

## Abigail, Ruth and the Case for Female Biblical Authorship

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Résumé de l'article

Until a century ago it was generally assumed that all of the books of the Tanakh were written by men, primarily for men. Herein the author will survey the growing number of scholars, female and male, who have contemplated the possibility that some of these works were composed by women. One of the principal texts that is commonly highlighted is Ruth. Although candidates for its authorship have seldom been suggested, it will be demonstrated herein that Abigail is worthy of consideration as the originator of the story of Ruth.

## Abigail, *Ruth* and the Case for Female Biblical Authorship<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Until a century ago it was generally assumed that all of the books of the Tanakh were written by men, primarily for men. Herein the author will survey the growing number of scholars, female and male, who have contemplated the possibility that some of these works were composed by women. One of the principal texts that is commonly highlighted is *Ruth*. Although candidates for its authorship have seldom been suggested, it will be demonstrated herein that Abigail is worthy of consideration as the originator of the story of *Ruth*.

**Key words:** Abigail, David, *Ruth*, female biblical authorship, 1 Sam 25.

Speculating on the authorship of any anonymous text is a dubious undertaking, at best. When considering ancient works, including biblical compositions, all such endeavors are indisputably a fool's errand. Even writings with traditional authorial attributions are often questioned by biblical scholars.<sup>2</sup>

Probing a work's provenance and agenda can nonetheless yield important insights into its authorship. Especially when the text seems to be cohesive and single-minded, such as *Ruth*, it may be possible to identify its central elements and in so doing draw out its author from behind the curtain of time. Although it is a bland truism, each work of Tanakh was composed by someone, whether it originated orally and was penned later on or was conceived entirely as a written text. Until early last century, it was assumed that all biblical books were written by men, primarily for men.

The purpose of this essay is twofold. Firstly, to examine the possibility that at least some works of the Tanakh were composed by women, especially *Ruth*. Secondly, to argue the case for Abigail, David's wife, as the originator if not the author of the book of *Ruth*. Initially there will be a methodical survey scholarly works that raised the issue of female authorship. In so doing Sarah Palmer's apt observation will be kept in mind: "Proving that certain texts were actually written by women is impossible, but providing evidence that some texts *could* been written by women is possible."<sup>3</sup> While various essays and monographs in the last half a century have broached this topic and regularly referred to some of the earlier forays, a systematic examination of the trajectory of this enterprise is currently lacking. Although this presentation does not claim to be exhaustive, it

will be more comprehensive than has hitherto been assembled. When practical direct quotes from the pertinent scholars will be provided thereby highlighting their perspectives and contribution to the topic.

*Ruth* offers one of the most impactful tales of female agency in the Bible, chronicling the exploits of Ruth and Naomi as they attempted to overcome the adversity of life's challenges.<sup>4</sup> It seems entirely plausible that *Ruth*, an explicitly gynocentric narrative, was composed by a similarly self-efficacious woman.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, the possibility that *Ruth* was written in the early years of King David's reign, by David's brilliant wife and ardent supporter, Abigail will be explored.

### **Scholarship on Women as Biblical Authors**

Before analyzing the foundational narrative in 1 Sam 25 involving the initial encounter between Abigail and David and their subsequent marriage, it would be worthwhile to offer a systematic overview of scholarly discussions of women as possible authors of biblical texts. The topic of female biblical authorship was initially broached nearly 100 years ago in the monumental, three volume study of the history of literature, by British philologists, the Chadwicks, (Hector Munro Chadwick (1870-1947) and his partner Nora Kershaw (1891-1972)).<sup>6</sup> It is somewhat surprising that this multi-faceted and insightful study has been virtually ignored in subsequent scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter part of their second volume the Chadwicks discussed the early development of biblical literature. Therein, building upon their analysis of Icelandic sagas they introduced the useful construct of 'feminine provenance,' which they then related to the Davidic saga:

By 'feminine provenance' we mean that the poems or stories in question have been composed either by women or for the entertainment of women. We suspect that much, though not necessarily all, of the story of David is of similar origin.<sup>8</sup>

They noted that "taking the story as a whole, women, especially the ladies of the court, receive a great amount of attention."<sup>9</sup> They then highlighted material pertaining to Bathsheba, David's daughter Tamar, as well as the earlier accounts related to David's first wife, Michal, who was also Saul's daughter. Even more important is their extended discussion of female rhetorical and literary creativity. They started by noting that among the significant speeches in the Davidic saga were those by a 'wise woman' namely the '*ishah hakhamah* from Tekoa found in 2 Sam. 14:1-20. The Chadwicks contended that this designation "must mean one who is a trained speaker, or who has

studied rhetoric.”<sup>10</sup> This is followed by a reference to a second such ‘wise woman’, who was mentioned in 2 Sam. 20:16-22.<sup>11</sup> Similar to the first instance, this woman initially interacted with David’s general, Joab. In the second case, however, the anonymous woman was the one who initiated the conversation with Joab and successfully negotiated with him. She then convinced her townsfolk to go along with her plan, thereby sparing her town of Abel of Beth-Maacah, which Joab’s army had besieged. Following the reference to this second perspicacious woman, the Chadwicks concluded: “Poetry and minstrelsy then were clearly not the only forms of intellectual activity in which women participated.”<sup>12</sup> One can interject that the thrust of the petition of this second wise woman had to do with a claim for leniency in the case where there would be no legitimate heirs, as the husband had died and the only surviving son was culpable of the death penalty. Though this case is not analogous to the narrative in *Ruth*, the underlying issue of preserving the family line is.

To bolster their argument concerning the role of women generating biblical compositions, the Chadwicks highlighted specific texts that were attributed to women. They asserted: “The earliest and most important of these is the ‘Song of Deborah’.”<sup>13</sup> They noted that whereas the introduction to the song credited both Deborah and Barak; nonetheless, in the poem itself Deborah “seems to be the chief speaker.”<sup>14</sup> They also commented upon her important status in Israelite society of the time, being identified as both a prophet and a judge. It could also be mentioned that in the book of Judges, Deborah was the only one of the two dozen ‘judges’ in the book that was actually depicted as being involved in judicial decision-making. The other important characters, like Ehud and Samson, were actually heroic warriors and not judges.

The Chadwicks went on to mention the Song of Miriam and how Miriam was also described as a prophet, who led the female Israelites in a song of triumph. Additionally, they offered a worthwhile observation concerning the ‘Song of Hannah,’ in 1 Samuel 2, which purportedly was her response to giving birth to Samuel. They noted that words of this poem do not fit the occasion and were presumably penned “as a thanksgiving for deliverance from some national calamity.”<sup>15</sup> What is intriguing is how they then dealt with this fundamental disconnect. Rather than simply dismissing this work as clearly not authored by Hannah and hence irrelevant, they concluded that by

attributing it to Hannah this “may be taken as showing that the composition of such a poem by a woman of early times was not regarded as anything very strange.”<sup>16</sup>

Another individual that the Chadwicks highlighted was the prophet Huldah, active towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, during the reign of Judean king Josiah. It could be noted that Huldah was a contemporary of Jeremiah; however, when the king ordered his ministers to consult a prophet it was to Huldah and not Jeremiah to whom Josiah’s ministers turned. The Chadwicks asserted: “Her response and her message to the king are quite in accord with the (literary) prophecies of the age.”<sup>17</sup> In sum, the Chadwicks pinpointed many of the important female characters in the Bible that subsequent scholars would further discuss and elucidate.

In 1957, some twenty years after the Chadwicks, Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900-1985), better known as the seminal scholar of medieval Jewish society in Arab lands, published a collection of essays on biblical themes. Appended to the end of his analysis of *Ruth* Goitein wrote: “The reasoned speculation that the scroll of Ruth was composed by a type of wise old woman is found later on in a note on p. 252.”<sup>18</sup> This is a reference to a footnote in Goitein’s important essay “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres.”<sup>19</sup> Therein Goitein asserted:

On the other hand, it is probable that the Book of Ruth was, in fact, written by a woman, not a woman like the heroine Ruth, but an old ‘wise’ woman (see below). For the narrator’s interest, and even more so her inner knowledge, are concentrated around Naomi ... it is her advice which keeps the entire plot going... and the book concludes with blessings devoted to her and it is well-known that in biblical narrative, the end counts for all.<sup>20</sup>

This association of the author of *Ruth* and the ‘wise’ women of the early monarchy will be discussed further along.

Goitein’s trenchant essay is frequently mentioned in passing but in general insufficiently analyzed. His interest originated with a study of the poets and poetry of Yemenite immigrants who came to Israel in 1949-50, during operation ‘Magic Carpet.’ Goitein noted that the poetry of the men was primarily religious, as opposed to the generally secular nature of the female compositions.<sup>21</sup> In discussing biblical poetry Goitein commented: “Anyone who makes even a quick survey of women’s poetry in the Bible is surprised to see how plentiful is the material that has been preserved.”<sup>22</sup> He then issued an important qualification: “This investigation will not discuss women as *authors* but as creators of biblical literary *genres*.”<sup>23</sup> It is through his delineation of

different genres of poetry that he explored “the extent of women’s participation in public life.”<sup>24</sup> The first genre that he discussed was the public celebration by women of military victories of the ancient Israelites. The examples he gave included women rejoicing in the defeat of the Philistines by King Saul and David, Jephthah’s daughter’s festive welcoming home of her father, the song of Deborah, and Miriam’s song and dance at the Sea of Reeds. Significantly, Goitein was the first to suggest that contrary to the presentation in Exodus 15, Miriam’s version was the progenitor. This would become a theory promoted by subsequent feminist bible scholars.<sup>25</sup> Goitein quoted the key verse “Miriam the prophetess took timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels” (Ex. 15:20). He then continued: “But there is no before and after in the Torah,<sup>26</sup> and in my opinion Miriam’s declamation, ‘Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea’ (15:21) came first and *it was the root from which the entire Song at the Sea sprouted.*”<sup>27</sup>

The second group that Goitein identified were the “mirthful mockers” and their songs. He included examples from Deborah’s song and various passages in Isaiah.<sup>28</sup> Goitein then spent more time analyzing the activities of the ‘wise women,’ a category discussed previously by the Chadwicks and one that will become central to many subsequent considerations of female authorship. In addition to the two wise women from 2 Samuel who interacted with David’s army commander Joab, Goitein also included in this category the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4, who was involved later on with the prophet, Elisha.

In this context he noted in passing “Abigail, wife of Nabal the Carmelite, is admittedly not called a ‘wise woman’ in the narrative, but as we shall see, it is clear from her words that she too was a woman of this special type.”<sup>29</sup> While technically correct that the phrase ‘wise woman’/’*eshah hakhmah*’ was not used in reference to Abigail, a comparable phrase *tovat-sekhel* i.e., intelligent or of good sense, was applied to Abigail (1 Sam 25:3).

Goitein then went on to muse:

What does all this have to do with literature? Just this: we have found that Abigail the Carmelite and the wise women from Tekoa and Abel-beth-[M]aacah speak *in a particular style*, both in the form their words take and in their choice of words and images.<sup>30</sup>

He illustrated this by offering extensive quotes of their pronouncements. Then he concluded this section by wondering if the allegory of the feminized Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and 9 originated “with the actual wise women whom we have found in the earliest history of Israel in such varied circumstances.”<sup>31</sup>

Other categories that Goitein identified are the Rebuker, the Prophet, the Witch, the Temple dancers, love poems and wedding songs, “whispered prayer—a female innovation,” the dirge-singers and lamenters and “various others.”<sup>32</sup> As Goitein emphasized in his concluding remarks that the verbal expressions of the women of ancient Israel had great societal significance: “Her poetry or her lament, her mockery or her blessing, were not only an expression of feeling or opinion; they *performed an action*.”<sup>33</sup> He ended his seminal essay by speculating on a *sitz-im-leben* within which the women of ancient Israel composed their songs: “The women sit for long hours busy weaving and spinning and other handicrafts... These long hours were seasoned not only with conversation, but also with stylized speech, story and song.”<sup>34</sup> Finally, he suggested: “There are some grounds for the suspicion that the Book of Ruth was the fruit of the spirit of an elderly prophet— ‘wise woman.’”<sup>35</sup>

A tantalizing passing comment on the possibility of the female authorship of *Ruth* is also found in an engaging study of the Hebrew Bible by Samuel Sandmel (1911-1979) published in 1972. “The story of Ruth is as subdued as the accounts of Samson are raucous. I have wondered if its unknown author were perhaps a woman, for it has a delicacy that seems to me feminine.”<sup>36</sup> Sandmel did not, however, elaborate on this intuition in his discussion of the contents of *Ruth*. A more substantial account on this theme was penned in 1975 by Edward F. Campbell in his Anchor Bible Series commentary on *Ruth*.<sup>37</sup> Campbell argued persuasively that *Ruth* was most likely composed in the monarchic period: “Taking all of this together, and assuming that the reference to David in 4:17b is integral to the story, we have date brackets which would run from about 950 to about 700 B.C.E.”<sup>38</sup> He then concluded: “Taking everything we have looked at here together, my own suspicion is that the Ruth belongs earlier in the spread 950-700 than later.”<sup>39</sup> This is based partly upon a linguistic analysis of archaic forms of Hebrew that frequently occur in *Ruth*.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of authorship, Campbell began by identifying two groups that were active as story-tellers during this period, Levites and wise women. Although he did not mention the Chadwicks and their prior discussion, he covered much of the same biblical sources as they did. He also fleshed out the cultural background of female singers and dancers in Canaanite and Assyrian sources. He concluded this discussion by asking: “May these women, especially the “wise women,” be a locus of the story-telling art in ancient Israel?”<sup>41</sup>

Campbell also noted that he had discussed this topic with a student of his, Eunice B. Poethig, in response to her seminar paper at McCormick Seminary, written in February 1974.<sup>42</sup> Poethig went on to complete her dissertation for United Theological Seminary a decade later.<sup>43</sup> Therein she paid attention to war songs and their connection to “the period of kingdom building under Saul and David” as well as their association “with stories of women.”<sup>44</sup> Of special interest is her subsequent analysis of “Hannah’s Song.” Following David Noel Freedman (1980), Poethig dated it to the late eleventh or early 10<sup>th</sup> century. In support, Poethig offered several parallels in motifs of Akkadian literature of the period.<sup>45</sup>

Overlapping with Edward Campbell was Phyllis Trible, one of the pioneering voices of feminist biblical criticism. She titled one of her earliest pieces, published in 1973, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation.”<sup>46</sup> Near its beginning, she disavowed sexism by refusing to assign gender identifications while discussing biblical theology. Most of this essay was focused on Genesis chapters 2-3 and the Song of Songs. She concluded her analysis by forcefully asserting, “We shall be unfaithful readers if we neglect biblical passages which break with patriarchy or if we permit our interpretations to freeze in a patriarchal box of our own construction.”<sup>47</sup> Trible reworked this essay and other works in her important 1978 monograph *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Especially relevant is her final chapter on Ruth, which was an expansion of an essay she published two years previously as “Two Women in a Man’s World.”<sup>48</sup> She began her discussion with the pointed observation: “A man’s world tells a woman’s story.”<sup>49</sup> Statements like this and the following, underscore Trible’s presumed conviction that the author of *Ruth* was a man. Commenting on the start of chapter 2 of *Ruth* Trible noted: “After the introduction, the storyteller steps back and the women speak (v. 2).”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Trible argued that the thrust of *Ruth* is essentially a feminist rejoinder to male dominance. Towards the end of this chapter, she insisted:

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After all, it is a man's world, and concerns of women may well be subsumed, perhaps even subverted, by this patriarchal climate. Yet the women of Bethlehem do not permit this transformation to prevail. They reinterpret the language of a man's world to preserve the integrity of a woman's story.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, even though Tribble did not explicitly advocate for female authorship of *Ruth*, she further opened the door for this hypothesis by seeing *Ruth* as countering an exclusively androcentric view of society.

