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HEROIC WOMEN IN DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY

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"Hero"[1] is the usual translation of the Hebrew word גבור[2] (*gibbôr*) which in the Bible refers to a "young vigorous man apt for all that is virile" or a "strong, valiant man."[3] גבור can thus be used for men who have achieved military or political

[1]For a discussion on the characteristics of a hero according to Hebrew tradition, see R. Porter, "Heroes in the Old Testament: The Hero as Seen in the Book of Judges," in H. R. E. Davidson, ed., *The Hero in Tradition and Folklore* (London: Folklore Society, 1984), 93–96.

[2]For the occurrences of גבור in the Hebrew Bible, see A. Even-Shoshan, *Qonqordanziah Hadashah Letanak*, 2nd ed. (Jerushalaim: Kiryat Sefer, 1992), 252.

[3]See *s.v.* "גבור," in L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M. Richardson, & J. Stamm, *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 165; F. Brown, S. R. Driver, & C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906/1951), 150. For a more extensive treatment of the meaning of גבור in the Hebrew Bible, see J. Kühlewein, "גבור *gbr* überlegein sein," in E. Jenni & C. Westermann, eds., *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1971), 398–402; H. Kosmala, "גבור," in G. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, eds., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* Vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 902–919; G. Botterweck & H. Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 373–377.

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victory for the welfare of the nation.[4] In this article, however, we examine some texts on women in the Deuteronomistic History (DH)[5] to determine whether the qualities that constitute a גבור can also be found in them. Indeed, some women in the DH could well qualify to be "heroines" based on the second part of the description of a גבור, that is, "those who achieved victory for the welfare of the nation."[6]

Swidler[7] qualifies the traditional view that women have a secondary status in ancient Israelite society. He explains that there was a dual tradition on women in the Hebraic nation—one positive and the other negative. The positive view of women was connected with goddess worship and higher status for them; the negative notion was traced to Yahweh worship and dominant status for men. As such, Swidler[8] claims

[4]W. McKane maintains that "more generally, ***gibbôr ḥayil*** was applied to men of ability who could hold positions of responsibility in the community, and ***ḥayil*** was used with reference to ethical worth" ("The ***gibbôr ḥayil*** in the Israelite Community," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 17 [1957–1958]: 35). For M. Bal, "it is … power more than any individual quality [that] defines the gibbor" (*Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* [Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988], 257 n. 24). In the case of the women discussed in this article, we may say that it is the power of Yahweh working in them that makes them heroines.

[5]Deuteronomistic History (DH) refers to the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings.

[6]Though the conclusion of T. Ilan ("Women's Studies and Jewish Studies—When and Where Do They Meet?" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3:2 [1996]: 172) that studies on women "are a yardstick by which to measure a person's prejudices" has a grain of truth in it, it is not always conclusive. If we let the text and its context speak for themselves, the Biblical texts on women in the Deuteronomistic History have something objective to teach readers of all times.

[7]L. Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 158.

[8]Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*, 159. See also S. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood & Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 85–86 and G. Emmerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," in R. Clements, ed., *The*

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that an intense restriction on Jewish women began after the return of the Jewish remnant from the Babylonian exile in the 6th century BCE.

Bozak[9] proposes another theory—that the Israelites who lived in Babylonian society during the exile had witnessed how Babylonian women enjoyed greater freedom and legal autonomy. This experience then influenced the status of Israelite women in Israelite society when they returned to their native country after the exile.

There are eight women in the Deuteronomistic History who can qualify as heroines according to the definition of the word discussed above. They are Rahab (Jos. 2:1–24), Deborah and Jael (Jgs. 4–5), the unnamed woman who had put an end to Abimelech's life (Jgs. 9:50–55), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:9–20; 2:1–10), Michal (1 Sam. 19:11–17), Abigail (1 Sam. 25:18–31), and Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:14–20).

Rahab in Jos. 2:1–24

Israel's entry into the promised land was made possible through the collaboration of Rahab, who is described as a prostitute, זונה. She facilitated the initial step of Israel's entrance into Canaan by hiding the two spies whom Joshua sent to reconnoiter the country. Laffey[10] calls her the "heroine of Jericho" and explains that the story of Rahab

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World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 391.

