

# The Need for a Trauma-Informed Lutheran Theology: A Case Study on Lutheran Study Bibles

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*“And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”*

—Jesus (Matt 25:40)

## Introduction

In his pioneering work *Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church*,<sup>1</sup> Pete Singer observes that trauma is “inseparable” from the Bible. Indeed, we need look no further than the first book of the Bible to find acts of “murder (Gen 4), child abuse (Gen 19), slavery (Gen 37), intimate partner violence (Gen 16), famine (Gen 47), loss of loved ones (Gen 4), sexual assault (Gen 34)” and war (Gen 14).<sup>2</sup>

The New Testament includes the torture and killing of the followers of Jesus (Acts 7:54-60; Acts 8:1; Acts 8:3; Acts 12:1-3). The Bible also tells us Jesus endured multiple forms of trauma. As a child, Jesus narrowly escaped child homicide (Matt 2:16-18). As a man, Jesus suffered emotional abuse (Matt 27:39-41; Mark 15:15-20), physical abuse (e.g., John 18:22-24; John 19:1), torture (e.g., Matt 27:32-44), and murder (e.g., Matt 27:45-50). Since he was stripped of his clothing, and crucifying victims naked was part of the sexual humiliation Roman soldiers forced victims to endure, our Lord suffered sexual exploitation as that term is understood today.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Pete Singer, “Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church: Equipping Faith Communities to Prevent and Respond to Abuse,” 51:1 *Currents in Theology and Mission* (2024): 62-76.

2. Singer, “Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church,” 62-76.

3. “What sort of abuse is stripping and forced exposure if it not sexual abuse? Public stripping, enforced nakedness, and sexual humiliation constitute sexual abuse because they are attacks on sexual identity and sexual vulnerability... They derive their power and impact because they were understood—and are still understood—to have a sexual dimension. To name them only as abuse is to mischaracterize what has happened, which serves to distort the reality of Jesus’ experience.” Jamey R. Reaves & David Tombs, “Introduction: Acknowledging Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse,” in Jamey R. Reaves, David Tombs, & Rocio Figueroa, eds., *When Did we See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse* (SCM Press: London, UK 2021), 3.

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Given that “trauma is woven throughout scripture” and that the God we worship was a victim of multiple forms of abuse, Lutherans should strive to better understand the impact of trauma at the time atrocities were committed as well as the impact on today’s survivors of abuse who may read these sacred texts.

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Given that “trauma is woven throughout scripture”<sup>4</sup> and that the God we worship was a victim of multiple forms of abuse,<sup>5</sup> Lutherans should strive to better understand the impact of trauma at the time atrocities were committed as well as the impact on today’s survivors of abuse who may read these sacred texts. Modern medicine may help us better understand leprosy or other diseases referenced in the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Archaeology aids in understanding ancient cities and other communities mentioned by the inspired writers of God’s word.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, modern research on trauma can help us better understand the anguish of victims whose experiences are recorded in the Bible as well as the mindset of those who commit cruelties.

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4. Reaves & Tombs, “Introduction: Acknowledging Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse,” 3.

5. For a more complete analysis of the abuse Jesus suffered as well as applying the teaching of Christ to cases of child abuse, see Victor I. Vieth, *On this Rock: A Call to Center the Christian Response to Child Abuse on the Life and Words of Jesus* (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2018).

6. e.g., Dr. Paul Brant & Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2019).

7. e.g., John F. Brug, *Digging for Insights: Using Archeology to Study the Bible* (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, 2016).

Irrespective of the lens through which a Lutheran denomination interprets scripture,<sup>8</sup> becoming more trauma-informed is critical if we are to slow the exodus of survivors of abuse from our congregations,<sup>9</sup> and provide pastoral care<sup>10</sup> to the large number of parishioners and community members who are spiritually wounded as a result of trauma.<sup>11</sup> Many pastors work with parishioners struggling with alcoholism, drug addiction, anger management, depression, and various medical conditions but are unaware of the role that childhood trauma plays in these conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Through the Bible, God has given us numerous accounts of trauma, which we can discuss in our sermons, Bible classes, and in providing spiritual care.<sup>13</sup> If, though, we know very little about the impact of trauma on the mind and body,<sup>14</sup> we may unwittingly say something insensitive to a victim or fail to speak a message that would bring emotional or spiritual relief. There is a balm in Gilead for victims of abuse, but the effectiveness of this ointment often depends on whether a pastor is trauma-informed and, in many cases, is willing and able to coordinate spiritual care with appropriate mental health care.<sup>15</sup>

8. As one overview and perspective of these theological divides, see Ken Schurb, ed., *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2024).

9. Kate Shellnut, “1 in 10 Protestants Have a Left a Church Over Abuse,” *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2019, available online at [www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/lifeway-protestant-abuse-survey-young-christians-leave-chur.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/lifeway-protestant-abuse-survey-young-christians-leave-chur.html).

10. Victor I. Vieth, “Providing Pastoral Care to Survivors of Child Abuse,” 24(2) *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (April/May 2024).

11. Victor I. Vieth and Pete Singer, “Wounded Souls: The Need for Child Protection Professionals and Faith Leaders to Recognize and Respond to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse,” 45(4) *Mitchell Hamline Law Review* (2019), 1213-1234.

12. Vincent J. Filetti & Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders, and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” *Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, Ruth A. Lanius et al., eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 77-87.

13. Spiritual care may differ, at least in part, on the type of abuse that was inflicted and how an offender may have incorporated religion into the trauma. For an overview of addressing the spiritual needs of children who were tortured, see Pamel J. Miller, Judith S. Rycus, and Victor Vieth, *Intrafamilial Child Torture: Victim Impact and Professional Interventions* (Child Maltreatment Policy Resource Center, 2022), available online at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64c7d1ee0140de0c81f26eb9/t/6571d50299f4f63a3c6e00ad/1701970798423/CMPRC-ICT-Victim-Impact-Prof-Interventions>

14. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Penguin Books: New York, New York, 2015).

15. Pete Singer, “Coordinating Pastoral Care of Survivors with Mental Health Providers,” 45:3 *Currents in Mission & Theology* (2018):31-35. As noted in Singer’s article, some clergy discourage victims of abuse from accessing mental health care believing it is inconsistent with scripture. This is ironic given that Martin Luther’s pastoral care for those suffering from mental illness parallels cognitive behavioral therapy, the most research-based form of therapy used today for those who have endured trauma. Stephen M. Saunders, *Martin*

## Becoming more trauma-informed is critical if we are to slow the exodus of survivors of abuse from our congregations, and provide pastoral care to the large number of parishioners and community members who are spiritually wounded as a result of trauma.

To assist in understanding the importance of this topic, this article offers a widely accepted definition of what it means to be “trauma-informed” and then applies this definition to Lutheran Bible commentaries published by the three largest Lutheran bodies in the United States. Since the Bible is replete with accounts of abuse, this article is limited to addressing four acts of sexual trauma—the sexual assault of Dinah, the sexual assault of Tamar, Lot’s decision to offer his daughters to be raped and his own impregnating of these children, and the sexual exploitation of Bathsheba. The article will also consider Lutheran Bible commentaries on the admonition in Deuteronomy that a woman is a victim of sexual assault in the city only if she cries out (a different standard applies to sexual assault in the country) (Deut 22:23-27).

As will be shown, there is significant room for Lutheran Bible commentators writing about sexual assault to demonstrate greater sensitivity to readers who have endured similar trauma. The need for improvement in this area is more than simply demonstrating compassion to those who have been victimized, it is also recognizing that if God inspired these accounts of trauma to be written down (2 Tim 3:16), the Lord must have wanted us to study and learn from them. Stated differently, it appears that our Creator is trauma-informed and desires that we also grow in our understanding of trauma and our ability to minister to those who are suffering. The purpose of this article is not to point a finger at the publishers, editors, or writers of Lutheran study Bibles. Instead, the goal of this case study is to offer concrete suggestions for improving future editions of these study Bibles, and to spur a more trauma-informed theological engagement with these texts in Lutheran seminaries, congregations, and other settings.

### SAMSHA’s definition of “trauma-informed”

The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) has the following concrete definition of being trauma-informed:

*Luther on Mental Health* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, Missouri, 2023).

