

Strange Stories of Unusual Women in the Bible

An Unnamed Woman

Judges 19:1-30

1 In those days Israel had no king. Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

2 But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months,

3 her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her father's house, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him.

4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, prevailed upon him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there.

5 On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself with something to eat; then you can go."

6 So the two of them sat down to eat and drink together. Afterward the girl's father said, "Please stay tonight and enjoy yourself."

7 And when the man got up to go, his father-in-law persuaded him, so he stayed there that night.

8 On the morning of the fifth day, when he rose to go, the girl's father said, "Refresh yourself. Wait till afternoon!" So the two of them ate together.

9 Then when the man, with his concubine and his servant, got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said, "Now look, it's almost evening. Spend the night here; the day is nearly over. Stay and enjoy yourself. Early tomorrow morning you can get up and be on your way home."

10 But, unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine.

11 When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, "Come, let's stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night."

12 His master replied, "No. We won't go into an alien city, whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah."

14 So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin.

15 There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them into his home for the night.

16 That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the men of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields.

17 When he looked and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked,

The story takes place during the time of the Judges, a time in the history of Israel when leaders were lacking, God seldom appeared, and chaos reigned among the Israelite tribes.

A recurrent theme of the book of Judges is the phrase, "every man did what was right in his own eyes."

"Where are you going? Where did you come from?"

18 He answered, "We are on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and now I am going to the house of the LORD. No one has taken me into his house.

19 We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants-- me, your maidservant, and the young man with us. We don't need anything."

20 "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square."

21 So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink.

22 While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."

23 The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing.

24 Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing."

25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go.

26 At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.

27 When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold.

28 He said to her, "Get up; let's go." But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home.

29 When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel.

30 Everyone who saw it said, "Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!"

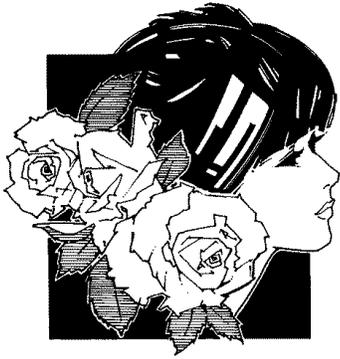
(NIV)

(See also 20:4-7; 21:10-16, 23)

Compare Genesis 19:1-29.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story has three parts to it. Can you identify them?
2. Have you ever read this story in the Bible before? Have you read a similar story elsewhere? If so, when? Where?
3. With what feeling(s) does this story leave you?
4. What questions do you have about this story?
5. What do you think this story has to do with God? With faith? With salvation?
6. What value does this story have for us today?



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The Story of Hagar

(Genesis 16:1-16; 21:1-21)

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar;

2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.

4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

6 "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.

8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."

10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery.

12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.

16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Scene One: Introduction (16:1)

Episode 1: (16:2-6)

Episode 2: (7-14)

Conclusion: (16:15-16)

Gen 21:1-3; 9-21

1 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

Transition: (17:1-21:8)

2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

9 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking,

10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

**Scene Two: (21:9-21)
Episode 1: (9-14)**

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes.

Episode 2: (14-19)

16 Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob.

17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

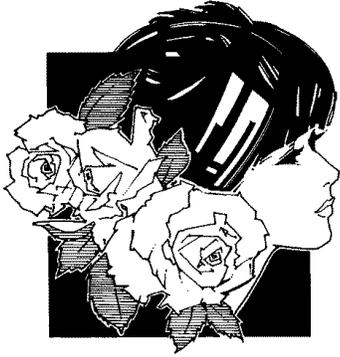
20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

Conclusion: (20-21)

QUESTIONS:

- What title would you give this story?
- Does Hagar's story parallel any other Biblical story you can recall?
- After reading the story, how would you describe Hagar to a friend?
- Have you known any modern-day Hagers? Explain.
- What does the story of Hagar have to say to us today?



Strange Stories of Unusual Women in the Bible

Jephthah's Daughter

Judges 11:29-40

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.

30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands,

31 whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

32 Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands.

33 He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

34 When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter.

35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."

36 "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites.

37 But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry."

38 "You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry.

39 After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite custom

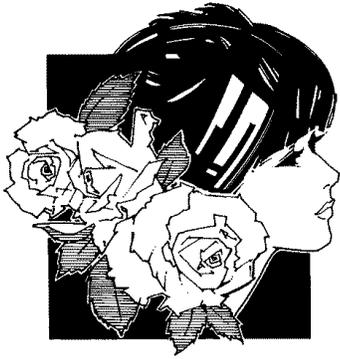
40 that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. (NIV)

The time of the Judges in Israel was a primitive, violent epoch. Israel was a tribal society with a decentralized government subject to threats of anarchy and extinction. This story takes place c. 11th century.

Jephthah is a mighty warrior, son of a prostitute and an unknown father. He was kicked out of his house and gathered as friends and allies the dregs of society (see 11:3b).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What title would you give this story?
2. This is a classic story motif. What other stories can you recall that use this motif?
3. What do you make of Jephthah's reaction in v. 35?
4. What do you make of the daughter's response in v. 36?
5. What ethical questions or issues arise in this story?
6. What, in your opinion, is the "moral" of this story?



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Tamar

2 Samuel 13:1-39

1 In the course of time, **Amnon son of David** fell in love with **Tamar**, the beautiful sister of **Absalom son of David**.

2 Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.

3 Now Amnon had a friend named **Jonadab** son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man.

4 He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

5 "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'"

6 So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand."

7 **David** sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him."

8 So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it.

9 Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him.

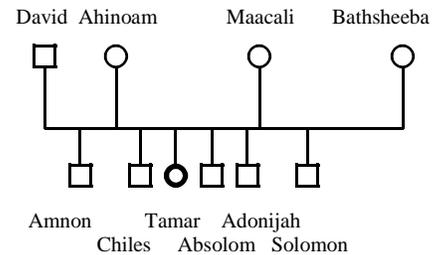
10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom.

11 But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister."

12 "Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing.

13 What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you."

14 But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.



Leviticus 18:9, "Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere."

15 Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"

16 "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." But he refused to listen to her.

17 He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her."

18 So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore.

19 Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman.

21 When King David heard all this, he was furious.

22 Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

23 Two years later, when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there.

24 Absalom went to the king and said, "Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his officials please join me?"

25 "No, my son," the king replied. "All of us should not go; we would only be a burden to you." Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go, but gave him his blessing.

26 Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon come with us." The king asked him, "Why should he go with you?"

27 But Absalom urged him, so he sent with him Amnon and the rest of the king's sons.

28 Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Have not I given you this order? Be strong and brave."

29 So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled.

30 While they were on their way, the report came to David: "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left."

31 The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn.

32 But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's expressed intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar.

33 My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead."

.....

36 As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his servants wept very bitterly.

37 Absalom fled But King David mourned for his son every day.

38 After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years.

39 And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death.

Ezekiel 18:9, "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What personal failures do you find in the principal characters?
2. What societal, systemic, family, or religious failures do you find in this story?
3. What "moral" would you give this story?
4. What statement can you make about Tamar based on your reading?
5. In your opinion, who is most responsible for what happened in this story? Why?
6. What does this story have to say to us today do you think?