

The Role of Women in the Life of King David in Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's History: Lessons to be Learned

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Abstract

The David presented to “the reader” in the Scriptures does not appear from a vacuum. He lives with, among and interacts with people. He is surrounded by two categories of characters: divine and human. The human characters consist of males and females. In this article, the role of female characters in the Davidic kingship, as presented by the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler, is discussed. The intention is to identify and critically analyse the role of selected women and how they informed David’s leadership, with the intention to draw some lessons for contemporary communities. Women are involved during David’s reign. They provided him with land and crucial duties in various sectors: political, education, socio-economic, legal and justice mediation, solving problems, and offering advice, among others. Their roles and expertise, if taken seriously, can be a solution during a time of “crisis” in any situation in any given community. dynastic connections, or even a narrative blot on his character. Irrespective of their role, favourable or unfavourable, female characters play a special place in the Davidic narrative. They function as prophets, teachers, advisors, leaders, deliverers, and heroines. A narrative approach has been used as a methodology in this article. The paper emphasises that despite the harsh treatment and unfavourable conditions they find themselves in, women continue to play significant roles in all spheres of life in any given community. They often perform crucial duties in various sectors: political, education, socio-economic, legal and justice mediation, solving problems, offering advice, among others. Their roles and expertise if taken seriously, can be a solution during the time of “crisis” in any situation in any given community.

Keywords: Chronicler; Deuteronomist; Kingship; Lesson; Women

Introduction

The David presented to “the reader” in the Scriptures does not appear from a vacuum. According to the Scriptures, he lived with, among and interacted with people. He was surrounded by two categories of characters: divine and human. The human characters consist of males and females. This article discusses the role of female characters in the Davidic kingship. During David’s reign, women provide him with land, diplomatic connections, and even a narrative blot on his character. Irrespective of their role,

favourable or unfavourable, female characters play a special place in the Davidic narrative. They can be divided into two groups: those who had marital relationships with David and those who did not. Women, furthermore, functioned as prophets, teachers, advisors, leaders, deliverers, and heroines. The intention of this article is to identify and critically analyse the role of selected women and how they informed David's leadership as presented by the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler, with the intention to draw some lessons for contemporary communities. This focus is on women due to the special place women have for both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler (Anderson 1989; Gunn 1991). Since David is the critical central character in the narratives, a brief overview of him is crucial in this article. This will be done by focussing on David's narratives in two main traditions: The Deuteronomistic (DeutH) and the Chronistic (ChrH) histories (Knoppers 2010; cf. Sebola 2013). In both, David is portrayed as a central figure (You 2019:179; cf. Bach 1997; Bailey 1990).

This article acknowledges that women are primarily associated with King David and his successors whenever they are mentioned. This implies that women hold a special place in the eyes of both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler (cf. Anderson 1989; Gunn 1991). It can be deduced that a king in ancient Israel was socially evaluated based on the number of women in his *harem*, among other things. The description of women's involvement with (a) king(s) is thus in line with the overall historical context of the period described in the text (Avioz 2006:11–57; Fuchs 2000; Alter 2011). With this background, the article will trace the role of women in Davidic leadership.

Overview of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler

The Deuteronomistic History (preserving preexilic and exilic materials using Standard Biblical Hebrew) and the Chronicler (which is a major postexilic revision of Samuel–Kings and other sources in the language of Late Biblical Hebrew) as described by Person (2010) and Trebelle (2007: 483ff; Knoppers2000. 341ff), are the products of different scribal bands, who were situated in Babylon and Jerusalem. Scholars such as Person (2010), Smith (2009) and MacDonald (2016) agree that the historiographies have a common institutional ancestor in the Deuteronomistic school of the Babylonian exile. It is fascinating that the Deuteronomist presents the monarch, especially King David, without ignoring his faults. The Chronicler, however, exempted David from wrongdoing and legitimated him as a spotless king, including his dynasty. It is worth noting the differences between the two Historians when presenting the monarchy, particularly regarding King David. Although they have a common source of information, the lack of certain materials found in 1 Samuel – 2 Kings suggests deliberate omission of the earlier material by the Chronicler. Person (2010) is of the view that deliberate substitutions of the earlier material in parallel passages that differ betray the distinctive theology of the Chronicler. Both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler presented their characters in a manner that suited their objectives and influenced their ideologies. The narratives of the monarchy have a special place in these traditions.

In the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles 3:1–3, 14:3–5, eight women married to King David are recorded (cf. Brenner 1994, cf. Ackroyd 1997). It must be noted that there are other women whose names are not recorded. Apart from regular and general responsibilities, women often perform duties in varied sectors: political, legal and justice mediation, solving problems, and offering advice, among other tasks (cf. Richter

2005:219–230). Their expertise in dealing with complex matters and solving issues between rivals and individuals earn them recognition in their communities (2 Sam 14 20; Judg. 5:29; Ex. 35:25; 2 Sam 14 20).

The Deuteronomist acknowledges female characters as they appear frequently in the books of Samuel and Kings. The Historian does not portray women as weak. Modern readers, however, appear to view biblical female characters as weak and helpless. They are often marginalised and blamed for the misfortunes of their male counterparts (You 2019:179). You (2019) condemns perceptions that perceive women as inferiors. According to You, the Historian's intention was not to regard women as weak and unimportant but as people deserving of recognition and respect. Meyers (2016:553ff) argues that although women seem invisible in the androcentric society, they are not presented as weak. Considering the argument made above, it should thus be clear that both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler had high regard for the status of women in their time.

