Violence Against Women

A Bible Study

By
Thomas Grinter
Violence Against Women: A Bible Study

Women, girls, men, and boys experience physical, sexual, psychological, and financial violence every day. This study focuses on violence perpetrated by men and boys against women and girls.

The month of October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month in the U.S. The violence that women experience is not only committed by their husbands, but also by their ex-husbands, boyfriends, and ex-boyfriends. Women and girls are violated in dating relationships, and violence occurs between couples in LGBTQ relationships. Therefore, the term "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV) is used as a more comprehensive way of describing the various perpetrators of violence. No one should experience any form of violence from an intimate partner or a stranger, and everyone who does experience such violence deserves care and justice.

This Bible study is intended to contribute to current discussions and spark new conversations about violence against women and girls. This study examines five Bible passages about rape and rape culture. A "rape culture" is a society, organization, or community where rape occurs frequently because of widely-accepted attitudes and beliefs that make sexual assault normal, insignificant, and excusable. For example, the following kinds of statements show attitudes and beliefs that support rape culture: "She wanted it." "That's just how men are." "She shouldn't have worn that." "Women like it rough." "Girls always play hard-to-get." "Guys are supposed to be aggressive." People in the Bible held similar attitudes and beliefs that created and supported a culture of rape.

While the Bible passages about rape in this study are graphic and disturbing, I strongly encourage youth to participate in discussions of this study. This study is formatted using insights and approaches of the Contextual Bible Study method. Facilitators and participants should engage in this study through open and honest discussion, creative and critical thinking, and a serious commitment to take action. Be respectful, sensitive, and attentive to memories, emotions, experiences, and perspectives about violence against women and girls that this study raises.

About the Author
Thomas Grinter is an educator, emerging biblical scholar, and minister. He earned the Master of Divinity Degree from Hood Theological Seminary and the Master of Theology Degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. Currently, he is pursuing the Ph.D. Degree in Bible, Culture, and Hermeneutics at Chicago Theological Seminary. He is an ordained elder in the A.M.E. Zion Church with over 18 years of experience serving in congregations across the country. He has taught biblical studies courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels for ten years.
Laws About Rape
Deuteronomy 22:23–29 NRSV

23 If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, 24 you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death, the young woman because she did not cry for help in the town and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

25 But if the man meets the engaged woman in the open country, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. 26 You shall do nothing to the young woman; the young woman has not committed an offense punishable by death, because this case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor. 27 Since he found her in the open country, the engaged woman may have cried for help, but there was no one to rescue her.

28 If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught in the act, 29 the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman’s father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives.

In Your Experience
In a small group or with a partner, write down your responses to these questions and share them with the entire Bible study gathering:

1) Have you ever read or heard about these biblical laws?
2) What are these laws about to you?
3) Do these laws remind you of any unwritten or unofficial rules in your community?

Words for "Rape" in the Bible
As we study violence against women in the Bible, we should be aware that there is no single word for "rape" used throughout the Bible. Also, there is no single word for "sexual intercourse" used throughout the Bible.

- When a Bible story is about sex, Bible versions use terms such as, "know," "go into," "lie with," "lay with," or "lie down with" to refer to sex. For example, "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore a son" (Gen. 4:1) means that Adam had sex with Eve.
- When a Bible story is about rape, Bible versions use the terms for sex (see above) along with words/phrases such as, "by force," "humbled," "humiliated," "violated," "took hold of," "seized," "grasped," and "lay hold of" to refer to rape. For example, "...he seized her and lay with her by force" (Gen. 34:2) means that he raped her.
A Closer Look
The laws from the book of Deuteronomy above give instructions about how Israel was supposed to address instances of rape.

1) The First Law (Verses 23–27): When a man's fiancée was raped by another man, the location of the rape mattered. If the rape occurred in a city, a populated area, the woman should scream for help to people in the town. If she didn't scream, both her and the man would be killed. If the rape occurred in an unpopulated area, there would be no one for the woman to cry out for help. So, she would not be punished, and her rapist would be killed.

2) The Second Law (Verses 28–29): When an unmarried girl, a father's virgin daughter, was raped by a man who was caught in the act, her rapist was required to marry her. The rapist had to pay money to her father, and he could never divorce her. This law was based on the belief that a woman or girl who had been raped was "damaged goods," and no man would want to marry her. This law also views rape as a crime against the girl's father, not against her. That's why her rapist had to pay her father to reimburse him for the dowry he had lost since he could no longer marry off his daughter to another man.

