5. Huldah and the Men of Anathoth: Women in Leadership in the Deuteronomic History (1984)

399 One of the fruits of the struggle for the liberation of women within biblical studies has been a fresh look at familiar passages of Scripture from a new perspective. We are consequently deeply in debt to scholars like Phyllis Trible for helping us see that Adam was not in fact a male figure as such until after woman was removed from him in the creation of Eve.[1] Thus the familiar arguments for the subordination of women based on the order of creation have no actual basis in the biblical text. Male and female are created together as Adam is transformed in the story of Genesis 2—from "human-kind," on the one hand, so the male counter-part of a remarkable "help-mate" who is in fact Adam's equal.

In a similar manner the current interest in the so-called "new literary criticism" of the Bible, with its focus on the integrity of the biblical text in its received form, has brought new depths of meaning to familiar passages as well.[2] This paper is an attempt to combine these two impulses in contemporary biblical studies to take a fresh look at the role of women in leadership in ancient Israel as preserved in the Deuteronomic tradition.

Within the Deuteronomic tradition there are only two women who are designated "prophets" (נביאה)—namely, Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah (2 Kings 23:14). It is interesting to compare these two persons who form an inclusion of sorts around the Deuteronomic History of life in the Promised Land. And since, as Frank Cross has argued, the first edition of the Deuteronomic History (Joshua through 2 Kings) was written in Josiah's reign, that inclusion in fact frames the whole of the original literary work as such.

Cross has identified the two major themes of the original composition of the Deuteronomic History, namely the sin of Jeroboam II, on the one hand, and the faithfulness of Josiah, on the other.[3] It is the interplay of these two parallel themes which gives the work its peculiar Deuteronomic flavor. If one keeps the terms of the covenant as David and Josiah did, the blessings are in effect. On the other hand, if one follows the example of Jeroboam I or the wicked Manasseh the covenant curses are inevitable. For Cross the sin of Manasseh is a secondary theme introduced by an exilic redactor to explain the 400 death of Josiah. Be that as it may, it seems likely that an additional theme should be added to the list—the role of the prophet in ancient Israel, especially in relation to kingship. It may well be that this theme is consciously developed as an exposition of the laws of the king and prophet in Deuteronomy 17–18.

The central stories within the Deuteronomic History which explore the role of the prophet in ancient Israel are as follows:

A	1 Kings 13	Kingship and Prophecy: the Way of Obedience
B	1 Kings 18	Elijah on Mount Carmel vs. Prophets of Baal
B	1 Kings 19	Elijah on Mount Horeb: the Mosaic Prophet
A	1 Kings 22	Kingship and Prophecy: Prophet against Prophet

Elijah is the focus of attention and is presented as a Moses-figure who defeats the "false" prophets of the first kind, as presented in Deut 18:9–14—namely, the Canaanite or pagan prophets who are an abomination. The contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on

Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18 is set over against Elijah's theophanic experience on Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19. In this latter instance Elijah's experience is clearly patterned after that of Moses who not only experienced God in the awesome "thunderstorm" on the mountain (Exodus 19:16–24), but who also had the privilege of a glimpse of Yahweh's glory from a "cave" on that same holy mountain (Exodus 33:17–23). But Elijah's experience is not oriented only toward the past. It clearly foreshadows a new phase of prophetic activity within the canon of both the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets in imagery which is particularly evident in the story of Jonah.[4]

But what is important for our purposes here is to note the role of Jezebel, both here and in the larger structure of 1 and 2 Kings. It is Jezebel who forms the link between these two contrasting stories of Elijah. The resultant structural pattern of "prophet" and "king" in the Deuteronomic rendition of the history of ancient Israel is indeed provocative.

A	Deborah and Barak	Judges 4–5
B	Jeroboam I and Prophetic Conflict	1 Kings 13
C	Elijah on Mount Carmel	1 Kings 18
X	**Jezebel**	1 Kings 16:31–2 Kings 9:37
C	Elijah on Mount Horeb	1 Kings 19
B	Ahab and Prophetic Conflict	1 Kings 22
A	Huldah and Josiah	2 Kings 22

In the opening story Barak, the son of Abinoam, foreshadows the Deuteronomic conception of what constitutes a good king. Like Saul and David, Barak is primarily a war lord who is commissioned by the "prophet" to lead Israel in fighting Yahweh's wars. And whatever his historical role may have been in ancient Israel, Barak is presented 401 in the story as subject to the word of God as delivered through Deborah.