[9]B. Bozak, *Life "Anew": A Literary-Theological Study of Jer. 30–31*, Analecta Biblica 122 (Roma: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1991), 164–170. But I. Ljung (*Silence or Suppression: Attitudes Towards Women in the Old Testament*, Uppsala Women Studies: Women in Religion 2 [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989], 70–73) traces the emergence of the female's role in Israelite society back to the pre-exilic Israel. The only positive role attributed by Ljung to females, however, was the naming of a child.

[10]A. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 85.

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"describes how the cooperation of a woman—the very lowest on the totem pole as foreigner and harlot—is crucial to that first success."[11]

Even though she is not an Israelite, Rahab confesses nevertheless that Israel's God is the God of heaven above and here on earth (v. 11). Her discourse in v. 9 can be considered prophetic,[12] for she proclaims Yahweh's plans for Israel: "I know that the Lord has given you this land." The narrator clearly gives the woman a prominent role, lowly in status as she may be, in risking her life in an act of heroism so that the Israelites could conquer the land.

Deborah and Jael in Judges 4

In the Book of Judges, only Deborah receives the double function of prophetess[13] and judge[14]—she is introduced in v. 4 as a woman (אִשָּׁה), the wife of Lappidoth (אֵשֶׁת לַפִּידוֹת), and as a prophetess (נְבִיאָה) who was judging Israel (שֹׁפְטָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל). For Kaswalder,[15] Deborah is a

[11]Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 89.

[12]Laffey comments that "her harlotry did not in any way prevent her from assuming an almost prophetic stance" (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 86).

[13]F. van Dijk-Hemmes ("Traces of Women's Texts in the Hebrew Bible," in F. van Dijk-Hemmes & A. Brenner, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* [Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1993], 43) claims that Deborah is portrayed in the narrative as the model of a true prophet as sketched in Deut. 18:18–20.

[14]For an evaluation of the different interpretations of Deborah as judge, from Alt to Seeligmann, see T. Ishida, "The Leaders of the Tribal Leagues 'Israel' in the Pre-Monarchic Period," *Revue Biblique* 80:4 (1973): 514–519.

[15]P. Kaswalder, "I Giudici di Israel," *Liber Annuus* 41 (1991): 35. See also A. Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges," in F. Cross, W. Lemke, & P. Miller, eds., *Magnalia Dei=The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 152–168 and A. van der Kooij, "On Male and Female Views in Judges 4 and 5," in B. Becking & M. Dijkstra, eds., *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific*

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judge, prophet, and charismatic leader in line with Moses, Joshua, and Samuel. All the four nouns used to describe her—woman, prophetess, wife, and judge—have a relational nuance: as a wife, Deborah is related to her husband and family; as a prophetess and judge, she is bound to relate to society.

Bal translates "wife of Lappidoth" into "woman of torches" and explains[16] that "'woman of torches' fits her character too well … 'of torches' is the essence of Deborah: an inflamed and inflaming woman whose prophecy is crucial for the story." For Bal, Lappidoth was not Deborah's husband on the ground; indeed, nowhere in the Bible do we find the name.[17]

Yahweh's special election of Deborah allows her to give moral support to the Israelites in their time of crisis. Block[18] considers her as the "alter ego of Yahweh [whose] presence alone was enough to guarantee victory over the enemy" while Klein[19] maintains that "the presentation of Deborah is altogether enigmatic: as deliverer, she catalyzes others to acts of delivery." O'Connell,[20] on the other hand, sees her role in the story as simply that of a "catalyst of action in the plot."

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and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, Biblical Interpretation Series 18 (Leiden/Köln: Brill, 1996), 141, n. 11.

[16]Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 208.

[17]Against this interpretation, see B. Lindars, *Judges 1–5: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. A. Mayes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 182. In the context of the narrative, "wife of" favors well Lindars's interpretation of taking Lappidoth as a personal name.

[18]D. Block, "Deborah Among the Judges: The Perspective of the Hebrew Historian," in A. Millard, J. Hoffmeier, & D. Baker, eds., *Faith, Tradition, and History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 249.

[19]L. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 42.