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; **recognizes** signs and symptoms in clients, families, staff, and others involved with systems; **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seeks to actively **resist re-traumatization**.<sup>16</sup>

### *Applying the SAMSHA definition of “trauma-informed” to Lutheran Study Bibles*

Applying SAMSHA’s “4 R’s” definition of being trauma-informed to the Lutheran study Bibles reviewed in this article, four questions are appropriate:

1. Do the authors of these commentaries **realize** the widespread impact of trauma, in this case sexual assault?
2. Do the authors **recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma found in the biblical accounts of sexual assault discussed in this article?
3. Do the commentaries **respond** to the biblical accounts of sexual assault by integrating knowledge about trauma into their writing about these texts?
4. Do the commentators write in such a way as to avoid **re-traumatizing** any victims of sexual assault who may be reading their work?<sup>17</sup>

### **The ELCA, LCMS and WELS Lutheran Study Bibles**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) is the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States and, in 2009, it published *Lutheran Study Bible* through its publishing house, Augsburg Fortress (AF).<sup>18</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is the second largest Lutheran denomination in the United States and its Concordia Publishing House (CPH) has produced two study Bibles. In 1986, the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* was published as “a Lutheran edition of the NIV Study Bible” whose “notes have been edited and revised to provide a distinctively Lutheran emphasis.”<sup>19</sup> In 2009, CPH published *The Lutheran Study Bible*. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) is the third largest Lutheran denomination in the United States and, in 2021, its Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) released *An EHV Study Bible*, which was produced by the “Wartburg Project,” a group of WELS pastors (and others in fellowship with the WELS).<sup>20</sup>

16. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “SAMSHA’s Concept of Trauma Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.” <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhas-concept-trauma-and-guidance-trauma-informed-approach/sma14-4884>.

17. SAMSHA, “Concept of Trauma-Guidance”

18. *Lutheran Study Bible* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 2009).

19. Foreword, *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1986).

20. For additional information, see <https://wartburgproject.org/>

**The goal of this case study is to offer concrete suggestions for improving future editions of these study Bibles, and to spur a more trauma-informed theological engagement with these texts in Lutheran seminaries, congregations, and other settings.**

To assist readers in distinguishing these Bibles, two of which have nearly identical names and all of which contain the words “study Bible,” each Bible will be identified by its title followed by an identification of its publishing house and the Lutheran denomination the book is affiliated with. Hence, they will be identified as:

- *An EHV Study Bible* (NPH WELS)
- *The Lutheran Study Bible* (CPH LCMS)
- *Lutheran Study Bible* (AF ELCA)
- *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (CPH LCMS)

When quoting Bible passages commented on by the authors of these study Bibles, the translation used by the particular study Bible will be used. *An EHV Study Bible* (NPH WELS) utilizes the EHV (Evangelical Heritage Version) translation, *The Lutheran Study Bible* (CPH LCMS) uses the ESV (English Standard Version) translation, *Lutheran Study Bible* (AF ELCA) uses the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) translation, and the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (CPH LCMS) uses the NIV (New International Version) translation from 1984. Unless otherwise noted, when the author is introducing various biblical accounts of sexual assault, the NRSVUE (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition) translation is being quoted.

### **All four Lutheran Study Bibles lack an article on sexual assault or exploitation**

As a preliminary matter, it should be noted that none of these Lutheran study Bibles contains an article on sexual assault or exploitation. Since the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (CPH LCMS) only has opening commentary on each book of the Bible as well as notes on the verses, this is not particularly noteworthy. *An EHV Study Bible* (NPH WELS) also has opening commentary for each book of the Bible but includes several appendices on subjects such as “weights and measures,” “the prophets,” and “climate and the land.”<sup>21</sup> It does not have any articles to assist readers in understanding the myriad accounts of sexual assault in the Bible and how God’s people should respond to these offenses. Similarly,

21. *An EHV Study Bible* (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, 2021), 2102-2144.

*Lutheran Study Bible (AF ELCA)* has several articles related to scripture and the catechism but not directly addressing the accounts of sexual assault or other trauma found in the sacred texts.

*The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)* stands out in lacking specific articles on sexual assault. This is because the study Bible has over 200 articles on myriad subjects including “Humor and comedy in the Bible,”<sup>22</sup> “Music and instruments in Israel,”<sup>23</sup> “Homosexuality and biblical teaching,”<sup>24</sup> “God’s desire in prayer,”<sup>25</sup> and “Five reasons to give tithes and offerings.”<sup>26</sup> Given the wide range of subjects covered in this study Bible, the absence of even one article addressing sexual assault is a more noticeable omission. Although topics such as “humor and comedy in the Bible” are interesting and worthy subjects to address, the biblical accounts of sexual assault and what God wants us to learn from these texts in providing pastoral and other care to survivors is just as worthy a topic.

Although each of the Lutheran Study Bibles lacks any specific article addressing sexual assault or exploitation, each of them addresses various accounts of sexual abuse contained in God’s word. The weaknesses and strengths of these commentaries are considered below.

## The Sexual Exploitation of Bathsheba

In 2019, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor John Schuetze examined twenty-five Bible commentaries on David’s sexual exploitation of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).<sup>27</sup> Schuetze found that fourteen of these commentaries “placed some of the blame on Bathsheba,” six were neutral on whether or not she consented but five of these used terms such as “adultery” which suggested consensual sex, and only “five of the twenty-five commentaries described Bathsheba as a victim of David’s desires.”<sup>28</sup>

Schuetze points out that the majority view of Bathsheba as complicit in her own sexual exploitation is not supported by anything in the biblical text. Instead, the reader is told that although it was “the time when kings go off to battle,” David “remained in Jerusalem” (2 Sam 11:1). Walking on the roof of his house, David saw a “very beautiful” woman bathing (2 Sam 11:2). David sends someone to learn the identity of the woman and is told she is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who is away at war (2 Sam 11:3). Although he now knows he cannot add her to his harem, David “sent messengers to get her” and “he lay with her” (2 Sam 11:4). This likely would have been an end to the offense except that Bathsheba becomes pregnant (2 Sam 11:5). This sets in motion a chain of events in which David arranges for the murder of Uriah (2 Sam 11: 6-25) and takes Bathsheba as his

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wife (2 Sam 11:26-27).

The inspired writer tells us the “thing that David had done displeased the Lord” (2 Sam 12:1) but does not mention God being upset with Bathsheba. God sends “Nathan to David” (2 Sam 12:1) but not to Bathsheba even though she would have been living in the royal palace with David at the time.<sup>29</sup> Nathan leads David to repentance by telling him a story in which Bathsheba is portrayed not as a “seductive tigress,”<sup>30</sup> but as “one little ewe lamb” (2 Sam 12:3), the epitome of powerlessness and vulnerability. When Nathan directly confronts David, he boldly asserts “You are the man!” (2 Sam 12:7).<sup>31</sup> As Schuetze notes, Nathan doesn’t say “You two are sinners” which would have been logical if Bathsheba was the seductress some assert and this was an intentional act of infidelity.<sup>32</sup>

Schuetze also takes issue with those who cast blame on Bathsheba for not crying out. In addition to this being “an argument from silence,” Schuetze notes the “huge power differential between David the mighty warrior and King of Israel, and one of his female subjects.”<sup>33</sup> “If she did cry out,” Schuetze asks, “would her cries have been heard and heeded? Her husband was gone, and she was in the inner chambers of the king’s palace.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, since David was about to engineer a murder, it is not outlandish to contemplate he was also capable of using force if Bathsheba, the “ewe lamb,” did not submit to his lust.<sup>35</sup>

Schuetze’s analysis is exegetically sound and adheres closely to the actual text. Unfortunately, each of the four Lutheran Study Bibles examined in this article stray outside the text and cast at least partial blame on Bathsheba.

29. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 246.

30. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 246.

31. For a deeper analysis of Nathan’s courage in confronting David, see Victor I. Vieth, “A Godly Response to Abuse within a Christian Institution,” in *CSB Life Counsel Bible* (New Growth Press: Greensboro North Carolina, 2023), 379-380.

32. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 246.

33. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 246.

34. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 246.

35. “That the authority of David’s command was not to be trifled with is also confirmed in the later experience of Uriah” in which his “noncompliance with David’s suggestions, commands and manipulations cost him his life.” Richard M. Davidson, “Sexual Abuse in the Old Testament: An Overview of Laws, Narratives, and Oracles,” in *The Long Journey Home*, Andrew J. Schmutzer, ed. (Wipf & Stocke: Eugene, Oregon, 2011), 136, 145.

22. *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2009), 1355.

23. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 933.

24. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 1911.

25. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 2071.

26. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 1092.

27. John D. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 116(4) *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Fall 2019): 243.

28. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 243.