Like Goitein, Athalya Brenner in 1985 also contended that Miriam was the originator of the Song at the Sea. One of her arguments was that Miriam was depicted as not simply leading the women, but she chanted the opening lines of the song, thereby implying her ownership of this composition.<sup>52</sup>

Brenner also underscored that there were numerous songs that were attributed to women in the Tanakh and therefore it was not inconceivable for Miriam to have composed one as well.<sup>53</sup> In her concluding remarks on the *Song of Songs*, she acknowledged that some of its verses may have been composed by a male author: "However, some passages are so typically feminine that female authorship is a distinct possibility."<sup>54</sup>

Phyllis Tribble also focused on Miriam's song.<sup>55</sup> Therein, she quoted a pioneering analysis from 1955 by Frank Moore Cross Jr. (1921-2012) and David Noel Freedman (1922-2008).<sup>56</sup> Cross and Freedman argued that the title the "Song of Miriam" does not imply anything about authorship, but it does indicate that it "would be more difficult to explain the association of Miriam with the song as a secondary development."<sup>57</sup> Tribble supported this assertion by noting that it is in association with this song that Miriam is given a name for the first time and is referred to as "the prophet." "[T]he first woman in all Israel to bear the title, and she acquires it before her brother Moses does."<sup>58</sup> Tribble also astutely noted that although Miriam was described as leading the Israelite women in a celebratory dance, Miriam then responded to them/*lahem* (masc. pl). "Perhaps, under the leadership of Miriam, the ritual involved all the people, though the major participants were women." Like Goitein and Brenner, she similarly contended that "the very retention of a Miriamic ending, in the presence of a Mosaic avalanche, argues both for its antiquity and authority."<sup>59</sup>

A few years later in 1981 Claudia Camp analyzed the narratives concerning the wise women in 2 Samuel.<sup>60</sup> Although Camp did not discuss Abigail, per se, her analysis of the ‘wise’ women of 2 Samuel is certainly relevant. She underscored principal traits of these wise women. “They speak, first of all, with the voice of authority.”<sup>61</sup> Secondly, they employed proverbs to bolster their argument and the use of proverbs was consistent with the tradition of biblical wisdom literature.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the women were attuned to human psychology and employed psychological pressure to achieve their goals.<sup>63</sup> Camp astutely observed: “The wise women of Tekoa and Abel, then, appear in situations in which they act in a manner associated with a prophet and a military leader, respectively, while using forms of language associated with the wisdom tradition.”<sup>64</sup>

Grace Emmerson, in her 1991 essay “Women in ancient Israel” expanded upon Camp’s work. Emmerson contended that the epithet ‘wise’ in relation to the wise women of 2 Samuel was not merely descriptive but rather referred to a commonly accepted social role, though not necessarily an official one.<sup>65</sup> In reference to Abigail, Emmerson noted:

The Old Testament does not play down the initiative and resourcefulness of women. Abigail is consulted by a manservant in a dilemma (1 Sam. 25.17), and in response acts resourcefully (v. 18ff.). The implication of v. 25 is that, had she known of the arrival of David’s men, it would have been quite within her power to deal with them without consulting her husband.<sup>66</sup>

Norman Gottwald in his 1985 “socio-literary” study of the Hebrew Bible devoted a short section to *Ruth*.<sup>67</sup> Therein he offered another perspective in support of female authorship of *Ruth*. He described the book as “a thoroughly credible folk tale” that is filled “with the stuff of everyday life, with the round of birth and death, with love and marriage, and with work as the necessity of life on the thin line between scarcity and abundance.”<sup>68</sup> He emphasized: “Throughout the story, the women operate out of their own culture with their own values in mind.”<sup>69</sup> He went on to explain that whereas the “male” institution of levirate marriage was aimed at perpetuating the familial lineage, the women were primarily concerned with marriage as a means to social and economic survival for a vulnerable single woman. Accordingly, Gottwald contended that the resolution of the story promoted the agendas of both the males and females. This he suggested undoubtedly contributed to its broad appeal. Finally, Gottwald asserted: “It is not difficult to imagine that this story was framed by a woman confidently at home in her social world.”<sup>70</sup> An entirely new approach to the issue of female authorship of biblical compositions was ushered

in by Richard E. Friedman, with the publication in 1987 of his eminently readable exposition on the Documentary Hypothesis, *Who Wrote the Bible?* A basic overview of the Documentary Hypothesis was offered by Joel Baden who observed in 2013,

From the mid-nineteenth century until the 1970's, the dominant theory in pentateuchal scholarship was the Documentary Hypothesis, which, in light of the manifold contradictions, doublets, and other inconsistencies in the Pentateuch, considered the canonical text to be a combination of four originally independent documents—the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Priestly source (P) and the Deuteronomist (D).<sup>71</sup>

Before proceeding to Friedman's discussion of the J source and its potential relevance to female biblical authorship, one can note that there are major problems with this theory, which is also referred to as Source Criticism. One deficiency is that it dissects and fragments the Torah, precluding a holistic reading of the work. Jacob Milgrom has addressed this issue in his erudite JPS commentary on Numbers (1990), wherein he advocated a different approach "redaction criticism:"

This newest approach in biblical research is termed *redaction criticism* and treats the text synchronically, not just diachronically. It refuses to dissect the whole into parts and then consider these parts as having meaning apart from the whole. Rather, it studies a literary piece as a whole by demonstrating the interaction of its parts.<sup>72</sup>

Robert Alter was similarly dismissive of the Documentary Hypothesis in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis wherein he opined it "has begun to look as though it has reached a point of diminishing returns, and many younger scholars, showing signs of restlessness with source criticism, have been exploring other approaches."<sup>73</sup>

While discussing the origins of the J source, Friedman noted that it reflected the interests of the Judean court:

[I]t came from a circle in which both men and women had a certain status...The possibility of J's being by a woman is thus much more likely than with E. More important, the J stories are, on the whole, much more concerned with women and more sensitive to women than the E source.<sup>74</sup>

An example he gave is the sympathetic treatment of Tamar in Genesis 38. Tamar was ultimately vindicated and the injustice perpetrated against her by her father-in-law Judah, was explicitly acknowledged by him.

At this point there will be a temporarily break in this chronological presentation by next discussing Harold Bloom's theories of J first published in 1990, followed by Friedman's 1998 sequel. A few years after the publication of *Who Wrote the Bible?* Harold Bloom took up Friedman's theory, without acknowledging him, and ran with it in his *The Book of J*. Early on Bloom acknowledged: "We simply do not know whether J was a man or a woman."<sup>75</sup> He then underscored two issues that tip the balance in favor of J being composed by a woman. First, Bloom, like Friedman, noted how women are represented in J as opposed to the other sources of the Torah, and secondly Bloom emphasized the pervasive role of irony in J.<sup>76</sup> The importance of the latter became paramount in his chapter "Imagining an Author." Therein he asserted that a "touch closer to J is what we call dramatic irony or even tragic irony."<sup>77</sup> This is followed by Bloom's assessment:

J's attitude toward Yahweh resembles nothing so much as a mother's somewhat wary but still proudly amused stance toward a favorite son who has grown up to be benignly powerful but also eccentrically irascible. Such a stance feels ironic, but again, how are we to categorize such an irony?<sup>78</sup>

Eventually, Bloom feminized J in order not to blur the distinction between author and text. "It is of absolute importance for the reader of the Book of J to begin with a realization that J did not think in terms of sacred texts as she composed the scrolls that constitute her achievement."<sup>79</sup> This is followed by his definitive albeit questionable assessment: "Of all the extraordinary ironies concerning J, the most remarkable is that this fountainhead of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam simply was not a religious writer."<sup>80</sup>

Although one may take issue with Bloom's idiosyncratic assertion concerning the lack of religiosity in J, he was more on target when he discussed J's valorization of women:

I think it accurate to observe that J had no heroes, only heroines. Sarai and Rachel are wholly admirable, and Tamar, in proportion to the narrative space she occupies, is very much the most vivid portrait in J. But Abram, Jacob, and Moses receive a remarkably mixed treatment from J. If she had a male hero, then it was David the King, who is not an overt part of her story, though Joseph, his surrogate, is.<sup>81</sup>

As will be seen shortly, Friedman will make this connection to David explicit in his subsequent monograph on J.

Two final observations by Bloom merit consideration. Bloom described "J's vision of human reality as familial rather than royal or priestly."<sup>82</sup> Further, "J sees power as marital and familial for the same reason that she has no male heroes: because she is a wise woman."<sup>83</sup> Although Bloom

confined his comments to that stratum of the Torah referred to as J, one could readily apply these descriptions to *Ruth* and its foci.

In 1998, a decade after he published *Who Wrote the Bible?* Richard E. Friedman followed up with an intriguing sequel. As noted above, biblical scholars who subscribe to the Documentary Hypothesis, identify four major strata of the Torah and assert that J is the oldest, dated circa 950 BCE, which corresponds to the reign of David's son, Solomon.<sup>84</sup> Friedman greatly expanded the scope of this perspective on J to also include most of Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and the opening of 1 Kings. If this hypothesis is substantiated then 1 Sam 25, the pivotal chapter of this essay, would belong to the J stratum. Friedman based his theory upon the pioneering work of Robert Polzin from 1976 that both the Court History and J were from the same time period.<sup>85</sup> This allowed Friedman to expand J beyond the initial books of the Torah and to include the Court History, i.e., material from Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and the opening of 1 Kings. In so doing Friedman offered dozens of narrative parallels between J and the Court history.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, Friedman built upon his earlier work by expanding his discussion of the possibility of female authorship of J. Although acknowledging that the "text clearly conceives this to be a man's world... Yet it still depicts women achieving a measure of power with this male-led structure through the strength of character (Abigail), cleverness (Rachel), influence on sons (Rebekah), pestering (Delilah), deception (Potiphar's wife), and negotiation (Rahab)."<sup>87</sup> It is noteworthy that this list is not organized according to the chronology of events as presented in the Tanakh and that Friedman listed Abigail first.

An additional fascinating observation by Friedman is that it was a woman, namely Eve, in Gen. 4:1, who first uttered the sacred Tetragrammaton, YHVH/Lord, which is central to the identification of J source material.<sup>88</sup>

Friedman is definitely piqued that Bloom did not bother to acknowledge him,<sup>89</sup> nevertheless he graciously admitted that Bloom's work has reached a wide audience, thereby promoting this new perspective. Friedman did, however, point out that Bloom insisted that the Court Historian and the author of J were at loggerheads, which was antithetical to both Polzin's and Friedman's perspectives.

Robert L. Hubbard Jr.'s 1988 commentary on *Ruth* also warrants mention. In his introductory discussion of the Authorship and Date of the text he noted: "Two crucial observations, however, suggest the likely possibility that the writer was a woman."<sup>90</sup> The first of these is that the narrative revolves around two women "in desperate straits with a society dominated by men."<sup>91</sup> The second factor pertains to "female assertiveness which drives the story's action."<sup>92</sup> Hubbard concluded that ultimately the successful outcome in the tale is owing to the initiative of both Ruth and Naomi. Andre Lacocque was another scholar from this period. In his 1990 discussion of female biblical figures that he deemed to be subversive, Andre Lacocque noted that Judith's widowhood called to mind that of Abigail, Bathsheba and Ruth.<sup>93</sup> It could also be noted that all three of these women were tied to the Davidic saga. Michal should be added to this list as well, for facilitating David's escape from her homicidal father, Saul. Additionally, Lacocque discussed the ironic etymologies of Ruth, Mahlon and Chilion, with Ruth as a countervailing force: "'Ruth' is the filling up to saturation, metaphorically a sign of restoration and redemption—she, a Moabitess!"<sup>94</sup> One can add that the primary association of this etymology is its association with watering. *Ruth* began with a drought and famine in Bethlehem. When Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem the drought was over and a plentiful harvest was underway. The ironic occurrence of naming is not specific to *Ruth*, but is also found in the contrast between the names of Abigail and her husband Nabal, which will be discussed below.

Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes (1943-1994) in her 1992 dissertation *Traces of Women's Texts in the Hebrew Bible* was one of the only scholars who made extensive use Goitein's essay and especially his identification of different genres of female literary creativity. Among other qualities that emerged by identifying specific biblical texts as originating from women, Dijk-Hemmes asserted: "Women's texts can speak to female hearers or readers in a (gender-) specific way." This is especially relevant to an understanding of *Ruth*.<sup>95</sup>

1992 also witnessed one of the most trenchant feminist analyses of biblical narratives by Ilana Pardes in her *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. She championed the notion that the Bible was a heterogenous text, more specifically a "heteroglot" work, in which different perspectives and plots are to be found. As a programmatic formulation, Pardes wrote: "My goal is to explore the tense dialogue between the dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible and counter

female voices which attempt to put forth other truths.”<sup>96</sup> It is in this context that she viewed “the Priestly story of creation as a reinterpretation of the Yahwistic one, the Book of Ruth as an antithetical completion of Genesis.”<sup>97</sup>

Pardes devoted a chapter of her monograph to *Ruth*. Therein she offered a fruitful and informative feminist analysis. She began by noting that in the final chapter of *Ruth* after Boaz arranged to marry Ruth, “the people at the gate deliver the following blessing: ‘The Lord make the woman that is to come into thine house like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel’ (4:11).”<sup>98</sup> Pardes commented that throughout the Bible “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are often evoked to highlight the continual manifestation of divine blessing in history, but this is the only case in the Bible where matriarchs are called up from the past to serve as a model for the future “building” of the house of Israel.”<sup>99</sup> For Pardes this statement contrasts the standard patriarchal conceptualization with an idyllic revisionistic “matrilineal tradition.” In a footnote that references this notion of “building” Pardes astutely commented: “The verb “to build” (*bnh*) in biblical Hebrew means both “to construct” and “to bear children.”<sup>100</sup> It is also significant that the speakers of this blessing were referred to as *kol ha-‘am*, which can be read as “the entire people/nation” thereby underscoring the national significance that is being attached to this forthcoming marriage. Also, the repetition of the term house implicitly associated Boaz’s incipient house with that of the “house of Israel.” This calls to mind Abigail’s prophetic blessing of David and the future Davidic house/dynasty, which will be discussed below. Pardes went on to underscore that the significance of Ruth, a Moabite foreigner, is doubly important: “her honorable incorporation within the house of Israel calls for a different perception of this house and a greater recognition of its female “builders.”<sup>101</sup>

Pardes expanded upon the association of Ruth with Rachel and Leah by viewing the entire book of *Ruth* as counterpart to the Genesis narrative involving the foundation of the Israelite nation. Within the Genesis narrative it is Jacob, who was the central figure in this process. He was even renamed Israel, and his two wives Leah and Rachel were sisters and rivals. *Ruth* on the other hand focused on Naomi and Ruth. Pardes pointed out that in the first chapter of the book their husbands died and the subsequent narrative revolved around their survival and return to the Promised Land, specifically the town of Bethlehem. By invoking Rachel and Leah as builders of Israel, Pardes

contended that *Ruth* emphasized that they were more than mere rivals and had cooperated in the gestation of the Israelite nation. Thus, *Ruth* has in effect rehabilitated the connection between Rachel and Leah and also offered a fuller representation of the relationship between women—something that is scarcely mentioned in the Bible.<sup>102</sup>

Pardes noted that the connection between Ruth and Naomi is unique in terms of depictions found between women in the Bible: “The Book of Ruth is the only biblical text in which the word “love” is used to define a relationship between two women.”<sup>103</sup> In 2004 Leila Leah Bronner also offered an important observation concerning their bond: “Ruth is a unique story in the Bible of two women choosing to be together as mother and daughter even after their formal familial ties have been sundered.”<sup>104</sup> The verse to which Pardes was referring to above is 4:15, wherein the women of Bethlehem praised Ruth by telling Naomi that “your daughter-in-law, who loves you, has borne him, and she is better to you than seven sons.”<sup>105</sup> This assertion is reminiscent of Elkanah’s claim to his barren wife Hannah, prior to the birth of Samuel: “Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?” (1 Sam 1:8).

