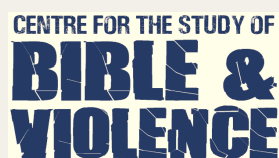


MAD, BAD, AND DANGEROUS TO READ?

Helen Paynter
Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence,
Bristol Baptist College



SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

Trigger alert

What stories are we talking about?

- Hagar Gen 16, 21
- Dinah Gen 34
- Levite's woman Jdg 19
- Tamar 2 Sam 13
- Also... Sarah, Esther, Bathsheba, Vashti, Bilhah and Zilpah...



... and even some sexual violence against men

- Threatened rape Gen 19, Jdg 19
- Lot Gen 19
- Joseph Gen 39
- Sisera? Jdg 4-5



THE LEVITE'S
WIFE:
A STORY THAT
MATTERS



BELI-FACHAD IN
THE HANDS OF
MEN.

“

Apply yourselves to it.
Take counsel. Speak.

(v.30)

”



BELI-FACHAD IN THE
HANDS OF
TRADITIONAL
CHRISTIAN
COMMENTATORS.

“

Judges is declared to be *about* male interests such as war, courage, and nationhood, and any texts which do not centre on these themes are then excluded by definition.

Mieke Bal
(paraphrase)

”



SILENCING THE
LEVITE'S WIFE:
1. CUT OUT OF THE
STORY

“

Appendix on various themes

Alberto Soggin

”

“

There can be no doubt that the first of the two narratives seems somewhat irrelevant from the point of view of the historian and is, rather a literary ‘novel’; furthermore the narrator has drawn considerably on Genesis 19, but without much coherence

ALBERTO SOGGIN, 20TH CENTURY

”



SILENCING THE LEVITE'S WIFE: 2. IT'S A MAN THING

“

One could ask whether the old man should be excused from guilt for exposing or offering his own daughter and the Levite's wife to the lust of these impious men *to avoid a more serious crime*, namely the crime against nature.

DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN
(15TH CENTURY)

”

“

The domestic affairs of this Levite would not have been related thus largely but to make way for the following story of *the injuries done him*, in which the whole nation interested themselves.

MATTHEW HENRY
(18TH CENTURY)

”

“

The free men of Gibeah attacked me lit. rose against me. Me they meant to kill, and my concubine they ravished so that she died.

Their purpose might very well be described as an attempt upon his life, especially since his concubine actually died under their maltreatment.

GEORGE MOORE
(19TH CENTURY)

”

*Three pages of comment
without a single female
pronoun*

ROBERT BOLING, 20TH CENTURY



SILENCING THE
LEVITE'S WIFE:
3. IT'S A
HOMOSEXUAL
THING

“

- What were the similarities between the behaviour of the people of Israel and that of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah?
- How does their behaviour conflict with the commands set out in Leviticus?
- In what ways are these practices a sign of God’s judgement (see Rom. 1:24–32)?

‘DAY ONE’ STUDY GUIDE
(21ST CENTURY)

”



SILENCING THE
LEVITE’S WIFE:
4. IT’S A
HOSPITALITY THING

“

It's all about hospitality

VARIOUS, MODERN

”



SILENCING THE
LEVITE'S WIFE:
5. IT WAS HER
OWN FAULT

“

And therfor euery woman aught to restraine wrathe, and to plese and suffre her husbonde, an he be wroth, with faire langage, and not to go away from hym, as ded that woman, of the whiche come moche sorugh, as the dethe of her selff and of so gret nombre of perill”

GEOFFROY DE LA TOUR-LANDRY
(14TH CENTURY)

”

“

By this heinous and abominable form of death our Lord God punished this woman’s adultery... God is not idle.

JOHANNES BRENZ
(16TH CENTURY)

”

“

In the miserable end of this woman, we see the hand of God punishing her for her uncleanness.

BIBLE SUMMARIZED HANDBOOK
(21ST CENTURY)

”



RAPED BY THE PEN?

“

- Anonymity
- Character assassination
- Narrative punishment
- Narrative reward for the Levite
- Portrayal as a chaotic force
- Voyeurism

CHERYL EXUM
SECULAR FEMINIST BIBLICAL SCHOLAR

”



OPENING UP
REDEMPTIVE
POSSIBILITIES

“

We struggle mightily, only to be wounded. But yet we hold on, seeking a blessing: the healing of wounds and the restoration of health.