[20]R. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, Vetus Testamentum Supplementum 63 (Leiden/New York: Brill, 1996), 107.

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Nevertheless, and despite the fact that she appears only in the first half of the story (4:4–14), Deborah plays a crucial role. Her leadership as a judge during the time of oppression was the germ of the forthcoming victory and liberation from the Canaanites.

The narrator mentions twice (4:17, 19) that Jael was the wife of Heber the Kenite.[21] Jael speaks only on two occasions—once to Sisera (4:18) and once to Barak (4:22b), both of whom she invites to enter her tent.

While some authors[22] see sexual implication in Jael's invitation for Sisera to enter her tent, it is totally absurd to claim that something sexual happened between the two while they were inside. Common sense dictates that such an intention could not have occurred to Sisera whose present concern then was to save his life by finding a safe hiding place.[23] Matthews,[24] however, has shown convincingly that although Jael violated the hospitality code by offering hospitality to Sisera (4:18a), the latter is more culpable for accepting Jael's invitation of hospitality (4:18b), requesting water from Jael (4:19b), and commanding Jael to stand at the door of her tent (4:20). These violations of the hospitality code in the Ancient Near East by Sisera justify the violent act of Jael.

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[21]On the different interpretations of Jael's name, see C. Meyers, "Jael," in P. Achtemeier, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 445; E. van Wolde, "Ya'el in Judges 4," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 107:2 (1995): 240–246; S. Layton, "Ya'el in Judges 4: An Onomastic Rejoinder," *ZAW* 109:1 (1997): 93–94; and N. M. Sarna, "Jael," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 9 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), cols. 1247–1248.

[22]E.g., Y. Zakovitch, "Siseras Tod," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 364–370; S. Niditch, "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in P. L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 50.

[23]See also B. Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 83.

[24]V. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21:1 (1991): 15–20.

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Yee,[25] moreover, defends Jael's alleged violations of hospitality as morally justifiable in the context of guerilla tactics; according to her, Jael's assassination of the Canaanites' army-commander qualifies her as a warrior, broadly speaking. In fact, Yee compares Jael's trickery to the guerilla tactics that the Israelite forces employ.

Jael's invitation to Barak, on the other hand, gives the reader an impression that she had just accomplished an heroic act. For Chalcraft,[26] "it is precisely in her deviance that Jael qualifies not only as a member of the narrator's social group, but as an heroic member of that social group. Jael is praised for breaking social conventions on behalf of Israel."

Bos,[27] meanwhile, describes Jael as one who "exercises physical and emotional strength" but is "weak by virtue of her womanhood." Jael indeed displays physical and emotional strength, but I do not agree with Bos's statement that womanhood implies weakness.[28] By killing the chief of the enemy, Jael became a military hero rather than a victim of war.

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[25]G. Yee, "By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman-Warrior in Judges 4," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 99–132.

[26]D. Chalcraft, "Deviance and Legitimate Action in the Book of Judges," in D. Clines, S. Fowl, & S. Porter, eds., *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 87 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 182–183.

[27]J. Bos, "Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17–22; Ruth 3," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 58.

[28]F. Buytendijk (*Die Frau* [Köln, 1953]) has tried to demonstrate that women are biologically and psychologically stronger than men; see also C. Jung (*The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* Vol. 10: *Civilization in Transition* [1964], 284–292), who illustrates this through his case studies. E. Good also expresses another opinion against Bos's interpretation ("Deception and Women: A Response," *Semeia* 42 [1988]: 117–132).

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Deborah and Jael in Judges 5

While she is referred to as judge, prophetess, and wife of Lappidoth in the narrative, Deborah is simply called the "mother in Israel" (5:7b אם בישראל) in the song, she who awakened the inactive villagers. According to De Boer,[29] Deborah earned this title through her good and effective counsel of faithfulness and unity in Israel. Camp[30] claims that Deborah is a "symbol of the unity that bound Israel together under one God Yahweh"; Lindars[31] explains that Deborah is mother of Israel because her act "preserves the population of the nation." Indeed, the title "mother" summarizes all the other titles given to Deborah in the narrative.