The first law ignored the fact that many women do not scream during sexual assault because of fear or shame. If a woman did not scream, this law assumed she wanted it and was not actually being raped, but was committing adultery. That's why she should be killed along with the man.

As for the second law, the requirement that the rapist be "caught in the act" was a loophole that undoubtedly allowed many men to get away with raping girls without consequence. This law did not allow the girl to make her own decision about who she married. Worst of all, this law minimized the girl's experience of rape to a problem that was resolved by a simple financial transaction between her rapist and her father. By forcing the girl to marry her rapist, this law did not protect her from being violated and abused by her rapist-husband in the future.

The "Proper" Path of a Woman's Life
These laws are based on certain beliefs and values about women. For people in the Bible, a woman's life was supposed to follow the following path:

A girl was to remain a virgin until her father arranged her marriage, which usually happened when she was a teenager. As her father's virgin daughter, she was to be quiet, modest, submissive, and obedient to her father. When a man paid her father a dowry, the daughter became a wife. She was supposed to show her husband the same respect that she showed to her father by being submissive and letting her husband take the lead, especially in public. At home, she had more control as she took care of the household. She depended on her husband for support and protection. She was not allowed to divorce her husband, but he could divorce her. He also had the right to use
physical violence to discipline her. Her main job as a wife was to become a mother. She should give birth to many children, especially sons who would carry on their father's name and legacy. If she did not have children, she was treated as "less than a woman."

Notice that this path gave power over a woman’s life to men (her father and her husband). A woman could not choose to stay single or not have children. As we explore stories about violence against women in the rest of this Bible study, we should keep this path for a woman's life in mind.

**Questions for Discussion**
1) How is the "proper" path for women in the Bible similar or different from beliefs and values about women today?
2) How do you define "rape" and "violence" against women?
3) When we address incidents of violence against women today, what things do people consider to decide what happened, who is to blame, and who should be punished?
Dinah
Genesis 34:1–7 NRSV

1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the region. 2 When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force. 3 And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. 4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl to be my wife.”
5 Now Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. 6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him, 7 just as the sons of Jacob came in from the field. When they heard of it, the men were indignant and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

In Your Experience
In a small group or with a partner, write down your responses to these questions and share them with the entire Bible study gathering:

1) Have you ever read or heard about this Bible story?
2) What is this story about to you?
3) Does this story remind you of any untold stories in your community?

A Closer Look
Some people think that Dinah went out alone because she was looking for a man for sex, and that’s why she did not scream or resist Shechem. They point out Shechem’s feelings and expressions of love for Dinah as evidence. No! This was rape.

The story is very clear that Dinah went to meet the women of the town, not to look for a man. Dinah and her family had recently moved to the outskirts of the city (Gen. 33:18–20), and she wanted to visit the Hivite women and girls in her new home. Shechem was King Hamor's son and the prince of the Hivite people. The city of Shechem was named for him.

Shechem saw Dinah, he grabbed her, he forced her down, and he raped her. Maybe Dinah screamed and fought her attacker. Maybe she was silent and still, paralyzed by fear and shame. We don't know what Dinah said or did during or after the rape because the man who wrote this story never tells us. The writer only reports what men did, what men said, and how men felt.

The writer states that Shechem loved Dinah and said affectionate things to her after he raped her. A rapist or abuser often sweet-talks or buys gifts for a girl or woman he has assaulted to convince her not to report the assault or to absolve himself of guilt. Maybe Shechem wanted to show this immigrant girl, who was a minority in the area, that he was in control. Maybe Shechem, the powerful prince, felt entitled to take whatever he wanted. Whatever his motives, what Shechem did to Dinah had nothing to do with love—he raped her. After raping her, Shechem kidnapped Dinah, took her home, and commanded his father, "Get me this girl to be my wife!"
King Hamor went to Jacob to get permission for Shechem to marry Dinah. Jacob had already heard that Shechem "defiled" Dinah, which means he violated and degraded her. Jacob kept quiet until his sons came home, and, when his sons heard what Shechem had done to their sister, they were extremely shocked and angry. Later, Dinah's brothers rescued Dinah from Shechem's house, and took revenge on Shechem and all of the Hivite people (Gen. 34:8–31).

A Young Girl in a Man's World
The story of the rape of Dinah is set in a world dominated by men. For young girls like Dinah, their fathers decided who they had sex with and married. That's why King Hamor went to get Jacob's permission for Shechem to marry Dinah. That's also why Dinah's brothers were so angry. To them, Shechem had sex with their sister without Jacob's permission.