Overview of King David

David is identified as a man after the Lord's "own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), God's chosen one, "the Lord was with him" (1 Samuel 18:14). The Bible regards David as the model king of Israel, and the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles describe his many successes. Yet even David, "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), abuses his power and acts faithlessly at times (2 Sam. 11:2–17; 2 Sam. 24:10–17). Yet despite David's failings, God fulfils his covenant with David and treats him with mercy. The David presented to the reader in the Scriptures (1 Samuel 16 – 1 Kings 1–2 and 1–2 Chronicles) does not arise from a vacuum. He lives with people, among people and interacts with people. Ruth and Naomi are David's maternal ancestors, who contributed to his birth through their loyal behaviour (Ruth 4:13–15). According to Jacobson (2003:403), Naomi, Ruth, and Hannah are the women who introduce David's story. David, king of Israel and Judah, was a mythic biblical figure to many people (Halpern 2001:479; McCarter 1986:117ff; cf. Brueggemann 1990:98ff). David is not just another king but a transitional figure whose leadership defined a nation for millennia (Anderson 2004:60ff; cf. Bentzen 1955: 16ff). Alter (1999:1ff) argues that the story of David is probably the most significant single narrative representation in antiquity of a human life by slow stages through time, shaped and altered by the pressure of (i) political life, (ii) public institution, (iii) family, (iv) the impulses of body and spirit, (v) and the eventual sad decay of the flesh. David's name is unique and belongs to him alone. The name bears a person who occupies a position of prominence in the lineage of Jesus Christ.

Role of Women in David's Kingship

The role of women in David's life cycle is traceable through six stages: ancestors, as a young warrior, as a fugitive, as a king of Israel, and finally as an older man (Sebola 2013). He was married to several women: Michal (1 Sam 18:27), Ahinoham (1 Sam 25:43), Abigail (1 Sam 25:42), Maacah (1 Chr. 3:2), Haggith (1 Chr. 3:2), Abital (1 Chr. 3:3), Shephatiah (1 Chr. 3:3), Eglath (1 Chr. 3:3), Bathsheba (1 Chr. 3:5). There are also other wives and concubines (2 Sam. 5:14; 1 Chr. 3:6-8, 14:4-7; cf. Brueggemann 2002; Zucker 2016). Jacobson (2003:404) attests that many of these unnamed or named women represent essential aspects of David's character. Jacobson further regards the relationship

between David and the women in his life as complex and often disturbing. Among the women mentioned in 1–2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles, the article will focus on the role of five women in the Davidic leadership. The women discussed in this paper might appear unimportant, but their actions, speeches and unspoken words prove otherwise.

In the words of You (2019:179), their role cannot be ignored or undermined as they express their expertise in various situations: correcting male leadership, calling for accountability, and peace-making, among others. I have divided the women in David's kingship into two groups: those who have a marital relationship with David and those who do not. The former group are represented by Michal (1 Sam 18:25, 27–18; 2 Sam. 6:14, 20, 21–23), Abigail (1 Sam 25:2–43), and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2–27; 2 Sam. 12:1–22; 1 Kgs. 1:11–53, 2:1–24); while the latter group includes a wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:2, 4, 9) and Abishag (1 Kgs. 2:1–4, 15, 17, 13–25). I have chosen these five women for a definite purpose. Besides analysing Biblical narratives on each of these women, scholarly interpretation of the saga will also be considered, since it is important to note the comments and views of scholars on women in King David's circle. Julia Michelle Hogan (2013:1) argues that these women are used to continue and explain the events that happen in the plot of 1 and 2 Samuel and the 'David story'. The women are here discussed in their order as they relate to David.

Michal

Michal is portrayed as a minor figure in the biblical narrative. She is presented for the first time when Saul's family is introduced (1 Sam 14:50). Michal is one of King Saul's daughters mentioned by name. Her appearance is meant to maintain the link between David and the "House of Saul". The Deuteronomist introduces her by reporting that she loved David (1 Sam. 17:25; 1 Sam. 18:20). The background of Michal's marriage to David is characterised by deception, dishonesty, manipulation, striving for fame and political gain (1 Sam. 18: 18:24, 27–29, 30). Exum (1993:26–27) is of the view that she is known by her two statuses: "Michal the daughter of King Saul" (1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 6:16) and "Michal the wife of David" (1 Sam 19:11). These two constructing statuses are important in these narratives. The contrasting status, as observed by Exum, demonstrates an "essential rift" that must be demonstrated between Michal and David to fulfil a theological agenda of the text (1 Sam 13:14). Monsma (2013:18) describes her as a troubled character torn by inner conflict. Monsman (2013:22) observes that in every passage where Michal is mentioned, she is referred to in terms of her relationship with Saul or David. The sentiment is echoed by Hogan (2023:3), as she regards Michal's character as doomed from the start. Her role in the narratives appears to be solely aiding the progression of David's becoming king, much to the detriment of her character. In other words, Hogan views Michal as a tool to advance men's interests. In the case of King Saul, she could serve as bait to have David killed in battle by the Philistines. On the other hand, David desired to be the King's son-in-law, a status that could afford him the opportunity for kingship. Commenting on the fate of Michal, Brueggemann (1990:252ff) regards Michal as having no future, no claim on Israel, and no prospect for life. Michal is depicted as contributing nothing: She is seen as providing nothing more than only a sarcastic comment to David. She is then immediately silenced and rebuked by David for the courage she has shown in coming out to reprimand him (2 Sam 6:21–

22). The narrator dismisses her as barren and hopeless. In other words, the appearance of Michal in the narratives centres on advancing David to a kingship position.

Michal plays two outstanding roles in the life of David: she saves David from Saul and reprimands him for acting indecently (1 Sam. 19:11–17; 1 Chr. 15:29). *Saving David from assassination*: Michal demonstrates her intelligence and cunning when she discovers a plot to assassinate David, and she chooses to warn him (1 Sam. 19:11–17). Michal's actions are similar to those of her brother Jonathan. Both risk their lives assisting David to escape (1 Sam. 19:4–7; 1 Sam. 20:33. Michal is caught in a predicament where she must choose between two conflicting loyalties. She is her father's daughter, but also a wife to her husband (cf. Monsma 2013:19; Exum 1996a:57). With these roles come certain expectations. Michal acts *contrary* to the general expectation, which was to act first in the interest of her father over and against that of her husband (cf. Daniel 13; Jos. 2). She demonstrates courage as she chooses to stand by her husband and save his life. In order to protect David, Michal lies to both the guards and her father, claiming that David threatened her life (1 Sam. 30–33). Ironically, by assisting David to escape from Saul, their union came to a “temporary end”. They were only reunited ten years thereafter (2 Sam. 6:14–22). Bach (1997) describes Michal as a woman who gains contempt rather than power.