The naming of Ruth’s son was also unique. The biblical norm was that children were usually assigned their names either by their parents or by God.<sup>106</sup> In *Ruth* it is the women of Bethlehem who called Ruth’s son Obed/worker. Pardes asserted that having neither Ruth or Naomi naming the baby was a way of affirming “joint motherhood” or it might be viewed as a “collective female voice” and another example of the nationalism.<sup>107</sup>

Pardes also speculated as to why Rachel was listed before Leah in 4:11. “Does this mean that the Book of Ruth is Rachel’s wish-fulfillment dream, a text in which the younger female character gains full access to heroism?”<sup>108</sup> Perhaps. One could also surmise that given the principal setting of *Ruth* is Bethlehem and Rachel’s tomb is associated with this city, this might have been the underlining motive for mentioning Rachel first.

In 1993 Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes collaborated on a significant reflection on female and male voices in the Tanakh. Dijk-Hemmes’ contribution is especially noteworthy. Dijk-Hemmes formulated two criteria for identifying female voices in biblical texts:

- 1) Does the text contain traces of a less androcentric intent? 2) Is there in it talk of a (re)definition of reality from a female perspective, so that the story contains definable differences between the views of the male as against the female figures?<sup>109</sup>



Dijk-Hemmes then referenced prior discussions by Brenner and Tribble to demonstrate that *Ruth* conformed to both of these criteria. She concluded by asserting that “Only in two cases are whole biblical books (the Song of Songs and *Ruth*) identified as possible products of women’s culture.”<sup>110</sup> That same year (1993) Athalya Brenner also published an important collection of essays by numerous authors on female authorship of biblical literature in general and *Ruth* in particular.<sup>111</sup> Carol Meyers’ contribution “Returning Home: *Ruth* 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of *Ruth*” took a somewhat nuanced approach. She argued that as long as biblical scholars defined authorship as someone who composed and transcribed a literary work, then the notion of female authorship seemed improbable; however, were one to view authorship as the one who was responsible for an oral composition, then one of the barriers to the consideration of female authorship has been removed.<sup>112</sup> Another worthwhile insight of Meyers was her drawing attention to when Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their respective ‘mother’s house’/*beit ’immah* (*Ruth* 1:8). Meyers emphasized that this phrase is relatively rare and is a strong indicator of a female perspective.<sup>113</sup>

The most relevant essay in this collection from 1993 is Adrien J. Bledstein’s “Female Companionships: If the Book of *Ruth* Were Written by a Woman.” In *Ruth* we are introduced to three women: Naomi, *Ruth* and Orpah. Bledstein pointed out that all three names are suggestive. “*Ruth*, ‘companionship’ or ‘water to saturation,’ may be likened to a fountain of living waters which refreshes and replenishes.”<sup>114</sup> Both of these possible etymologies are relevant in so far as *Ruth* was a devoted companion to Naomi, as well as a source of national sustenance by being the great-grandmother of the future king.

Bledstein also formulated a pivotal argument concerning female authorship. She began by noting that there are several examples in Tanakh of women described as writing, specifically Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:8 and Esther in Est. 9:29. She also mentioned that there are extant copies of prayers and letters by the daughter of Sargon of Akkad.<sup>115</sup> In the latter pages of her essay, Bledstein explored the possibility that David’s daughter Tamar was worth considering as *Ruth*’s possible author. As an explanation for why Tamar was not given credit for authorship, Bledstein noted that it was the practice of the priestly scribes “who tended to omit women’s names”.<sup>116</sup> Bledstein then offered the following assessment, in an attempt to situate the dating of *Ruth*. “The features of the

book of *Ruth* to which I have called attention in this essay—characterizations, themes, irony and a healing sense of humor—mark the narrator as J, the Yahwist and ‘master’ storyteller of the Bible.”<sup>117</sup> Based upon her associating *Ruth* with J and its presumed dating of the early monarchic period, Bledstein championed Tamar as the author of *Ruth*.

Bledstein also noted that both Boaz and Ruth were referred to by the same descriptor *hayyil*.<sup>118</sup> Boaz was characterized as an *'ish gibbor hayyil* (Ruth 2:1) and Ruth as an *'eshet hayyil* (Ruth 3:11).<sup>119</sup> According to Bledstein, Ruth was described this way to indicate that she was “a woman of sound judgment, wholesome values, and energetic pursuit of what is important.”<sup>120</sup> Bledstein could have mentioned that when David was recommended as a music therapist to King Saul, he was also described as being a *gibbor hayyil* (1 Sam. 16:18), thereby connecting him to both of his great-grandparents.

Not only do Ruth and Boaz complement each other, but Bledstein asserted that the use of *gibbor hayyil* in *Ruth* was subversive. She contended that Tamar, a victim of rape by her half-brother Amnon, was redefining what it meant to be a *gibbor/hero* in an age that celebrated machismo. Tamar’s supposed motive for writing *Ruth* was not only to present the historical background of her father, David, but also as a literary rebuke of male aggression:

By leaving Amnon unpunished, David abandoned his devastated daughter; and his inaction precipitated further disaster. Her brother Absalom assassinated Amnon, avenging his own honor tarnished by the humiliation of his sister. Later, his attempt to unseat David in civil war resulted in Absalom’s own violent death. Experiencing and living beyond these griefs, Tamar might be motivated to imagine and redefine the nature of an *'ish gibbor hayil* at the same time she draws attention to the survival tactics of female companions.<sup>121</sup>

While this is an interesting theory, the underlining rationale is counter-intuitive, namely that Tamar wrote a book that was diametrically opposed to her own experience. According to Bledstein, *Ruth* is essentially an imaginary paean to a world in which gender dynamics were radically altered and women were self-efficacious and able to take care of each other, unlike that of Tamar’s life. Bledstein’s attempt to validate Tamar’s authorship by hypothesizing that she composed a work to as a kind of therapy exercise to counteract all of her tribulations is unconvincing.

Below we will instead make the case that Abigail is a more plausible candidate. A contrarian position to the feminist perspectives discussed so far was advocated by Cheryl Exum in her 1993 monograph, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives*. “I

begin with the assumption that the biblical literature was produced by and for an androcentric community. I understand women in the biblical literature as male constructs.”<sup>122</sup> The female character connected to King David that Exum discussed at length and with considerable insight was Michal, Saul’s daughter and David’s first wife.<sup>123</sup> Although Michal was described as loving David (as did her brother Jonathan) her relationship with David was suspended for a protracted period owing to her father’s jealousy and numerous attempts to kill David. Exum contended that David “apparently makes no effort to see Michal.”<sup>124</sup> After David became king, he negotiated with Saul’s surviving son, Ish-boshet, the return of Michal (2 Sam 3:15). Although the narrator described the dejection of Michal’s erstwhile husband Paltiel, Exum added: “Michal’s reunion with David is not reported, a highly significant textual silence that suggests a volatile subject.”<sup>125</sup> Ultimately, Michal’s love of David was transformed when she saw David dancing ecstatically before the ark of the covenant, as it was being ceremoniously conveyed into Jerusalem: “Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord; and she despised him for it” (2 Sam 6:16). Exum commented: “That her love has turned to hatred serves as a pointed indication of her suffering at David’s hands.”<sup>126</sup> Exum also emphasized that by this point she had reverted back to being “Michal daughter of Saul” and not wife of David. One of the most intriguing and far-reaching presentations on *Ruth* is found in Mishael Caspi and Rachel Havrelock’s 1996 monograph. They contended that *Ruth* was a product of an ancient female oral tradition that traversed centuries of Israelite history:

The Book of Ruth stems from a female oral tradition. Evidence of its orality is provided in the existence of different Hebrew and Aramaic versions of the story, patterns which mirror other biblical stories, and the elements of orality contained within the texts themselves. We will use the term storyteller instead of author because even in its written form, the Book of Ruth maintains integrity as an oral story.<sup>127</sup>

Caspi and Havrelock were not interested in trying to date *Ruth*, but rather in showing thematic connections with earlier tales:

The storyteller of Ruth has knowledge of the ritual led by Miriam the Prophetess. She connects her tale with Miriam’s song through reminiscent phrases and storytelling devices. The women of Miriam’s assembly, like Ruth and Naomi, move toward independence by departing from the male world.<sup>128</sup>

Another connection that they drew to ancient history is that when Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she referred to herself as “Mara,” i.e., bitterness and no longer Naomi, pleasantness. For Caspi and

Havelock this is an allusion to the story in Exodus 15:23 when the Israelites lacked water and they named the site Mara.<sup>129</sup>

Of special importance to Caspi and Havelock's thesis is the role of a female chorus in the narrative: "Through the appearance of a female chorus (the women whose voices frame the tale of Naomi in Bethlehem), we discover a female oral tradition only hinted at in earlier passages."<sup>130</sup> These female townsfolk offered a bookend to the narrative of *Ruth*, by welcoming Naomi home and even naming Ruth's son.

Alice Bach, in a related discussion from 1997, focused on the inversion of the commonplace male gaze with Michal's female gaze: "While David sees Bathsheba first, Michal is the one who gazes at David."<sup>131</sup> Bach then continued by noting Michal's overpowering passion: "The only report in the Bible of a woman loving a man romantically highlights the importance of this situation and explains Michal's intensity toward David, her disloyalty to her father, and her later fury with her unresponsive-husband."<sup>132</sup>

Richard Bauckham's 1997 essay, "The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic" offered numerous insights. He maintained that the theory that *Ruth* was authored by a woman "is a real possibility,"<sup>133</sup> but his agenda was different and more nuanced. He was primarily concerned with ascertaining whether or not it should be identified as a 'female text' or 'women's literature' irrespective of whether or not it was composed by a woman. He began by discussing a South African novel, *The Wall of the Plague* published in 1985, in which the protagonist was a first-person female narrator. The novel, however, was written by a man. To be sure, the conceit of a man writing in the voice of woman and vice versa is not unusual in modern literature. Bauckham then tried to relate this process to *Ruth* and argued that even if one concluded that *Ruth* does reflect a female worldview, this in itself "cannot actually demonstrate female authorship."<sup>134</sup> He agreed with modern feminist scholars, that throughout the text the voice in *Ruth* is that of a female, except for the concluding verses (4:18-22), which depict King David's genealogy, wherein "a male voice speaks."<sup>135</sup> On this point he noted that some see these verses as a later addition to the text, which would therefore not undermine the intrinsically female orientation of the work.<sup>136</sup> He went on to suggest a radically different alternative. The genealogy was a subversive act "by the female voice of the narrative" to expose the "pitiful" inadequacy of

the conventional androcentric stance, which focusses exclusively on the male line in an otherwise entirely gynocentric narrative.<sup>137</sup>

While Bauckham's suggestion is intriguing, it would require further support from other texts from the Tanakh to substantiate his theories of differing gendered voices and their subversive nature. A good starting place would be *Song of Songs*, with its dialogical structure of female and male speakers. The attribution to King Solomon in 1:1 is undermined by the references to Solomon in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, for example in 3:7 and 9 and, as well as the identity of the male lover as a shepherd and not the king. Perhaps this too can be seen as transgressive.

Bauckham's most important contribution is his concluding discussion of the canonization of *Ruth*. He argued:

The real process of canonization must therefore have been a process in which the audience of religious literature played the decisive role through its critical reception of the texts. Women as well as men would certainly have had a voice in the process, and so the inclusion of some examples of women's literature in the canon need not be regarded as accidental...we may reasonably suppose that the importance of women in the grassroots processes of canonical selection led to their inclusion precisely as women's literature, in order to counterbalance the androcentrism of the rest of Scripture.<sup>138</sup>

It is undeniable that *Ruth* was considered sacred literature by the Jews of antiquity, so much so that it is traditionally read on Shavuot, the festival commemorating the revelation of the commonly named "10 commandments" at Sinai. There are even four fragmentary scrolls of *Ruth* within in the corpus of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is an early example of its relevance, even to an extremely androcentric community.<sup>139</sup> However tantalizing, Bauckham did not provide support for his speculation that women were also involved in the process of canonization.

Wilda Gafney in her 2008 monograph, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* offered an intriguing extension of the notion of 'wise women' with her discussion of 'scribal guilds.' In surveying literature from the Ancient Near East she has compiled a list of some two dozen female scribes. Her comment that "there is some evidence that royal cloistered women used female *naditu* scribes preferentially"<sup>140</sup> was made in reference to Mesopotamian cities, but may have applied to Jerusalem, as well.

Although most of the scribes that Gafney listed were from kingdoms outside of Israel, she does mention two related biblical texts.<sup>141</sup> Among the returning exiles, who were categorized as "the sons of Solomon's servants" and hence part of royal retinue, were "the sons of Hassophereth"

(Ezra 2:55). In the parallel text in Neh. 7:57 this individual, whose name bears a feminine ending and was presumably a woman, is referred to as Sophereth. Gafney noted that Hassophereth is actually a Hebrew noun preceded by the definite article, i.e., *ha-soferet*, literally the female scribe. Accordingly, Gafney's assertion that there were female scribes active within the Jerusalem based monarchy has some biblical support.