Mothers in the Old Testament play very important roles in Israelite society.[32] While they have no direct participation in the political realm,[33]

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[29]P. de Boer, "The Counsellor," in M. Noth & D. Thomas, eds., *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, VTS 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 59; P. de Boer, *Fatherhood and Motherhood in Israelite and Judean Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 126.

[30]C. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43:1 (1981): 28.

[31]B. Lindars, "Deborah's Song: Women in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 65:2 (1983): 168. See also Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 210; J. Exum, "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in L. M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 73–85; van der Kooij, "On Male and Female Views in Judges 4 and 5," 144; and H.-D. Neef, "Der Sieg Deboras und Baraks über Sisera: Exegetische Beobachtungen zum Aufbau und Werden von Jdc 4, 1–24," *ZAW* 101:1 (1989): 46.

[32]On the positive role of women in Old Testament society, see, among others, L. Jacobs, "Woman," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 16, 623–630; J. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Woman in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 66–193; C. Meyers, "Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-Female Balance in Early Israel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51:4 (1983): 571–578; and A. Maillot, *Eve, ma mère: Étude sur la femme dans l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1989), 17–22.

[33]G. Yee ("By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman-Warrior in Judges 4," 109–114) argues, however, that "women like Deborah in pre-state

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their influence is strongly felt in the family circle for it is their duty to educate and raise the children.[34] Contrary to claims that women in Israelite society are merely silent citizens, Deborah is an active member who inspires, initiates, and transforms the attitudes of her fellow citizens both in the song and in the narrative. Her leadership is underlined in 5:15a in particular, where she is portrayed as working not only with Barak but with the princes of Issachar as well.

Jael is mentioned twice in the song: in v. 6, which informs us of the time and situation, and in v. 24, where she is praised as the most blessed among women in the tent—תְּבֹרַךְ מִנָּשִׁים יָעֵל אֵשֶׁת חֶבֶר הַקֵּינִי מִנָּשִׁים בָּאֹהֶל תְּבֹרָךְ. The repeated praise of Jael in 5:24 underlines her prominence over other women; for Scippa,[35] Jael is blest above all women because of her obedience and docility as an instrument of God.

The reason for the praise of Jael is given in v. 26: she had the courage to kill the enemy of the Israelites, thereby ushering in freedom for the nation. Jael thus stands out and is acclaimed as the most blessed above all women of her time. Her circle of influence goes beyond her

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Israel had opportunities to take up leadership in war precisely because military organization was essentially domestic in character."

[34]See Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel?," 14–29; J. Hackett, "Women's Studies and the Hebrew Bible," in R. Friedman & H. Williamson, eds., *The Future of Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Scriptures*, SBL Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 150–153; J. Crenshaw, "A Mother's Instruction to Her Son (Proverbs 31:1–9)," in J. Crenshaw, ed., *Perspectives on the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Walter J. Harrelson* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 9–22; C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); and C. Pressler, *The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomic Family Laws*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 216 (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1993).

[35]V. Scippa, "Giaele, una donna forte dell'Antico Testamento: analisi strutturale di Gdc 5, 23–27 e 4, 17–23," *Rivista Biblica* 39:4 (1991): 399.

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family,[36] and Niditch[37] considers her as "the center and heroine of the story."

An Unnamed Woman in Jgs. 9:50–55

The unnamed woman in this pericope, who had the courage to throw a millstone on the rebel king Abimelech, delivered the Israelites from the evil he was about to inflict on them (vv. 50–52). Her deed remembered more than her name, she can be considered a forgotten heroine, yet what she did to Abimelech can be compared to what Jael did to Sisera, whose death put an end to Canaanite rule and ushered in peace for the land.

Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:9–20; 2:1–10

The history of kingship in Israel opens with the story of the humiliations which the barren and aged woman Hannah had to suffer, yet whose afflictions and prayers were rewarded with a son. She could be considered a model of private prayer, yet her role and influence cannot be confined only to such—Yahweh's answer to Hannah's prayer benefits not only her and her family but the whole nation as well.

Callaway[38] maintains that Hannah as a barren woman symbolizes the afflicted and hated people of Israel whom Yahweh visits. Her son

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[36]See J. Hackett, "In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women in Ancient Israel," in C. Atkinson, C. Buchanan, & M. Miles, eds., *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 15–38.