Reprimanding David for indecency: Michal resurfaces when she expresses her dissatisfaction with David's behaviour (2 Sam. 6:16, 6:20). David dances half-naked as he celebrates the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1–19; 1 Chr. 13:1–16). David's action displeases Michal. She reprimands David for humiliating himself among the people, including young maids. David defends his action (2 Sam. 6:21–22). In this narrative, Michal expects her husband not to publicly disgrace himself.

Abigail

The Abigail narrative (1 Sam. 25:2–42) can be seen as one of the most important events in the Hebrew Narrative. Political instability created by King Saul precedes Abigail and David's narratives. The internal crisis polluted the atmosphere, mainly caused by King Saul, as he had lost divine favour (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:1). Saul's rivalry with David was well-known in the region. He tried to kill David on several occasions, but with no success. David had spared Saul's life on a few occasions, which indicated that David had no intention to kill Saul (1 Sam 24:16–22; 1 Samuel 26:1–12). The escape of David and his men from Saul demonstrates that he was not willing to cause civil war in Israel. In the episode, the Deuteronomist informs his readers about the death of Samuel (1 Sam. 25:1), a great prophet and kingmaker (cf. Onuh 2017:59). David and his men were in the wilderness of Paran (1 Sam. 25:1–2). They became acquainted with a wealthy man, introduced by the narrator as Nabal (נָבָל) (1 Sam. 25:25). Nabal's name in Hebrew equates to the word “fool”. He is described as a wealthy man in the area. Nabal's wealth was measured in livestock tended by servants in the wilderness. David and his six hundred men safeguarded Nabal's livestock and his servants in the wilderness (1 Sam.25:16). They refrained from taking some livestock for food. On one occasion, when Nabal was shearing his sheep in Carmel (1 Sam. 25:2–9), David requested food to feed his soldiers. Mulza (2003:47) is of the view that David's request was justifiable as it was in line with the customs of the day. David believed that Nabal would extend gratitude as a token of appreciation for taking care of his flock in the open land. David's humble

requests indicated that he respected other people's properties, as he did not want to take them by force. He enforces a patron-client relationship with Nabal, where the latter must play the role of the client. Nabal expressed the true meaning of his name when he mocked, ridiculed, and insulted David (1 Sam. 25:10, 11; cf. Cru 2007).

Nabal had a beautiful and intelligent wife, named Abigail (1 Sam. 25:3b). She is introduced as a remarkable woman whose character contrasts with that of her husband, Nabal. Baumgartner (2015:312–339) sees Abigail as the only woman described in the Bible as both beautiful and intelligent. Abigail's personality and character have been used as a role model in ancient Israel and most modern Christian communities (Onuh 2017; cf. Bar-Efrat 1989). She is regarded as a woman of courage, wisdom, and integrity. Brueggemann (1990:178, 179) notes that she "shows her extraordinary boldness, common sense, and capacity for effective language. Abigail heard about what her husband said to David's requests (1 Sam 25:9–11, 14–15) and the eminent calamities (1 Sam 25:16–17, 21–22).

She is action orientated and decisive. Okoh & Ugwueye (2022:154) views Abigail as approachable. Abigail realises the importance of time and information, a significant factor in communication. You (2019:185) describes her as a remarkable woman who changes a dangerous situation through her expertise in communication. Abigail intervenes and rescues the situation (Mulza 2003). She becomes practical, and the description of her action (gathered 200 loaves of bread, two wineskins full of wine, five sheep that had been slaughtered, nearly a bushel of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisings, and 200 fig cakes) is narrated by the Deuteronomist (1 Sam. 25:18–19; Cartledge 2001). The amount of food she prepares is a perfect example of an industrious and generous woman. Abigail doesn't need to meet David in person; she could have sent food supplies and a word of apology through the servants. Judging from the circumstances, Abigail decides that personal interaction with David is crucial. She accepts the patron-client relationship by providing ample sustenance to her patron, David. She uses a donkey as a means of transport (1 Sam. 25:20). In the Biblical world, the usage of a donkey symbolises service, suffering, peace, humility, and wisdom. It is also associated with an expression of abundance, power, and influence. Her reaction as she saw David was enough to avert his plans (1 Sam. 15:23–31). Abigail demonstrates her expertise in negotiation skills and generosity. In response to her request, David accepted her offer (1 Sam. 25:35), preventing him from attacking Nabal and his household. Various scholars (Jacobs & Spiering 2016:103–129; Mulza 2003:45–53) and commentators (Wilbanks & King 2023:90) perceive Abigail as possessing the following characteristics: She was a *wise woman* (1 Sam. 25:28); she was a *courageous woman* (1 Sam. 25: 2, 25:13, 25:20); she was a *prophetic woman* (1 Sam. 25:33); she was a *faithful woman*: (1 Sam. 25:26, 25:42). The outstanding quality that Abigail exhibits is wisdom (Mulza 2003:53), and therefore qualifies as a role model for contemporary communities. She averts a clash. She oversteps the traditional male-female boundary by interacting directly with David and taking on the client role. You (2019:185) describes Abigail as action-oriented and courageous, equipped with negotiation skills.

