

Dysfunctional Families of the Bible

Session 4: Children

Having about all the terrible Biblical people with terrible marriages and atrocious parenting running about, we can hardly be surprised that some of these children turn on their parents.

One of the first children to rebel against their parents stands out as a hero and she appears in Exodus 2. The current Pharaoh no longer remembers how Joseph the Hebrew had not only saved the Egyptians and everyone in the surrounding area from a seven-year famine but also had made the Pharaohs undisputedly the most powerful rulers in the land by selling food to the Egyptian people in return for their land and then in return for themselves and their families as slaves (Genesis 47:13-26). In his fear of the descendants of Joseph and his relatives, this current Pharaoh has declared war on the Hebrews, insisting that all Egyptians throw all Hebrew baby boys into the Nile in order to destroy their population (Exodus 1:22). This threat terrifies a new Hebrew mother to the point that she takes her three-month-old son, hides him in a hand-made miniature ark and places

him strategically amongst some reeds with his older sister watching over him (Exodus 2:1-4).

The reeds where the baby's ark is placed just so happen to coincide to where Pharaoh's daughter likes to bathe. The baby's mother has gambled on the compassion of probably the most powerful woman in the world at that time.

The Bible never states why Pharaoh's daughter chose to defy her father and save the infant in the personal ark. All the Bible tells us is that she "has mercy" or "showed compassion" on the baby even though she knew immediately that the baby is a Hebrew baby. Her compassion overrides everything, her willingness to obey the law, her fear of punishment for disobeying the law, her filial duty to her father.

While we never learn what prompted her to stand up against her father's unlimited power, she does. By doing so, the law to slaughter Hebrew baby boys evaporates. While the defiance of Pharaoh's daughter changes the course of history, one other factor should be noted: Pharaoh himself did not retaliate when his daughter publicly defied him. Perhaps Pharaoh's daughter counted on his paternal love for her; nevertheless, at the moment her compassion overrode

her duty to father, country and law, she had no absolute assurance he would respond in the manner he did. Her bravery cannot be underestimated.

Patricide, or the killing of parents by their children, is even rarer than murder between siblings, 1% of all murders.¹ While no Biblical story recounts an actual murder of a parent by his or her children, in one case, it wasn't for lack of trying.

King David, the rapist, murderer, destroyer of others' happy marriages, and bad parent, should not have been surprised when his own child turned on him. In 1 Samuel 13, David's heir and eldest son, Ammon rapes his half-sister Tamar in the most abusive way. Although the king is angry, he does nothing. After all, Ammon is his heir – and what's a rape or two amongst royalty?

Tamar's full brother, Absalom, however, is willing to act. He welcomes his traumatized sister into his home, caring for her for the rest of her life (1 Samuel 13:20). In the meantime, he bides his time. He waits two full years to exact his revenge. After luring Ammon away to a sheep-shearing, Absalom orders his men to kill him 1 Samuel 13:28. It is made clear to David that this execution has been carried out

¹ [Q&A: Why kids kill parents - CBS News](#)

to avenge the brutality done to Tamar (1 Samuel 13:32). David weeps bitterly but Absalom has gone into hiding at a neighboring kingdom.

Nevertheless, David continued “to mourn over his son [Ammon]; but his longing reached out for Absalom as he became reconciled to the death of Ammon” (1 Samuel 13:39). So he got over the death of one son and ached to reconcile with that son’s murderer who was his other son. On one hand, one could see the awful position a parent could find themselves in. On the other hand, one could also say that David reaped what he sowed. Perhaps if he had disciplined Ammon and taken care of Tamar in the first place, Absalom wouldn’t have felt the need to take his own vengeance. Perhaps if he had raised his heir to be a kind man who respects women, especially the women in his own family, the atrocity against Tamar wouldn’t have happened at all.

After several years, David calls Absalom back to Jerusalem but hesitates to meet with him for some time. In response, Absalom begins to plot against his father (1 Samuel 15). Ultimately, Absalom leads an open rebellion against his King David. Absalom’s forces eventually are defeated and he himself is entangled in a tree. David has declared that no one shall harm Absalom but his general,

Joab, and ten of his men kill the rebelling prince (1 Samuel 18:14-15). David mourns Absalom's death to the point where his general Joab reprimands him (1 Samuel 19:2-9).