One of the most sustained investigations of the role of women in generating biblical literature is Hillel Millgram's 2008 monograph *Four Biblical Heroines and the Case for Female Authorship*. Early on Millgram unequivocally attributed *Ruth* to a female author: "I would suggest that an obvious explanation for the feminine point of view exhibited by *Ruth* would be that the Book's author was a woman."<sup>142</sup> In so doing Millgram mentioned some of the earlier writers discussed above who also adopted this perspective, including Edward Campbell, Carol Meyers, Norman Gottwald and S.D. Gottein.<sup>143</sup> Millgram also connected *Ruth* to Genesis 38, the "Tale of Tamar." Similarities that they both have shared include the secular nature of their narratives and their relevance for the genealogy of David. Millgram even goes as far as suggesting that "Ruth may very well have been both the inspiration and the model for Genesis 38."<sup>144</sup> Were this correct, then *Ruth* would have been a relatively early composition. Like others that we have encountered, Millgram situated both *Ruth* and Gen. 38 "sometime in the period of the United Kingdom, in the days of David and Solomon."<sup>145</sup>

Millgram also offered an interesting Appendix V "But Could She Read? The Question of Literacy in Ancient Israel."<sup>146</sup> By presenting various archaeological and epigraphic finds from the ancient Near East, he argued persuasively that "by this point we have established a strong presumption that literacy was sufficiently widespread by the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE to create the basis of a reading public for whom authors could write."<sup>147</sup> He then listed numerous female authors from the ancient Near East, the first being Princess Enheduanna, daughter of King Sargon, c. 2360 BCE. According to Millgram, these and later female figures give credence to the attribution in the Tanakh of female authorship of those songs, which were discussed above by earlier writers.

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky in the Introduction to their 2011 commentary on *Ruth* referred to several scholars who "entertain the possibility that the author was a woman."<sup>148</sup> They, did not, however aggressively pursue this theory and instead concluded: "Suffice it to say

that the book provides a female perspective in the way the story unfolds, even though we cannot determine the author's name or gender."<sup>149</sup>

Without a doubt, the most unexpected and outlandish discussion of female biblical authorship is Preston Kavanagh's *Huldah: The Prophet Who Wrote Hebrew Scripture* published in 2012. Through a combination of unsupported speculation, manipulation of the letters of names, using the ancient process of 'aTBaSh (wherein Hebrew words are transformed such that the letter *aleph* is read as a *tav* and *beit* as a *shin* etc.), as well as skip sequencing, the procedure made popular in Michael Drosnin's *The Bible Code* (1997), Kavanagh claimed that Huldah was one of the most important authors of biblical texts. Huldah, it should be emphasized, was only mentioned twice in the entire Tanakh, initially in the latter half of 2 Kings 22:14, as well as the parallel text in 2 Chron. 34:22. In both accounts she responded to the discovery of a Torah scroll in the Temple by the High Priest, Hilkiah, with a message for King Josiah, concerning the impending punishment of the Israelites. Without supplying any support, Kavanagh also asserted that Huldah "presumably was married to Jehoiakim" i.e., Josiah's son and she eventually became "Judah's queen mother."<sup>150</sup> Kavanagh also claimed that Huldah went into exile in Babylon in 597 BCE and while there she visited Ezekiel and purportedly collaborated with Daniel. According to Kavanagh, by 586 BCE Huldah had returned to Jerusalem and then travelled to Egypt.<sup>151</sup> Without any substantiation, Kavanagh also asserted that Huldah was responsible for composing numerous biblical texts including those found in Genesis, the book of Kings and "she actually participated in about one-fifth of the Psalter's words."<sup>152</sup> Kavanagh even claimed that Huldah co-authored the *Shema* with Daniel.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, she was responsible for narratives about important female figures in the Tanakh including "Deborah, Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar and Rebecca."<sup>154</sup> It is within these narratives that Kavanagh contended that Huldah concealed elements from her own autobiography. Interestingly, Kavanagh did not connect Huldah with Ruth. What is relevant is Kavanagh's surprising association of Huldah and Abigail. He claimed: "Abigail is Huldah, and the Bible's story line might reflect an actual period in Huldah's life...It appears that Huldah created Abigail, fashioning her in the prophet's own image."<sup>155</sup> His only apparent support for this bizarre hypothesis is a puzzling anagram that he created from the letters of Huldah's name, which he then associated with Abigail by changing the spelling of the latter's name. "The Huldah anagram is םיבג ן

and the altered Abigail word is אַבִּיגַיִל.”<sup>156</sup> Although one can credit Kavanagh with a wild imagination and appreciate that he was able to publish an entire book on his far-fetched theories, his assertions are entirely without any scholarly merit.

### **Abigail’s Tale**

Having surveyed numerous discussions of female biblical authorship, the rationale for considering Abigail a viable candidate for authoring *Ruth* can now be undertaken. As seen above, there have been suggestions by a variety of scholars that *Ruth* may have been composed by a woman in the early monarchic period. Only Adrien Bledstein had the temerity to name a potential author, David’s daughter Tamar. While possible, we previously noted several shortcomings with this theory. Most importantly, Tamar’s life experience was fundamentally different than that of the protagonists in *Ruth*. *Ruth*’s rural setting of agrarian Bethlehem, was unlike anything that Tamar knew firsthand. Tamar was raised in the royal palace of the urban capital, Jerusalem, and then found shelter in her brother’s estate after having been raped by her half-brother, Amnon. Tamar also had good reason to resent her father, King David. After all it was David, who ordered Tamar to attend to Amnon’s feigned illness (2 Sam. 13:7). Although David was greatly upset when he heard what had happened to Tamar (2 Sam 13: 21), he did not intercede in any way, either to help Tamar or rebuke and punish Amnon. Finally, the Court historian’s account of Tamar in 2 Sam 13 provided the readers with no evidence that she had any of the requisite literary or rhetorical skills necessary to have created a literary gem like *Ruth*.

Abigail on the other hand was a product of the rural Judah, living not far from Bethlehem. She also had the life experience of being a widow, like both Naomi and Ruth. This could have enabled her to empathize with the characters in *Ruth* and allow them to come to life on the page. Recall also Goitein’s assertion mentioned previously that it was more likely that the author of *Ruth* was a wise old woman, more like Naomi than young like Ruth (or Tamar for that matter). More importantly, unlike Tamar, Abigail had a personal investment in promoting an enviable backstory to David. She was a direct participant in the ascendancy of David and *Ruth* could be viewed as a way of establishing David’s bona fides. This clearly was unnecessary later on when Tamar lived. By then David was the well-established king of Israel.



Abigail is eminently worthy of consideration for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, she had motive. She was a devoted wife of David and was totally committed to his success as the emerging king of Israel. As will be seen, she sacrificed her own well-being in order to accompany David. At the time when Abigail first met and then married him, David was being mercilessly hunted by King Saul and his army. As opposed to Tamar, who was essentially abandoned by David in her time of need, David even rescued Abigail after she had been kidnapped by the Amalekites (1 Sam 30). This episode will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this essay, but it established that for Abigail, David was indeed a *gibbor hayyil*/hero.

Abigail was also accredited by the narrator of 1 Sam 25 with being exceedingly perspicacious and eloquent. This would lend credence to her having the skill set required to conceive the short masterpiece that is *Ruth*. To be sure, by assigning authorship of *Ruth* to Abigail, I am not necessarily asserting that she wrote down the text as it exists in its present form—merely suggesting that she was responsible for telling the story and formulating its main elements. Perhaps this was initially done as an oral rendition, along the lines of what Goitein suggested as to how Israelite and later Jewish women composed poems and tales. Alternatively, she may have written down the earliest version of the tale of *Ruth* and it was later revised. This would account for both the archaic and more recent phraseology found in the book.

In considering the dynamic relationship between orality and literary composition it is worth mentioning Susan Niditch's 1996 trenchant monograph *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite*. Niditch was not interested in the possibility of female authorship of specific biblical texts, per se, but rather the complex relationship between orality and biblical literature. She argued against the simplistic notion that ancient oral traditions were replaced by fixed literary works. In her introduction she posited "that large, perhaps dominant, threads in Israelite culture were oral, and that literacy in ancient Israel must be understood in terms of its continuity and interaction with the oral world."<sup>157</sup> She went on to caution, "we err if we view oral and written cultures, oral and written literatures, as incompatible."<sup>158</sup> Moreover, she asserted that "the Hebrew Bible presents a case in which "written" and "oral" interact."<sup>159</sup> Although one might assume that this dynamic is uni-directional going from oral to written, Nidich goes on to assert that a "written work may then be reoralized, told aloud from memory, or made the thematic core of a new orally created and/or

delivered work that is then written down.”<sup>160</sup> Accepting Niditch’s analysis, the thesis concerning Abigail as the source of *Ruth* is agnostic as to whether she composed the work as an oral presentation, which someone else eventually recorded or she actually wrote down the initial draft, which was then redacted.

### **Narrative Context of 1 Samuel 25**

Abigail first appeared in 1 Samuel 25 at a critical stage in the Davidic saga. What follows is a brief plot summary to contextualize this key chapter. Prior to this point, King Saul had fallen out of Divine favor for not completely annihilating the Amalekites, as he was commanded (1 Sam 15). God then directed the prophet Samuel to journey to Bethlehem, where he anointed Saul’s successor, the young shepherd, David (1 Sam 16). Soon after, in one of the many ironic twists in their nascent relationship, David became one of Saul’s attendants, acting as a music therapist and assuaging the king’s psychological afflictions that were depicted in the Bible as “an evil spirit of God” (1 Sam 16:15f.).

Thereupon the Israelites were taunted by Goliath, the Philistine giant and Saul promised that whoever killed Goliath would be richly rewarded, as well as receiving Saul’s daughter in marriage (1 Sam 17:25). After David killed Goliath, Saul began to send David out on a series of missions against the Philistines. As David’s success and fame grew, so did Saul’s jealousy, so much so that on several occasions he tried to kill David.

As a reward for David’s numerous successful campaigns against the Philistines, Saul had initially promised David, Merab, his older daughter (1 Sam 18:17). Saul, however, reneged and married Merab off to Adriel the Meholathite (1 Sam 18:19). Instead of Merab, David was given Saul’s younger daughter, Michal. Saul continued his obsessive attempts to kill David and eventually, with Michal’s help, David was able to flee for his life. He initially went to Ramah to seek the prophet Samuel’s help (1 Sam 19:18). Although Saul sent messengers to capture David, Samuel was then at the head of an ecstatic band of prophets. The spirit of God descended upon Saul’s envoys and incapacitated them by entralling them in an ecstatic trance. When Saul went to seize David, he too fell into ecstasy (1 Sam. 19:24).

This was followed by a series of near captures and miraculous escapes, as David fled Saul’s relentless pursuit of him throughout the southern regions of Israel. With the help of Saul’s son,

Jonathan, David escaped Saul's wrath in 1 Sam. 21. At the start of 1 Sam 22 David was joined by his brothers, relatives, as well as those who were characterized as being in desperate straits, debtors and embittered, and so David became the leader of a ragged band of about 400. This hapless troupe can be contrasted with Saul's hand-picked, elite army of 3,000 that tenaciously pursued David (1 Sam 26:2). Anticipating danger to his family, David arranged for his parents to be protected by the king of Moab (1 Sam 22:3-4). This offers an interesting affirmation of David's ancestry, with his great-grandmother being Ruth, the Moabite. Although David might have felt that he was secure remaining in the fortress of the Moabite king, the prophet Gad approached David and instructed him to return to the territory of Judah. Interestingly, this is the first time that Gad appeared in the biblical narrative and he would continue to function as one of David's divinely appointed prophets. Later on in this chapter David was also joined by Abiathar, the only surviving son of the Ahimelech, the priest of Nob.<sup>161</sup> Ahimelech had helped David and thereby incurred Saul's murderous wrath. David promised Abiathar refuge and eventually he would serve as one of David's priests, together with Zadok.

Towards the end of chapter 23 David eventually took refuge in the "wilderness of Maon." This locale is important, for it will eventually be the region where David will encounter Nabal and his wife Abigail. Moreover, it may also legitimate David's future claim that he and his men had previously aided Nabal's shepherds there. Although Saul almost captured David at this time, he was given a reprieve when Saul had to break off his quest after being informed that the Philistines have invaded the land. In chapter 24 David sought refuge in Ein Gedi. While there David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but instead spared him. Afterwards Saul returned home and David and his men went up to the *metzudah*/stronghold.

### **1 Samuel 25: An Introduction**

Having provided the necessary narrative background, the focus will be on 1 Sam 25, wherein David first encountered and eventually married Abigail. Although there is no scholarly consensus as to when 1 Sam 25 was composed, as a starting point it is worth considering Andre Lemaire's 2003 position that it and surrounding chapters were composed in the early years of David's reign "shortly before 1000 BCE in Hebron and in the entourage of David."<sup>162</sup> 1 Sam 25 is sandwiched between chapters 24 and 26, which seem to constitute a compositional doublet, in which one finds

the same fundamental narrative of Saul hunting David, but becoming his prey instead. As such, 1 Sam 25 appears to be a tangential insertion, which reads like Genesis 38, wherein a tale about Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar interrupted the flow of the Joseph saga. That Genesis 38 provides the genealogical background to David's ancestry, highlighted at the conclusion of *Ruth*, may not be coincidental.

Assuming that chapters 24 and 26 are a mere doublet. Following the lead of advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis, in which doublets in the Torah are assigned to different sources, Baruch Halpern (2010) and other source critics divided 1 Samuel into sources A and B. Accordingly, 1 Sam 24 was assigned to A and 25 and 26 to B. In reference to 1 Sam 25 Halpern considered the "historical intentionality" of B. He pointedly noted: "The survival of the story of Nabal and Abigail clearly has no resonance after Solomon's reign or, possibly even his early years – honestly, who would have cared?"<sup>163</sup> If Halpern is correct, this would situate not only the narrative itself, but also its author within the timeframe of King David, which is similar to Lemaire's contention, mentioned above.

As Jan Fokkelman has demonstrated (2010), chapters 24 and 26 are more intricately related than a superficial reading would yield. He contended and then demonstrated that these two chapters "show at least three forms of complementarity which all of them open new windows for interpretation."<sup>164</sup> Moreover, Fokkelman's discussion in 1986 of chapter 25 offers one of the most extensive analyses of this text and several of his insights will be included as we progress.<sup>165</sup>

A different approach on the relationship between these three chapters was advanced by Robert Polzin in 1993, who followed in the footsteps of Martin Noth's classic identification in 1943 of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings as a unified historical source commonly referred to the Deuteronomistic History or DH.<sup>166</sup> Polzin viewed 1 Samuel chapters 19-28 as depicting a common theme of Saul pursuing David. Within this context, Polzin noted that in chapter 25 this theme was echoed when Abigail told David in reference to her husband, Nabal, "those who pursue you and seek your life" (1 Sam. 25:29).<sup>167</sup> The thematic parallels between Nabal and Saul have also been echoed by Laurence Turner: "Like Saul, Nabal also uses the insulting term "son of Jesse" for David (25:10, cf. e.g., 20:30; 22:7). Nabal and Saul both repay David "evil for good" (25:21; cf. 24:17).<sup>168</sup> David J. Zucker has provided another interesting comparison in that Nabal and David's future

adversary, Sheba son of Bikhri, were both described as being a worthless individual/ *'ish bliya 'al* (1 Sam 25:25 and 2 Sam 20:1).<sup>169</sup>

Chapter 25 begins by noting: “Samuel died, and all Israel gathered and lamented/eulogized (*vayispedo lo*) him and buried him in his house in Ramah. Then David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.”<sup>170</sup> It seems likely that David understood that with the death of Samuel, his patron and protector, he became very vulnerable to attacks by Saul and therefore sought refuge in the southernly wilderness of Paran, far from Saul’s home base in central Israel.