Repent! Repent! We must take counsel to say never again

PHYLLIS TRIBLE
CHRISTIAN FEMINIST BIBLICAL SCHOLAR

”



DISCOVERING HER DIGNITY 1. ANONYMITY



DISCOVERING HER DIGNITY

2. MARITAL AND MORAL AGENCY

Uses of *'her husband'*

- **Eve** giving the fruit to her husband (Genesis 3:6)
- **Sarah** giving Hagar to her husband (Genesis 16:3)
- The annunciation scene where **Samson's mother** receives a visit from an angel and calls her husband (Judges 13:9,10)
- Elkanah is described as **Hannah's** husband (1 Samuel 1:8,22; 2:19)
- **Bathsheba** mourns over Uriah her husband (2 Samuel 11:26)
- The Shunammite is described as the husband of **a woman who provides hospitality** to Elisha (2 Kings 4:9,22)
- Naomi attempts to send **Ruth** and **Orpah** back to remarry and each live in the house of her (new) husband; Boaz is described as a relative of **Naomi's** husband (Ruth 1:9, 2:1)



“

Linking unfaithfulness and rape causally creates a dilemma... do we condemn the concubine as guilty and therefore deserving her fate—thereby risking legitimising monstrous behaviour?

ISABELLE HAMLEY

”

Textual question in v.3

- ‘to speak to her heart to bring **him** back’ *ketiv* (what is written)
- ‘to speak to her heart to bring **her** back’ *qere* (what should be read)





DISCOVERING HER DIGNITY 3. LISTENING TO HER VOICE.

By contrast: the Levite

- Silence with father in law
- We'll press on to Gibeah
- Disingenuous description of journey
- Up! Let's go!
- Disingenuous description of events



And he sent her [dismembered body] into all the territories of Israel. And everyone saw and said, ‘This has not happened or been seen since the days when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Apply yourselves to it. Consider. Speak. So the sons of Israel came out, from Dan as far as Beersheba, and the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man before the LORD at Mizpah.’ (Judges 19:29-20:1)



“

If there were to be an obituary, there would have to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition.”

JUDITH BUTLER

”

“

- This story **makes me feel things** I don't want to feel.
- A **disgusting** act that still offends society in every culture.
- **Grab some tissues** or a hanky.
- The stark description of the extreme sexual violence in this passage is **physically nauseating** for me, as a woman, to read. Although, thankfully, I've never been a victim of sexual abuse, it is all too easy for me to imagine the extreme pain, terror and degradation this poor woman went through. The text **paints a picture in my head** which I don't want to see.

”



Jyoti Singh 1989-2012

DISCOVERING HER DIGNITY 4. REFUSAL TO FORGET



DISCOVERING HER DIGNITY 5. REFUSAL TO BE SILENT



ESTHER:
TYRANTS WILL
FALL



This happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the same Ahasuerus who ruled over one hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia. ² In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were present, ⁴ while he displayed the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty for many days, one hundred eighty days in all.