When a young girl was raped, the assault was not a crime against her, but a crime against her father and his right to determine his daughter's sex-partners. That's why the man who wrote this story did not focus on how Dinah was affected by the rape. That's why the man who wrote this story did not tell us what Dinah said or felt. He focused only on how Shechem, Jacob, and Jacob's sons reacted to the rape because he wrote this story in a man's world. Shechem raped Dinah, and the writer did another kind of violence to her by silencing her voice and ignoring her pain.

Questions and Exercises
1) How is the world in which this story was written similar or different from our world today?
2) What attitudes and beliefs about women, men, and power created the conditions for Dinah to be raped?
3) Why is this story in the Bible?
4) Use your imagination to describe what Dinah might have said and done in this story.
5) This story is the only Bible story about Dinah. Use your imagination to tell more of her life story.

Developing A Plan of Action
In a small group, with a partner, or as an entire Bible study gathering, write down an action plan describing how you will respond to this Bible study in your community.
In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father’s house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months.

Then her husband set out after her, to speak tenderly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. When he reached her father’s house, the girl’s father saw him and came with joy to meet him. His father-in-law, the girl’s father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days; so they ate and drank, and he stayed there. On the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; but the girl’s father said to his son-in-law, “Fortify yourself with a bit of food, and after that you may go.” So the two men sat and ate and drank together; and the girl’s father said to the man, “Why not spend the night and enjoy yourself?” When the man got up to go, his father-in-law kept urging him until he spent the night there again. On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave; and the girl’s father said, “Fortify yourself.” So they lingered until the day declined, and the two of them ate and drank.

When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, “Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it.” But his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will continue on to Gibeah.” Then he said to his servant, “Come, let us try to reach one of these places, and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah.” So they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. He went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night.

Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) When the old man looked up and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, he said, “Where are you going and where do you come from?” He answered him, “We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home. Nobody has offered to take me in. We your servants have straw and fodder for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and the woman and the young
man along with us. We need nothing more." 20 The old man said, "Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square." 21 So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

22 While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him." 23 And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. 24 Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing." 25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.

26 As morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man’s house where her master was, until it was light. 27 In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. 28 "Get up," he said to her, "we are going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey; and the man set out for his home. 29 When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. 30 Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, "Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, ‘Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.’"

In Your Experience
In a small group or with a partner, write down your responses to these questions and share them with the entire Bible study gathering:

1) Have you ever read or heard about this Bible story?
2) What is this story about to you?
3) Does this story remind you of any untold stories in your community?

A Closer Look
As we study this story, we should keep in mind that the twelve tribes of Israel were living in Canaan, but Canaan was full of other peoples. The Israelites did not control all of the land of Canaan yet, and each tribe lived in its own separate territory throughout Canaan. In this story, a Levite who lived in the tribe of Ephraim's territory, in central Canaan, married a Canaanite woman who lived in Bethlehem, a village to the south that would later become a part of the tribe of Judah's territory.

A "Levite" was an Israelite religious leader who served at local sanctuaries in the tribes of Israel. The Canaanite woman that the Levite married is called a "concubine" in this story. In English, the word "concubine" refers to an unmarried woman who lives with and has sex with a married man. However, the word "concubine" is used in the Bible to
refer to a foreign woman who was married to an Israelite man. Since a concubine in the Bible is a man’s foreign wife, we can call the Canaanite woman in this story, "the Levite's wife."

At some point in their marriage, the Levite's wife left him and moved back home to her father's house in Bethlehem. The NRSV passage above states that she "became angry with him." Other Bible versions state that she had "played the whore against him." This phrase is used by men in the Bible to describe a wife who has either 1) committed adultery or 2) was assertive and out-spoken, instead of being passive and submissive like a "good wife" was supposed to be. Since the Levite went after his wife to convince her to come back to him, he was the one in-the-wrong. Whatever he had said or done to his wife caused her to leave him and go back to her father's house in Bethlehem.

The Levite took his servant and went to Bethlehem to get his wife back. The Levite spoke with his wife's father and stayed for several days at her father's request. After being very kind and friendly to the Levite, her father allowed her to go back with the Levite. On their journey back to Ephraim, the Levite chose to stop over in Gibeah of the tribe of Benjamin instead of in Jebus as his servant suggested. Though Jebus would eventually be conquered by the Israelites and become Jerusalem, Jebus was a Canaanite city at the time of this story. The Levite preferred to stay with his own people rather than with Canaanite foreigners. This choice is ironic because the Levite's Canaanite father-in-law had been so hospitable, but the men of Benjamin would not be. An old man from Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah, invited the Levite into his house for the night.

