

NARRATIVES AND TRAUMA IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: A CREATIVE WRITING RESPONSE

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- Bathsheba
 - Hagar
 - Jephthah
 - Judges 19
 - Dinah in the context of Rape Culture

CONTENTS FOR JESSICA



SURVIVORS/VICTIMS OF TERROR

- These narratives need to be commemorated.
- They cannot be dismissed as relics of an ancient past: 'the evidence of history refutes all claims to the superiority of the Christian era' (Trible, 2).
- They cannot be 'read away' as products of a wrathful Jewish God, who is replaced by the loving Christian God.
- 'It interprets stories of outrage on behalf of their female victims in order to recover a neglected history, to remember a past that the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again. In telling sad stories a feminist hermeneutic seeks to redeem the time' (Trible, 3).

BIBLICAL NARRATIVE OF BATHSHEBA

2 Samuel 11

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

² It happened, late one afternoon, when **David rose** from his couch and was walking about on the **roof** of the king's house, that he saw from the roof **a woman bathing**; the woman was very **beautiful**. ³ David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is **Bathsheba** daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴ So David sent messengers to get her, and **she came to him**, and he **lay** with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

THE 'TAKING' OF BATHSHEBA



- Bathsheba is 'taken' because of her beauty.
- David knows that she is the wife of another man, and yet consciously (and openly) initiates an act of adultery.

'Bathsheba at the Bath', Friedrich Heinrich Füger (1751-1818)

THE RAPE OF BATHSHEBA



‘So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her’ (II:4).

Motives and responses are left undefined.

Bathsheba is a passive figure (‘I am pregnant’).

Cheryl Exum speaks of ‘the rape of Bathsheba by the pen’. The male author casts her in such an ambiguous light that her actions could be deemed questionable by later authors. Her ‘literary rape’ encourages her objectification.

‘David and Bathsheba’, Ernst Fuchs, 1985.

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

- David had no intention of taking Bathsheba away from her husband Uriah.
- He calls Uriah from the battlefield so that he can lie with his wife and assume paternity of the child (11:6-13).
- When the plan fails, David ensures that Uriah dies on the battlefield to avoid accusations of adultery (11:14-25).
- There is no expression of love for Bathsheba, only David's demonstration of concern for his own reputation.
- Bathsheba mourns for her dead husband: 'When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him' (11:26).
- 'When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son' (11:27).

‘DAVID DISPLEASES THE LORD’ (I I:27)

- David is condemned in the parable recited by the prophet Nathan: ‘Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have take his wife to be your wife’ (II Sam. 12:9).
- The transgression is against Uriah (for violating his marital rights), not Bathsheba (= ‘the wife of Uriah’).
- The death of the child is taken as divine punishment for David’s sin.
- ‘Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son and he named him Solomon’ (12:24).

HAGAR NARRATIVE

GENESIS 16: 1-6

The Birth of Ishmael

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, ² and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; **go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.**" And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. ⁴ He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" ⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.

THE UNNAMED DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHAH (JUDGES 11:29-34)

Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt-offering.' So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand... Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her.



THE DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHAH (11:34-36)

There was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her. When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. **For I have opened my mouth** to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.' She said to him, 'My father, **if you have opened your mouth** to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites.'

- She comes out with timbrels and dancing to celebrate his victory in battle (cf. Exod. 15:20; 1 Sam. 18:6-7).
- He 'blames' the daughter for her actions (11:35).
- And yet he takes some responsibility for his role in the tragedy: 'I have opened my mouth' (Jephthah - *yiphthah* - 'he has opened').

THE MOURNING OF A MAIDEN LIFE

And she said to her father, 'Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I.' 'Go,' he said and sent her away for two months. So she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains (11:37-38).

She mourns her death as a maiden, as one who will never fulfill her potential as a 'daughter of Israel'.



THE SACRIFICE OF JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER



At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made (11:39).

The act of sacrifice is described in the briefest of terms (five words in the Hebrew text).

‘The Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter’, Johann Christoph Weigel, woodcut 1695

THE TRAGEDY OF NO INTERVENTION



‘Unlike the father Abraham, Jephthah fails to evoke the freedom of the deity to avert disaster. Nor does he wish to die instead of his child, as did the father David (2 Sam. 19:1). Although his daughter has served him devotedly with music and dance, Jephthah bewails the calamity that she brings upon him. And throughout it all God says nothing’ (Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 102).

Bible illustration, Cologne, 1450.

THE 'SILENCING' OF THE DAUGHTER



Postscript to the narrative: 'So there arose an Israelite custom that for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite' (11:39-40).

'Jephthah through faith conquered kingdom put foreign armies to flight' (Hebrews 11:32-34).

'Jephthah's Daughter', Homer Yost, 2004

THE SHILOH PROJECT: RAPE CULTURE, RELIGION AND THE BIBLE

Genesis 34

The Rape of Dinah (NRSV)

34 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the region. ² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, **saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force.** ³ And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl to be my wife.”