### *An EHV Study Bible (WELS NPH)*

This study Bible correctly notes that Bathsheba was bathing as an act of “purifying herself after her period.”<sup>36</sup> In the same sentence, though, the EHV commentators say this shows “they were more careful about keeping the ceremonial law against contamination by blood than they were about the moral pollution of adultery” (emphasis added).<sup>37</sup> By using the word “they” not once but twice and calling the act “adultery,” the writers are asserting Bathsheba’s complicity in David’s sexual misconduct. However, there is nothing in the text which would support this conclusion. As Schuetze points out, “Bathsheba was not enjoying a relaxing ‘bubble bath’ to refresh herself at the close of a warm day, or to draw the attention of a vulnerable king” but was instead honoring God’s law to purify herself after her monthly period (Lev 15:19-24).<sup>38</sup> As Joyce Baldwin writes, “Opposite the man who is the prey of blind passion stands Bathsheba, and by contrast her purity receives an emblematic aspect.”<sup>39</sup>

After *An EHV Study Bible* asserts Bathsheba’s complicity in David’s sexual misconduct, the very next sentence reads “The text does not specifically tell us whether Bathsheba was a willing participant in this situation or she was an innocent victim of David’s power.”<sup>40</sup> If this is true, then why does the previous sentence in the commentary suggest the offense was adultery and that Bathsheba’s bathing was a hypocritical adherence to purity laws pertaining to blood but not God’s law forbidding adultery?<sup>41</sup> Moreover, while it is true the text does not specifically say “Bathsheba was an innocent victim,” the text does repeatedly make clear that David is sinning and at no point casts blame on Bathsheba. When Nathan likens Bathsheba to “one little ewe lamb” he does not have the lamb willingly submit to a sacrifice but instead the lamb is killed and consumed (2 Sam 12:4).

### *The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

This study Bible also finds Bathsheba complicit in David’s sexual misconduct. In commenting on the language “he lay with her” (2 Sam 11:4 English Standard Version), the commentary describes this as the sin of adultery without commenting on the language in the same passage that “David sent messengers and *he took her...*” (emphasis added).<sup>42</sup> As Bill Arnold writes “The specific verbs used in 11:4 to describe David’s actions are painfully clear: He sends, he takes her...and he lies with her. Mercifully brief, with

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no account of conversation or mitigating circumstances, the verse coldly recounts David’s crime.”<sup>43</sup>

Just as *An EHV Study Bible* casts aspersions on Bathsheba’s honoring of God’s law pertaining to purification, *The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)* casts doubt as to whether or not Bathsheba truly grieved that her husband was killed (2 Sam 11:26) by saying “*Whether or not* the lamentation was genuine...” (emphasis added).<sup>44</sup> Instead, the commentary asserts “Bathsheba likely became David’s wife shortly after the seven days in *order to hide their sin*” (emphasis added).<sup>45</sup> These comments are made even though there is nothing in the text to suggest Bathsheba did not grieve her husband’s murder or was pretending sorrow simply to cover up David’s crimes. In commenting on this text, Richard Davidson writes:

The strong emotive language used to describe Bathsheba’s grieving for Uriah when she heard he was killed assures us that she was by no means a co-conspirator with David: she doesn’t just mourn (*abal*, v. 27) but wails/laments with loud cries (*sapad*, v. 26). The fact the narrator still here calls her “the wife of Uriah” implies her continued fidelity to her husband, as does the reference to Uriah as her “lord/husband.” By using the term “lord” (*ba’al*) to denote her husband, the narrator intimates that “if Uriah is her ‘lord,’ then David is not.”<sup>46</sup>

It is also noteworthy that after her lamentation, the narrative does not say that Bathsheba went to David but rather “David sent and brought her to his house” (2 Sam 11:26).

### *Lutheran Study Bible (AF ELCA)*

This is the least egregious of the four Lutheran study Bibles in blaming Bathsheba. Commenting on 2 Sam 11:1-12:1 the writer

36. *An EHV Study Bible*, 447.

37. *An EHV Study Bible*, 447.

38. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 245.

39. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 245.

40. *An EHV Study Bible*, 447.

41. This is not the only time *An EHV Study Bible* writers cast equal blame on Bathsheba. In commenting on 2 Sam 12:26, they write: “David had stayed home during the campaign against Rabbah... an act which provided an opportunity for his *sin with Bathsheba*.” (emphasis added). *An EHV Study Bible*, 449. The phrase “sin with Bathsheba” as opposed to “sin against Bathsheba” conveys the notion she was equally responsible for David’s sexual offense.

42. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 501.

43. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” citing Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 527.

44. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 502.

45. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 502.

46. Richard M. Davidson, “Sexual Abuse in the Old Testament: An Overview of Laws, Narratives, and Oracles,” in *The Long Journey Home*, Andrew J. Schmutzer, ed. (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2011), 136, 147.

states “David exercises his royal power as he *sends* many people in many directions to serve his tragic purposes: Joab, Uriah, and messengers to Bathsheba. Finally, David’s sending is cut off when God *sends* Nathan to him” (emphasis in the original).<sup>47</sup> Although this commentary puts the focus on David’s sin it does not make clear the logical connection that there is no focus on Bathsheba because of an implicit recognition of her powerlessness. Moreover, the emphasis on David’s misconduct alone is undermined by the editorial heading for this section: “David Commits Adultery *with* Bathsheba” (emphasis added).<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, while the emphasis is on David’s sin, this study Bible nonetheless includes language blaming Bathsheba.

### **Concordia Self-Study Bible (CPH LCMS)**

Of the four Lutheran study Bibles examined in this article, this is perhaps the most egregious in casting blame on Bathsheba. In commenting on 2 Sam 11:4, the writer states “Bathsheba appears to have been an unprotesting partner in this adulterous relationship with David.”<sup>49</sup> This language reflects a long-standing bias against sexual assault victims that unless they make clear their objection to assault, any offenses against them are not to be taken seriously.<sup>50</sup> As Schuetze points out, though, this is an argument rooted in silence and devoid of common sense. Even if Bathsheba protested and cried out, who could have heard and been able to help her?<sup>51</sup>

It is impossible to understate the potential of commentary such as this to harm sexual assault victims of today who have endured similar victim blaming.<sup>52</sup> As one example, consider the experience of Emily Joy Allison, who recounts the abuse she endured as a child at the hands of a male church leader and the reaction of her family and congregation when the abuse was discovered:

47. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 514.

48. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 514.

49. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 437.

50. As one victim of child sexual abuse writes, “Although I instinctively knew that what he was doing to me was wrong, I did not have the courage to confront my abuser at the time. To this day I lament my silence because I am convinced that it was mistakenly construed as compliance—compliance that contributed to the furtherance of the abuse.” “Sean’s Story,” in *The Long Journey Home*, Andrew J. Schmutzer, ed. (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2011), 369, 370.

51. Schuetze, “Bathsheba and the Nature of David’s Sin,” 246.

52. When the Southern Baptist Convention invited survivors of clergy abuse to share their experiences, they received chilling accounts of victim blaming. For example, survivor Susan Codone said: “The disruption of my life began at age 14 in my small Southern Baptist church a few miles outside of Birmingham, Alabama. For months, my youth minister had showered me with flattering attention, telling me that God had chosen me to help his ministry. This grooming led to 18 months of progressively worse sexual abuse, layered with threats. When I could not tolerate the abuse any longer, I told the only person whom I thought could stop it—my pastor. Implausibly, he was not receptive, and suggested that maybe I had brought it on myself.” *Caring Well: A Report from the SBC Sexual Abuse Advisory Group* (2019) 4, available online at: <https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC-Caring-Well-Report-June-2019.pdf>

**If the Christian community is to effectively minister to sexual assault victims, Bible scholars need to improve their understanding of power differentials and the dynamics involved when those in power lust after those without power.**

The more I learned, the more I realized how shameful and ludicrous it was that not a single adult in my life at the time realized that a relationship between a sixteen-year-old with no sex education and a man in his thirties who was supposed to be a spiritual authority figure at church could not possibly be consensual. And yet it had been treated like a coequal perpetration of sin and not the predatory campaign of manipulation and grooming that it was.<sup>53</sup>

If the Christian community is to effectively minister to sexual assault victims, Bible scholars need to improve their understanding of power differentials and the dynamics involved when those in power lust after those without power. To this end, the publishing houses of each of the Lutheran study Bibles discussed in this article are urged to reconsider their commentaries on the sexual exploitation of Bathsheba.

### **The Rape of Dinah**

In the book of Genesis, we are told of Dinah who “went out to visit the daughters of the region” when a man named Shechem “saw her,” “seized her,” and “lay with her by force” (Gen 34:1-2). The reader is also told that Shechem’s “soul was drawn to Dinah” and that “he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her” (Gen 34:3). As a result, he told his father “Get me this girl to be my wife” (Gen 34:4). When Dinah’s father, Jacob, learned of the offense, he “held his peace” until he could speak to his sons (Gen 34:5). Jacob’s sons were “indignant and very angry” (Gen 34:7) and devised and executed a plot to murder Shechem (Gen 34:13-31).