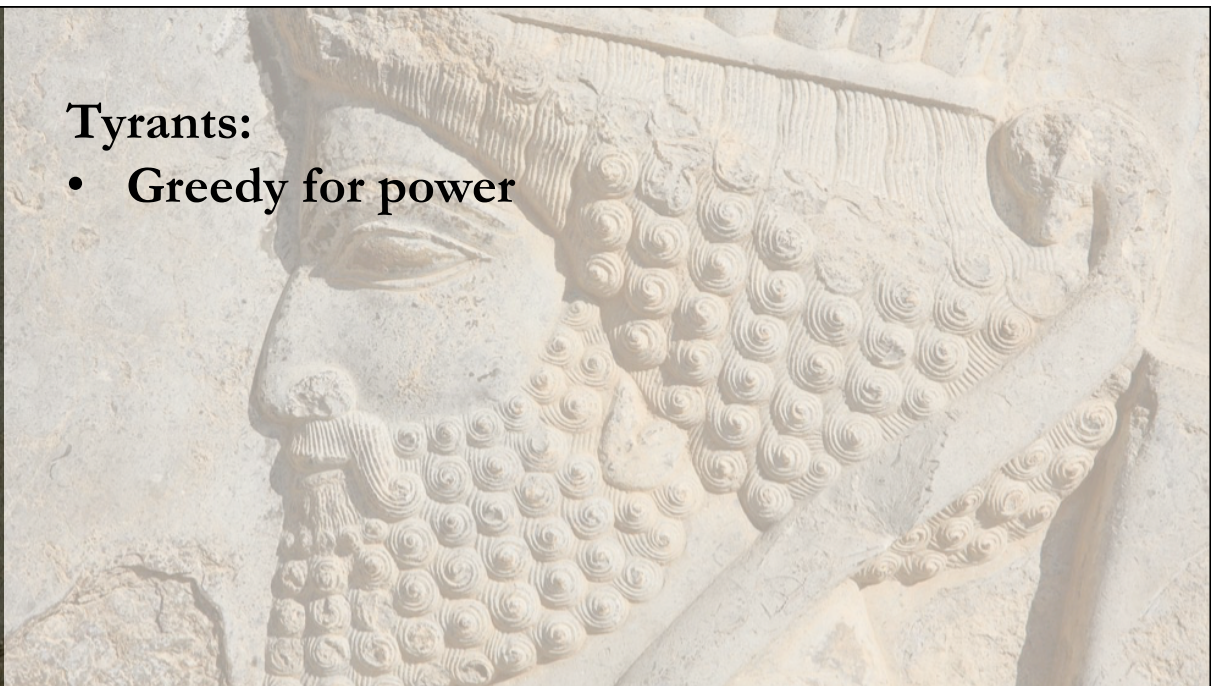
5 When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in the citadel of Susa, both great and small, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were white cotton curtains and blue hangings tied with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stones. 7 Drinks were served in golden goblets, goblets of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. 8 Drinking was by flagons, without restraint; for the king had given orders to all the officials of his palace to do as each one desired. 9 Furthermore, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the palace of King Ahasuerus.