Beginning the narrative with David being uprooted and sojourning in the wilderness, will provide a marked contrast to the end of the chapter, at which point his circumstances were completely transformed, as he began to be rehabilitated by his marriages to Abigail and Ahinoam of Jezreel. It should be emphasized that at the start of 1 Sam 25 David lacked a wife, for Saul had previously assigned David’s wife Michal to Palti son of Laish, though we do not find this out until the concluding verse of 1 Sam 25. Undoubtedly Moshe Garsiel in 2013 has correctly interpreted Saul’s action: “Saul publicly signified that David had no more link with the royal family and was disgraced and outlawed.”<sup>171</sup>

The account in 1 Sam 25 then shifted to two neighboring Judean towns, Maon and Carmel. Maon was approximately 1½ kilometers south of Carmel and the latter was just over 11 kilometers south of Hebron. Next, we are introduced to Nabal and his wife Abigail:

There was a man in Maon<sup>172</sup> whose possessions were in Carmel. The man was very wealthy; he owned three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. At that time, he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. The man’s name was Nabal, and his wife’s name was Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man, a Calebite, was a hard man and an evildoer” (1 Sam 25:2-3).

By introducing Nabal and Abigail in this way, the narrator unambiguously contrasted the mean-spirited Nabal with his praiseworthy wife. Abigail’s name can be rendered as “my father rejoices.” Garsiel has also noted: “Some scholars derive the last component from *g'l* ‘to redeem’ in view of the fact that she succeeded in saving her whole family and property.”<sup>173</sup> It is also worth mentioning that *g'l*/redeem is the leitmotif of the concluding chapter of *Ruth*.

Although most readers of 1 Sam 25 view Abigail positively, following the lead of the narrator, there are some contrarian perspectives. An early critic was Athalya Brenner. She described

Abigail's intervention in stopping David from killing Nabal as successfully solving a short-term problem, but her "motive is totally selfish."<sup>174</sup> Whereas other scholars included Abigail in the category of the "wise woman," Brenner asserted that the reason she was referred to as having 'good sense' and not as 'wise' was "because her scope is limited to her own affairs and does not extend to public affairs."<sup>175</sup>

Steven McKenzie writing in 2000 was also critical of Abigail. He argued that the biblical narrator of David's history constructed an apology, justifying David's questionable actions as he rose to power.<sup>176</sup> His assessment of Abigail was similarly ambivalent. McKenzie did acknowledge that "Abigail's speech and demeanor are models of diplomacy. She is obviously a person of refinement and sophistication."<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, McKenzie ultimately portrayed Abigail in a fundamentally negative light: "Ruthless, or at least desperate, she was willing to conspire with David to murder her husband in order to forward his career and secure her own future."<sup>178</sup> Not only is there no evidence in 1 Sam 25 of a conspiracy between Abigail and David to murder Nabal, but given the lengths that Abigail went to stop David from killing her husband, McKenzie's claim seems baseless.

Yitzhak Berger writing in 2009 was influenced by McKenzie in his fascinating comparison of 1 Sam 25 and *Ruth*. Berger noted a dozen parallel expressions between these two texts. The first is that the introduction of husband and wife, Nabal and Abigail, is the same as the beginning of *Ruth*, wherein we meet Elimelech and Naomi. Moreover, Berger asserted that "these are the only two instances in the Bible where this formula appears."<sup>179</sup> Although this and the other examples that Berger cites clearly indicate an intricate relationship between these two texts, Berger was not concerned with when either work was composed or by whom. His thesis was that *Ruth* was written in an attempt to restore the negative portrayal of both David and Abigail in 1 Sam 25. This thesis is questionable on various levels. He promoted Steven McKenzie's hypothesis that Abigail should be viewed as "a profoundly flawed character," who conspired with David to murder her husband.<sup>180</sup> Leaving aside Berger's controversial conclusions, given the numerous parallel expressions found in both, one can at least entertain the idea that 1 Sam 25 and *Ruth* stemmed from the same time period. One should also note that none of the parallels that Berger cited actually

contribute to his thesis that *Ruth* was written as a character corrective for either David or Abigail. The similar phrasings are all rather straightforward.<sup>181</sup>

There was even ambiguity in the classical writing of the Sages as to their assessment of Abigail. As will be seen below they praised her for being one of the prophets. Similarly, in *Midrash Tehillim* one reads, “Abigail was better for David than any sacrifice in the world (could have been).”<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, there are also numerous negative Rabbinic comments about her as well. This material has been collected by Daniel Bodi in an essay he published in 2013.<sup>183</sup> In the Talmud (*B. Meg.* 15a) Abigail was described as being so seductive that even the thought of her caused great lust. Bodi also cited the *Midrash Shemuel* 23:11, wherein she attempted to distract David and his men by uncovering her thigh.<sup>184</sup> This same midrash continued by noting that her impudence was the reason that in 1 Sam 25:32 her name was spelt defectively.<sup>185</sup> Bodi suggested that this reading of the classical Rabbis was in keeping with the historical context wherein during wars against the Romans, native women would disrobe in an effort to curry favor with the enemy.<sup>186</sup> One might also note that it was a trope in classical Rabbinic literature that assertive biblical women were chastised for behavior that was deemed arrogant. In *B. Meg.* 14b both Deborah and Huldah were condemned for the way they interacted with their male contemporaries and as a result they were assigned “loathsome names.”

Returning to the way that Abigail was introduced in 1 Sam 25, it can be noted that she was not the only biblical character described as beautiful or handsome. Other examples include Sarah and Joseph. Notice, however, that the first attribute of Abigail’s was that she was “intelligent” (*tovat-sekhel*). This is a unique characterization in Tanakh. No other person, woman or man, is so depicted and underscored Abigail’s exceptionality.

Whereas Nabal was explicitly identified as being from Maon, Abigail, on the other hand is subsequently referred to in 1 Sam. 27:3 as coming from Carmel: “Abigail, wife of Nabal, the Carmelite/(*ha-Karmalit*).” The feminine Hebrew ending *it* of *Karmalit* indicates that Abigail was from Carmel. One might then speculate that the reason Nabal’s business operation was located in Carmel and not in his hometown of Maon was that the flocks were originally Abigail’s, prior to their marriage. If this were so, Nabal acquired much of his wealth and his status by marrying Abigail. Revisiting the way Nabal was introduced may also confirm this theory: “There was a man

in Maon whose possessions were in Carmel. The man was very wealthy” (1 Sam 25:2). What we see herein is the first characteristic that we learn about Nabal has to do with his possessions.<sup>187</sup> Essential to Nabal’s identity was his material wealth and it was as if he only existed as a result of the possessions, which might not have even been originally his. As Jon Levenson noted in 1978: “1 Sam 25 is the story of how this fool and his property came to be parted.”<sup>188</sup>

That Abigail was from the upper-classes may find support later in the account when she decided to align her destiny with David. As Abigail travelled to meet David “she rode on a donkey and her five maidservants were walking attending to her” (1 Sam 25:42). Insofar as she had her own female servants escorting her was relatively rare in Tanakh. The only earlier female character that was described this way was Rebekah, when she journeyed to marry Isaac and was accompanied by an unspecified number of female servants (Gen 24:61).

Not only does Nabal live up to his miserly reputation in his subsequent encounter with David, but he also was appropriately named. Abigail aptly commented to David: “Please, my lord, pay no attention to that wretched fellow Nabal. For he is just what his name says: His name means ‘boor’ (*naval*) and he is a boor” (1 Sam 25:25).<sup>189</sup> Herein, Abigail adroitly punned on her husband’s name, thereby exhibiting the scorn that she bore him.<sup>190</sup> More importantly, she was trying to allay David’s wrath and save her household from imminent retribution. The term boor/*naval* is especially relevant, given that Nabal eventually became thoroughly drunk on wine and Abigail appeased David by bringing him, among other items, two *nivlay-yayyin*/wineskins (1 Sam 25:18.) That Nabal was a Calebite, i.e., a descendant of Caleb ben Jephunah is also very significant. According to a Talmudic tradition in *B. Sotah* 34b, Caleb was the only one of the twelve spies sent by Moses that visited Hebron and prayed at the tomb of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.<sup>191</sup> As a result of Caleb’s fidelity to God, in championing the conquest of Canaan in the face of bitter opposition, Caleb and his descendants were bequeathed Hebron and its environs as their territorial patrimony. This was confirmed by Joshua: “So Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and assigned Hebron to him as his portion...as it still is, because he was loyal to the Lord” (Josh 14:13-14).

Moshe Garsiel has offered an important analysis of 1 Sam 25. Most intriguing is his treatment of the dialogue between David and Nabal. He discerned a complex pattern of family references in



which both David and Nabal tried to assert their superior social status through various allusions to their family genealogy.<sup>192</sup> While the intricacies of his argumentation are too rarified for the purposes of this essay, if he is correct and there are embedded in these few verses allusions to most of the names of David's ancestors listed at the end of *Ruth* this would not only give credence to the legitimacy of the David's lineage, but it could also be used in an attempt to establish an early monarchical dating for *Ruth*.

After the death of Nabal and David's marriage to Abigail, David became the titular head of a family connected to Hebron. This played out later on when David first ascended to the throne. He initially chose Hebron as the seat of his monarchy, rather than his hometown of Bethlehem, which would have been more natural. Throughout biblical times Bethlehem was relatively insignificant in relationship to Hebron. The only mention of Bethlehem in the Torah is in reference to Rachel's death and burial there (Gen. 35:19-20).<sup>193</sup> Whereas all the other matriarchs and patriarchs, (i.e., Sarah and Abraham, Rebekah and Isaac, and Leah and Jacob) were buried in the double cave purchased by Abraham at Hebron for Sarah's burial (Gen. 23).

Through his marriage to Abigail, David could then claim Hebron as his prerogative.<sup>194</sup> One could also speculate that Abigail herself had Calebite roots. Not only was Carmel not very far from Hebron, but Abigail's son that she had with David, (in fact her only son recorded in the Tanakh), was named Chileab: "Sons were born to David in Hebron...[H]is second was Chileab, by Abigail wife of Nabal the Carmelite" (2 Sam 3:2-3).<sup>195</sup> Although the text does not specify who named him, it is plausible that Abigail assigned this name to her son, for it was commonplace in ancient Israel for the mothers to name their children, as was the case with both Leah and Rachel. As noted above in reference to her husband, Abigail was acutely aware of the significance of names. The Hebrew characters of Chileab are the same as Caleb, with an *'alef* inserted after the *lamed* (i.e., פלאב). This is the same pattern as the relationship between the words *melekh* (king) and *malakh* (messenger). (After all, a messenger is someone sent by the king on a mission.) Perhaps, Abigail or David, wanted to indicate that Chileab was a true descendant of Caleb and therefore worthy of residing in Hebron. It is also possible that whoever slightly modified Caleb's name and transformed it into Chileab wanted to protect the child from ridicule, for the Hebrew consonants that constitute Caleb's name spell *kelev*, which means dog.<sup>196</sup> By inserting the *'alef*

into the name it thereby transformed the last syllable into the word *'av* (father), which is thoroughly positive, while at the same time preserving an allusion to a prestigious Calebite ancestry and Hebron legacy.

Turning back to the narrative in 1 Sam 25, David and his peripatetic band were traversing the countryside, trying to avoid Saul's capture: "David was in the wilderness when he heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep" (1 Sam 25:4). David, who had grown up as a shepherd in Bethlehem, understood that sheep shearing was a festive celebration of bounty. He therefore sent some of his young followers as emissaries to ask Nabal to share his abundance. This was not merely charity that David was requesting. He told his messengers to remind Nabal, "As you know, your shepherds have been with us; we did not harm them, and nothing of theirs was missing all the time they were in Carmel" (1 Sam 25:7).

Nabal abusively dismissed David's request:

Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many slaves nowadays who run away from their masters. Should I then take my bread and water, and the meat that I slaughtered for my own shearers, and give them to men who come from I don't know where?" (1 Sam 25:10-11).

As soon as David heard a report of Nabal's insulting refusal, David ordered 400 of his fighters to prepare for battle. The scene then shifted to Abigail taking center stage, which she occupied for the next 30 verses, until the end of the chapter. One of Nabal's servants informed Abigail about David's request and her husband's acerbic rebuff. The servant praised David's men for guarding Nabal's shepherds and their flocks and ended with an ominous warning: "So consider carefully what you should do, for harm threatens our master and all his household; he is such a nasty fellow<sup>197</sup> that no one can speak to him" (1 Sam 25:17). Abigail immediately set out to rectify matters. What follows as she prepared to diffuse this potentially explosive situation clearly illustrates why she was introduced as *tovat sekhel*/intelligent. Instead of trying to persuade her "nasty" husband to apologize to David and appease him, she took matters into her own hands and orchestrated an immense banquet for David and his men. Note that the first item listed were the "two hundred loaves of bread," intended to assuage the hunger of David and his men.<sup>198</sup>

Abigail quickly got together two hundred loaves of bread, two jars of wine, five dressed sheep, five *seahs* of parched corn, one hundred cakes of raisin, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs. She loaded them on asses,

and told her young men, “Go ahead of me, and I’ll follow you”; but she did not tell her husband Nabal (1 Sam 25:18-19).

The first word in the above quoted account is *va-timaher*/and she quickly. This characterized her subsequent actions as well. When she first saw David “she quickly dismounted from the ass” (1 Sam 25:23) and later on when David sent her messengers proposing marriage, “Then Abigail rose quickly” (1 Sam 25:42). This stress on her alacrity underscored Abigail’s decisiveness and self-confidence. It is also reminiscent of the actions of the biblical matriarchs and patriarchs. This same verb is used in Rebekah’s interactions with Abraham’s servant who was sent to find a suitable bride for Isaac in Genesis 24:18 and 20, as well as when Abraham welcomed the three wayfarers/angels and arranged meals for them in Genesis 18:6 and 7.