### **Lutheran Study Bible (AF ELCA)**

This is the strongest of the four study Bibles concerning the trauma experienced by Dinah. The heading selected by the publisher for this section of the Bible is “The Rape of Dinah” and the commentary makes clear that this was a sexual assault.<sup>54</sup> The commentary notes the “narrator does not give Dinah a voice, so we

53. Emily Joy Allison, *#ChurchToo* (Broadleaf Books: Minneapolis, 2021), 15.

54. The commentary for verses 1-2 states Dinah is “Jacob’s only daughter (30:21). She is raped by Shechem.” *Lutheran Study Bible*, 95.

don't hear the story from her perspective."<sup>55</sup> From this observation, the commentary also poses a reflective question "How might this text, in which Dinah is silent, help us in the church talk about rape (and other forms of sexual abuse)?"<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, there is a lost opportunity to help the reader understand the cognitive distortions exhibited by the rapist. In talking about the "love" Shechem expresses for Dinah, the commentary simply says "this is not unusual in view of Israel's laws (see Deut 22:28-29).<sup>57</sup> What is also not unusual, and what is supported by modern research, is for sex offenders to engage in the cognitive distortion that their sexual crimes reflect a "love" of the victim and how often they manipulate a victim through grooming patterns which include seemingly kind gestures such as gentle words and expensive gifts.<sup>58</sup> If these additional facts had been included, the reader would be better able to understand Shechem's conduct and to apply his actions to contemporary cases of sexual assault.

### *Concordia Self-Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

This study Bible uses the 1984 NIV translation that Shechem "saw her, he took her and violated her" (Gen 34:2). In commenting on this verse, the writers note that Shechem "was probably named after the city" but offer no commentary on the rape of Dinah.<sup>59</sup> As noted earlier, one standard of being trauma-informed is to actively resist re-traumatization. If this commentary is looked at through the eyes of a survivor of sexual assault, it is easy to see how a survivor may be hurt by the decision to avoid any comments about the violation of Dinah but instead to comment on the origin of Shechem's name. It is as if the assault is unworthy of discussion, and it reinforces Dinah's silence in the biblical account itself.

### *The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

This study Bible does acknowledge Shechem "raped" Dinah.<sup>60</sup> However, the commentary places its emphasis not on the

55. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 95.

56. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 96. Other scholars have also noticed the silencing of Dinah. Richard Davidson writes: "The account of Dinah's violation not only denies her rape by Shechem, but the carefully crafted narration perhaps emphasizes *by its silence* the denigration and oppression of the women in the story. Dinah never speaks! Even though she is sexually abused, feminist interpreters point out, she is given no voice to protest. Even in the brother's retaliation for the heinous crime done against their sister, Dinah is apparently not given the full respect of her personhood." Richard M. Davidson, "Sexual Abuse in the Old Testament: An Overview of Laws, Narratives, and Oracles," in *The Long Journey Home*, Andrew J. Schmutzer, ed. (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2011), 136, 147.

57. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 96.

58. See generally, Theodore P. Cross, Victor I. Vieth, Amy Russell, and Cory Jewell Jensen, "Adult Sex Offenders Against Children: Etiology, Typologies, Investigation, Treatment, Monitoring, and Recidivism," in Robert Geffner, et al., eds., *Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan* (Springer Nature: Switzerland, 2022), 857-883.

59. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 57.

60. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 68, (commentary of verse 2 says "He raped her.").

What is also not unusual, and what is supported by modern research, is for sex offenders to engage in the cognitive distortion that their sexual crimes reflect a "love" of the victim and how often they manipulate a victim through grooming patterns which include seemingly kind gestures such as gentle words and expensive gifts.

sexual assault of Dinah but rather the sins of Dinah's brothers. Specifically, the commentary states "One sin leads to another. Shechem rapes Dinah, and Jacob's sons abuse God's holy institution of circumcision so they could massacre the men of Shechem. Christians, beware! Those who treat God's holy things carelessly and who nurture vengeance prepare for themselves lasting misery. Zeal for a right cause is good, but moderation and due process are also required."<sup>61</sup>

Although this commentary is not without merit it is puzzling that there are no comments on the failure of both Jacob and his sons to care for Dinah in the aftermath of being raped. Other than a reference to "moderation and due process," there is no guidance on how Christians can pursue justice for victims of sexual assault such as calling the police and otherwise working with the criminal justice professionals God has charged with the obligation of holding sex offenders accountable (Rom 13:3). It is curious for this study Bible to observe the "abuse of God's holy institution of circumcision" but not observe, or at least not elaborate on the rape of a woman made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). One of the SAMSHA standards for trauma informed practice is to respond "by fully integrating knowledge about trauma" into our conduct. This was not done here.

### *An EHV Study Bible (NPH WELS)*

The EHV translation of Gen 34:2 is that Shechem "saw her and took her, he lay down with her, and humiliated her."<sup>62</sup> Although this language implies a sexual assault, the commentary says "The three Hebrew verbs *could* be rendered by the one English word *rape*, but the text uses euphemistic terms here and elsewhere in the chapter"<sup>63</sup>(emphasis added). Without commenting on the use of euphemisms, the authors leave open the possibility that Dinah

61. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 70.

62. *An EHV Study Bible*, 52.

63. *An EHV Study Bible*, 52.

may not have been raped.<sup>64</sup>

In commenting on the sexual assault of Dinah and its aftermath, the commentary concludes: “The purpose of this story is to show why it was necessary for Israel to go down to Egypt. It was getting hard to tell the difference between Israelites and Canaanites. The most honorable man<sup>65</sup> among the Canaanites was guilty of rape, but Jacob’s sons were guilty of murder, looting, and using the sacred sign of the covenant as a tool for murder.”<sup>66</sup>

Even if we concede that one purpose of God’s decision to inspire the recording of this sexual assault is to show the need for Israel to go down to Egypt, it is mystifying not to comment on what lessons God may have for today’s church in responding to sexual assault. A trauma-informed writer, for example, could easily compare the silencing of Dinah’s voice to the decision of many in the church today to silence the voice of victims of sexual abuse.<sup>67</sup>

Tiffany Thigpen, a survivor of sexual assault within the Southern Baptist Convention writes about her experience, and the experience of others in getting the nation’s largest Protestant denomination to listen to their cries. Even when the denomination debated and ultimately decided to take relatively small steps to reform,<sup>68</sup> Thigpen was wounded by how many of those who spoke minimized the pain of the victims:

“What we had to endure from those microphones, from some ‘pastors’ and leaders, was beyond horrific. Over and over again they insisted that there aren’t that many survivors, that sexual abuse is not a crisis, that reforms will cost too much, that all of this is a ‘sham,’ and worse. It was trauma inducing. And there are survivors who refuse to enter that room again. I really do not want to ever be there again.”<sup>69</sup>

64. Some scholars do raise the issue of whether Dinah was sexually assaulted. Commenting on Gen 34:2-3, one study Bible states: “We can’t tell what the storyteller meant to say about how Shechem treated Dinah. The Hebrew word translated *humiliated* is sometimes used to mean putting a virgin in a difficult social situation by having sex with her before marriage (Deut 22:29). In this case, the man was required to marry the woman and couldn’t divorce her. In other texts, the Hebrew word refers to abusive sex, that is, rape (Judg 20:5, 1 Sam 12:12, 14). Because the story stresses Shechem’s love for Dinah (cf Gen 34:11, 19), it may imply the first meaning, that by having sex with Dinah before marriage Shechem damaged Dinah’s social standing. As required, he seeks to marry her (Gen 34:4-12). In any event, Dinah’s brothers clearly felt Shechem had committed a serious wrong (Gen 34:7).” Joel B. Green, general ed., *The CEB Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee, 2013), 56.

65. This is in reference to Gen 34:19.

66. *An EHV Study Bible*, 53.

67. See e.g., note 52.

68. See e.g., Victor I. Vieth, “Lessons from the SBC Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Family & Intimate Partner Violence Quarterly* 15:3 (2023): 61-73; Michael D. Antonio, *Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime, and the Era of Catholic Scandal* (Thomas Dunn Books: New York, New York, 2013).

69. Tiffany Thigpen, “Why Would Survivors Attend the Southern Baptist Convention Meetings,” *Religion News Service*, March 15, 2024, available online at: <https://religionnews.com/2024/03/15/why-would-survivors-attend-the-southern-baptist-convention-meetings/?fbclid=IwAR31h677G4ErgPTwMOOCu81iXgTXsT2FQLhBMPp2>

**A** trauma-informed writer, for example, could easily compare the silencing of Dinah’s voice to the decision of many in the church today to silence the voice of victims of sexual abuse.