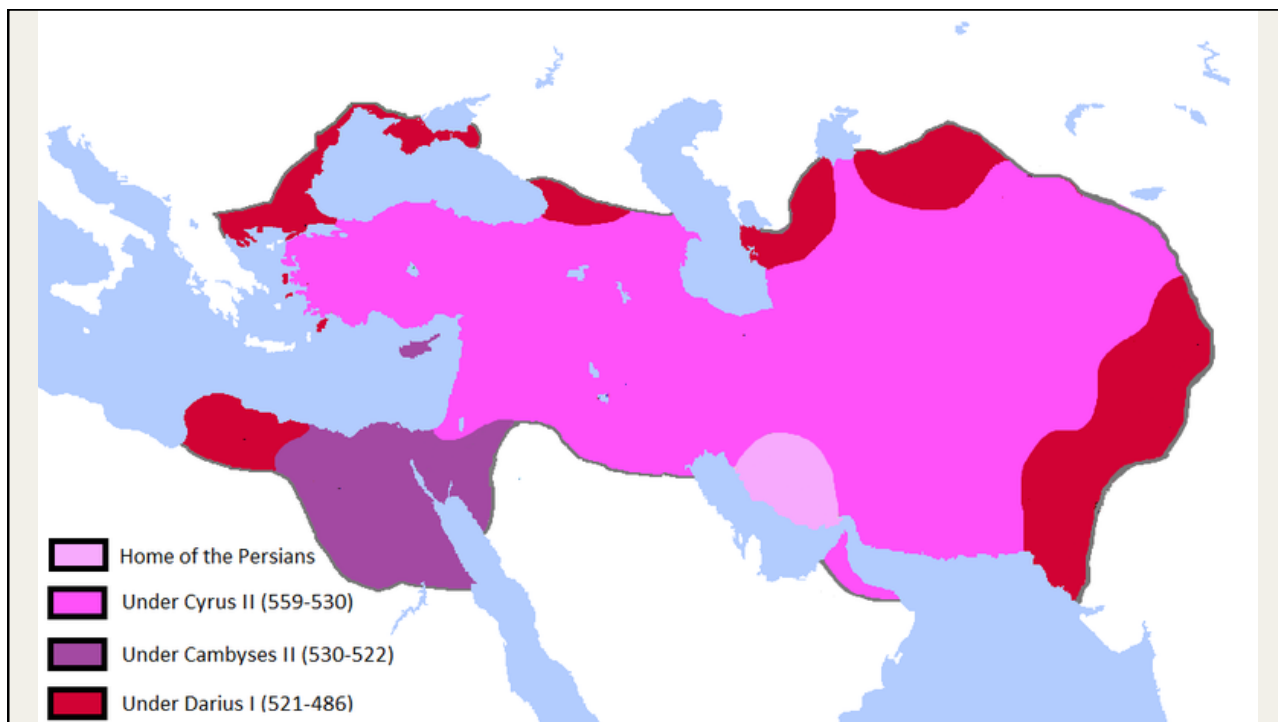


This happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the same Ahasuerus who ruled over one hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia. (Es 1:1)

Tyrants:

- **Greedy for power**

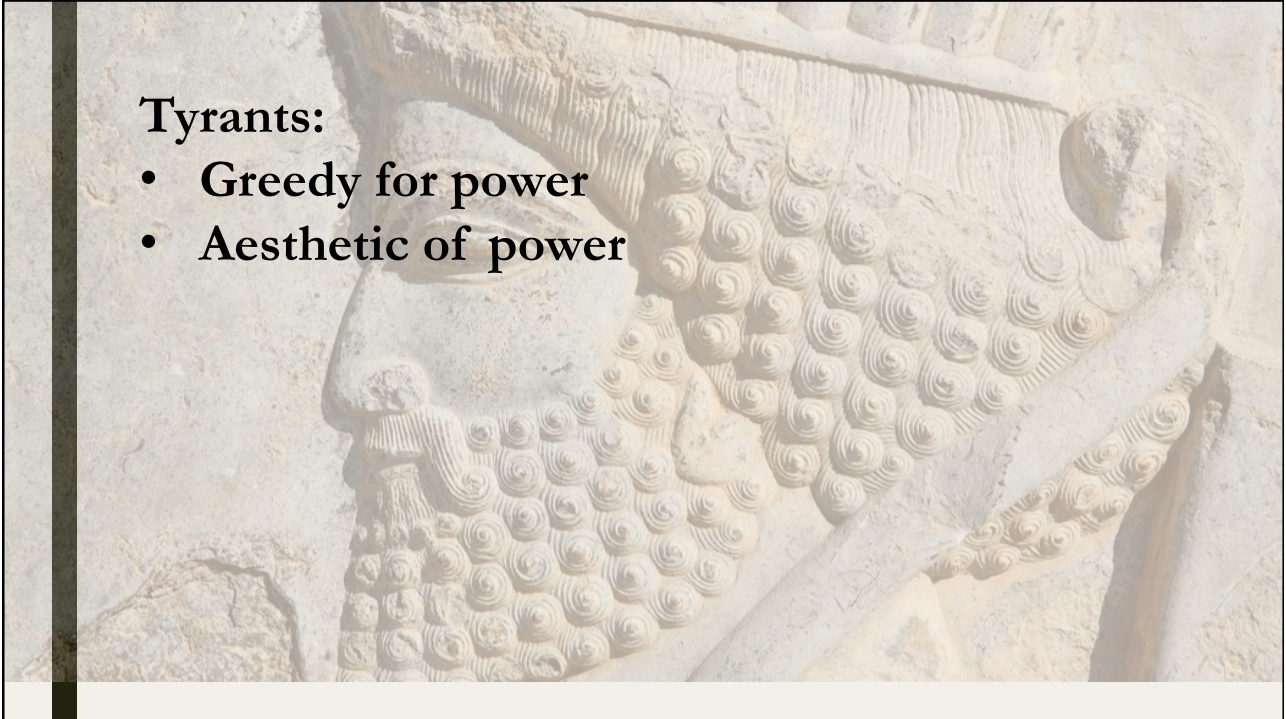




In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were present, 4 while he displayed the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty for many days, one hundred eighty days in all. There were white cotton curtains and blue hangings tied with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stones. 7 Drinks were served in golden goblets, goblets of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. (Es 1:3-7)

