

A Pentecostalist Reads Tamar's Story of Rape and Humiliation with a Hermeneutical Awareness

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ABSTRACT

Early Pentecostals came from the ranks of the disenfranchised and marginalised. When they read biblical texts that describe violence against those who are weaker, such as gender-based violence, they readily acknowledged that the Bible's apparent approval of such violence demonstrates the human tendency to sin. In later Pentecostal hermeneutics the Bible was read in a literalist manner as though each passage contains a word from God. It is argued at the hand of Amnon's rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 that a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic linked to the way early Pentecostals read the Bible is necessary to ensure that in Tamar's narrative a 'Spirit-Word' would challenge readers' ideologies and perceptions rather than reinforce notions of violence. While Tamar's narrative does not provide comfort or any ethical role models to modern readers, a Spirit-filled hermeneutic with a feminist sensitivity will emphasize that narratives of terror want readers to feel what God feels because the Bible is not only meant to shape and transform minds and actions but also affections. A Spirit-Word creates meaning within the context of the Bible as a whole, revealing the God who grieves over victims of violence and gets angry with the violent.

Introduction

For the average Bible reader, it is disconcerting to find that the most prominent anthropological theme in the Hebrew Bible is that of violence.¹ No other human activity or experience is mentioned so frequently as the act of violence, neither the world of labour and economy, nor that of family and sexuality, nor that of LK,, also to God while human violence is at times actively promoted as God's will, representing what Lüdemann calls the dark side of the Bible.² Schwager states

- 1 E. Peels, 'The World's First Murder: Violence and Justice in Genesis 4:1-16', in *Animosity, the Bible, and us*, edited by J. T. Fitzgerald, F. J. Van Rensburg & H. Van Rooy (Atlanta: SBL; Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship 12, 2009), 19.
- 2 H. Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scriptures: The Dark Side of the Bible*, translated by J. Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), 50.

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