It is also noteworthy that although Abigail gave orders to young men who led the asses that bore the provisions to go ahead of her, the text states explicitly that “she loaded” the food onto the asses. The implication is that she did this task by herself. Once again this was like Abraham preparing for the Akedah/Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:3). Moreover, Abigail did not attempt to persuade her husband. She consciously avoided informing him of her actions, lest he intervene and try and stop her. One can also draw a comparison between Abigail’s gifts of appeasement and those of Jacob, when he sent messengers ahead to assuage the wrath of his brother Esau in Genesis 32.<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, the emissaries were referred to as “her young men”/ *ne‘areha*. This is the only place in Tanakh wherein a woman has male servants at her disposal to do her bidding. It certainly underscores Abigail’s upper-class status, as well as her ability to act independently. Natan Klaus, in his study of Abigail’s speech even asserted that “without a doubt,” Abigail composed her speech while she was en route for her encounter with David.<sup>200</sup> Whether or not Abigail’s speech, as presented herein, was an accurate reflection of her conversation with David, it certainly reflects how Abigail was remembered within David’s court.

Next there is the initial encounter between Abigail and David: “She was riding on the ass and going down a trail on the hill, when David and his men appeared, coming down toward her; and she met them” (1 Sam 25:20). The Hebrew adds more flair to the momentousness of this encounter. “*Ve-hayah he’ rokhevet...ve-hinay David...*” literally “And so it was when she was riding... and

behold David...” When this meeting suddenly occurred, David had been in the middle of ranting about how unfairly he had been treated by Nabal:

It was for nothing that I protected that fellow’s possessions in the wilderness, and that nothing was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. May God do thus and more to the enemies of David, if by the light of morning, I leave a single male of his (1 Sam 25:21-22).

At this point David seems to have stopped in mid-sentence, before he finished his thought. Presumably this was when he saw Abigail approach. This pause in David’s speech allowed for the narrator to shift the focus of attention to Abigail and her perspective. It also marked the critical transition in David’s life, for his circumstances changed markedly from this moment onwards: “When Abigail saw David, she quickly dismounted from the ass and threw herself face down before David,<sup>201</sup> bowing to the ground. Prostrate at his feet, she pleaded” (1 Sam 25:23-24). What follows next is one of the longest speeches by a woman in Tanakh. Levenson aptly characterized it as “a rhetorical masterpiece.”<sup>202</sup> Fokkelman offered an overview of the variety of topics that Abigail mentioned:

In order just to give an idea of the complexity: the speech covers today, the past and the future, names of six parties (Nabal, Abigail, David, his enemies, his soldiers, God) and we meet such apparently heterogenous terms as a stumbling block, an enduring house, the sling, good and evil, the Lord’s battles, the bundle of life, pursuit and even more.<sup>203</sup>

One of the most instructive essays on this interaction between Abigail and David is also the most recent. Sarah Schwartz in her 2013 exposition initially referred to how Abigail was first introduced in 1 Sam 23:3 as being an *’ishah tovat sekhel*/a woman of good understanding. She astutely noted that generally the root *skhl* denotes success in much of Tanakh. It is only in Wisdom literature, most often in Proverbs and occasionally in some Psalms that it connotes wisdom: “The unique nature of the phrase (i.e., *tovat sekhel*) raises a possible link between 1 Sam 25 and the book of Proverbs.”<sup>204</sup> Schwartz continued:

However, I would argue that Abigail’s speech includes an educational element which designs her character as a wise educator, similar to the explicit or implied speaker in Proverbs, whose objective is to use rhetorical wisdom to instruct the recipient and design his personality and behavior.<sup>205</sup>

After offering numerous highly specific rhetorical and thematic links between Abigail’s speech and Proverbs Schwartz arrived at the thrust of her analysis. David not only listened to what Abigail

had to say, but he used phrasings that are found in Proverbs by a pupil acknowledging receiving advice from a mentor. In v. 33 David responded: *u-varukh ta 'amekh*/and blessed be your prudence and in v. 35 he affirmed: *shama 'ti vekolekh*/I have heeded your plea.<sup>206</sup>

The major point of Abigail's lessons for David was that he needed to rely upon God and not on his own martial prowess: "David is portrayed as a worthy recipient of wisdom, with the ability to learn and change by utilizing the wisdom he is provided."<sup>207</sup> Schwartz suggested in conclusion that it was only owing to Abigail's instruction that David attained the wisdom necessary for his ascension to the throne: "[T]he purpose of the narrative may be to offer justification for David's monarchy in the twilight period between his anointment and his rise to power, through his encounter with Abigail."<sup>208</sup>

Turning to actual encounter, after abasing herself at David's feet she began, "Let the blame be mine, my lord, but let your handmaid speak to you; hear your maid's plea" (1 Sam 25:24).<sup>209</sup> Although she had done nothing wrong, she asked to be held accountable. Moreover, she debased her actual status as a woman of great significance by twice referring to herself as David's female servant, (*'amatekha*/your female servant) and to David as *'adoni*/my lord. This was an ironic counterpart to Nabal's prior disparaging David, as Saul's slave.

Although Abigail initially addressed David in the second person, so she could make her point that I am your female servant and therefore at your mercy, she deferentially continued in third person when discussing David's attitude towards her husband "Please, my lord, pay no attention<sup>210</sup> to that wretched fellow Nabal. For he is just as his name says: His name means 'boor' and he is a boor. (1 Sam 25:25).

Abigail continued by arguing that it was really God who was orchestrating David's actions and caused him to show restraint in not carrying out his intention to kill Nabal. It is "the Lord who has kept you from seeking redress by blood with your own hands—let your enemies and all who would harm my lord fare like Nabal!" (1 Sam 25:26). This is an intriguing assertion for several reasons. First Abigail assumed that David would not kill Nabal as he was planning, even though there is no indication at this point that David had changed his mind. Perhaps, she sensed David's change of heart when David stopped his murderous declaration in mid-sentence as soon as he saw her

approaching. Abigail's claim that it was really God and not herself who had changed David's mind is evidence of both humility and an excellent rhetorical tactic.

It is worth noting that upon receiving Abigail's gifts David acknowledged his indebtedness to her for preventing him from killing Nabal "had you not come quickly to meet me, not a single male of Nabal's line would have been left by daybreak" (1Sam 25:34). That David was attuned to a persuasive argument is evident much earlier on 1 Sam, when David was initially introduced to Saul. One of Saul's attendants praised David as being "sensible in speech/*nevon davar*" (1 Sam 16:18). Finally, Abigail's concluding assertion that all of David's enemies should suffer the fate of Nabal is significant in light of the fact that at this juncture nothing bad had yet happened to Nabal. This can possibly be viewed as a foreshadowing of Abigail's prophetic insight. Abigail made two noteworthy declarations concerning David's future. The first was how she referred to David as being the divinely designated Israelite king and his destiny: "And when the Lord has accomplished for my lord all the good He has promised you, and has appointed you ruler of Israel" (1 Sam 25:30). While it is the case that David had been anointed by Samuel as Saul's successor, this was in a private ceremony in Bethlehem, attended only by David's brothers (1 Sam 16:13). One wonders how Abigail was privy to this.<sup>211</sup> Even more noteworthy is a further contention: "Please pardon your maid's boldness. For the Lord will grant my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord" (1 Sam 25:28). Reassuring David that God will grant him a lasting dynasty is indeed a bold prediction. This was not even something that Samuel had promised David. It would not be for a number years, until after David had assumed the throne and established his reign in Jerusalem that the prophet Nathan reiterated Abigail's prediction: "The Lord declares to you that He, the Lord, will establish a house for you...Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:11-16).

In addition to a Davidic dynasty, which Samuel had not promised David, Abigail made a second unprecedented forecast, namely that God would deliver David from all of his enemies:

And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the Lord; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling (1 Sam 25:29).

The phrasing herein displays several rhetorical flourishes. The expression of being “bound up in the bundle of life”/ *tsrurah be-tsror ha-hayyim* is significant. This wording, as well as its conceptualization, is unique in Tanakh and was so favored by the Jewish tradition that it was incorporated into the *El Malei Raḥamim* prayer for the deceased.<sup>212</sup> Additionally, the fate of David’s enemies being flung by God from a sling recalls David’s heroic victory of Goliath, whom he killed with his slingshot (1 Sam 17:49). Abigail’s contentions were truly prophetic. Not only did she affirm what Samuel had sworn to David, but she extended the Divine promise that would eventually be confirmed by Nathan.

This together with her preventing David from murdering Nabal and his entire male lineage (1 Sam 25:24) certainly warranted the introductory praise of Abigail’s exceptional intelligence. The theme of prophecy as it relates to Abigail was discussed in an intriguing essay by Laurence Turner (2021), wherein he viewed Abigail and the medium of Endor as bookends to the prophetic career of Samuel. Turner discussed parallels between 1 Sam 25 and 1 Sam 28. Both chapters began with an editorial comment that what follows took place after the death of Samuel. One might have assumed that prophecy would end with the death of Samuel. The Israelites had insisted that Samuel not be succeeded by his wicked sons and that the nation would rather have a king to lead them (1 Sam 8). This was an implicit rejection of Divine authority and might have resulted in the cessation of prophecy. Abigail functioned as a prophetic oracle, even prior to the eventual ascension of the David’s court prophet Nathan.

As Turner noted, in the Talmud *B. Megillah* 14a, Abigail is even referred to by the Sages as one of the biblical prophets.<sup>213</sup>

It was years later, once David had established Jerusalem as his capital and had built a royal palace for himself that Abigail’s claims about the Davidic dynasty were reiterated by Nathan. Interestingly, Nathan’s reception of the Divine promise came to him in a dream the night after he had misinformed David by encouraging him to proceed with his plan to build a Temple for the Lord; see 2 Sam 7. It is worth emphasizing that in Numbers 12 one finds a distinction between how God communicated with regular prophets versus Moses. Regular prophets received Divine communication by means of visions and dreams, whereas God spoke to Moses directly (Num 12:6-8). It is therefore very significant that the prophetic pronouncements of women in Tanakh, for

example Deborah in Judges 4, Abigail here in 1 Sam 25 and Huldah in 2 Kgs 22:14-20, were all instantaneous predictions that turned out to be completely accurate. This is suggestive of the special nature of female prophetic capabilities that were Moses-like, in contradistinction to the male prophets, such as Nathan.

As an addendum, one would be remiss to neglect addressing issues of identity raised initially by Jon Levenson and then expanded upon in a sequel essay by Levenson and Baruch Halpern. 1 Sam 25:43 concluded by noting that David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. Levenson speculated that only one other woman in Tanakh was named Ahinoam, namely Saul's wife. "Could it be that David swaggered into Hebron with the wife of a Calebite chieftain on one arm and that of the Israelite king on the other?"<sup>214</sup> That David married his mother-in-law seems highly unlikely. Another weakness of this theory is that there is no indication that there was only one woman named Ahinoam in Tanakh and not two distinct individuals. Fokkelman dismissed Levenson's speculation as being "much too wild." He went on to argue that "the name was very likely quite common in old Israel" by demonstrating that its component elements were found in the names of numerous biblical figures, including Naomi.<sup>215</sup> As Shulamit Adler has pointed out, Saul's wife was at least twice as old as David, being the mother of David's first wife Michal and David's companion Jonathan.<sup>216</sup> It is also incongruous that several years later after David began to rule, Ahinoam gave birth to David's first son: "Sons were born to David in Hebron: His first-born was Amnon, by Ahinoam of Jezreel" (2 Sam 3:2). One would have imagined that had such a relatively elderly woman given birth to the king's son the court historian would have commented on this extraordinary event.

The only explicit reference to Saul's wife is in 1 Sam 14:50 wherein she was referred to as Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. All five references in Tanakh to David's wife, Ahinoam, indicated that she was from Jezreel and do not mention that her father was Ahimaaz. It seems that by identifying Ahinoam in two different ways, the author of 1 and 2 Sam was underscoring that there were two different women called Ahinoam. More importantly, one would have expected that had David absconded with Saul's only wife, this would have been highlighted as Saul's motive for chasing after David and not totally ignored. David could not even reconnect with his own wife, Michal, to whom he owed his life, until after the death of Saul. How would he have been able to



capture the King's sole wife and then travel surreptitiously with his band of rogue companions throughout the countryside, with her as his captive?

In support for Levenson's fanciful hypothesis, a follow-up article by Levenson and Halpern cited God's words to David, conveyed by the prophet Nathan: "I gave you your master's house and possession of your master's wives" (2 Sam 12:8).<sup>217</sup> King Saul, however, had only one wife as well as a concubine, Rizpah, (2 Sam 3:7). If one were to follow the argumentation of Levenson and Halpern, then according to 2 Sam 12:8 David must have married Rizpah as well, though Levenson and Halpern do not make this claim. Actually, it was Saul's general Abner who had sexual relations with Rizpah after Saul's death (2 Sam 3:7).<sup>218</sup>

Lest one think that it was only after the death of Saul that David married Ahinoam, the events recorded in the latter chapters of 1 Samuel demonstrate otherwise. In order to escape from Saul's persistent attempts to capture him, David decided that he had to once again<sup>219</sup> take refuge in the south with Achish, the Philistine king of Gath (1 Sam 27). Initially David and his followers, including Ahinoam and Abigail, settled in Gath and later on David negotiated with Achish that his entourage could dwell in the nearby town of Ziklag (1 Sam 27:6). Achish eventually reported to his fellow Philistine confederates that David and his supporters had been staying with him "for a year or more" (1 Sam 29:3).

In 1 Sam 30, while David went with Achish to prepare to go to war against Saul, Amalekites attacked Ziklag and took all of its women captive, including David's wives Ahinoam and Abigail (1 Sam 30:5). When David returned to Ziklag and discovered the extent of the Amalekite attack he sought counsel from God, via the priestly ephod<sup>220</sup> that was in Abiathar's possession. He was informed by the Lord "Pursue, for you shall overtake and you shall rescue" (1 Sam 30:8). Subsequently, David successfully attacked the Amalekite troops and rescued Ahinoam and Abigail (1 Sam 30:18). All of this occurred prior to Saul's final battle with the Philistines and his death in 1 Sam 31.

Even more audacious is the claim by Levenson and Halpern that because there were two women in Tanakh named Abigail, the first being Nabal's wife and the second being David's sister (1 Chron 2:16) then they must be one and the same! This also seems far-fetched, as is their argument that the husband of David's sister, identified as Ithra in 2 Sam 17:25 was really Nabal.<sup>221</sup>

Contrary to the wildly imaginative claims of Levenson and Halpern, it should be noted that it was not uncommon for more than one biblical character to share the same name. For example, there were three individuals named Ahimaaz. The first was Ahinoam's father. The second Ahimaaz was the son of the priest Zadok (2 Sam 15:27). The third Ahimaaz was one of King Solomon's governors and son-in-law (1 Kgs 4:15).

### **Conclusion**

Numerous scholars have asserted that *Ruth* was most likely composed by a woman. The main observation that led many of them to that conclusion were the numerous gynocentric themes of the narrative. *Ruth* is primarily a tale of two women, Naomi and Ruth, with an inseparable bond. Together they overcame life's adversities through mutual support and affection. It is an unparalleled story in Tanakh. Clearly the framer of this tale displayed a special talent that enabled her to convey this tale with deep compassion and understanding.