Tyrants:

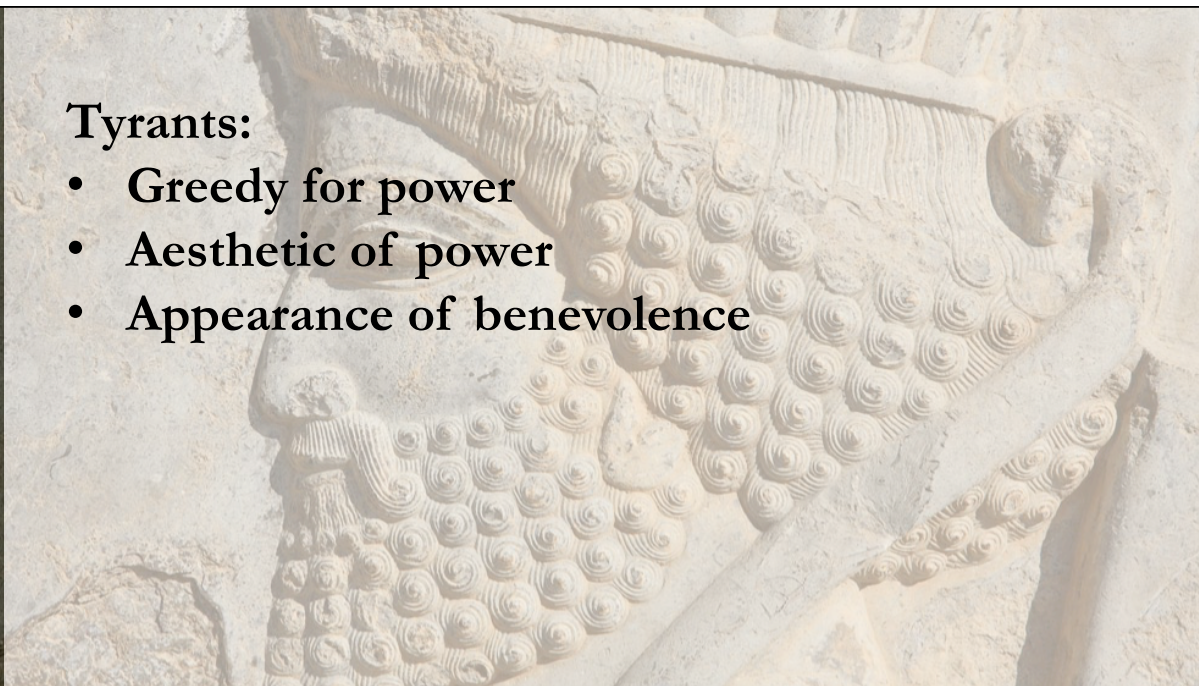
- Greedy for power
- Aesthetic of power



When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in the citadel of Susa, both great and small, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.... 8 Drinking was by flagons, without restraint; for the king had given orders to all the officials of his palace to do as each one desired. (Es 1:5-8)

Tyrants:

- **Greedy for power**
- **Aesthetic of power**
- **Appearance of benevolence**



On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who attended him, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing the royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the officials her beauty; for she was fair to behold. (Es 1:10-11)

Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. 3 And let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in the citadel of Susa under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; let their cosmetic treatments be given them. 4 And let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so. (Es 2:1-4)

Tyrants:

