:12) Her plea, echoing Lev 18:9 and 20:17, frames Amnon's act as *בְּלָה* – a vile outrage. Even after the assault, Tamar protests: "Sending me away is a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." (2 Sam 13:16) Her words underline the multiple layers of her violation – physical, emotional, legal, and social. Yet her protest is met with rejection, and she is left to live "desolate" (2 Sam 13:20) in Absalom's house, a haunting witness to injustice without redress.

By contrast, Susanna is portrayed as righteous and God-fearing (*δίκαια*, Dan 13:2). When cornered by two corrupt elders, she resists with unwavering resolve: "I am completely trapped. If I yield, it will mean death for me; if I resist, I cannot escape your hands. Yet it is better for me to fall into your hands than to sin before the Lord." (Dan 13:22-23) Her cry – "With a loud voice Susanna cried out" (*ἐβόλησεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ*, Dan 13:24) – becomes the narrative's turning point. God stirs the spirit of young Daniel, who exposes the elders' lies through inspired cross-examination (Dan 13:45-62), and Susanna's honor and life are restored. As Meir (2020, 13–15) notes, Susanna's story demonstrates that divine justice can prevail when the prophetic voice is heeded.

Despite their divergent outcomes, both Tamar and Susanna bear prophetic significance. Tamar's resistance and lament – even unanswered – stand as a silent yet searing witness to truth in a community that refuses to listen. She embodies faith that persists in the absence of human justice, trusting in God's righteousness

when all systems fail. Susanna's story, by contrast, depicts the power of divine intervention: God raises up Daniel as a prophetic advocate, vindicating the innocent and condemning the guilty. Taken together, the two narratives offer a theological vision in which women's voices – whether silenced or vindicated – carry prophetic weight. Their integrity testifies that God is present even in the silence, and that justice, however delayed, remains a divine imperative.

3.1.3 Tamar and the Woman Accused of Adultery

Drawing a connection between Tamar in 2 Sam 13 and the woman accused of adultery in John 8:1-11 – though the two narratives differ in context, genre, and outcome – opens a theologically fruitful reflection on justice, mercy, and the restoration of dignity.

Like Tamar, who suffers sexual violence and is left to bear public shame while her perpetrator remains unpunished, the woman in John 8 is subjected to exposure, accusation, and male judgment, while the man's accountability is conspicuously absent. In Tamar's case, her voice is silenced, and justice is withheld: Absalom instructs her to be silent and she lives "desolate," while David's anger fails to translate into action (2 Sam 13:20-21). By contrast, the woman in John 8 utters no words, yet Jesus himself becomes her advocate. Confronting the hypocrisy of her accusers – "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7) – Jesus exposes the double standard of a system that condemns women while excusing men. Instead of leaving her in shame or subjecting her to death, he grants her dignity and a future: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin again." (John 8:11)

Read side by side, the two narratives illuminate the moral blindness of patriarchal structures that silence women and normalize male transgression. Yet the Johannine account introduces a decisive turning point: divine justice embodied in Jesus, who restores not only the woman's safety but also her dignity. The contrast underscores a deeper theological truth – that true justice is not reducible to retribution, but is fulfilled in mercy, truth, and the restoration of the human person.

4. Conclusion

The narrative of Tamar unveils the paradox of resilience that emerges from lament. In a world consumed by ambition and abuse of power, her voice is silenced by the very men who should have defended her. Yet her actions – tearing her *ketonet passim*, scattering ashes, placing her hand upon her head, and crying aloud – become enduring gestures of embodied protest. They testify to a truth the royal household refuses to name: unchecked violence corrodes not only individuals but the entire covenant community. Tamar's mourning is therefore not resignation but a profound act of theological resistance, honoring the depth of the violation while placing it – implicitly – in God's presence. Within the Davidic narrative, Tamar's plight exposes the collapse of royal authority: David's passivity and Absalom's ven-

geance reveal systemic failure. Yet Tamar herself becomes a point of continuity and hope. The name of Absalom's daughter Tamar (2 Sam 14:27) functions as a memorial of dignity, refusing to let her story vanish into silence.

Viewed through the whole canon, Tamar is more than a tragic victim. She is a beacon of wisdom in a sea of madness: her protest unmasks the violence of patriarchy, her grief preserves human dignity against erasure, and her memory becomes a seed of hope within Israel's story. Ultimately, her narrative points forward to Christ, who fully hears the silenced and restores the shamed (John 8:11).

Tamar's story, then, is not an isolated tragedy but a theological testimony. It shows how Scripture integrates trauma into the covenant story and invites communities of faith to remember the violated, resist silence, and trust the God who hears the abandoned. Her voice – though suppressed in her own time – still resounds as a prophetic witness, calling for justice, dignity, and hope. In this way, Tamar indeed shines as a beacon of wisdom amidst a sea of madness.

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