That night, an evil mob of men of the tribe of Benjamin surrounded the old man's house and demanded that the Levite be given to them so that they could rape him. The mob wanted to show this Levite who was visiting their town that they were in charge. The old man tried to protect the Levite and offered his daughter and the Levite's wife instead, but the mob insisted on the Levite.

A man in the house threw the Levite's wife outside to the mob. The story is not clear about which man threw her out, so it could have been the Levite, the old man, or the Levite's servant (although the Levite's servant was probably a young boy not an adult man). The mob gang-raped and abused her all night. At dawn, they let her go. She pulled herself to the door of the house and placed her hands on the threshold. When the Levite opened the door to leave, he saw his wife and yelled at her to get up, but he heard no response. He put her on a donkey and took her home to Ephraim.

Once they arrived, the Levite grabbed his wife and cut her into twelve pieces. The story is not clear as to whether his wife was still alive when he cut her to pieces. (In the next chapter, the Levite claimed that the mob had killed her (Judg. 20:4-5). The Levite sent a piece of her to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. His gruesome act imitated an ancient war ritual. To encourage the twelve tribes to go to war against an enemy, a king of Israel would cut an animal into twelve pieces and send each piece to a tribe (for an example, read 1 Sam. 11:1-7). The Levite wanted the other tribes to fight together against the tribe of Benjamin because of what the mob did to his wife. The Levite's plan worked, and the tribe of Benjamin was decimated (Judg. 20).
A Woman's Worth in a Chaotic World

The story of the Levite's wife was written in a world that was set up in ways that valued men more than women. Men could hold public positions of authority, while most women only worked in the household. Men could own and inherit property, but women could not. Men could receive a formal education, but most women could not read or write. A man was viewed as a full citizen of his community, while the status of a woman depended on her relationship to a man.

In addition, the story of the Levite's wife shows us that even a man's life mattered more than a woman's life. The old man in the story was willing to sacrifice his own daughter and the Levite's wife to the mob in order to protect a man. One of the men in the house did sacrifice the Levite's wife to protect the Levite. Men protected men at any cost, even at the cost of an innocent woman.

The Levite's wife was an innocent woman, but she was raped, brutalized, and murdered. The Levite used his wife's death to satisfy his desire for revenge. No one sought justice for the Levite's wife, and the writer of this story gave a reason. Each man in Israel did whatever he thought was right, and there was no king to protect the innocent and hold the guilty accountable (Judg. 19:1). The lack of responsible leadership and the failure to value and treat women with equity created a chaotic and dangerous world. In that kind of world, women like the Levite's wife suffer.

Questions and Exercises
1) How is the world in which this story was written similar or different from our world today?
2) What attitudes and beliefs about women, men, and power created the conditions for the Levite's wife to be raped and murdered?
3) Why is this story in the Bible?
4) The details in this story are all we learn about the Levite's wife. Use your imagination to tell more of her life story.
5) If the Levite's wife could have spoken to her father about what happened to her, what would she have said?

Developing A Plan of Action
In a small group, with a partner, or as an entire Bible study gathering, write down an action plan describing how you will respond to this Bible study in your community.
In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, “This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant.” So David sent word to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David.

When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house, and wash your feet.” Uriah went out of the king’s house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, “Uriah did not go down to his house,” David said to Uriah, “You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?” Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.” Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.” As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant warriors. The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite was killed as well. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting; and he instructed the messenger, “When you have finished telling the king all the news about the fighting, then, if the king’s anger rises, and if he says to you, ‘Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?’ then you shall say, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too.’” So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, “The men gained an advantage over us, and came out against us in the field; but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate.” Then the
archers shot at your servants from the wall; some of the king’s servants are dead; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.” 25 David said to the messenger, “Thus you shall say to Joab, ‘Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another; press your attack on the city, and overthrow it.’ And encourage him.”

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. 27 When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD…

In Your Experience
In a small group or with a partner, write down your responses to these questions and share them with the entire Bible study gathering:

1) Have you ever read or heard about this Bible story?  
2) What is this story about to you?  
3) Does this story remind you of any untold stories in your community?