[37]S. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*: *A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 116.

[38]M. Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 137. See also J. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOTS 163 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 43–60.

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Samuel, moreover, anointed the first king of Israel at a moment in the nation's history when the people perceived kingship as the best solution to their problem of leadership.

Michal in 1 Sam. 19:11–17

Michal is usually remembered in history for her deceit and lies. She betrayed her father Saul to save her husband David (vv. 12–17) by helping him escape through a window (v. 12).[39] When Saul's messengers came for David the following morning, Michal lied and said that David was sick. This was reported to Saul, who then ordered that the bedridden David be brought to him so that he might kill him (vv. 13–15). It was then that the messengers discovered the dummy that Michal had made. When Saul asked Michal why she had deceived him, she replied with another lie and led her father to believe that it was the only way to save her own life.

Deceit and lies characterize the actions and words of Michal.[40] Yet had Michal not taken the initiative and persuaded David to flee, Saul's messengers might have captured him and Saul would have killed David. David's—and Israel's—history might thus have been very different had Michal not intervened. The text portrays her as a faithful wife who used prudence, courage, and even cunning to save David from Saul's anger.

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[39]J. Exum writes that "by letting David out the window … Michal figuratively births David into freedom" (*Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 89).

[40]A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 25; A. Berlin ("Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," in D. Clines & T. Eskenazi, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation*, JSOTS 119 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991], 92–93) notes that "Michal has been cast in a most unfeminine role." Against this opinion of Berlin that Michal is portrayed as unfeminine, see Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 72.

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Exum[41] argues that the female voice, particularly the stories of Jephtha's daughter and Michal, cannot be silenced, even by "literary murder." Here is another example of a woman who saved a man's life. Yet she is also a heroine indeed, for her act had repercussions for national advantage—King David bringing peace and prosperity to Israel.

Abigail in 1 Sam. 25:18–31

The narrator describes Abigail, the wife of Nabal,[42] as beautiful and intelligent; according to Berlin,[43] "Abigail epitomizes the אשת חיל 'worthy woman.'" Her description contrasts with that of her husband Nabal who is said to be a mean and bad-tempered man,[44] and whose refusal of David's request for provisions (vv. 6–11) infuriated the latter, making him set out with his men to kill Nabal and his troops (v. 22). The imminent danger to Nabal's life, however, was averted through Abigail's intervention. Informed by her servants, she went out to meet David along the way, offered him and his men provisions which she herself had prepared (v. 18), and pleaded with David not to take vengeance on her husband (v. 23–27). David's anger was thus abated. Indeed, Abigail's initiative to appease David even without consulting her husband and yet returning to him afterwards portrays her as a strong and determined woman who acts promptly to avoid bloodshed and save her family.

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[41]J. Exum, "Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative," in Clines & Eskenazi, *Telling Queen Michal's Story*, 176–198.

[42]For a characterization of Nabal, see J. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *CBQ* 40:1 (1978): 13–17.

[43]Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 31. See also P. McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 40 and S. Schroer, "Abigail: eine kluge Frau für den Frieden," in K. Walter, hrsg., *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung: Biblische Frauengestalten* (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 96.

[44]Berlin describes Nabal as "the proverbial fool" (*Poetics and Interpretation*, 31).

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Levenson[45] describes Abigail as a "woman of providence … endowed with the highly valued initiative and efficiency of the *'ešeṯ ḥayil* (ideal woman)" and comparable to the woman in Prov. 31:10–31. Laffey notes, however, that the traditional interpretation has overlooked the character of Abigail and focuses more on the promise made to David through her, that the Lord will make him a king over Israel and victorious over his enemies (vv. 28–30). Both interpretations, though, are complementary rather than contradictory, for Abigail's words anticipated Yahweh's message for David through Nathan in 2 Sam. 7:4–16.[46]

The courage of both Michal and Abigail in protecting and supporting David saved his life and thus gave Israel a king who united its people and led them to prosperity.