Bathsheba

Bathsheba is another woman in King David's life. She is first presented as a beautiful woman, known as the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah, the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:2–

3). According to You (2019:197), she is presented as a victim of the king's power but later uses her persuasive skills to secure Solomon's succession to the throne. This is revealed by her speech where she says to David: *My lord, you made a vow before the LORD your God when you said to me, 'Your son Solomon will surely be the next king and will sit on my throne' (1 Kings 1:17, New Living Translation)*. According to You (2019:190), Bathsheba is one of the best-known, yet misunderstood, female characters in the Hebrew Bible. Like other women, Bathsheba is notorious because of King David (Bailey 1990). The narrative plays out during a war between Israel and the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:1). Every eligible man, except the newlyweds, old and invalids, was expected to go to war, led by the king. Yet, King David remained at home (2 Sam. 11:2). While at home, David walked about on his house's balcony. It happened that he spotted a woman taking a bath. In the narrative, the woman's attractive appearance compelled David to keep looking at her (2 Sam. 11:2–26). The woman appeared to be passive, silent, and vulnerable. David commanded his servants to take (לקח) her for him, and he violated her. The Hebrew phrase *עָשָׂה עִוְבֹן עִמָּהּ* is used in Deuteronomy 22:23; 25 and 2 Samuel 12:11 to express forced intercourse with a woman, probably against her will. Despite her privacy being invaded, the narrator doesn't indicate that she protested (Deut. 22:24; cf. Davidson 2006:86; cf. Fokkelman 1999).

The David and Bathsheba narratives have attracted varied views among scholars and commentators. Scholars and commentators vary significantly concerning the part Bathsheba plays. This ranges from Bathsheba being a femme fatale who deliberately plots to become David's wife to her being an innocent victim, utterly unaware of David's voyeuristic gaze (Vom Orde 2002:143; Klein 2000:48; Seiler 1998:256; You 2019: 190; Bailey, R C 1990). Interpretations of Bathsheba's personality are numerous and diverse. Two contrasting views regarding Bathsheba are identified, namely, portraying Bathsheba as innocent and who becomes a victim of male domination, and the other as guilty as charged (cf. (Davidson, 2006; Létourneau, 2018; Gravett, 2004). The former perceives Bathsheba as of secondary importance in an analysis of this narrative as she is almost entirely passive (Berlin 1982:72; McCarter 1984:288; Ackroyd 1977:105–106). She is also described as an object (Sheiler 1998:256).

Bathsheba is innocent

Her innocence has been defended with several substantial grounds. The grammar of 2 Samuel 11:4 indicates a non-consensual sexual offence, or what we would refer to as "rape", which is something that has apparently gone unnoticed. I intend to highlight this disturbing aspect of the narrative. The surrounding context, early translations, and rabbinic sources support this interpretation. The narrator solely describes what David did: dispatched, took, brought her, and laid with her. Regarding Bathsheba's responses, the author says nothing. Was she awestruck or flattered? Did she find David's popularity and influence alluring or terrifying? Bathsheba had no legal authority to agree to have sex with David under the Israelite law. She was a married woman, and adultery would bring humiliation to her, to her family, and endanger her life because adultery was punishable by death (Leviticus 20:10). A woman's honour in Israel was determined by her excellent reputation, which also included her virginity. The treatment Bathsheba received at the hands of David ruined her honour as a woman.

The Deuteronomist presents two sets of narratives on Bathsheba: the first is found in

2 Samuel 11–12 and (2), while the second is narrated in 1 Kings 1:1–2. These episodes are discussed here as passive and active roles. These scenarios are marked by a period of silence where the authors relegate Bathsheba to the background, only to resurface after the birth of Solomon (cf. Koenig 2011)—each of these periods directly impacts David’s leadership and even that of his successors.

Passive role: Besides sending messengers informing David about her pregnancy (2 Sam. 11:15), Bathsheba remains passive throughout the narrative. Two contrasting views regarding Bathsheba are identified: one portraying her as innocent and the other as equally guilty (Berlin 1982:72; McCarter 1984:288). The innocence of Bathsheba is further based on two factors: (1) Object: Seiler (1998:256) observes that Bathsheba is an object which has to be subjected to King David’s authority. (2) Weak: In this narrative, she is presented as weak and vulnerable, unable to resist when the king advances (You, 2019:190). Bathsheba is viewed through the male gaze (Kirsanova 2018: 68ff). Exum (1996b) notes that throughout the ages, Bathsheba has become the quintessential object of the gaze in literature and art. According to Davidson (2006:89), the narratives depict David taking advantage of his subjects. As the king appointed by God, he was responsible for defending the weak and the vulnerable against misfortunes. Bathsheba is, therefore, perceived as innocent and cannot be blamed.

Bathsheba to blame

Campbell (2005:114) is of the view that Bathsheba is given part of the blame for the wicked deeds described in the narrative. The narrative of David’s adultery involving Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–2) has often been interpreted as implicating Bathsheba as co-conspirator or at least partly to blame (Davidson 2006:81; Klein 2003). Bailey (1990) argues that Bathsheba is “a willing and equal partner to the events that transpire”. Hertzberg (1964:309) suggests a possible element of “feminine flirtation”. Bathsheba is also blamed for being complicit in the sexual adventure and offering herself to be sent for and taken (Klein 2003; Kirk-Duggan 2003). One is tempted to ask, was she the only woman who happened to have a bath at that time? In support of Kirk-Duggan’s view, it appeared that Bathsheba had exposed herself when she chose to take a bath in a vulnerable space. Bathsheba is not regarded as a helpless and innocent victim. The narrative does not indicate any humiliation and depression on the part of Bathsheba when she realises that she is pregnant. In 2 Samuel 11:5 states, “the woman conceived and sent word to David, saying ‘I am pregnant’ (NIV). In this passage, Bathsheba seems more than eager for King David to bear the consequences of his actions.

She is viewed as a willing woman (cf. Bailey 1990:88) who revealed her real characteristics as a seductress, loose, immoral adulteress who availed herself to any potential man in the compound. She is accused of deliberately choosing to bathe in a place where she knew the king could see her. They imagine her coquettishly parading around naked to catch the king’s eye. In this scenario, as Bobby Kurnia Putrawan et al., (2023:1ff) mentioned, David seems almost a helpless victim in the sights of a conniving vixen determined to seduce him. According to You (2019:190) and Davidson (2006:81), the trail of misfortunes within David’s circle described in 2 Samuel 11–12 is blamed on Bathsheba. Blaming Bathsheba on the grounds of one’s thinking and imagination is unfair. The reader’s objectivity when reading the text is crucial to avoid bias unless influenced by their allegiance to David as a character in the narrative.