A Closer Look
“David Commits Adultery with Bathsheba” is a commonly-used title for this story. However, this story is not about adultery. David raped Bathsheba. But, how was this rape? Why was Bathsheba taking a bath outside? Why did she go to David's house? If she was being raped, why didn’t she scream for help or resist David? If she was raped, why didn’t she report what David did to her? These questions are often raised to prove that Bathsheba was not raped and that she wanted it. Actually, these kinds of questions try to shift the responsibility for what happened in this story from David to Bathsheba through "victim-blaming." Let’s address the issues in these questions.

First, Bathsheba was bathing outside (v. 3). The actual Hebrew phrase in this verse is, "she was washing herself." Bathsheba could have washed herself outside for one of two reasons. One reason could have been that she was purifying herself after her period. Biblical law stated that a menstruating woman was considered unclean for seven days until her cycle ended, and she was purified (Lev. 15:19-24). This purification ritual involved washing the hands and feet in water, and this story states that Bathsheba was indeed purifying herself after her period (v. 4). Bathsheba was not naked when David saw her. She was clothed and barefoot, dipping her hands and feet into water, probably in a stream or pool. The other possible reason that Bathsheba washed herself outside was because there was no in-door plumbing. People would have washed themselves outdoors. Though Bathsheba would have made sure that no one could see her and that she was in a safe place, David was able to see her because he was on his rooftop. (Note: David should not have been at home at all. He should have been leading his army in battle!) Whether Bathsheba was purifying herself or cleaning herself, she was not inviting and did not deserve to be sexually assaulted.

Second, Bathsheba was summoned by the king, and she could not refuse David. After learning who Bathsheba was, David sent messengers "to get her" (v. 4). The literal Hebrew phrase states, "he [David] grasped her and had sex with her." Bathsheba could
not refuse David's summons, and she never gave her consent to have sex with David. David raped Bathsheba. David had the power, and Bathsheba did not. If Bathsheba had refused David, her life could have been in danger, as the rest of the chapter proves.

After David raped her, Bathsheba became pregnant, and David tried to hide his crime. David tried to convince Uriah the Hittite to have sex with his wife, but Uriah refused. Then, David made sure that Uriah was killed in battle. The king held lives in his hands, and Bathsheba had every reason to be afraid of what David might have done if she refused or resisted him.

Once Uriah was killed, David moved Bathsheba in and married her. David thought no one knew what he had done, but God was watching. God sent the prophet Nathan to tell David about the consequences of his sins (2 Sam. 12:1–15).

A Vulnerable Woman in an Unpredictable World

This story comes from a world in which women were susceptible to all kinds of violence and abuse. Invading soldiers and raiders often raped women and girls to show their dominance and power. There were no such crimes as "child abuse" or "domestic violence." Fathers were allowed to beat their sons and daughters severely as discipline and could even have a disobedient child killed. Husbands could beat their wives in public to humiliate them. Elderly women and widows were usually neglected and left in poverty for the rest of their lives. Women had little protection from men in their own families, let alone strangers.

Bathsheba was a vulnerable woman. David raped her because David knew that Uriah, her husband and protector, was away fighting in David's war. When Uriah was killed, Bathsheba lost all means of support. No other man would want her because she was pregnant with another man's child. To make sure that she and her unborn child were safe, Bathsheba had no viable option but to marry her rapist.

In a way, David's rape of Bathsheba did not end that night at his house. He forced her again by putting her in a situation in which her only option was to marry him. He did not love her, he did not want her, and he did not want the child she was carrying. He just wanted to hide his sins to protect his public image. While the Lord exposed and punished David, Bathsheba suffered in so many ways because of what David had done, Bathsheba became an influential queen and the mother of King Solomon not because of, but in spite of what David did to her.

Questions and Exercises
1) How is the world in which this story was written similar or different from our world today?
2) What attitudes and beliefs about women, men, and power created the conditions for Bathsheba to be raped?
3) Why is this story in the Bible?
4) Use your imagination to write an open letter by Bathsheba. Describe Bathsheba's thoughts and feelings about being raped by David, lamenting the death of Uriah, and her hopes for her unborn child.
5) How did David’s rape of Bathsheba do sexual, psychological, and financial violence to her?
**Developing A Plan of Action**
In a small group, with a partner, or as an entire Bible study gathering, write down an action plan describing how you will respond to this Bible study in your community.
1 Some time passed. David’s son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David’s son Amnon fell in love with her. 2 Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. 3 But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David’s brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. 4 He said to him, “O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?” Amnon said to him, “I love Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.” 5 Jonadab said to him, “Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.’” 6 So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, “Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand.” 7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, “Go to your brother Amnon’s house, and prepare food for him.”