### The Rape of Tamar

The rape of Tamar is perhaps the most explicit, unequivocal sexual assault recorded in the Bible. The reader is told that Amnon “fell in love” with his sister Tamar and was “tormented” because “it seemed impossible” that he could “do anything to her” (2 Sam 13:1-2). With the help of a friend, he hatches a plan to feign illness and get the king to summon his sister to feed him (2 Sam 13:3-7). When Tamar brought food, Amnon “took hold of her” and demands sex from his sister (2 Sam 13:8-11). Tamar responds that such a “vile” thing should not be done and pleads with her brother not to sexually assault her (2 Sam 13:12). She explains the harm the rape would cause her by asking her brother “where could I carry my shame?” She also appeals to her assailant’s vanity by noting that he would be labeled a “scoundrel.” She even tries to buy herself some time by suggesting he seek the king’s permission to marry her (2 Sam 13:13). Amnon “did not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he forced her to lay with him” (2 Sam 13:14).

After the rape, Amnon’s “love” turns to hatred. We are told “his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her.” Amnon tells her to “get out” but when she begs him to allow her to stay to avoid even further shame, he asks a servant to “Put this woman out of my presence and bolt the door after her” (2 Sam 13:15-17).<sup>70</sup> Tamar responds by putting ashes on her head, tearing her robe, putting her hand on her head and “crying aloud as she went” (2 Sam 13:19).

Given the inspired writer’s explicit depiction of rape and the cunning cruelty of Amnon, it is shocking that pillars of the church have for centuries sought to blame Tamar for the crimes committed against her. In her book *The Cry of Tamar*, Pamela Cooper-White writes: “Commentators from the early church through the Reformation portrayed Tamar as an allegory for the dangers of feminine beauty, flirtation and seduction.”<sup>71</sup> As one example, Calvin condemned Amnon’s use of force but considered Tamar the greater sinner, concluding her plea for her rapist to marry her

IdFxPdaub6SpRwKiS8M

70. Some scholars note the phrase “this woman” is not in the Hebrew text and could be translated as “this thing.” Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford University Press: New York, New York, 2001), 463.

71. Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church’s Response* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 2012), 34.



was little more than “squatting in her own filth.”<sup>72</sup>

Although modern commentators “generally have passed on this androcentric bias,”<sup>73</sup> many have nonetheless failed to view the rape of Tamar through a trauma-informed lens. Each of the four study Bibles discussed in this article acknowledge Tamar was raped by Amnon and none of them blame Tamar for the assault. Nonetheless, two of the study Bibles have virtually no commentary on the verses detailing the rape and its aftermath. The other two study Bibles do a much better job of addressing the verses describing the sexual assault but fail to connect this event to modern trauma research or offer any prayer or comfort to sexual assault victims who may read this account and become triggered.

### *An EHV Study Bible (NPH WELS)*

This study Bible notes that “Amnon, David’s oldest son, commits a cruel act of incestuous rape against his half-sister, Tamar, and sends her away.” The commentary goes on to describe the “cold-blooded calculated murder” of Amnon by Absalom (Tamar’s brother) and notes that “David’s polygamous life catches up with him in an undisciplined family.” The commentary also observes “We see how a moment’s gratification of a sexual desire brings an entire household, indeed an entire kingdom, into disruption and sorrow.”<sup>74</sup>

Although there is a clear recognition that Tamar was raped, there are several weaknesses in the commentary. First, the statement that David’s “polygamous life catches up with him” may be true but this is less a case of polygamy than rape. Accordingly, a stronger observation would be to note how David’s sexual exploitation of Bathsheba may have influenced his son to believe that women are objects to be seized to fulfill lustful ends.

Second, this study Bible provides no commentary on the trauma Tamar experienced. Specifically, there is:

- No commentary on the impact of Amnon’s “hatred for her” which was “more intense than the love he had felt for her” (verse 15)
- No commentary on verse 16 in which Tamar says “There is no excuse for that. To send me away is a greater wrong than what you already did to me.”
- No commentary on verse 17 in which Amnon tells his servant to “Send this woman outside, away from me, and bolt the door behind her”
- No commentary on Amnon actually locking Tamar outside
- No commentary on verse 19 in which Tamar “put ashes on her head and ripped the robe that she was wearing. She placed her hand on her head, and she went away weeping loudly as she walked.”

The commentary does correctly note that Tamar’s suggestion of

## Given the inspired writer’s explicit depiction of rape and the cunning cruelty of Amnon, it is shocking that pillars of the church have for centuries sought to blame Tamar for the crimes committed against her.

getting David’s permission for Amnon to marry her “may just have been trying to buy time.”<sup>75</sup> However, this commentary would be stronger if it noted “negotiating” with a rapist has been identified in research as one way a victim may respond when enduring a sexual assault.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the text is describing a trauma response of victims that would not be fully understood for centuries. Perhaps survivors can find comfort knowing that even if modern Bible commentaries are not always trauma-informed, it appears that God is.

### *Concordia Self-Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

This study Bible provides no commentary on the verses detailing the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13:4-14).<sup>77</sup> With respect to Amnon’s hatred of Tamar after the rape, the commentary notes: “The reversal in Amnon’s feelings toward Tamar demonstrate that his former love (v. 1) was nothing but sensual desire.” The commentary states Tamar’s fear of being sent away is because she was “no longer a virgin” and that placing ashes on her head and tearing her robe is a means of “expressing her anguish and announcing her virginity has been violated.”<sup>78</sup> While this may have been a legitimate fear of Tamar’s in the era in which she lived, the commentary fails to make any argument that God does not hold victims of sexual assault responsible for the trauma they have endured. This could be a lesson drawn from the account of Bathsheba, for example. In failing to make this observation, the commentary misses an opportunity to dispel the myth that victims in some way invite a sexual assault or are somehow impure.<sup>79</sup>

75. *An EHV Study Bible*, 450.

76. Sasha N. Canan, Alejandra M. Kaplan & Kristen N. Jozkowski, “A National U.S. Study of 906 Women’s Qualitative Accounts of their Reactions During Sexual Assault,” *20 Sexuality Research and Social Policy* (2023), 977, 984-985.

77. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 440.

78. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 440, 442 (commenting on 2 Sam 13:15, 19).

79. As one example of how some modern church leaders continue to make sexual assault victims feel “impure,” consider the experience of “Abigail,” a student who was anally raped at a Protestant institution of higher education. The male leadership of the school told Abigail that “anal rape isn’t rape at all” and that “he didn’t take anything from you. Your future husband will still think you are a virgin.” *Caring Well: A Report from the SBC Sexual Abuse Advisory Group* (2019) 17, available online at: <https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBC-Caring-Well-Report-June-2019.pdf>

72. Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar*, 34.

73. Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar*, 34.

74. *An EHV Study Bible*, 450.

With respect to David's failure to punish Amnon, the commentary speculates that perhaps "the memory of his own sin with Bathsheba adversely affected his judicious handling of the matter."<sup>80</sup> It may very well be that David's sexual exploitation of Bathsheba influenced the behavior of Amnon and even made David sympathetic to his son's crimes. Unfortunately, this potential lesson is lost with the language of David's "sin with Bathsheba"—language that again casts equal blame on the victim.

### *Lutheran Study Bible (AF ELCA)*

This study Bible notes that Tamar "speaks the most wisdom" but that Amnon (and others) will not listen. As "David's own family members draw him unknowingly into the plot to rape Tamar," they are "fulfilling Nathan's words that David's own house will be troubled."<sup>81</sup> The commentary describes the rape of Tamar as "humiliating," an act of "pure self-indulgence" by Amnon, and a violation of Israel's law.<sup>82</sup> The commentary notes that "Tamar's desolation (2 Sam 13:20) will become Israel's as fighting breaks out."<sup>83</sup> Noting that listening is "a mark of character and faith," Amnon's failure to listen to Tamar showed he was lacking in both.<sup>84</sup> The commentary also finds fault with David for failing to punish Amnon and for ignoring "Tamar's plight."<sup>85</sup> As a whole, this is a relatively strong commentary which places the blame on the offender as well as his father for protecting the assailant and failing to care for the victim.