The Active Role (1 Kings 1:1–2)

Again, the reappearance of Bathsheba in the episode had a direct impact on David's final days as king and also on his successor. She displays an active role in the reigns of two of Israel's kings, her husband, David, and Solomon, her son (cf. You 2019:192). In this narrative, King David is old (1 Kgs. 1:2ff), and discussing his successor is crucial. Adonijah, one of his sons, claims the throne while David is still alive (1 Kings 1:5–10). Bathsheba ensures her son, Solomon, is considered for kingship (You, 2019:192). Her active role is revealed through *bowing down* (1 Kgs. 1:16, 31a) and *speaking* (1 Kgs. 1:17–22, 31b). She reminds her husband (David) about his promise that Solomon will succeed him as king of Israel (1 Chr. 28:6, 9). The fragile old monarch has no option but to fulfil his promise and grant Bathsheba's request (1 Kgs. 1:32–40). It appears that she was aware and well-informed about the royal affairs. Her actions and words revealed that she might have been involved in making crucial decisions in the elderly king's leadership. In the narrative, Bathsheba's speech is direct, suggesting some form of authority (cf. You 2019:193). Bathsheba's active role is also depicted during her son, Solomon's reign (1 Kgs. 2:13–22). Unfortunately, Bathsheba's ambition causes the death of Adonijah (1 Kings 2:23–25). It appears that women's actions and speech towards men carry a significant weight, as revealed in 1 Samuel 25 and 1 Kings 1:16, 31a and 1 Kgs. 1:17–22, 31b respectively.

Woman of Tekoa

The David and Bathsheba saga (2 Sam. 11:1–27) brings several unfortunate and tragic episodes into David's family circle (2 Sam. 12:1–2 Sam. 20:1–23). These tragedies negatively impact the nation's prosperity and warrant his officials, led by Joab, to intervene (cf. Zhang 2022). The episode of the Woman of Tekoa takes place within the context of David's family crisis due to his adultery with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah: The lust, rape, and rejection of Tamara by her half-brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1–14, 8:15–20), *David's lack of decisive action on the rape of Tamara* (2 Sam. 13:21–22), Absalom's murder of Amnon and then fleeing (2 Sam. 13:23–39), David's longing for Absalom and its negative impact on the nation (2 Sam. 13:39), Joab conspires to bring Absalom home (2 Sam. 13:39–14:24). In this narrative, Joab, David's chief army officer takes action. He might have observed and realised that David's longing for his son has affected the entire nation (2 Sam. 13:37–39). It is against this background that he conspires to bring Absalom home (2 Sam. 13:39–14:24). Joab concluded that reconciliation between father (David) and son (Absalom) could be the best option. Joab seeks the services of the woman of Tekoa, presented as a "wise woman". He recognises her wisdom and trusted her to fulfil the objectives.

The phrase *wise woman* deserves an explanation. In the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible, wisdom is personalised as a woman (Camp 1981). It is worth noting how she became a "wise woman" in her community and the surrounding areas. Joab informs the woman about the situation in the palace. He tells her the words she is expected to say (2 Sam. 14:3). Upon arrival, the Tekoaite woman bows down to the ground respectfully. The bowing down of women towards men receives a special place in Biblical narratives, just like in most African communities. A speech is accompanied the action: "*Help me your Majesty*" (2 Sam. 14:4b), probably spoken in a convincing and emotive manner. One wonders what is going on in David's mind, but it might have reminded her of Abigail

a year earlier (cf. 1 Sam. 25:23–24) when she spared him from shedding blood. In this narrative, the woman gets David's attention as she seizes the opportunity to relate her concerns to the king in the form of a parable (2 Sam. 14:5–7, 9, 11, 12a–17). The woman asks the king to intervene, and the king agrees (Cormody 1988:45). According to Brenner (1994), she manages to enlist David's support by posing two principles of social order: private blood revenge to impose the basic prerogative of central government and to impose order through the institutional procedures of the law. A person, a woman for that matter, who could be summoned to the palace to address royal matters reveals an outstanding character. The woman of Tekoa is described as the one who values life, peace, and stability (Carmody 1988:46). She manages to bring reconciliation between rival individuals, father (David) and son (Absalom) (2 Sam. 14; 2, 4, 9). In this case, the woman of Tekoa fulfills her obligation as a negotiator and peacemaker (cf. Hye-Kyung 2012:65–82). The narratives of the woman of Tekoa reveal that reconciliation between rival individuals is possible if the parties involved are willing to reconcile.

Abishag

Abishag (1 Kgs. 1:1–4) is another female character whose appearance has to do with David. Unlike the women above, her connection with David is based on his ill health. The Deuteronomist and the Chronicler present David to the public and record his achievements since his anointing as king (1 Sam. 16: 12bæ13; 2 Sam. 2:4, 2 Sam. 5:1–3; 1 Chr. 11:1–9, 14:1–7), to lying on his deathbed at his ripe old age (1 Kgs. 1:1) until his death (1 Kgs. 1:10–12; 1 Chr. 29:28). David's military and political successes are well-known both in Israel and her neighbouring nations (2 Sam. 8:1–14, 1 Chr. 18). His shortcoming, mistakes, weaknesses, and misfortunes in his family circle was recorded by the Deuteronomist, although excluded by the Chronicler. The Abishag and David episode consists of only four verses (1 Kgs. 1:1–4), yet it has attracted important debate among scholars. Most modern interpreters have understood the Abishag Episode as a virility test that indicates that David is unfit to rule. The debate is based on two pieces of parallel literature (the Sumerian folktale "The Old Man and the Young Woman" and the Kirita Epic). Walsh (1996:4) commends him for founding an empire and dynasty but disapproves of his conduct and his failures, which disgrace the nation. Regardless of his failures, David is celebrated as Yahweh's particular favourite (2 Sam. 7). In this narrative (1 Kgs. 1:1–4, 15), David is aged, weak, cold and cannot get warm. Walsh (1996:4) diagnoses David, suggesting that he (David) suffered from arteriosclerosis. According to Ben-Noun (2002:M365), King David suffers from a low body temperature due to old age. This implies that neither his wives, including (Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba) nor blankets could keep him warm at that stage.