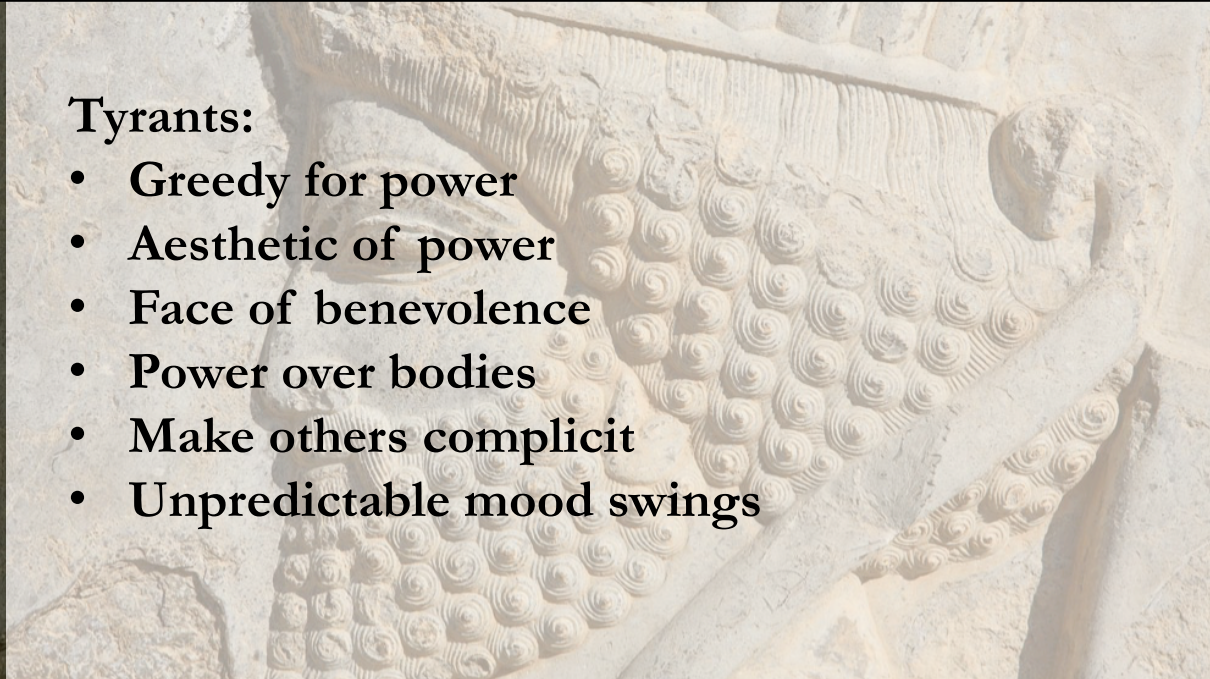
- Greedy for power
- Aesthetic of power
- Face of benevolence
- Power over bodies

So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in the citadel of Susa in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women... When the girl went in to the king she was given whatever she asked for to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went in; then in the morning she came back to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. (Es 2:8, 13-14)

Tyrants:

- **Greedy for power**
- **Aesthetic of power**
- **Face of benevolence**
- **Power over bodies**
- **Make others complicit**

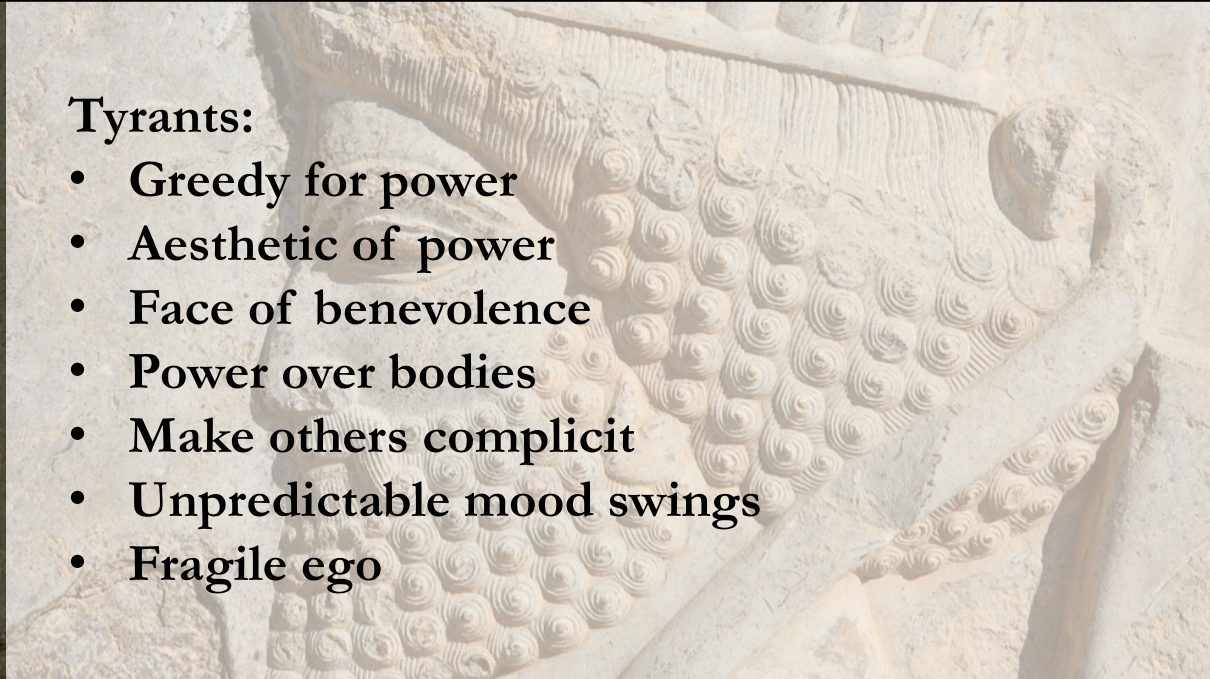
On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he commanded... the seven eunuchs who attended him, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing the royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the officials her beauty, for she was fair to behold. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. At this the king was enraged, and his anger burned within him. (Es 1:10-12)