### *The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

Of the four study Bibles examined, this one has the most extensive commentary on the rape of Tamar and draws out the cruelty of Amnon and the trauma inflicted on Tamar. Commenting on the language it was "impossible" for Amnon to "do anything to her" (2 Sam 13:2 ESV), it says: "As a young virgin daughter of the king, Tamar was housed under protective care and supervision."<sup>86</sup> This language underscores the obligation of the monarchy to keep Tamar safe but also highlights the failure of David to do so even after he learned of the rape. In fact, the unwitting involvement of David in the plot "would lend legitimacy to the scheme."<sup>87</sup>

The commentary notes that by sending others away, Amnon made sure "there was no one to hear or respond to Tamar's cries for help."<sup>88</sup> The commentary notes incest was forbidden by God and that when Tamar said sexual assault is "not done in Israel" (2 Sam 13:12), she was correctly noting the "Law God gave to Israel."<sup>89</sup>

The most impressive feature of this commentary is in detailing

**A** better observation would be that it is not unusual for sex offenders to claim they love their victim as a means of luring them into their web and then rejecting them when the victim has fulfilled their needs—particularly when an offender is a psychopath.

the impact the trauma will have on Tamar. "Rape would rob Tamar of her present life and future hope. She would no longer be a virgin daughter of the king; marriage arrangements for her would be badly complicated. There would always be a suspicion of fault or willingness on her part."<sup>90</sup> This explains her desperate move to suggest obtaining the king's permission to marry as preferable to being taken by force.<sup>91</sup>

The commentary considers Amnon's hatred of Tamar as proof his "love" was "never true, only self-serving" but speculates perhaps "this hate came from his own guilt and shame."<sup>92</sup> Given the thought and effort Amnon put into the sexual assault and his cruelty to Tamar in the aftermath, there is little reason to believe he felt "guilt and shame." A better observation would be that it is not unusual for sex offenders to claim they love their victim as a means of luring them into their web and then rejecting them when the victim has fulfilled their needs—particularly when an offender is a psychopath. As former sex offender treatment provider Dr. Anna Salter notes:

If violence were all, psychopaths would simply be thugs. But what distinguishes psychopaths from other offenders is not just their level of violence and their propensity for crime; it is that they have personality traits that allow them to manipulate people pretty much with impunity. Key characteristics of psychopathy are glibness, superficial charm, and an extraordinary ability to con and manipulate.<sup>93</sup>

Of course, we can't go back in time and diagnose whether or not Amnon was a psychopath. However, as we grow in our knowledge of trauma, we may be more cautious in suggesting "guilt and shame" is the reason an offender hates their victim. As Salter notes, offenders who are psychopaths "do not have a conscience" and conducts "that would bother others—and even haunt non-

80. *Caring Well*, 442, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:21).

81. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 518, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:6).

82. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 518, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:14).

83. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 518.

84. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 518.

85. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 519, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:21).

86. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 502, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:2).

87. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 504.

88. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:9).

89. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505, (commenting on 2 Sam

13:12).

90. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:13).

91. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505.

92. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:15).

93. Anna C. Salter, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders* (Basic Books: New York, New York, 2003), 125.

**A**s Salter notes, offenders who are psychopaths “do not have a conscience” and conducts “that would bother others—and even haunt non-psychopathic child molesters or rapists—give no pause, cause no regret.”<sup>94</sup>

psychopathic child molesters or rapists—give no pause, cause no regret.”<sup>94</sup>

In commenting on verses 16-17, the commentators astutely note that although Amnon was now required to marry Tamar, by sending her away “he insinuated that she, not he, was at fault (cf Deut 22:13-21). Tamar’s reputation was ruined.”<sup>95</sup> Amnon’s instruction to a servant to put “this woman out” and bolt the door after her “implies that Tamar had done the wrong, perhaps that she had seduced him.”<sup>96</sup> The sin of blaming victims for being sexually assaulted is one that offenders and even some congregations continue to exhibit today.<sup>97</sup>

In commenting on verses 19-21, this study Bible exhibits an understanding of the level of trauma experienced by Tamar, noting that the tearing of her robe was a “sign of mourning and graphic indication of what has been taken from her” and that placing her hand on her head was a “sign of great grief.”<sup>98</sup> The commentary explains the language of “desolate woman” in verse 20 means Tamar was “raped and rejected.”<sup>99</sup> David’s failure to discipline Amnon for the rape shows that “David’s fatherly care and provision for Tamar was also missing.”<sup>100</sup>

94. Salter, *Predators*, 127.

95. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505.

96. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505. (commenting on 2 Sam 13:17).

97. The independent investigation of decades of sexual abuse in the Southern Baptist Convention found this dynamic in play. For example, investigators found a chilling e-mail suggesting the devil was using sexual allegations to stem the true work of the church. The e-mail states: “This whole thing should be seen for what it is. It is a satanic scheme to completely distract us from evangelism. It is not the gospel. It is not even a part of the gospel. It is a misdirection play. Yes, Christa Brown [a survivor] and Rachael Denhollander [a survivor advocate] have succumbed to an availability heuristic because of their victimization. They have gone to the SBC looking for sexual abuse, and of course, they have found it. Their outcries have certainly caused an availability cascade...but they are not to blame. This is the devil temporarily successful.” Guidepost Solutions, *Report of the Independent Investigation of The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee’s Response to Sexual Abuse Allegations and an Audit of the Procedures and Actions of the Credentials Committee*, May 15, 2022, 6.

98. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505 (commenting on 2 Sam 13:19-21).

99. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505, (commenting on 2 Sam 13:20).

100. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 505, (commenting on 2 Sam

With a handful of exceptions discussed above, the language in this commentary on the rape of Tamar reflects a meaningful understanding of the cunning behavior of the rapist and the impact of the trauma on the victim.

### **Lot’s offering of his daughters to be gang raped and his subsequent acts of incest**

In the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Bible tells of two angels being served a feast in the home of Lot. A mob of men gathers outside and demands the angels come outside in order to sexually assault them (Gen 19:1-7). In response, Lot says, “Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof” (Gen 19:8).

After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot “lived in a cave with his two daughters (Gen 19:30). Fearing there is “not a man on earth” to continue the human race, the daughters provide their father wine and, in a state of intoxication, Lot impregnates both of his children (Gen 19:31-38). With respect to both daughters, we are told Lot “did not know when she lay down or when she rose” (Gen 19:33, 35).

In commentary on this biblical narrative, two of the four study Bibles examined here minimize the conduct of Lot in offering his daughters to be raped and the other two don’t address this at all. With respect to impregnating his children, only two cast any blame on Lot while one provides no commentary and the other labels Lot as a victim of sexual abuse.

### ***Concordia Self-Study Bible (CPH LCMS)***

In reference to Lot offering his daughters to be gang raped, this study Bible contends “ancient hospitality obliged a host to protect his guests in every situation.”<sup>101</sup> Through the lens of a survivor of sexual abuse, this language may be deeply troubling. A better commentary would be “although ancient hospitality obliged a host to protect his guests in every situation, Lot’s proposal is morally repugnant, and one can only imagine the horror his daughters must have felt when their father offered them to a mob to be raped and perhaps even killed.”<sup>102</sup>

13:21).

101. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 34.

102. Lot specifically told the mob to “do to them [his daughters] as you please.” Gen 19:8. Martin Luther acknowledged that if the mob had taken Lot up on his offer that the daughters would have been exposed “even to death” and added Lot’s “extreme disloyalty toward his daughters, whose respectability the parent should defend at his own life, is execrable.” Nonetheless, Luther says “I excuse Lot and think that he adopted this plan without sinning. He did not plan to expose his daughters to danger, for he knew that they were not desired by the frenzied men; but he hoped that this would be a way to soften their wrath. Therefore, this speech should be regarded as hyperbole.” Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20,” Jeroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House 1961), 259. If Lot knew the daughters “were not desired by the frenzied men,” it’s hard to conclude this was a “way to soften their wrath.” In the

This study Bible does a much better job in discussing Lot's impregnating of his daughters, stating "Though Lot's role was somewhat passive, he bore the basic responsibility for the drunkenness and incest that eventually resulted in his two daughters becoming pregnant by him (see v. 36)."<sup>103</sup> Although it would be better to say Lot "bore responsibility" as opposed to he "bore basic responsibility," the text nonetheless holds Lot ultimately responsible.

Although expressing sympathy to Lot, Martin Luther also said he could not "completely excuse"<sup>104</sup> him for the incest and writes "Scripture does not state that Lot was not aware of the intercourse but states that he got up and did not know that he had had intercourse."<sup>105</sup> In other words, Lot knew what he was doing at the time of the sexual acts but that as he sobered up he could no longer recall what he did while drunk or at least could not fully recall every detail.<sup>106</sup>

### *An EHV Study Bible (NPH WELS)*

In commenting on Lot offering his daughters to be raped by a mob, this commentary states: "Lot's response to the men of Sodom is certainly weak and flawed, yet 2 Peter 2:6-9 treats lot as a godly man struggling against ungodly surroundings."<sup>107</sup> This commentary is reminiscent of modern-day sexual assault scandals in which abusive clergy are described merely as weak or sinful but ultimately righteous men of Godly character.<sup>108</sup> The choice of language may be particularly hurtful to victims of trafficking or gang rape who know that those who offer them for such cruelty are more than simply "weak or flawed."<sup>109</sup>

absense of any contrary evidence, we should assume Lot meant what he said.

103. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 35.

104. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20," Jeroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 309.

105. Luther, "Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20," 308. In explicit language, Luther says "Lot was undoubtedly aware of having had intercourse with his daughters since coition is a shaking of the entire body with an excitation of soul and body."

106. Specifically, Luther states: "Why, then, is it strange that Lot did not know in the morning what he did at night? A drunken man says something and is well aware of saying it, yet after sleeping he does not remember what he said." Luther, "Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20," 309.

107. *An EHV Study Bible*, 30.

108. A survivor of sexual abuse within the Southern Baptist Convention contends that offenders thrive within the church because "These guys live off the message of cheap grace. They prop each other up by stressing God's forgiveness. And obviously, that's an important part of His word. But God also talks about bringing darkness to light; about truth; about justice, about discipline; about the qualifications for pastors and leaders. You can't take one part of the Bible and dismiss the rest." Tim Alberta, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2023), 369.

109. See e.g., Mary Anne Layden & Lennea W. Smith, "Adult Survivors of the Child Sexual Exploitation Industry: Psychological Profiles," in Sharon Cooper, Richard Estes, Angelo Giardino, Nancy Kellogg & Victor Vieth, *Medical, Legal, & Social Science Aspects of Child Sexual Exploitation* (G.W. Medical Publishing: St. Louis, Missouri,

**A better commentary would be "although ancient hospitality obliged a host to protect his guests in every situation, Lot's proposal is morally repugnant, and one can only imagine the horror his daughters must have felt when their father offered them to a mob to be raped and perhaps even killed."**

The only commentary on Lot's impregnating of his daughters is a comment on verse 30 pertaining to Lot's decision to settle in the hills with his daughters. In commenting on this verse, the writer finds it "strange that Lot did not go to Abraham for help. Perhaps he was too embarrassed by the mess he had gotten himself into to go to Abraham."<sup>110</sup> This is an odd comment given that the subsequent verses deal with Lot's impregnation of his children in a state of intoxication. A survivor of sexual assault might understandably be puzzled by both the language and the decision to comment on this verse. A survivor would justifiably wonder why the editors did not also find it "strange" that Lot would fail to recognize he was having sex with not only one but both of his daughters.

Although alcohol can lower our inhibitions, it does not cause us to do things we did not at some level already have in our heart.<sup>111</sup> Given that Lot was willing to offer his daughters to be gang raped, it is not difficult to imagine he would be willing to have sex with them but might simply need the excuse of being drunk in order to justify this offense. As prosecutors have long noted, "perpetrators of incest frequently use alcohol as a disinhibitor to their crimes and as a defense when their conduct is challenged."<sup>112</sup>

When seen through the eyes of a sexual assault victim, this account may look very different. For instance, sexual abuse survivor R.L. Stollar reads the narrative as "two young girls are offered up by their father for a gang rape—a father prone to drinking, who cares little about his daughters' protection nor objects to their sexual violation. The poor girls are dragged from one city to another until they are forced to live in isolation with their drunken father in a cave. Shortly thereafter both daughters

2005), 155-177.

110. *An EHV Study Bible*, 31.

111. Tracy Bahm, et al., "Hearing the Cry: Investigating and Prosecuting Adult Sexual Assault Cases," in Angelo P. Giardino, Elizabeth M. Datner, & Janice B. Asher, eds., *Sexual Assault: Victimization Across the Lifespan a Clinical Guide* (G.W. Medical Publishing: St. Louis, 2003), 525, 540.

112. Bahm, et al., "Hearing the Cry," 540.

are pregnant.”<sup>113</sup> When read through a child protective lens, Stollar sees the incest as a clear case of child sexual abuse.<sup>114</sup>

Even if a pastor does not completely agree with Stollar’s exegesis, every caring clergy will want to consider the experience of parishioners who were sexually abused by a father and were subsequently blamed for their parent’s crimes. Accordingly, a trauma-informed pastor will recognize Lot’s impregnation of his daughters as a potential trigger for these survivors and will exercise great care in commenting on this text in Bible class, from the pulpit, and when providing pastoral care.

### *Lutheran Study Bible (AF ELCA)*

With respect to Lot’s willingness to allow his daughters to be raped, this study Bible sees this as “another sign of Sodom’s immorality.”<sup>115</sup> With respect to the multiple acts of incest, the commentary concludes “Lot himself is sexually abused.”<sup>116</sup> There is no commentary on the power differential between father and daughters, no consideration of his daughters’ youth,<sup>117</sup> no consideration that while his daughters may have offered him wine he nonetheless chose to drink to the point of intoxication, and no consideration of the unlikelihood that Lot could have sex with two of his children and at no point understand what he was doing. Since it was only Lot and his daughters in the cave, who did he think he was having sexual intercourse with?

### *The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

With respect to Lot offering his daughters to be raped, this study Bible says the “Culture of hospitality made it unthinkable for Lot to abandon his guests. Yet righteous Lot’s proposal was horribly wrong. Perhaps he sought what he regarded as the lesser of two evils (heterosexual rape instead of homosexual rape), but his suggestion was evil nonetheless.”<sup>118</sup>

With respect to Lot’s impregnating both his daughters, the commentary states “Lot’s role, though inexcusable, was passive, carried out in a drunken stupor.”<sup>119</sup> The problem with this is that no one gets drunk passively. Although his daughters may have offered him wine, Lot chose to drink to excess and, unless he was completely incapacitated, chose to have sex with his daughters.

## **Deuteronomy 22:23-27**

From the standpoint of sexual assault victims, five verses in Deuteronomy may be the most troubling, most triggering words in all of scripture. The reader is told that if a man meets in town a “young woman” engaged to be married and “lies with her” both parties shall be stoned to death—the man because he “violated

Since these passages seem to place the burden on a rape victim to take action to stop her assailant, these words can be particularly troubling to survivors and to other modern readers.

his neighbor’s wife” and the woman “because she did not cry for help” (Deut 22:23-24). However, “if the man meets the engaged woman in the open country” and rapes her, only the man shall be punished because “the engaged woman may have cried for help, but there was no one to rescue her” (Deut 22:25-27).<sup>120</sup>

Since these verses seem to place the burden on a rape victim to take action to stop her assailant, these words can be particularly troubling to survivors and to other modern readers. It is understandable, then, that some commentaries often avoid these texts altogether. One of the Bible commentaries examined here chooses that route, another skirts the issue, one resorts to a euphemism to describe sexual assault, and one offers potentially helpful language that could be expounded upon.

### *Concordia Self-Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

This study Bible has no commentary on Deut 22:23-28. When viewed through the perspective of a survivor, this decision is concerning. For any number of reasons, a survivor may not have screamed or made a verbal outcry and, if that is the case, it may appear that God is telling her or him that they are not really a victim or are at least partially to blame. When a Bible commentary chooses not to correct this perception, the potential damage of these verses remains intact.

### *An EHV Study Bible (NPH WELS)*

This study Bible has no commentary on the troubling texts of Deut 22:23-26 but with respect to verse 27 (pertaining to a victim unable to be rescued in the country), says “In consensual sexual immorality both parties were punished by death. A female victim of male misconduct was not liable to punishment.”<sup>121</sup> It is troubling to euphemistically describe a woman being raped in a location where rescue is unlikely no matter how much she screams as a “victim of male misconduct.” If there are future editions of this study Bible, perhaps there will be a better choice of language which more accurately describes the crime of rape.

### *Lutheran Study Bible (AF ELCA)*

This Bible commentary also does not directly address the subject

113. R.L. Stollar, *The Kingdom of Children* (Wm B. Eerdmans, 2023), 48.

114. Stollar, *The Kingdom of Children*, 48.

115. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 70.

116. *Lutheran Study Bible*, 70.

117. R.L. Stollar contends the daughters are still children.

R.L. Stollar, *The Kingdom of Children*, 47.

118. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 44.

119. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 45.

120. The word “may” in this text is noteworthy because it appears to assume the woman’s innocence irrespective of whether she cried out. Davidson, “Sexual Abuse in the Old Testament: An Overview of Laws, Narratives, and Oracles,” 138.

121. *An EHV Study Bible*, 269.

of sexual assault. Instead, it puts the language about raping women in the broader context of examining Deut 22:22-29 and states “To understand these four legal cases, it is helpful to know some things about Israel’s culture at this time. Society protected the rights of husbands and fathers (22:22, 24, 29) more than those of the women involved. Engagements (22:23) were legally the same as marriage. Paying money to the woman’s father (22:29) would have carried out the custom of paying a ‘bride price’ to a new wife’s family. Prohibiting future divorce was a way of providing support and security for the woman.”<sup>122</sup>

Although this broader commentary on the history of Israel may be important, it leaves unanswered the question of what a modern reader should make of an admonition that if someone did not cry out in the city, they are not a victim of rape. To address this question, a survivor of abuse is forced to look elsewhere.