*Ruth* is set in King David's hometown, Bethlehem. Moreover, its ending explicitly identified the story's protagonists as David's ancestors, something that is confirmed elsewhere in Tanakh. This leads to another conclusion that the narrator's agenda was to provide a positive and compelling backstory to King David.

Owing to archaic language usage and ancient customs, it is likely that *Ruth* originated during the early years of David's reign.

It is certainly conceivable that the author was an individual who was never mentioned in the Court history of the period, and hence lost forevermore. There was, however, only one woman from that time period that was depicted as being exceeding intelligent, resourceful, decisive and having a rare rhetorical talent, namely Abigail. Abigail not only intervened to save David from a rash act of murder, but she subsequently married him at a time when he was a forlorn vagabond fleeing Saul's persistent attempts to kill him. Through her actions and superior Judean status, she helped elevate David to a position of power, enabling him to assume the throne after Saul's death, in Hebron, what was then the religious and social center of Judah.

Abigail can be seen as both a literary genius and a true visionary. In *Ruth* she was able to recreate what it was like living in an agrarian village in Judah, in the pre-monarchic period of the Judges. She was from an agrarian town, most likely Carmel, not too distant from Hebron, nor all that

dissimilar to Bethlehem. She could therefore authentically depict village life of the time with all of its vicissitudes. She not only possessed immense rhetorical gifts, but she also displayed prophetic abilities that built upon Samuel's prior act of anointing David as Saul's successor. Upon meeting David, Abigail predicted that not only would David triumph over his enemies, but he would also start a dynastic lineage. Both of these predictions came to fruition.

No woman other than Abigail within David's circle was depicted as having the ability, resourcefulness, and life experience similar to the female protagonists in *Ruth*. Undoubtedly Norman Gottwald was correct when he asserted, as noted above: "It is not difficult to imagine that this story was framed by a woman confidently at home in her social world."<sup>222</sup> Clearly, Abigail fits this description. Finally, given that the attempt to identify the author of *Ruth* is like a mystery, one can assert without any hesitation that Abigail possessed all the necessary elements: means, motive and opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is dedicated to the memory of Professor Frank Ephraim Talmage, z”l, who taught that one should consider the author and their agenda, in addition to the text that is being studied. The author would also like to thank Dina Ripsman Eylon for her editorial acumen and to the reviewers for their constructive improvements and bibliographical suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Talmud, the prophet and judge Samuel composed the biblical books that bear his name, as well as *Ruth* (*B. Baba Batra* 14b). A biblical source for part of this assertion is found at the end of 1 Chronicles, which concludes the Davidic saga, the primary focus of 1 Chronicles. “Acts of King David, early and late, are recorded in the history of Samuel the seer, the history of Nathan the prophet, and the history of Gad the seer” (1 Chron 29:29). Attributing both 1 and 2 Samuel to Samuel himself is rather puzzling, given that the death of Samuel is recorded in 1 Samuel 25, a text that we will consider below at length.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Palmer, “Recovering Female Authors of the Bible,” *Studia Antiqua* 15, no. 1, (2016): 13. Palmer’s agenda is far more conservative than what will be attempted in what follows. She is merely arguing that a few biblical texts that are credited to women such as the Song of Deborah (Jud 5) or Hannah’s prayer (1 Sam 2), might actually have been written by women.

<sup>4</sup> *Ruth* is a much beloved text that has been studied from a variety of perspectives. See Jennifer Matheny’s survey of scholarship on *Ruth* from the last two decades, in which she thematically groups her sources and offers an extensive bibliography of more than 200 entries; Jennifer M. Matheny, “Ruth in Recent Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 1 (2020), 8-35. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988) will be discussed below. For *Ruth* as the paradigmatic convert in classical rabbinic literature, especially in *Gerim* and *Ruth Rabbah*, see Jennifer Zilm, “Blood, Bead, and Light: Female Converts in Early Judaism,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 2 (2008). Robert D. Holmstedt offers an erudite grammatical commentary in his *Ruth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010). The commentary by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011) will be discussed below. For an informative review of this work, placing it within the context of other related treatments of *Ruth*, see David Zucker, “The JPS Bible Commentary - Ruth,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 2 (2012). For a more traditionally orientated Jewish commentary see Yael Ziegler, *Ruth: From Alienation to Monarchy* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2015) and below. Jeremy Schipper, in his recent contribution to The Anchor Yale Bible series asserted that “it is doubtful that the author wrote any other extant literature, biblical or otherwise”; see Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 19. Stephanie Day Powell in her recent monograph considers the possibility of a homoerotic relationship between Ruth and Naomi; see Stephanie Day Powell, *The Narrative Desire and the Book of Ruth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 24-28. For a recent essay exploring comparative phrasings between *Ruth* and other biblical texts see A. Graeme Auld, “Ruth: A Reading of Scripture?” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 215-228. While discussing whether *Ruth* should be considered a “women’s book,” Auld points out something obvious but easily overlooked, namely that since ancient times it has been named *Ruth*, 225.

<sup>5</sup> On the theme of female self-efficacy in the Bible see Mark Verman and Shulamit H. Adler, “Matriarchs and Self-Efficacy: Reassessing the Israelite Patriarchy,” *Gender and the Curriculum: Theory and Practice, Selected Papers* (Collegeville, MN, Saint John’s University, 1988), 62-67.

<sup>6</sup> H. Munro Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936).

<sup>7</sup> An exception is the dismissive en passant mention in a footnote by S.D. Goitein, whose work will be discussed below. Goitein contended that the Chadwicks’ discussion was “too general” to be “acceptable as the basis for investigation” of female authorship of biblical texts, S.D. Goitein, “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres,” *Prooftexts* 8, no. 1 (1988): 31, n.2.

<sup>8</sup> Chadwicks, 649.

<sup>9</sup> Chadwicks, 649.

<sup>10</sup> Chadwicks, 761; see also p. 737 wherein they asserted that the woman from Tekoa was referred to as wise evidently for her “rhetorical skill”.

<sup>11</sup> This material was insightful analyzed by Claudia Camp and will be discussed below; Claudia V. Camp, “The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, (1981): 14-29, (reprinted in, *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 195-207.

<sup>12</sup> Chadwicks, 761.

<sup>13</sup> Chadwicks, 763.

<sup>14</sup> Chadwicks, 763. This is supported by the Hebrew syntax in which the song is prefaced: “*Va-tashar Devorah u-Varak/And Devorah and Barak sang* (Jdg 5:1). Note that the verb *va-tashar* is third person, feminine singular, i.e. “and she sang”.

<sup>15</sup> Chadwicks, 764.

<sup>16</sup> Chadwicks, 764.

<sup>17</sup> Chadwicks, 764.

<sup>18</sup> S.D. Goitein, *Bible Studies: From a Literary and Social Perspective*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1967), (originally published in 1957), 58. Goitein developed this theory, as we will see shortly in S.D. Goitein, “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres” *Prooftexts* 8 no. 1, (1988): 1-33.

<sup>19</sup> Goitein, “Women”.

<sup>20</sup> Goitein, 31, n. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Goitein, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Goitein, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Goitein, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Goitein, 5

<sup>25</sup> See below, Phyllis Trible, “Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows,” in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus–Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 170ff.

<sup>26</sup> This is a well-known expression found in Rabbinic literature and popularized by Rashi in his Torah commentary, for example on Gen. 6:3.

<sup>27</sup> Goitein, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Goitein, 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> Goitein, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Goitein, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Goitein, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Goitein, 11-29.

<sup>33</sup> Goitein, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Goitein, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Goitein, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Sandmel, *The Enjoyment of Scriptures: The Law, The Prophets and the Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 25. Interestingly, Sandmel’s insight concerning female authorship of *Ruth* was not evident in his earlier and much reprinted study, *The Hebrew Scriptures: An Introduction to Their Literature and Religious Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

<sup>37</sup> Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth: a new translation with introduction, notes, and commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975).

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, 28.

<sup>40</sup> For examples see Campbell, 25-26. For another discussion of the ancient phraseology in *Ruth* from the early monarchic period; see Feival Meltzer’s introduction to *Ruth* in *Hamesh Megillot* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1973), 12-13. For a balanced discussion of both early and late linguistic elements including scholars who advocated for each position, see Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 244-246.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, 23, n. 31.

- <sup>43</sup> Eunice B. Poethig, *The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel*, PhD Diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1985.
- <sup>44</sup> Poethig, 230.
- <sup>45</sup> Poethig, 232-233.
- <sup>46</sup> Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 30-48.
- <sup>47</sup> Trible, 48
- <sup>48</sup> Phyllis Trible, "Two Women in a Man's World" *Soundings* 59 (Fall, 1976): 251-279.
- <sup>49</sup> Trible, Phyllis. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 166.
- <sup>50</sup> Trible, 175.
- <sup>51</sup> Trible, 196.
- <sup>52</sup> Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) and reprinted 1994, 51-2.
- <sup>53</sup> Brenner, 52.
- <sup>54</sup> Brenner, 56.
- <sup>55</sup> Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows" *Bible Review* 5, no. 1(1989): 14-25; reprinted in, *A Feminist Companion to Exodus-Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: and that of other scholarly perspectives, see Alice Bach, "With a Song in Her Heart: Listening to Scholars Listening to Miriam" in *Bible Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 419-427.
- <sup>56</sup> Frank Moore Cross Jr. and David Noel Freedman "The Song of Miriam" *JNES* 14, no. 4 (1955): 237-250.
- <sup>57</sup> Cross and Freedman, 237.
- <sup>58</sup> Trible, "Miriam", 171
- <sup>59</sup> Trible, "Miriam", 171.
- <sup>60</sup> Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 14-29; (reprinted in Bach, *Bible Women*), 195-207. Tikva Frymer-Kensky concluded her discussion of the "wise women" in 2 Samuel by asserting that although they were situated during the reign of David, they essentially belonged to a "pre-monarchic" era, when women had agency and could hold positions of power, to settle societal disputes and make important decisions. This status would change from Solomon's reign onwards. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (NY: Schocken Books, 2002), 63. For a more recent discussion of this topic see David J. Zucker, "Abigail of Maon and the Wise Woman of Abel: Speaking Truth to Power" *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary e-Journal* 17, no. 2 (2020): 1-2 6. For David Zucker's informative overview of biblical related articles in WIJ, see David J. Zucker, "Biblical Studies in *Women in Judaism* [WIJ]: The First Twenty Years" *Women in Judaism* 14, no. 2 (2017).
- <sup>61</sup> Camp, 197 in Bach.
- <sup>62</sup> Camp, 197.
- <sup>63</sup> Camp, 199.
- <sup>64</sup> Camp, 201.
- <sup>65</sup> Grace Emmerson, "Women in ancient Israel" in *The World of Ancient Israel* ed. R.E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1991), 376-7.
- <sup>66</sup> Emmerson, 381.
- <sup>67</sup> Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 554-558.
- <sup>68</sup> Gottwald, 554-555.
- <sup>69</sup> Gottwald, 557.
- <sup>70</sup> Gottwald, 557.
- <sup>71</sup> Joel Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27. For a readable introduction to the Documentary Hypothesis and its evolution, see Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1987), 22-27. As noted therein of great significance was the role played by Julius Wellhausen in the mid-1880's in crystallization this theory. See also the informative entry by John Barton, "Source Criticism (OT)" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Vol. 6, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 162-165. Interestingly, some of the most forceful critics of the Documentary Hypothesis were prominent Jewish bible scholars in Israel, especially Umberto Cassuto's *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*

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(Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), originally published in Hebrew in 1941 and Moshe H. Segal, *The Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967). The first chapter of this collection of essays was originally published as a journal article in 1961.

<sup>72</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), xii.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1996), xli.

<sup>74</sup> Friedman, 86.

<sup>75</sup> Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg, *The Book of J* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), (originally published by Grove in 1990), 10.

<sup>76</sup> Bloom, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Bloom, 25.

<sup>78</sup> Bloom, 26.

<sup>79</sup> Bloom, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Bloom, 31.

<sup>81</sup> Bloom, 32.

<sup>82</sup> Bloom, 32.

<sup>83</sup> Bloom, 32.

<sup>84</sup> On the J Source see Albert de Pury “Yahwist (“J”) Source” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Vol. 6, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1012-1020.

<sup>85</sup> Richard E. Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible: The Discovery of the First Prose Masterpiece* (N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1998), 7.

<sup>86</sup> Friedman, esp. 13-23.

<sup>87</sup> Friedman, 51-52.

<sup>88</sup> Friedman, 52.

<sup>89</sup> Friedman, 52.

<sup>90</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 24.

<sup>91</sup> Hubbard, 24.

<sup>92</sup> Hubbard, 24.

<sup>93</sup> Andre Lacocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 35.

<sup>94</sup> Lacocque, 116. Lacocque also included an interesting private communication with Jon Levenson, who maintained that “women’s power in the Bible is *rhetorical*”, 72, n. 47.

<sup>95</sup> Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, *The Double Voice of Her Desire: Texts by Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes*, eds. J. Bekkenkamp and F. Droes, (Leiden: Deo, 2002), 164.

<sup>96</sup> Pardes, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Pardes, 4-5.

<sup>98</sup> One can also note that the verse continues: “Prosper in Ephrath” (Ruth 4:11). The specific mention of Ephrath also refers to the place where Rachel died (Gen. 35:19). Naomi’s husband and children were identified as Ephrathites (Ruth 1:2). Additionally, at the start of the account involving David and Goliath, David’s father, Jesse, was also an Ephrathite (1 Sam 17:12); see Yael Ziegler, *Ruth: From Alienation to Monarchy* (Maggid Books: Jerusalem, 2015), 52, n. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Pardes, 98.

<sup>100</sup> Pardes, 170, n. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Pardes, 99.

<sup>102</sup> Pardes, 101.

<sup>103</sup> Pardes, 102.

<sup>104</sup> Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 68.

<sup>105</sup> Pardes directly discussed this verse on p.110.

<sup>106</sup> Although one may view Moses’ naming as an exception to this principle, given that it was Pharaoh’s daughter who named him, insofar as she explicitly adopted Moses as her son, this was not a violation of the norm (Ex 2:10).