In a similar fashion Huldah plays a role of great importance over against that of King Josiah. It was to Huldah that Josiah sent Hilkiah the high priest to authenticate the "book of the Torah," which was found in the Temple (1 Kings 22:13–14). And it was Huldah the prophetess who pronounced a word of judgment, blessing, and instruction to both the people of Judah and their king (2 Kings 22:16–20). Besides these two stories there are only two other kings who recognize the authority of the prophet in ancient Israel and thus are deemed good kings from a Deuteronomic point of view—namely, David who recognizes the authority of Nathan, and Hezekiah who installed Isaiah as royal prophet in Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. It is curious to note that Isaiah's wife is also singled out as a "prophetess" (נביאה) in Isaiah 8:3. The only other time this term is used in the first two sections of the Hebrew canon (the Law and the Prophets) is to designate Miriam, the sister of Moses, as a "prophetess" (Exodus 15:20).

The parallel stories dealing with prophetic conflict in 1 Kings 13 and 22 present all three of the major themes of the Deuteronomic historian. The story of the unnamed man of God who is slain by the lion of Judah is set over against the sin of Jeroboam at the very moment of the building of the detested altar of Bethel (1 Kings 13). And Josiah is named explicitly in perhaps the most glaring *vaticinum ex eventu* in the Bible (1 Kings 13:2). The primary focus of the story, however, is on prophetic conflict, which takes on still deeper meaning when seen over against the story of Micaiah and Zedekiah in 1 Kings 22.

Both stories deal with two prophets in conflict, both of whom presume to speak the word of Yahweh (cf. Deut 18:20–22). In one case the two prophets are anonymouos while in the other they are clearly identified. In one instance the prophetic word is described as coming from a "messenger" (angel) of Yahweh (1 Kings 13:18). On the other hand, Micaiah describes a vision of the very proceedings of the heavenly court with Yahweh himself presiding over the host of heaven (1 Kings 22:19). The description of what Micaiah observed throws unexpected light on an ambiguous statement in the early story. In Micaiah's account it is clearly Yahweh himself who sends the "lying spirit" to entice Ahab to go to his own death. In the previous story the narrator added the simple statement, "He lied to him" (1 Kings 13:18). Though the commentaries are almost unanimous in assuming that it was the old prophet from Bethel who deceived the man of God from Judah, it is quite possible to see the "angel" as the author of the lie. The old prophet would then have lied unwittingly. Such an interpretation would make it easier to understand the old prophet's grief over the death of his "brother" (1 Kings 13:30) and the curious instructions he gave his "sons": "When I die, bury me in a grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones" (1 Kings 13:31).

By far the most interesting feature of the structuring device observed in this nesting of parallel stories in the Deuteronomic History is the actual center. It is the wicked Jezebel who forms the bridge between the two mountain-top experiences of Elijah. And the structure itself invites a comparison of Jezebel with Deborah and Huldah. In the account of Josephus, Jezebel's father Ethbaal king of the Sidonians was a priest in the Phoenician cult of Baal and Astarte.[5] Be that as it may, she certainly is responsible in the biblical story for advancing the cult of Baal in Israel; as her daughter Athaliah is subsequently in Judah (2 Kings 2:18).

402 It is particularly instructive to examine closely the account of the death of both Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah. When Jehu came to Jezreel for Jezebel she was in an upper room where "she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of the window" (2 Kings 9:30). What a splendid woman! Though she knew her death was imminent, she was going to make her exit in style. But of even greater interest to the careful reader is the wording here which reminds one of the ending of the "Song of Deborah," where:

> Out of the window she peered;
> The mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice (Judges 5:28)

In Canaanite mythology the god Mot ("Death") found entrance to Baal's palace through a window, which the latter had been urged not to construct. As Grace Lorenz has recently noted, "Through the window/lattice" is a vivid metaphor for the way in which death enters a building. As she put it:[6]

> Death has not only come to Sisera, but it is simultaneously entering into Sisera's dwelling and his mother with such clarity that the action of the woman is a stark reality. She does not see her son's body, but in the act of looking and/or shrieking she is already mourning without fully knowing why. The first view of entering Death is unobstructed. The second view of death comes through a veiled or latticed window.

The text in the Song of Deborah continues by quoting the mother of Sisera:

Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the hoof beats of his chariots? (Judges 5:28b)

The imagery here is perhaps a foreshadowing of the curious description of the death of Jezebel's daughter Athaliah who was taken out of the Temple "through the horse's entrance to the king's house" where she was slain (2 Kings 11:16).