### *The Lutheran Study Bible (CPH LCMS)*

Through a trauma-informed lens, this commentary has the best language. The commentary on verses 23-29 states: “These laws do not always clearly cover the difference between consent and force (rape).”<sup>123</sup> Having said that, there is room to improve.

Keeping in mind that survivors of sexual assault will be reading this commentary the author could have pointed out the many reasons why a victim cannot cry for help. A victim may be unconscious or drugged, the perpetrator may be holding a knife or other weapon to the head of a victim, or the offender may have simply threatened death to the victim or the victim’s family if they make an outcry.

We know from research the myriad responses of victims to a sexual assault. A lack of consent may be communicated through overt resistance such as words or defensive action but there can also be involuntary freezing such as when a victim is in shock or simply shuts down and chooses to stay still or feign sleep.<sup>124</sup> In some instances, a victim may “negotiate” with the offender in the hope of a lesser sexual act.<sup>125</sup> In other cases, victims exhibit confusion and “report not understanding what was going on or not knowing how to react to what was happening.”<sup>126</sup> A state of confusion may occur when the assault occurs quickly. Examples of exhibited confusion include statements such as “Before I knew it, he had his finger inside me,” “He grabbed my hand and shoved it down his pants,” and “I was in shock and didn’t know what to do.”<sup>127</sup>

An awareness of how victims experience sexual assault and demonstrating that awareness in the commentary would move this study Bible closer to the goal of being a trauma-informed text.

122. *An EHV Study Bible*, 337.

123. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 313.

124. Sasha N. Canan, Alejandra M. Kaplan & Kristen N. Jozkowski, “A National U.S. Study of 906 Women’s Qualitative Accounts of their Reactions During Sexual Assault,” 20 *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 977, 984-985 (2023).

125. Canan, et al., “A National U.S. Study,” 984.

126. Canan, et al., “A National U.S. Study,” 985.

127. Canan, et al., “A National U.S. Study,” 985.

**These study Bibles largely fail to address the sin of sexual assault in a way that may bring comfort to survivors and hold offenders accountable. In Lutheran terms, these study Bibles are lacking in their application of both law and gospel to cases of abuse.**

### **Conclusion: the need for Lutheran theological engagement with the topic of abuse**

As we have seen, currently existing Lutheran study Bibles contain problematic language pertaining to accounts of sexual assault which could be triggering to some survivors of abuse. In some cases, this is done not only by what the commentators say, but what they choose to be silent about. Equally important, these study Bibles largely fail to address the sin of sexual assault in a way that may bring comfort to survivors and hold offenders accountable. In Lutheran terms, these study Bibles are lacking in their application of both law and gospel to cases of abuse.<sup>128</sup>

One reason for the church’s insensitivity to sexual abuse victims is not because accounts of trauma do not exist in the Bible but because most seminaries do not provide instruction about abuse and how to read, teach, and preach<sup>129</sup> about biblical accounts of sexual assault or other trauma.<sup>130</sup> There is some indication that this may be changing. There is movement within the ELCA to improve seminary education and otherwise engage theologically with the subject of child maltreatment and sexual assault.<sup>131</sup> The WELS seminary utilizes a pastoral theology textbook with significant information about responding to child abuse and other forms of trauma<sup>132</sup> and the WELS has launched a special ministry on child abuse.<sup>133</sup> The LCMS promotes the WELS special ministry on their

128. Victor I. Vieth, “What Would Walther Do? Applying Law & Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse,” 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* (2012), 257, 270-273.

129. Timothy C. Bourman, “Trauma Sensitivity as a Heuristic for the Lutheran Preacher,” 118(3) *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (2021), 199, 208.

130. Victor I. Vieth, “The Least of These: the Urgent need for ELCA Seminaries to Prepare Called Workers to Minister to Survivors of Abuse and Develop Trauma-Informed Congregations,” 23(6) *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (December 2023/January 2024).

131. Craig L. Nesson, “Rationale for a Social Statement on Child Abuse and Child Protection,” 48:2 *Currents in Theology and Mission* (2021):43-56.

132. John D. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology* (Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee 2017): 116, 272-274, 295-304, 306.

133. The ministry is called “Freedom for the Captives” and its

list of resources for addressing maltreatment.<sup>134</sup>

Despite this progress, there is significant work to do in the Lutheran community. In a 2019 national survey of Protestant churchgoers, only 45% of Lutheran congregants said their church is “willing to correctly address sexual misconduct that may occur in the church even if it costs the church or hurts its image.”<sup>135</sup> When asked how they would respond if someone accused their pastor of sexual misconduct, only 57% of Lutherans said they would “want the victim protected.”<sup>136</sup> Only 10% of Lutherans said they had heard a sermon addressing sexual assault or sexual violence in the past year—which was less than Pentecostals (25%), non-denominational churches (22%), and Baptists (21%).<sup>137</sup> Only 51% of Lutherans consider their church “very prepared” to protect children from sexual abuse and only 35% of Lutherans believe their church is better prepared to protect children than it was ten years ago.<sup>138</sup> Less than half of Lutheran congregants (47%) strongly agree that their church is a good place for a child sexual abuse victim to find healing.<sup>139</sup>

Perhaps the reason for these concerning numbers is because Lutheran pastors see their job primarily as preachers of the Gospel and believe mental health providers are best suited to work with survivors of abuse. The problem with this is that mental health providers are often not theologically trained to address the very specific religious questions of survivors. However, when a pastor is trauma-informed, clergy can often help the survivor find a biblical passage or story that not only lessens their spiritual pain, but also improves their medical and mental health. As two scholars note:

The research around religious and spiritual coping shows strong and convincing relationships between psychological adjustment and physical health following trauma. Spirituality provides a belief system and sense of divine connectedness that helps give meaning to the traumatic experience and has been shown over and over to aid in the recovery process.<sup>140</sup>

In some cases, a survivor needs to know that God shares their righteous indignation over the wrongs committed. As one survivor said, “I used to have a hard time reconciling the God of the Old Testament—all that doom and gloom and anger—with the idea of a loving God. But now, having lived this hell [of abuse], I like God’s anger and judgment. I understand it. I relate to it. I can see how betrayed God must have felt watching people mock His name with the way they treated each other.”<sup>141</sup>

website is [www.freedomforcaptives.com](http://www.freedomforcaptives.com).

134. <https://www.lcms.org/social-issues/child-abuse>

135. *Sexual Misconduct and Churchgoers: National Survey of Protestant Churchgoers* (Lifeway Research, 2019).

136. *Sexual Misconduct and Churchgoers*.

137. *Sexual Misconduct and Churchgoers*.

138. *Sexual Misconduct and Churchgoers*.

139. *Sexual Misconduct and Churchgoers*.

140. Casey Gwinn & Chad Hellman, *Hope Rising*, 180 (2019).

141. Tim Alberta, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2023), 369.

**M**ental health providers are often not theologically trained to address the very specific religious questions of survivors. However, when a pastor is trauma-informed, clergy can often help the survivor find a biblical passage or story that not only lessens their spiritual pain, but also improves their medical and mental health.

In other cases, a survivor needs to see Christ as a suffering servant who can understand their pain. One survivor notes:

One of the powerful moments in dealing with my own experiences of sexual abuse came as I listened to the passion narrative on Palm Sunday more than 20 years ago ... The abuse suffered by Jesus was not the same as what I had endured, but at the time I could see in him an ally who understood some of the consequences of sexual abuse. In particular, Jesus was someone who had experienced repeated rejection and denial of his humanity, rather than being treated with the respect which one might contend is a human right.<sup>142</sup>

When properly applied, accounts of sexual assault in the Bible can help a survivor feel less alone and more connected to the story of God’s people. Upon discovering the biblical texts of abuse, one survivor said, “I saw myself not on the periphery of the faithful but as one whose experiences were shared with the women and men of faith recorded in Scripture.”<sup>143</sup>

As the words of these survivors make clear, the Holy Scripture compassionately applied through a trauma-informed lens can have a profound impact in both this world and the world to come. This is not secondary to the Gospel. It is the Gospel.

142. Beth A. Crisp, “Jesus: A Critical Companion in the Journey to Moving on from Sexual Abuse,” in Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, & Rocio Figueroa, *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse* (2021), 249, 251.

143. Crisp, “Jesus: A Critical Companion in the Journey,” 249, 250.