Huldah in 2 Kgs. 22:14–20

Huldah[47] is the only prophetess[48] mentioned in the DH during the period of the monarchy. When King Josiah ordered Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Ashiah to inquire from the Lord about the book of the law found in the temple (vv. 11–13), they went to consult Huldah the prophetess (v. 14) who told them God's ultimate

[45]Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," 20.

[46]Laffey gives Abigail the title "prophetess" by inference. She writes, "Her words are the vehicle of God's promise for David's future.… Though the text does not give her the title prophetess, her words virtually portray her as such" (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 110).

[47]On the meaning of the name "Huldah" as "weasel," see T. S. Frymer, "Huldah," *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 8, 1063. On a treatment of Huldah in the Haggadah, see A. Rothkoff, "Huldah," *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 8, 1063.

[48]For a comparative study of rabbinic and Christian interpretations of the prophetess Huldah, see C. Colafemmina, "Le profetesse Debora e Hulda nell'esegesi giudaica e Cristiana," in *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi. Atti del 1° Seminario di ricerca su "Storia dell'Esegesi giudaica e Cristiana antica," Ottobre 27–29 1983* (Bologna, 1984), 223–229.

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judgment upon the nation (vv. 15–17). Glatt-Gilad, however, claims that "from a literary-thematic point of view, Huldah's prophecy, which appears between the two faces of the reform in Chronicles, serves as a corrective reinforcement, rather than as a fatalistic foreboding as in Kings."[49]

Huldah, who speaks and acts to accomplish God's will, is described in the Targum as a teacher in the house of instruction.[50] We may thus ask how and why the story of this prophetess was preserved in the patriarchal culture[51] from which the sacred text emerged. We could infer from this the important role Huldah played in such a crucial moment of the history of the monarchy.[52]

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[49]D. Glatt-Gilad, "The Role of Huldah's Prophecy in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Josiah's Reform," *Biblica* 77:1 (1996): 30. See also Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 142.

[50]See D. Harrington & A. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets*, The Aramaic Bible 10 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 309.

[51]Laffey (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 85–143) attributes the negative portrayal of women in the Bible to the patriarchal mentality in ancient Israel. See also P. Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 41–88; R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 45–50; E. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 23–27; and E. Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 13.

[52]D. Christensen ("Huldah and the Men of Anathoth: Women in Leadership in the Deuteronomic History," *SBL Seminar Papers* 23 [1984]: 399–404) takes the mention of Deborah in Judges 4 and of Huldah in 2 Kgs. 22, together with Queen Jezebel (1 Kgs. 16:31–2 Kgs. 9:37) and Queen Athaliah (2 Kgs. 11), as illustrations of the theme that is so important in the Deuteronomistic history—the conflict and tension between prophet and king.

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Summary

Women in the Deuteronomistic History have played significant roles which could qualify them to be called "heroines." Just as the story of the Israelites' entrance into the promised land begins with a woman collaborating with the spies of Joshua, so the story of the monarchy opens with a trusting and faithful woman who, though beyond her fertile years, cooperates with Yahweh's designs. The story of the monarchy also concludes with the collaboration of a woman, one designated as a prophetess, with King Josiah.

The women who accomplished such heroic deeds—Rahab, Deborah, Jael, an unnamed woman, Hannah, Michal, Abigail, and Huldah—are of diverse social status and characters. Rahab's low social standing as a harlot of Jericho was no hindrance for her to do good for the welfare of God's chosen people. Her heroic act of risking her life for their sake has been written down and will forever be remembered in history.[53]

The unnamed woman who killed the wicked king Abimelech with a millstone thrown from the tower saved the nation from an evil ruler. Hannah's prayer ushered in the monarchy which united the nation for some time. Michal's and Abigail's courage and initiative exemplify women who are faithful and mindful of the well-being of their family. Huldah delivered the message of Yahweh at a time when neither the good king Josiah nor his advisers could know it.

Indeed, there are still stories in the Bible about women with heroic qualities despite the strong patriarchal culture of the society from which these sacred texts emerged. These women risked their lives and made sacrifices for the sake of the nation and the well-being of the chosen people of God. The sacred texts give witness, therefore, to the significant role that women play in the fulfillment of the divine plan for humanity.

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[53]Laffey maintains that "the stories of these women are her-story and bear retelling" (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 142).

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