8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon’s house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. 9 Then she took the pan and set them out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, “Send out everyone from me.” So everyone went out from him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand.” So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11 But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, “Come, lie with me, my sister.” 12 She answered him, “No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! 13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.” 14 But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

15 Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, “Get out!” 16 But she said to him, “No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.” But he would not listen to her. 17 He called the young man who served him and said, “Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her.” 18 (Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times. So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. 19 But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, “Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.” So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom’s house. 21 When King David heard of all these
things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

**In Your Experience**

In a small group or with a partner, write down your responses to these questions and share them with the entire Bible study gathering:

1) Have you ever read or heard about this Bible story?
2) What is this story about to you?
3) Does this story remind you of any untold stories in your church or community?

**A Closer Look**

In this story, David's firstborn and favorite son, Amnon, raped Tamar, David's virgin daughter and Amnon's half-sister. The words, actions, and inaction of other men in this story add to the violence that Tamar experienced.

Note that Jonadab, Amnon's cousin, gave Amnon advice that led to the rape of Tamar. Jonadab knew that Amnon was Tamar's half-brother, and incest was strictly prohibited by the law (Deut. 27:22). Whether he intended to enable rape or not, Jonadab's words had that effect.

Amnon followed Jonadab's advice. In the most detailed account of rape in the Bible, Tamar pleaded with Amnon not to rape her. She appealed to his sense of morality, his commitment to family, and his own self-interest. She even suggested that he get their father David's permission to marry her instead of raping her. Amnon did not listen. He overpowered Tamar, and he raped her. Afterward, Amnon felt intense hatred for Tamar. Rapists often feel this kind of disgust toward women they have violated. Amnon yelled at Tamar to leave. As a woman who had been raped, Tamar knew that no other man would want her and that people would humiliate and disrespect her for the rest of her life. Her only hope of becoming a wife and mother would be for her rapist to marry her. Tamar pleaded with Amnon not to send her away. She appealed to his common sense. Amnon did not listen, and he had a servant put Tamar out. With ashes on her head to show her deep sorrow and a torn royal robe to show her severe pain, Tamar left.

Tamar's brother Absalom advised her not to plan on telling anyone what happened. Tamar's father David did not say or do anything to care for Tamar or to hold Amnon accountable. Two years later, Absalom took revenge and had Amnon killed (2 Sam. 13:23-34). As for Tamar, she spent the rest of her life as a "desolate woman."

**A Desolate Woman in a Cruel World**

Amnon's rape of Tamar made her a "desolate woman." This phrase refers to the fact that Tamar was never married and never gave birth to children. Tamar's fate as a childless and unmarried woman would have made her feel a painful sense of emptiness, shame, and despair.

The cause of Tamar's depression and suffering was rape. In the world of this story, a woman or girl who had been raped was considered to be "damaged goods." She was thought to be "defiled," which means she was believed to have been tainted.
and ruined because of rape. Amnon’s rape of Tamar degraded her, making her of less value in the eyes of other men. Men wanted to marry virgin daughters, that was the way that this world worked. Tamar was no longer a virgin because of Amnon. Men would not have wanted to pay a dowry to marry a woman or girl who had been raped, so Tamar would have been of no value to her father or to other men.

As a woman that no man wanted, Tamar would have been mistreated and abused by her community. People would have thought that Tamar was "not good enough" to get a man and "not good enough" for God to bless with a child. Family members, former friends, and even strangers would have gossiped about her, made fun of her, and humiliated her even in public. She would have been disrespected and excluded by her own people. This cruel world made her a "desolate woman."

Questions and Exercises
1) How is the world in which this story was written similar or different from our world today?
2) What attitudes and beliefs about women, men, and power created the conditions for Tamar to be raped in this story?
3) Why is this story in the Bible?
4) This story is the only Bible story about Tamar. Use your imagination to tell more of her life story.
5) Imagine that Tamar, as an older woman, could have spoken with the young girls and boys in her family to offer advice and direction. What would she have said to them in light of this story?

Developing A Plan of Action
In a small group, with a partner, or as an entire Bible study gathering, write down an action plan describing how you will respond to this Bible study in your community.
Some Helpful Resources for Further Study and Action

Books


Websites

Violence Prevention: Intimate Partner Violence
Centers for Disease Control and Preventions
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence

Intimate Partner Violence and LGBTQ Communities
Human Rights Campaign
www.hrc.org

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
www.nsvrc.org

Thursdays in Black Campaign
World Council of Churches

Violence Against Women Network
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
www.vawnet.org