But it is not just repetition of words or imagery as such that ties together these four dominant women, in the Deuteronomic account of the history of ancient Israel. The presentation of these four women also takes up the three central themes of the Deuteronomic historian already noted, while at the same time introducing something more.

A Deborah: "Prophetess" of Yahweh alongside Barak
B Jezebel: Royal Advocate of Baal in Israel
B Athaliah: Royal Advocate of Baal in Judah
A Huldah: "Prophetess" of Yahweh alongside Josiah

Huldah brings an added dimension to the theme of Josiah's faithfulness. In place of the sin of Jeroboam we have explicit pagan practice that centers in the worship of Baal. And 403 though the two "prophetesses" here are not in conflict with each other, they are clearly set in sharp contrast over against the two royal feminine personages to illustrate the inherent tension between "prophet" and "king" in ancient Israel.

But why did the Deuteronomic historian focus on four dominant women in this structural schema? How are we to explain the fact that in the Deuteronomic tradition, which crystallized at the end of the national history of ancient Israel, women are singled out to occupy major roles in both the royal and prophetic offices? The answer to these questions is perhaps to be found in placing the Deuteronomic tradition in its proper social location in ancient Israel. And this brings us to the "men of Anathoth."

It is perhaps going too far to see Huldah as Jeremiah's aunt, as suggested by Robert Wilson.[7] But it is clear that the circle of persons mentioned by name in 2 Kings 23:3–14 includes members of the Anathoth priesthood, descendants from Abiathar, who were part of the central political establishment in Jerusalem under Josiah.[8] The "men of Anathoth" who subsequently plotted against Jeremiah are probably to be identified "as some of Jeremiah's priestly relatives who were still occupying positions in Jerusalem's religious establishment" after Jeremiah's removal form the royal court.[9]

The Levitical establishment at Anathoth, a suburb of modern Jerusalem, was probably the social location which preserved the so-called Northern or Ephraimite tradition in ancient Israel. The prophet Jeremiah was born in Anathoth. Josiah's reform thus included a religious compromise which brought back the "Moses group" which stemmed ultimately from premonarchic Shiloh, and canonized their perspective alongside that of the royal Zadokite priesthood long established in Jerusalem. It was this alternative view of Israel's ancient story that was in fact the more archaic. In fact, the very description of Josiah's great Passover celebration in 2 Kings 23:22 is instructive: "For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during the days of the kings of Israel or the kings of Judah."

It was the institution of the monarchy in ancient Israel, at least from the point of view of the "men of Anathoth," which was ultimately responsible for all that was wrong in ancient Israel—including the subordination of women. The social stratification introduced by a new economic and political order, and the royal harem in particular, as introduced by Solomon, were responsible for subtle and far-reaching changes in the status of women. The so-called Northern perspective, as preserved among the "men of Anathoth," was more archaic in nature, rooted in agrarian values of a pre-monarchic era where the sexes were treated with relative equality. It was to this Moses-group in Anathoth that both Huldah and Jeremiah belonged. Among the agrarian values they brought to the canonical process in the time of Josiah was a high regard for the place of women in roles of leadership, both religious and political.

It should be noted that the treatment of women on the part of the Deuteronomic historian is simply part of a larger concern for the powerless in ancient Israel. The "men of Anathoth" were excluded from political power from the time of Solomon to Josiah and again after the fall of Jerusalem. The book of Deuteronomy represents their point of 404 view in its constant concern for the widow, the orphan, and the alien within the social structure of ancient Israel. For the most part, women in general were among the powerless whose rights were protected by Deuteronomic legislation. They also apparently provided an appropriate symbol around which to structure some of the central theological concerns of the Deuteronomic historian.

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[1] Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 12-21.

[2] For a convenient bibliography of this growing body of literature see Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983) 159-179.

[3] Frank M. Cross, Jr., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) 274-289.

[4] See my article on "The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis," *JBL* 104 (1985) 217–231. Whereas Moses and Elijah ascend the mountain of God to experience a theophany, Jonah descends to "the roots of the mountains" where he also encounters Yahweh. The fact that details in the story of Elijah, as recorded in 1 Kings 19, are also reflected within the narrative of the book of Jonah has been noted by numerous scholars.

[5] *Antiquities*, VIII, xiii, 2.

[6] The paper in question was presented under the title, "Judges 5:24–31, Propaganda for Yahweh at its Best," at a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature / Pacific Coast Region on March 30, 1984, at Golden Gate Baptist Seminary. The quotation is taken from p. 13 of her unpublished manuscript.

[7] Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 223.

[8] Ibid., 234.

[9] Ibid., 245, where Wilson is citing S. Dean McBride.