The king's condition has a negative impact on the running of the nation's affairs. Intervention to resolve the crisis was necessary (Begg 2006:85ff). David's servants suggested a young woman to take care of him (1 Kgs. 1:3–4). A search for a "beautiful" young woman was made in Israel (1 Kgs. 1:3), and Abishag, from Shunem, a small village in the tribal territory of Issachar, met the criteria. She is depicted as "very beautiful", which qualifies her for the position. The word *beautiful* receives much attention in Biblical narratives. She is deemed beautiful by the courtiers of King David, a stereo-typical prerequisite for the role to fulfil. The underlying theory is that the vigour and energy of the youthful person would spread to the elderly one through physical

contact. Based on her beauty, Abigail was found to be the perfect woman needed to serve the palace. Her responsibilities at the king's court were clearly stated: She would be David's attendant and lie beside him. The "omnipotent" (knowledgeable) narrator reveals his expertise by the phrase "...but he (David) did not have intercourse with her (Abishag)" (1 Kings 1:4b). This implies that the Deuteronomist knew what was happening in King David's bedroom, on his bed and even inside his blankets.

Summary

Borrowing from Hogan's comment, each of these women endures incredible experiences of suffering that are brought about primarily through the actions of King David and the narrator. These women suffer at the hands of the narrator due to the narrator's neglect to record their experiences in any detail in the text. Instead, it will be my argument that these women are used to continue and explain the events that happen in the plot of 1 and 2 Samuel and the 'David story' (Hogan 2013:i). According to Hogan (2013:1), the experiences that some of these biblical women are described as enduring are of a highly sensitive and personal nature that includes the subjects of childbearing, barrenness, marital problems; sexuality and sexual abuse. The five women chosen in this article each share an affinity with one another in that they endure incredibly significant and wholly negative experiences brought about primarily by the actions of King David and in Tamar's case also by his son Amnon (Hogan 2013:2).

Lessons to be learned

I have investigated five women in the life of King David, intending to draw some lessons for contemporary communities. These five women (Michal, Abishag, Bathsheba, the Woman of Tekoa and Abishag) represent different age groups and social statuses, which implies that one can learn from people and individuals from different backgrounds. Lessons are learned through people's mistakes, shortcomings, failures, and successes. Lessons deduced from women in the Davidic leadership are related to using people as "tools"/snare, as agents, as examples of submission and humility, as advisors, loyal companions and also as influencers. They are here discussed as follows:

Using people for personal gain is unfair

The David-Michal marriage is motivated by the interests of individuals who intend to benefit from it. Each of the three characters involved (King Saul, Michal and David) have secretive desires known by the narrator (Deuteronomist). When King Saul realises that his daughter is in love with David, he decides to *use* Michal to trap David (1 Sam.18:20, 21; 25; cf. Robinson 1993:105). Saul regards his daughter's marriage to David as a perfect opportunity to have him killed (1 Sam 20:21–22). This is evidenced when he demands a hundred foreskins of the Philistines as dowry (1 Sam. 20:24). He is of the view that the Philistines will kill David in the process. David embraces the marriage to show military skills and triumph over the Philistines. Saul is surprised when David brings two hundred foreskins of slain enemy men instead (I Sam 18:27). In this scenario, Saul's plan to use Michal and the Philistines as a tool to kill David does not materialise. Michal, on her part, is infatuated with being the king's wife. A marriage arranged to serve extraneous interests will likely be unsuccessful and bring no benefit to the couple. Abishag is also used as a tool to move the plot along. In her earlier days at

the palace, she marks the inability of David to continue his rule and, later, the failure of Adonijah to assume that power. To use other people or their properties for personal and selfish benefits should be avoided at all costs. The contemporary community should avoid using other people for selfish and personal gain.

Abuse of power must be avoided at all cost

The narrative of David and Bathsheba represents contrasting issues, such as gender and social status. David is a male and a king; obviously, he is of a high social status, while Bathsheba is a female and probably from a lower social status. Considering the vast difference between the statuses of women and men at that time, the latter would hardly resist when called. The story, like many of the stories in the Old Testament, reflects power and dominion on the one hand and compelled submission on the other. Examples of such a mentality are evident throughout the ages, and the contemporary community is no exception. David is presented for the first time as powerless, almost an outcast and the forgotten eighth son of Jesse. Favoured by God, he ascended from a humble beginning to become the most powerful King in Israel and the surrounding nations. In this episode, David uses his power to fulfil personal gain at the expense of the weak. Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah (2 Sam 11:3), was compelled to submit to King David's summons (2 Sam 11:3–4). History is full of examples of leaders and people in positions of power who abuse their subordinates or those with lower social status. The Bathsheba and David narrative demonstrates gender-based violence by the elite against the poor. Contemporary society should strive to avoid gender-based violence, especially against women and children.