In the end, a dying David is manipulated by his queen, Bathsheba, and his prophet Nathan, into naming Solomon – not his oldest living son – as his heir (2 Samuel 1:15-37). The great king who has led mighty armies and charmed chieftains and women throughout the Levant cannot muster himself to be the law to his family when they commit crimes nor can he even guide the kingdom into the next generation. Instead, he lies helplessly, gasping his last while his family/victims squabble over his wealth and power. The mighty one is now shown to be who he has been inside all along: weak and utterly unloved.

At the end of the day, all David had to commend himself was the one thing he had ever built: his kingdom. It was the only thing he had ever been good at and it was the only thing about him anyone near him had ever cared about.

God continued to try to work good through the kingdom David had built, but despite Solomon's prayers for wisdom, David's ultimate heir chooses to never heed wisdom. Indeed, Solomon's policies serve to destroy the united monarchy

that David had established virtually the moment Solomon dies (1 Kings 12:1-20).

God's greatest act of salvation, of course, is through the work of the divine human, Jesus. While Jesus was always in perfect obedience to His Heavenly Father, He did not always necessarily put His earthly parents first.

Luke 2:41-51 reveals this aspect of Jesus to us. Every year, Joseph and Mary take Jesus up to Jerusalem for Passover, like the good Jews they were. Because travel was so dangerous in first century Judea, people traveled in large groups. In such large groups, women generally walked together while men socialized in their own groups.

During the year Jesus becomes an adult, the year He is twelve, His family joins the groups of happy pilgrims traveling to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This is the first year that Jesus will be attending the holiday as an adult man. Because of this fact, Mary and Joseph give Jesus free rein during this journey, permitting the young Jesus to roam throughout the caravan, without mom or dad hovering.

However, after a day and a half of not seeing Jesus at all, Mary and Joseph become understandably concerned. They search among their relatives, friends and even

acquaintances, but cannot find any sign of Jesus. Any one of us can empathize with their sense of growing panic as they return to Jerusalem and search for their son for three days.

We must remember that all numbers in the Bible are symbolic. Three is a symbolic number signifying “completeness and stability, as represented by the three Patriarchs and the three pilgrimage festivals – Passover, Shavuot [Pentecost] and Sukkot [the Feast of Booths].”² Therefore, Mary and Joseph must search the big city of Jerusalem for their lost young adult son until “the time of stability” can be reached, until the time is proper for finding Jesus.

We can only imagine the terror of Mary and Joseph as they swept the streets in search of the young Jesus. Although He was an adult, He was still young and sheltered and from a very, very small town. He didn’t know the ways of such a massive city or the type of people that can be found in it! The image of Jesus dead in a ditch is probably the mildest image running through the couple’s minds.

The Bible doesn’t describe why Joseph and Mary finally chose to search the Temple or if they went there to appeal to

² [Judaism and Numbers | My Jewish Learning](#).

God and the elders for assistance as they became desperate. Nevertheless, upon their arrival, they are shocked to discover their son “sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:46-47). They probably froze in the doorway.

However, Mary makes it clear that she and Joseph are not amused. She says to Jesus, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have looking for you with great anxiety” (Luke 2:48). Personally, I think she showed great restraint. She undoubtedly did not raise her voice and she could have laid the guilt on way more thickly than she did two things I know I would have raised my voice and it would have been filled with guilt-inducing language if my child had disappeared for four and a half days. I would do that now if one of my children disappeared for four and a half days and they’re twenty-six and twenty-four.

And how does the perfect, obedient Son of God respond to the pain of His earthly parents? Does He apologize? No! Does He empathize with their suffering? No! Does He even express concern that they have been searching for so long? Goodness, no! He merely answers, “Why were you looking

for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

If my child's first response after such a situation was not immediate and complete contrition, I would still be hollering at them.

However, we should take note of Jesus' actions here. As respectful of His earthly parents as Jesus always is, at the end of the day, it is God's will which we must obey above all else.

We are told that Jesus "went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). If we notice, we don't hear about Jesus again until He is thirty years old. I believe that is because Jesus has been grounded for eighteen years, until He is thirty.

In Matthew 12:46-50, "while he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him...But he said in reply to the one who told him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

In a culture where blood ties bind a person and create their meaning in the world, Jesus has just publicly disowned His family and told everyone that they can only rejoin Him as family if they raise their moral behavior to the higher standards that Jesus has just set, standards that his disciples are already following.

Those of us who hold the Blessed Mother in high regard find this treatment of her astonishing and offensive. We should also see this treatment of her as a cautionary tale. If the behavior of the Blessed Mother is not up to the standards of Jesus, than we better be looking to our own behavior very, very carefully.