- <sup>107</sup> Pardes, 106.
- <sup>108</sup> Pardes, 107.
- <sup>109</sup> Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes, 106.
- <sup>110</sup> Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes, 107.
- <sup>111</sup> Athalya Brenner ed., *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
- <sup>112</sup> Carol Meyers, "Returning Home: Ruth 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *The Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 89.
- <sup>113</sup> Meyers, 91f. This is also the case in its two usages in *Song of Songs* 3:4 and 8:2, wherein it is the female who took or wanted to take her lover to "her mother's house".
- <sup>114</sup> Adrien J. Bledstein, "Female Companionships: If the Book of Ruth Were Written by a Woman" in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 131. Interestingly, in the Talmud one finds the same etymology of Ruth, but therein it is not related exclusively to Ruth, but also to King David composing Psalms. "R. Yohanan said: 'Why was she named Ruth? This is because from her issued David, who satiated (*shervihu*) the Holy One, blessed be He, with songs and praises" *B. Berakhot* 7b.
- <sup>115</sup> Bledstein, 116.
- <sup>116</sup> Bledstein, 131.
- <sup>117</sup> Bledstein, 132.
- <sup>118</sup> Bledstein, 121 on Boaz and 124 on Ruth.
- <sup>119</sup> See also Heather McKay, "'Eshet *Hayil* or 'Ishah *Zarah*: Jewish Readings of Abigail and Bathsheba, both Ancient and Modern" in *Jewish Ways of Reading the Bible*, ed. George Brooke, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 257-280.
- <sup>120</sup> Bledstein, 124. It is worth noting that in general the term *hayyil* refers to material prosperity. For example, "Remember it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth/*hayyil*" Deut. 8:18. This is also the connotation of the blessing of the townsfolk to Ruth when she became betrothed to Boaz. "Prosper/*va-aseh hayyil* in Eprathah" (Ruth 4:11).
- <sup>121</sup> Bledstein, 133.
- <sup>122</sup> Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), 11.
- <sup>123</sup> Exum, see 21-27, 37-38 and 42-60.
- <sup>124</sup> Exum, 23.
- <sup>125</sup> Exum, 23.
- <sup>126</sup> Exum, 24.
- <sup>127</sup> Mishael Caspi and Rachel Havrelock, *Women on the Biblical Road: Ruth, Naomi and the Female Journey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 55.
- <sup>128</sup> Caspi, 66.
- <sup>129</sup> Caspi, 72.
- <sup>130</sup> Caspi, 69.
- <sup>131</sup> Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 137.
- <sup>132</sup> Bach, 137-8.
- <sup>133</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic," *Biblical Interpretation* 5 no. 1 (1997): 30.
- <sup>134</sup> Bauckham, 31.
- <sup>135</sup> Bauckham, 31. For the most part Bauckham relies on the essays in Brenner, *Feminist Companion*, esp. those of Meyers, van Dijk-Hemmes and Bledstein, all of which were discussed above.
- <sup>136</sup> Bauckham, 33.
- <sup>137</sup> Bauckham, 40.
- <sup>138</sup> Bauckham, 45.
- <sup>139</sup> 2Q16 Ruth<sup>a</sup>, 2Q17 Ruth<sup>b</sup>, 4Q104 Ruth<sup>a</sup> and 4Q105 Ruth<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>140</sup> Wilda Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 125

<sup>141</sup> Gafney, 127; see also Tamara Cohn Eskenazi's entry "Hassophereth/Sophereth" in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, C. Meyers, General Editor, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 91-92.

<sup>142</sup> Hillel Millgram, *Four Biblical Heroines and the Case for Female Authorship*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 26.

<sup>143</sup> Millgram, 26-27.

<sup>144</sup> Millgram, 88.

<sup>145</sup> Millgram, 89.

<sup>146</sup> Millgram, 233-239.

<sup>147</sup> Millgram, 237.

<sup>148</sup> Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011), xvi.

<sup>149</sup> Cohn Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, xvii.

<sup>150</sup> Preston Kavanagh, *Huldah: The Prophet Who Wrote Hebrew Scripture* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 29.

<sup>151</sup> Kavanagh, 29.

<sup>152</sup> Kavanagh, 143.

<sup>153</sup> Kavanagh, 90 and 109.

<sup>154</sup> Kavanagh, 2.

<sup>155</sup> Kavanagh, 84.

<sup>156</sup> Kavanagh, 35, n.15.

<sup>157</sup> Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>158</sup> Niditch, 4.

<sup>159</sup> Niditch, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Niditch, 5.

<sup>161</sup> In 1 Sam 23:6 it is noted that Abiathar brought down an ephod with him, which will eventually become important in the subsequent rescue of Abigail.

<sup>162</sup> Andre Lemaire, "The Residency of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 and the Connection between David and Abraham," in *Abigail, Wife of David, and Other Ancient Oriental Women*, ed. Daniel Bodi (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 11.

<sup>163</sup> Baruch Halpern, "The Historiography of Samuel" in *For and Against David: Story and History in the Books of Samuel*, eds. A. Graeme Auld and Erik Eynikel (Leuven: Uitgeveru Peeters, 2010), 119.

<sup>164</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, "The Samuel Composition as a Book of Life and Death" in *For and Against David: Story and History in the Books of Samuel*, eds. A. Graeme Auld and Erik Eynikel (Leuven: Uitgeveru Peeters, 2010), 41.

<sup>165</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 2 (Dover, N.H.: Van Gorcum, 1986), 474-528.

<sup>166</sup> Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History, Part Two 1 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 9f.

<sup>167</sup> Polzin, 206.

<sup>168</sup> Laurence Turner, "What Do You Do When Your Prophet Dies? Abigail, the Medium of Endor and the Raising of Samuel," *Spes Christiana* 32: no. 1, (2021): 115.

<sup>169</sup> Zucker, "Abigail", 2.

<sup>170</sup> Author's translation. Alter has noted, the wilderness of Paran would be an unlikely destination for David, given that it is too far to the south for David's men to have helped Nabal's shepherds, as David claimed in 1 Sam 25:7 and confirmed by one of Nabal's servants in 1 Sam 25:15-16. Alter therefore suggests the Septuagint's alternate reading of Maon, which fits better with subsequent events; Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 152, n.1. Fokkelman, however, has suggested that this Paran is not the same place as the one that is commonly referred to in the Torah, but rather is somewhere near Maon, where the narrative takes place, Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 474, n.1.



Moshe Garsiel, on the other hand, insisted that Paran was the proper reading and viewed it as an allusion to ancient biblical narratives; Moshe Garsiel, “The Story of David, Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25): A Literary Study of Wordplay on Names, Analogies, and Socially Structured Opposites” in *Abigail, Wife of David, and Other Ancient Oriental Women*, ed. Daniel Bodi (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 69. Perhaps, this chapter should be read sequentially. Initially, David, fearing for his life travelled as far south as possible to Paran. As the threat level decreased, he ventured further north into Judea, his tribal home. It is worth noting that this verse is not found in the Dead Sea scroll’s version of Samuel; see Frank Moore Cross and others, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, 17, *Qumran Cave 4*, 12, 1-2 *Samuel*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 86 and Martin Abegg, Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 233 and is possibly a later editorial insertion.

<sup>171</sup> Garsiel, 77.

<sup>172</sup> See Garsiel, 70 who rendered this word as “mansion” thus emphasizing the contrast in status between David, the wilderness habitue and the well-healed Nabal.

<sup>173</sup> Garsiel, 70.

<sup>174</sup> Brenner, *Israelite*, 40.

<sup>175</sup> Brenner, 41.

<sup>176</sup> Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14-15.

<sup>177</sup> McKenzie, 98.

<sup>178</sup> Mckenzie, 101.

<sup>179</sup> Yitzhak Berger, “Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Case of 1 Samuel 25,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 2 (2009): 257.

<sup>180</sup> Berger, 264.

<sup>181</sup> See also Berger’s companion essay in which he discussed *Ruth* as a corrective to David’s flawed relationship with Bathsheba, Yitzhak Berger, “Ruth and the David-Bathsheba Story: Allusions and Contrasts,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 4 (2009): 433-452.

<sup>182</sup> This is quoted and discussed by Elisheva Baumgarten, “Charitable like Abigail: The History of an Epitaph,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 3 (2015), 318.

<sup>183</sup> Daniel Bodi, “Was Abigail a Scarlet Woman? A Point of Rabbinic Exegesis in Light of Comparative Material,” in *Abigail, Wife of David and Other Oriental Women*, ed. Daniel Bodi (Sheffield, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 79-95. For a briefer discussion of this topic that is generally more sanguine see Tamar Kadari, “Abigail: Midrash and Aggadah” <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/tamar-midrash-and-aggadah>.

<sup>184</sup> Bodi, 81.

<sup>185</sup> Actually, this seems to be a case of a scribal error, in that previously her name was written with the letter *yod* positioned as the second last letter and herein as the third last letter.

<sup>186</sup> Bodi, 86-89.

<sup>187</sup> John Dekker, “Characterization in the Hebrew Bible: Nabal as a Test Case,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 26, no. 3 (2016), 314.

<sup>188</sup> Jon D. Levenson, “1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978), 15.

<sup>189</sup> An interesting contrast between the *naval* (boor) versus the *maskil* (enlightened one) is found in the opening verses of Psalm 14. Therein these terms are discussed in relationship to an appreciation of God. “The *naval/boor* says to himself ‘there is no God’... the Lord looks out from Heaven on humans to see if there is a *maskil/enlightened* one who seeks out God” (Ps 14:1-2, author trans.). This verse resonates even more when one keeps in mind that Abigail was characterized as being imbued with *tovat-sekhel* and hence enlightened.

<sup>190</sup> Although Garsiel agreed that in this context Nabal’s name had a negative connotation, he noted that “his name originally carried a positive connotation, ‘noble’, ‘a leather wineskin,’ or a ‘harp’”, 70.

<sup>191</sup> This is based on a grammatical peculiarity in Num 13:22, “They went up in the south, and he came to Hebron.” The shift from a plural subject and verb referring to the spies in the first half of the verse, to a singular subject and verb in the second half is interpreted as only one of the spies, i.e. Caleb ventured to Hebron.

<sup>192</sup> Garsiel, 71-73.

<sup>193</sup> The relative insignificance of Bethlehem was underscored during the time of the judge, Ibzan, who had to import brides from “outside the clan” for his thirty sons and sent away his thirty daughters to marry outsiders (Jud. 12:9).

<sup>194</sup> Levenson speculated that “[i]t may well be that David picked a quarrel with Nabal with precisely such a marriage in mind”, 27. This seems misplaced as it was Abigail and not David who initiated their relationship. Note also that in 2 Sam. 15, when Absalom wanted to usurp the crown from his father David, he too went to Hebron to stake his claim and consolidate his power base.

<sup>195</sup> Levenson likewise noted: “It is possible that Abigail’s Calebite origins are reflected in the name of the son she bears David, Chileab (2 Sam. 3:3)”, 25 n. 26.

<sup>196</sup> Interestingly, when Nabal is initially identified, although the text is traditionally read as *kalibi*, i.e. a Calebite, according to the Masoretic tradition it is written *klbo*, which can be vocalized as *kalbo*, his dog. Both of the medieval commentators, R. David Kimchi and R. Levi b. Gershon, associate Nabal’s wretched character with that of a dog. Jacob Milgrom in his commentary on Numbers 13:6 suggests that in the ancient Near East the term “dog” is used to refer to “an obsequious servant” and is attested in theophoric names identifying the individual as a devotee of a specific deity; see Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Numbers* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 101. For an edifying discussion of Caleb’s ethnicity see Milgrom therein Excursus 31, 391-2. On the problematic identification of Caleb as a Kenizzite in Num. 32:12 see the thorough analysis by Jacob Wright, *David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>197</sup> The Hebrew is *ben beliya`al*, literally a worthless person.

<sup>198</sup> For the theme of hunger as *leitmotif* in *Ruth*, see Ruth Tsoffar, “The Trauma of Otherness and Hunger: Ruth and Lot’s Daughters,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 1 (2007). For an interesting discussion of Bethlehem, consisting of the Hebrew nouns for “home” and “bread” and their corresponding gender implications, see Tzachi Cohen, “Home (*bayit*) and Bread (*lechem*): Masculine Power and Female Authority in the Book of Ruth,” *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 19, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>199</sup> See also Levenson, 18.

<sup>200</sup> Natan Klaus, “Abigail’s Speech: A Literary Analysis,” (Hebrew) *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible* 32, no. 4, (1987): 321. Later on, Klaus diagramed her speech as a complex chiasmic pattern of 15 elements, p. 331. This seems too intricate for a speech that was composed while she was travelling on an urgent mission.

<sup>201</sup> Klaus, 322, n. 7 commented that the expression of bowing “face down before David” with its specification of the indirect object is a unique formulation in Tanakh. This further underscored the special nature of Abigail’s actions.

<sup>202</sup> Levinson, 19.

<sup>203</sup> Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 496.

<sup>204</sup> Sarah Schwartz, “A New Look at Abigail’s Wisdom,” *Vetus Testamentum* (June, 2013), 2, accessed online at <https://brill.com/view/journals/vt/aop/article-10.1163-15685330-bja10138/article-10.1163-15685330-bja10138.xml>.

<sup>205</sup> Schwartz, 3.

<sup>206</sup> Schwartz, 16; see the parallels to Proverbs that Schwartz cites therein.

<sup>207</sup> Schwartz, 17.

<sup>208</sup> Schwartz, 17.

<sup>209</sup> In her analysis of Abigail’s speech, Chaya Feigenbaum pointed out that Abigail’s opening statements were intended to get David to focus specifically on her; Chaya Feigenbaum, “Artistry and Intention in Abigail’s Speech,” (Hebrew) *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible* 42, no. 2, (1997): 172.

<sup>210</sup> Unlike the JPS English translation, which employed a second person verbal command, the Hebrew phrasing *’al-n’a yasim ’et-libbo* incorporated both a third person verb and noun.

<sup>211</sup> Based upon Nabal’s derogatory comments about David, Fokkelman assumed that Nabal was unaware that David was “the new Lord’s anointed”, Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 477.

<sup>212</sup> This is an example, among others, of the Rabbinic tradition which based Jewish prayer practices upon statements or actions of the women of Tanakh. Other instances include Leah naming her fourth son Judah/*Yehudah*, following her assertion: “This time I will praise the Lord” (Gen. 29:35). On this the Sages commented that Leah was the first individual to offer praises to God and like Eve before her, she used the sacred Tetragrammaton, integral to the J source; see *B. Berakhot* 7b. Additionally, from Samuel’s mother Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:13 the ancient Rabbis derived that one should pray silently; see *B. Berakhot* 31a.

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<sup>213</sup> Laurence A. Turner, “What Do You Do When Your Prophet Dies? Abigail, the Medium of Endor and the Raising of Samuel,” *Spes Christiana* 32, no. 1, (2021): 121.

<sup>214</sup> Levenson, 27.

<sup>215</sup> Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 525, n. 72.

<sup>216</sup> In private conversation.

<sup>217</sup> Levenson and Halpern contended that David’s purported marriage to Ahinoam constituted a claim to Saul’s throne; see Jon D. Levenson, Jon D. and Baruch Halpern, “The Political Import of David’s Marriages,” *JBL* 99, no. 4 (1980): 513.

<sup>218</sup> It could be noted that David did ultimately have control over Saul’s descendants, including Rizpah’s two sons that she bore to Saul; see 2 Sam 21:8.

<sup>219</sup> See 1 Sam 21:11 concerning David’s earlier sojourn with Achish in Gath.

<sup>220</sup> The ephod was the outer garment worn by the High Priest, over which the priest also wore the *hoshen mishpat* /breastpiece and *’urim ve-tummim*, which had oracular powers; see Ex. 28.

<sup>221</sup> Levenson and Halpern, 511-512. See also the discussion by Steven McKenzie, who offered several different ways of reading the conflicting verses concerning the other Abigail, 54-55.

<sup>222</sup> Gottwald, 557.