Agent for either misfortune or fortune

In legal terminology, the word “agent” refers to a person who has been legally empowered to act on behalf of another person or an entity (Kagan 2022). The World Development Report on Gender and Development (2012) defines *agency* as the ability to use endowments to take advantage of opportunities to achieve desired outcomes (Markham 2013). Two contrasting viewpoints on the notion of an agent are noted, namely, negative, and positive. *Agents of misfortune*: Gunn (1991:182) remarks on the major episodes of the story of King David. As stated earlier, Bathsheba is depicted as a woman who brings the doom of death in the story of King David. Gunn also draws attention to the theme in Proverbs 1–9 of a “foreign /strange woman” whose way leads to death. The quarrel over Rizpah leads, indirectly but relentlessly, to the destruction of both Ishhosheth (the owner) and Abner (the claimant); the seduction brings in its train the death of Uriah (the owner) and the illegitimate child (a token for David, the claimant?); the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13:1–22), leads to the death of Amnon (claimant) and Absalom (her protector); and finally David's concubine Abishag, is the occasion of the death of Adonijah (the claimant) and Joab. *Agents for peace*: Although no specific woman is associated with peace or text referring to peace among the women of King David, Abigail's action fits well in this context. Through Abigail, David is “restrained from bloodguilt” (1 Sam. 25:26) to taking vengeance himself (cf. Robison, 1993:135). David acknowledges Abigail's intervention as the act of God (1 Sam. 25:33). Abigail qualifies to be a peacemaker. Brueggemann and Linafelt (2012) regard Abigail as a divine agent advancing God's will for peace and stability in a hostile situation. In the

text (1 Sam. 25:26), Abigail desists David from shedding blood by the power of speech. David recognises Abigail's intervention as her acting as God's agent (1 Sam. 25:32). The Bible consists of names of individuals who possess significant roles as agents of God's plan of salvation, irrespective of gender. The Old Testament is replete with women who are agents of God's salvific plan. Certain female characters excel when performing their duties or responsibilities as agents in their own rights. Their decisiveness, boldness, intelligence, and faithfulness confirm God's salvific plan for Israel and humanity (Bird 1997:53). Conversely, some women were agents for unpleasant aspects of history.

Submissive and Humility

Humility is the ability to view yourself accurately as an individual with talents and flaws while being void of arrogance and low self-esteem (Tangney (2000:70–82). Humility is not always acknowledged as a positive trait to possess, but it is, in fact, a remarkable character strength (Harvey & Pauwels (2005:23). Abigail's actions when she saw David were a determining factor. She was not sure how he and his men would react when they saw her. On the other hand, it was unclear what David, the warrior and his army could do to her. Amidst this, there is no doubt that Abigail's appearance attracted David's attention. The Deuteronomist's intention is clear; he ensures the portrayal of Abigail's bodily gestures and her speech (1 Sam. 25: 23-24). The move represents determination and urgency as well as convincing motives. The action involves "dismounting quickly" and *throwing herself on the ground*, which is a sign of high respect, especially to men. Abigail's first words of appeal "please sir, listen to me!" (1 Sam. 25:24), "let me take the blame" (1 Sam 25:24), were sufficient to ground David. Through her speech, she managed to take charge of the situation. She kept David silent and made him eager to listen. Her speech is dominated by a confession, remorse, and accepting the guilt. Submissiveness is one of the qualities that most men admire from women, especially one's spouse. Her humility calmed David's anger.

Advisory Women as advisors

Abigail's actions and speech dominate the narrative. She is portrayed as active and vocal, while David is passive and silent. Her speech reveals an advisory character and negotiation skills. Her ability to convince David perfectly indicates that he values Abigail in all respects. Through Abigail's skilful speech, David is here "restrained from bloodguilt" (1 Sam. 25:26) so that he may not have to account, at a later stage, for killing "innocent" people (Robison 1993:135). David, therefore, acknowledges that it was God, who through Abigail, restrained him "from bloodguilt and from avenging" himself with his own hand (1 Sam. 25:33). He receives Abigail's gifts. He grants her petition not to avenge himself in person. By so doing, a peace treaty was signed and sealed. In this scenario, Abigail demonstrated negotiation skills, wisdom, and her abilities as a peacemaker. She managed to disarm a furious army leader who was ready to destroy (Schroeder 2013:47). Abigail's expertise averted an unnecessary attack on Nabal and his family.

Loyalty

Michal demonstrated loyalty to David when confronted with a daring situation. The conflict between David and Saul was at an early stage (1 Sam. 19:10–17). King Saul had

already dispatched guards to ensure David would not escape during the night, hoping to kill him in the morning (cf. Brueggemann 1985:120). Michal's responsibilities under such circumstances are outlined by Jewish law. This implies that a married woman is expected to act decisively in favour of her husband first when he is in need. It is this background that prompts Michal to assist David in escaping (1 Sam. 19:11–18). She crafts a scenario to save her husband, the move which could have cost her own life. This demonstrated genuine love (1 Sam. 18:20) for David, the son of Jesse (1 Sam. 16:11–13). Michal displayed loyal character and therefore qualifies to be a “brother’s keeper” (cf. Gen. 4). If those who are tasked to offer protection services for certain individuals in any given situation could learn from Michal’s action, most lives could be spared. Michal demonstrated loyalty to her husband, David.

Influential

The term *influence* is described by Needham (n.d.) as the capacity (of persons or things) to be a compelling force on or to have an effect, changing how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks. In this article, five women in the Davidic kingship have been discussed. Each of these women uniquely influence David. *Michal* saves his life from death on a few occasions, *Abigail* saves his career and reputation, *Bathsheba*, regardless of controversies, saves and helps to establish the Kingdom, and the Woman of Tekoa restores the broken relationships that affect the welfare of the nation, and *Abishag*, saved him from pain and loneliness in his latter days. The influence of this nature is regarded as a solution that can serve as a lesson to be learned in every situation. Constructive influence, without force and manipulation, is helpful in every sphere of human life, environment, and space (DeFalco Nicole 2009; Mu.SA. 2018). It is important to note that females must not be defined according to current gender and biological classifications, as these concepts were not used in the ancient world (Levine 1993:133). It is better to describe a female functionally regarding the relationships she was expected to act in within the broader Ancient Near East Cultures. History has proved that women have continued to suffer discrimination over the ages. The struggle for equal rights and an end to gender discrimination and gender-based violence is ongoing. Women have played a significant role since the time immemorial.