Tyrants:

- **Greedy for power**
- **Aesthetic of power**
- **Face of benevolence**
- **Power over bodies**
- **Make others complicit**
- **Unpredictable mood swings**

Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, “Not only has Queen Vashti done wrong to the king, but also to all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For this deed of the queen will be made known to all women, causing them to look with contempt on their husbands, since they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.’ 18 This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen’s behavior will rebel against the king’s officials, and there will be no end of contempt and wrath! (Es 1:16-18)



Tyrants:

- **Greedy for power**
- **Aesthetic of power**
- **Face of benevolence**
- **Power over bodies**
- **Make others complicit**
- **Unpredictable mood swings**
- **Fragile ego**

King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the officials who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and did obeisance to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance... When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, Haman was infuriated. 6 But he thought it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.
(Es 3:1-6)

The king said to Haman, “What shall be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?” Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?” 7 So Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king wishes to honor, 8 let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and a horse that the king has ridden, with a royal crown on its head. 9 Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble officials; let them robe the man whom the king wishes to honor, and let them conduct the man on horseback through the open square of the city, proclaiming before him: ‘Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor.’ ” 10 Then the king said to Haman, “Quickly, take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to the Jew Mordecai who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing

19 “If it pleases the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be altered, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. 20 So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, vast as it is, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike.” (Es 1:19-20)

Tyrants:

- Greedy for power
- Aesthetic of power
- Face of benevolence
- Power over bodies
- Make others complicit
- Unpredictable mood swings
- Fragile ego
- Cloak of legitimacy

I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, ³ and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then, as I watched, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human being; and a human mind was given to it. ⁵ Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three tusks in its mouth among its teeth and was told, "Arise, devour many bodies!" ⁶ After this, as I watched, another appeared, like a leopard. The beast had four wings of a bird on its back and four heads; and dominion was given to it. ⁷ After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring,

As I watched,
thrones were set in place,
and an Ancient One took his throne,
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
and its wheels were burning fire.
10 A stream of fire issued
and flowed out from his presence.
A thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.
(Dan 7:7-10)

The court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.
11 I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant
words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast
was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be
burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion
was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and
a time.
(Dan 7:10-11)

13 As I watched in the night visions,
I saw one like a Son of Man
coming with the clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One
and was presented before him.

14 To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-burdened, and I will take advantage of you. I will lay the yoke of my will upon you and you will be manipulated by me; for I am single-minded in my ambition; your body will be used, and your soul will be crushed. My yoke is harsh and my burden is intolerable.”

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

For further reading:

- *Texts of Terror*. Phyllis Trible
- *Telling Terror in Judges 19: Rape and Reparation for the Levite's Wife* Helen Paynter

Other resources:

- <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/shetoo/>



- <https://www.csbvbristol.org.uk>

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF
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