

CRIMES MOST FOUL  
Read Genesis 4:1-11 and 2 Samuel 13:1-19

Abel's staff sunk into a hidden rabbit hole which caused him to stumble as he trudged toward his meandering sheep. His flock was fewer in number today since he had taken all the first-born of his flock yesterday to make his grateful offering to his God. He was not concerned about the smaller flock size; he had faith that God would provide what he required. He was, however, distressed about his brother. Since the previous day, the usually cheerful Cain had become moody— minutes before, Cain had stomped away from their conversation together. Abel's puzzled reflections prevented him from hearing the rushed footsteps behind him; he never felt the blow to his head. Abel suddenly tumbled to the earth, dead... like a lamb newly slain.

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Cain and Abel are presented to the reader through an account of their births. Cain is conceived first; he is followed by Abel "his **brother**" (Genesis 4:1). The author repeatedly reminds the reader that these siblings are brothers. A close study of the narrative is necessary to unveil the reason for this repetition. Following God's acceptance of Abel's gift as well as His rejection of Cain's gift, "Cain talked with Abel his **brother**" while they were in a field. Then "Cain rose up against Abel, his **brother**, and slew him" (v. 8). The LORD identified Abel as Cain's brother when He asked Cain, "Where is Abel, your **brother**" (v. 9). And with his infamous reply of "am I my **brother's** keeper?" Cain shirks even basic familial responsibilities (v. 9). The Lord, however, demands, "What have you done? The voice of your **brother's** blood cries to Me from the ground." God then declares that Cain is "cursed from the earth, which has opened her mouth to receive your **brother's** blood from your hand" (vv. 10-11). Clearly, the reader has no need to be reminded seven times that Cain and Abel are brothers.

Another example of a repeated kindred relationship is the record of Tamar and Amnon. They are sister and brother by King David, but they have different mothers. Once their relationship is made known in 2 Samuel 13:1, we are informed that "Amnon the son of David loved Tamar." Amnon lusted for her so that "he felt sick for his **sister** Tamar" (v. 2). When he expresses his feelings to his friend Jonadab, however, he distances his relationship to her by saying, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's **sister**." This seems to be an attempt to excuse or minimize his lustful feelings toward his sister.

Jonadab, whose name can be translated "crafty," proposes a devious scheme. He advises Amnon to pretend he is sick. Jonadab tells Amnon, "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Please let my **sister** Tamar come and serve me food'" (v. 5). Amnon makes this request when David comes to see him: "Let Tamar my **sister** come and make for me a couple of cakes in my sight that I may eat at her hand" (13:6). The reader may feel a chill when David sends for Tamar and demands that she "Go now to your **brother** Amnon's house" to prepare food for Amnon (v. 8).

When Tamar "went to her **brother** Amnon's house" he was lying down. In his presence she baked the food while Amnon sent everyone out of the room. At his request she brings the food to "Amnon her **brother**" (13:10). Amnon then grabs Tamar and urges her, whispering, "Come lie with me, my **sister**!" (v. 11). Such a deceitful trick appears even worse reading her anguished response: "No, my **brother**, do not force [yourself on] me!" (v. 12). Tamar's appeal did nothing to stop Amnon. After he "forced

her and lay with her,” however, he despised her so completely that “the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her” (v. 15). Additionally, his pretense of sisterly affection is now gone when he demands, “Arise, be gone” (v. 15). He tells his servant to “Put now this one out from me, and bolt the door after her” (v. 17). She is now “this one” and no longer “my sister.”

It seems evident that the author wishes to emphasize the horror of the crimes by reminding the reader of the close family relationship between hunter and prey. It is not against a stranger or even an enemy that these horrible acts were committed—these were between two brothers and between brother and sister. The words “brother” and “sister” are very purposeful. These acts of brutality—the slaughter of Abel by his brother Cain and the incestuous abuse of Tamar by her brother Amnon--are made significantly more repulsive through the use of repeated words in the narrative. The crimes are, indeed, most foul.