Their active participation in all spheres of life in any given community must not be undermined, ignored, or dismissed. As modern society continues to become more enlightened towards gender sensitivity, women’s contributions in socio-economic, political, religious, and other disciplines must not go unnoticed. Women should be allowed to express their capabilities and expertise in favourable and unfavourable environments (cf. Madu 2014:123). Influencing others for good is crucial: Influence is about affecting, changing, and swaying people’s thoughts, opinions or actions, either good or bad. Anyone who influences others for good is a community builder. In this article, Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba, the Woman of Tekoa and Abisha are women of influence who dramatically affect the life of David. Each can teach the contemporary community timeless truths that can help us impact our families, our friends, and the world for good.

Risk Takers to help others

Current societies have been characterised as risk societies, where dealing with risk is a

normal experience of everyday life (Beck 1992; Giddens 2000). In risk societies, understanding people's perceptions and responses to and taking of risk is crucial to deal with rapid social, technological, and environmental change and the side-effects of social advancement (Beck 1992, 2009). The phrase risk-taking is described by Zinn, Jens O (2017:1–15) and Prince Samuel (2018:764–767) as any consciously or non-consciously controlled behaviour with a perceived uncertainty about its outcome and/or about its possible benefits or costs for the physical, economic or psycho-social well-being of oneself or others. Michal was a risk-taker. A risk-taker risks everything in the hope of achievement or accepts more significant potential for loss in decisions and tolerates uncertainty. She lies when she informs the men who are instructed to capture David. Michal takes a risk in order to help David. The sevenfold use of the Leitwort "kill" (vv. 1, 2, 5, 11, 15-17) also helps to shape Michal's character as being willing to risk her life for her husband: six times, "kill" refers to David, but the seventh time it relates to Michal, symbolising her devotion to her husband.

Intervention in the time of crisis

Crisis intervention is an immediate and short-term emergency response to mental, emotional, physical, and behavioural distress. Crisis interventions help restore an individual's equilibrium to their bio-psycho-social functioning and minimise the potential for long-term trauma or distress. Certified crisis intervention counsellors conduct many crisis interventions at hospitals, clinics, social services, drug rehab centres, or an individual's home. Crisis counselling is not intended to provide psychotherapy or similar treatment but offers a short-term intervention to help clients receive assistance, resources, stabilisation, and support.

What is crisis intervention?

With Abigail's intervention, David returns to his senses by learning restraint, a quality needed for effective leadership. In 1 Sam 26, once more balanced, he refuses to kill Saul again. Abigail becomes the balancing act between folly and evil, the quintessential epitome of wisdom. Thus, Abigail is the moderating force who "averts the clash of two extremes; and at the same time, she is also the wise teacher, who instructs and directs the man, and whose advice is taken."

Approachable / Increasing Your Approachability

Approachability is about being accessible, consciously breaking down perceived barriers, having appropriate body language, and using the proper verbal communication and listening skills. Our approachability directly impacts the flow of information to us. The more approachable we are, the more likely we are to receive complete information through formal and informal channels. Abigail's approachable character made it possible for the household servants to approach her. It would have been too late had she waited for David's arrival. In most situations, unapproachable people, and unnecessary delay tactics, cause more harm.

Nonviolence

Contemporary communities in most countries around the globe are often earmarked by violence, crime, and criminal activities. Violence, strikes, crime and criminal activities

have become the language of the day in South Africa. People are used to all kinds of violence. No violent language and behaviour is necessary when addressing or responding to unfavourable situations. The contemporary community requires individuals and people who can avert violence. Michal, Abigail, the Woman of Tekoa and Abishag represent non-violent behaviour in David's kingship.

Conclusion

David's kingship was shaped by both male and female characters as presented by the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler Historians. In this article, I focused on the role of five women in the Davidic kingship. The women discussed in this paper might appear to be unimportant, but their actions, speeches and unspoken words prove otherwise. In the words of You (2019:179), "their role cannot be ignored or undermined as they express their expertise in various situations: in correcting male leadership, calling for accountability, and peace-making, among others". Women demonstrates their role in multiple forms and prove to be peacemakers, negotiators, reconciliatory, visionaries, intellectuals, and caregivers, among others. Their actions, words and silence contributed positively to Israel's monarchy, particularly King David. The five women discussed in this article play distinguished roles in David's leadership. Each female character displays lesson(s) that can be learned in contemporary society. *Michal*: She displays a character loyal to those around her. Indeed, by assisting David in escaping from Saul's wrath, one can learn to save the lives of others when faced with danger. She, therefore, qualifies to be a "brother's keeper". If those who are tasked to offer protection services for certain individuals in any given situation can learn from Michal's action, more lives can be spared. *Abigail* is more of a stock character, a stereotyped "woman of worth", "clever" (wise), in control, and embodying wisdom. She demonstrates the following characteristics: bravery, courage, generosity, hospitality, industriousness, humility, and accountability. *Bathsheba*: Depending on the circumstances, as in the case of King David, the role of women can either be unfavourable or favourable in nature. *The woman of Tekoa*: Through her expertise, she manages to bring reconciliation between the two rivals who are closely related (2 Sam 14: 2, 4, 9). In this episode, the woman of Tekoa is a negotiator. Good communication skills can restore broken relationships in a family set-up, workplace, or any contemporary community environment. *Abishag*: The service of a willing server can stabilise the situation and encourage effective service in any given community.

In order to learn something from biblical characters, especially women, there is a need to put aside prejudices and biases and approach them objectively. Characteristics that are most admired in varied settings and situations include wisdom, intellect, courage, resourcefulness, and entrepreneurship, among others. Indeed, from the time immemorial, women have significantly contributed to various fields of endeavour. Women's role, if taken seriously, can be a solution during the time of crisis. Lessons are not only learned not only from characters who appear to be doing well in the narratives but also those who display bad and unfavourable things. One can learn through the mistakes of others. Every biblical character is a role player in contemporary society.

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