

Women in Scripture



A Dictionary of
Named and Unnamed Women in the
Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books,
and the New Testament



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preference for patrilineal endogamous marriage results in Esau's exclusion from the Terahite descent line, due to his exogamous marriage.

NAOMI STEINBERG

SEE ALSO Part I: Adah 2; Anah; Judith 3; Mahlah 3; Oholibamah.

FOR FURTHER READING: Steinberg, Naomi. *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective*. Wilson, Robert R. *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*.

Basemath 2

(1 Kgs 4:13)

Among the organizational acts of King Solomon (reigned c. 968–928 B.C.E.), according to 1 Kgs 4:7–19, is the division of the kingdom into twelve fiscal districts, each with a governor and each to provide provisions for the royal household for one month a year. The governor of the eighth district, Naphtali in eastern Galilee, is Ahimaaz; he is married to Basemath, one of Solomon's daughters. The text does not indicate her mother's name, so her status within the royal household cannot be ascertained. Nonetheless, her marriage to a high official indicates political patronage.

Perhaps because the eighth district was the northernmost one, far from Jerusalem, the marital connection with the royal house was calculated to maintain the distant governor's loyalty to the crown.

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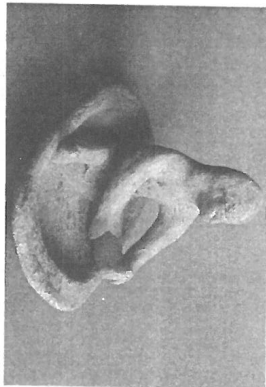
SEE ALSO Part I: Taphath.

Bathsheba

meaning uncertain; perhaps "daughter of Sheba" or "daughter of abundance," from Hebrew *bat*, "daughter," and *šēba*, "Sheba" or "abundance"

(2 Samuel 11–12; 1 Kings 1–2; 1 Chr 3:5; Ps 51:super-scription)

Bathsheba, the wife of David (reigned c. 1005–965 B.C.E.) and the mother of Solomon (reigned c. 968–



Terra-cotta figurine (3 inches high) of a woman in a bathing, dating to the Iron II period (ninth–early sixth century B.C.E.). It was discovered at Achzib on the Mediterranean coast of Israel. See Bathsheba.

928 B.C.E.), is featured in each of these roles in one major narrative sequence in the David stories, and she is characterized quite differently in each.

The account in 2 Samuel 11–12 of how Bathsheba came to be David's wife makes clear that the circumstances are morally problematic. Yet because her character is suppressed, she emerges untainted by the adultery and murder for which David receives full blame. Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite, becomes the object of David's lustful gaze. The story implies that David should have been at the battlefield, leading his troops, but instead he is at home in Jerusalem. From his rooftop he sees a woman bathing; David has her brought to his royal residence and lies with her. Afterward she returns to her home. The adultery results in a pregnancy; this sets in motion David's plan to pass the child off as Uriah's and, when this fails, to legitimize the child as his own by ensuring that Uriah will be killed in battle so that David can marry the widowed Bathsheba.

Bathsheba seems to know nothing of David's plan, and, indeed, it unfolds outside her purview. Bathsheba is "on stage" in this story very infrequently and is silent except for the announcement of her pregnancy, which she does not deliver in

person. No hint is given of her inner life or of her complicity with or resistance to David's actions. We see her next after her husband, Uriah, has died, and she reacts as a proper wife would. 2 Sam 11:26 emphasizes her status as Uriah's wife: "When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him." Immediately after the mourning period, David marries her and she bears him a son.

The child born to David and Bathsheba becomes ill and soon dies. David is portrayed as a distraught father, praying and fasting that the child might live. Of the mother we hear nothing, except that after the child has died, "Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he [or she] named him Solomon" (12:24).

One should not conclude that Bathsheba was a callous woman, but rather that the narrator has intentionally shaped the portrayal of her character for a purpose. Bathsheba's role is intentionally minimized to focus the story on David. David bears the responsibility and the condemnation, and from this point on he is beset by problems within his family that have political implications for his reign. This David is quite different from the man depicted in the Abigail story.

If Bathsheba is portrayed as passive in her early relationship with David, she becomes strongly active toward the end of David's life in her successful attempt to ensure that her son Solomon will inherit the throne. 1 Kings 1 shows her plotting, along with the prophet Nathan and other supporters of Solomon, to convince David that he has promised the kingship to Solomon. David is by now a pathetic figure who had lost control over his sons long ago. The first three of David's sons have already died, and the succession will be decided between the fourth son, Adonijah, and the destined heir, Solomon. The operative familial relationship is the mother-son relationship, and it is emphasized in the way the narrator refers to the characters: "Adonijah, son of Haggith" (1 Kgs 1:5), and "Bathsheba, Solomon's mother" (1 Kgs 1:11).

Bathsheba succeeds in having her son designated as David's successor, but her importance in the nar-

rative does not stop when he has become king, as we see in 1 Kings 2. When David dies, the unsuccessful Adonijah, who has been assured by Solomon that no harm will come to him if he proves worthy, asks Bathsheba to convey a request to Solomon, for she is considered influential. Adonijah requests that one of David's concubines, Abishag, be given to Adonijah as his wife. It sounds innocent enough—a small consolation prize from the king to his brother who has lost the throne. Bathsheba conveys the request, with a small change in the wording, to Solomon, whereupon Solomon reacts violently, interpreting the request as an attack on his position as king. The request costs Adonijah his life.

Why did Bathsheba agree to convey this request? There are several possible explanations. Perhaps Bathsheba understood the impropriety of the request (it has been interpreted as tantamount to claiming the throne) and knew how Solomon would react. She might have been happy to see Adonijah killed so that he could not remain a rival to her son.

Or perhaps Bathsheba would have been only too happy to have Abishag removed from Solomon's household and transferred to Adonijah's. Abishag had been in David's bed when Bathsheba came to convince the feeble old king to designate Solomon as his successor. And, although David did not have sexual relations with Abishag, she was, in a sense, a younger rival to Bathsheba herself for David's favors and perhaps for future influence over Solomon. Whatever the explanation, Bathsheba plays an important role in the succession of Solomon to the throne.

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SEE ALSO Part I: Abigail; Abishag; Azubah; Bath-sheba 2; Part II: Wife of Uriah (Matt 16).

FOR FURTHER READING: Bailey, Randall C. *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12*. Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*.

Gunn, David M. *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*.

Levenson, Jon D., and Baruch Halpern. "The Political Import of David's Marriages."

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*.